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## Choices for Bates, December 2010

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# CHOICES

CHOICES FOR  
**Bates**

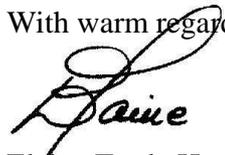
A PLAN FOR BATES  
**College**

## *New Pathways for the Learning Century at BATES*

Dear Colleagues,

As promised in the last issue of this occasional newsletter, we are pleased to update you now on the progress we have made this semester in implementing the strategic initiatives identified through the Choice for Bates planning process. Each of the faculty and staff groups appointed to lead these initiatives has been hard at work honing and developing the ideas that won support from the Mellon Foundation last spring. All are designed to build in a timely way on some of the greatest strengths of a Bates education, to advance its distinctive qualities and its key priorities. I am grateful to the ongoing work of all who have been involved in this effort to date, and I hope you will enjoy reading more about their accomplishments and aspirations.

With warm regards,



Elaine Tuttle Hansen  
President

### *Arts Initiative*

The Bates Arts Collaborative is up and running and finding its way. Constituted by the President and fueled by the good will and hard work of a long-laboring group of arts advocates over the past several years, the collaborative is now moving forward with exciting opportunities and action steps to make the arts in the liberal arts at Bates ever stronger, vibrant and attractive to art makers, students, audiences, patrons and donors of the past, present and future. Chaired by **Kirk Read** (French) the inaugural committee consists of faculty and staff from across the campus and hopes to include an ever-evolving and rotating cast of characters. For now, we are: **Gina Fatone** (music), **Georgia Nigro** (Harvard Center), **Eden Osucha** (English), **Michael Reidy** (theater), **Dan Mills** (Bates College Museum of Art), **Heidi Chirayath** (sociology), **Pamela Johnson** (art and visual culture), **Anne Odom** (academic administrative assistant, Olin Arts Center), **Laura Faure** (Bates Dance Festival), **Nancy Salmon** (ex-officio, Bates Dance Festival; dance; and Arts Summit project manager).

**Propelled into the academic year by the energy and enthusiasm generated by our first Arts Calendar, a glossy, beautifully designed booklet**, we have met weekly as a whole, and often around the edges, on tasks that have arisen both from the past and from the current arts landscape. We hope to build on the foundation of recommendations and action steps suggested in the recent past (Choices for Bates, the Presidential Arts Initiative Report, the Facilities Master Plan Update, as well as opportunities in Advancement, Communications and the Dean of the Faculty's Office, and in many other exciting conversations) and move ahead with efforts in programming, curricular development and space needs. We move through this first year with a constant self-critical eye to who we are as a group and how our fledgling collaborative may grow into a robust and effective Bates institution for the arts.

We are fortunate to have the financial support of several Mellon grants (one through the President's office, as well as an Innovation Grant) and are moving ahead on several fronts. Our most exciting event at the moment is the **Arts Summit** that will take place **January 24 and 25**. This occasion will bring together art makers, critics, advocates and patrons from a variety of perspectives in the liberal arts including visiting guest speakers and presenters of national repute: Marc Bamuthi Joseph (spoken word artist/performer and activist), Lynne Conner (theater and dance, Colby College) and Amara Geffen (visual artist and environmental activist, Allegheny College).



The Arts Summit will serve our goals of self-reflection and outward promotion and advocacy for the arts in important ways. During both the summit itself and the planning and assessing phases of the event, the Arts Collaborative will facilitate discussions around key issues in the arts that we will see materialized both in January and beyond. For the summit, we hope to celebrate — in performances, exhibition, open rehearsals, impromptu art-making experiences and public talks and conversations — an array of possibilities for the arts in the liberal arts at Bates. The first annual "Arts Crawl," patterned after monthly open-gallery events in Portland and elsewhere, will complement the more academic conversations and traditional performances in an informal and participatory way. At once fueled by the wonderful work already in progress and eager for support of newly imagined possibilities, the summit hopes to be a very public witness to the strengths and potential for the arts community at Bates.

While we have found that project-based agendas are the best way to move our goals forward — the arts calendars for this year being another collaborative and productive focus — we continue to advance our work with meetings and discussions with a variety of advocates and interested parties:

- presentations both at Bates and on the road for alumni and donor groups;
- a first-year seminar collaborative project;
- work with the museum and facilities on an "arts corridor" and gallery space in the new academic buildings;
- and conversations with admissions and media relations regarding how we attract, recruit and follow through with the best and brightest for the art-makers and scholars of the past and future.

One may become involved with the Arts Collaborative in a variety of ways:

- conversations between members of the collaborative and you and or your department, program or organization;
- attendance at the huge variety of arts events;
- attendance at the CurriculArts event in Chase Hall Lounge (December 13, 10 a.m.–noon) to advertise and explore arts events and opportunities for next semester;
- and/or participation in the summit in January (and in the follow-up roundtable on April 11).

Already, it is apparent that there is much to be gained through the formal organization and recognition of this important new entity on campus. We hope that the community, both on campus and beyond, will join in our celebratory and organizational work to help establish what appears to be a collaboration with great creative potential.

## *Science and Math Initiative*

Led by co-chairs **Matt Côté** (chemistry and dean of the faculty's office) and **Hong Lin** (physics), the Science and Math Initiative team of **John Creasy** (geology), **Pallavi Jayawant** (mathematics), and **Rebecca Sommer** (biology), along with faculty in the natural sciences and mathematics are working on two initiatives that will, among other outcomes, lay the groundwork for the development of an integrated math and science building, as envisioned by the Campus Facilities Master Plan.

### *Pilot Research Program for Underclassmen*

Undergraduate science research was once unusual. Today, it's becoming unusual for science majors *not* to do research, thus it is easy to conclude that graduate schools and employers now expect our science graduates to have had some research background.



Bates has a long history of providing excellent research opportunities for students in the natural sciences and mathematics. However, because funds to support student research are limited, the faculty often hire students who have significant coursework experience and are therefore equipped to help the research progress. As a result, while summer research opportunities are open to all students, those who have completed two or three years of study have been offered most available positions.

Of course, many faculty know that younger Bates students — even those in their first year — can benefit greatly from a chance to work closely with faculty on research projects. Such experiences can be particularly important for students who do not thrive in large introductory science and math courses. Working closely with a faculty mentor, perhaps alongside more experienced student researchers, can help first and second-year students discover their place in science and math.

To create more such opportunities, and to free first- and second-year students from the burden of competing with more experienced students for research positions, the science and math faculty have used funds from President Hansen's Mellon grant to create a new undergraduate research pilot program. The program, which will accept proposals from faculty early in the winter 2011 semester, will especially target students from under-resourced high schools, multicultural students, or first-generation college students — anyone whose experience might cause them, for example, to look at a picture of a Nobel Prize winner and shrug, "Well, that could never be me." Faculty want to give them an experience that complements the lecture-hall experience, a taste of research that makes them say, "I really can do this."

One major benefit of undergraduate research is that it broadens students' career horizons. While an aspiring science major may come to Bates thinking that becoming a doctor or dentist is his or her natural career path, exposure to research projects can illuminate a broader range of highly rewarding careers in science. In addition, studies have shown that undergraduate research sustains or increases graduates' interest in postgraduate education.<sup>1</sup>

### *A Coordinated Math and Science Sequence*

Work in the natural sciences and mathematics is becoming progressively more cross-disciplinary. Even as studies within disciplinary boundaries thrive, researchers increasingly find that their projects naturally take them

across those boundaries. Nonetheless, science and math curricula have often been designed without explicit attention to this trend.

To begin addressing this issue, the Bates mathematics and natural sciences faculty are working to coordinate the teaching of similar course material offered by different departments. In the absence of coordination, for example, we find that some students will learn about atomic structure in their introductory physics course and then again in introductory chemistry. Other students take chemistry and then physics and thus see the treatments in the opposite order. And those taking only chemistry or only physics see the material just once.

If faculty in different departments could collaborate as they teach a common set of students, it would likely improve students' understanding of the material, reinforce the notion that scientific and mathematical ideas span disciplinary boundaries as often as they respect them, and free up time to teach new material by allowing them to eliminate redundancies.

With that in mind, and with Mellon support, Bates faculty have started some pilot projects of multidisciplinary teaching. This fall, for example, Eric Wollman (physics) and John Creasy (geology) are team-teaching "The Unexpected Earth" (GE/PH 120), a multidisciplinary introductory course targeting students with strong secondary-school backgrounds in the physical sciences and mathematics.

Mellon funds are also supporting a project initiated by Meredith Greer (mathematics), who is developing a course that helps students investigate and become comfortable with some of the mathematical concepts they will see in their science courses. After seeking ideas and examples from faculty in all the subject areas encompassed by the natural sciences, she will compile and form the information into a cohesive, orderly set of topics for a semester course that may be offered in 2011–12.

Science and math faculty and staff continue regular discussions of their overlapping and interdependent curricula. On Nov. 29, they met to brainstorm ways of synchronizing their introductory curricula, and Mellon funds are being used to support faculty and staff for their effort to move in this direction.

As always, those working on these projects are given greater incentive by the knowledge that it will further their goal of adding a new integrated math and science building to Bates — one that will support faculty and staff's innovative teaching and research efforts.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2104507/>

### *Learning Initiative*

One of three projects designed to build on the strengths of the Bates learning environment, the Learning Commons initiative is poised to see concrete reality begin to emerge from an exciting and well-developed bank of ideas.

In essence, the Learning Commons is an incubator, resource center, and workshop for academic collaboration. We envision spaces for it that are both virtual and physical, with the two main floors of Ladd Library accommodating the latter.

During this semester, the Learning Commons planning team consisting of **Jane Costlow** (environmental studies); **Grace Coulombe** (mathematics and statistics workshop); **Holly Gurney** (dean of students); **Michael Hanrahan** (information and library services); **Laura Juraska** (information and library services); and chair **Hillory Oakes** (writing), determined that peer-to-peer student learning should be the focus of the physical space. We

also agreed that our efforts could run on parallel tracks: doing our best to provide integrated support for faculty pedagogy while planning for the student-centered space in Ladd.

The library, already home to the Peer Writing Center, will become a showcase for peer-to-peer collaborative learning, a space for students to work together on academic questions big and small. It will house the following:

- Already-existing programs such as the Mathematics and Statistics Workshop, the Technical Writing Assistants, and the Peer Science Leaders.
- Expanded student-to-student support for oral presentations.
- Recently piloted peer mentoring for academic advising questions.
- Flexible space for academic tutoring, group work, and other student collaborative work.
- Some space for creativity, such as a gallery for student art.

The Learning Commons would, moreover, be a resource center for students — offering not just the usual reference materials but also such things as a video library of past student presentations and performances. The facility would have close ties to academic support services that are not currently student-run, including the Imaging Center, library reference, and the Digital Media Center.

Underpinning these concrete services will be staff — from writing specialists to reference librarians to technologists — working together on programs and coordinating unified approaches to training for students who work as peer mentors.

Our primary goal for the near term is to spend the winter semester engaging a space planner to think through necessary renovations in Ladd. During winter 2011, we will invite faculty, staff, and students to join the space-planning effort through open meetings and by engaging a few individuals, on stipends, to join the planning team. By fall 2011, we hope to have taken concrete steps toward preparing the facility.

Turning to support for faculty, we support a long-term goal for a dedicated Center for Teaching. Until space is available for that, the Learning Commons website for faculty (complementing the Web presence for students) will offer integrated faculty development and pedagogy support — e.g., teaching modules, readings, and sample assignments. We plan for both faculty and student sites to be live by fall 2011.



Ultimately, we would invite those across campus who offer faculty development programming — such as Writing Program workshops, pedagogy support provided by Academic Technology, or the Diversity in Excellence project — to come together under a Learning Commons umbrella that would unify and streamline publicity and other supplementary functions.

In the immediate future, we ask anyone running winter 2011 programming related to pedagogy — whether a workshop, speaker, reading group, or other event — to contact the members of our faculty development subgroup (Oakes, Hanrahan, and Costlow) with details. We hope to circulate a combined schedule of all faculty development opportunities at the beginning of the semester.

Finally, during Short Term 2011, the Learning Commons will influence the shape of the annual May Conference. Although a final conference theme and title are not yet available, our current plan is to invite speakers from Learning Commons-like entities at other institutions to discuss how faculty can be supported by a

Learning Commons; and to hold pedagogical workshops on their areas of specialty, such as support for faculty who teach writing, or oral communication, or technology, or the arts.

We hope that such a conference will also highlight all the Choice for Bates initiatives — showing how a Learning Commons might support diversity work or the sciences, for instance.

## *Residential Life*

The concept of students living together on campus in residence halls presents the opportunity for intellectual exchange that can be of a different nature than that offered through the classroom curriculum. We have offered at Bates for years the opportunity for students to engage in theme house living, in which students propose a topic for a compelling living-learning environment. Approved proposals are assigned a residential building in which the students reside for the year in order to explore the topic in depth, literally living the experience in practical terms, with an expectation of sponsoring open events through which the entire community can benefit from the expertise developed by the students. Student proposals for theme houses are required to have a faculty or staff liaison to their house, to lend expertise to the topic and help guide the work of the students in the house. Some recent examples of theme houses have been the Literature House, the Verse House, the Local Living House, the Healthy Living house, and the Environmental house.



Recognizing only mixed success with theme houses over the years, members of the Dean of Students Office, specifically deans **Tedd Goundie**, **Holly Gurney**, and **Erin Foster Zsiga** along with Residential Life Assistants **Carrie Murphey** and **Sara Noyes**, have been working over the fall semester to determine ways to intensify the academic influence in theme houses. We are interested in working with students and faculty early in the proposal process to help develop themes that are intellectually engaging and are facilitated by living together. The programs and ideas we will be exploring and implementing in the coming semester include:

- Providing a modest stipend and programming budget for faculty who agree to advise a theme house. Understanding that time is precious for faculty members who nevertheless agree to advise theme houses, we were able to secure funding through the Mellon grant awarded to the President's Office to pilot a program to compensate for the added time required of advisors to theme houses. A program budget will bring about greater opportunity for a meaningful and sustained experience.
- Encouraging partnership between faculty members or a faculty member and a staff member in advising theme houses. Lessening the time commitment for a single advisor, the partnership more importantly will offer opportunities for the exploration of interdisciplinary themes that are not as readily achieved in a classroom setting.
- Exploring the possibility of connecting theme house topics with General Education Concentrations. Some GECS already include outside the classroom experiences that count toward fulfilling the requirements of the GEC, and we are interested in exploring with GEC coordinators if theme houses might be developed that would contribute toward a GEC requirement.

We look forward to engaging faculty, staff, and students in further developing these and other ideas at the start of the Winter semester. In the meantime, we invite anyone with ideas for themes or other ways to strengthen the program to be in touch with any of the people in the Dean of Students Office listed above.

## *Diversity in Excellence*

The strategic goals of the Diversity in Excellence project are to engage new faculty in a learning and development opportunity to increase their knowledge about difference and diversity issues; identify useful educational practices and strategies to help faculty, students and staff use diversity as a resource for learning; and cultivate a more inclusive campus climate.

Led by **Leslie Hill** (politics and president's office), the project planning group includes **Roland Davis**, (intercultural education and dean of students); **Heather Lindkvist** (anthropology and NECASL Project); **Ellen Peters** (institutional assessment and research support); **Carmen Purdy** (equity and diversity resources); **Soni Reese** (president's office); and **Marylyn Scott**, (admissions). The group will include one or two additional faculty members.



The planning group is pursuing the following *Action Goals*:

- Recruit recently tenured faculty to participate in a learning and professional development opportunity (Faculty Learning Community – FLC) focused on the transitions, learning engagements, and social identities our students face in college.
- Carry out a brief off-site retreat or on-campus seminar facilitated by an outside expert during which participants
  - review scholarship about relevant student transitions, intercultural engagements, and classroom dynamics;
  - build a culture of collegial reflection on how students learn and what they experience in classrooms about differences, diversity, and the usefulness of inclusiveness; and,
  - begin modification or development of (a portion of) course content, materials, or instructional strategies to include attention to diversity-related issues (to be implemented in a future semester); each member will share and get feedback from the group on his/her work-in-progress.
- Conduct periodic meetings during the academic year, during which FLC participants will meet to
  - discuss how they are applying their insights, and
  - review their efforts and observations with the retreat facilitator.
- Invite senior or experienced faculty whose research about difference or inclusive teaching practice equips them as Resource Persons to interact, consult with, and /or mentor FLC participants.

*This semester* the planning group has focused on:

- Identifying facilitator(s) for the retreat/seminar — including gathering recommendations for facilitators, reviewing credentials, and holding preliminary conversations with a small number in order to select one or

two who will work with the planning group and facilitate the retreat. By the end of the semester the group hopes to engage a facilitator and consult her/him on the feasibility of a campus presentation and plans for the FLC retreat/ seminar.

- Surveying faculty to identify optimal timing and topics of interest within the broad area of student transitions and student learning, intercultural engagements and classroom dynamics.

*By the end of the 2010-2011 academic year*, the planning group aims to:

- Prepare (and conduct) the FLC retreat/ seminar and establish a format for ongoing meetings among participants.
  - Identify options for communication and interaction of FLC participants with faculty and staff Resource Persons.
  - Begin planning for dissemination of best practices among faculty and members of the campus community.
-