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Planning at Bates, 02-25-2008 insert page

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In omnibus negotiis prius quam aggredi, adhibenda est praeparatio diligens.

In all matters of importance, before beginning, a diligent preparation must be undertaken.

Cicero, De Officiis (I, 21)

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I have to confess, when I go to Master Planning meetings I sometimes ask myself, “is this what Oren Cheney imagined

we’d be doing 150 years after he founded Bates College?” He transformed a patch of newly industrial Maine into a center for learning, in defiance of the challenges that would have daunted lesser men. I read binders, take notes, ask questions about geothermal heating, residential life, square footage, academic calendars and architects and sometimes fear that something has gone terribly prosaic, if not quite wrong.

Yet, if I take my Cicero to heart, surely it is the humdrum business of binders and notes that constitutes the *praeparatio diligens* we must undertake before beginning any important matter. You can almost hear the echoes of austere approval murmured by hard working planners from Cicero, to Oren Cheney to our less illustrious if equally diligent crew of present day planners at Bates. “Hard work, hmmm, yes; meetings, good; organization, wonderful; papyri scrolls, books, binders...excellent.”

What we undervalue in this somewhat Yankee gloss of Cicero’s *praeparatio diligens*, however, is a more passionate connotation to the Roman words than our modern notions of diligence allow. Roget’s Thesaurus tells me that today we consider words like, attentive, careful, economical, conscientious and assiduous, synonyms of “diligent.”

These synonyms sound appropriate, if a bit antiseptic, when we want to describe an idealized planning process. I suspect that is because they occlude the notions of choice and desire that Cicero heard when he recommended a *praeparatio diligens* to his readers.

For Romans, being diligent was as much the act of choosing what you desired from a host of possibilities as it was working industriously towards a goal. *Diligere*, the Latin dictionaries tell us, means to choose out, to prize, to esteem, to love. When Catullus describes his ardor to the love of his life in poem 72, he uses the verb *diligere*. When the poet said, “I loved you,” he also meant, “I chose you out to love.” Etymologically at least, the *praeparatio diligens* of planning is sexy stuff indeed.

If we don’t want to lose the Latin passion in our translation, we need to connect with the sense of choice in our own *praeparatio diligens*. When we make our plans we make our choices based on cherished values. The sense of choice in *diligere* comes from its own root word. The Roman verb for reading, *legere*, means to select or to choose, to pluck, as a flower. Romans didn’t put spaces between the words of their texts. When a Roman woman read, therefore, she plucked each word from a sea of letters and so, choice by choice, constructed the meaning of the sentence composed of her choices.

When we plan at Bates, we too are faced with a sea of possibilities, from which we must first identify, and then construe. If we are worthy heirs of Oren Cheney we must ask what each option might mean for Bates a decade, a generation or a century and half from now. We discover what we value now by constructing our vision of a future Bates born from the values we presently share and hold.

The *praeparatio diligens* of planning, then, is an engine through which Bates as a community can interrogate itself about its own identity. In the Master Planning Steering Committee we spent time early in our deliberations last year talking about the values that should inform the recommendations the committee made. We quickly came to agreement on our rubrics: academic excellence, diversity, community partnership, sustainability and stewardship.

But what do we mean by these words and by what rationale shall we make our choices when these values come into conflict? It is, thankfully, a rare occasion when a community must choose to abandon one value to pursue another. But in every choice we make, each of our values is jostling with the others to dominate our decisions. If we have achieved a healthy social dynamic, our values are in constant competition, always challenging us.

To make good choices, then, we need more than rubrics. We need to nuance and deepen our shared agreement about the content of our values. We need to be able to articulate our rationale for prioritizing them in any given choice if we wish to make the best choices in the sea of seemingly mundane decisions when planning for the future.

To that end, this semester, the Master Planning Steering Committee is holding a number of meetings to which we invite the entire Bates community. In January, for example, Julie Rosenbach and John Smedley of the Bates Committee on Environmental Responsibility gave a presentation at our open meeting. They asked us to engage the kinds of questions whose answers would deepen our understanding of the Bates value of sustainability. John and Julie led a wide-ranging and challenging discussion in which all attendees participated: members of the Master Planning Steering Committee and the faculty, students and staff who were interested in the meaning of the value “sustainability” in the context of planning for space on campus. The handout John and Julie gave us is available for all to read at the Master Planning web site <https://kent.bates.edu/masterplanning>. We encourage everyone to read the handout and give us your feedback on this important question (Masterplanning@bates.edu)

We plan to hold other meetings this year in which we explore what we mean when we say we want to plan for the future space and place of Bates in accord with our values of diversity, community and academic excellence. We encourage everyone to come and help us think about the content of our core values. It is, as Cicero would have told you, never a bad thing to think about what you love. And while we can’t promise you that our *praeparatio diligens* will be as exciting as Catullus’ love poems, we think you’ll find the discussions interesting in their own right.

Margaret Imber is an Associate Professor of Classical and Medieval Studies and member of the Campus Facilities Master Planning Steering Committee.

Now is a good time for you to contribute to the planning effort by sharing your comments, questions and suggestions. To do so, please email your thoughts (preferably in 250 words or less) to president@bates.edu in the next week.

Responses received by Monday, March 3 will be printed in a special issue of Planning at Bates to be circulated the first week in March.