

11-16-2007

## Planning at Bates, 11-16-2007

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## PROGRESS UPDATE AND THEMES

BY ELAINE TUTTLE HANSEN

In fall 2007, we began a planning process to guide some very important decisions about the future of Bates. In addition to affirming faith in the College and articulating ideas about moving forward, my aim is to support a highly interactive form of consultation with the community. This document reviews the process, provides an update on progress, and outlines four draft themes.

### AN UPDATE ON PROCESS AND PROGRESS

The first step in our process was a series of small group conversations with about 175 faculty members, staff members, and students to talk about the College's goals and aspirations and about what is and is not working well. In addition to exploring just what it is that makes Bates great and how the experience can become even greater, participants in these groups discussed external forces that are affecting strong liberal arts colleges and how to leverage those challenges to Bates' advantage. Most of the participants were chosen randomly to increase the likelihood that all opinions were represented in the range of information that was gathered.

Then I began to make appointments to a steering group to guide the planning process during this academic year. The members of the group have begun their work by using notes from the small group conversations and their own knowledge of Bates to articulate several timely topics or themes that will frame the planning effort.

Now the steering group is in the process of editing the themes (outlined on pages 2 and 3) and inviting faculty, staff, and students to form working groups to study them and develop concrete plans to advance the goals and aspirations that fall under their theme. One defining characteristic of this planning process is its openness to new ideas and questions all along the way. Each working group will consult with many members of the community in the course of this work and some members of the working group will join the steering group in the coming weeks.

The first charge to the working groups is to consider the theme they will develop and articulate questions to frame their work. The following questions were developed by the steering committee to encourage all the working groups to consider values, diversity and inclusion, opportunities for learning, and effective communication as they explore their theme. The committee encourages each working group to edit, change or add to these questions as their work begins:

- What are the strongest or most effective parts of our work in this area now? What are our current best practices? What values contribute to our exemplary strengths?

- What is missing that would increase the effectiveness of our work in this area?
- How does work in this area support and advance diversity and inclusion goals of:
  - building a multicultural community that includes members of underrepresented groups,
  - nurturing a climate in which people approach differences (and the tensions that accompany them) as opportunities for learning and creativity, and
  - crafting a learning experience that equips students to recognize and respect differences as well as to lead and serve in diverse communities?
- How can we use diversity and inclusion work as lessons to strengthen future planning processes and action projects? How do we make diversity and inclusion a source as well as a goal of our work?
- What individuals, groups, committees, departments and offices can help explore this theme? What previous work (reports, plans, reviews, and other documents) should be considered? What new information is needed? What lessons would increase our understanding of the impact of this work on various campus constituencies and enhance its effectiveness?
- How does our work in this area compare to our peers? What can we learn from them? What can we use?
- What are near-to-mid term gains we can achieve? Are there changes to practices, for example, that would improve practice or conditions now?
- What should we accomplish in the longer term? Are there new activities, programs, resources or facilities that we need?
- Please order the needs you identify from most to least crucial. Suggest how to allocate attention and resources to these needs.
- How can we evaluate progress we make in this area? What are useful benchmarks of change?
- As a working group, how can we best communicate with those who would be responsible for carrying out our recommendations or would be affected by them?

The following themes are under consideration by the steering group. In addition to or instead of the general questions above, other questions that are more specific to each theme are listed in the sections below.

## Theme 1: Clarifying and Explaining the Bates Experience

This draft theme is drawn from about 170 comments from faculty, staff, and students. The comments pointed to the need to emphasize the value of a liberal arts education and clarify the goals and priorities of the College as well as to refresh internal communication practices and the ways Bates is explained and presented to those outside the College. A working group for this theme might take up the following questions:

1. What are the College's values? How are these values expressed by and within the Bates experience?
2. What elements of the Bates experience provide the biggest benefit to all? How can Bates hold onto important traditions while advancing into the 21st century global arena?
3. How can Bates manage campus communication in a more effective way? How can the Bates website be improved to include more accessible information to faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni, and community members? Are there other internal methods we should use?
4. What attracts students and parents to Bates? How can Bates best promote and communicate its accomplishments and values to diverse students, parents, and community members?
5. How can Bates serve as a model to other liberal arts colleges? How can we be a place where top educators come to discuss liberal arts issues?



## Theme 2: Learning at Bates

This draft theme is drawn from about 40 comments from faculty, staff, and students shared at meetings with President Hansen. The comments, which ranged from the curriculum and residence life to facilities and transportation, suggested that the integration of academic life and student life might be enhanced. A working group for this theme might take up the following questions:

1. How can Bates promote the values and lessons that are taught in the classroom and many co-curricular programs in the residence life of students?
2. What type of activities and spaces would enhance the intellectual life of students and do more towards connecting academics and residence life?
3. What is our assessment of how the academic calendar affects learning at Bates? What calendar would best benefit Bates faculty, staff, students, and the curriculum?
4. How can we build on distinctive aspects of a Bates education like experiential learning, student research opportunities, and the success of the thesis requirement to enhance the intellectual life of the College?
5. Where and how do we build into the intellectual life of the college an expectation that learning about and learning how to function well in communities where people come from backgrounds and experiences unlike our own is an important part of a liberal arts education and of a Bates education?
6. How can Bates encourage and support students as they accept responsibility for their intellectual pursuits and as they challenge their comfort zones?

## Theme 3: Teaching and Scholarship at Bates

This theme is drawn from about 55 comments from faculty, staff, and students. They ranged from faculty workload and faculty size to support for teaching, scholarship and service. A working group for this theme might take up the following questions:

1. How can Bates best support and reward faculty in their teaching, scholarship and service pursuits?
2. How can we better integrate a faculty member's many roles?
3. How does Bates create a shared culture of scholarship among faculty?
4. How do we sustain the intellectual life of the faculty? What type of activities and space would do more toward connecting scholarship and teaching?
5. How do we support staff and faculty members' efforts to bring diversity to intellectual life at Bates? How does the reward system encourage or fail to encourage this value now?
6. How do we break down traditional boundaries of knowledge?



### CURRENT STEERING GROUP MEMBERS

**Terry Beckmann**, Vice President for Finance & Administration and Treasurer  
**Dave Chirayath**, Research Analyst in Advancement  
*(Selected by the Bates College Staff Association)*  
**Meg Creedon '08**  
**Sylvia Federico**, Assistant Professor of English  
*(Member of the President's Institutional Planning and Advisory Committee)*  
**Tedd Goundie**, Dean of Students  
**Ben Hester '10**  
*(Selected by Bates College Student Government)*  
**Leslie Hill**, Special Assistant to the President and Associate Professor of Politics

## Theme 4: Strengthening the Bates Community

This draft theme is drawn from about 100 comments from faculty, staff, and students. They ranged from building community among faculty, staff and students and connecting to the local community to developing creative spaces for people to gather. A working group for this theme might take up the following questions:

1. What types of programs and facilities can build on and enhance Bates faculty, staff, and students' sense of community?
2. How do we make diversity and inclusion a source of learning? How can programs and facilities—in their architecture, décor, modes of communication, spatial arrangement, etc.—reflect the presence, approach, or ambience of more than one culture?
3. What new programs and policies would increase the integration of students and faculty with staff and enhance campus life for all?
4. What can be done to increase integration with the local, national, and global world when that makes sense?

As the steering group continues to edit these themes and questions, your thoughts are important. Please share your ideas now and at any point in this planning process.

The steering committee is also preparing to appoint members to the working groups, and I invite nominations and self-nominations from the entire community. While the final working groups will be relatively small (on the order of 6-8 members), we are eager to include everyone who is interested in this process as it unfolds. To that end, the names of all who express an interest in one or more of the themes will be collected, and the working groups will find ways to reach out to all who volunteered or were nominated as they gather information and consider ideas. Please send names by Thursday, November 29 to [president@bates.edu](mailto:president@bates.edu). On behalf of the steering group, I thank you for your interest and assistance.

**Bill Hiss**, Vice President for External Affairs  
**Bev Johnson**, Associate Professor of Geology  
*(Member of the President's Institutional Planning and Advisory Committee)*  
**Kevin McHugh**, Director of Athletics  
*(Member of President's Council)*  
**Wylie Mitchell**, Dean of Admissions  
**Jill Reich**, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty  
**Gene Wiemers**, Vice President for Information and Library Services and Librarian