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Choices for Bates, February 2010

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New Pathways for the Learning Century at BATES

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the *Choices for Bates* newsletter, which replaces *Planning at Bates* as a way to update all members of the community on our progress on the *Choices* plan. I anticipate issuing this newsletter periodically and welcome all suggestions for content and ideas about how to make the publication stronger or more useful.

This issue contains news about a proposal the College has submitted to the The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and details about strategic steps the College is taking to improve distinctiveness, increase resources, and boost outreach. I am also pleased to let you know that printed copies of *Choices for Bates* will be available soon. Please watch for news of this publication and for information about how each member of our community can help take forward the ideas the plan contains.

In this first issue of the newsletter, it is more than fitting to recognize the many people who contributed to *Choices for Bates* during the two-year planning process. Without your insight, hard work, and devotion to our future, we would not be entering the exciting period of development that is taking shape.

Following their January meeting, one Trustee said that he “felt a little tingle of discovery” when he heard how the educational experience we offer students can be “of the liberal arts tradition and distinctive at the same time.” Bolstered by ideas like this and by the active spirit of collaboration our work has stimulated on campus, I am confident that we will use *Choices for Bates* to shape a leading role for the College in this new learning century.

With warm regards,



Elaine Tuttle Hansen

Bates seeks support for *Choices for Bates* ideas from special Mellon presidential discretionary funds

In December The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation gave Bates the opportunity to explain how the College could use their help to advance the powerful ideas that make up *Choices for Bates*. By offering the possibility of support from a fund designed to help experienced presidents advance specific strategies at key points in the development of the institution, this invitation prompted Bates to think about immediate and tangible ways to start down those “new pathways for the learning century at Bates” suggested by the subtitle of the plan.

Eager to endorse the innovative approaches and powerful ideas at the heart of *Choices*, President Hansen asked leaders of each component of the plan to propose one or two critical projects that (1) foreshadow the plan’s full potential by achieving a visible early win and (2) advance the highly networked processes the plan emphasizes.

On February 9 the Foundation let President Hansen know that the proposal has received preliminary approval and is moving to the final stage of Mellon’s process. Here are brief descriptions of the projects the grant, if funded, will support, framed by the components of *Choices for Bates* they advance. Because each project grows out of ongoing effort, this single investment has the potential to produce significant gains.

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The first initiative is designed to deepen and enrich collaboration, curriculum and leadership in two key areas of great strength at Bates, (1) the Arts and (2) the Natural Sciences and Mathematics. This effort to build on significant achievement through different ways of knowing and working together in an intellectually ambitious and well-rounded community includes two distinct initiatives—a plan for the arts and a plan for the natural sciences and math.

The arts plan seeks robust support for more collaborative campus productions—dance, visual arts and new media, music and theater—to promote deeper engagement in the world. To lead the initial phases and develop a more sustainable model for leadership, Bates is forming a new kind of interdisciplinary team called the Arts Collaborative.

Attuned to Bates' liberal arts mission, this team will work across disciplines and campus/community borders to enhance and coordinate the vitality and visibility of the arts. If awarded Mellon funds, the Collaborative will:

- *Tailor three to four existing arts-related first-year seminars to introduce the arts at Bates as an integrated course of study and a stimulating collaborative experience.* This is a pilot project to help reveal the conditions that will best advance new ways of leading and implementing the arts-related academic program. There will be a second project chosen from ideas already under consideration or new ones that might arise. Bates will supplement these funds from existing sources to extend the impact of the Mellon grant.
- *Develop the new leadership model called the Arts Collaborative.* Funding will support stipends for representatives of each involved academic department, the museum, and the dance festival, as well as those who reshape and connect the first-year seminars. This project will resemble a faculty development seminar, charged in this case to develop the Collaborative's leadership model.
- *Begin to develop an effective communications strategy.* A website will be created to interpret the Arts Collaborative to the community; achieve clarity about leadership and goals; and present new activities like the first-year seminar project under the auspices of the Collaborative. The discipline of writing a website offers a practical and concrete way to achieve and/or show immediate progress.

The plan for the natural sciences and math will improve the quality, coherence and reach of the curriculum. In the longer term, it will prepare Bates to provide technologically advanced facilities and more resources for faculty and undergraduate research to ensure that students take full advantage of close interaction with faculty. This proposal is to:

- *Accelerate the faculty's design of an integrated four-semester science and math sequence.* Due in part to existing Mellon support, curriculum redesign is underway, and there is remarkably broad support for a more creative approach to teaching math and science at the introductory level. Leaders ask for new funds to release two scholars from one course for one semester, an investment that will lead to significant gains.
- *Implement a pilot project to expand and deepen one of Bates' existing strengths: close, long-term contact between faculty and students working on real-world problems.* This type of customized attention distinguishes Bates, and students with summer or independent study experience in the lab are particularly well positioned to benefit from senior thesis work. Faculty agree on the importance of finding ways to extend that benefit to more students and intensifying the preparation for either graduate work or applied work in industry.

The second initiative is designed to extend and integrate elements of learning at Bates. The planning process has revealed new ideas about how to build on the strengths of the learning environment in a world that is experiencing rapid social and technological change. As a result, leaders have identified three developing projects that are poised to benefit by being brought together in a well-designed plan: a Learning Commons to

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promote excellence, innovation, diversity and collaboration; a Residential Life program that extends intellectual exchange beyond the classroom and helps students strengthen interpersonal skills; and a commitment to diversity as both a goal and resource. Because the approach is focused on building each area individually while also linking them, an investment in these projects can pay great dividends.

The first project is the Learning Commons, which is being designed to increase coherence, effective communication, and community strength. Its conceptual underpinnings are already in place: Bates will improve the quality of learning; foster the values of excellence, innovation, diversity and collaboration; and broaden the intellectual experience for students and faculty. Feasibility studies support locating the Learning Commons in Ladd Library to give it high visibility in a place that is both an intellectual center of the College and a prized space for student interaction. Two essential next steps are to:

- Encourage new activities that integrate the ideas of the Learning Commons in the community. Funds will support stipends for faculty who join the leadership team in writing, quantitative reasoning, student affairs, and library and information technology services to assure that the outcome is embedded in the curriculum and the life of the College.
- Engage a space planner to reconfigure existing space into a serviceable, inviting home for the Learning Commons. Bates is prepared to redesign the main two floors of the Library around this idea, but detailed programming for adjacencies and essential elements is still needed.

While students learn directly through the curriculum, the residence halls encourage different kinds of intellectual exchange. Although many top liberal arts colleges are residential, most are failing to achieve the full value of that advantage. Bates—residential by design, not by accident or merely as a convenience to students—aims to do more to stimulate students to learn where they live and encourage habits that will serve them well throughout their lives. The first step is to set a higher standard for residential life as an experiential educational opportunity. With Mellon's help Bates would:

- *Engage students with faculty-directed theme houses to intensify academic influence.* Currently, student residents determine the ideas behind theme houses and how to implement related activities. With new support, faculty will guide decision-making and test ways to integrate theme house living with other initiatives. For example, the Arts Collaborative might use this opportunity to increase arts-related activity in residential spaces. Guided by faculty in the arts, theme houses might pilot specific ideas and explore factors for success. This request will support modest stipends for up to three faculty members and small budgets to fund activities they design.

An integral part of the educational community is the Diversity in Excellence project, which is designed to support learning and teaching about difference and diversity issues, identify useful practices, and help the community cultivate a more inclusive climate. To accelerate this process, leaders propose to:

- *Invite 12 to 15 faculty members to participate in a year-long pilot seminar on the transitions and social identities students face in college.* Activities would include exploring narratives from various assessment projects recently conducted or underway. This faculty development seminar will also investigate scholarship about relevant classroom dynamics and student learning, as well as collegial reflection on what students learn and experience in classrooms about diversity and the value of inclusiveness. Participants will generate or re-design a teaching or advising strategy or set of materials and discuss it with other seminar members. Funds will support small stipends for participants.

Across all elements of *Choices*, this early boost from Mellon could significantly advance ideas that go to the very heart of the plan while also underscoring the importance of thinking *institutionally* about the future—and then acting *systematically* on those ideas. Each project represents what participants in the planning process learned over the course of their work: When community members come together and integrate ideas, perspectives, and dreams, they can change and enrich Bates' very core.

Strategic, integrated action strengthens Bates every day

As we develop the elements of *Choices for Bates*, we do well to recognize that other important strategic actions over the last few years have helped to prepare the way for our work and position us well for the work ahead. Here are but a few of the most prominent examples of actions and accomplishments that represent the innovative ideas and integrated effort of many people all across our community.

Whether these marks of progress resulted from faculty action, staff support, or administrative leadership—or, as is more often and appropriately the case, from the combined efforts of all three of these essential forces—they have improved the distinctive educational experience of Bates' students, increased resources for teaching, scholarship, and the many forms of support our mission requires, and helped us lead and manage through outreach to our external stakeholders and supporters for the longer term and day-to-day. In addition, these recent moves have strengthened our position in light of weak economic conditions and active competition from other top liberal arts institutions. Thanks to each person, regardless of your role, who supports and encourages the kind of progress these actions represent.

Learning and Living

- Revised the curriculum and increased learning support programs to **help students develop skills across disciplines and think in complex ways**. Includes GECs, three writing-intensive courses and three courses on scientific reasoning, laboratory experience, and quantitative literacy.
- Improved residential life and student support to **increase academic intensity**, serve students with learning differences, help students on academic probation, and reduce damage to residence halls.
- Created diversity initiatives and doubled AHANA students in three incoming classes to **improve learning environment and retention and spur innovative programs** like Swing Deans.
- Increased visibility and resources to community engagement through the Harvard Center to **enhance our reputation and help students apply classroom learning** and learn from the real world.

Teaching and Supporting

- Strengthened faculty compensation to **close distance between Bates and the BCM mean** from 15% to 6% for full professors and from 7% to 3% for assistant professors in five years.
- Enhanced sabbatical plan (with Mellon's help) to **improve teaching and scholarship and increase success in winning external grants**, leading to 44 faculty grants providing \$820,000 for 2010 and \$4.5 million in total grant funding.
- Implemented performance management to **recognize excellence and increase emphasis on priorities** across the staff.
- Increased investment in academic technology and electronic resources to **expand transactional Web services and reduce labor requirements** by several FTEs.
- Formed partnerships to **link library services** with Williams, Wellesley, Northeastern and Middlebury, in addition to Bowdoin and Colby.

Leading and Managing

- Created Advancement to **join alumni and communications/media** under one leader and to complete Endowing Our Values at more than double the previous campaign and with largest cash gift.
- Formed Friends of Bates Athletics to **engage an athletics affinity group, increase competitiveness of varsity teams and build larger donor base** to support all parts of the College.
- Hired a top leader to **position Advancement to increase annual fund revenues**, launch ambitious and appropriately staffed fund-raising efforts, and institutionalize an Advancement organization that transcends administrations.
- Formed Enrollment and External Relations to **join admissions, financial aid, career services, and communications and media**, charging new leader to do more to shape and narrate students' experiences before, during, and after Bates.