

Report from the Research Opportunities Working Group: A Set of Goals, a Set of Possibilities

May 2008

Executive Summary

By virtue of its size, its endowment, and the caliber and commitment of its faculty, Smith College is uniquely poised to redefine the meaning and content of a liberal education for the twenty-first century. Our graduates will enter a rapidly changing world characterized by dense information and complex problems. Our commitment to *educate women of promise for lives of distinction* is, therefore, a commitment to mould scholars who can bring intellectual agility and rigor to these complex problems, and who can exhibit a love of discovery.

We believe that **purposeful inquiry**—a deliberate and organized set of experiences where a student identifies an idea, engages in a meaningful pursuit and exploration, and creates a product that reflects the effort—lies at the core of this new Smith education. The following report identifies the key steps necessary to create an excellent, meaningful and visible culture of purposeful inquiry at Smith College, one that would be a hallmark feature of a Smith education.

Changing institutional culture is, by definition, a difficult undertaking. We are buoyed by the fact that many of the ingredients for a culture of purposeful inquiry are already in place, and have been quietly (and sometimes invisibly) simmering for some time. At least in part, the task is to coordinate and make visible what is already here. We are also encouraged by the many ways in which a culture of purposeful inquiry weaves together many of the important strands of *The Smith Design for Learning*. Above all, we are convinced that this initiative captures the intellectual and creative energy of students, faculty and staff.

The recommendations that follow are meant to be a starting point for a sustained period of discussion and implementation. We anticipate that a good deal of facilitated discussion will have to take place within academic units as they consider the initiative relative to their size, history, offerings and ambitions, as well as across the College as a whole. We want to encourage – and, wherever possible, facilitate—these discussions, as they will shape the details of this initiative. And still, our report includes proposals for immediate implementation; ones intended to translate the faculty’s good enthusiasm into tangible and visible changes.

Our report is anchored in an explicitly developmental conception of purposeful inquiry, one that begins with orientation and runs through all four years. Achieving this vision requires, amongst other things, an honest acknowledgement of the time and resource demands on faculty, students and staff.

We offer five broad initiatives, each of which groups a set of recommendations in pursuit of a common objective. Taken together, the five lay the foundations for a culture of purposeful inquiry.

- 1) *Creating an Institutional Body to Enhance and Guide a Culture of Purposeful Inquiry*, including:
 - An appointed temporary implementation committee;
 - A permanent steering committee;
 - Establishment of the Inquiry Fellows Program.
- 2) *Supporting and Rewarding the Work of a Culture of Purposeful Inquiry*, including:
 - Redefining teaching to acknowledge research mentoring;
 - A fund to encourage new initiatives that promote a culture of purposeful inquiry;
 - Allocation of annual research stipends to departments and programs;
 - Conversion of 25 work-study positions into research assistantships;
 - Sponsorship of workshops to assist faculty in the implementation of research opportunities in and outside the classroom.
- 3) *Supporting and Enhancing Research in the Curriculum*, including:
 - Creation of the “Smith Focus,” an annual theme for research efforts and lectures;
 - Creation and underwriting of inquiry and methods courses;

- Reexamination of the purpose and structure of seminars;
 - Reexamination of the purpose and structure of orientation offerings;
 - More purposeful process for declaring a major, including a more explicit and intentional mechanism for entry and a self-reflective capstone statement;
 - Enhancement of summer research opportunities, particularly in Div I and Div II.
- 4) *Targeting the Junior Year and Students from Underrepresented Populations*, including:
- Enhancement and articulation of purposeful inquiry opportunities for students participating in JYA programs;
 - Creation of a focused and intensive JY@ program at Smith College for students remaining on campus in their junior year;
 - Creation of 20 JY@ research assistantships in the existing or projected centers and extradepartmental units;
 - Creation of a research fund in the Office of Institutional Diversity;
 - Creation of a prize for the best student work in race studies.
- 5) *Making Visible and Extending the World of Research at Smith*, including:
- Creation of a publication for student research and inquiry at Smith;
 - Increase web presence of the components of a culture of purposeful inquiry;
 - Enhanced format for “Celebrating Collaborations;”
 - Creation of a research fair and a research coordinator;
 - Enhanced presence of research activities within student houses.

Report from the Research Opportunities Working Group

Our Process and Motivations

Our working group grew out of the Strategic Planning and Re-accreditation processes (06-08), directed by Strategic Direction II (“Promote a Culture of Research, Inquiry and Discovery”) as outlined in *The Smith Design for Learning*. Beginning as a subcommittee of CMP in October 2006, the group was officially convened by President Christ in March 2007.

We have sought to understand the culture of research that already exists at Smith College, as well as the ambitions our colleagues have for such a culture. To that end, we have met with representatives of every academic department and program, as well as with representatives from various centers/institutes/non-curricular offices; we also met with a group of students organized through the SGA. We have also organized an all-faculty retreat (May 2007), attended by 80 faculty, and had conversations with the Provost, President, and the Board of Trustees. Finally, we explored research initiatives at the University of California at Berkeley, Davidson College and Williams College; attended the Mellon 23 Conference on Interdisciplinarity, where student research was a considerable topic; and informally consulted with colleagues at other peer institutions.

A number of motivations animate this undertaking. For one, we were compelled by discussions that occurred during the Strategic Planning process, and by data that indicated that students felt they had limited opportunities for research, especially before their senior year. We were also motivated by the increasing heterogeneity of our student population, with the attendant variability in their levels of preparation and in their ability to identify and seek out research experiences. But perhaps most importantly, we were driven by the firm belief that Smith College is uniquely positioned to invent and implement a new template for a liberal education – one that combines traditional teaching with a commitment to direct student involvement in the intellectual enterprise. This discussion, we believe, is part of a larger conversation about the meaning of a liberal arts education, the role of liberal arts colleges, and the function of women’s colleges at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

We contend that Smith College’s human and material resources, its newly restated mission, and its history as an innovative institution provide us with a unique opportunity to implement a culture of purposeful inquiry. That said, however, we have remained keenly aware of the current demands on our faculty and our students, and mindful of how this initiative might affect those demands. Throughout our discussions, we have always kept in mind that each discipline within the academy defines purposeful inquiry and its prerequisites differently.

From our very early work—including a meeting with Chairs and Directors (fall 2006), a conversation at a faculty meeting, and initial meetings with sixteen (16) academic units—we identified some foundational commitments that would guide our thinking and exploration:

- That a culture of research and purposeful inquiry should be a hallmark feature of the excellence of a Smith education.
- That our models for research and inquiry should be developmental and should reflect opportunities for students in all four years.
- That we should be attentive to research opportunities in the classroom, broadly imagined, and should identify research opportunities that go beyond the current model of independent work with students.
- That the foundations and methods of a discipline can be part of a culture of research and inquiry, especially in a developmental context.

We settled, then, on an inclusive but still relevant definition of research and inquiry: *any organized experience that helps a student identify an idea, engage in a meaningful process of pursuit and exploration of that idea, and yields a product.*

Smith College is uniquely poised among its peers to implement a visible, inclusive and vibrant culture of purposeful inquiry. We are heartened by the many aspects of the College that are already compatible with supporting and enhancing such a culture, most notably:

- strength of the faculty
- size of the endowment relative to the size of the institution
- established integration of research and teaching (including the proposal for a teaching and learning center)
- commitment to interdisciplinarity
- extensive facilities (centers, institutes, projects), including the ones to come
- support of the Board of Trustees
- attention to advising (especially the excellent report from the Advising Task Force)

Defining Features of Our Culture of Purposeful Inquiry (CPI)

From our conversations over the past eighteen months, the following features have emerged as definitive of our culture of purposeful inquiry. In essence, these are a set of principles that should guide the College's pursuit of a culture of purposeful inquiry, and they animate the recommendations we make below.

- Cultivating a sense of **CURIOSITY** in students. As fundamental to purposeful inquiry as library skills and discipline-related techniques or knowledge are curiosity and the belief that one can aspire to know more. This curiosity would have to be cultivated from the earliest stages.
- **INTENTIONALITY** from both students and faculty. This includes a student's purposeful mapping of her curriculum before and during the major, and the faculty's embrace of a more explicit articulation of what it takes to engage in inquiry in each of our fields (for example, explicitness in our syllabi).
- **ACCESSIBILITY**, specifically providing multiple, visible and stage-appropriate entry points into research opportunities, entry points that would ensure that all students have access to such opportunities.
- **TRANSPARENCY**, which includes making current and projected instances of purposeful inquiry clear and explicit to students in syllabi, websites, presentations of the major, etc... This transparency supports the efforts towards more comprehensive and integrated advising.
- **VISIBILITY**, through meaningful showcasing of the work of students and faculty. This includes classroom assignments, performance, exhibitions and collaborations within and outside the Smith community. This could also involve more opportunities to showcase faculty research in various stages, as well as more support faculty research.
- **INNOVATION and ENTREPRENEURSHIP**, including creating opportunities that cross established administrative and academic units. This also includes mechanisms that emphasize agility in response to opportunities, and a culture that is tolerant of risk and failure.
- **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT** of the work that faculty undertake in the creation of a culture of purposeful inquiry. This includes more explicit rewards, release time where appropriate, administrative mechanisms that streamline the establishing of new initiatives, as well as staff support to help sustain these initiatives.
- **INTEGRATION** of the efforts to create a culture of purposeful inquiry so they are not additions to existing demands on faculty and student time. If this strategic initiative is to succeed, it needs to become the hallmark of coursework, curricula and requirements, as well as an explicit component of Smith's identity.

Of these eight features, it is the last two that require brief comment. First "acknowledgement": the committee appreciates the profound engagement of the faculty in the work of the College, and is concerned about the increasing demands on faculty energy and time. Through our conversations, colleagues have raised this as a concern, especially in light of the reduction to the overall size of the faculty. The idea of "integration" is linked to these concerns since it is intended to challenge the additive nature of new initiatives. Such incremental additions to the expectations of faculty, students and staff only undermine the capacity to do what we do with excellence and with some sanity.

We remain optimistic that the culture of purposeful inquiry imagined in our proposal below can be implemented over the next five years. But we are convinced that such implementation depends upon a shift in how we as a College define the undergraduate experience, a shift that requires great imagination and great resources.

How to Implement a College-Wide Culture of Purposeful Inquiry

Below are our recommendations, divided into five overarching initiatives or plans-of-action. Each initiative intends to respond to specific needs or characteristics of a culture of purposeful inquiry, and comes from our work with faculty, students and administrators (in many cases, we make reference to existing efforts in academic units and other places in the College). We know that institutional change is slow to come, but we also believe that this is the right moment for Smith to develop a comprehensive plan to enhance and promote its culture of purposeful inquiry. To that end, we have combined modest initiatives that are easier to implement with more ambitious ones that will require more time and thought.

We think of this as a living document, as a series of proposals that will be amended and supplemented through further conversation by initiatives that have yet to be imagined. Therefore, though we have indicated estimated dates when each action could be launched, we consider these dates to be benchmarks. We recognize that timelines and proposals will shift and change as the College becomes engaged in the work of building and supporting a comprehensive culture of purposeful inquiry.

We have declined, intentionally, to include dollar amounts with each initiative, though have outlined near the end some concerns about resources and structures.

Initiative One: Creating an Institutional Body to Enhance and Guide a Culture of Purposeful Inquiry

We imagine the recommendations below as a dynamic and ambitious lot and trust their inclinations and their potential. And still, we consider the work of supporting and enhancing a culture of purposeful inquiry to be long-term, to involve further thinking, trial and implementation, and assessment. We think that the vetting and implementing and balancing of the recommendations below will be best done by a group charged with this particular task.

To that end, we recommend first that an interim **steering committee** responsible for implementation be appointed. The steering committee could be charged to consider initiatives that might be implemented immediately or quickly (perhaps those marked for 08-09 in this report). This committee would be temporary.

To undertake the long-term work of a culture of research and inquiry, we recommend that a **standing committee** be appointed subsequently to monitor progress and implementation.

One of the under-used resources at Smith is faculty scholarship and knowledge in the research process. In truth, part of the effort to make research a defining feature of a Smith education should focus on supporting, encouraging and showcasing faculty research. To this end, we would create an **“Inquiry Fellows”** Program. [2010-11]

The program would select three faculty members as Inquiry Fellows. Part of their work would be to identify new and support on-going initiatives for the office of student research (see below), and generally to participate in the life of research efforts. These fellows would serve on the standing committee for ongoing efforts to establish a culture of purposeful inquiry at Smith. They could, for instance, be involved in orientation efforts and Collaborations planning, in interactions with the Kahn fellows and in conversations with the centers. In short, they could be expected to be engaged participants and visible ambassadors for research, and would work closely with the staff of the proposed teaching/learning center.

Fellows would be associate professors or full professors whose scholarly and College service achievements make them suitable for such a fellowship. The fellowship would consist of a course release for each year.

Initiative Two: Supporting and Rewarding the Work of a Culture of Purposeful Inquiry

Much good work is already happening in academic units; what is missing is a real structure to reward and support this work. We aim, therefore, to foster local autonomy to encourage and reward faculty initiatives with students, in and out of the classroom. We also want to help faculty think about the many possibilities for research in the classroom, as well as about ways to best engage and support student research that extends beyond the classroom.

First is the matter of **redefining teaching to acknowledge research mentoring**. Our commitment to expanding research opportunities for all Smith students has emphasized the classroom, though we are clear that some of these opportunities will happen in contexts beyond the formal classroom. At present, we lack incentives to encourage or reward faculty for this work. The achievement of a culture of purposeful inquiry will require thinking about how teaching credit is assigned. This conversation could happen in academic units as well as College-wide, and could include a consideration of what constitutes a course. We see this as an opportunity for academic units to think about the relationship and trade-offs between traditional content and inquiry-based approaches. This is also an important conversation about how we can substitute, rather than simply add, new requirements for students and new demands for faculty.

Such redefinition doesn't necessarily involve extensive faculty resources. Let us give one specific example: if the College could identify a set of parameters for assigning teaching credit, academic units could be encouraged to think creatively about how to distribute teaching FTE's to support research opportunities. In this example, only in exceptional cases (for example, a small academic unit) might an occasional course replacement be needed and provided.

We think that initiating these conversations would need to be first on the agenda for the steering committee that oversees the enhancement of a culture of purposeful inquiry, and stress that these conversations need to acknowledge the varying ways that student research happens in various disciplines and divisions. It is possible to imagine that the steering committee might invite proposals from a few academic units to serve as pilots, since this could be done soon and might serve as a model for future directions in this regard. [2009-10]

We would create a **fund specifically for research activities**—to support faculty and student travel to conferences, to support other ventures to introduce students to the culture of a discipline, to support emergency requests. This fund would be substantial (at least \$50,000/yr) and would be housed in the office for student research or the teaching and learning center (see below) and administered by the steering committee described above. [2008-09]

We would also create a modest **research and inquiry budget line for each department or program that does not have its own endowed discretionary funds**, starting at \$2500 each. This money would support each unit's initiatives in research and inquiry (for example, hosting the presentation of the major as a research fair; or planning a small student conference as the final project for seminars in the department/program). [2008-09]

We would convert **twenty-five (25) student work-study positions into research assistantships** that department chairs and program directors can request for a three-year period. Faculty in units could use these positions in ways similar to the Quigley Fellowships in SWG. [2009-10]

We would host a number of **"best practices" workshops** as part of the May workshop series. We would also include **one Teaching Arts Lunch (TAL) on research and inquiry each semester** for the next five years. [2008-09] We propose the following initial topics for these workshops:

- Best practices at Smith and beyond (emphasis on approaches that succeed in enticing students to a culture of purposeful inquiry, and in supporting them once they are involved).
- CPI in the classroom (emphasis on how courses and syllabi can be designed to showcase opportunities for PI in the classroom. Here, the example of project-oriented assignments in the performing arts—Theatre, Dance and Music—might be helpful. Also a discussion of how to incorporate research into large and/or entry-level courses)
- Making CPI explicit in the major (emphasis on the ways in which majors can be revised to make purposeful inquiry an integral part of every student's experience, for example via methods courses, capstone experiences, etc...)

We would also begin a series of **"syllabi" lunches**, where faculty present and talk about the organization of a syllabus, especially its assignments. These lunches could be hosted between allied academic units. [2008-09]

Initiative Three: Supporting and Enhancing Research in the Curriculum

We have been struck by the various successful strategies that faculty already use to incorporate research and inquiry into classes. What we also find, though, is that there are few administrative mechanisms to support such incorporation. In this initiative, we are especially interested in a student's conscious experience of seeing a work through to completion—to find its beginning threads, to gather and assemble, to imagine and achieve an end—an experience we consider the centerpiece of this new culture.

We recommend that the College develop and announce an **annual theme or topic (“Smith Focus”)** meant to catalyze interaction and integration within and outside the curriculum. Ideally, the Smith Focus would be a complex problem or question or topic (for example, the meaning and relevance of time; the shape and exigencies of water; the gifts of the twentieth century) that by its very nature requires multidisciplinary attack and would center on a series of high profile lectures. In consultation with existing and projected centers and interested academic units, the focus would be selected at least a year in advance, giving faculty the opportunity to modify syllabi, or to construct new courses centered on the advertised topic. The process would be supported by funding for course development, an expedited CAP approval process, and incentives for departments willing to participate. [2009-10]

We recommend developing a mechanism for **bringing two or more courses together around a shared topic(s)**—in a context similar to but less comprehensive than the Smith Focus proposal above. The idea is to have students come to a topic from different perspectives, under the auspices of a research project. These interactions could take the form of a single week carved out of the relevant syllabi for the purpose of having courses come together, or might involve regular joint meetings throughout the semester (in the latter case, administrative and, where appropriate, financial support would be offered). In some ways, the intention here is to mimic the impulse of the presidential seminars though with more flexibility; we also see the Women, Race, Culture cluster in SWG as a possible model. [2009-10]

We propose a series of **one-credit interterm courses** related to inquiry that could be hosted by academic units or centers (similar to the course offered by Kelly Anderson of the Sophia Smith Collection). This would be a key part of the effort to use interterm more constructively and more deliberately. These courses would also locate existing and projected centers at the very center of the culture of purposeful inquiry [2009-10]

A culture of purposeful inquiry can only take root at Smith if we are explicit about the skills and methods involved in such inquiry. Courses specifically designed to impart these skills and methods exist in certain units, but are absent in others. In practice, it seems both impractical and unnecessary for every department or program to mount such a course since there are methods and practices shared by several disciplines. We propose that the College explore the creation of a set of interdisciplinary **Inquiry Methods Courses**. Such courses would be open to all students in the relevant disciplines, and would be considered an integral part of the majors. Once again, we envision current and projected centers as being integrally involved in such courses [2010-11]

We would create an opportunity for faculty to revisit the purpose and structure of **seminars**. In our meetings with students, they felt that they had uneven opportunities to do research in seminars, though given that all majors require or encourage seminars, this seems like the right place to expect such a conscious engagement. We would create some incentives, maybe via teaching arts and faculty development sessions, to incorporate a more deliberate research experience in all seminars. This might include providing models for faculty to offer 2-credit group special studies for a subset of seminar students as an acknowledged part of the teaching load and not as an overload (this would require that we consistently honor the 12-student cap of seminars as well as recognize the value of seminars with 3-5 students). Another possibility is senior tutorials. These conversations might benefit from looking at the seminar experiences offered by the Kahn Institute and the Mellon-Mays fellowship. [2008-09]

We would recommend the creation of **one credit “writing labs,”** writing groups that would be supervised by faculty and that would provide students in 300-level courses a chance to work together (modeled somewhat on science labs). These writing “labs” could be designated by division, or even by some smaller conglomeration of field areas (for example, area studies, literature and text studies, languages), and could meet at a time set by the students once per week. The faculty would attend and oversee the first session;

check-in via email; help resolve conflicts; provide general research guidance as necessary. These labs could meet in designated spaced (houses, areas of the library, common areas of particular building), and could be limited to five students. [2010-11]

We would also recommend that the College provide an opportunity to think about **summer research with students** (similar to the proposed effort for seminars identified above). Central to this is streamlining processes for financial support for students and identifying a mechanism for assigning teaching credit. Given that much of the summer work with students occurs in Division III, we recommend that consideration also be given to opportunities for faculty in Divisions I and II to hire summer students and engage them in a comparable way, perhaps inspired by the Quigley Fellowships in SWG. [2009-10]

We would also recommend that all units adopt a **more purposeful process for declaring a major**, as well as a **senior capstone statement** that asks a student to reflect on her major. More purposeful process for declaring a major, including a more explicit and intentional mechanism for entry and a self-reflective capstone statement These would provide more opportunities for advising, as well as a chance for a student to be engaged consciously in imagining and constructing her career as one of research and inquiry. We were inspired by the efforts in ART and REL in this regard. [2009-10]

Finally, we would recommend the implementation of more **(pre)orientation offerings like “Intellectual Inquiry,”** which is an introductory opportunity for students to think about questions, their long trajectories, and the pleasure of pursuit. [2009-10]

We also want to acknowledge and support the Library’s informational literacy initiative and the effort to create a concentration in “museum studies,” which could well serve as a model for better engagement of the rich co-curricular resources in offering more research opportunities to students.

Initiative Four: Targeting the Junior Year and Students from Underrepresented Populations

Our conversations with faculty and students made clear that the junior year is critical to student engagement with a culture of inquiry (we believe that the first-year is well addressed by the College’s current initiatives, including the work on the capacities). The junior year is when most students are capable of crafting specific research goals, but is also when a large proportion of our students travel abroad.

We recommend imagining the junior year as a moment of intellectual risk-taking. We propose that **JYA programs** be encouraged to discuss the year abroad as an extraordinary opportunity for purposeful and guided inquiry. This formulation probably requires prospective JYA students to prepare for travel in the months prior (perhaps in interterm, as an offering from a center and/or as a department or program seminar). JYA directors would also promote individual and collective opportunities for purposeful and explicit intellectual inquiry. Funds meant to facilitate such efforts should be available to JYA programs. [2010-11]

For students remaining at Smith, we propose the creation of **JY@**--a set of initiatives that would make the junior year a distinctive experience. For example, students could be encouraged to design a semester where all of their credits were focused on a single problem or topic, followed perhaps by a second semester of independent study with one or more faculty members and an intensive seminar where research experiences could be shared and discussed with other students. Students might be encouraged to focus their experience in laboratories, museums, theaters, or other research facilities at Smith or nationally (modeled, for example, on the Smithsonian program). [2011-12]

We would also create **twenty (20) JY@Smith research assistantships located in the centers/extrdepartmental units as well as in departments and programs**. These assistantships would be awarded competitively based on proposals from academic units.

Additionally, part of the motivation for exploring research opportunities at Smith was anecdotal and data-based evidence that students from underrepresented populations, especially students of color and/or first-generation students, were not participating in research experiences in numbers reflecting their percentage in the student population. We believe that the expansion of research opportunities as well as the integration of research as a central, defining feature of a Smith education will go a long way to making research an

expectation of all students in every aspect of their career experiences. To that end, we also make the following recommendations:

We would create **inquiry-based (pre)orientation workshops** that could be complementary to BRIDGE. [2009-10]

We would create **two student research assistantships to replace the volunteer student participation in Otelia Cromwell Day planning**. These students would help research speakers, performers and presenters for the year's event, and would work with the chair of the planning committee. [2008-09]

We would create a **fund to host research/inquiry based seminars** or presentations, housed in the Office of Institutional Diversity (OID) or the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) and advertised to all student organizations at the start of each academic year (especially the UNITY ones). This fund would allow a student organization to put on events relevant to research and inquiry. [2009-10]

We would endow a **paper prize for the best research in race studies and best performance that engages race** (currently there is no such prize—the former could be housed in AAS or AMS or LAS, the latter as part of the Museum's Tryon prizes). [2009-10]

We would also make sure that **research assistantships** are readily available to **departments and programs that have large numbers of students of color**. We would work with OID and OMA to think about other initiatives to sustain the commitment to diversity. [2009-10]

Initiative Five: Making Visible and Extending the World of Research at Smith

One thing missing as part of the array of research opportunities, efforts, practices at Smith is a coherent apparatus for showcasing and coordinating those efforts. To that end, this initiative proposes to communicate more effectively what we already do, as well as to provide for new efforts.

First, we would create a **site for the annual publishing of student research** at Smith. This could be a well-designed webzine venue with a review mechanism that will serve as an outlet for student research. The venue could have guest editors or special issues—and could even link with *Meridians* if areas of interest overlap—and would reserve some space for publishing critical reflections on Praxis/study abroad experiences. This publishing venue would also provide new research work opportunities for students and would be conversant with the proposal for an institutional digital repository (from the Virtual Learning Commons Working Group report). [2009-10]

We would increase the web-presence of research by providing a link from the Smith website to a research home page titled **“This Is What Research Looks Like at Smith.”** [2008-09] This site could talk about the importance of student inquiry, of intellectual curiosity and its pursuit. It would also have rotating clips from the arts, Collaborations, the sciences, students engaged in community learning, students in the library and in discussions in houses; a list of relevant events and brief student profiles that speak to research and inquiry through the four years. We would redesign **department and program websites** [2009-10] to feature research opportunities, including splash pages and links to the publishing venue described below. Departments and programs would also develop and post a statement on research.

We would make **Collaborations** more visible by making it a two-day affair—all-day Friday and part of Saturday [2008-09]. This would allow for greater emphasis and attendance, as well as would serve Admissions purposes. We would develop a whole series of forums for presentation of student work, including panels and symposia on specified disciplines, as well as on aspects of the research process. We would substitute classes for that Friday with this research fair, and organize meals and receptions to make the whole thing far more spectacular and inviting. We would also designate a separate day as **“honors” day** in the model of Collaborations, so as to make it more possible to schedule defenses and presentations, and to encourage greater attendance. It might require another suspension of classes to make “honors” day effective, and we would take a day from the interterm to compensate for the loss. [2009-10]

We would sponsor an all campus **research fair**, perhaps in the mid-spring—an event designed to acquaint and connect students with research opportunities. It might work best to first expand “Conversations” to

highlight research opportunities in classes, and then eventually build a separate and visible research fair. [2008-09]

We would also establish an **Office for Research Opportunities (ORO)** [2009-10], eventually housed in the proposed teaching/learning center, and linked to any of the places that currently support student research efforts (the Science Center, the CDO, Fellowships office, etc.) This office would be a clearinghouse for students and faculty, a way for students to get additional advising and information for events, internships, and fellowships. This office could sponsor a series of **annual prizes** (for example the best reflective essay on “what research and inquiry has meant to my career at Smith” or for the best research project in each of the divisions). [2010-11]

Another way to increase faculty ambassadorship of research is to **create a stronger presence of research activities in the student houses**. One such example is the language lunch tables; another is the series of tea discussions that houses host when there is a particular cultural or social crisis on campus (or a political event of significance in the national or international climate). We recommend a more thoughtful engagement of the houses as places of scholarship and inquiry, including the creation of a Liberal Arts Lunch-like series that moves from house to house and that features student and faculty presentations (the inquiry fellows could be helpful here). We think that this effort should be undertaken in conjunction with the Residence Life staff. We are encouraged in this thinking by the proposals to have similar lunch series in the newly proposed centers. We also encourage use of the UNITY organizations in an attempt to highlight research to students of color, even hosting some of the LAL-like series in spaces allocated to these organizations. [2009-10]

The Breadth and Integrity of this Work

These initiatives to support and enhance a culture of purposeful inquiry speak directly to the goals outlined in *The Smith Design for Learning*. We see these ideas, and more so the intent of these ideas, as being fundamental to re-imagining the meaning and reality of a liberal arts education. Our proposals speak explicitly to the desire to strengthen essential student capacities and to prepare women for rewarding lives, as well as to each of the proposed centers. But there are smaller initiatives, ones already in place, that are allies to ours, including remapping the curriculum, increasing informational literacy and the redefining of honors. We believe that Smith is and must continue to be a place of excellence of opportunity and excellence of experience, and creating a stronger culture of purposeful inquiry is at the heart of that ethic.

We feel proud of this work but even more so of the work and participation of our colleagues. In that regard, we are committed to making sure that this body of ideas is shared and discussed widely. We plan for an active process of sharing this report, including a series of meetings with various constituents (including CMP, CAP, Chairs and Directors) and open forums. We also hope to engage in ongoing conversation with the President, the Provost and the Trustees.

We believe our proposals are flexible, comprehensive and ambitious, but not totalitarian. Certainly, time and resources will determine which ideas seem most appropriate for the College. And yet we believe in the integrity of the ideas from our colleagues and in the ambition of the body of ideas here. If Smith is to really enhance and promote a culture of research and inquiry, it will require a serious investment of resources and a long-term vision. We hope that the future of these initiatives is determined on the merit of the proposals and not on a crude economic metric.

We believe that these initiatives have the greatest possibility to overcome the obstacles to a richer culture of purposeful inquiry. These obstacles include:

- questions about IRB and human subjects approval, administrative and grants management support
- the impact of the current and projected size of the faculty, and the need for compensation structures that allow flexible use of faculty time
- the need for better support for students (of particular concern are advising, the high stress culture amongst students, and courses for skills enhancement)
- challenges involved in mounting new initiatives across and between academic units and “centers”

We have witnessed real excitement and commitment on the part of faculty to the idea of enhancing and supporting the culture of research and inquiry. We believe that the work of making this happen has to retain

the collaborative spirit, and has to involve faculty and students and staff in the conversations and, when appropriate, the decision-making. The potential is there to make this culture of purposeful inquiry definitive and distinguishing of the Smith experience—to make it the hallmark feature of the education we provide in the twenty-first century.

Respectfully, humbly, we are grateful to all the colleagues who talked with us through this year long process.

Submitted

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Patricia DiBartolo, Psychology

Rob Dorit (co-chair), Biological Sciences

Jim Henle, Mathematics

Chris Loring, Director of Libraries

Kevin Quashie (co-chair), Afro-American Studies and Study of Women and Gender

Patricia Skarda, English Language & Literature

Susan Van Dyne, Study of Women and Gender

Fraser Ward, Art

Margaret Zelljadt, Dean of the Senior Class