

**THE LIBERAL ARTS AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES:  
A Critical Tension on Campus**

**The Liberal Arts/Professional Studies Group**

**THE LAPS GROUP**

**LAPS Group Members**

**Lisa Cassidy (Philosophy, AIS)**

**Jason Hecht (Finance, ASB)**

**Bernard Langer (History and Philosophy of Science, TAS)**

**Kim Lorber (Social Work, SSHS)**

**Nancy Mackin (Student Affairs)**

**Kenneth McMurdy (Mathematics, TAS)**

**Edna Negrón (Journalism, CA)**

**Stephen Rice (American Studies, AIS)**

**Cristina Stearns (Nursing, TAS)**

**Marta Vides (Law and Society, SSHS)**

**Prepared and edited**

**by**

**Bernard Langer**

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## **PART 1**

### **1. Introduction:**

Ramapo College has historically enjoyed an identity as a public baccalaureate institution founded to provide an integrated course of study grounded in the liberal arts and sciences. Its curriculum was rooted in core values and a commitment which undergirded the design of our programs and which directed our missions. Recent dramatic increases in enrollment and the emphases on graduate and new professional programs have generated a palpable concern in the community that the intellectual core which had once made the College unique may have fractionalized. What have emerged in its stead are two distinct cultures of professional and practical studies, on the one hand, and the liberal arts and sciences, on the other, each segregated by its own purposes, curricula, and resources.

That the College has taken this course has not been the subject of community deliberation or discourse. Indeed, the need for the LAPS discussion group was in large part occasioned by the recognition that the changes in the College's identity, mission, and direction have proceeded without community participation and plan. The changes have not been only curricular; they have also been fiscal and organizational. Almost fifty percent of our undergraduate students are enrolled in professional studies or practitioner/practice programs. Yet, we continue to identify the College as a "public liberal arts" institution to regional and national audiences.

Of particular concern is that new professional and practical undergraduate and graduate programs have been installed and marketed at the expense of the liberal arts and comprehensive education. The most financially successful undergraduate programs have been the points of origin of new graduate programs by design. It is to these programs that the College has signaled its intent to dedicate even more resources to promote their ostensibly fiscal successes. Such resources take the forms of not only more faculty, but also an increased allocation of existing labor, facilities, and funding. Whether these changes leave the liberal arts and sciences and comprehensive education as central to the College's identity remains to be seen.

## 2. **The “LAPS Group:”**

A group of faculty and administrators gathered to address these issues and the critical tension which seemed to have arisen on the campus. Bernard Langer (History and Philosophy of Science, TAS) acted to organize the group and served as its facilitator. Its original and standing members represent a wide scope of academic and professional interests and arise from distinct generations of the community: Lisa Cassidy (Philosophy, AIS), Jason Hecht (Finance, ASB), Kim Lorber (Social Work, SSHS), Nancy Mackin (Student Affairs), Kenneth McMurdy (Mathematics, TAS), Edna Negron (Journalism, CA), Stephen Rice (American Studies, AIS), Cristina Stearns (Nursing, TAS), and Marta Vides (Law and Society, SSHS). We called the group the “Professional Studies/Liberal Arts Discussion Group,” which eventually was abbreviated to the “LAPS (Liberal Arts/Professional Studies) Group.”

We met every three weeks in a conference room over lunch for discussions, most of which proceeded beyond the hour to two hours allotted at each session. Tasks were undertaken based upon common readings and the discussions; all participants contributed written analyses of the issues and commentaries on the positions of their colleagues. A “working document” was eventually drafted and published in December, 2008, setting forth the propositions which the Group wanted to be subjects of broader community discussions (**see Part 2**). Copies were given to the President and the Provost for critical comments and further consideration, which they expressed to the group at a brief joint session shortly thereafter.

The LAPS Group continued to meet throughout the Spring, 2009, and will continue to meet this upcoming year. The Group came into existence sua

### **3. Themes and Threads of Discussion:**

What began in September, 2008, as a discussion among a selected group of faculty and administrators on the growing divide on campus between professional and practical studies and the liberal arts and sciences grew to reflect a larger national debate on the changing culture of higher education and its institutions. The essential nature of that change lies in the challenges posed by contemporary economic distresses and the demands placed upon colleges and universities by the marketplace and a new construction of social realities.

Most institutions are in states of transition and adaptation. Others have arisen anew in forms which are products of the age. Among those are the for-profits, designed specifically as corporate enterprises to meet market needs. Colleges with a historical dedication to the liberal arts and sciences are reassessing their curricula in the face of economic instabilities and changing social expectations. The underlying value that a broad based education provides a foundation for social productivity and engaged citizenship seeks expression in a new curricular form. Ramapo College, most agree, is one of those institutions in transition, and seems to suffer from uncertainties in direction and purpose because of the contingencies of the future and the vicissitudes of the present.

The emergence of distinct and seemingly unrelated cultures on our campus – that of the professional/practical arts and that of the liberal arts/sciences - reflects that uncertainty. That such a divide has arisen in our relatively small community ought to direct us to reconsider the primary purposes of “higher education” and how those purposes are to be carried out with deliberate academic and resource planning. The need for community discourse about the identity and direction of the College has become imperative, if we are to remain vital and stable.

A burgeoning number of recent publications have already sounded the alarm. The “LAPS Group” read two books this past year as points of departure for its discussions. Each casts the issues in an entirely different light. The first, A New Agenda for Higher

Education: Shaping a Life of the Mind for Practice (William M. Sullivan and Matthew S. Rosin, 2008), advanced curricular solutions to the growing isolation of the cultures on campus by proposing methods of integrating the liberal arts with professional studies and vice versa. The second, The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities (Frank Donoghue, 2008), was far more surgical in its analysis of a rapidly changing academic labor market serving the ends of redesigned curricula and new institutional objectives.

Present economic realities have been the material causes of changes at many colleges and universities. The traditional “elites” offering enriched programs in the liberal arts and sciences have seen a dramatic decline in eager applicants. Legislative support for public colleges and universities has steadily diminished, leaving the “publics” to their own private fiscal devices to raise funds. At issue, in many instances, is the very existence and continuity of the institution. Witness the fate of Antioch College, for example.

Cheap academic labor in the forms of adjunct and temporary faculty has increasingly replaced the historical stability of a tenured community of instructors and researchers across the country. Only some 31% of faculty presently are tenured, down from 55% forty years ago, even though the total number of faculty has increased nation-wide by 84% over the same period (Science, Vol. 324, 1147 (May 29, 2009)). Part-time faculty (now 49% of all faculty) have become the mainstay of college labor and the principal means of fiscal planning at most institutions. One of Donoghue’s theses is that tenure will soon become a historical relic if current practices continue.

Institutional trends have arrived in many forms - from the development of for-profit online universities, to the renewed vigor of the community colleges, to the abolition of general education core curricula (as at Cornell University), to attempts to integrate curricula by bridging the “great divide” into a comprehensive whole.

What is certain is that higher education is undergoing an essential transformation. It has become clear that faculty and other academicians can no longer ignore the trends and

leave the direction of the academy to the managers and financial officers. At the heart of



and sciences do not require practicums or professional studies courses. In fact, the professional studies programs on campus do not contribute any courses, with very few exceptions, to the general education curriculum of the College. They exist behind a “virtual wall” of separation from the rest of the comprehensive educational curriculum.

The means by which apparently disparate studies have historically been mediated at the College is through the “practice” of “interdisciplinarity.” It is a concept which has become protean not only in meaning but in form (see Table 2). It has not drawn the professional studies/practical programs into the mainstream curriculum and it has not expanded the liberal studies programs into the professions.

**Table 1** lays out the principal concepts put forth by the Carnegie study, characterized in a fashion intended to lead to further discussion. It was prepared for and distributed to (October, 2008) the Group as a way to generate further analyses of the issues as they apply to the current conditions at the College.

### TABLE 1

## Professional Studies/Liberal Arts Discussion Group

### Working Paper

Prepared by B. Langer

October 15, 2008

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 A. Sullivan and Rosin: **A New Agenda for Higher Education**, some principles and assumptions:

1. a primary distinction is made throughout between *phronesis*, or practical reason or moral thought AND *sophia*, contemplative rationality or critical thinking (without once mentioning Aristotle or Plato).

a. the end of *phronesis* is *praxis* or action itself.

b. the end of *sophia* is

3. The connecting concept resides in *practical reasoning* (not Aristotle's) or, more accurately, in *reflexive reasoning* (Dewey's), which is the process of forming moral decisions leading to action.

4. Professional studies and the liberal arts find common ground (according to the arguments advanced) in *teaching for practical reasoning and responsible judgment*.

5. The method by which professional studies and the liberal arts can arrive at common ground is through the use of the "case study," a set of real circumstances presented to the student to foster the *formation of judgment*.

6. The discussion assumes that "analytical and theoretical rationality" is too limited to meet the "demands of judgment," and that "critical thinking" is conceived much too narrowly to be a means for integrating *praxis* and *theoria*. The goal is to integrate the "practical" and the "critical/analytic."

7. The primary purpose of this integration is the *formation* of a *person* who exercises "reflexive judgment" in a variety of moral circumstances. The formation of the PERSON ought to be the primary goal of every educational initiative.

8. If so, how can that goal be commonly actualized in both professional studies and the liberal arts – if not through "reflexive reasoning" taught through case studies, as in, for instances, bioethical issues in nursing, fiduciary responsibilities in business and law, and so forth?

9. Do the theses advanced in the study assume that professional studies and other programs along with their faculty are *spatially* remote from one another on a common university campus? Do they assume that integration of *theoria* and *praxis* can only occur cognitively through the means "reflexive reasoning" AND by a *common* commitment of an academically diverse faculty?

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**B. Discussion Themes:**

1. **INTERDISCIPLINARITY:** it has taken protean forms historically at the College without securing an identity or nature established by community consensus. Yet, it was installed as a "mission pillar."

a. Is it an aspiration devoid of curricular content?

b. Does it merely code for the "humanizing value" and act as antithetical to disciplinary and professional studies as diminishing that value? Do the professions, the practical curricula, the sciences, and mathematics or any type of specialization represent perils to that value? Is that value rooted in the social and economic critiques of the technology and the sciences of organization?

c. Is it merely an institutional and organizational category reflected in the academic meeting calendar and in arguments against inter-school majors? By what criteria were some curricula deemed interdisciplinary and most others not?

d. Does it merely have operational meaning only in teaching strategies, such as team teaching?

underwriting programs which need or seek accreditation more than other programs, particularly in the liberal arts and social sciences, which generally have not been subject to accreditation?

g. Have the faculty in professional programs embraced accreditation as a means of residing in a more universal faculty community OR as a means of immunizing themselves from the demands to “humanize” “praxis” or to emphasize “theoria” in their courses OR to meet the demands of the general educational objectives of a liberal arts college?

h. Do the professional programs subject to accreditation represent a range of discretion allowed in the curricula, from the strictest(nursing) through business and teacher education to chemistry and social work, or do all programs seeking accreditation seek uniformity over academic diversity in the College?

i. Does accreditation in a wide range of programs change the nature and the identity of a liberal arts institution and render a common curriculum or general education curriculum irrelevant?

j. Do accreditation standards foreclose even the possibility that courses within a professional studies program can be offered as part of a general education curriculum for all students?

k. Does accreditation relieve those programs subject to it of the obligations to contribute to the objectives of a liberal arts education?

**3. LIBERAL ARTS VALUES:** Despite the institutional identity of the liberal arts at the College, the public message implied by the focus on the programs in professional studies is clear – the liberal arts do not educate in *praxis* and do not equip students for a job or a career. What is also conveyed is that the liberal arts do not carry with them the value expected of college education. Value resides in practice, not in contemplation, critical thinking, or cultural and historical competence.

a. How have the liberal arts been promoted by the College to regional communities and students as having value, and how has the College sought to underwrite that value in the allocation of resources?

b. How has the connection been made between the expectations encouraged by parents, the media, peers, counselors, and others of work and careers and studies in the liberal arts?

c. How has the nexus between life goals and life enrichment and studies in the liberal arts been promoted to incoming students and to reviewing bodies?

d. What IS a liberal arts education at Ramapo College? What is its essential nature?

e. If neither interdisciplinarity nor the liberal arts have identities established by community consensus at the College, how is it possible to integrate such studies with professional studies with any direction or purpose?

f. Has the College essentially abandoned the liberal arts by promoting professional and practical programs as those most meeting the expectations of students and the demands of full enrollment?

g. Has the value of a liberal arts education been eroded collaterally by the emphasis on and marketing of the professional and practical programs at the College? Is that damage irreparable?

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**C. Other points and questions:**

The integrating principle in the Carnegie study lies in the design of curricula in both the liberal arts and professional studies leading to critical thinking in the form of “reflexive judgment,” particularly using case studies posing complex moral issues calling for action. The end is the “formation of the person” through morally informed choices and directed action. The teaching method which this approach requires is the “case” method, typically used in professional schools, but occasionally used in courses addressing axiological questions.

The College has historically delivered a curriculum and structured its academic organization upon the integrating principle of “interdisciplinarity.” It is both a principle of lore and one which constitutes one of the “Four Pillars” of the Strategic Plan. It was, in fact, the subject of a report delivered (2007) by the Provost’s “Interdisciplinary Education Task Force.” Nothing has been operationalized from that report, to our knowledge, nor has the principles it set forth been integrated across the curriculum. In short, although it was produced in earnest by informed and committed faculty as a result of an institutional charge, nothing has arisen because of it. It has merely been posted by the Provost to gather dust in cyberspace.

The Group addressed this problem, particularly with respect to the operational needs of installing “interdisciplinarity” as an institutional and methodological principle across all curricula at the College. It carries with it the issue of the allocation of resources. The issues which attend the principle as an operational methodology were considered by the Group as a conceptual/operational map presented here as **Table 2**.

## **TABLE 2**

- Cross-over interdisciplinarity, referring to fields like biochemistry, which have roots in two disciplines.
- Exploratory interdisciplinarity, for scholars who apply material from other fields on occasion — e.g., a medievalist who draws on queer theory in one article and demography in another, but remains first and foremost a historian.
- Free-range interdisciplinarity, to refer to people like Jared Diamond and Martha C. Nussbaum, who are so eclectic that people aren't sure of their disciplinary homes.

(From Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Expanding on the I-Word*, The Chronicle Review, Chronicle of Higher Education, January 20, 2006)

<b>RCNJ Practices</b>	<b>Team Based</b>	<b>Cross-Over</b>	<b>Exploratory</b>	<b>Free-Range</b>
<b>Co-Teaching (VPAA regulates terms according to resources not student or faculty need)</b>	<b>Different Convening Groups/Majors</b>	<b>Within a Convening Group</b>	<b>Within a Unit</b>	
<b>Interdisciplinary Convening Groups* A &amp; B</b>	<i>Resource . . . .</i> <b>X</b>	<i>Issue pending</i>	<i>Full Funding</i> <b>X</b>	<i>Or as Trial</i> <b>X</b>
<b>Co-Curricular</b>	<b>Panels on Specific topics</b>			
<b>Research</b>	<i>Second Chair .</i> <b>X</b>	<i>Faculty . . . .</i>	<i>Compensation</i> <b>X</b>	<i>Issues</i> <b>X</b>
<b>Cross Listed Courses</b>		<b>Core or elective</b>	<b>Elective</b>	<b>Elective</b>
<b>Interdisciplinary Courses</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Major/Interdiscip</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

### **5. Further Perspectives on Integration:**

The LAPS Group understood that the integration of professional/practical studies curricula with the liberal arts/comprehensive education curricula would require more than a reconceptualization of the aims of “forming the person” through the fostering of “reflexive judgment” in a case study approach. Indeed, to install a common foundation and purpose across the programs would require dedications in resources, marketing approach, fund raising efforts – and even in new, sufficient, academic facilities. The College has not even begun to



but driven in a Professional Studies direction due to possibilities of revenue generation.

initiatives. Priorities should be clearly stated so that all programs receive what is needed to have an authentic liberal arts curriculum in which all courses of study, including Professional Studies are informed by Liberal Studies.



Fish further sets out the historical tension between institutions of higher learning

obsolescence of the liberal arts and humanities, the decline of the traditional comprehensive education college, the rise of online courses and for-profit universities, and the dramatic explosion of the economic vitality of the community colleges – piecemeal. On the contrary, the material conditions of the changes in the labor market in higher education cannot be viewed as mere symptoms of the underlying problem but as where the problem resides. If the tenured, permanent, professor is eliminated from the landscape, so will be the continuity of competencies and the preservation of every aspect of accumulated learning. It is the professor, he argues, which passes on the traditions of the mind and culture, not the corporation or the corporate managers.

His work is not a call to action in particular. But Donoghue cautions that unless professors learn about the dynamics of the business of higher education, about institutional operations, about hiring practice, about fiscal planning, and about the external markets, especially at their own colleges and universities, and unless they are willing to participate in the direction of institutional operations and planning, then, he argues, professors cannot but help be herded into obsolescence by shepherds who have fixed their eyes on the bottom line, not lives of the mind.

The Group segregated the principal themes advanced in the book and laid them out as propositions to be considered and discussed. They are presented here as **Table 4**.

#### **TABLE 4**

##### **LAPS Discussion Points/Donoghue’s Theses Posted on the Academy’s Door**

##### **TRUTHS ABOUT THE FATE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS:**

1. The liberal arts/humanities will not survive except at the “elite” universities and at “mass producing” universities - and there only as distribution requirements.
2. The liberal arts/humanities will become extinct at all other universities and colleges as being maladaptive to the marketplace.
3. The survival of liberal arts/humanities faculty require them to learn and to be engaged in how universities function and work in the marketplace.

4. The power of liberal arts/humanities faculty to save itself lies beyond them; that power has already been lost to faculty and universities meeting marketplace and students' expectations.

5. Liberal arts/humanities faculty

5. Tenure and the pursuit of tenure promote expressions of unpopular opinions and positions.
6. Tenure is antithetical to the corporatization of the academy.
7. Tenure eligible and tenured faculty, as co-workers in a labor system, are sympathetically in support of the class of their excluded co-workers, i.e., adjuncts and temporaries, in the academy and workplace.
8. Tenure does not create and promote a class labor system in which new Ph.D.s become the new migrant, day, laborers in the system of tenure ineligible adjuncts and temporaries, i.e., casual labor.
9. Tenure is more than a career and economic measure in a professor's life.

**ONTOLOGICAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1. What IS the essential nature of a “professor?”**
- 2. What is the essential nature of “higher learning” and HOW is it related to the essential nature of the “liberal arts/humanities?”**
- 3. How DOES the “liberal arts” meets the “expectations of students” who live and breathe in the marketplace?**

Prepared by B. Langer 2/22/09

The LAPS Group leaves the discussion of these propositions to the community at the College in forums which best serve to inform and to foster critical analysis and participation. The Group takes the position that reform is essential at this moment in the historical life of the College without prescribing the forms it ought to take. It is the collective will of the community which has the responsibility to establish the most effective means of directing the best ends of the profession, of higher education, and the College.

## **PART 2**

**Part 2** of this document is the product of the Group's first semester discussions delineating the issues raised by the first reading and those which were deemed critical at the College. After a number of papers and analyses were submitted from around the table, the participants were asked at the end of the semester to fashion five "propositions" which they thought captured the perception on campus of issues and problems which were in critical need of community discussion. It was these proposition which were presented to the Presidw 2. 2

**accelerated migration of students to professional and practical studies and by the dedication of limited internal resources and new marketing strategies to the professional programs. The four pillars of the College's mission stand essentially alone without the collateral and directed support of current academic and curricular initiatives at the College. Integration across the programs through the intermediacy of the liberal arts and experiential learning remains largely only in a state of expectancy.**

*In all the efforts at assessing academic programs and linking those programs to the college's strategic plan, the strategic plan's first guiding principle—that educational activities at the college must be “based in the liberal arts”—should be given the priority that its placement in the plan suggests. This would mean that all existing programs would have to demonstrate their commitment and contribution to a liberal arts education, and any proposed new program would have to be evaluated in terms of its ability to contribute to this fundamental mission and strategic direction of the college.*

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*Absent a precise meaning of our tall pillar of interdisciplinarity and its relevance to each course taught at RCNJ and within each major, minor, gen ed, core requirement, etc., how can we measure if we are doing it well, what we should be doing, and if we should be doing it beyond bringing in pieces of the other courses in the major to help students integrate learning (as I must do in research to remind them of ethics, practice models, theoretical frameworks, policy implications, etc. representing the gist of the major).*

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*Interdisciplinarity, along with the other three pillars at Ramapo College, becomes more critical in preparing students to become citizens of the world and find their place in a global, technologically converged society. How do we as faculty take our teaching to the next level to prepare students to act on the knowledge they acquire here? How well can students apply what they know to make ethical decisions, care about the world they live in and be able to problem-solve in today's complex society?*

*Ramapo is a liberal arts institution, but is it a 21st Century institution of higher learning? What should higher education look like*





*INTERDISCIPLINARITY.* Oh dear. A concept that is critical to the convergence of LA and professional studies; but no one seems to understand its nature (or is it a lack of appreciation?). The book needs to be reopened here and it needs to be 1) redefined in light of the fact that the student base has shifted so heavily towards professional studies and 2) ideas need to be generated within groups as to how we can execute this more appropriately.

*LIBERAL ARTS. DOES* [it] succeed as the mission of this college-- regardless of the large amount of professional degree students? What is critical to that mission is its acceptance of it by the professional studies faculty. What does LAs mean to the faculty of professional studies? Are the teachings of these courses valued and the 'skills' being applied in professional courses?

The students seem to be 'lost in translation' to the teachings of the liberal arts courses when they reach the professional studies courses. They are missing the relevance of the LA courses to their profession of choice and believe (mistakenly) that these courses are 'fluff'... who is responsible for this outcome? DOES real-world application exist in LA courses so that professional studies students may be able to value these teachings more (and prove the acquisition of these 'skills' once they reach professional studies).

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We know that Ramapo is "NJ's liberal arts college." However, recent growth in academic programs has been largely in "professional" programs. Is there a point at which we would no longer be a liberal arts college? If so, could we identify the characteristics which would result in our no longer being able to defend the "liberal arts" designation? Assuming a continuing commitment to our current mission, what changes, if any, do we need to make to ensure we do not reach a "tipping point?"

Adding graduate programs which build on our undergraduate strengths is a priority for the College. Such programs are likely to be professional ones rather in the liberal arts. Given limited resources, will the addition of professional graduates programs make it more difficult for the undergraduate liberal arts programs to compete for funding and other kinds of support?

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*Establish institutional commitment to interdisciplinary education:*

- a. Establish unambiguous definitions of: liberal arts, professional studies, interdisciplinarity.*
- b. Establish administrative and institutional support structure to promote interdisciplinary courses and scholarship:*



*Provide institutional and administrative support for greater coordination between the General Education program and accreditation needs of the different schools.*

*1. Promote understanding of a priori teaching and research demands in order to achieve accreditation.*

*2. Promote the location of disciplinary interstices that allow for the fulfillment of (a.) while promoting the liberal arts. Existing interdisciplinary graduate programs in evolutionary biology, biostatistics, bioinformatics, history of science, history of economic thought, may provide models that we could “step down” to meet our undergraduate needs.*

*3. Poor student preparation and/or low standards in foundational (Gen Ed) courses will undermine the effectiveness of interdisciplinary courses.*

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*Rather than treat the professional programs as a separate entity (and “cash cow”), or worse to allow the professional programs to reshape and drive the liberal arts curriculum, do we seek to incorporate professional programs into the broader liberal arts curriculum? Do we further expect the College-wide liberal arts curriculum to inform the specific curricula of the professional programs in a meaningful way? If this goal is to be embraced and realized, we must acknowledge that it will not happen without considerable extra time and effort on the part of faculty who take on, in earnest, the task of building bridges. Therefore, we must provide real, tangible incentives for motivated faculty who are willing to take on this substantial task. Should we institute a program similar to SBR in which the stated goal is to develop courses and partnership opportunities between disciplines which serve to enhance both, and to further the educational mission of the College as a whole? Such a program might well promote and support bridge building efforts between liberal arts programs, and not be specifically limited to the professional programs.*

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*Accreditation/Professional Studies and Liberal Arts concerns need to be accommodated in a way that complements each. Each kind of program has an internal integrity that must be preserved. Ascertaining what these interests are and determining which are conflicting, which are separate and which are overlapping requires an on-going deliberative process within the institution. Decisions such as allocation of undergraduate resources to graduate programs would be made with the long view in mind. This will assure programs receive the resources we need: e.g., if an accredited Professional Studies program requires additional faculty or staff to be able to incorporate Liberal Arts courses in its core, that is a funding priority. Likewise, if a Liberal Arts curriculum seeks to build in relevant professional examples to Liberal Arts case studies, professors should receive payment for major course/curriculum revisions.*

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*The first step of solving an issue is admitting that it exists. It will trouble me (and all in*

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*To the extent General Education curriculum provides a space for bridging Professional Studies and Liberal Arts, the administrati*



## **PART 3**

### **1. Open-ended Issues and Lingering Questions:**

**Part 3** brings us to the present moment, one in which all those academicians at our College who are genuinely committed to the moral purposes of higher education must find their own voice. The community must now pause, consider, and discuss the College's future direction and identity with deliberation and purpose to arrive at a collective understanding. That understanding must be one which is the most authentic, not one which is the most convenient at this historical moment. That this is the community where most faculty will spend the balance of their professional careers renders their commitment and engagement all the more imperative.

Faculty need to reaffirm the reasons they chose Ramapo College in the first place as a place to teach and carry out their work as academicians and scholars. While the instrumental management of the day-to-day operations of the College is the task of administrative and financial officers, the reputation and the future of the College has historically been driven and must continue to be driven by the lasting relationships between teachers and their students. These are the very relationships which seem either not to be acknowledged or to be marginalized in our planning processes.

The identity of the College is in a state of flux. The College is known as New Jersey's "public liberal arts" college, an identity reflected in Middle States accreditation criteria and by virtue of our membership in the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges(COPLAC). It is alternatively known as the "fifth in the north in the top Public Universities-Masters category" in U.S. News and World Report, as "among the top 100 public colleges and universities," in Kiplinger, as "Best in the Northeast" in The Princeton Review, as "an undergraduate and instructional program including the arts and sciences plus profession with some graduate co-existence" or a "small Masters college" by the Carnegie Foundation.

These external labels allow the choosing of the “flavor of the month” to market the College to prospective students and their parents, as well as to prospective donors and new faculty. But marketing serves the purpose of selling a commodity by any means required to a particular audience; it cannot substitute for the community discussion on a coherent plan for the College’s academic character and the devotion of resources to promote it. The current strategies have the effect of foreclosing the very community engagement and discussion critically necessary to foster the very vitality of the institution.

In the past, planning initiatives have languished while well considered reports were shelved and forgotten. Faculty of goodwill who undertook work on task forces related to assessment, curricula, and other issues have stepped away from that work, disillusioned when their recommendations were diluted or deflected or resulted in no real changes or action.

The LAPS Group views this working document as an opportunity for all professionals working for the best purposes of education to take the moment to develop and to express the collective will and voice of the campus, and to let that will and voice genuinely and authentically arise from across the community. Let all voices be heard in seizing the moment. We leave you with these thoughts:

[Students struggle for meaning and orientation in the world – and the source of cooperation between the professions and the liberal arts lies in the art of placing analytical concepts into a mutually illuminating relation with sources of meaning and responsibility in the world of practice...A basic question should guide us all:]

*What is higher education really for?* In this larger perspective, the apparent rivalry between liberal and professional education in the academy is ill-conceived and unnecessary. (*A New Agenda for Higher Education*, p. 23.)

and:

Professors...have, I believe, lost their awareness of what it means to be an intellectual *within* the academy. (Donoghue, p. 23)

[Faculty must come] to balance their commitment to the content of higher education with a thorough familiarity with how the university works. (Donoghue, p. 137)