

Report on the College of Natural Sciences Forum dealing the *Report of the Task Force Force on Curricular Reform*

The forum for CNS faculty was held on February 21, 2006, from 4:00-5:30 p.m. in Welch Hall 2.246. The turnout was quite impressive for a midweek, late-afternoon meeting on the subject of general curriculum reform: attendance was well in excess of 100. (While the exact attendance was hard to pin down because of late arrivals and constant comings-and-goings, the headcount made by my designated census-taker at 4:40 p.m. was 122. My impression was that a significant number of people arrived after that. Indeed, one of my colleagues put the peak attendance at more than 150.) Desmond Lawler, one of five taskforce members present at the forum, started the proceedings by providing a twenty-minute overview of the report and its recommendations. I then opened the floor to CNS faculty members, asking them to express their views on the report but prefacing the discussion by identifying five topics that, based on my e-mail exchanges with faculty during the days leading up to the forum, struck me as the issues of greatest concern: (1) University College, (2) the signature courses, (3) deferring the choice of a major, (4) the university-wide advising center, and (5) the three-hour science and technology class. (I strongly urged speakers not merely to criticize the report, but to suggest alternative avenues for reaching the goals set forth in it, goals with which CNS faculty are largely in agreement – to light the way with candles rather than simply to curse the darkness.) I requested that we go down the list of topics in the order indicated, treating them separately. In hindsight, I realize that this plan was doomed from the start. From the outset it was the first two topics that totally dominated the discussion. It became very clear very quickly that, at least to judge by those who attended the forum, CNS faculty have grave doubts about either the necessity or the value of a new administrative structure such as University College. Nor are they even remotely convinced that the signature courses as proposed by the taskforce represent an effective (or, given the dollar and human resource costs associated with them, a feasible) means of improving the quality of the educational experiences of first- and second-year students. I will not attempt to quote individuals here. Suffice it to say that the lion's share of remarks made at the forum echoed sentiments that one will encounter with some frequency upon linking to the Faculty Council website devoted to the report. (I had the session videotaped, so if exact quotes are desired, I can make the tape available to the Faculty Council Executive Committee and/or Educational Policy Committee.) The upshot of the discussion was a motion from the floor that the CNS endorse David Hillis's dissenting minority report, a proposal that was met with resounding applause from the participants in the forum.

Unfortunately, item (4) was addressed by only one speaker in any depth, while items (3) and (5) received virtually no direct attention at all. (My failed attempts to keep the discussion on topic were perhaps too feeble, for which I must take responsibility.) Even more disappointing, very few speakers suggested concrete alternatives to the taskforce's recommendations, especially in regard to signature courses. I encouraged – nay, pleaded with – faculty to get competing ideas for curriculum reform on the record by sending

them to the Faculty Council. Happily, one is beginning to see this kind of positive response appearing on its website.

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CNS Forum Moderator