

**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 sponte, without any external charge, and out of a common purpose and interest. The Group’s activism lies in its collegial and effective discussions and critical analyses. It was best put by one of the participants that it is hoped that the work of the group will have an “organic” impact on the rest of the community. We can see that beginning to happen.

### **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 the commitment of every academic professional resides a firm grasp of the moral purposes of education, particular those of “higher education.” What is now required at our College, in particular, is a moment of pause, dedicated to reflection and contemplation, about our identity and direction, and what must be spoken is a community voice which expresses the collective will of our campus.

#### **4. The Carnegie Foundation Solutions:**

The first book the Group read to launch discussions was A New Agenda for Higher Education: Shaping a Life of the Mind for Practice (William M. Sullivan and Matthew S. Rosin, 2008), a work produced as the result of a project conducted at The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The project team sought ways “to conceive of the liberal arts and the professions as seamless contributors to the overall education of college and university students.”(p. ix)

The participants wished to establish methodological “bridges” between the liberal arts and the professions to promote their integration in the college curriculum. The study acknowledged that the gulf between professional studies and the liberal arts and sciences on campuses was “vexing” and existed as a “virtual wall” of separation – not only spatially but in purpose. The lack of cohesiveness and a commitment to mutual benefit in the curriculum serves as a perpetual barrier to collegial cooperation and common interests.

In the case of the Carnegie study, the principal methodological “bridge” is to be found in the capacity of “practical reason” to direct all thinkers to action and all actors to thought. The keys lie in the method of “reflexive reasoning” and in the pedagogical use of case studies. Case studies, it is urged, would demand that professional programs place greater emphases on real life situations which require moral choices and deliberate action, and that liberal arts programs focus more on the relation between thought and moral action.

The LAPS Group noted that as an actual circumstance at the College, professional studies do not require courses in axiology and critical analysis, and programs in the liberal arts

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

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 *theoria* or universal knowledge.

2. Professional studies have historically been devoted to *praxis* and the liberal arts have focused on *theoria*. The assumption is thus made in the book that the purposes for which professional studies and liberal arts programs are designed are incommensurate.

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?

e. Has it been used merely to secure a preference institutionally?

f. Does it, as an aspiration or as a preferred value, compel faculty to present themselves as “multi-competent” or to teach beyond their areas of competencies?

g. Is it an OBSOLETE curricular category which no longer reflects contemporary cultural and social trends?

h. What criteria can be used to assess the outcomes of interdisciplinary initiatives – in EITHER the liberal arts OR professional studies?

**2. ACCREDITATION:** accreditation is double edged. On the one hand, it requires more rigor and standardization of professional programs, and, on the other, it forecloses, varying degrees, the professional discretion that faculty have historically enjoyed in the academy.

a. Do accreditation and the standards it imposes extinguish faculty autonomy?

b. Are the faculty in professional programs subject to accreditation divested of their “expert” functions in certifying student competencies and in designing curricula consistent with the local community standard of experts with whom they reside? Is not that expertise now vested in an external body unfamiliar with the nature of the diversity of competencies in a local academic community?

c. Do national accreditations standards ignore local professional and academic practices in the name of establishing a uniformity of competencies?

d. Do such standards render irrelevant the site of professional studies, that is to say, whether professional programs are found in a liberal arts institution or in professional schools without any liberal arts or comprehensive curricula?

e. Does accreditation require a “threshold of competencies” in the faculty without fostering adventure in designing courses and with restricting cross disciplinary initiatives?

f. Does accreditation distort the allocation of institutional resources by

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?

**C. Other points and questions:**

1. Should not ALL professional programs have clinical or practicum curricula incorporated into them BEFORE graduation? How can practice be developed academically without such curricula?

2. What is the common ground for a discourse or dialogue among an academically diverse faculty upon which shared values and concerns can be fashioned?

3. Do the narrow studies in professional and graduate school limit the recruitment of new faculty and do their specific competencies restrict broadening the curricula in professional and practical studies programs?

4. Why are effective writing, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and other academically developed skills not required commonly across all programs in the College, including in most programs subject to accreditation?

5. Does accreditation create an “instrumental imperative” to impose versions of the liberal arts onto professional studies programs as a means of satisfying a remotely established accreditation standard?

6. What is “multi-competence” or “academically qualified” apart from the requirements of accreditation standards? Has accreditation divested faculty of determining whether their peers are academically qualified?

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**

**LAPS: What translations must *interdisciplinarity* undergo operationally to promote the integration of the liberal arts into professional studies &/or vice versa?**

In order to obviate the need to unpack the cross-inter-trans-meta-multi controversies and provide a framework for our Liberal Arts/Professional Studies, I have subdivided interdisciplinarity into *types*:

\* Team-based interdisciplinarity, which could describe, say, an ecological study to which several scholars bring different skills.

- 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>
<b>FYS</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

**\* Interdisciplinary Convening Groups**

A: American Studies; Bioinformatics; Environmental Science; International Business; Latin American Studies; Women's Studies

B: Environmental Studies; Biochemistry; International Studies; African American Studies; Gerontology; Integrated Science; Substance Abuse

**Prepared by M. Vides**

## **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 initiate planning discussions in the community on whether such an effort ought to be made or whether the tension existing on campus should continue and be acknowledged as “inherently natural,” as revenue generation programs are developed. This leaves entirely open the questions of the identity of the College and the use of that identity in marketing strategies, and of the intent of the current leadership in promoting the College regionally and nationally.

Many of these questions were raised by the Group and published for consideration in the form of principles and prospective actions. These are set forth in **Table 3**. The actions proposed are open-ended and are supposed to be discussion provoking, not solutions.

**TABLE 3**

**LAPS – FURTHER DISCUSSION POINTS**

<b>AGREED UPON PRINCIPLES</b>	<b>NEXT STEPS IMPLICATED</b>	<b>DISCUSSION/DATA NEEDED</b>
Liberal Arts & Professional Studies exist in tension.	Establish an institutional structure, effective in supporting the Interdisciplinary Pillar and providing rigorous protocols to support interdisciplinary practices in the General Education curriculum and throughout.	* Provost feedback?
The College is defined as one of Liberal Arts studies	Create a curriculum-driven process for fund-raising	* LAPS Recommend process?

<p>but driven in a Professional Studies direction due to possibilities of revenue generation.</p>	<p>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.</p>	
<p>Resistance exists in each curriculum regarding the other. Professional Studies concerns: Accreditation (real or imagined obstacles) &amp; dilution of the professional culture . Liberal Studies concerns: immediate career-relevant concerns are a partial perspective.</p>	<p>Assure that programs receive the resources required to accommodate both accreditation needs &amp; the Liberal Arts mission of the College: 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.</p>	<p>* LAPS – recommend a process within Institutional Effectiveness, Units, Convening group channels?</p>
<p>Opportunities to address concerns exist in some RCNJ interdisciplinary practices though not rigorously defined.</p>	<p>* <i>Define clearly and unambiguously</i> what is meant by: (1) Liberal arts; (2) Professional Studies and (3) Interdisciplinary work – which includes but is broader in scope than the above.</p>	<p>* Remaining work of the LAPS think tank?</p>

Prepared by M. Vides 11/12/08

## **6. The Last Professors and The Survival of the Liberal Arts/the Humanities and Comprehensive Education:**

The principal reading for the Group in the Spring, 2009, semester was Frank Donoghue's The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities (Fordham, 2008). Donoghue's work had attracted national attention even though many of his predictions have been subjects of other, contemporary, studies. Stanley Fish (Donoghue's former teacher) critically reviews the themes of the book in his blog (<http://fish.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/18/the-last-professor/#more-145>) but is more sparing as a seer. As he puts it:

*In previous columns and in a recent book I have argued that higher education, properly understood, is distinguished by the absence of a direct and designed relationship between its activities and measurable effects in the world.*

*This is a very old idea that has received periodic re-formulations. Here is a statement by the philosopher Michael Oakeshott that may stand as a representative example: "There is an important difference between learning which is concerned with the degree of understanding necessary to practice a skill, and learning which is expressly focused upon an enterprise of understanding and explaining."*

*Understanding and explaining what? The answer is understanding and explaining anything as long as the exercise is not performed with the purpose of intervening in the social and political crises of the moment, as long, that is, as the activity is not regarded as instrumental – valued for its contribution to something more important than itself.*

*This view of higher education as an enterprise characterized by a determined inutility has often been challenged, and the debates between its proponents and those who argue for a more engaged university experience are lively and apparently perennial. The question such debates avoid is whether the Oakeshottian ideal (celebrated before him by Aristotle, Kant and Max Weber, among others) can really flourish in today's educational landscape. It may be fun to argue its merits (as I have done), but that argument may be merely academic – in the pejorative sense of the word – if it has no support in the real world from which it rhetorically distances itself. In today's climate, does it have a chance?*

*In a new book, "The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities," Frank Donoghue (as it happens, a former student of mine) asks that question and answers "No."*

Fish further sets out the historical tension between institutions of higher learning promoting the humanities and lives of the mind and corporate values and purposes:

*Industrialist Richard Teller Crane was even more pointed in his 1911 dismissal of what humanists call the “life of the mind.” No one who has “a taste for literature has the right to be happy” because “the only men entitled to happiness . . . are those who are useful.”*

*The opposition between this view and the view held by the heirs of Matthew Arnold’s conviction that poetry will save us could not be more stark. But Donoghue counsels us not to think that the two visions are locked in a struggle whose outcome is uncertain. One vision, rooted in an “ethic of productivity” and efficiency, has, he tells us, already won the day; and the proof is that in the very colleges and universities where the life of the mind is routinely celebrated, the material conditions of the workplace are configured by the business model that scorns it.*

*The best evidence for this is the shrinking number of tenured and tenure-track faculty and the corresponding rise of adjuncts, part-timers more akin to itinerant workers than to embedded professionals.*

It is this change in the labor structure of the institutions of higher education which offers the most compelling evidence of the dramatic courses recently taken by colleges and universities distressed by economic imperatives, argues Donoghue. The new organism which has arisen in this new environment is the for-profit university. As Fish says:

*What is happening in traditional universities where the ethos of the liberal arts is still given lip service is the forthright policy of for-profit universities, which make no pretense of valuing what used to be called the “higher learning.” John Sperling, founder of the group that gave us Phoenix University, is refreshingly blunt: “Coming here is not a rite of passage. We are not trying to develop value systems or go in for that ‘expand their minds’” nonsense.*

*The for-profit university is the logical end of a shift from a model of education centered in an individual professor who delivers insight and inspiration to a model that begins and ends with the imperative to deliver the information and skills necessary to gain employment.*

*In this latter model, the mode of delivery – a disc, a computer screen, a video hook-up – doesn’t matter so long as delivery occurs. Insofar as there are real-life faculty in the picture, their credentials and publications (if they have any) are beside the point, for they are just “delivery people.”*

Donoghue offers a bleak view: the time for the traditional professoriate to save itself may have already passed. But he does not present the larger arguments - about the soon to be

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 at "non-elite" universities will survive only as incident to the survival of "distribution" and "general education" requirements.

#### **TRUTHS ABOUT THE NEW ACADEMY:**

1. Only "prestige" will insure the survival of the "brand name" universities and colleges.

2. The marketplace will insure the survival of the "mass producing" universities.

3. All other college and universities are being squeezed out of historically adaptive cultural and economic niches by "for profit" universities, community colleges, and "online courses and curricula."

4. The liberal arts/humanities have lost the rhetorical battle to define the meaning of "higher education" and "higher learning" to "for profit" universities.

5. The "for profit" universities have successfully promoted the concept and place of the "new university" by being rooted in the marketplace and meeting students' expectations.

6. Colleges and universities not adapting to the "for profit" approach have developed the strategy of using "prestige" as a marketing tool.

7. "Prestige" is directly related to the perception and power of "exclusivity," including inflated admission requirements.

8. An erosion of admission requirements, conversely, erodes the perception of "exclusivity" and defeats the new marketing strategies.

9. College rankings establish "prestige" and "comparative exclusivity."

10. College classifications establish "comparative competition" in the marketplace.

#### **MYTHS OF THE PROFESSORATE:**

1. Scholarship establishes "relative prestige."

2. Scholarship is related to teaching.

3. Professors are "public intellectuals."

4. Tenure is related to the preserving of academic freedom.

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 President and Provost for further consideration.

Under each proposition(**in bold**) are the analyses(*in italics*) of individual members of the Group presented without attribution.

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### Professional Studies/Liberal Arts Discussion Group(LAPS)

(12/3/08, Revised 12/8/08))

*[Assembled below each of the proposed "discussion propositions" are the analyses submitted by all the participants identifying the essential issues arising from our group sessions.*

*Consider again that fully one half(48.9%, 2,270/4,645) of all undergraduate students at the College are enrolled in professional studies or "practice" programs; it is similarly the case with more than two thirds(67%, 59/88) of the graduate students.*

*The accelerated growth of these programs and the diminution of emphasis on the liberal arts have created "two cultures" in the community with attendant tensions and misconceptions. With the recent consideration of new graduate programs, principally in professional studies, the gap between those cultures can only widen unless steps are taken to publish and to discuss the issues which have arisen, and to begin to fashion appropriate means to reintegrate the community and curriculum.*

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**1. The public identity of the College as a "liberal arts," undergraduate, institution, grounded in interdisciplinarity, has been eroded by the**

**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 in a global, interactive society? What are the objectives of each pillar and where do they intersect to a larger set of objectives for the College? How will Ramapo students be able to respond to a diverse society in which they live and work, and make informed, responsible judgments? Can students deconstruct information and make relevant connections to what they do after they graduate?*

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The identity of the College is in flux. The College is defined in a bureaucratic sense by Middle States Accreditation criteria; in a popular sense by U S World & News Report, Kiplinger & others; in a marketing sense by the academic-flavor-of-the-month for student recruiting; in revenue-generating initiatives -- based on what funding or donor preferences are available; in a program sense - by majors and faculty, some in accredited programs (Social Wk, Business, Nursing), some in programs affiliated with academic disciplines and peer academic societies (Psychology, Law & Society, Sociology); in a pragmatic sense - by what students actually come to Ramapo & therefore are the people we actually serve. These identities can be seen as an /or \*either/or\* or as a \*both/and\* option. How are these identities discussed? - Are they discussed? How do we know what "trumps?" What identity directs the academic program?

To the extent General Education curriculum provides a space for bridging Professional Studies and Liberal Arts, the administration of the Gen Ed curriculum must be normalized. Consider implementing an institutional structure, effective in supporting the Interdisciplinary Pillar and providing rigorous protocols to support interdisciplinary practices in the General Education curriculum and throughout.

To the extent the "pillars" such as interdisciplinary & perhaps all, provide an opportunity to bridge Liberal Arts and Professional Studies, we need to define our terms: e.g., \* Define clearly and unambiguously what is meant by: (1) Liberal arts; (2) Professional Studies and (3) Interdisciplinary work - which includes but is broader in scope than the above.

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*With the additional of professional programs, changing societal factors, and new faculty replacing the "old guard", it becomes increasingly necessary for Ramapo College to clearly define a set of unifying and guiding principles, if it is to maintain the emphasis on liberal arts which has historically defined its identity. In the absence of such principles, others will fill the void and drive the curriculum. In particular, monetary concerns will inevitably inflate the role of professional programs. Also, as faculty are primarily trained first as disciplinarians, convening groups will diverge rather than converge (sort of an academic Law of Entropy which is clearly observable in other institutions).*

*We should acknowledge that the Pillars do not, at present time, serve this purpose. They have the potential to provide strong unifying principles, but at present they are vague ideas whose practical implementation runs contrary to that which was intended. i.e. Pre-tenure faculty largely build their program precisely as they see fit given their own individual vision, and then retroactively seek to place aspects of their program into the Pillars, as if checking so many boxes. Thus, the Pillars do not serve as guiding principles. Rather, they become a shaky false foundation standing in the way of a true foundation or set of unifying/guiding principles. They must be given content and presented as true guiding and unifying principles, or discarded. Of course, effort has been put into this very task, but with no discernible tangible outcome or consequences.*

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*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:*

1. Establish funding mechanism such as “interdisciplinary based education (IBE)” grants, similar in scale and scope to competitively-granted SBR and sabbatical leaves.
2. Enable faculty in professional programs to teach in the first-year seminar program.
3. End perception (and reality?) that team-teaching and interdisciplinary courses/programs are largely the purview of established faculty.

*Ensure support of core liberal arts disciplines and seek to raise student competencies in both written composition and mathematics.*

*Encourage the recruitment of faculty with meaningful interdisciplinary backgrounds (e.g., peer-reviewed scholarship), especially in the professional programs.*

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*Interdisciplinary teaching may mean putting accreditation demands aside. I am not naive enough to think we are going back to team teaching on a large scale. (Long aside: it is easy to do a modified version of it by offering related classes at the same time of day and then plan regular joint meetings between the classes - having joint meetings on the topic.) If we are to give an interdisciplinary education this means more than just offering students a [potpourri] of Gen Ed offerings. It means really communing together as intellectuals. If doing something like modified team teaching takes away from accreditation, then so be it!*

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**2. The singularly directed accreditation initiatives of the most populated professional programs pose the prospect of segregating them further from the core liberal arts mission of the College. These programs should seek to incorporate the liberal arts into their curricula sufficient to serve the general education needs of all students. Accreditation aspirations ought not to diminish the responsibility of such programs to contribute creatively designed practical and experiential courses to the liberal arts curriculum. Internal funding and the allocation of faculty resources should be rethought to accommodate the integrity of every program at the College and be used judiciously to foster the integration of the newly emergent “two cultures” on campus.**

*It is essential that the demands of program accreditation not drive curricular and budgetary decisions such that the fundamental mission of the college is no longer clearly served. This is a particular concern given that while the liberal arts are at the core of the college’s mission, there generally are no accrediting bodies for liberal arts programs.*

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*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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*Decisions to seek \*new\* accreditation of professional or other nationally certified programs should be mulled over by the entire College. Example: maybe I would have signed on for AACSB for the business school, I might have even voted for it if I had the chance. But accreditation is having a major impact across the College and (as far as I recall) the decision to pursue it was not part of a College -wide conversation. So, it is too late for ASB, but if journalism, for example, seeks to become accredited I think the entire College needs to weigh in on that. This principle obviously would not impact exist programs or past decisions.*

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**3. The consideration of a liberal arts education by students of every aspiration – for careers, employment, graduate and professional schools, and other life courses – has not been primary in the recruiting, marketing, and fund raising initiatives of the College. A thorough understanding of the scope of the four pillars, grounded in sound curricular planning, needs to be at the very center of our efforts to engage potential students. It has become the case that the professional and practical programs have become dominant in promoting the College inter-institutionally and in the regional community in a fashion which is divorced from a liberal arts education.**

*As NJ becomes a more heterogeneous State, more new immigrants--mainly Hispanics--and their children will be attending public colleges. Recent history indicates that such students are more interested in learning that leads directly to employment. This portends increasing interest in professional programs. Are our liberal arts programs conceived in ways that clearly help students not only analyze and think critically, but also learn how to connect such learning to the general world of work and civic life ("practical reasoning"). If yes, how can we communicate this to perspective and current students? If no, is this desirable and what process would be followed to enhance course work in ways that were outlined in a NEW AGENDA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.*

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*The monetary value of professional programs, and the ease with which these programs are sold to prospective students, are a double-edged sword for any college which, like Ramapo, is a liberal arts institution at heart. Along with their undeniable value to the College, we must acknowledge that they will also ultimately draw the emphasis of the College away from "a strong liberal arts curriculum" unless specific steps are taken to counterbalance the inherent advantages which these programs have over their liberal arts counterparts. Those programs which have smaller numbers of majors and less opportunity for outside funding are particularly vulnerable to a decrease in emphasis (eg. History,*

*Philosophy, etc.). Yet these same programs have historically played a central role in determining the identity of the College, and a diminishing of their role would undeniably alter that identity. What concrete steps, particularly regarding funding, can be taken to restore balance and prevent this presumably unwanted outcome?*

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*The ailing global economy is squeezing higher education and making parents and students increasingly question the practical value of a liberal arts education? “What can you do with a degree in \_\_\_\_?” is a common question parents ask. Beyond rankings, how is Ramapo communicating our Liberal Arts message to the public? What does it mean to get a degree from Ramapo College? How can we foster the value of diversity to enrich the educational experience? How can the College translate a holistic view of education to consumers increasingly bent on degree marketability?*

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*Enrollment management should be sure to maintain a full range of strategies for attracting students to liberal arts programs so as to help enable the college to remain committed to its fundamental mission. Among these strategies would be to develop a clear, evidence-based set of answers to questions students have about what they could do with a liberal arts degree outside of teaching and graduate school.*

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*We need an all-out PR press in favor of liberal arts education. Parents and nervous teenagers are of the belief that a professional degree equates to employment. This may be true for nursing, but I am certain it is not true for teaching and business. Studies show just the opposite, that a degree in lit, for example, leads to more job satisfaction and security.*

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**4. It has become critical for the College to separate and to strike appropriate balances between academic planning and income generating initiatives. The present tension between professional studies and the liberal arts at the College is rooted, in substantial part, in the failure to distinguish their common and conflicting interests from considerations of revenue and institutional and academic planning. The “two cultures” have thus become discouraged from working collaboratively to develop integrated approaches to teaching and learning. Such cooperation would also foster the very integration of the programmatic and budgetary goals needed to unify the College’s mission and future.**

*The first step of solving an issue is admitting that it exists. It will trouble me (and all in the LAPS, I know) to discover that these issues will get swept aside even after we have taken much time to discuss them. This cross section of faculty in our group seems disenchanted with the fundamental principles this college rests upon. That is troubling. I am not sure if this makes sense, but I think its important that administration understands that there is a consensus that believes that nothing is going to come from this effort. Perhaps that may be a stimulus for them to intervene...*

*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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*Faculty in programs in the liberal arts should be asked to reflect on how they contribute to practice-oriented programs beyond teacher education. In addition to developing a clearer sense of how skills in writing and critical reasoning carry into the business or medical fields, they might develop new courses in the history of business, or in medicine and literature. Faculty in professional programs should be consulted about new courses in the humanities and social sciences that would be especially likely to serve students in those programs.*

*Many of the challenges faced by faculty seeking to more fully integrate the liberal arts with professional studies, and to maintain flourishing programs in the liberal arts, are the result of the long-standing problem of insufficient full-time faculty across the college. Adding full-time faculty should be a priority, and line allocation decisions should be tied to the strategic plan and made part of a public discussion about the fundamental mission and strategic direction of the college.*

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*The General Education program could also provide another avenue by which the entire College defines a set of unifying principles, particularly laying out a vision for core learning outcomes that we feel are essential to all Ramapo students. Ironically, many Ramapo students view these courses as nothing more than a silly hoop through which they must jump, and even put off gen ed courses until senior year. Thus, the courses serve no purpose of preparation for rigorous interdisciplinary study (particularly with regard to writing skills, critical thinking, etc.). For the gen ed program to serve its proper function(s), must we impose not only a credit requirement for gen ed courses but also a timeline for the program to be completed? i.e. would the gen ed program better serve the above two-fold purpose (core learning plus preparation for advanced work) if all Ramapo students were forced to complete this part of their program say within the first year or two years of study*

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*To the extent General Education curriculum provides a space for bridging Professional Studies and Liberal Arts, the administration of the Gen Ed curriculum must be normalized. Consider implementing an institutional structure, effective in supporting the Interdisciplinary Pillar and providing rigorous protocols to support interdisciplinary practices in the General Education curriculum and throughout.*

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*Ensure support of core liberal arts disciplines and seek to raise student competencies in both written composition and mathematics.*

*Encourage the recruitment of faculty with meaningful interdisciplinary backgrounds (e.g., peer-reviewed scholarship), especially in the professional programs.*

*Improve communication between all schools regarding program accreditation requirements and demands. Provide venues for collaboration between faculty and schools to deepen liberal arts-professional school linkages.*

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*A concrete suggestion is to require students to have an interdisciplinary minor through which they would learn about different perspectives from courses all relating to the same topic while meeting students who would be project collaborators and participants in class discussions also coming from different disciplines/perspectives.*

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*Every student, liberal arts and prof, should do some serious experiential learning. I am envisioning a buffed-up Cahill center and study abroad office that could ensure (as part of graduation requirement? not sure) that every RCNJ grad has gotten off campus to have some serious work/life experience. Make the lit majors do internships at publishing houses and newspapers, make the finance kids to co-ops, make the Spanish majors study abroad, etc.*

## **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)