

Memorandum

To: Professor Minoo Derayeh
Chair, Faculty Council

From: Academic Policy and Planning Committee

Date: June 10, 2020

Subject: LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning Response from APPC

APPC received the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies *LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning REVISED DRAFT Preliminary Report* on October 16, 2019 and discussed it at several meetings. The Committee would very much like to thank College Heads Pablo Idahosa and James Simeon for leading this important initiative and authoring the resulting report with its four “practical initiatives” and three “principles of practice”.

The Committee has examined this report in conjunction with other information received from the LA&PS Dean’s Office, including student survey data collected in the Colleges Re-Visioning process and recommendations made in the course of an earlier audit of the Colleges. We recommend that a forum be made available at a Faculty Council meeting on this topic and hope that this response will contribute to the discussion and decisions that must be made to re-vision the LA&PS Colleges to:

- better enhance student experiences; and
- maximize their support of student interactions with faculty and staff.

In our response, we have considered the following key issues:

- utilization of space
- allocation and efficient use of resources
- overlap of services/programs offered centrally and by Colleges
- student orientation, outreach, and support
- College identity, community building, and the role of the College Heads



APPC agrees with the “principles of practice” outlined on page 3 of the report but has concerns regarding the report’s proposal that Colleges offer a “First Year Seminar” (practical initiative 1). Because all curricular proposals must be vetted through collegial governance processes, APPC is asking that this initiative be referred to the General Education Working Group via its Chair, Professor John Simoulidis (or to the larger Faculty Council Committee on Curriculum, Curricular Policy, and Standards if the working group has dissolved by the time this response is considered).

As well, APPC believes that the report’s third principle to “require” all faculty members attached to a College to mentor students (in addition to present forms in which mentoring is currently being conducted) may be too onerous. Positioning such mentorship roles as opportunities for collegial service contributions, particularly for teaching stream faculty, (as articulated at p. 24 of the report), may be a more persuasive way to attract faculty to these positions.

APPC also has several questions which are designed to contribute to the discussion of how LA&PS can best support all students ----- the 80% that are commuter students (both full-time and part-time evening students) as well as the 20% that are living on-campus¹ ---- by providing spaces that support:

- academic success,
- community engagement, and
- mentorship and career skills-building (through experiential education (EE) and research connections with faculty research projects, workshops and other service training options, etc.).

These questions and sub-questions are as follows:

1. In what ways can the role of LA&PS Colleges be adapted to be as relevant as possible to current and future students?
 - a. Should specific LA&PS Colleges have tighter connections to academic programs?
 - b. Or should a specific LA&PS Colleges focus on a particular student cohort linked by shared interests and objectives other than programs such as:
 - international students who currently comprise 22% of LA&PS

¹ 80% of the LA&PS students who completed the LA&PS College Student Survey conducted in March 2019 (with 2702 respondents) self-identified as commuters (see page 11 of the report). Similar statistics for full-time vs. part-time students or evening vs. day FTEs would be useful.

- students (with higher percentages in particular programs)
 - graduate students who currently comprise 1800 LA&PS students
 - some other demographic group?
 - c. Or should a specific LA&PS College become a hub focused in an area such as:
 - health and wellness
 - student success
 - research or
 - something else?
2. How much LA&PS College space should be made available to students?
 3. How can LA&PS Colleges fulfill their original mandate (as outlined in an earlier audit) of providing a sense of community for commuter students and making interdisciplinary space available to students? What role does the College Head play in fostering a sense of collegial identity and coordinating the many initiatives of the college?
 4. What role would LA&PS Colleges play in working with Fellows and Alums to expand EE opportunities for students (the report's practical initiative #3). How exactly would this be coordinated with
 - LA&PS faculty using experiential education in their courses;
 - the LA&PS EE Office; and/or
 - the College Head?
 5. Is there clarity for students about the relationships, authorities, and layers of community and services currently available within LA&PS and elsewhere within the university?
 - What can be done to improve clarity and streamline the processes for students?
 - Have we learned anything about improving clarity, processes and supports for students as a result of the covid-19 public health crisis?
 6. What strategies for more effective communication, processes, and supports for students can be introduced in the process of rethinking how Colleges are organized?

At the present time, APPC has generated four recommendations that might envision the road ahead in this regard:

Recommendation 1: MISSION and COMMUNICATION. Redefine the main mission of each LA&PS College and improve connections/communication with students.

The data in the LA&PS College Student Survey conducted in March 2019 (with 2702 respondents) revealed that, in response to a question regarding the students' sense of identification with a College, the majority identified "not at all" (39.47%) or "a little bit" (24.57%). This represents approximately 64% overall (page 8 of 8)¹, and leads APPC to question how identification can continue to drive the current association of the Colleges to students, if the majority seems to have lost this sense of connection? Therefore, new ways of engaging students in the Colleges system need to be devised.

Recommendation 2: SERVICES. Eliminate the duplication of services.

The main academic advising should take place within program, department and central advising services already available. Orientation and welcome sessions could be held in academic units, directly with their students and faculty and staff. LA&PS Colleges could assist with promoting these events and with scheduling/housing these in their respective locations. PASS² courses (currently run by LA&PS Colleges) could be run by either departments or LA&PS Colleges.

Recommendation 3: SPACE. Reconfigure LA&PS College space to allow for greater student experience, student-student and faculty-student interactions. This will involve renovating spaces to enlarge them and make them physically and visually appealing as well as accessible. Areas that are in particular need of renovation include:

- Main entrances;
- Student study spaces (to accommodate increased student numbers since the Colleges were originally built); and
- Spaces for peer mentoring (arranged tutoring hours, for spontaneous meetings among students, and other forms).

² As of Winter 2020, all LA&PS Colleges run the Peer-Assisted Student Success (PASS) program that involves weekly group-learning sessions for difficult courses which are facilitated by a "PASS" leader, that is, a student who has completed the respective course in a previous term with an A or A+. Colleges work with departments to select the difficult courses and the PASS leaders.

Recommendation 4: IDENTITY. Explore additional ways of enhancing a sense of identity among members of each LA&PS College. These may include initiatives such as proceeding with the report’s idea of a “Common Read” for each College.

A Common Read will help bring students, staff, and faculty together over a shared reading experience. Texts can be selected from an informal panel comprised of faculty, staff, and students, and could relate to the subject area of one of the College’s affiliate academic programs. Students could be provided with a complimentary copy of the “Common Read” prior to their start date in September. Faculty could be encouraged to use the “Common Read” for assignments in their coursework.

College Heads play a vital role in fostering a sense of identity among members of the college community. They coordinate initiatives and events, and provide a bridge to the academic programs they play host to. According to the LA&PS Strategic Plan, College Heads “coordinate relevant co-curricular and first-year activities” Retain a College Head for each of the four LA&PS Colleges, and consider whether these might be appointments made from YUFA or CUPE pools of qualified candidates.

Recommendation 5: EVALUATION. Adopt a collegially decided upon method of evaluating progress to follow up with any changes that are made.

Sincerely

Joanne Magee
Academic Policy and Planning Committee
Liberal Arts & Professional Studies