

## Notes from Workshop on Division II February 20, 2009

**Panel of Discussants: Myrna Breitbart, Sue Darlington, Eva Rueschmann, Stan Warner**

**Aaron Berman** opened the seminar with some general thoughts about Division II. He emphasized that it is based on a relationship between two faculty members and one student. Some of our studies show that issues that arise are often around a lack of satisfaction and feeling of success. Ongoing contact is critical between the committee members and the student – there will be a two year relationship among the three. How to stay in touch is important. What is a reasonable number of meetings that should take place? There should be a “formal” preview of the Division II portfolio after year two, midway through the Division I. Is the material the student is presenting headed in the right direction? Aaron mentioned something that Lee Spector used to say that Division II is a *living document*. Students need to think about what the Division III will be, and begin to formulate it. He mentioned the Wabash Task Force Report and its importance to the Division II contract.

### **Myrna Breitbart**

Myrna said that students give attention to Division I but devote insufficient attention to Division II (beyond coursework). Project based work should be incorporated in Division II. The community learning engagement requirement brings integrity to this concept and practice and anchors it in the college. Advisors should encourage students to become familiar with the Hampshire community and topics that matter. This might lead to an internship. Internships often help students in coalescing ideas. Gaps are filled in this way, and questions are answered that help formulate Division II. Internships complement coursework.

The spirit of community service requirement causes students to apply learning in significant ways. This service augments classroom learning and enriches the community. Myrna believes the more background you have, the more useful you are to the community. In Division II students often go immediately to one discipline and instead they should be encouraged to think about what questions they are most curious about. WHY are they the most interesting or important questions? WHAT does the student need to know from the asking of the questions? Are there SKILLS that the student needs to develop in order to answer these questions?

### **Sue Darlington**

Sue emphasized the important transition from Division II to Division III. Division II prepares for Division III and beyond. She also spoke about finding the balance – exploring and touching on other areas.

She also described the process by which she checks in along the way with her students. Sue asks to see the portfolio at the end of every semester – or midway through the semester if she has the time to review it. Ask the student to throw everything into it. Using this technique, faculty can get a general sense of how students are doing.

Using the portfolio:

Faculty should encourage documentation of “other” materials. This is especially useful in the case of transfer students who are coming to H.C. with prior work. Sue asks all students to write a mini retrospective (one or two paragraphs) for every class and learning activity they have had -- to focus their thoughts about what they have learned. Such “mini blurbs” help to get students out of the chronological accounting method of thought. How did these experiences contribute to your thinking? Then they add evaluations, self-evals, and sample work to the portfolio. This process leads to shorter, tighter, better focus for the main retrospective. It is important that the portfolio address the question of where this Division III is heading. (Students can use the Division II retrospective to think about where they are going in Division III).

Sue is now teaching a 300 level course which is mostly filled with last semester Division IIs, She asks students to work on a semester-long project to test out some Division III ideas. Class sessions are handled by teams, who provide the readings, organize the class activities, etc. This creates a good transition to Division III.

### **Eva Rueschmann:**

The centerpiece of a Hampshire education is a highly individualized course of study, which involves a contract. The most important aspect of Division II begins with the student conceptualizing it. More time and care needs to be taken at the beginning so there will be a better overall result, and more satisfaction. When sufficient early time is not put into it, sometimes the Division II seems to be cobbled together. There needs to be a continuum in order to finish well, beginning at Division I, through Division II and finishing at Division III. The critical time is at the beginning, when the student needs to speak with faculty and refine proposals and contracts.

Proposals go onto the HUB in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester. Therefore this is a four semester undertaking, including the first semester of the second year for planning. This third semester is an important transition period. Students should think about this contract even in their second semester at Hampshire, and talk about the questions they want to pursue.

Tutorial faculty help prepare students for Division II, and guide them towards the background that they will need for depth and breadth in the concentration. Students need to brainstorm and write about interests, ideas, and questions as they complete Division I, and to think of this as a process.

### **Stan Warner**

Stan said that one question that should be asked of students is what would you like to know outside of your concentration? A related question is: what does it mean to be an educated person? We should not expect that all intellectual breadth is accomplished in the first year in Division I, but should encourage students to take at least 1/4th to 1/3 of their course work outside the Division II concentration.

Stan raises the related question: how much work constitutes a Division II? Course counting usually follows the lines of 4 courses a semester for a total of 16 courses. So over the middle two years it would be better to think of the Division II concentration as comprising 8-10 courses, with at least 6 courses taken in areas unrelated to the Division II.

Students craft very creative Division IIs, but “horizontal associative drift” often happens! They and their committee need to think about where the “center of gravity” of their Division II is located, in terms of reading and working at a deeper level of sophistication.

“Veer if you must, but don’t skate on intellectually thin ice.”

### **Annie Rogers**

The challenge for me in mentoring Division II students is how to help them formulate questions as a puzzle in relation to areas of study in Division II. Often their questions are too amorphous, and terribly abstract. I ask if a student can already answer a question she's posed. If students already have answers to their questions, then why bother with those questions?

I also think that sometimes we take for granted the idea of what is interdisciplinary. Much of what happens in Division II could be called "multidisciplinary." What is the difference? This would make for a great faculty discussion and workshop.

Is it possible at the end of the first year for the student to raise new questions? How can a student begin to leverage learning in one area against learning in another, and in doing so find critical gaps, questions, rather than glomming things together. When a Division II really works, the student's puzzle deepens, and gives substance to his or her plans for Division III. My question is: How does the student's thinking in Division II become more advanced?

**Jill Lewis** spoke about students visualizing or creating a map in writing. She asks them to take out a big piece of paper and draw bubbles and circles on it containing topics, holding these things externally. It's important for students to visualize the component parts. Because students often do not think in linear ways, this exercise helps them to hold many disparate topics at one time and not try to make them mesh too soon. Students have the capacity to *veer*! Division II sometimes seems entirely different from the original plan. As students come to the transition to Division III, they are getting better as entrepreneurs. They need to find the right vocabulary – it's a puzzle. Ask the student - where are the sparks that are propelling you?

**Thom Haxo** spoke about the different learning styles that exist among Hampshire students. There should be more collaborative discussion among students. Thom's students are dealing with things that are visual – so a verbal/written contract is not easy. They do not want to become slaves to words that they have written.

**Laura Wenk**

Laura emphasized that the Division II contract helps faculty to prepare students for Division III. For example, her students are encouraged to take a research methods course and make practical learning objectives to develop their own learning goals.

**Bob Rakoff**

Bob spoke about the Division II form on the HUB. He thinks that the form should be formatted. The first section should be about questions and goals so that students can reorient their thinking.

**Michelle Bigenho**

The transition between Division I and Division II is very important. Contact with professors can be very helpful at that time. The HUB organizes the contracts, but the student needs to interview the professor. This is hard to do for many students. They sometimes feel shy and intimidated approaching professors or deans. However, finding the right mentors is an essential part of creating the Division II so students should be encouraged to seek them out early in the process.

**Joanna Morris**

How to help students find the right faculty member? Advisors should send their students to the school dean or to CASA. Encourage students to use all the resources available to them.