

## **Notes from the Dean's Response to the Working Group Reports, 1 October 2014.**

### **At McMaster, Humanities Means Leadership.**

Look at any list of the attributes of effective leadership, and what do you find? Some variation on the following:

- Strong personal and ethical values.
- The ability to influence others by making reasoned, well-thought out arguments.
- Emotional intelligence, achieved both by knowing oneself, and by being able to see the world from the perspective of others.
- Social intelligence, the ability to engage others in conversation, to collaborate, to be sensitive to social situations and to work with those culturally different from ourselves.
- Communication, conveying complex ideas in clear and inspiring ways.
- Creativity, particularly an openness to new ideas and a willingness to question everything, not for the sake of asking questions, but to make this a better world.

These are the so-called “soft skills”. The “soft skills” build careers. The “soft skills” build leaders. Leaders in the worlds of scholarship, and in the worlds of business, policy and social entrepreneurship. They are the skills that build leaders in our communities, in our neighbourhoods, in our classrooms, in our social agencies, in our arts organizations, and yes, in businesses, from corporations to startups.

We are often asked by parents and students, “what does Humanities mean?” I want to have an answer for them: Humanities means leadership. It is in our lecture halls, seminar rooms, workshops, performance spaces and laboratories that future leaders develop the skills that they need to succeed, the skills that they will need to build a better world.

Humanities means leadership. You know that. I know that. So why in the high schools and in many universities is “leadership” the purview of business programs? I have nothing against business programs; I think we can help them be better, and they can help us be better. That is why we are working with the business school on several new programs. And I would be the first to admit that we don't have a monopoly on the skills that leaders need; we do, nevertheless, have a lot to offer. And “leadership” in a Humanities context is potentially more inclusive and collaborative, embracing the wider concept of civic leadership and citizenship. We need to let our students know that we see them as potential leaders of the future, that we can help them be the agents of change that our world so desperately needs.

I recognize that I am vastly simplifying the thoughtful statements proposed by the Working Group on Engaging our Community, although I don't think I am contradicting many of the values they articulated. Most obviously, I believe that framing Humanities in terms of

leadership is in the spirit of their statements, which sought to be confident and assertive about the value of our disciplines. As we develop the theme of leadership, I expect that we can make use of some of the other ideas contained in that Working Groups report, such as the community fair and summer camps. And we certainly will want to use the new website capabilities, which are on their way, to help frame the story. We want to have a story.

This is not just an exercise in public relations. We have to take a critical look at what we currently offer to our students and how we offer it. We have to ask, how would any student know that our aspiration is to build the leaders of tomorrow? How would any student or parent know that our disciplines offer some of the best ways for students to develop as leaders? How would any student, parent or member of the community know that there is a McMaster advantage – that we offer students the chance to encounter great teachers, researchers and creative artists, who model leadership in their scholarship and teaching?

Leadership. This is the lens that you provided to me in the town hall meetings, and which shaped my thinking as I reread and contemplated all of the Working Group reports. And this is how I think we should build and transform the faculty in the five years ahead.

### **Transforming the First Year Experience**

What does this mean in practice? For undergraduate students, we need to start in First Year. As the Working Group concluded, offering a wide menu of disciplinary-specific courses --- no matter how excellent each of those specific courses is – simply is not working. We have trouble retaining students and the number of students who make us their first choice is declining. The children of the baby boomers have graduated from university now – many of us know that from first-hand experience. In an era of demographic decline, it is not just the Arts or Humanities, but Humanities at McMaster that is not competitive.

The Working Group offered a very precise recommendation around two new first year courses, and also the transformation of our current Humanities orientation course. I was particularly intrigued by the way that the Working Group thought about competencies and also about putting them in plain language, because it raised the question that students undoubtedly ask of themselves, especially in first year: why am I here? What is our answer? To build your capacity to lead change.

I appreciate the attention that the Working Group gave to making use of the new active learning classrooms. Other universities are gradually introducing these classrooms, but few of them will be like ours, because ours will be opened as part of a brand new building. We can get students excited about these technology-enabled classrooms, especially if we can say that all of them will be in one of those classrooms in their first year. And we should be excited about them. Studies suggest that learning in these classrooms is enhanced, most especially for

students who are not from privileged backgrounds. We want to build leaders, and we want to build leaders in every community.

I recommend that we support and adapt the recommendations of the working group, connecting them to our broader aim to make Humanities Mean Leadership.

I would suggest the introduction of two mandatory 3-unit required Humanities courses in Level I, *Voice and Vision: Words to Change the World*, and *Insight and Inquiry: Questions to Change the World*. We don't want courses that are just about how to write, or how to conduct research. We don't want courses that suggest that we are engaged in a remediation that our best students are likely to resent. We want courses about how to write and how to research in order to improve our world. We need to recruit strong students, excite them about being here, and give them a sense that a Humanities degree will help them build a better future.

*Voice and Vision: Words to Change the World*. Effective leaders must understand the power of words. Humanists consistently emphasize the importance of the language that we use, and we understand that good ideas are only powerful when they are communicated clearly and effectively. We need to convey these ideas to our students. While this course will clearly do much of what was imagined for the "Writing Lab", giving this course the purpose of exploring words to change the world also changes it in other ways – focusing on words and writing in this way shifts the course from a "how to write a better essay", "how to engage in academic writing", "how to write a book review" or "how to pass your university courses", to a course on how to be an effective and persuasive writer to lead change. We might be inclined to have our students read words that have changed the world, to consciously think about how the elements of effective writing and argumentation connect to a world that includes many forms of writing, be they essays, speeches, blogs, policy briefs, business cases, tweets, and op eds, to name just a few.

*Insight and Inquiry: Questions to Change the World*. Effective leaders need to be able to ask questions, about themselves and about the world around them. Again, framing the course in this way shifts Inquiry from being a university preparatory course, "how to conduct research" and "how to prepare a research essay" to being one about thinking about formulating creative questions about the world that can lead to change. I would propose that this course include some of the elements of the current Hum 1AA0, most especially the attention to the Learning Portfolio. If effective leaders need to know themselves and need to define their own objectives, the Learning Portfolio offers a tool for doing so.

Each of these courses would be taught in the larger of the Active Learning Classrooms in Wilson Hall, which encourage collaborative learning. Although these classes seat 99 or 108, the tables

of nine (and technology sharing that results in three groups of three at each pod), can create an intimate atmosphere and can help build a learning community.

Ideally, each classroom would engage one tenure or teaching stream instructor, a few teaching assistants, and up to 10 senior undergraduate student mentors. Ideally, every table in the room would be supported by at least one graduate or undergraduate student at all times. The undergraduate students would not be involved in any grading but would help students in their discussions, and would be recruited from a new leadership course. If you think this is fanciful, consider: we introduced an “Applied Humanities” course – Leadership: The Art of Mentoring -- only a few weeks before the beginning of this term with very little fanfare, and attracted more than 35 students from across campus, but mostly from our own faculty.

The proposed new courses are not an insignificant investment – they would involve up to 5 instructors and 10 TAs each term to be drawn from as many departments as possible. And the courses will displace some of the discipline specific courses that our students take in first year. These courses will come at some cost and risk to all of us, but the cost of doing nothing – of just doing more of the same -- could be much greater.

The Dean’s Office will do its best to support both the instructors and departments involved in these two new courses, but we will need your help.

### **Beyond the First Year**

What happens beyond the first year? I have already suggested one initiative: we will formalize a leadership and mentoring course along the lines of this year’s experiment, to provide students with an opportunity to serve as model leaders in the new first year courses. I also think that we need to think about the Working Group on Undergraduate Education Beyond the First Year, who proposed the creation of a Certificate in Community Leadership. And the Certificate in International Engagement, perhaps reframed as a Certificate in Global Leadership, fits very well with the lens through which I propose we think about our offerings.

Although I think we could move forward with these Certificates in the short term, in the longer term, I would hope that we can build these competencies into our undergraduate program. For the past few months, we have been working with the Faculty of Business to create a Specialized Minor in Business for students taking Humanities degrees. We believe that this Specialized Minor - which students will declare at the beginning and not the end of their degree - requires more units than a regular minor, and will help those students who want to build some of the technical skills needed for leadership in the world of business. It will not be for everyone, of course, and I would propose that we use the ideas underlying the certificate proposals to create, for example, a Specialized Minor in International Engagement and a Specialized Minor in Community Leadership. A feature of the former minor will be a language requirement.

Language, after all, is the key to the kind of cross-cultural understanding demanded of today's leaders.

I believe that the Specialized Minor may provide the vehicle for other Integrated Leadership Learning Communities, sequences of courses that cross our disciplines and which address significant issues. For the most part, we leave it to our students to create coherent degrees and make connections between the courses they take. At best, we concern ourselves with the coherence of the courses that they take in our individual program. Some of our students do very well at making connections and finding direction, and more active use of the Learning Portfolio may help others to do so. Learning communities focused on interdisciplinary themes are opportunities to help students to connect concepts from one course with those of another. Such thinking across the boundaries of disciplines is a feature of some of our strongest research initiatives, and another skill that will prepare our students to be leaders.

I recommend that the Dean's Office welcome proposals for Integrated Leadership Learning Communities. We will provide development funding, some of which will support a research assistant – ideally a graduate student so that we extend the experience beyond our undergraduates – to help in the development of the learning community courses. Simply connecting a series of courses around a topic is not what we are after. There must be an integration of the material in the courses – including some extracurricular events – for the students in the learning community, although they should also be imagined as a subset of larger, open classes. Preference will be given to proposals that deepen the connections between the learning community and our own research programs, as well as the known strengths of the university. Imagine a Humanities Leadership Learning Community on a large health issue. A more detailed call for proposals will be forthcoming from the Dean's Office.

At the same time, Departments are encouraged to start thinking of ways to build elements of leadership into some or all of their programs. That, after all, is what is making our programs in Communication Studies and Justice, Political Philosophy and Law so successful. Students can imagine the kinds of skills and future opportunities that those programs will provide. The Faculty will welcome and support proposals for courses in all of our programs that fit the pattern of our new first year courses, which explicitly foreground in their design the skills that will help our students become the leaders of tomorrow.

### **Graduate Education**

What about graduate education? I am inclined not to fix what isn't broke. Our disciplinary and interdisciplinary research strengths continue to attract strong students. Making our undergraduate program more exciting and purposeful certainly won't hurt. And as we gain confidence in associating our programs with ideas of leadership, we may be in a position to

develop professional graduate workshops, certificates and perhaps even programs in leadership competencies.

While the Working Group on Graduate Education and Professional Development was doing its work, a larger, Ontario-wide professional development initiative was led by McMaster. I would encourage graduate programs to make use of and give feedback on [mygradskills.ca](http://mygradskills.ca). The course modules on the site are designed to help students navigate their graduate experience, and imagine both academic and non-academic careers at the end of the day.

Although I am happy to entertain a proposal for an interdisciplinary PhD, I do not see that as a priority. I am even more interested in ensuring that our current programs are open to some level of interdisciplinarity and engage a wider range of faculty members in existing PhD programs. As this and another Working Group pointed out, one key to that is the introduction of a Faculty-wide “points system” to recognize graduate supervision.

### **Points System**

Last year, the Office of the Dean introduced and shared guidelines on balancing work assignments that recognized that someone not actively engaged in research for a number of years ought to be expected to rebalance their work assignment to take on more teaching responsibilities. We included communication of research results in peer-reviewed publications as an important component of active engagement in research. Contrary to what I have heard some argue, this is not using increased teaching assignments as a form of punishment, but rather recognizes that someone not actively engaged in research ought to be contributing as much to the university and Faculty as their colleagues who are active. It is an effort to try to ensure that the contributions that faculty members make are fairly balanced.

Similarly, the graduate points system was designed not to offer “teaching release” as a reward, but to balance teaching assignments. The system was introduced because a good deal of graduate supervisory work was not included in the 15 unit teaching assignment, yet required as much of a faculty member’s time and energy as a formally recognizable 3 unit course. If all faculty members undertook the same amount of graduate work, then there would not be an issue, but this is clearly not the case, for a wide variety of reasons.

The other reason it is important not to think about the points system as being about “teaching release” is because departments must understand that it is NOT a release time stipend system, in which some body external to the department pays to have courses taught that otherwise would be taught by a faculty member. The points system is simply a system that allows Departments and programs to build 15 unit assignments for all of its faculty members in a relatively equitable manner, by managing its program requirements and course offerings appropriately. The Departments of English and History do not receive sessionals when a faculty

member is not teaching 15 units. The Department of Classics made a decision not to adopt the points system, but instead chose to use the units that might otherwise go to release to continue teaching small language classes. All departments and individual faculty members will need to consider the trade-offs that need to be made.

The model proposed by the Working Group on Graduate Education is the current one used in the Department of English and Cultural Studies, which is a version of the points system adopted by the Faculty for what were then all Departments with PhD programs.

I have one major concern with the proposal, and that is that it might not actually produce the kind of incentive that we are looking for. Let us take the example of a faculty member in a program who does not have very much opportunity to supervise PhD students, either because of field or because there is not a PhD program or any graduate program. A faculty member would need to supervise 18 MA Major Research Projects over 3 years - 6 per year, or supervise 3 or 4 MRPS per year and sit on 2-3 PhD supervisory committees over the same 3 year period. My concern is that faculty members might see that he or she is unlikely to make this threshold, and therefore see little encouragement or incentive in the system.

To deal with this issue, I will be proposing that we adopt a variation of the older “box top” system that was in use in some Departments, which would allow a faculty member to accumulate points for as many years as necessary to reach a threshold, and then be entitled to count 3 of their 15 unit assignment as graduate supervisory duties. Some faculty members would continue to be eligible for release annually, but it might take others more than 3 years to reach the threshold. Nevertheless, the extra time that they had put into the supervisory work over the years would be recognized. Faculty members earning points in this way will not be unreasonably denied the release, although it will be at the discretion of the Chair and Dean. And faculty members will be expected to trade-off requests for releases against, for example, a focus on smaller class teaching.

I would point out that there is another key to making such a system work – Chairs, directors and supervisors must be open to and proactive in making use of the expertise that we have within the Faculty. It is fair to say that one of the concerns that I have heard about the points system is that not all faculty members are even considered for supervisory duties, regardless of the expertise and/or alternative disciplinary perspective that they might bring to a committee. We can make our current committees more interdisciplinary, enhancing rather than diminishing the experience of our students, and also make a better effort to balance the contributions of all faculty members in our Departments. To assist everyone, the Faculty Office will seek to develop a directory, indicating areas of research strength and previous/current supervisory areas of all Faculty members. As well, Chairs and Directors will be expected to report annually

to the Dean's Office (at the time of course management) on the proposed implementation of the points system in their program.

Several faculty members expressed concern that our teaching loads affected research in the Faculty. The Faculty Office is open to proposals for other activities that might be recognized in the allocation of work assignments. I am not opposed to differentiated assignments of formal course teaching. Insisting on 15 units for every tenure faculty and 24 units for every teaching faculty can create other kinds of inequities in the work assignments of faculty members. All we should expect is that the Faculty and Departments develop transparent and accountable guidelines, have them approved by the Dean's Office, and report regularly on their implementation. This is a discussion I am happy to have with Departments.

We also must do our best to help Departments understand the financial consequences of such decisions under the budget model. Consider: because our programs offer full TAs and office space to MA students, our net revenues from them are actually very small. Indeed, we must ensure that we are using our TAs to teach more undergraduate students than we would without them, or most if not all of our MA programs are money-losing propositions. We also should, as the Working Group on Reimagining and Repositioning Programs and Departments recommended, be looking for ways to combine a proportion of small Level IV and MA courses in our graduate programs, to lessen the costs of teaching. Otherwise, the amount of credit currently given for MA supervisory work in the points system will need to be reviewed, as it only adds to the cost of already costly programs.

### **Program Review**

My reference to the working group on reimagining programs undoubtedly raises a bigger question in your minds. I will actually say less about that today than some of you may want. I found many of the observations and recommendations in the report of the group to be extremely helpful, and I deeply appreciate the time and risks that they took in producing the report. I do not intend to make grand pronouncements on the recommendations yet, because I think I need to discuss all of them with the individual departments and programs involved.

In the Strategic Mandate Agreement, the University pointed to the new budget model as its alternative program prioritization. There will be no TransformMac, or even TransformHumatMac. As a step beyond the Working Group report, our office – David Kingma and Phoebe Hu to be specific – spent a good deal of the summer looking at how the budget model looks when applied to Departments in the Faculty. Not an easy task. David is now meeting with each of the Chairs and Directors, to show them what that the results look like, for all Departments including their own. We are handling it this way because of the complexity of the exercise – David is able to answer detailed questions in these meetings – and because we

don't want anyone to think that the Faculty will make decisions based only on the budget model. It is a starting point for further discussion, however, since it helps to underline the financial consequences of some of the ways in which programs operate. I did think this exercise worth doing to provide some context for the discussions that I will have with programs and/or departments about the proposals contained in the working groups report over the coming months.

We can look at the budget numbers. And then we can ask the question of departments and programs: what contribution do you make to the Faculty? What challenges do you face in doing so? What changes could be made to the way you are offering graduate and undergraduate programs that might help the faculty? Most importantly, no one expects all departments to be the same. So the question I will ask is: What contribution can you make to the Faculty? And you should know by now what other question I will ask.

In fact, if you come to me with a request, an idea, a scheme, a dream, I want you to know exactly what I will ask. I will ask, how will that make McMaster the place where Humanities Means Leadership?