

Minutes of a Faculty Forum

Provost's Initiative in Executive and Professional Education

March 22, 2011

A faculty forum on the Provost's Initiative in Executive and Professional Education was called to order at 4 p.m. by Provost David Kertzer who reported that Brown was in the early stages of developing professional MA programs. Dean Karen Sibley and Associate Provost Rod Beresford are spearheading the effort to find a suitable structure. The Provost said that Brown was unusual among its peers in not offering Masters programs that were neither traditional departmental degrees nor part of traditional continuing education. Brown stands to gain from a new group of students, principally mid-career professionals with full-time jobs, a group that can study only part-time. The new revenue stream would be an important benefit since Brown is more dependent on undergraduate tuitions than its peers. To assure quality students, there will be an admissions process. Faculty will be separate from tenure-track Brown faculty. Coursework will be conducted partly on-line.

Associate Provost Rod Beresford added that Brown needs new revenue sources, that professional MA's can be of high quality, in keeping with Brown's educational mission, and that such programs are becoming the norm, as evidenced by their presence at places such as Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, Cornell, Columbia. He pointed out that we already have the successful Brown-Pfizer Master of Arts Program in Biology. New programs would maintain selectivity in the admission process: a 3.0 undergraduate GPA; letters of recommendation; personal statement and writing sample. He anticipates some involvement of regular faculty, including in the hiring process. However, these programs are not residential, but a combination of on-campus and on-line learning, probably supported by adjunct and visiting faculty. Eventually there will be regular rules, as for any degree program, which the administration hopes to bring through the approval process in the fall.

Professor Tim Roberts (Environmental Science) described an MA program at Oxford in "bootcamp format," that was held on campus and served both regular students and returning professionals. Citing the precedent of the Watson Institute, he asked if this initiative could bring more faculty resources to Brown. He suggested that June, July, and August were opportune times for intensive one-week events. He also expressed concerns about the quality of adjunct faculty. Rod Beresford responded that regular faculty would serve as consultants and that the new hires would be Ph.D's in positions comparable to lecturers.

Professor Reid Cooper (Geological Sciences) asked if there was a financial plan and how much money would be need over the next ten months? How much will be invested for what kind of a return? Rod Beresford said that financial models do exist, and that finding faculty may be the more limiting factor. To Professor Cooper's question about the supply of appropriate adjuncts in the Providence area, David Kertzer replied that the on-line component makes the problem less acute. He said that new programs require bringing in experts in order to build viable financial models. They believe that approximately one-third of the gross revenue will be

netted to the university; the goal is approximately five hundred new students in a cycle that would turn over the student population every six months.

Professor Patrick Vivier (Community Health) asked for clarification about the approval process, since requests for degree-granting programs typically originate in departments. Will departments be bypassed? The Provost said that most of these MA's are not clearly in departments as constituted. Professor Vivier wondered about the extent of the isolation of the new programs, and about how departments could be excluded if benefits were to accrue to regular faculty and students. Professor Jan Tullis (Geology) agreed that more clarity was needed with respect to responsibilities regarding hiring, teaching, and other quality control issues.

Professor Richard Fishman (Visual Arts) cited the existing IE Brown Executive MBA. Despite initial skepticism, his involvement was very positive and allayed concerns about eroding Brown's reputation in order to leverage a revenue stream. Karen Sibley suggested that IE should be given as a model when seeking faculty approval. Professor Fishman added that the program took fifteen months to develop. Professor Vivier said that, despite the desire to fast-track, Brown still needed to allow time for departmental involvement. The Provost pointed out that some programs do not align with a particular department – such as “production management” – but others do. At present, they are seeking flexibility in planning.

Professor Tom Doeppner (Computer Sciences) asked if there would be revenue sharing with departments, to which the Provost replied that it would depend on who is doing the teaching. At Johns Hopkins, for example, some regular faculty have moved over to the new programs.

Professor Fishman distinguished between continuing education as a public service and as a means of professional credentialing. Professor Neumann raised the question of courses in the humanities, which are not viewed as “vocational.” Rod Beresford said that creative writing is in high demand, and cited Brandeis as a model. He also noted, when the question of financial aid arose, that professional programs typically are not supported by financial aid. Dean Sibley pointed out that the IE budget included financial aid, but that most students were employer-sponsored or self-sponsored.

Professor Susan Smulyan (American Civilization) observed that the quality of Brown tenured faculty has been a huge issue and wondered how we can ensure quality of faculty who are hired by a committee. She also asked why regular faculty would not teach the new courses. Rod Beresford offered several possibilities for quality control: a faculty committee to oversee hires and approval of syllabi through normal channels. He said a different audience and different curriculum would require different faculty.

Professor Cynthia Garcia Coll (Spanish/ FEC) said that in a recent FEC meeting, current graduate students expressed worry over the devaluation of their degrees. Rod Beresford cited other institutions that regularly issue alternate MA degrees. Professor Bill Suggs (Chemistry) pointed out that the faculty has experience in vetting outside expertise and regularly maintains quality control in independent studies and GISPs. Rod Beresford noted that the new degrees will have different names, such a “Executive MA degree in . . .” Professor Doeppner emphasized the importance of not competing with our own MA programs.

Professor Roberts asked about the break-even point and was told by Beresford and Sibley that the initial investment is high but with a minimum of 15 enrollees per program (with a target of 30-40), the university should break even in two years. Professor Philip Rosen (Modern Culture and Media) asked if research had been done on areas of high demand. Rod said that they were looking for established markets that have not been saturated. To Professor Roberts question about the need for housing, he said that on-campus facilities were not needed because hotels would suffice for short-term on-campus classes. To Dean Sibley's remark that student-professionals at this level are motivated, savvy consumers, he added that a Hopkins comparative study of classroom and on-line learning of this kind showed no difference in performance, but rather greater satisfaction on-line.

There was general agreement that Brown needs to get some experience in order to succeed in this initiative but that it also needs to keep up with changes in the ways learning can take place.

The Provost thanked the faculty and encouraged further communication with his office. The forum was adjourned at 5:16.