

Executive Summary
Research Findings from
The Bennington College Plan Process: Toward a Shared Understanding
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Introduction

My interest in studying the Plan Process came from my sense that the many complexities and changing dynamics of the Plan were presenting a formidable challenge to Bennington students and faculty and, as such, the full potential of the Plan was not being realized. The Plan serves as the center of a Bennington education. It is the process by which students take responsibility for the design of their education with the Plan Committee responsible for ensuring breadth and depth. It serves as both a manifestation of a philosophy and a mechanism for implementing it. From several years of reading all first-term reflection and senior essays, observing Plan meetings, and reviewing selected transcripts, it was unclear whether the Plan Process was ensuring breadth and depth in our students' education. My sense was that while there were lively and eloquent understandings of the Plan process and of breadth and depth on the part of faculty and students, there was also a lack of a shared, common understanding that led, at times, to confusion and tension for both students and faculty.

My research process included interviewing twenty faculty, conducting focus groups and reviewing the transcript of a student panel with students at varying stages of the Plan Process, taking notes of meetings of the Academic Policies Committee and the Curriculum Planning Committee as well as interviewing members of these committees. I observed 21 Plan meetings and reviewed and analyzed a random selection of first-term reflection essays and senior reflection essays. I also interviewed members of the staff including the president. Finally, I read and reviewed many historical documents, books, and articles written about the founding and the founders of the College as well as literature in general education, interdisciplinary studies, and integrative learning.

My research questions began with exploring how curricular breadth and depth is understood by both students and faculty. From there, I explored how curricular breadth and depth is implemented in a Bennington education. The final question was how those understandings and implementation of the Plan Process promotes or constrains curricular breadth and depth.

The findings of my study are presented in two chapters (chapters 4 & 5) – *Constructing Curricular Breadth and Depth at Bennington* and *The Work of Integrative Learning*. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the first research question about understandings of curricular breadth and depth. Chapter 5 presents the more in-depth examination of three challenges that emerged from discussions with faculty, students and staff: advising, curriculum planning and assessment, and accountability. I will briefly describe the understandings of breadth and depth and then explore more fully the three challenges. Whenever possible, I will include some of the many eloquent, at times, breathtaking, quotes from faculty and students that illustrate the findings.

Constructing Curricular Breadth and Depth

The interviews, essays, and focus groups provided compelling insights into all aspects of the Plan Process. They also reveal the many paradoxes of the Plan Process; it is both guided and self-directed, inspiring and confusing. At the heart of the faculty and students' understandings of breadth and depth is the concept of exploration, but the value of guideposts or maps is unclear. This exploration is always distinguished by a sense of intentionality, and the metaphors of journeys, adventures and searches that prompt connections permeate the interviews, discussions, and essays. Exploration is part of the ethos of Bennington. Students are drawn to Bennington because of the flexibility of the curriculum and embrace the idea of taking something they never dreamed of or that they fear. Likewise, faculty are encouraged to teach about their passions rather than being handed a pre-determined curriculum. The findings reveal that the interactions and learning that develop between and among students and faculty in the Plan Process are meaningful and multi-faceted but, at times, ambiguous and confusing.

Three distinct, yet overlapping, concepts of breadth emerged from interviews with faculty, observations, and document review. These models of breadth center on the pursuit of organizing ideas and questions, the development of skills, or the acquisition of knowledge in various subject areas. The faculty's understanding of breadth is spread across the three models whereas the students' understanding is more heavily weighted towards one model.

The three models of breadth that emerged are: IDEAS, SKILLS and DISTRIBUTION. The IDEAS model centers on the students' conception of what they want to learn. Faculty argue that the concept of breadth is dependent on the questions that are driving the student to learn and explore. They discuss encouraging students to ask questions, to explore from different perspectives and angles, and to seek the larger meaning and synergy between and among their coursework. Students also see questions as organizing their educational explorations.

The second is the SKILLS model. In this model, faculty discuss the need for students to develop certain skills such as the ability to write and to speak publicly, to conduct research, to be analytical, to understand aurally and visually, and to understand the context for different ways of thinking. Although faculty make reference to particular disciplines and/or courses, they speak more frequently of specific skills or capacities that students need.

The third is the DISTRIBUTION model, which, on the surface, is arguably the most traditional. Typically, distribution requirements are described as either students taking certain core courses or unspecified courses in various subject areas brought together in groups or divisions. As Bennington does not have core courses, participants in the study who suggest this model tend towards the latter approach by placing emphasis on choosing courses from variety of curricular areas. There is some consensus about choosing from a disparate set of courses or courses from particular disciplines that might

relate to a students' concentration. However, faculty are not uniformly in agreement on how many areas constitute sufficient breadth nor on where to place emphasis in developing a program of advanced work. Unlike the more traditional model of distribution requirements, faculty members tend to agree that the students need to be intentional and thoughtful about their course choices.

The three models developed from the data in this study represent the faculty and student understandings and are used to illustrate the differences and similarities between and among students and faculty. The findings describe the faculty's understanding of breadth as spread equally across the three models. While some faculty adhere to one model, most faculty express preferences for combinations of models. The IDEAS and SKILLS models are more consonant with the Plan Process and the concept of student-centered education. The IDEAS model focuses on the students' articulating their questions and making connections. The SKILLS model provides a guide to the capacities that students need to answer their questions. On the surface, the DISTRIBUTION model appears the least resonant with the Plan Process because it is typically a predetermined and discipline-specific rule of what students should take. However, when faculty describe the DISTRIBUTION model as needing to be connected to what is driving students' questions, it, too, connects with the core ideas of the Plan particularly when it is paired with another model.

Like the faculty, the findings describe students' understanding of breadth as spreading across the three models. The distinct difference is the students' greater preference for the IDEAS model whether alone or in combination with another model. In all of the essays, panel discussion and focus groups, only two students expressed a preference for the DISTRIBUTION model with one student using it in combination with the IDEAS and SKILLS models. The students are excited and determined about being in charge of their education and see breadth as exploring, studying broadly, and making connections. Students also describe breadth and depth as interdependent with one feeding the other.

The findings indicate a fairly consistent understanding by the faculty of depth or advanced work. Over the years, Bennington faculty have discussed and, at times written, guidelines for advanced work in particular discipline groups. These discipline group guidelines are intended to be flexible given the changing nature of the curriculum and the centrality of the Plan Process. While at most institutions it would be expected that the disciplines or departments would decide the requirements for the major, Bennington has eschewed such rigid and narrowly defined rules in favor of a more fluid interpretation of advanced work that comes from the question or questions posed by the student. However, in recent years, there have been more focused conversations on the meaning of advanced work in the disciplines. These discussions have been undertaken, in part, in response to faculty complaints about lack of rigor and achievement of recent graduates. One now-infamous story is of a student graduating in Literature who was virtually unknown by the literature faculty. The ensuing conversations within the disciplines produced, for the most part, creative and flexible approaches to issues of depth. However, the faculty have not engaged in any sustained discussion of advanced work that is interdisciplinary or

multi-disciplinary. While there have been attempts to develop such guidelines, consensus has not been reached.

As illustrated by the discipline-group reports discussed in APC and CPC, the curriculum and the guidelines for advanced work do not dictate a set sequence of courses that students must take. While students declare a concentration, there is flexibility in what courses might constitute that concentration. Some discipline groups are fairly direct in what types of courses should be taken by a concentrator while others leave choices to the student. There are no “required” courses in disciplines although there are certainly courses that are strongly recommended.

Although the guidelines vary somewhat within any particular discipline, advanced work is almost always defined as discipline-specific. Of particular note is how some disciplines insist on breadth within the discipline as a way of defining depth, demonstrating the vital relationship between the two. The discipline groups’ focus on the synthesis of ideas and the mastery of skills also illustrates the essential relationship between breadth and depth. While the development of the guidelines has clarified, to some extent, the faculty’s understanding of advanced work within the discipline, it may have inadvertently hardened the lines between the disciplines. The more free-flowing and boundary-less world of interdisciplinary work has been largely unattended. It is worth noting that, in interviews, faculty discussed how students’ questions guide the advising process; however, the guidelines developed do not explicitly consider the students’ individual questions. Finally, the communication of the guidelines is mixed and essentially dependent on an oral culture that for some students remains a mystery.

Many students describe depth or advanced work in the ways similar to the faculty. Some students also describe studying in more than one discipline as part of their advanced work. Students see more connections between breadth and depth. Students also see the Field Work Term and Study Abroad as integral to breadth and depth. It seems that students begin their studies at Bennington full of the drive to discover their questions through exploring varied courses. However, as they begin to focus their attention on advanced work, they fall into the more limited discipline-generated ideas of depth as defined by the faculty. Although not surprising, this raises the question of how to balance the need to define advanced work within a discipline (if that is what is needed for the student to answer his or her questions) with a more individually defined definition that considers the student’s trajectory and may involve the interaction of more than one discipline.

Interestingly, students, more than the faculty, seem to grasp the idea of the integration of breadth and depth which promotes both concepts. This is not surprising given their decision to become Bennington students. It is not the different models that are problematic but rather the lack of shared understanding that results in multiple voices speaking, at times, at cross-purposes. The outcome of the multiple voices means students are hearing different perspectives from different advisors and, as is discussed later, their experiences in Plan meetings can be puzzling and, therefore, constraining.

The Work of Integrative Learning

To examine curricular coherence, I asked *how* curricular breadth and depth are implemented at Bennington and how these processes support or constrain the achievement of balanced and integrated liberal education. In this chapter, I examine three challenges that emerged from discussions with faculty, students, and administrators: advising, curriculum planning and assessment, and accountability.

At Bennington, all aspects of curricular breadth and depth are implemented through advising and the Plan Process. With no required courses and no distribution requirements, the full responsibility of ensuring breadth in a student's education rests with the student, the faculty advising relationship, and the Plan Process. As already discussed, students are eager to explore during their first years at Bennington and faculty encourage their exploration. However, in order to move beyond basic exploration and be more purposeful, there must be processes such as the Plan and advising to make the exploration more intentional. With loosely and/or differently defined and communicated understandings of advanced work or depth, the student, faculty advisor, and Plan Process are all responsible for ensuring depth.

I will begin with an overview of the roles and responsibilities of advising and how faculty and students describe them. I will then discuss how faculty and students describe the Plan Process, including Plan Committee meetings and related advising. Finally, I will review the faculty's understanding of accountability for the implementation of approved Plans.

Faculty Perspectives: Roles and Responsibilities of Advising

Many faculty interviewed described the role of the advisor at Bennington as a facilitator and mentor. One faculty member depicted his role as "a sympathetic adult presence," and another explained that he was acting "as a kind of home base for them." Other words used by faculty include "guide" and "coach." All faculty interviewed described advising as essential and central to the Plan Process. They also spoke of their advising as being focused on the Plan Process and each individual advisee's Plan.

When the question was posed, "What if there were no faculty advisors at Bennington?" faculty responses ranged from "It would mean the Plan Process couldn't happen" to "The place would implode" to "That's huge! That's the glue. Faculty advising, when it's done well, is the glue that keeps this place what it is." While faculty were mostly concerned about the loss that students would experience, they also acknowledged that they themselves would suffer the "loss of the two-way relationship" and of "our deeper understanding of our students."

In discussing first-year students, most faculty described how they spend time speaking with students about their transition to college and building a relationship with students. They also discussed assisting first-years in their understanding of the College, helping to manage their expectations, and advising in the course selection process during registration. Almost all faculty interviewed found having first-year students in their

classes valuable and productive. The faculty highlighted the value of knowing the student in different settings while gaining a better understanding of their sense of engagement.

In describing the most rewarding aspects of advising, many faculty discussed the pleasure of developing a relationship and that it can be “a kind of friendship.” Faculty described it as being “a personal dialog about creating something.” They also described the joy of watching and being a part of students’ development. A faculty member stated, “You get to see somebody at such a seminal time in their lives when they change absolutely. It’s just great to see that process.” Another saw it as merging into the general role of teaching: “Working with students who construct their lives, at least this part of their lives, in a way that is congenial and collaborative, and working through problems in a constructive way.”

Conversely, when faculty discussed the least rewarding aspects of advising, there are three dominate themes – the pressures of time, students not being engaged, and dealing with emotionally unstable students. Faculty also mentioned their distaste for being the authority figure, the chore of “cleaning up after the kids mess up,” and lack of continuity when students change advisors.

All faculty interviewed discussed the need for better and more readily accessible information about their students including student transcripts, plan documents, and documents related to their academic standing. Most of this information is currently only available in paper form in the Registrar’s Office. One faculty member described the need to gather this information as a “tedious secretarial task.” Another faculty member discussed the scene at registration as “chaotic” putting him in a “foul mood” knowing that he does not have the information necessary to adequately advise students. Another faculty member asserted that “basically all your advising falls apart at registration.” A few faculty pointed out that the lack of information is particularly problematic with students who have changed advisors repeatedly.

Along with information needs, some faculty also discussed the desire for longer Plan meetings and a re-thinking of the actual plan meeting. One faculty member also expressed the need for faculty training on how to run the meeting. These faculty are suggesting that inconsistencies in managing the meeting can clearly affect the outcomes for students.

Faculty seem to agree about the importance of regular and frequent meetings with advisees. It is unclear whether this ideal is realized. A faculty member who has been at the college for over 20 years pointed out that advising “is perceived as a little less important than it used to be, even though it’s more important....it’s become scattered.” He was referring to a time when the college had designated an afternoon each week for advising. Advising was also thought of as a fifth course in terms of course load. Today faculty are expected to advise an average of 14 students and teach 5 courses per year.

Most faculty report their meeting practices with advisees in terms of the students’ year of study and their place in the Plan Process. Almost all faculty state that they meet, or try to

meet with first-year students weekly. A few meet with first-years on a bi-weekly basis, three times a term or “as needed.” One faculty member has regular group meetings with all advisees including dinner in the dining hall four times per term. Almost all faculty describe meetings with non-first-year advisees as happening in a more ad hoc fashion.

In addition to face-to-face meetings, faculty use e-mail and voicemail to communicate with advisees. One faculty member meets with all advisees once a week. Another posts advisee office hours as distinct from regular office hours. Most others describe advisee meetings as being driven by the due dates of Plan documents. Some describe spending significant time with advisees on Plan proposals – writing, editing, and re-writing. A few describe preparing students for the actual Plan meeting. With regard to Plan essays and proposals, some faculty also complain that students frequently wait until the last minute to complete them. Others describe having “to chase down students” or catching up with them in the dining hall at lunch .

While the overall sense from faculty is that advising is important and central, there are some clear messages from faculty that students do not appreciate its significance. Faculty comments include: “The ones I should see the most are the ones that skirt me the most” and “Most of my advisees don’t stay in touch with me.” The implication of the ideal advising connection not being realized is that the ongoing attention needed to develop a full understanding of the Plan Process may be missing. The necessary conversations about breadth and depth are part of an intense, iterative process that is demanding and time intensive.

In this collaborative or “two-way” relationship, lack of engagement may happen on both sides. Given the demands of advising and the average advisee load of 14, the time factor is significant. Faculty described the time commitment as “onerous” and “frustrating.” One faculty member admitted to feeling that, at times, he was “just going through the motions.” Another stated “I just feel like I don’t follow up in the ways that I should or make connections or be that support thing.” The lack of engagement is described as ranging from students not showing up for appointments to being discouraged by their sense of entitlement to students not being open to change and development. One faculty member explains that it’s like “throwing water on a rock and nothing is going to grow.”

Faculty also discussed drawing on the expertise of the Dean’s Office in managing disengaged students. They also expressed concern for emotionally challenged students but, at the same time, felt ill-equipped and burdened in dealing with such students. While many referenced directing students to Health and Psychological Services, they implied that Bennington has a greater number of these types of students than other colleges. While this may or may not be the case, the intensity of the advising relationship and the demands of self-reflection and self-management bring these issues into greater relief.

Faculty also described having many “informal” advisees who seek them out on a regular basis. It is not unusual for students to meet with faculty other than their advisors to discuss issues beyond a particular course. While this practice provides students with

expansive access to faculty expertise, it does add an invisible layer of advising responsibility and exacerbates the already “onerous” pressures on faculty time.

Faculty understand and appreciate the intensity of the advising relationship. However, their pre-occupation with the workings or mechanics of advising indicates their need to focus on the logistics of advising. These challenges have the potential to push to the background the more substantive goals of advising to ensure breadth and depth in the Plan Process.

Student Perspectives: Roles and Responsibilities of Advising

When seniors in a focus group were asked to use one word to describe advising at Bennington, their responses were: close, unique, dynamic, advantageous, secure and nourishing. One student embellished her one-word description by stating that advising is “picking up the slack for all the flies in the Plan Process, and I’m not saying this is a bad thing because there’s lots of beauty in flies!” Another student described the support role of advising: “It’s a kind of safety net to exploit this education at Bennington.”

Students also spoke of advisors as helping them decipher things and “hone in on things.” The students’ experiences demonstrate the value of the faculty’s description of getting students engaged through asking questions. Students also made reference to learning to become a “good advisee” by acknowledging that they needed to take the responsibility for actually going to see their advisors. Additionally, one student discussed learning to have “a willingness to look at yourself and have someone else look at you and then look at yourself again.” Another student explained the process of understanding that the relationship was different than the “cheering and cuddled” relationship she has with her mother. She discussed her growing independence and need for other students to become more independent.

While the seniors described their relationships with their advisors in mostly positive terms, they also acknowledged the challenges. One dominant theme was changing advisors. During their four years, one third of the seniors had stayed with the same advisor, one third had two advisors, and one third had three. Students portrayed their reasons for changing as being driven by their own interests and as a result of faculty leaving the college. In addition, students also described using other faculty as informal advisors with one student noting, “It’s very nice to have that network of advisors rather than just one person.”

Focus groups interviews and student Plan essays also suggest mixed meeting practices of advisors and advisees. A focus group of first year students was asked directly about their advisors’ role in working with them in writing their First-Term Reflection essays. One student described her advisor asking her to think about writing a book about her experiences at Bennington without using classes that she had taken or would plan to take. She explained that she had been thinking about this idea constantly and found it enormously helpful. Most students describe seeking out other faculty and staff for help in their writing. A few students describe faculty as being too busy to attend to the task

with one being annoyed at having to “chase down” his advisor and another receiving a brief e-mail approving the essay. Conversely, a student in a senior focus group admitted to “skirting” his advisor until the advisor put a note in his box saying, “If you don’t come see me, I will cry.” He went on to say he eventually switched advisors and “did the neurotic 180 where I was constantly checking in with my advisor and driving him up the wall.” Other seniors describe meetings happening on an ad hoc basis which suited their individual needs.

When asked about how students learn about the Plan Process, the first-year focus group described other students, including peer mentors, as their primary source of information. The college’s literature, website and/or admissions counselors are cited as a secondary source. Only two students mention their advisors – one as a secondary source and the other as a third source. The first-year focus group also suggested unevenness with regard to advisor influence and participation in the first phase of the Plan Process.

In the sample of First-Year Reflection Essays submitted by students at the end of their first term, only one student mentions her faculty advisor. This student’s advisor is one who is known to devote extraordinary amounts of time to his advisees. While this lack of mention does not prove that faculty are not meeting with first-year students on a weekly basis, it may indicate that the influence of the advisor is not felt by students to the extent one would expect given the practices as described by faculty. At the same time, since the essays must be reviewed and approved by the advisor, students know the faculty advisors are a primary audience and therefore may not refer to them.

Faculty and students agreed on the distinctiveness and centrality of advising at Bennington. They also agreed that both student and advisor have responsibility for ensuring that meetings actually happen. They appeared equally aware that the apparent mixed meetings practices of advisors and advisees can negatively affect the goals of the Plan Process. The planning that is at the heart of the Plan Process happens in the give and take between advisors and students and where the goals of breadth and depth are communicated and negotiated.

Planning and Assessment: The Plan Process

Curricular planning and assessment at Bennington is an iterative and collaborative process that is structured through the Plan Process. As discussed earlier, Plan committees are charged with helping students to articulate their educational goals and outcomes and assessing the overall quality of the Plan

The Plan and Advising

Ongoing conversations with advisees were seen by faculty as foundational to the understanding of the Plan Process: “The serious conversation has got to be about how they are thinking about their education. It has to be that continuous conversation about how they are learning, what they are learning, whether it’s moving forward.” A faculty member expressed concern that the more fundamental concept of the meaning of the Plan

was needed when she stated: “We need a shared understanding of what advising is and hand in hand with that goes a shared understanding of what the Plan means and what the Plan’s place is. I don’t think we have that. I absolutely don’t think we have that.” Both faculty members saw the role of the advisor in the Plan Process as essential. They, along with other faculty, agree that the Plan Process, and the attendant achievement of breadth and depth, could not exist without advising.

Faculty Perspectives: The Plan and Advising. As described earlier, faculty saw the Plan Process as the primary focus in advising. Some faculty start the conversation with their students about the Plan during their first or second term. One faculty member observed:

For instance, right now, with my second term first-years, I start talking about registration. Not just what courses do you want to take, but if you had to write your Plan right now, what area would you say you’re going in? How would you support that?

Another explained taking time to distinguish between students’ perception of the autonomy of the Plan and the advisor’s “duty to keep them aware that there are a couple of sides of the brain” and wanting them “to exercise different parts of it.” For this faculty member, he is engaging the student in a discussion of breadth as integral to the Plan. Nevertheless, it appeared that most faculty do not engage students in a discussion specifically about the Plan until the first term of the second year at the time the Plan Proposal is due. The lack of integration of ongoing preparation for the Plan poses significant problems that were articulated by many faculty.

As discussed earlier, students consider the Field Work Term and Study Abroad as vital components of their education and instrumental in their understanding of breadth and depth. Although these experiences take place away from campus and are different from Bennington coursework, students do not view them as distinguishable from their overall academic pursuits but rather as integral to them. Some faculty are active in securing Field Work Term opportunities for students as well as becoming increasingly involved in investigating Study Abroad experiences. Faculty advisors are required to approve Field Work Term plans. They are not, however, given copies of the required essay completed by all students upon completion of the Field Work Term and submitted to the Field Work Term office for approval. The advisor and at least one member of the Plan Committee approve Study Abroad plans. The limited references to Field Work Term and Study Abroad in faculty interviews and in Plan meetings suggest these student experiences exist more on the periphery for faculty. Not considering these experiences as integral to student Plans implies that the Plan Process can be considered as a set of discrete parts rather than the whole of a student’s education.

In addition to synthesizing the component parts of a student’s education, the Plan Process should promote intellectual coherence. To this end, a faculty member argued that “we need to find a way to bring more focus to the advising in the Plan.” Another recurring theme from faculty is the need for a more focused advising session that takes place *before* the Plan meeting. This type of conversation was described by a faculty member who said

he asks students to “tell me what they are interested in without using the names of disciplines. That opens a conversation.” He asserts that this “opens up all kinds of vantage points” from which to look at what they are interested in. He tells students, “This isn’t a logical process; it’s more like an excavation.” However, faculty questioned whether this type of conversation was only happening on a limited basis. One faculty member captured her sense of the problem by saying, “Ideally those conversations about the nitty gritty of what courses I’m going to take, et cetera, have already happened with the advisor. That’s the ideal. Reality is that an enormous amount of time in the Plan meeting is spent talking about courses.” She went on to say that the Plan meeting conversation should be much more broad-ranging:

The student should have prepared a way of talking about what he or she wants to do, and then the faculty on the Committee need to ask some extremely pointed, interesting questions about why – what is it about? I don’t think there is a better location for the conversation with a kid about why do you love this so much?

Her own observation is that this scenario happens in “one out of 10” Plan meetings. While this faculty member’s assessment of the severity of the problem may or may not be correct, it resonates with some Plan meeting observations which will be discussed later in “Plan Committee Meetings.”

Faculty also described a related problem that might best be described as “discipline dominance.” A faculty member asserted:

We need to be reminded about the importance of the student’s individual plan as opposed to what literature thinks or music thinks....I think one of the big detriments of this kind of active making of a plan of study is students trying to fulfill perceived requirements whether or not they are there.

A faculty member in the Academic Policies Committee (APC) focus group asserted that the advisor should not be “representing the discipline” but rather should “foster the self-discovery of the student as they go through the ups and downs of the Plan Process.” This issue is explored further in the following section on “Plan Committee Meetings.”

Student Perspectives: The Plan and Advising. A focus group of sophomores who had just experienced their first Plan meeting discussed issues that surprised or disturbed them. For these students, the faculty input on their writing seemed mixed. A few students described feeling unprepared for writing their Plan proposal and/or their Plan meeting. Some students did not seem to understand what the content of the proposal should be with one student stating that her advisor “wasn’t very specific about what I needed to do to make it more clear.” Another student described re-writing the proposal four times and feeling that it was “still pretty confusing” with her advisor not “as informative as I would have liked” about what wasn’t working. The students also expressed frustration at not understanding what to name their Plan or area of concentration. This became an issue in their Plan meetings with one student explaining that the majority of time in the meeting was spent on the name of the Plan rather than on what he was interested in studying. The

student felt that “those sorts of problems can be gone over way before the actual meeting. I think it wastes so much time when you could actually be explaining what you want to do.”

When pressed in the focus group, two students retracted earlier statements about not being fully prepared for their meetings. One student admitted meeting with his advisor every other week to prepare for the meeting. Another student discussed meeting with her advisor the day before the Plan meeting as she “was completely freaking out” and the advisor provided a “comfort session.” While further reflection revealed a more complex picture, the lack of student preparedness resonates with the faculty perspective that more attention needs to be paid in pre-Plan meetings with advisees.

The senior focus group expressed a more philosophical point of view about advising and the Plan Process. They see the Plan as both the process and the outcome of their education. One student described it this way:

[my] soliloquy about the Plan Process is that there is such a deep ambiguity that’s written into – by necessity, it needs to be ambiguous, but I think it’s difficult to communicate to people that don’t know about Bennington – that this kind of ambiguity is necessary to the Plan Process. It’s by nature an abstraction or like a series of abstractions and I think that can be difficult.

Another senior discussed appreciating the amount of flexibility in the Plan Process. Referencing the hourglass concept, she explained how the shape of her education was more like the traditional pyramid with her last year very focused on her concentration. The reference to the hourglass and pyramid prompted another student to dismiss the idea of a shape to explain an education. She asserted, “I think it’s more of a spirit in which you study something...but not being so tightly focused looking at one thing that you don’t draw from everything else you are studying.”

Switching to more practical aspects of the Plan, a few seniors expressed wanting more time in Plan meetings and more Plan meetings. Like the sophomores, they also wanted more help in writing the plans. They discussed the changing nature of their work and needing more continual feedback from the advisor and the committee in a more formal setting rather than pursuing that advice on an ad hoc basis. A student highlighted the repercussions of the ad hoc system by saying, “It means you are in charge of your destiny, it also means for a lot of people you are in charge of your own slacking off.”

While it could be argued that students at Bennington always want more time with faculty and advisors, there are indications from faculty and students that there is a disconnect between what students perceive as their needs in terms of advising and the Plan and what faculty are providing. Looking at the issue from a different perspective, it can also be said that faculty are pressed for time and, as such, need to present a clearer articulation of what advising time can realistically be provided. Both of these perspectives reveal the need for an understanding that the responsibility for the Plan Process is shared by faculty and students.

Plan Committee Meetings

The Plan meetings are the setting where the dynamics of the Plan Process are brought into sharp focus. The students must now articulate and defend their Plans to their Plan Committee. The students have taken courses, are planning to register for new courses, have had discussions with their advisors and other faculty, reflected on their work thus far, and synthesized their thinking. The Plan meeting provides an opportunity for an exchange of ideas and marks a passage on to the next phase of the process. As stated in the 2003/05 *Book on Bennington*, the Plan Committee has the responsibility for ensuring that “students design an education with breadth and depth, unified and fueled by their own passions” (p. 1). The Plan meetings are also the venue in which the faculty’s differing perspectives about breadth and depth are most visibly played out.

In addition to faculty and student perspectives on Plan Committee meetings, my observations of 21 Plan meetings serve to illustrate how the dynamic actually plays out. The observations of different types of meetings –Proposal, Confirmation, and Progress– provide insights into faculty-student interactions and faculty-faculty interactions. The similarities and differences between and among faculty and students in the interviews, focus groups, and observations demonstrate the complexity of the role of the meetings in the Plan Process.

Faculty Perspectives: Plan Committee Meetings. Many faculty responded to questions regarding breadth and the responsibility for its implementation by the Plan Committee with the assertion that it depends on the faculty composition of the committee. If, for instance, three faculty members, including the advisor, adhere to the IDEAS model of breadth, the conversation would likely be quite different than if the faculty members were supportive of the DISTRIBUTION model. Likewise if Committee members’ understanding of depth or advanced work includes an interdisciplinary approach, the exchange with the student would be quite different than if the faculty members had more rigidly defined discipline-based definitions. The lack of consistency in perspective concerned most faculty interviewed.

A dance faculty member described it by saying, “It’s different in every case, some good, some bad...the quality of the analysis is dependent on the committee.” A literature faculty member asserted that her experience on most Plan Committees reveals that the discussion of breadth is “pretty superficial...It really is just looking at the Plan and making a suggestion here or there.” She went on to say that she and some her colleagues have recently become more assertive in Plan meetings. In a Plan Proposal meeting this term, a student had only taken music and literature classes and she and another faculty member insisted, “This won’t do in the strongest possible terms.” The student did “branch out” as a result.

A language faculty member described a specific experience with a colleague who was too “anchored in his discipline.” The faculty member to whom she refers is a member of a discipline group that is inherently interdisciplinary, with multiple, distinct subject areas

and guidelines for advanced work that encourages work in more than one area as a characteristic of advanced work. She expressed frustration at his unwillingness in a Plan meeting to explore a more interdisciplinary approach to advanced work outside his discipline group. She asserted that students “are more exploratory than the faculty, and it’s the students who push those boundaries more than faculty do.” In her mind, the differences in this case clearly affected the trajectory of the student’s Plan. A music faculty member also described faculty in Plan Proposal meetings “who are advocating just for their field...we are all obsessed with our areas, but again, in these meetings we should all be advocates for that other thing.” In the interview, the faculty member was arguing for more focus on students studying broadly as well as the importance of faculty appreciating perspectives other than their own. In Plan meetings, this same faculty member also urged colleagues to think about what the student may need to know in the future as opposed to what they are interested in now:

People emphasize the current student too much over the future person. We get so enamored of their art work...We don’t push them enough to develop in the many ways that they need on the chance they may not be artists at all in a future life and we don’t know what they are going to be...They may be a medical technician or a librarian...and therefore they should study broadly.

Both faculty were suggesting that the discipline groups’ definition of depth or advanced work has skewed the plan meeting conversation toward fulfilling faculty determined needs rather than student-driven needs. As discussed later, this faculty view was confirmed by students.

Two faculty members raised the issue of the Plan Proposal meeting as being too late for a discussion of breadth, and this issue is further complicated by the individual advisor’s various definitions of breadth, as illustrated by the models described earlier. They pointed out that, by the time of the meeting, students have completed two terms of coursework and are registered for a third. Their view is that the Plan Committee is placed in a position of “correcting the course” if the student and the faculty advisor has not seriously addressed the issue of breadth prior to the meeting. A science faculty member, whose own definition of breadth fits the IDEAS, SKILLS, and DISTRIBUTION model believes that the inconsistency is the price paid for having a flexible system. He stated, “We could setup all kinds of standards and criteria that must be met, and every time we add one or make one harder and more rigid, we lose something in terms of the flexibility with which we can approach things creatively.” Another faculty member whose definition of breadth fits the IDEAS model simply stated, “Breadth is not disconnected from depth...there are different things that you are interested in, but the question is ‘what is it that connects them?’” He called this “the pedagogy of the Plan” and believes that this basic concept is what should drive the conversation in all Plan meetings. He promotes an approach that centers on each student’s exploration and making connections.

Student Perspectives: Plan Committee Meetings. In a focus group of sophomores who had just completed their first plan meetings, there were several key issues discussed

relevant to Plan Committees and the actual meeting. Most students commented on the shortness of time in the meeting, the exhaustion of faculty, and a sense of there being “secret” requirements in certain disciplines. One student explained that he thought “it was ridiculous” that his advisor had ten Plan meetings in one day. Another student commenting on the sense he had from faculty in his Plan meeting stated “they’re already fed up with all these other Plans they’ve been attending.” The issue of “secret requirements” was discussed by two students. In response to being told by Plan Committee members what courses she needed to take for a certain concentration, a student suggested “that they [the faculty] could have meetings with students that are interested in certain fields and go over what you are going to need to do before you write your proposal.” According to some of the Curriculum Coordinators, these types of meetings are held. Clearly, this student would have benefited from those meetings. However, if a student is not identified as a concentrator before the Plan meeting, she or he would not know to attend the meeting. Also, an advisor may only know about the meetings happening in her or his discipline and, therefore, not know to tell her or his advisees about the other group meetings. There was also confusion expressed about the purpose of the composition of the Plan Committee with one student stating, “I think it’s kind of strange that you walk in and there are people that you’ve never met before and don’t know you at all.” The sophomores’ comments indicate the need for clearer and perhaps more frequent communication about the intention of the purposeful structure of the Plan committees and meetings.

In a focus group of seniors, two students referenced the composition of the Plan Committee having a negative influence on their experience. They expressed feeling that faculty were advocating for their disciplines rather than listening to the students’ interests. In one case, a student felt pressured by a committee member to take one of his classes. After discussion with his advisor, the student eventually dropped the class. The faculty member who had advocated for taking his class recognized his own mistake and later apologized to the student saying, “I don’t know what I was thinking.” Another student argued in favor of the diversity of the Plan Committee asserting that her experience was much more about faculty asking her why she was interested in certain things and what the connections were rather than telling her what courses to take. Another student saw the issue from both perspectives saying the committee members serve as “pure guides as far as planning what you want to do here, and if they are a poet and a philosopher, then obviously that’s going to really shape how you visualize your future.” All of these comments illustrate the power of the advisor and the committee in influencing the breadth and depth of a student’s plan.

Plan Observations. I observed 21 Plan meetings; 11 were Plan Proposal meetings occurring in the third term and 10 were either Plan Progress (scheduled any time after the first Plan meeting) or Plan Confirmation meetings occurring in the sixth term. The different types of Plan meetings provided an opportunity to observe the Plan Process at different stages, students with different academic interests and concerns, and Plan Committees with various combinations of disciplines. The observations contributed to understanding the perspectives of faculty and students.

Faculty and student interviews and focus groups indicated that the most successful Plan Proposal meetings were those in which a student made a well-prepared opening statement about which the advisor had direct knowledge and the committee members engaged in a broad ranging conversation about the student's interests and the connections she or he was making. Many of the Plan Proposal meetings I observed could be described in such a way. Coincidentally, all of these "successful" meetings included at least one faculty member that I interviewed. It is worth noting that faculty represented by the IDEAS model and/or the IDEAS and SKILLS model were at each of these meetings.

However, in almost half of the Plan Proposal meetings the Chair (who is the faculty advisor) and/or the students appeared not to be fully prepared for the meeting. In these meetings, either the advisor did not seem fully engaged in the conversation or well versed about the students' thinking behind their proposal. There was also some level of confusion about issues of breadth and/or depth. In one case, the advisor seemed only interested in engaging the student in discussion of advanced work while other faculty appeared to be interrupting with questions asking the student about expanding her perspective.

In three of the meetings where confusion was evident, other faculty on the Committee were able to carry the meeting and push through by questioning the students about their interests. While the Plan Committee structure provided the opportunity for these faculty "saves," the experiences are the likely result of advisors and students not meeting before the Plan meeting to discuss the students' work; alternatively, one faculty member pointed out in an APC focus group that she feels that some of her most productive plan meetings are when she talks the least. This did not seem to be the case in these meetings but it is important to note. Another complication is that in three of these meetings, faculty simply starting questioning the students. Typically in Plan meetings students are asked to make a presentation or statement about their proposal. Not having students speak first put them in the position of speaking only in response to faculty questions rather than having the opportunity to present their ideas.

I also attended five Plan Progress meetings and five Plan Confirmation meetings. All five Progress meetings appeared to involve students who were struggling academically. In three of the meetings, the conversation also focused on the need for advanced work. In two of these meetings, there appeared to be consensus among the faculty about what was required of the students. In one of these two cases, the student was directed to re-write her proposal within two weeks before registration. In another case, the chair and another faculty member agreed on the advanced work issue and the third had a different perspective. This third perspective did not prevail. These Progress meetings highlight the particular challenge of the flexibility of the Plan Process with academically challenged students. Without set "major" requirements, the definition of advanced work is fluid which can lead to a lack of clarity about what is passable or acceptable work. In the five Plan Confirmation meetings, the conversation focused on advanced work. In three of the meetings, there were disagreements among the faculty about what constituted advanced work. This is not surprising given that faculty and students in interviews also describe similar conflicts. In two of the meetings, the conflict was resolved in the

meeting. In one of these two cases, a faculty member kept pushing the students with questions as to why she was interested in her work. After a vague presentation about advanced work in visual arts, the student's advisor pressed her about advanced work and her lack of advanced visual arts courses. He seemed to be suggesting that advanced work equaled a certain number and type of courses. He went on to suggest that there also needed to be synthesis. Another faculty member interrupted and "I didn't get a sense of what you are really interested in. What are your ideas? They weren't in your essay." After saying she wanted to design something, he continued with a series of questions: "What are you going to design? Why design? What provokes it?" He was asking her to define her question and pushing her to be intentional about asking it. Unlike the advisor, who appeared to think the advanced work would surface as a result of certain advanced classes. This exchange was important for the student in that she broke through in terms of her own thinking about her work. The "pushing" faculty who is a more senior member of the faculty also provided a model for the faculty member who served as the advisor/chair.

In the third case, one faculty member insisted on certain "requirements" for her particular discipline. The student was presenting an interdisciplinary approach to her work which was encouraged by the chair/advisor. The chair/advisor finally announced that she had consulted another member of the particular discipline who was in agreement with the student's Plan. There was considerable tension in the meeting but the chair/advisor and student prevailed. It seems less than ideal to have to work out these tensions in a meeting with a student present. The case highlights a lack of consensus regarding students who are doing interdisciplinary work.

Faculty and student comments about Plan meetings along with my observation of meetings present a complex picture of a complex process. There are clear indications that the Plan meetings are viewed as important culminating experiences that are flexible, often successful, and rich with possibilities. At the same time, there are numerous weaknesses that demand attention. President Coleman asked, "Is this the best place for what's happening here to be happening?" She is pressing hard about what should and should not be happening in the Plan meetings as well as in the student/advisor relationship. It seems that part of what should not be happening is a demonstration of the lack of shared understanding of breadth and advanced work. Some faculty indicated that the third term when the Plan Committee meets is too late for a discussion of breadth. They are suggesting that during the students' first three terms it is the advisor, not the Plan committee, who carries the major responsibility for ensuring breadth. Students expressing confusion about the multi-disciplinary composition and structure of the Plan Committee indicates a fundamental misunderstanding of the essential value the meeting. While students receive formal communications from the Dean's Office about the purpose and composition of the Plan meeting and committee, the first year and sophomore students are more often than not unclear. As senior students reflect on their experiences, they reveal a sort of hard-learned but highly valued understanding of the purpose and meaning of the Plan.

Accountability for the Implementation of the Plan

Faculty were asked who is accountable for the implementation of the Plan – faculty advisors, students and/or the Dean’s Office. Almost all faculty agree that the advisor must be responsible, although not exclusively. Many faculty felt that advisors should be more responsible but lacked the information, tools, and time to do so. While agreeing with this perspective, one faculty member also discussed the lack of clarity about the expectations for this aspect of the advising role. One faculty member agreed with the need for more tools but “bristled” at the thought that she should have to keep track of details. Another faculty member pointedly asserted that the faculty simply cannot be responsible without the proper information and tools. The Dean’s Office acknowledged that there is adequate information available to faculty but that the information is not readily accessible.

The faculty also generally agreed that students should be held more accountable for following through on what has been agreed upon on in Plan meetings than they currently are. However, there was also general agreement that the current behavior of students in this regard is unlikely to change. One faculty member stated that all the accountability should be the sole responsibility of the students. He explained that as a student-centered plan, they must be accountable. Two faculty thought the advisor should be more accountable than the student. One faculty member suggested that the students should be held accountable by the advisor and thereby bringing the responsibility back to the advisor. Another faculty member thought of the accountability resting with the “team” – student, advisor, plan committee, and Dean’s Office.

In general, faculty agreed that the Dean’s Office accountability is to monitor students’ progress, manage information, and provide tools for advisors to ease the burden of advising. Most faculty did not see the Dean’s Office as the final approval stage of the Plan Process. A few faculty indicated that the involvement of the Dean’s Office with regard to students on academic probation or concern was helpful and important. Unlike most of their colleagues, two faculty stated that the Dean’s Office is the “final say” in terms of follow-through and accountability. Three faculty felt that the Dean’s Office should be less central than it currently is in terms of overall involvement with implementation issues with one of these faculty saying the role of the Dean’s Office is confusing and unclear.

The issue of accountability presents an interesting dilemma at an institution where students are responsible for “driving their education.” On one hand, students express a strong desire for, and ownership of, designing their own education. Yet, according to faculty, they do not always follow-through on certain aspects of the Plan Process. Students are intentional about their learning, seem aware that they are “learning to learn,” and, yet, seem to lack self-awareness about the many dimensions of the associated responsibilities. At the same time, faculty describe their own awareness of the need to facilitate and help students navigate the process. At the very least, there are communication issues at play. At its most extreme, there are serious disconnects in some fundamental understandings of their respective roles and responsibilities.

The Challenges of Implementation: Integrating Breadth and Depth

In theory, Bennington does not provide the meaningful source of order in the curriculum itself, in the design of the curriculum, in how it is organized and presented, and certainly, it doesn't in terms of telling you what of the curriculum you have to do. So the sources of coherence about the total experience have to come from somewhere else. One is the student's responsibility for that and the capacity for doing that. But the institution's responsibility for it at Bennington is carried out by the advisor whose role it is, as I understand it, to be in ongoing conversation with the student in which the fundamental question is "How are you making sense of your education at this college?"

Here, President Coleman is describing a partnership that is the linchpin of a Bennington education. With the absence of externally imposed templates, the expectations of the relationship between advisor and student, and the conversations that evolve from that relationship, are considerable. While the students must have the "capacity" for the "making sense" of their education, the definitive and defining role of the advisor cannot be underestimated.

The lack of externally imposed templates also leaves the understandings of breadth amorphous and the understandings of depth primarily rooted in the disciplines. Faculty are more comfortable and, perhaps feel more capable, of defining what it means to "major" in drama or science or dance. As described in interviews, focus groups, essays and Plan observations, the variation of views on breadth are not necessarily problematic in and of themselves. It is the lack of a shared understanding of breadth and the absence of clear communication about that understanding that make for what one faculty members calls "a muddle." Many faculty and staff agree that there needs to be "a working consensus about fundamental values." It seems the first step is to clarify those fundamental values.

Faculty and students agree about the essential nature of advising. When faculty speak of the "genuine interaction," "emotional connection" and "affective joys" of advising, they are expressing the power of the relationship for themselves as well as the student. While there are rich rewards, the challenges are equally abundant. The pressure of time, the struggle to get students engaged, and the emotional instability of a few students strain the best of faculty intentions. Students, especially seniors, appreciate the intensity and impact that advising has had as they discover their trajectory. Younger students emphasize what's missing for them. They seem to have a taste of what the relationship can and should be but it is elusive and not fully formed. Finally, confusion about the mechanics of what can and should happen in Plan meetings highlights communication issues. The Plan meetings are a reflection of the strengths and weakness of the advising relationship. When the Plan meetings provide a venue for the exchange of ideas, for the opportunity for a young person to articulate his or her questions and propose answers, and for the faculty to provide guidance in response to those questions, a responsive chord is struck and the essence of the Plan is revealed. Unfortunately, the burden of the

number of advisees, differently prepared students at Plan meetings, and the lack of a shared conceptual understanding of the meaning of the Plan leave many students and faculty yearning for that harmony.

The Plan is both a manifestation of a philosophy and a mechanism for implementing it. The faculty deeply understand the essential role of advising in the Plan Process as demonstrated by their responses insisting the Plan could not exist without advising. However, it is less clear that the faculty fully embrace the Plan as the conceptual framework for a Bennington education. As President Coleman stated, we need “a working consensus about what it [the Plan] means, and when we do not have that working consensus about what it means, the student is put in a very complicated position and so is the faculty.” A faculty member aptly describes this complicated position:

What’s very strange is, we as faculty were cast into a role within the Plan Process ourselves. When hired, I was cast into the role of an advisor to students trying to negotiate a Plan Process... Yet, we’re not graduates of the Plan Process.

The faculty member is expressing his concern about his lack of expertise with a concept that is not simply the foundation of a Bennington education but its essence, the core, the key. While faculty do their best to “learn on the job” for the most part, their own academic experiences have not given them personal models to emulate.

Not being “graduates of the Plan Process” can lead to what another faculty member describes as “going through the motions.” While his particular reference is in relation to the very serious issue of time constraints, it may also indicate a lack of connection to the idea. A related issue is revealed by the inconsistent understanding of the Plan as a four-year process. In discussing the roles and responsibilities of advising, many faculty see preparation for the Plan as starting with the writing of the Plan proposal essay in the student’s third term rather than as an ongoing conversation that is interconnected to each and every course, each and every plan writing task, and each and every Plan meeting. The faculty demonstrate keen interest and appreciation of the Plan but it is less clear that they fully grasp its complexity.

The interviews, discussions, and writings of faculty and students show clear signs that the college’s founding ideals and those re-articulated in the Symposium are part of the cultural fabric of the institution. Nevertheless, the mixture of understandings of breadth and depth and their implementation in the Plan Process reveals the need for both students and faculty to come to a greater conceptual understanding of the Plan Process and how their concepts of breadth and depth are vital to it. The development of a more substantive meaning of the Plan can serve to explore and connect the understandings of breadth and depth resulting in the entire community becoming both students and graduates of the Plan Process.

Although subtle and not substantial, the differences between students’ and faculty’s understandings of breadth and depth are important to note. Students reveal their interest in “being in charge” of their education, asking questions, and in the interconnectedness of

their experiences. Their clear preference for the IDEAS model of breadth illustrates the centrality of these concepts for them. In making connections between breadth and depth, they are naturally pre-disposed to applying the IDEAS model to their advanced work as well. While the faculty acknowledge the importance of the students' questions and the trajectory of discovery, the guidelines for advanced work do not explicitly consider the students' pre-disposition to explore a path that might be a more interdisciplinary. The lack of clear communication about the faculty's guidelines of advanced work further complicates the situation.

As described in the Introduction, the *Symposium Report* (1994) called for replacing the traditional department structure with academic program groups intended to encourage faculty to teach "their disciplines in ways that cut across traditional departmental categories" (p. 23). The curriculum would then be aligned in new ways to make "the reality of handcrafted student education much closer to its promise" (p. 20). As demonstrated by the findings of the faculty's understanding of advanced work, the discipline groups continue to function as quasi-departments. In addition, the faculty have rich and varied understandings of breadth but they are not explicitly shared. In this context, the Plan Process has taken on increasing burdens as the framework that will fulfill the promise of the "handcrafted student education." The findings reveal many of the burdens.

One burden is exposed by the tensions evident in the Plan meetings resulting from the different definitions and constructions of breadth and depth. With advising acknowledged by faculty and students as the cohesive element of the Plan Process, the burdens on it are demonstrated in numerous ways. From student confusion over the Plan to unrealistic numbers of advisees to unengaged students, the responsibility of advising has become unmanageable. Also, faculty do not always see the Plan Process as ongoing and fully integrated throughout the student's education as demonstrated by some faculty not engaging students in a discussion of the Plan Process until the third term and limited faculty engagement with Field Work Term. This fragmentation of the Plan Process contradicts its purpose as the synergistic and intentional exploration of students that must be guided by the faculty.

While the magnitude of the burdens is considerable, the faculty and student investment in the Plan Process is palpable. However, the investment alone cannot sustain the Plan. Without a fuller and shared understanding of the Plan's powerful purpose and potential, the burdens will continue to hamper the implementation of breadth and depth within it.

The different models of breadth demonstrate a diversity and richness of thought that has great potential to lay the foundation for a robust discussion that can lead to a shared understanding. The different guidelines developed by the faculty about depth demonstrate a flexibility of mind and keen interest that can contribute to expanding the concept beyond the disciplines. Further, the different models of breadth and a more expansive notion of advanced work could provide guidance and incentives for students to more fully exercise their responsibility for creating their "trajectory of discovery."

Finally, the findings reveal a desire on the part of faculty and students to “get it right” so the Plan can reach its greatest potential.

Next steps

I concluded my study with a set of recommendations. Among them was the preparation of this summary for distribution to interested faculty and students. My hope was, and remains, that the findings can provide a base of information that can inform discussions intended to improve the Plan process. Ernest Boyer, who was an influential scholar of American higher education, spoke often of the importance of an “essential conversation.” He thought of these conversations as arenas for advocating debate. He said the greatest value of the debate “is not in the certainty of the outcome, but in the quality of the discourse.” One of the most compelling attributes of life at Bennington College is the quality of the discourse – that is, when it is given time and space to happen.

From January through May of 2007, more than half of the Bennington College faculty and numerous staff engaged in an “essential conversation.” While we came together to discuss the “New Initiative,” we found ourselves immersed in many of the issues and concerns that emerged in my study. I believe I can speak for most of those involved in saying that the process of engaging with colleagues was stimulating and, at times, exhilarating. Nevertheless, that pace was not sustainable. The question before us is how to sustain the level of engagement and discourse. How might we use the current committee structures (APC, CPC, Advising) and how might we invent new ways of conducting our essential conversation.

