CHAPTER TEN: HONORS PROGRAMS, INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES, AND DEGREE PROGRAMS FOR NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

I. Overview

In addition to the Core Curriculum and departmental curricula, Brooklyn College fulfills its academic and intellectual mission through programs based outside, and often cutting across, traditional departmental and disciplinary structures. These programs include the Honors Academy (designed to offer students an enriched educational experience), degree programs that respond to the needs of "non-traditional" students, and degree programs that pursue inter- and multidisciplinary inquiry.

In 1988, Faculty Council recognized the college's need to oversee these non-departmental programs by establishing the Committee on Review of Programs. This committee solicits and reviews annual reports, reviews new programs after their third year, solicits and reviews self-studies every seven years, determines program activity level and viability, and makes appropriate recommendations to Faculty Council. This oversight alerts program directors, participating faculty, and the college at large to problems as they emerge. The Committee does not push troubled programs over the cliff, but its review insures that non-viable and dormant programs do not linger in the college's offerings. Faculty Council has discontinued several programs for lack of faculty, financial support, or student interest. Examples are Area Studies, Gerontological Studies, Urban Studies, and the Masters Program in Political Economy. At present only one program falls into the category of "troubled."

These non-departmental programs help Brooklyn College pursue its mission in different ways, and each faces its own set of challenges. Each program brings together faculty and students from a variety of disciplines, and, in many cases, pursues research of an inter- or multidisciplinary character. Because they exist outside the departmental structure, most also draw on departmental resources to meet their teaching, staffing, and programmatic goals. Only programs supported by grants or other outside funding can compensate departments for their losses. In the current era of tightening resources, however, non-departmental program needs often compete with department needs. In the past, departments have been generous in their support, but they may be less able to be so in the future.

II. Honors Programs

Brooklyn College offers a variety of programs of academic enrichment for students with superior academic records so that its students will have opportunities to compete nationally for places in the most selective graduate and professional schools. These programs provide students with a variety of opportunities, including financial support, mentors, funded summer research, and special interdisciplinary and integrative classes.

The most significant change in the configuration of these programs since our last self study is the creation of The Honors Academy at Brooklyn College housed with the Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities (see Research and Professional Development, in the chapter on
Faculty). It federates seven honors programs: the Scholars Program, the Ford Colloquium, the Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship, the B.A./M.D. Program (in cooperation with SUNY Health Science Center at Brooklyn), Engineering Honors, Honors in the Special Baccalaureate Degree Program, and the Dean's List/Departmental Honors Program. Admission to the various programs in the Honors Academy is competitive. The Honors Academy offers students honors sections of Core courses, priority registration, and collegiality. Its interdisciplinary seminars fulfill goals of the college's Core Curriculum by helping students relate what they have learned to new knowledge in challenging and creative ways. In cooperation with the Honors Academy, the Wolfe Institute schedules speakers, discussions, and other events relevant to Honors Academy seminars. Each of the programs in the Honors Academy is unique.

**The Scholars Program**, founded in 1961 with a grant from the Ford Foundation, is a four-year program limited to 100 students. Students examine relationships among diverse fields in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences in honors level writing courses, seminars, colloquia, and independent study projects. They take honors sections of Core courses, earn honors through independent study, and do a year-long interdisciplinary senior thesis. Candidates enter as freshmen or as matriculated or transfer students up to 48 credits.

**The Ford Colloquium**, established in 1987 with Ford Foundation funding, is a two-year pre-professional program for college and university teaching and research that offers students scholarships, teaching experience, research experience with a faculty mentor, graduate counseling, and supplementary funds for research activities. The Ford curriculum introduces students to the nature of academic research and academic professional culture. Students apply in the second semester of their sophomore year.

**The Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship** maintained with funds from the Mellon Foundation, is a two-year program designed to attract African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students to scholarly work in the humanities, anthropology, and selected physical sciences. It prepares these students for careers in college or university teaching and research. Successful applicants receive a tuition scholarship, two summer research stipends of $3,000, and help repaying their undergraduate loans while they are in graduate school.

Through **The B.A./M.D. Program**, students are insured entry to SUNY Health Science Center at Brooklyn (formerly Downstate Medical Center). A four-year program at Brooklyn College, BA/MD gives students a broad background in the sciences, humanities, and social sciences. Brooklyn College and SUNY Health Science Center faculty members review applications and interview selected candidates for admission to the program.

**Engineering Honors** is a recently instituted program, offering a rigorous two-year engineering curriculum that allows students to make a smooth transition as Juniors to major engineering schools. Polytechnic University guarantees that it will accept students who complete the Brooklyn College Engineering Honors program as Juniors for their final two years of engineering studies.

**The Dean's List/Departmental Honors** program invites up to twenty-five Dean's List Juniors each year (61-90 credits) to join the Honors Academy for their last two years in college if they are active candidates for departmental honors in their major, or if they are Chase Smart Start Interns, Howard Hughes Research Fellows, or CUNY Pipeline Program members.

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The creation of the Honors Academy multiplied the benefits available to students in each of these programs. While each program is administered separately, all now share a common set of support services and a common space, so that students with a broad variety of interests and from diverse backgrounds can share experiences with one another, form a cohort, take classes together, and advise each other. The Honors Academy and the Wolfe Institute together function in many ways like a small college for very talented students. A group of these students serves every year as "ambassadors" of the president to meet campus visitors and to represent the college at public functions.

III. Programs for Non-Traditional Students

Brooklyn College has a long tradition of offering high-caliber degree programs for adult and non-traditional students. Enrollment in evening classes, which for many years had been declining, appears to have stabilized since Fall 1995, at about 2500 per semester. At present it is possible for students who take courses only at night to complete undergraduate majors in six departments. In addition to regular evening classes there are three special programs aimed at this population.

Special Baccalaureate Degree Program. Established in 1954, the first of Brooklyn College's two degree programs for adults, Special Bacc. brings highly motivated, experienced, academically ready adults back to college. Students may earn up to 32 life-experience credits. The program offers three year-long seminars (extended sessions meeting on Monday and Wednesday evenings) in communication/humanities, social science, and science, which satisfy the college's core studies requirement. Traditionally Special Bacc. seminars have been taught by full-time faculty from the Departments of English, Sociology, Chemistry, Physics, and Geology. Recent retirements have made staffing these courses more difficult. After taking the seminars, students complete an academic major. At its peak in the 1970s, the program admitted about 125 students a year and had its own faculty and administration, including two full-time counselors. Currently the program admits about 25 students a year.

The Honors Academy has recently inaugurated an honors program for students in the Special Baccalaureate Degree program.

Weekend College provides non-traditional students courses in a limited range of disciplines administered by a director and assistant director of Adult Degree Programs. Weekend enrollment has risen from 1200 in Fall 1996 to 1800 in Fall 1997. More than two-thirds of the students are twenty-five years of age or older. At present four departments offer undergraduate majors for weekend-only students.

Small College. This program, intended for working adults, enables students to take as a group a year-long seminar that fulfills the requirements for English Composition 1 and 2 and Core Studies 6. According to the program description, Small College also offers an Integrated Science seminar that fulfills the requirement for Core Studies 7.1, 7.2, 8.1 and 8.2, but this seminar is not currently offered. However, special sections of the Core courses are scheduled for students in the program. Small College students complete a major in an academic department. In recent years the program has also accepted transfer students.
Graduate Center for Worker Education

The Center was founded in 1984 and is located at 99 Hudson Street in Manhattan. It provides a full service graduate program for municipal workers, adult students, union, and other non-traditional students returning to school after a hiatus. The Political Science Department of Brooklyn College offers courses leading to a Master of Arts in Political Science with a specialization in Urban Administration and a jointly sponsored Master in Health Administration with the Department of Health and Nutrition Sciences. The program was initially supported by tuition remuneration for union workers, but even when that practice ended, participation increased. This satellite venue enrolls over 160 students and continues to grow. In 1997 a new computer lab was added to enhance quantitative course requirements and to provide the latest educational software. A multimedia lab is being constructed to begin training students in cutting edge technologies.

IV. Interdisciplinary Programs and Majors

Governance, allocation of resources, and organization and dissemination of knowledge at Brooklyn College assume a direct correspondence between disciplines and departments. The college has nevertheless developed a number of programmatic forms to promote multi-departmental collaborations, the integration of knowledge across disciplines, and interdisciplinary inquiry. At the simplest level a substantial number of courses are cross-listed in two or more departments. These courses which satisfy major requirements of the cross-listing departments are usually offered jointly and listed in the offerings of each department. Some departments have collateral requirements for their degree that require students to take a concentration in another discipline. The Department of Philosophy, for example, offers a degree option that requires students to take 12 credits in a field of concentration outside the department.

In addition, the college offers students opportunities to study in interdisciplinary programs toward degree options that range from departmental minors to the masters degree. Examples are the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies, the Bachelor of Arts in American Studies, and both a dual major and a minor in Studies in Religion. Programs of this type exist marginally, with varying degrees of comfort, inside or outside the college's departmental structure. The problems these programs encounter in common result largely from this status outside the college's normal governance and resource allocation process. The annual reports of the Committee on Review of Programs highlight three consistent areas of difficulty:

- lack of released time for program heads for administration, scheduling, and counseling;
- lack of office space, secretarial assistance, and budget for duplication and promotional material;
- inability to maintain a predictable rotation of classes because the scheduling of participating faculty is controlled by their home departments.

There is also no formal way to recognize and account for departmental staff contributions to the programs.

These problems lend an air of marginality and fragility to multi-departmental collaboration and interdisciplinary inquiry. In the case of existing programs, many of which have been in place
for more than a quarter-century, these problems have been chronic rather than fatal. But this institutional weakness tends to frustrate program leaders, faculty, and students alike.

Nevertheless, with some exceptions, courses offered by these programs enroll at or above the college-wide average. Program faculty continue to plan, add new courses, and reinvent themselves. In the last two years, for example, American Studies and Women's Studies have been upgraded from dual-major to independent major status. Journalism was similarly upgraded; although it is housed in the English Department and its courses are offered under the English rubric, the Journalism program requires one or more Television/Radio courses in broadcast journalism and 12 credits in any department (as approved by the program director).

The existence of these programs is a quandary that continues to energize collegial activity on campus. In addition to the new interdisciplinary major in Environmental Studies and the multi-departmental minor in Children's Studies, "transdisciplinary minors" in Community Studies and in Archival Management are being developed. The latter have been supported by "New Visions" grants provided by The Aaron Diamond Foundation. Other multi-departmental collaborations and interdisciplinary projects in various stages of planning, several originally proposed under the working title "Brooklyn Connections," include a B.A. in Communications, a B.A. in Marketing Communications Arts, and a B.A. in Latino Media Studies.

By recently creating Faculty Council seats for some of the interdisciplinary programs, Faculty Council has acknowledged their curricular interests and the importance of interdisciplinary inquiry to curricular development and vitality in the liberal arts.

V. Planning for the Future

Brooklyn College has made substantial commitments to non-departmental programs, as it has to graduate programs, but it has not articulated a clear sense of where they fit in the college's mission. The Honors Academy seems to be working well, but degree programs for non-traditional students and interdisciplinary studies programs need renewed attention. Recent decisions of Brooklyn College, such as giving full degree status to interdisciplinary programs that were formerly designated "dual majors," imply a potential for curriculum design and allocation of resources to interdisciplinary thought, research, and teaching. The college should begin serious discussion of its future in terms of the implications of a number of recent curricular and programmatic decisions, some of them voluntary and others forced by budgetary exigencies. The Budget and Planning Committee and the Faculty Council Committee on Master Planning, Educational Policy, and Budget regularly study long-range plans that include and account for decisions the college has already made. With the advent of a broad outcomes assessment plan, described later in this self study, all programs, centers, and institutes will engage in regular self study, reflecting on their goals, stating their objectives, and planning assessment procedures.