CHAPTER EIGHT: UNDERGRADUATE MAJORS

I. Overview

The ongoing reductions in CUNY's budget of the last few years have led to a series of university and college planning initiatives that have caused Brooklyn College to reexamine its mission, its priorities, and the status of its academic programs. These initiatives have included the Report of the Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Academic Program Planning and the college's response to that report (1992); two Brooklyn College Retrenchment Committees, constituted in response to University mandates in 1995 and 1996; the college's long-range planning document known as *Brooklyn College: Beyond the Year 2000* (1993); and the Ad Hoc Faculty-Administration Committee on Department Structures (1995).

The college's planning efforts have led to the elimination of a number of programs, to major curriculum revision in several departments, to the creation of more than 35 minors, and to the development of new interdisciplinary programs. At the same time, in keeping with its mission as a comprehensive institution in the City University of New York, Brooklyn College has continued to reaffirm its commitment to providing for its students a broad range of programs both in the liberal arts and sciences and in professional and career-oriented areas. Those engaged in the institutional planning activities of the last few years have repeatedly concluded that ensuring access to a rich array of educational options is a primary objective and that even programs and departments with small numbers of declared majors may still play an important role in the undergraduate curriculum, for example by offering electives, collateral requirements, and minors for students majoring in other fields. A second recurring theme in curricular discussions is the importance of maintaining a balance between the traditional liberal arts and sciences and pre-professional and career-oriented programs. A third important theme is the recognition of the interdependence between the college and the surrounding community.

II. Areas of Concern

The scarcity of resources and the continuing loss of full-time faculty have had a serious impact on the coverage of essential courses, both in the major and in college-wide requirements. Because most departments give priority to the needs of their own majors, the areas hardest hit are often "service" courses that meet the needs of other departments and courses in interdisciplinary programs that rely on the services of faculty from several different departments. These factors have also resulted in an increasing reluctance on the part of some departments to offer advanced courses for evening and weekend students. While enrollments in evening classes appear relatively stable and weekend enrollments are growing, a limited number of majors are offered in those sessions and the too few required courses that are offered are often overenrolled. Overall problems related to the loss of full-time faculty are increases in class size in certain high demand programs and increases in the percentage of courses taught by part-time faculty, especially in evening and weekend programs. The external evaluations of a few departments express concerns about the need to modernize the departments' curricula and, in some cases, to consider reducing the number of programs being offered.
Another problem directly related to the scarcity of resources is the college's inability to maintain and periodically upgrade its instructional facilities, particularly in laboratory and studio courses. The lack of appropriate facilities has limited the number of sections that can be offered, especially in the natural sciences, and has led at least one department to reconfigure its laboratory requirements for the major.

III. Major Changes

In spite of the very real problems alluded to above, the external evaluations of many departments highlight the fact that the morale of the faculty is remarkably high and that in the past ten years there have been a number of significant, positive developments in the undergraduate major. An enormous amount of energy and creative thinking has gone into curriculum review and revision in every division of the college. Departments have taken very seriously the continual review of their majors, updating curricula to meet students needs. A brief summary of a few of these efforts will serve as examples of the kind of work that has taken place.

- The Biology Department has completely revised its curriculum for undergraduate majors. The new sequence of courses requires students to complete several lecture courses before taking laboratory courses. The purpose of the new curriculum is to provide courses with a more modern focus and more rigorous lab components, to economize on lab equipment and supplies, and to use the introductory courses as gateways in which students who are not suited for advanced work in the field will be identified and screened out. The department has also been active in developing Web-based and multimedia materials for Core 8.1. This activity may have future applications in the biology major.

- A completely restructured curriculum in the School of Education now requires students majoring in elementary education and in early childhood education to complete a sequence of specially designed courses in the social sciences, humanities, and sciences. In each of these strands, courses in the liberal arts and sciences are linked to courses in education. Students also complete a concentration of four or more courses at the intermediate or advanced level in a liberal arts discipline. Recognizing the central importance of its goal of training teachers, the college has created a plan that brings the liberal arts and sciences faculty directly into a collaborative process with their colleagues in Education.

- The Early Childhood Center programs in the School of Education now combine lab school functions of teacher education, curriculum development, and educational research with actual child care in the Child Care center, addressing the needs of students with children ages 3-12 for campus child care. The programs provide on-site opportunities for teacher education students and for students in related disciplines to participate in research and curriculum projects while obtaining direct experience working with children.

- The Department of Speech Communication Arts and Sciences has also revised its undergraduate major. The number of credits required in each of the principal divisions of the department -- speech arts and speech sciences -- has been reduced. The number of
laboratory hours has also decreased, and students now have more options for fulfilling
department requirements. The department has also instituted a minimum GPA for students
enrolling in advanced electives.

- The Philosophy Department has introduced a Philosophy and Business option for majors
  with an interest in planning careers in business, management, and finances. The option
  provides philosophic training that has a bearing on analytic and communication skills and
  on rational and moral judgment.

- Other recent undergraduate curricular initiatives include the introduction of nine new
courses in the Department of Computer and Information Science in response to the rapid
expansion of the field; the introduction of a Bachelor of Fine Arts in creative writing by the
English Department; the revision of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science in Geology
and the introduction of a new program in Environmental Geology; and the work currently
underway in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures to revise its entire
curriculum. The programs in American Studies, Journalism, and Women's Studies have
been upgraded to the status of independent majors, as mentioned above.

- Mention should also be made of the ongoing work of interdisciplinary committees on
programs in Children's Studies, Communications, Community Studies, Environmental
Studies, General Science, and Queer Studies. A minor in Children's Studies was approved in
1996, and a B.A. degree program in Environmental Studies was approved in 1998. The
experiments of faculty in the WebCore and Virtual Core programs have far-reaching
potential for the rest of the curriculum as well. The re-establishment of an optional minor
has led to the creation of over 35 minors.

- Responding to the realities of years of reductions in state funding for the City University,
several departments have sought to find alternative funding sources and have revised their
curriculum to reduce the cost of their programs. The administration has also encouraged
departments to share equipment and other resources and, where appropriate, to develop
requests for shared faculty positions. In a similar spirit of meeting new conditions, the
Physics Department has introduced a liberal arts Physics major for students not intending to
pursue graduate studies in physics.

IV. Liberal Arts and Career-Oriented Programs

Although Brooklyn College's Core Curriculum provides students with a solid foundation in
the liberal arts and sciences, analysis indicates that the strength of the college's liberal arts and
sciences extends throughout students' undergraduate careers. Statistics in the Brooklyn College Data
Book show that in the last six years 47% of all baccalaureate degrees were awarded in the liberal
arts and sciences and that of the seven most popular majors, three are in the liberal arts and sciences.
The breakdown of these majors and the percentage of degrees granted is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
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</tbody>
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Aside from Education, Accounting, Business, and TV/Radio, the percentage of students majoring in career-oriented programs is as follows:

- Health and Nutrition: 2.7%
- Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology: 2.5%
- Studio Art: 1.2%
- Physical Education: 1.0%
- Music Composition, Performance and Dance: 0.7%
- Creative Writing and Print Journalism: 0.5%
- Theater (BFA): 0.2%

Further, it would be a mistake to assume that there is a sharp distinction between programs in the liberal arts and sciences and programs that have a pre-professional focus. A number of career-oriented programs have a significant liberal arts and sciences component. Some of these programs require majors to take courses in liberal arts and science departments while others include courses whose content draws heavily on the traditional liberal arts and sciences.

Departments offering career-oriented programs that require majors to take courses in other departments include Economics, Education, and TV/Radio. The Bachelor of Science program in Business, Finance, and Management, for example, requires that students take courses in Economics and in either Classics or Philosophy or Speech. In the Department of Television/Radio, Bachelor of Arts candidates are required to take department courses in media ethics and media genres. Film majors are all required to take courses in the language of cinema.

Another important example of the close relationship between liberal arts and sciences and career-oriented programs is the Brooklyn College/SUNY Health Science Center B.A./M.D. program. In addition to required pre-medical science courses, students in this prestigious and demanding program have been required to major in a liberal arts or science discipline and, since 1993, after a restructuring of the program's requirements, to take a number of interdisciplinary courses. It should be noted that Brooklyn College has a very strong pre-med program outside of this honors program.

Brooklyn College has chosen not to engage in some strictly pre-professional programs, but the Physics Department has entered into a Coordinated Engineering Program with Polytechnic
University, City College, and the College of Staten Island which enables students to transfer into an engineering program after completing two years at Brooklyn College.

V. The College and the Community

The college relies heavily upon community institutions to implement the practical aspects of programs in departments such as Education and Speech. The increasing number of internship programs throughout the college indicates that even in those departments that do not see themselves as drawing upon community resources or directly serving community needs, there is a growing awareness that the college does in fact have a symbiotic relationship with the surrounding community. It has been apparent for many years that the college must reach out to the community for financial and political support. The community also plays a subtle but significant role in the shaping and implementation of the curriculum. Brooklyn College students often intern in community organizations and return to those sites in a professional capacity, sometimes then influencing students who will ultimately study at Brooklyn College.

VI. Planning for the Future

Fund-raising and recruitment of qualified students will be growing priorities. These activities are both dependent on and integral to the improvement of the college's reputation.

Departments must continue carefully to review their priorities in keeping with the mission of the college. Departments do from time to time reexamine the number of programs they offer and the appropriateness of their current departmental structure. The required external evaluations, held every ten years, contribute to this process.

The status of majors and special degree programs for adult, evening, and weekend students needs to be monitored carefully.