

Appendix G:
Departmental Distinction and Faculty Excellence
An on-going faculty dialogue
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
As of Fall 2003

SUMMARY: The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences strives to be a college of distinction. Achieving distinction requires that each department, and all faculty, share this goal and take positive steps in the direction of excellence.

Departmental distinction is judged within many domains: creative teaching and programmatic strength, collaboration and community-building that promote dynamic interactions, a collective culture of achievement, DEO leadership in pursuit of intellectual goals, and challenging personal goals set by each faculty member. These domains overlap with one another, and success in all of them is necessary for building departments of the highest distinction that are greater than the sum of their constituent parts.

THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

What are the advantages of pursuing departmental distinction and faculty excellence?

The pursuit of excellence creates and fosters an exciting intellectual environment and a culture of interaction, achievement, and collegiality that provides an inviting and productive environment in which to work. These benefits are manifested in the following ways:

- a) Strong academic programs and innovative pedagogy in service to students.
- b) Increased departmental visibility and recognition, both within the University and within the academic community nationally.
- c) Recruitment and development of the best faculty and graduate students.
- d) Retention of the best faculty.
- e) Increased support from the College, University, and other entities for research and creative work, faculty and student travel, and guest speakers.
- f) Participatory governance and shared responsibility for the success of the department's mission.
- g) Opportunities to perform valuable services to the state of Iowa and to the nation.

What characterizes an excellent department?

Faculty need to periodically reflect on and discuss the vitality of their department, the progress the department is making collectively, and the aspirations they have, in order to set an agenda for the future. The questions below are offered as guides for that self-assessment.

- a) Does our department have collective goals and a vision that challenges and excites members of the faculty?
- b) Does our department have a culture of collaboration and collegiality that allows it to make collective efforts toward distinction?
- c) Does our department as a whole have strong and productive interactions with other departments and with interdisciplinary programs?
- d) Does our department have a faculty hiring plan that focuses on areas of existing or potential distinction, defines emerging areas in its field, and includes strategies for diversity in hiring?

- e) Does our department regularly compete with the best departments in our field for faculty and graduate students? Are we successful in attracting outstanding faculty from prestigious departments?
- f) Does our department have explicit criteria for recognizing and rewarding excellent and creative teaching by faculty and TAs?
- g) Does our department have a plan for actively mentoring our junior faculty, including a forum in which they can present their research to the department? What is our faculty's record in being promoted to progressively higher faculty ranks?
- h) Is our department able to recruit excellent graduate students? Does our recruitment ensure that the graduate program is diverse and at a sustainable and justifiable size?
- i) Does our department's mentoring plan extend to undergraduate and graduate students? Do our graduate and undergraduate students compete effectively for the best placements, honors, or other forms of recognition in our field?
- j) Does our department have a commitment to continually improving the advising system and the quality of information available to undergraduate students?
- k) Does our department continue to improve its preparation of graduate students for teaching, as an important contribution to the quality of our undergraduate teaching and as preparation for their future professional lives?
- l) Does our department contain a group of individuals who are acknowledged leaders in their field?
- m) Do our faculty publish books at the best academic presses and articles in the best journals? Do they present their artistic works in the most respected venues?
- n) Does our faculty as a whole apply aggressively for and compete strongly for the external funding available to scholars/artists in our discipline?
- o) Does our department have a vibrant colloquium series or visiting artist program that brings in recognized scholars and distinguished artists and engenders lively intellectual exchanges among faculty and students?
- p) Are our faculty regularly recognized by peers through awards; invitations to give talks at local, national, and international conferences; invitations to perform, design, and exhibit, or to teach master classes; and invitations to serve on grant review panels and as editors of prestigious journals?
- q) Does our department celebrate the scholarly/artistic achievements of our faculty and make opportunities available to them?
- r) Do peers at other institutions recognize our department as a leader in promoting a particular perspective or method?
- s) Does our DEO have a vision for the department, as well as administrative ability?
- t) Is our department developing a cadre of future leaders/DEOs?
- u) Does our department maintain strong relationships with its alumni and encourage them to help in recruiting students and developing goodwill within the community, state, and region?

What are the impediments to achieving excellence?

The achievement of excellence depends upon a collective effort toward increasing intellectual vitality, programmatic strength, and external visibility. Complacency, territoriality, and jealousy are among the many forces that can impede a department's improvement. Faculty must work to minimize the corrosive effects of these forces on their department.

WHAT FACULTY CAN DO TO PROMOTE EXCELLENCE

The most important decisions that affect the future of departments begin with the faculty. Thus, all members of the faculty should be mindful of their power to make positive changes by promoting academic values that emphasize excellence and putting those values into action. For example:

- a) The most accomplished and respected faculty are self-motivated and do not need to be induced to excel. They are creative self-starters, who actively pursue opportunities to improve their department and their own standing within their field.
- b) Faculty should be proactive with regard to improving their department or generating creative solutions to problems. They should not simply wait for the DEO or College to “step in.”
- c) Faculty should look for opportunities to support their colleagues, especially those who may need mentoring or who may benefit from nominations for awards or opportunities to present invited talks at conferences.
- d) Faculty should support the DEO and College in their efforts to retain the best faculty and, when necessary, allow others to leave.

WHAT DEPARTMENTS CAN DO TO PROMOTE EXCELLENCE

DEOs, in consultation with faculty, need to chart a clear path toward excellence. Sound departmental leadership can have a significant impact in all aspects of our collective mission.

Teaching

Every decision the College and its departments make—including curriculum changes, hiring new faculty, appointing graduate teaching assistants, and distributing available funds—affects our academic programs and our students. A vital academic institution has a strong and continually updated curriculum, insists on excellent teaching, and produces accomplished graduates. It is crucial that all faculty be creative and engaged teachers, just as it is crucial that they be productive scholars and artists.

In excellent departments, the following conditions are achieved:

- a) Faculty integrate into their teaching their own research/creative work and the most recent developments in their field.
- b) The department promotes interdisciplinary collaboration in teaching as well as in research/artistic work.
- c) The faculty encourage and provide opportunities for undergraduates students to learn about and be involved in the department’s research mission.
- d) Teaching and student mentoring results in student publications, student presentations, students competing for grants, and student placements.
- e) The department creates and promotes opportunities for faculty to engage in discourse about teaching and pedagogical issues with each other and with faculty in related departments.
- f) In reviews of tenured faculty, the department sets high standards for continued excellence in teaching and for contributions to program development.

- g) The department and the College reward excellent teaching on a par with excellent scholarship and artistic work, as both are essential to creating and maintaining an environment of intellectual and creative vitality.

Communication within the Scholarly and Artistic Community

Faculty excellence and departmental distinction are founded on the many ways of “publishing” and communicating within the disciplinary and interdisciplinary community, both on campus and off. This communication begins with our teaching and extends to presentations at conferences and symposia, grant submission and review, publication of scholarly books and articles, public performances or exhibits of creative work, and many other forms of testing and refining our knowledge through discourse and critique.

The collective communications of departmental faculty with their discipline-wide communities (including grants applied for and grants funded) help departments achieve their aspirations by creating an impact for our learning and creativity outside our own walls, by making the department’s standing relative to others apparent, by bringing in resources that the College and University cannot supply, and by contributing to the recruitment of graduate students.

In excellent departments, the following conditions are achieved:

- a) Available resources are used to reward faculty for their scholarly achievements and to help the best scholars continue to achieve. Resources should not be used as inducements to perform; faculty who need such inducements are not likely to achieve long-term success.
- b) The department actively encourages and expects all faculty to apply for intramural and extramural funding, as appropriate to their discipline.
- c) The various departments within the College differ with regard to opportunities for external funding. Where funding opportunities exist, however, an excellent department establishes clear expectations that everyone will have external funding.
- d) DEOs and senior faculty actively assist the careers of junior faculty through mentoring and nominations for awards.
- e) DEOs and senior faculty create an environment where faculty at all ranks can openly express their concerns, values, and opinions without fear of reprisal.

Service

Service to the department, College, and University is the substructure supporting both the excellence of our teaching and the excellence of our research and creative work. “Service” is often indistinguishable from support for the department’s teaching and research/artistic mission—as in the recruitment and mentoring of students and new faculty; creative rethinking of the department’s curriculum, and the organization of opportunities for intellectual and artistic exchange, such as colloquia, symposia, and performances.

In excellent departments, all members work in unison to allow the department to function well, just as the department as a whole works to support each of its members.

Faculty Hiring and Retention

Excellence begins with the faculty that we recruit, promote, and retain, as well as with the intellectual environment that is fostered among the faculty.

- a) DEOs should ensure that the most capable faculty, regardless of rank, are in the best position to influence decisions that will have a positive impact on the future of the department.
- b) Because the health and vitality of the College ultimately depends on sound hiring decisions, departments should conduct searches that cast as wide a net as possible in order to identify the best candidates in a field. The College and its departments have achieved an excellent record in recruitment of a diverse faculty, and remain committed to diversity as a goal in every faculty search.
- c) Departments should advertise and recruit with the aim of attracting the very best scholars and artists in the field. When putting this ideal into action, however, a tension often arises between hiring for depth (i.e., “spires of excellence”) or breadth. Developing spires of excellence can be a successful strategy when the goals are clear and realistic. Some believe, however, that such spires are more likely to emerge from the hiring of intellectually accomplished and stimulating faculty who come to interact with each other in unique and unexpected ways.
- d) The College encourages sharing of “best practices” in hiring across departments. CLAS departments have used the following practices successfully.
 - i) Advertising as broadly as possible to increase the chances of finding the best candidates available that year in your field, broadly construed.
 - ii) On visits to other departments or to conferences, identifying individuals whom you would like to have apply for a position and encouraging them to do so. Even before a line is available, departments should invite potential applicants to the department for a colloquium. This can be a particularly useful strategy for identifying minority applicants in fields where such applicants are rare.
 - iii) When interviewing, focus on the quality of the applicant’s scholarship/creative work. Look for the candidate’s passion for his/her subject during the hiring process.
 - iv) Hiring only when the department can identify a candidate who has the greatest potential for contributions as scholars/artists, teachers, and citizens of the department and for improving the department as a whole.

Each department (through its DEO) and the College (through the Dean) must reward only those faculty who embody — in their scholarship, mentoring, and teaching — the pursuit of excellence. Rewarding excellence can be achieved in a variety of ways, including but not limited to promotion, financial support, and nominations for awards, Collegiate Fellowships, and named professorships. It is essential that those faculty who have achieved or are on a trajectory toward national and international prominence be recognized and rewarded proactively, that is, before they are inspired to look for positions elsewhere.

Tenure and promotion

- a) Departments must send clear signals to faculty that excellence in scholarship is a critical factor in tenure and promotion. Candidates for tenure at the rank of associate

- professor must have established a record that “shows unmistakable promise of promotion to full professor” (cf. the College’s Criteria for Tenure-track Faculty Rank).
- b) Third-year reviews of junior faculty are crucial opportunities to document the achievements of the faculty member and to advise him/her on progress still needed for a tenurable record. Reappointment should be tendered only to those who are fulfilling the promise that was the basis of their initial faculty appointment and who are sustaining their passion for an academic career.
 - c) Ideally, departments should tenure and promote only individuals whose scholarly abilities place them at the top of their field nationally relative to others at the same rank.
 - d) When departments fail to make the tough decisions, their credibility within the College is diminished. Departments can only gain the confidence and respect of their peers when they demonstrate high standards through action.
 - e) Departments must not tolerate an atmosphere conducive to the creation of non-research-active faculty.

WHAT THE COLLEGE CAN DO TO PROMOTE EXCELLENCE

General issues

The College is committed to the following actions:

- a) Communicating regularly the core principle that distinguished faculty, regardless of department or discipline, are the foundation for the development of a distinguished College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.
- b) Engaging in a bottom-up review of all of the College’s commitments to various programs and departments with an eye toward distributing resources toward those that are contributing or are most likely to contribute to the attainment of distinction.
- c) Continuing to use evidence of excellence in both teaching and scholarly/creative work in making faculty development awards (such as the Dean’s Scholar Award and the College’s teaching awards) and career honors, such as the Collegiate Fellows Award.

Departmental leadership

The College has repeatedly found that departmental leadership is the most crucial resource needed to increase departmental visibility both within and outside the institution.

- a) The College seeks candidates for DEO who are leaders in their field of scholarship and who have a vision for achieving departmental distinction and external visibility.
- b) The College has supported and will continue to support DEOs’ efforts to maintain their scholarly excellence, through course reductions, travel funds, and other assistance.

In addition, the College seeks to

- c) Provide DEOs with clear strategies for helping their department to attain excellence.
- d) Empower those DEOs who do have a clear vision to carry out needed changes in their departments.
- e) Work with DEOs to ensure that every department has a viable colloquium or visiting artist series.
- f) Work with DEOs and other faculty leaders to empower energetic faculty, regardless of rank, before they become frustrated in their efforts to make changes within a department. It is never too early to start developing leaders.

Recruitment, retention, and faculty development

The College pursues the following policies in order to recruit, retain, and develop an excellent faculty:

- a) Offering competitive salary and start-up for new faculty.
- b) Discouraging departments from adopting slot-filling or replacement strategies for hiring.
- c) Proactive rewarding of faculty to forestall outside offers, including reallocating internal funds to award larger merit salary increases than those funded by the State and University.
- d) Working with DEOs to ensure that individuals are rewarded with merit salary increases that are commensurate with their level of achievement, regardless of rank and time in rank.
- e) Assuring departments that a negative tenure or reappointment decision will not result in the loss of the faculty line from the department.
- f) Selectively making highly competitive counter-offers in cases where faculty are recruited by other institutions.

In addition, the College seeks to

- g) Increase the number of named and endowed chairs in the College by 12 (from the 2002–03 level of 36). In addition to using named chairs to retain our best faculty, endowed chairs can be used to recruit outstanding mid-career and senior faculty.
- h) Reward and acknowledge mid-career faculty through new faculty scholarship and fellowship programs, to augment current programs that target faculty at earlier career stages.
- i) Take a proactive role in identifying outstanding junior and senior faculty at other institutions whose recruitment would significantly strengthen a department in need or help a good department become a great department.