

WEISSMAN SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES, GENERAL FACULTY REPORT (Spring 2008)

The Weissman School remains committed to the most ambitious goals of an education in the arts and sciences: to encourage the growth of our students as citizens, as professionals in the making, and as human beings. With these ends in mind, we strive to foster high levels of skill in the areas of oral and written communication and quantitative reasoning, to develop outstanding critical and analytical abilities, and to cultivate aesthetic, ethical, civic, and cross-cultural awareness. Whether our students come to us with the intention of majoring in one of our own subjects or go on to major in business or public affairs, these goals constitute the core of our mission as a school and help to form the experience of a Weissman education. They also guide our efforts to promote beneficial changes in our programs and curricula and to continue the process of innovation in places where we have already made significant progress, such as the assessment and revision of the core curriculum, the growth of the freshman learning communities, the recruitment of new faculty and students into Weissman, the support of scholarship, and the encouragement of culturally enriching activities.

The Core Curriculum and the Project of Assessment

In recent semesters, the Weissman School has given special attention to improving pass rates in our core curriculum mathematics courses, and this past fall we have seen a remarkable rise in the percentage of students who succeeded in passing one of the most widely-enrolled and consequential courses in the sequence: pre-calculus (MTH 2003). Whether the percentage is calculated simply as passes vs. failures or as passes vs. all other grades (including Ws and INCs), these numbers represent an enormous jump between the fall '06 and fall '07 semesters: from 50% in to 78.5% (passes vs. failures) and from 41% to 60.5% (passes vs. all other grades). We would like to congratulate the Mathematics Department and everyone involved in this project on their striking success.

As the College prepares for a review of our General Education curriculum mandated by the Provost, we have made substantial progress in establishing learning goals for the core curriculum and in conducting initial assessments of our core offerings. In fall '07, the Weissman Curriculum Committee established a subcommittee charged with focusing on the project of assessment. Already we have conducted assessments of two of the areas in which we have established learning goals (oral and written communication, critical thinking, quantitative skills and scientific inquiry, technological skills, civic awareness, ethical awareness, global/cross-cultural awareness, aesthetics, and information literacy) and have formed plans to assess two more in coming semesters.

Freshman Learning Communities in Fall, 2007

This past fall, the Weissman School successfully offered the largest cohort of freshman learning communities that it has ever attempted, accommodating well over 700 students (half of the freshman class) in thirty-six communities, each of which included two faculty

members (as well as a peer mentor) and enjoyed the support of numerous staff members. Altogether, seventy-two faculty from all three schools participated in the program this year, no less than sixty-nine of them from Weissman alone, representing every one of our departments. Our program is based on the premise—supported by a considerable body of research conducted in this country and abroad—that students learn most successfully in a setting that emphasizes exchanges both with faculty and with their peers. Our learning communities aim to create such a supportive milieu and in the process to help students make the transition from high school to the environment of higher learning. Students in learning communities have responded to the program not only by expressing great enthusiasm for the experience but also by posting measurably higher GPAs over the course of their first year at Baruch than students in non-learning community blocks.

Recruitment of New Faculty and Students

Weissman continues to experience levels of enrollment in our classes well above anything that we have seen in earlier years. The Tier III minor requirement, which has done much to increase enrollment in upper-level electives, has been enriched by the creation of several interdisciplinary minors, which combine courses from various Weissman departments and, in the case of the newly created minors in “Law and Policy” and “Information Technology and Social Responsibility,” include courses offered by the Zicklin School as well. On the graduate level, our enrollments continue to increase, especially in our MS program in Financial Engineering, which has already received an extraordinary 300 applications with three months still to go before the deadline.

After having completed the most productive hiring season in thirty-five years last year, the Weissman School continues to recruit new faculty and is currently conducting nineteen searches in nine different departments. When they are completed, these hiring efforts will add to the impressive influx of new teachers and scholars that was begun with last year’s recruitment of some forty-one full-time members of the instructional staff.

Faculty Achievement and Support for Scholarship

Faculty in the Weissman School have received a remarkable variety of grants and fellowships from such prestigious sources as the Ford Foundation, the Fulbright Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Cancer Institute, the National Institute of Diabetes and Kidney Disease, the National Institute of Health, Prudential Financial, Inc., the Stonybrook Foundation, the Society for Human Resource Management, and the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. In support of scholarly activity among our faculty, the Weissman Committee on Reassigned Time and the Dean of the Weissman School approved twenty-nine requests for Research Reassigned Time in the spring ’08 semester. In addition, eighty-one faculty members were approved to receive support for travel, and fifteen more were awarded Graduate Assistants. As this record suggests, our faculty have compiled an admirable record of accomplishment in their fields, and the Weissman School remains committed to supporting their activities.

Promotion of Cultural Activities

Under the leadership of its new Director, the Antonowsky Performing Arts Center, in collaboration with the Weissman School, continues to present a superb range of musical, theatrical, and other performing arts events, which contribute substantially to the life of the College and the Gramercy Park neighborhood. The Aaron Silberman Concert Series presented several programs of chamber music this past fall, including another installment of the Alexander String Quartet's complete cycle of the sixteen Beethoven quartets; and the Milt Hinton Jazz Perspectives Concert Series offered two fall concerts, the first by Grammy-nominated vocalist Carla Cook and the second by noted clarinetist and bandleader Andy Statman. The Sydney Harmon Writer-in-Residence for the fall '07 semester was the novelist Sigrid Nuñez, and in the spring it will be the distinguished poet Charles Simic, who has just been named Poet Laureate of the United States. Finally, this past fall students from Weissman's Department of Fine and Performing Arts presented a production of Neil LaBute's *The Shape of Things* in the Bernie West Theater. Along with its record of superior scholarship and pedagogy, the Weissman School continues to establish its reputation as a center of cultural activity generally and of the performing arts in particular.