

# Committee on Academic and Related Affairs (CARA)

Final Report for 2013–2014

March 27, 2014

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## 1 Committee Participants

**Committee Members:** Frederick Dickenson, Melissa Hartz, Paula Henthorn, Steven Kimbrough (chair), Jonathan Korn, Michael McGarvey, Yessina Moreno, Ani Nenkova, Suzanne Oh, Mechthild Pohlschroder, Barbara Riegel, Rahim Rizi, Peter Rockett, Laurie-Ellen Shumaker.

**Administration Liaison:** Leo Charney (Provost’s Office)

**Staff:** Susan White (Provost’s Office)

## 2 Background and Charge to the Committee

The Committee has a very broad charge that covers a considerable portion of the University. For the 2013–4 academic year, the standing general charges were as follows.

## **2.1 General Committee Charge**

The Committee on Academic and Related Affairs

- i. shall have cognizance over matters of recruitment, admissions, and financial aid that concern the University as a whole and that are not the specific responsibility of individual faculties, including the authority to carry out studies on existing recruitment and admissions procedures and their relationships with existing policies on admissions and financial aid and to recommend changes in policy to the Council;
- ii. shall consider the purposes of a University bookstore and advise the Council and the management of the University bookstore on policies, development, and operations;
- iii. shall review and monitor issues related to the international programs and other international activities of the University, including advice and policy recommendations in such areas as services for international students and scholars, foreign fellowships and studies abroad, faculty, staff and student exchange programs, and cooperative undertakings with foreign universities;
- iv. shall advise the vice provost and director of libraries on the policies, development, and operation of the University libraries;
- v. shall have cognizance over recreation and intramural and intercollegiate athletics and their integration with the educational program of the University, including the planning and provision of adequate facilities for various sports and recreational activities; and
- vi. shall have cognizance of all matters of policy relating to research and the general environment for research at the University, including the assignment and distribution of indirect costs and the assignment of those research funds distributed by the University, and shall advise the administration on those proposals for sponsored research referred to it because of potential conflict with University policy.

## **2.2 2013–2014 Specific Charges**

For the 2013–4 academic year, the specific charges were as follows.

1. Continue discussions concerning undergraduate research. Follow up on recommendations that aimed at raising the awareness of students, faculty, and the general public and to discuss innovative ideas that were raised last year by the committee. Explore ideas for increasing the scope of undergraduate research opportunities. Consider the best practices in place at Penn.
2. Continue present conversations with Business Services as the bookstore is reorganized.

3. Continue annual dialogue with the Dean of Admissions, Eric Furda, at a joint meeting with the Senate Committee on Students and the Educational Policy (SCSEP).
4. Review and discuss this Committee's general charge and identify two or three issues that should be given the highest priority for the committee's work in academic year 2014-15.

### **3 Narrative**

CARA met six times during the 2013–4 academic year (October 2, 2013, November 18, 2013, December 6, 2013, January 30, 2014, February 14, 2014, and March 20, 2014). In addition, approximately 6–8 preparatory and background meetings were conducted by the Chair for the purpose of gathering information for the Committee. We wish to express our gratitude for the time and attention provided to the Committee by various people, both at the CARA meetings and in the background meetings, including: Marie Witt, Chris Bradie, Dan Raff, John Mark Ockerbloom, Alice Xie, Rob Nelson, Beth Winkelstein, and Wallace Genser.

#### **3.1 Undergraduate Research**

CARA's second, third, and sixth meetings were devoted to discussion of undergraduate research. In the second meeting the Committee heard from Beth Winkelstein, and Wallace Genser regarding the activities and findings of the Middle States Reaccreditation Undergraduate Research Committee. In the third meeting, CARA devoted its time to an extended discussion of undergraduate research with the aim of responding to Winkelstein's and Genser's suggestions to provide timely feedback to the Middle States Reaccreditation Undergraduate Research Committee.

The following is a summary of CARA's discussion on undergraduate research, which was forwarded to the Middle States Reaccreditation Undergraduate Research Committee on December 18, 2013:

CARA discussed a number of ideas for improving the general undergraduate research picture at Penn, as well as for addressing the recognized problem of under-reporting of, and under-recognition of, undergraduate research. These ideas include possible tracking mechanisms that might more easily capture the number of undergraduate students applying for and participating in research activities, as well as ideas that might lead to greater participation by undergraduates in research. Suggestions included:

- Develop a module in Canvas for faculty to set up a research course that could track and record research activities. The committee noted that Canvas will be up and running university-wide next fall and privacy issues might have to be examined.

- Track “work-study” student research activity data that might be easily obtained, if this is not already done.
- The committee by consensus agreed to recommend that a new “institution” be created at Penn, perhaps called a *supervised internship*. It could be paid or not, depending on circumstances, but it would not be for course credit. Even so, there would a way to record the internship and the supervising faculty’s assessment of it. Perhaps this could be done on Canvas. The records would become “official” in the sense that Penn would maintain the archives and students would be able to reveal the records to prospective employers and others they deem.
- Track the applications for research positions and look at any discrepancies particularly for underrepresented minorities. In addition, it would be useful to survey a more general population in order to assess the willingness of minority students to undertake research as well as their awareness of the available opportunities at Penn.
- Options for enhancing underrepresented minority applications other than the proposed summer program should be explored. The Committee discussed using monetary incentives for faculty members to take on more student research projects. It was thought that this might be effective in SAS, but perhaps not in the other schools, which tend to have more outside funding.
- Inform faculty about NIH Training Grants and opportunities for supporting undergraduates. It was noted that Penn has the largest number of NIH Training Grants, and while NIH is NOT generally interested in supporting undergraduates on training grants, it IS VERY interested in supporting underrepresented minorities, INCLUDING undergraduates. So, there may be a nice opportunity here.
- Identify potential applicants for scholarships such as the Rhodes scholarship in their junior year and provide assistance to aid these identified students. It was noted the CURF already does provide assistance but more support might be beneficial. The point was raised in the discussion that the majority of Penn Awards are given to seniors, but if we would award students in their junior years (or earlier) they would have stronger CVs for scholarship applications.

\* \* \*

In addition, at its sixth and final meeting of the year CARA heard from Alice Xie, an undergraduate who has been funded by the University Scholars program and has prospered under it. Alice offered the Committee thoughtful insights on the great value of the program. She also made a number of suggestions for improving the program, urging in particular more outreach to the broader student community. Rob Nelson of CURF reported on efforts by CURF aimed at earlier recruiting students for undergraduate research and for applying for post-graduate fellowships. CURF presently provides considerable assistance to students showing interest in research and post-graduate fellowships

and is examining ways to improve its support. At the same time, many of the prominent fellowships have rules prohibiting some forms of direct assistance. A subtext here is that there is a general perception that Penn's rate of placing students in top post-graduate fellowships is below its rate in producing excellent graduates with outstanding research achievements, and that it is to the advantage of the entire Penn community to promote and to display to the world excellence in undergraduate research.

### **3.2 Penn Bookstore**

Business Services, working with Barnes and Noble, reorganized the Penn Bookstore during the summer of 2013. The results are visually striking. For instance, upon entering the store from Walnut Street one is presented with a vista of clothing racks, where bookshelves formerly stood. This development occasioned questions regarding the appropriateness of the changes and regarding what to expect for the future of bookstores at Penn. In consequence, CARA was assigned to look into the matter.

CARA devoted two full meetings (the fourth and fifth) to the bookstore issue. In addition, the Chair undertook about 6–8 meetings for the sake of obtaining background information for the Committee. We are very grateful for the time and energies provided to us by a number of people, especially Marie Witt and Chris Bradie of Business Services, Professor Dan Raff, and John Mark Ockerbloom of the library.

Upon reflection and collection of background information the Committee framed the bookstore issue as having two parts:

1. Reviewing the recent changes at the bookstore and assessing how we should go forward, e.g., with changes to the changes, with new advising mechanisms, etc.

CARA's fourth meeting was focused on this aspect of the issue.

2. In anticipation of the finding that secular trends are fundamentally driving the changes in the bookstore, and indeed in most bookstores, to raise the question: What values (if any) are lost or diminished because of these secular forces and how might any losses be recouped or at least defended?

CARA's fifth meeting was focused on this aspect of the issue.

Regarding the first aspect of the bookstore issue, the Committee heard from Marie Witt and Chris Bradie of Business Services, and Professor Daniel Raff, who has served on Penn committees overseeing the bookstore and who undertakes scholarly research on the publishing industry. The underlying worry associated with this aspect of the issue is that the reorganization of the bookstore signals a degree of abandonment of certain values historically associated with great bookstores and their communities. If so, certain obvious secular trends—electronic books, alternate media, online purchasing and rentals, etc.—would seem to be able to explain any decline in bookstore vitality. Is this what is going on? What

might we expect for the future? The Committee set out to answer these questions (as part of the first aspect of the issue).

What the Committee learned is heartening and encouraging. First, Marie Witt and Chris Bradie summarized the mission of the bookstore as serving three main purposes:

1. To be a place for encountering and obtaining academic materials, primarily books, but related materials as well, such as learning aids, tool kits of various sorts—broadly materials needed for teaching and research, but focusing on written materials, on text books and trade books.
2. To be a place for managing and promoting Penn’s brand. The bookstore is where one buys t-shirts and coffee mugs with Penn’s label affixed. And so on.
3. To be a place of community. With a café, open book shelves, study tables, and various events, the bookstore affords social and intellectual gathering and interaction.

Assuming that this mission is not in need of revision, it is true that secular trends may be undermining to some degree the ability of the bookstore to achieve these goals. Certainly, the number and range of books on display that can be economically justified has fallen by perhaps half or more in the last 15 years. However, the reorganization of the bookstore (floor space) did *not* result in a decline of the number of trade book titles available in the store. The Penn bookstore hosts about 60,000 distinct titles (down from more than 100,000 15 years ago). This remains a significant and vibrant collection, and it does not appear to be in any immediate jeopardy on economic (or other ) grounds. Time will tell, but for the present, books in the bookstore are here in force and will remain so absent significant new developments. In addition, the reorganization enhanced the café and, very significantly, added a new meeting and lecture room (adjacent the café) for hosting author events and other public events of interest to the Penn community. These have been running at about 100 a year and the new room will facilitate these happenings. Moreover, it is available for general use by the Penn community and the bookstore (Business Services in conjunction with Barnes and Noble) wishes to encourage the use of this room.

The Committee notes with pleasure the retaining of a vibrant book collection at the bookstore and the exciting portents of the addition of the new meeting and seminar space in the bookstore.

We turn now to the second aspect of the bookstore issue: Are there values at risk in consequence of secular developments? If so, what can we do? The Committee devoted its fifth meeting to these issues, aided in the discussion by Marie Witt, Chris Bradie, and John Mark Ocklerbloom.

The following points arise in this context:

- i. Bookstores (and libraries) have historically afforded serendipitous discovery, in part by browsing in well-curated collections of books.

- ii. Community is another value that has been served; bookstores and libraries are places in which discussion is stimulated.
- iii. There are interesting software developments that seem to hold much promise in these regards. Some examples: <http://librarylab.law.harvard.edu/blog/stack-view/>, <http://stacklife.law.harvard.edu/>, <http://shelf.io/>, and <http://vimeo.com/57334719>.

It will be useful now to offer for discussion a slightly different—hardly conflicting—list of values pertaining to bookstores and libraries (and museums and archives) from the perspective of students, faculty, and other knowledge creators at Penn, than was given by Business Services.

1. Curation.

Intelligent and informed organization of materials to facilitate effective access to them. (This is an important service, historically, of bookstores.)

2. Serendipitous discovery.

Good curation helps. So does community. So do size and depth of collections. (This is an important service, historically, of bookstores. Arguably, it is a value at risk diminution with smaller collections.)

3. Community.

As described by Business Services. See above.

4. Scholarly communication.

(This is a recognized mission of the library.)

5. Preservation of records (written and otherwise, including data) for research and teaching purposes.

(This is a recognized mission of the library.)

6. Facilitating access to information.

(This is a recognized mission of the library.)

With the possible exception of #5, bookstores have served all of these values.

Provisionally taking this list as adequate to support further discussion, what might be done to promote and strengthen these values at Penn? The Committee had two general ideas.

## 1. Idea events.

Think prototypically of author events, aimed at a general audience, in which authors give presentations about their books, take questions from the audience, and generally stimulate and promote intellectual discussion. All of this affords community, serendipitous discovery, and other values. This is a well-established institution. The Free Library has a long-established, flourishing series. The Penn bookstore has long had a series and now has a new facility for supporting such events (see above). Borders used to sponsor such events.

(1) Surely it would be desirable to take steps to encourage having more such events on campus. How might we do this?

(2) How might we generalize or abstract this institution, and encourage that?

Here are some of the Committee's thoughts. Every year, Penn picks a theme and encourages its discussion. Evolution was the theme during the year of Darwin's bicentennial. Proof was a recent theme, and so on. Why not have evening events in which one or more speakers are invited to discuss the theme, perhaps to debate it, or serve on a panel for discussion? Why not invite display of curations on the topic? If it's evolution, then literature on evolution, etc. Why not invite the area bookstores to display their wares on the topic? And the library.

This, too, can be generalized. Why limit idea events to Penn's theme of the year. Invite clubs, student groups and so on to curate and promote an idea event. Undergraduate researchers, in particular, could benefit enormously by having opportunities to present at such idea events and to see the presentations of their peers. Organizing one would be a tremendous service to the community and enriching experience.

We might look to Philadelphia's First Friday institution as a model: an open cultural event that is a lot of fun, that happens regularly, and that costs very little.

Such thoughts might be encapsulated by saying the Committee suggests more systematic organization and promotion of *idea events* at Penn, involving all groups in and members of the Penn community. Let there be a careful a thorough exploration of this idea.

## 2. Information discovery software.

It is generally agreed that recommendation systems such as those in place on Amazon, BN.com, and so on, are not ideally suited for serendipitous discovery. As a baseline, we might consider browsing in the stacks of the library. The recommender systems are not as good as that, surely. In fairness, they are designed to make sales, not to afford exploration and discovery.

So, why not make software that affords discovery? One could do worse than starting

by emulating online the experience of browsing in the stacks. And so we have Stack Life <http://stacklife.law.harvard.edu/>, among other efforts.

Points arising:

- (a) We need to be careful about recommending new software systems, especially systems embodying concepts not fully mature and tested. There is risk of spending a lot of money on something that doesn't work. I suggest we would do better to propose ways forward incrementally to adopt and test such systems. Can we find an evolutionary, incremental way forward? Perhaps idea events could make use of such software?
- (b) The group at Harvard that produced Stack Life specializes in prototypes, open-sources all of its work, and is very open to collaboration with other universities.
- (c) The Penn library is actively exploring this area (software for discovery, etc.) and sincerely welcomes ideas and suggestions from the Penn community.

## 4 Recommendations

In summary, CARA has three principal recommendations at this time.

1. The concept of *supervised internships* as described above should be carefully and thoroughly explored and, we hope, implemented. Under this concept, students would undertake research with the supervision of a faculty member, who would provide a record of the student's work and accomplishments, which record could be used by the student to document the student's experience. The work could be done either with or without pay, but without course credit in any case. The work record might be stored on Canvas or another courseware system. Penn would maintain the records and secure their integrity.

Anticipated positive consequences of instituting supervised internships include better, more thoroughgoing documentation of research at Penn, benefitting thus both Penn and individual students, as well as the faculty research projects in which they work. Financial costs should be minimal.

2. The concept of *idea events* as described above should be carefully and thoroughly explored and, we hope, implemented. Under this concept, there would be an organized effort to raise the level of activity of intellectual exchanges aimed at more general audiences, both at Penn and indeed in the larger community, rather than at disciplinary specialities. We note that undergraduate research would seem to offer exciting opportunities in this regard.

3. The creation and use of *information discovery software* should be carefully, creatively, and thoroughly explored with, we hope, the goal of implementation. The Committee notes the downside risks inherent in open-ended software development, but believes these can be contained with wise management. The Committee notes as well the exciting upside risks of aiding serendipitous discovery, facilitating intellectual and scientific communication, etc. that plausibly are in store.