

## Making of the College 2.2

### MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 17, 2008

TO: Hampshire Community

FROM: President Ralph J. Hexter

SUBJECT: Making of the College 2.2: The Arts of Change  
Strategic Planning for 2008-2015

For two years we have been engaged in abstract, theoretical discussions about our vision for Hampshire in the first decade of the twenty-first century. My contributions to this on-going conversation have been “Making of the College 2.0” (MC 2.0, 2006) and “Making of the College 2.1” (MC 2.1, 2007), both intended to stimulate interest in the creation of a strategic plan to guide the college over the next five to seven years. In MC 2.0, I asked many questions as I sought to get the pre-planning process I called “revisioning” underway. A number of exchanges of ideas took place, in different venues and modes, and especially through the good efforts of a faculty-staff-student committee co-chaired by Professors Elly Donkin and Lee Spector. Many members of the campus community participated, some in face-to-face meetings, others on-line or on paper. It was valuable to learn that there was a great deal of agreement about what Hampshire is and in what it excels.

In part for this reason, in MC 2.1 I focused intensively on the future, offering some specific ideas for consideration, although still very much at the conceptual and thematic levels and in a spirit that sought dialogue. I had a number of rich discussions about these ideas with individuals and with groups, including each of the five schools. The discussions sharpened my thinking so that I am now prepared to charge the campus with the task of developing a five-to-seven year strategic plan built on four guiding principles around which a consensus has grown. I offer brief commentary here on each:

Hampshire’s orientation must be towards an ever-evolving future. In order for Hampshire to remain the vibrant institution its founders envisioned and in which its students have flourished, the college must be open to change—in some instances, radical change. Change is inevitable; responsible persons will want to play their part in the changing world—shaping, influencing, critiquing, resisting—optimally prepared via their education. A liberal arts education is a thing of change itself that evolves by our asking questions not only of the “content” but of the forms and modes of its delivery. Are we living up to its highest values? How can we render today’s liberal arts education better than those of the past? How can we persuade more individuals, at home and abroad, of its value—proving that value—and how can we offer access to more individuals once persuaded?

Hampshire’s view of the world must be a world-view. In MC 2.1 I spoke of “a commitment to

inhabit an international polity without assuming we are, or expecting to be, at its center,” a center-piece of what will be required of U.S. policy and politics in an increasingly multi-polar and interdependent world where U.S. primacy is likely diminished, often contested, and certainly questioned. (The events of recent months and weeks in the world’s financial markets will have brought this home to many who might otherwise not have been thinking in such terms; the uncertainty of “business as usual” simply underscores the urgency and attention we must bring to this exercise.) Although we are already to some extent an international community, as a college located in the United States and largely populated by U.S. citizens, we must take responsibility for widening our purview, diversifying perspectives, and subjecting all narratives, and especially the standard ones, to careful and critical analysis. In MC 2.1 I emphasized the role the study of languages other than English could play in this process of decentering, and I am pleased that the Mellon Foundation has awarded the college \$730,000 in support of the first three years of the development and expansion of such a program.

Hampshire must redefine the “liberal arts” so that they are rooted in responsibility. I have in both MC 2.0 and MC 2.1 referred briefly to the history of the liberal arts, and will not rehearse that material again. Let me highlight, however, a few of what I see as the continuities and discontinuities between the liberal arts of the future and those of the past. One strong continuity is that however much we imbed our studies in the demands of a changing world (and where so many institutions need change), our studies are not in the first instance conceived as comprehensive preparation for any particular profession or job. A discontinuity exists, however, between our motivations for unlinking appropriate paths of liberal learning from professional preparation and that of the earliest phases of the liberal arts. When the term first came into use, it marked those who dedicated themselves to the artes liberales as belonging to an utterly different class of individuals, those who were free in a slave society, from those whom economic necessity forced to a life of work. The elite connotations for liberal arts have long continued, and in reality continue today. They should be undone, for a college education, including a college education at a liberal arts college, is intended to prepare one for a life of involvement in the world, in most cases doing some compensated activity. The question is: what is the most valuable education to prepare one to be maximally effective in the world, and in the way one wants to be effective? (This is a different question from: what is the most valuable education to prepare one to be maximally compensated?) The kind of education Hampshire College offers helps students discover what they—with ever-maturing understanding of the world and of themselves, and an ever-increasing grasp of facts and issue—they wish to do. This form of education equips them to ask the right questions, to find and critique answers, to reformulate the question in light of deeper understanding, and to put plans, or at least prepare to put plans into action. We know from our alumni that this preparation is immensely valuable as training in how to learn and prepare one’s self for action, and is put to use repeatedly by our graduates over the course of their work life.

Hampshire must reanimate its innovation in modes of teaching and learning. Hampshire’s founding premise is that it experiment with new ways of organizing a liberal arts college and new modes of student-teacher interaction. I believe that in the next phase of our thinking—i.e., strategic planning—we must find ways for us to step back from and out of our ongoing enterprise in order to “blue sky” and even workshop modes of learning and teaching that may well be discontinuous with current practice even as we review and assess the achievements of

our current modes—and publish the results, as an “experimenting” institution should. Looking forward, we must ask whether there are, for example, new and as yet unrealized opportunities for student-centered learning that make much broader and deeper use of communications and other digital means? Does recent work on cognition make us want to experiment with new models for study and creative activities?

Let me elaborate briefly my insistence on the need to redefine the “liberal arts” so that they are rooted in responsibility and oriented toward the future. Given the rate at which the world is changing, and the fact that jobs and professions are themselves morphing in response to such changes, preparation for change might be seen as more valuable even from a downright utilitarian perspective. The future of the world calls for the preparation of individuals with the skills and talents to take up their responsibilities to respond to the changing world's challenges and do so responsibly: to make a difference in the world, in a way to shape the world. Not in place of others, but in concert with others, and taking advantage of their great good fortune in having the opportunity to learn at Hampshire College (or, *mutatis mutandis*, earn a liberal arts degree at other colleges or universities) to bring about a time when many more, all if they so desire, can have a comparable education.

In light of all these reflections, it might be appropriate to think of the liberal arts in our redefinition of them as “the arts of change.” (I do not offer this as a translation proper of *artes liberales*; it would be taking too much liberty even for a “free translation.”) They are the studies and pursuits that permit and promote change in the individual who is engaged in such studies and pursuits, and the very studies that will permit and promote optimal change in the world.

For Hampshire the next step in this journey is a systematic, comprehensive strategic planning process. I have asked Vice President for Finance and Administration Mark Spiro, highly experienced in planning for colleges and universities, to manage this effort under the aegis of my leadership, an effort Mark and I anticipate will take a full eighteen months. Every area of the college will be engaged in developing the strategic plan, and each area will have its own plan to implement, assess, and enhance.

Shortly we will assemble a steering committee composed of faculty, students, staff, and administrators that will oversee decentralized planning sub-committees. The steering committee will review, collate, and combine the work of the sub-committees, so that the comprehensive plan that emerges will cohere with the four guiding principles and permit Hampshire to articulate programmatic, staffing, and funding objectives. Our plan will give us clear markers for success—and accountability. It will be reviewed and endorsed by the board of trustees and broadly shared with our larger community. The work of the steering committee; indeed, the plan itself will be as transparent as possible, and progress reports will be issued to the community on a regular basis.

Vice President Spiro will be writing to and meeting with the campus community before the end of the term to begin the process in earnest. I hope that you join us in looking forward to this exciting time for Hampshire College.