

**Five Modest Proposals:  
Transforming Augsburg's Education**  
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Since its publication in 1998, *Augsburg 2004* has provided the College with a sense of mission and vision. Therefore, it is appropriate that *Augsburg 2004's* authors, Joan Griffin and Mark Engebretson, have now offered their reflections on that document in the year before it is supposed to come true. Their essays are progress reports on what has been done and what remains to be accomplished. Both have also asked us to consider the tensions inherent in our mission--tensions that are natural, perhaps inevitable, but certainly worthy of discussion. For his part, Rick Thoni has offered important thoughts on the nature of Augsburg's academic culture and recommended that we continue with even more clarity the journey on our student-centered "third way." In all these essays, there are many questions to ponder and to debate.

As others have noted, many feared that *Augsburg 2004* would end up on a shelf next to earlier strategic planning documents, thereby failing to produce any significant changes in the College. We now know that such worries were misplaced. In particular, Augsburg has made vocation the rhetorical centerpiece of its work, thanks in part to the concurrent interest in vocation shown by the Lilly Endowment. *Caritas* (inadequately translated as love or, perhaps, charity) and *civitas* (or community) remain less fully discussed, though Joan Griffin's paper is intended to remedy at least some of that deficit.

Others suggested that, by its very nature as a vision document, *Augsburg 2004* did not provide much in the way of specific initiatives and so the college would find itself engaged in interesting discussions but unable to act. Here, as the other writers have pointed out, events have proved otherwise. *Augsburg 2004* was the underpinning for dramatic changes ranging from reform of the calendar, changes in graduation requirements, alteration of faculty workload, new hiring practices, and, of course, a new Augsburg Core Curriculum (our new term of choice for General Education). The Augsburg community has proved itself able to move from conversation to action. While unresolved tensions, the subject of Mark Engebretson's essay, remain very much with us, they are to be expected. Indeed, some have argued that they should be celebrated. According to Richard Hughes (and others), the open engagement with such matters is part of what gives power to the Lutheran model of higher education.

At this point, then, it seems appropriate to move away from reflections on *Augsburg 2004* and on to some consideration of what we might do next. What steps, in other words, should we take in those areas in which the Augsburg of 2003 falls short of *Augsburg 2004*? Accordingly, this essay offers some specific suggestions that grow out of the theoretical claims offered by the others, both in *Augsburg 2004* and in this recent set of papers. Several of these suggestions also appeared in the first draft of the Academic Plan.

Since the task of the August 27<sup>th</sup> event is to begin the process of defining strategies for the next three to five years and thereby move from the general to the specific, let me offer five recommendations. These five would, I believe, draw Augsburg closer to its

institutional mission, in particular the provision of a transformative education; help us put into more explicit practice our understanding of *caritas*; respect institutional financial opportunities and challenges; and acknowledge the nature of the higher education market today. If we do these five things, the College will be very close to what the community envisioned during the process that culminated in the publication of *Augsburg 2004*.

So, in that spirit and in order to stimulate discussion, I propose that over the next three to five years Augsburg College:

1. “globalize” the curriculum by requiring that every major provide for an **international study** experience
2. require that every undergraduate have within their major an **immersion** experience off campus
3. undertake the addition of three new **master’s programs** in the next five years
4. offer at least ten **interdisciplinary** and team-taught General Education courses each year
5. study and implement an **e-learning** strategy that makes our adult programs the standard of excellence against which others in the region are measured

A final caveat: the five proposals here all deal with the curriculum as the central expression of our transformative education, as the place where our requirements reveal our commitments. The college, however, is committed to the learning that occurs outside the classroom, too. There are many co-curricular initiatives that are every bit as significant as the proposals offered here. For example, building a mentoring culture, something identified in my colleagues’ papers, is a process that has already led to major changes in how we think about—and how we do—academic advising. Building such a culture will remain a high priority.

With that said, let me take these proposals in turn and argue for each as something that will ensure the transformative nature of an Augsburg education, one rooted in our identity as a Lutheran college in the city.

## 1. Study Abroad

This first proposal is intended to answer *Augsburg 2004*’s call for more commitment to international study. This proposal should also be heard to echo Joan Griffin’s recommendation that we focus more explicitly on the civic responsibilities of liberal learning. This recognition is not new for us; indeed, as she notes, Augsburg has long understood that its students must engage the world, both in the surrounding city and beyond the United States. Augsburg has always been a part of the wider world. Founded by and for immigrants, Augsburg remains connected to its international heritage and our home in Cedar-Riverside remains a neighborhood of immigrants. These immigrants are both part of the historical diversity of this country and visible links to other parts of the globe. Study abroad should be understood, at least in part, as civic

engagement, as education for citizenship. As a result, Augsburg is called to offer a “classroom in the world.”

In the Office of International Programs, we have an institutional expression of this commitment, though in the case of the Center for Global Education one that remains more utilized by students from other institutions than our own. In recent years, however, CGE has worked more closely with Augsburg faculty and students. We need to build on that progress and more firmly direct our students into study abroad programs. Even better, we have through CGE a useful model for international study in a variety of formats from a year-long experience to a short-term trip.

The draft Academic Plan asked that by 2004 all students in the Day program be required to take part in a study abroad experience. We have not moved especially close to that goal and so it is time that we act more aggressively. As Rick Thoni points out in his paper, students will often avoid precisely those experiences that are the most transforming. The College, then, must require those experiences. Accordingly, each major should provide an opportunity for its students to have an international experience without holding up their progress toward graduation.

Does this necessarily mean a course or courses? No. As in so many areas, we should move beyond thinking of each curricular experience as something that can be captured only in a credit-bearing course. Short-term trips, for example, can be a practical alternative to the year- or semester-experience. As noted above, the CGE staff has experience in making a variety of formats work. We also have opportunities for short travel experiences at several places in the calendar: the first two weeks of January, Spring Break, May, and summer school, for example.

How can we pay for this? One answer, of course, is to find auxiliary revenues and use them to help students meet the costs of such experiences.

We should, however, increase our openness to study in a range of countries and to a variety of pedagogies and interpretive frameworks. Let us encourage students to study Asia and Europe, too. No matter where students go to learn, however, the exposure to different cultures should be transforming. In fact, one might be able to move beyond debates over access versus excellence to a consensus that experience in—and reflection on—a culture different from one’s own is a powerful education tool for all.

Let me digress a bit and offer another proposal as a subset of this first one. In order to promote faculty interest in and comfort with international study, the College should support a minimum of two sabbaticals per year for faculty teaching abroad.

## **2. Immersion at Home**

Like the first proposal, this second one is an effort to move us more quickly to something first recommended in our vision document. In addition to *Augsburg 2004’s* insistence that Augsburg offer a “classroom in the world,” it also asked that we provide a “classroom in the city.” Urban immersion experiences are, like study abroad, an Augsburg Experience option within the new Augsburg Core Curriculum. And, like study abroad, such experiences should reach *every* student no matter what their major.

There are other similarities. Just as we have an important asset in CGE, for example, Augsburg is a national leader in service-learning, an experiential pedagogy that immerses students in the community around them. Service-learning, however, is just one of many possible intense immersion experiences available in the Twin Cities. Augsburg students, for example, fill internships across the metropolitan region, often beyond the requirements of their majors. Increasingly, courses in many disciplines have students do significant work off campus.

What do I mean by immersion experience? The term is currently used within the Augsburg Experience requirements to refer to a specific type of program such as those offered by HECUA. In this paper, though, I include significant service-learning experiences, internships, and anything else that takes the student off-campus for at least 30 hours of structured activities and requires reflection. Here, too, the proposal is not that every major add a course that offers this sort of immersion but that every major provide all students in the program with such an experience whether or not it is tied to a credit-bearing class.

One way to increase the opportunities for immersion in the city is to broaden our understanding of urban life, past, present and future. To repeat an argument that some of us have been making for years, the city should be understood as a place of opportunity, of strength, and of vigor. Indeed, the promise of the city is what has drawn its diverse populations to it. Augsburg, however, has often tended to see the city as a diseased entity and directed our students to come to grips with what is wrong with it. That perspective is important and relevant in our understanding of *caritas*. We might, however, find many more valuable experiences for our students if we allowed them to explore all aspects of city life. For example, we might offer our fine arts students the opportunity to take part in programs that allow them to work with (and in) mainstream arts organizations, without requiring that they focus exclusively on social justice issues.

### **3. Graduate Programs**

We now turn to an area in which *Augsburg 2004* was largely silent: adult programs, particularly those serving graduate students.

Augsburg has become, in its degree offerings at least, something akin to a university. We now have five graduate programs and, I hope, will approve an MBA later this fall. We are not a liberal arts college by any of the national classification systems used for American higher education. This fact causes considerable dismay for some but, ironically, the health of our liberal arts undergraduate program is heavily dependent on our adult and graduate programs.

Our graduate programs have been in almost every case tightly connected to undergraduate programs and offer them significant enhancements. The MSW, for example, is closely tied to the BSW. Similarly, the Nursing Department is able to extend its outreach to the community's health care needs by both its bachelor's and master's programs. MAL offers a rigorous curriculum that builds on a liberal arts core and, thanks to an intentional recruitment effort, we are starting to see the enrollment levels that the program deserves. The Master of Arts in Education met a market need, drew on departmental expertise in serving baccalaureate-trained students, and has proved

immensely popular in just over one year of existence. As we explore graduate programs, we must look seriously at those that grow out of our undergraduate strengths. Less appealing are those that are disconnected from our undergraduate curriculum.

Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, graduate education at the master's level is consistent with Augsburg's history and tradition. From its founding in 1869 until 1963, Augsburg provided an advanced, professional education for those entering the pastorate. More generally, we have always prepared students for work and now it is clear that in many fields the master's degree is the standard of entry. In order to prepare students for lives of leadership and service, graduate education has become an essential part of our mission.

There are some practical issues connected to graduate education. One involves governance, including committee and divisional structures that are focused on graduate education. That, however, is a debate that is already underway and one that need not detain us here. What is worth mentioning, however, is the reality that graduate programs must very quickly return a surplus to the college, in part to subsidize the undergraduate Day program. Put simply, graduate programs need to attract students as well as provide a high quality education.

So, let me propose that we add three new master's programs in the next five years, at least one of which (two would be even better) should be in the sciences. We should also look at a master's program (likely combined with certification) that would join the Education Department with departments such as English, History, and Biology in providing training for teachers of Advanced Placement courses in secondary schools.

#### **4. Interdisciplinary programs**

*Augsburg 2004* called on the College to offer more interdisciplinary courses. Yet while Augsburg proclaims its commitment to interdisciplinary teaching and learning, and while many faculty have enjoyed team-teaching with colleagues from other disciplines, the college has been able to do very little to make such courses a regular part of the curriculum. Recent offerings bringing together Religion and Philosophy, Art and History, and Physics and Chemistry, have all been successful. Yet our structure, both curricular and financial, works against developing and offering more of such courses. Note, however, that these courses represent more than the lumping together of two discrete experiences taught separately by the faculty involved; as Mark Engebretson points out, this is not necessarily an effective strategy for student learning. Better to offer courses in which the faculty are integrally involved in every aspect of course design and teaching.

The new General Education, while in some ways more discipline-bound than its predecessor, does provide opportunities for such courses to "count" toward graduation. We can, however, do more. The greatest barrier to offering more interdisciplinary courses has been the lack of resources. The time needed to design them is difficult to find and might not be compensated adequately, if at all. Perhaps even more difficult has been the inability to provide multiple instructors a full-course load credit. We should, therefore, agree to use both current and new resources to support at least ten team-taught courses per year without insisting that they attract more students than what a

course taught by a single professor would be required to draw. These courses would be encouraged to blend multiple disciplines, address both liberal and professional learning, and consider explicitly aspects of Augsburg's mission, such as vocation.

## **5. E-Learning**

The first version of the Academic Plan argued that the College must investigate distance learning options with an eye toward serving the needs of our students, particularly those in the adult programs. Since then, we have had a considerable expansion in the use of Blackboard, our course management system; experimented with online courses; developed a strong team of LFCs who work closely with faculty in using information technology; and found ourselves considering a relationship with Capella University. John Benson, for example, offered Rochester students the opportunity to take "Theology of Death and Dying." Course evaluations found very high levels of student satisfaction with their learning. Despite these successes, however, much more remains to be done.

The IT department is going to be investigating the best models of hybrid ("click and brick") programs and courses for various student populations. From that, we must adopt the e-learning strategies that keep us a regional leader in adult education. As Leif Anderson has noted, no college in the Twin Cities provides adult programs that offer e-learning as part of a quality program. The issue here is not one of convenience, simply cutting down travel time for students, but rather enhancing the student experience by using information technology.

The need to move more quickly in developing an e-learning strategy is related to the changing market for adult students. Augsburg was a regional pioneer in educating working adults. Yet for all of Weekend College's success, there is increased competition among providers who offer the same kinds of programs, those who offer the sort of accelerated programs that the College has traditionally rejected, and those who provide distance education. It is necessary to respond to these challenges, both because creative and new approaches build on our existing strengths and reputation with adult students and because we have come to rely on the revenues generated by our alternate-schedule programs. While there is much we don't know about e-learning, we do know that it has changed the landscape for adult programs.

Therefore, we should devote considerable time and energy to developing e-learning in the ways that best serve current and future students in our adult programs. That is, we should aim at being known for the best adult programs in the region and use e-learning as a tool for reaching that goal.

## **Conclusion**

So, there they are: five things to do that will make Augsburg live up to its vision and allow us to provide a truly transformative education. Financial support for them is essential and should be the first place to which the money from new revenue streams is directed.

None of these proposals will be easy or inexpensive to implement. We can, however, do them if we want to--and, if we hope to live up to *Augsburg 2004*, we should start to work on them now.

What do you think?