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FROM: Dr. Carole Leland  
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In the observations and questions which follow I have not adhered strictly to your original guidelines because my conversations with faculty members, students, and administrators led me to the more topical outline which I shall use. I hope, nonetheless, that each area of your concern will receive attention. What I offer will no doubt be familiar to you, for such evaluation cannot help but reflect the problems expressed by those involved in the situation. I trust that the faculty will realize that observations and recommendations based upon limited exposure will be valuable only as they guide discussions, raise questions, and perhaps support or challenge the faculty's own concerns and conclusions. This is indeed, as you asked, only a "reading on things."

I do write with a distinct sense of ambivalence: on the one hand I recognize and admire the enormous attention to the details of data collection, evaluation, and program planning that go far beyond the usual "survival" efforts for a school in its first year. But at the same time I acknowledge that this extensive and comprehensive effort could put the College in a very marginal, almost teetering position. In several areas the energies of the faculty and administration may be so dissipated as to preclude focus, direction, and forward motion. I hope this latter theme will be more explicit in some of my specific observations. And I would be worse than dishonest if I did not also suggest that evaluators

always seem to emphasize negative or questionable aspects of their observations and seldom balance those with positive comments. I, too, have erred in this direction but am well aware of the great strides this College has made in an incredibly short time.

## I. SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Educational atmosphere. I was struck by the lack of a clear sense of what distinguishes the college from a high school. Students called attention to this question in particular, speaking of the faculty's desire to keep them in the "high school mold," and I wonder if the faculty should spend some time in trying to develop some symbols of a college learning environment? As I shall no doubt suggest in other areas, there seems to be an enormous effort to make students feel comfortable, even at times entertained. But I frankly was not conscious of efforts that would create some intellectual or cultural influences beyond specific classroom contacts. This may stem from what also appears to be limited faculty contact among themselves, and it is also linked to standards and expectations for performance which I shall refer to later. In essence the advertised "distinctive educational atmosphere" needs clarity and specificity. What is it that the faculty wish to create? In an effort not to impose upon the youth culture the faculty may not be taking seriously the necessity for leading students to some higher level of intellectual and cultural sophistication which befits a college.

2. Academic goals. The literature of the College states quite clearly the commitment to an urban, interdisciplinary, "total learning experience" curriculum. While the goals may be clearly stated I am not sure the faculty have accepted or internalized them in a way to make them genuine. For

example, there are courses which constitute the "urban core" but I do not find expression from either students or faculty members that such a focus pervades the College. Nor does the interdisciplinary emphasis seem distinct or near its full potential. The faculty may need some continuous sessions to talk and re-think the implications of these commitments. Certainly care should be exercised not to slip back into a completely traditional emphasis before some honest experimentation along the stated directions takes place over some defined periods of time.

3. Curriculum development. Understandably in a first year curriculum development may in some cases be hap-hazard and unfocused. The vehicle of a curriculum committee may help considerably. But there are some disconcerting signals: the interdisciplinary focus is missing in some areas, particularly social science, and to a degree in humanities. And already there loom large the possibilities for a proliferation of basic courses and intensives, in the former case very distinctly discipline-based and in the latter, unrelated to previous offerings. While I agree with the notion of options and alternatives, course offerings, it seems to me, have to have some inherent relationships with the goals of the College and the directions set for the divisions. It is clear that within and across divisions the faculty (and students) need to engage in more thorough and focused curriculum planning. I see only one area where that seems to be clearly happening: mathematics.

4. Cooperative education. From the standpoint of the academic program much can and should be done to integrate the cooperative work aspects of the College with a student's academic program. In some instances, foreign

languages for example, the faculty recognize the problem and are working at it. I should think it would have a high priority among the faculty since this concern offers much to them in the way of curriculum planning. There need to be vehicles for more systematic feedback concerning work experiences; faculty may need to be more involved in orienting students to work and to the values to be derived from their experiences; and they may need to take a greater hand in helping to find suitable work placements, as several faculty members are now doing. The concern here is to find more links between these two areas of a student's experience, for at the moment, they appear headed in somewhat separate directions. I think much can be gained if more connections can be identified on more than a chance basis.

5. Evaluation. While I appreciate what is so rarely found, great concern for evaluating students, faculty, and activities, I cannot help but offer a caution: the saturation point does come and a balance has to be achieved which allows for thoughtful planning and change without smothering creativity. There is already some suggestion that the College is reaching that saturation point, and in so short a time there does need to be a period to allow courses and structures to take on some shape before they are altered. Otherwise too much or premature evaluation leads to superficial solutions and adjustments. As with curriculum development there may be some wisdom in slowing down. What may also be needed are some different approaches: faculty members need to talk more together in sessions which have an evaluative focus; reports and data should continue to be churned out but with a commitment to analyze them and to follow through with some implications for the curriculum and teaching procedures; more refined evaluation procedures need to be developed

such as focused interviews with students and faculty members, group discussions, and observations which might be conducted by graduate or even undergraduate students from other institutions. And perhaps the most important aspect to further evaluation is to develop some basic standards of success and performance for individual areas where that has not been done.

6. Standards and expectations of performance. In its planning for curricula, and in data collection, the College shows genuine concern for "where the student is," and for realistic assessments of student capacities. In some areas there are definite efforts to sort out the student's previous achievement, such as communication skills. But such assessments may also be leading faculty to lower their expectations of student performance, with insufficient attention to the question of "where the student should be." With strong efforts to motivate students and to create pleasant relationships, the faculty may in some instances be neglecting their responsibility to challenge students and to expose the reality that learning is not always pleasant and in most cases is difficult. The students themselves express concern for low expectations and the lack of challenge in some of their classes. Certainly there are vehicles to conceptual learning (in literature for example) which are not purely indulgences for adolescent interests and values. But, however, true as that may be, there still is the necessity for setting standards which are flexible and geared toward challenge and the honest difficulty of intellectual effort. To sort out students for whom the challenge and effort can be greater isn't always easy, but once accomplished it leads to the possibilities of independent study and student leadership in the academic program, two promises which now seem unfulfilled.

7. Time. The use of time within the College needs some attention. The faculty obviously need more time to meet together, formally and informally, to plan and to share insights. The College needs to take more time in allowing some offerings and programs to develop and alter within themselves before they are subjected to extensive external evaluation. And the faculty need to consider the best uses of time within the instructional program. My observation is that the 70 minute period, in many cases, is being used wastefully for lectures and depositing factual information, while violating what we know about the attention span of even highly verbal students. There need to be some experimental efforts to use time more wisely, freeing faculty for planning and work with individual students, and giving students more challenges to learn concepts and skills on their own initiative.

8. Quarter system. While the shortened period of the quarter system does place heavy burdens on students and faculty alike, the complaints in this area may again signal a teaching and learning problem. If the emphasis is put upon material to be covered, with the student as receptacle, rather than upon developing "disciplined thought" and the techniques and curiosity of the independent learner, then indeed the quarter system frustrates its participants. But this relates again to an adjustment to new circumstances which takes time, and to a re-thinking of the best use of time itself in relation to clearly conceived objectives and expectations of success.

9. The student situation. Though this admittedly is not a direct dimension of the academic program, my experiences provoke some comment about students and their status at Laguardia. I have already referred to the suggestion which students make about their "high school mold" and my own inability to recognize differences at Laguardia between high school<sup>0</sup> and college-level

performance and atmosphere. But I would add to this my feeling that students are still considered receptacles for information and that the promise of "student leadership and peer influence" in the academic program has not been explored, let alone fulfilled. More devastating, to me at least, is my hint of a condescending, patronizing attitude toward students. For example, on the evaluation forms students are told, "You are being asked to do a serious and responsible task" as if suddenly they were instructed to act like adults, not children. As a student I would find that insulting. My suggestion is that in the haste and intensity of program development the students have been considered mostly in a statistical way. They are a known quantitative category but otherwise are almost rejected. They serve on few committees, have relatively few outside classroom contacts with faculty, and are not truly involved in curriculum planning. Their image is more of "youngsters" as one faculty member boldly tabs them, which in effect may become a self-fulfilling hypothesis. The faculty appear to have few opportunities to know the students--their interests and abilities--except through tests and the other performance scores available. And for the students rewards seem hard to come by--they are picked up for errors, tabbed for less-than-average abilities, condemned by lack of attendance, but in fact, how are they rewarded? I would suggest that the faculty admit its collective ignorance about students and begin to share in small focused sessions its insights about their interests, impediments, motivations et al., in an effort to move from shaky assumptions to evidence and the involvement of students in planning and evaluation. However well faculty and administrators describe students, I found a lack of prominence of student needs and capacities inherent in program and faculty planning activities.

10. Intensives. Clearly this is a high priority item for all at the College. Nothing at the moment so well embodies the College's central commitments to the urban setting, to interdisciplinary focuses, and to the cooperative work program. And certainly it is too soon to judge the value of the intensives in any stay-or-go fashion. But the problems and concerns are clear: first, the faculty need to clarify their commitment and values vis-a-vis the intensives. Obviously they generate interest and involvement for both faculty and students. But the faculty must ask soon whether the intensives are vaguely tickling or genuinely holding students in terms of learning. And there are inherent dangers that the intensives will be considered separate and subject to different evaluation than other courses. It seems important at this juncture not to solidify or rigidify the format; there should be some flexibility and experimentation that allows teachers to work with different periods of intensity, different forms of follow-up activities, and different possibilities for individual and group projects. And curiously, in describing the intensives as "different modes of learning than the ordinary schedule" I am provoked to ask why and how such new modes should be isolated from the main stream of basic courses and requirements? How do the strengths and weaknesses of the intensives get fed into the regular college courses and teaching methodologies?

I think the intensives face the danger of endless proliferation--reducing the chances to experiment and evaluate the same course over a series of offerings and with a variety of students--or they can rigidify in their present and seemingly unquestioned format without benefit of other experiments or trials. There is a distinct/that one week of intensive work serves  
feeling

well as a motivational device for both students and faculty members, but to sustain the interest and involvement is also crucial. The methodology in at least some intensives is academically questionable if not downright suspect. If in the students' terms the "teacher makes or breaks" the intensive this may say little for the learning inherent in the scheme. And it is quite obvious that students need clarity about their performance: what standards should they follow in research projects? What is good and what is bad in terms of expected performance? Unfortunately I did not find such structure and standards buried beneath the glitter and enthusiasm of "relevant" topics. In sum, I am trying to suggest that this feature of the College is sufficiently promising and enough unique to warrant better performance on the part of faculty and more serious attention to modifications.

11. Teaching methodology and professional development. While this is an area too complex and important to toy with lightly I cannot resist some observations and questions. I have already suggested my concern about the inappropriate expenditure of time. Here I raise the question of the College's commitment to the "wide range of teaching techniques" stated in its plans and literature. Again, there is the question of marginality: whether the use of technological devices and sophisticated techniques will teeter toward gimmickry or will be integrated genuinely and effectively into learning experiences. The wide range of teaching techniques is not now inescapably visible. Such things as independent study, crucial in a population such as Laguardia's, peer teaching, research projects, and team teaching, as described in the Master Plan, are hard to identify.

Though limited, my exposure to class situations provokes other concerns: are the faculty providing materials that are honestly relevant to

student interests and experiences? I suggest that the faculty need more contact and exposure outside the classroom to make such connections with students (for example, which works of literature or which topics in science best lead students to discuss and question societal values and emphases?). What materials could be programmed for individual study, or handed out for discussion or put on audio-visual equipment in order to break up the tedium of a 70 minute lecture? How good is student note taking, of what value to the student, and how can a teacher check such efforts and guide them? And how can the faculty engage students in developing curricular emphases and arrangements? How can a teacher avoid, as I witnessed, negative retorts to student answers or questions and instead move from such responses to some positive corrective influence?

Many teachers may be duplicating class and text materials, may also be neglecting the development of skills of inquiry such as synthesis, analysis, or perspective. Worse, they may be serving as distinctly negative models themselves. (I heard one teacher say "you know" and "like" at least a dozen times in one period, and in another class a teacher accepted a verbal report without any clear evaluation for the methods of inquiry being used.) And finally, in terms of structure and methodology, the College has not seemed to use models of successful programs, such as mathematics and languages, which might offer insights to other areas of the College. The quest for professional development is recognizable within the administration and with some faculty, but my impression is that the faculty have found most comfort in traditional lecture-based methods.

12. Learning. In my limited observations the one question which plagued me, for which I could find no ready response, was "What are the students

really learning?" I find it a most compelling question for it cannot evade the focus on goals and objectives to which I have already referred. At some point the faculty may wish to rest on some qualitative assessments-- their own, or perhaps something like the College-Level Examination Program-- in order to get some comparative data with the populations like Laguardia's. Again, the question begs attention to the faculty's individual and collective definitions of performance and success for their students. I could honestly not find entree into so crucial a question. Even when teachers seem emotionally and energetically involved in their classes, I could not be sure of the intellectual or conceptual progress they expected or achieved. Arduous as it may be, I hope this will be a high priority for the faculty's concern.

## II. MORE SPECIFIC REACTION WITHIN THE LIBERAL ARTS

1. Liberal arts. Again, I question whether the faculty have some clarity about what the liberal arts are and what their function is at Laguardia? I think this needs some definition and understanding since presently it appears, in the terms of one faculty member as an "entity" with no way of seeing how it fits the College. In terms of atmosphere and emphasis, i. e., in relation to my earlier point about college-level expectations, and an intellectual or cultural climate, the College could explore other avenues such as lecture series, displays, films etc., to underscore the role of the liberal arts in society.
2. Social sciences. The trend in the division to separate disciplinary emphases is dangerous, unnecessary, and possibly detrimental to the College's goals. There is a substantial opportunity to combine the skills of the social sciences with the urban and interdisciplinary thrust of the institution. The College cannot afford to proliferate courses, as is now the tendency,

without some integrated objectives which center on the skills and techniques of the social sciences and their relevance to social problems. In effect the social sciences need to re-think their goals and emphases and to guard against offering too many courses at the expense of not repeating, evaluating, and perfecting their offerings over a specified period of time. While the social science electives fit the urban core focus they also are highly specialized and not necessarily related enough to offer students some consistent and comprehensive exposure to the fields included in the division. Perhaps no other division has the inherent structure from which to evolve the "inter-disciplinary conceptual base" to which the College is committed, but at present that is not being realized.

3. Language and culture. My impression is that the language program is developing into a major resource for the College with carefully conceived methodologies and strong commitments to integration across disciplines and with the cooperative program. And since the communication skills have had separate evaluation I could offer no better observation. But, I will suggest that the cultural emphasis within the humanities should provoke more than passing interest, that is only the development of intensives. In this area the urban emphasis is relatively minor, and the interdisciplinarity possibilities may not have been fully explored. I had admittedly minor contact with the division but I would expect that it would take on a more experimental, interdisciplinary focus. At the moment preoccupation with skill development may legitimately preclude that.

4. Mathematics and science. I have suggested earlier my impression that the mathematics curricula are being developed with sound philosophy, clear

objectives, distinct approaches which reflect a commitment to learning by doing and laboratory experience, and support for individual learning through tutorials, faculty contact, and lab experimentation. At present this program is exemplary in the College and should be used in some way to help guide other efforts at curriculum development. It combines beautifully the sense of reality about students with a flexible, expansive level of expectation.

The sciences, however, are another but no less important matter. Perhaps not necessarily a fault, the sciences now appear to be the most traditional and perhaps the most inadequate area in the liberal arts, mainly because they do not have sufficient laboratories. The use of class time may also be questionable, for some materials now presented would obviously lend themselves best to programmed instruction. Students need the motivation of topical emphases rather than textbook chronology. And in the sciences is a vivid example of how much better the intensives serve the students than the basic courses. The successful topics and methods of the intensives should certainly be incorporated into the latter. The College needs little justification for attending to this area: the sciences are so obviously crucial to understanding the problems and their solutions within an urban setting. But at Laguardia the sciences seem pitifully peripheral, doubtfully adequate or relevant. My own recommendation would be to give this area some priority, to study developments at other schools (probably no area is receiving more attention in a number of schools), especially those directed at courses for non-science majors, and to use the services of a qualified consultant in this area to help define the directions it might take within the thrust of the College.

5. Library. I would be remiss not to suggest that even in these early

stages the library begins to shape up as a strong resource for the College and for the Liberal Arts. It is too soon to make other observations but my guess is that the facilities will continue to support more than adequately the academic program.

### III. SUMMARY

In essence I am calling attention to the heavy burden upon the faculty to address itself to some difficult academic concerns: the educational, cultural, intellectual climate of the College; standards and expectations of performance and success; the integration of the academic and cooperative programs; and attention to the goals and objectives that lead to an independent learner and resourceful student. Further, I am asking what students at Laguardia are actually learning and whether such learning fits the college-level expectations of the faculty.

I have tried to suggest that in this limited time the promise of the urban focus, interdisciplinary emphases, and technological developments in teaching, has been approached but not fully planned nor realized. Faculty involvement in setting goals and standards is crucial to the College's stability and identity.

Finally, I have given some cautions about time, evaluation, and methodology which should suggest to the faculty a need for focus, planning, experimentation, and ultimate reassessment of directions and commitments. I have emphasized the necessity for communicating with and understanding students and for the importance of modeling behavior for them in order to interpret the College's goals and translate those goals into legitimate actions.

If Laguardia teeters it is understandable for its burdens have been

heavy and shifting. But the real test is whether it will choose to build some stability without stifling its passion for innovation and uniqueness. The balance required is clear and the faculty will need to invest much energy and intelligence to achieve it.