

April 3, 2002

To: Executive Council

From: Curriculum Committee

Re: MAP Assessment

Last September, the Executive Council asked the Curriculum Committee to evaluate the MAP program in terms of its academic value to the college. To this end, we have solicited, reviewed, and discussed an extensive set of relevant documents, including:

- Detailed statistics on participation levels (total faculty, total students, number of departments, divisional distribution, etc.),
- Descriptions of MAP models with examples of each model;
- Comprehensive summary report of evaluations submitted by 76 faculty members who directed one or more MAPs,
- Report by David Lopatto: "MAPs & NonMAPs in Summer 2001"
- Results of surveying current students and the alumni of Class of '01 (both participants and non-participants in the MAP program),
- Summaries of Spring 2002 discussions in each academic division and on the Student Curriculum Council,
- April 2000 proposal from the Executive Council (endorsed by the faculty) to launch the MAP experiment; and
- October 1998 FFE Proposal on Mentored Independent Learning, with a focus on facilitating student achievement through MAPs.

Through the year, we called to the attention of our colleagues the fact that we were posting on the web a set of MAP assessment documents and the minutes of our committee's MAP discussions. We also facilitated open discussions in which students and faculty contributed ideas and views to this process. We have heard from a broad group of current students and faculty, as well as 90 members of the Class of 2001.

At the end of this process, we have reached the following conclusion:

**The Curriculum Committee seeks Executive Council endorsement of our intention to bring to the whole faculty before the end of this academic year (2001-2002) a proposal to make Mentored Advanced Projects a regular part of the Grinnell College curriculum.**

We have two additional recommendations that we view as very important. First, it became clear from assessment that the original definition of MAP, endorsed at the beginning of the trial period, needs to be refined and updated to reinforce what is

successful about the program. Second, we urge the Executive Council to examine issues of faculty compensation for directing MAPs. While our assessment kept its focus on academic value, the issue of compensation repeatedly arose and will need to be addressed if the MAP program becomes a regular part of the College curriculum.

### **Proposed New Definition of MAP**

**A Mentored Advanced Project is an approved course of faculty-directed scholarly or creative work by highly qualified upper-level students that is the culmination of significant preparatory work and aims to produce results that merit presentation to the college community or the wider scholarly world.**

We offer the following points to clarify this new definition.

- 1) **“Highly Qualified Upper-Level Students”**: Students should complete the fourth semester (sophomore year) to be eligible for the MAP program. Beyond that, we believe it would be a serious mistake either to *require* all students to complete a MAP, or to offer MAPs as something to which all students are *entitled*. We believe that individual faculty members should retain the discretion to select MAP students and to determine the appropriate prior experience (“significant preparatory work”) that culminates in a specific project. We strongly recommend that faculty members take into account the student’s complete academic record, with emphasis on recent performance, as well as the maturity the student has shown in designing his or her academic program. Therefore, we would ask students to present a copy of their academic transcript and Four-Year Plan (list of courses) to the potential faculty director as part of the MAP proposal process. This step will allow faculty members to see the earlier work done by the student, including preparation for the MAP. *We strongly encourage faculty members to apply higher standards when selecting a student for MAP work than they use when admitting students to their regular courses.* We regard it as acceptable for a faculty member to turn down a MAP request on the basis of relatively weak academic performance or a poorly designed comprehensive academic program.
- 2) **“Faculty-Directed”**: Faculty members should intensively guide the preparation and the analysis/write-up of a MAP, but there should be enough flexibility for the student to carry out some of the research at a distance from the faculty member. For example, students may prepare with a faculty member to do summer fieldwork or gather data off-campus and then return to analyze and write up their results as a MAP.
- 3) **Approval of Projects**: To indicate that these projects occupy the highest level of the curriculum, we recommend a designator of “499” for all MAPs. Proposals should be signed by the faculty director and department chair, and approved in the Dean’s Office in keeping with the process used for all Independent Study.

- 4) MAPs Completed in the Context of a Seminar: While most MAPs have been independent, about 25% of them have taken place in the context of a seminar. The term “MAP course” or “MAP seminar” can be misleading because it obscures the independent quality of MAP work and the importance of applying higher standards to MAP approval than just the act of registering for a course. Therefore, we recommend against the term “MAP seminar” and any structure in which every student who enrolls in a certain course becomes automatically eligible to carry out a MAP. Instead, departments or divisions may choose to indicate in the Schedule of Courses specific upper-level seminars in which it is possible for students to apply to carry out a MAP. Students will need to submit MAP applications to the faculty member teaching the course, according to a process and criteria set forth by the instructor. The student may or may not be selected to carry out a MAP (see “Highly Qualified” above.)
- 5) Multi-Term MAPs: The definition of a MAP as a “course of scholarly or creative work” implies that some MAPs may extend over more than one academic term. We believe that a MAP may be taken for 4, 6, or 8 total credits, with no more than 4 MAP credits in a given term. For example, preparatory work for 2 credits might take place in the spring semester preceding a ten-week summer MAP, or the summer work may extend into a senior thesis or project carried out during the academic year.
- 6) “Results That Merit Presentation”: In keeping with the 499 designator, results of each MAP should be evaluated by the faculty member using higher standards than those applied to non-MAP Independent Study (297, 397, 399). Each MAP, in the stage of initial design, should aim to produce work in some format suited to the presentation of original and significant work in that academic discipline. While we recommend continuing support for conference travel and other external presentation of MAP work, we find that a required presentation beyond Grinnell College is not possible, practical, or enforceable, due to the unpredictable nature of creative and scholarly outcomes as well as time lags in the processes of publication and conference presentation.
- 7) Student Initiative: The importance of student initiative in devising a MAP topic stands in uncertain relation to the question of whether MAP work contributes to a faculty member’s own research. We believe that here, the practices of academic disciplines diverge sufficiently that the definition needs to leave room for both types of project.
- 8) Departmental Clarification: To assist students in their academic planning, upon the establishment of MAPs as a regular part of the college curriculum each academic department should be asked to define how (if at all) MAPs fit into the departmental curriculum, to describe any MAP model(s) that the department plans to offer, and to list examples of MAPs that can be carried out in the department.

## **Addendum: Faculty Compensation**

In the course of this assessment, we encountered a vast array of opinions on how best to compensate faculty members for directing a MAP. Many faculty members assert that the cash stipend for summer MAPs is vastly inadequate. These might prefer to see fractional teaching credit awarded in the summers, as well as during the academic year. Others believe it may prove too cumbersome and manipulative to “tally up” fractional teaching credit, and these suggest that the energy formerly invested by faculty members in various forms of uncompensated Independent Study (whose numbers are now declining) should simply be transferred to directing MAPs. Among those who approve of teaching credit, we did not detect opposition to the current formula of 6 MAPs equivalent to one 4-credit course. We found general agreement that this form of teaching is extraordinarily intensive, so that any level of compensation that truly is “adequate” also could put the overall financial demands of the program beyond the reach of even an affluent liberal arts college. Here again we would reinforce the benefits of a process requiring stringent planning and selection, not only to keep academic quality high, but also to keep within bounds the “proliferation” of MAPs and total resources required to support them.

If our recommendations receive endorsement by the whole faculty, we suggest that the Executive Council examine compensation in greater detail. Meanwhile, the College could continue using the same compensation guidelines that have been in effect during the MAP trial period. Whatever form of compensation is finally adopted, we urge the College to foster a climate and a system that fully recognizes the intensive nature and outstanding benefit to students of this form of teaching, which has historically not been counted in the teaching load.