

External Review Report

Liberal Studies BA Degree Completion Program

Sonoma State University

External Reviewer

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February 2017

This report comprises my external review of the Liberal Studies BA Degree Completion Program at Sonoma State University. During my two visits to campus, in early November and early December 2016, I met with the following members of the SSU staff: Thaine Stearns (Dean, School of Arts and Humanities), Robert Eyler (Dean, School of Extended and International Education), Stephanie Dyer (Director, Hutchins School of Liberal Studies), Greg Milton (Director of Academic Credit Programs, School of Extended and International Education), Beth Warner (Senior Academic Programs Coordinator, School of Extended and International Education), Susie McFeeters (Program Coordinator/Advisor, School of Extended and International Education), and the present and most recent past Faculty Coordinators of the Degree Completion Program, Jack Wikse and Debora Hammond respectively. I am appreciative to them all for sharing time, information, and insights. I am similarly indebted to the members of the Degree Completion Program (DCP) faculty whom I met, emailed, and/or spoke with by phone, including Mutombo M’Panya, Nancy Uber-Kellogg, and Barbara Wildham. I sat in on all four DCP courses and met with groups of students during the lunch hour on both of my visits. Most of the students who were enrolled in the DCP at that time attended the lunch meetings; their enthusiastic yet thoughtful participation made a strongly favorable impression on me.

1) History

The Liberal Studies BA Degree Completion Program was founded in 1996 in order to serve students whose work or family commitments, or location of residence, precluded them from attending conventionally-scheduled classes at Sonoma State University. The program was the product of a partnership between the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies and the School of Extended Education (now the School of Extended and International Education, or SEIE). Since its inception, the DCP has employed a transdisciplinary liberal studies curriculum that emphasizes self-reflection, creative thinking, research, collaborative inquiry, and the study of original literary, historical, and scientific sources. The DCP pedagogy has been designed in the spirit of Robert Maynard Hutchins, the celebrated educational innovator after whom the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies was named, who extolled the virtues of the “great human conversation” in search of shared meaning. Classes are held in the seminar style favored by Hutchins, and are supplemented by experiential workshops and occasional lectures.

The DCP was originally led by Ardath Lee, a tenured member of the Hutchins School faculty. Dr. Lee directed the program and taught several of its courses for approximately the first decade of its existence. She was succeeded in the role of Faculty Coordinator by another Hutchins School faculty member, Debora Hammond, who had been teaching in the DCP since its inception. Dr. Hammond held the Faculty Coordinator position for several years before turning it over to Jack Wikse. Unlike Dr. Lee and Dr. Hammond, Dr. Wikse coordinates and teaches in the program as an independent contractor and an adjunct faculty member rather than as a member of the Hutchins School faculty.

The DCP has enjoyed a considerable degree of continuity in staffing as well as in curriculum, pedagogy, and academic focus. Four staff and faculty members – Beth Warner, Nancy Uber-Kellogg, Debora Hammond, and Mutombo M’Panya – have been with the DCP since its inception, although the latter two are not expected to be involved with the program in the future due to impending retirement.

2) Program Staff and Administrative Structure

The Faculty Coordinator, Jack Wikse, and the Program Coordinator/Advisor, Susie McFeeters, are the persons who are most involved in administrative aspects of the DCP. The other staff members whose formal duties include serving the DCP, Greg Milton and Beth Warner, are assigned many other responsibilities within the university, although both are sincerely committed to the program and dedicate as much time and effort as possible to the DCP as their other duties allow. All four staff members have served in their current positions for some time; all have impressive résumés and are well qualified for their roles.

Many of the responsibilities of the DCP staff are handled collegially rather than strictly individually. Nevertheless, to the extent that responsibilities can be properly allocated to individual staff members, they are listed below.

The Faculty Coordinator

- a. assures that the program learning objectives for students are effectively achieved.
- b. bears primary responsibility for program assessment.
- c. updates and develops the curriculum in conjunction with the teaching faculty.
- d. mentors new faculty members.
- e. orients and guides the DCP faculty to integrate the program’s pedagogical principles and methodologies into their teaching.
- f. plans, organizes, and leads faculty meetings.
- g. reviews teaching evaluations and discusses them with the faculty.

Again, while the Faculty Coordinator is primarily responsible for each of these duties due to her/his status as educational leader of the program, Dr. Wikse attempts to handle them collaboratively insofar as is possible. He sees this as a matter of fidelity to the Hutchins ideal; as he told me, “In the Hutchins tradition, we do our course planning collaboratively, in regular meetings with course staff. This collaborative decision making is rooted in the Hutchins and learning community pedagogies and is an integral aspect of the program.”

At present, the Faculty Coordinator is also primarily responsible for maintaining a pool of qualified adjuncts for consideration for DCP teaching and for hiring instructors when needed. I will have more to say about this function in the final section of this report.

The Program Coordinator/Advisor

- a. maintains the programs database, which includes applicants as well as current and past DCP students.
- b. mentors and otherwise provides non-academic support for DCP students.

- c. communicates with prospective students by email and phone.
- d. develops and updates semester schedules, including room assignments.
- e. maintains and updates the student handbook.
- f. evaluates preadmissions transcripts and reviews transfer credit once students are admitted.
- g. prepares advising materials to guide students toward graduation requirements.
- h. maintains communications (phone, email, in person) with all students.
- i. prepares program materials, including syllabi, Moodle online classrooms, booklists, and Readers.

I understand that a forthcoming SEIE hire relieve Ms. McFeeters of admissions responsibilities so that she can focus more of her time on her other duties, particularly advising and program coordination.

The Faculty Coordinator and the Program Coordinator/Advisor jointly hold program information sessions for prospective students and host orientation sessions for newly-enrolled students.

SEIE staff, particularly the Director of Academic Credit Programs, are responsible for marketing and for all financial aspects of the program.

It will be noted that all of those mentioned above are either members of the SEIE staff or (in the case of Dr. Wikse) independent contractors; there is no direct staff participation from the Hutchins School. According to several sources, a tenure-track member of the Hutchins faculty is supposed to serve as Faculty Liaison to the Hutchins School when the Faculty Coordinator is an adjunct, as is currently the case. In theory Dr. Hammond serves as DCP Faculty Liaison, but in practice her role with respect to the program has been declining for some time, and in any case it will officially come to an end when she retires in a few months. This raises the issue of the extent to which the DCP can still be regarded as representing a partnership between the School of Extended and International Education and the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies (now a department within the School of Arts and Humanities). The nature of that partnership has changed over the years, in practice if not in theory. While the SEIE continues to administer the program and does so effectively, the role of Hutchins has diminished to the point where there appears to be significant internal uncertainty as to whether it is the appropriate institutional home for the DCP. I will discuss this important issue in detail toward the end of this report.

3) Faculty

In addition to the Faculty Coordinator, who regularly teaches in the DCP, the program currently utilizes five teaching faculty during most semesters. All current and recent faculty are appropriate credentialed, and all are adjuncts. One of the teaching faculty during the fall 2016 term was a graduate of the Hutchins School, but none were current members of the Hutchins faculty.

The DCP faculty teach courses, supervise and mentor their students, attend faculty meetings, and participate in curriculum development. The Faculty Coordinator orients them to their duties and, according to those with whom I spoke (most of the fall 2016 faculty), does so very well. DCP faculty have limited opportunity for group meetings, partly due to salary and logistical issues, but they are able to meet on occasion. Those meetings involve discussions of pedagogy as well as review of course syllabi, which are reviewed and revised each semester. The faculty with whom I spoke regard those meetings as productive and helpful.

The DCP faculty with whom I spoke are impressed with the program and pleased to be a part of it. They expressed appreciation for how they have been treated by DCP staff. As one seasoned adjunct told me, "I've never felt as supported in a program as I have here, by the director (Dr. Wikse) and Susie (McFeeters). This is really amazing, and it's felt like a real learning community."

4) Admissions, Enrollment, and Marketing

The DCP is designed for students in the local area who have earned associates degrees from schools within the California State system and who are motivated to complete their BA degree in a program that allows for family and employment commitments. Recruiting efforts include participation in community college information events and at conferences and fairs in an area stretching from the South Bay to Mendocino County and west to Sacramento, at which other SSU programs are also represented.

Prospective DCP students are strongly encouraged to attend an information meeting at SSU in order to acquire in-depth information about the program. Those meetings, which take place approximately once a month and are hosted by the Faculty Coordinator and Program Coordinator/Advisor, provide a comprehensive overview of the philosophy, requirements, and organization of the DCP. Students with whom I spoke who had attended such meetings found them valuable. They suggested that the presence of current DCP students or alumni might make them even more valuable, and that letting prospective applicants know in advance that such students would be present might make them more likely to attend. It's not clear what incentive there would be for current or past DCP students to participate in such events, but most of them appear to be dedicated to the program and might be willing to volunteer as a way of demonstrating their gratitude and support.

DCP applicants are recruited and selected on the basis of their ability to benefit from this rather unique program. Applications are carefully reviewed to ensure that standard SSU entrance requirements have been fulfilled and to "vet" them for appropriateness for the DCP. This is important in a small program in which class discussion is an important component, since the quality and character of the students greatly impacts the learning environment.

Approximately 90% of DCP applicants are admitted to the program. This was explained to me as a matter of self-selection and advising: those whom the staff regards as unlikely to be able to successfully complete the program are advised against applying and are informed about alternative opportunities for earning their BA degree. Those who enroll are expected to attend an orientation session hosted by the Faculty Coordinator and Program Coordinator/Advisor. As with the information meeting, the students with whom I spoke found the orientation session valuable, but suggested that the presence of current DCP students or alumni might have rendered them even more useful.

The DCP aims to cap each entering student cohort at 15 students, and to begin each new cohort with a minimum of 10. They have been successful at achieving that. The data for the past six years, during which the program has normally welcomed one or two new cohorts each fall and one each spring, shows that enrollment has averaged 60 students per semester during that period, ranging between a low of 45 and a high of 75. I believe that a larger total enrollment for the program would be advisable, especially for the purpose of sustainability; however, the regional nature of the program limits the

applicant pool, and the fact that enrollment has been fairly constant over a period of years might indicate that a significant increase in the foreseeable future is unlikely. Still, DCP staff should consider whether more can be done by way of attracting students to the program.

The DCP student body fares reasonably well with respect to diversity. Less than one-third of almost every entering class self-identifies as “white,” with the remainder representing a variety of ethnicities. Ages of current students range from the early 20s to 60. There is significantly less gender diversity, with the program consistently enrolling four women students for every male student.

Almost half of currently-enrolled students live more than 25 miles from campus, with none residing more than 100 miles away. Given the nature of the program and its singular appeal to students who have earned two-year degrees from academic institutions in California, that is to be expected.

The self-study reports 75% of students who begin the DCP as graduating, which is somewhat higher than my rough tally based on the materials I received for the last several years. I believe that this discrepancy can be explained by the number of students who have taken all four of the 10-credit DCP courses but have not completed their remaining degree requirements (see next section), of whom there have been quite a few over the course of the program’s history. As the DCP self-study notes, “At any given time there are approximately 50 active students and a further 25 who have completed our coursework but need additional units to fulfill graduation requirements.”

Completing those additional credits can be a challenge for students who are not able to take the vast majority of standard four-year college courses. However, it was clear from my conversations with DCP staff that this is a priority for them, and that they are regularly honing their methods for apprising students of their options and supporting them in availing themselves of them. Intersession courses are sometimes offered to provide some of the additional units that most DCP students need for graduation, and that plans for additional courses of this type are in the works. I’m not sure whether students who completed DCP coursework some time ago but have yet to qualify for their degree are apprised of such opportunities after their departure; if not, this should be done whenever such opportunities become available.

The DCP staff keeps documentation on students who enrolled in the program but subsequently took a leave of absence and have yet to complete it. This allows them to remain in contact with those students and to assist them in rejoining the program when they are able to do so.

5) Academics

As an integrated general education program with a core curriculum, the DCP’s academic goals have remained consistent since the program’s inception. Students take one 10-unit class per semester for four semesters to fulfill the 40 units the DCP offers toward graduation requirements. Most need only ten additional units beyond the 40 offered by the DCP in order to qualify for their BA degree.

The DCP is a so-called “hybrid” academic program. Students meet in face-to-face seminars on campus one Saturday per month each semester, and in on-line threaded postings and responses to each other’s essays when “live” classes are not in session. The online forum is not conducted in real time, so each student is able to do assigned weekly readings and post their written work at times that are convenient for them. Longer writing assignments are timed to allow about a month for completion, and are scheduled so that presentations based on those assignments can be given during a class meeting. Writing is an important component of the DCP; a writing instructor works intensively with students during their first semester in order to develop competencies in academic writing.

The four core courses in the program, which are taken sequentially, are as follows:

- LIBS 380 (*Identity and Society*) looks at changing conceptions of selfhood, drawing from psychological, sociological, and anthropological theory as well as from literature, art, and biology, philosophy, and epistemology.
- LIBS 381 (*Technology and the Environment*) concentrates on the relationship between the human environment and the physical environment and the economic and political aspects of environmental issues.
- LIBS 382 (*Work and the Global Future*) explores the global economy and its impact on societies around the world.
- LIBS 470 (*Senior Project*) allows students to combine individual interests with one or more themes from the core courses.

Those four 10-unit courses, normally taken in consecutive semesters over a two-year period, are unchanged over the two decades of the program’s existence with respect to titles, and little changed with respect to themes. However, almost all of the assigned texts have changed over time, usually so that more up-to-date works on the given topics can be included.

As would be expected from a program with a core curriculum, all sections of each course in any given semester utilize the same reading list. Course faculty meet each semester in planning sessions with the Faculty Coordinator to reevaluate syllabi, based in large measure on student feedback from the previous semester’s courses. The review process includes assessment of assignments and workshops as well as course texts. The faculty also discusses and evaluates student progress toward learning goals and provides students with substantive feedback and support.

The online essays I have read and the in-class presentations I witnessed showed serious engagement with the relevant materials and the issues they raised. The academic quality of those online posts was uneven, ranging in my judgment from marginally acceptable to quite exceptional but inclining more toward the latter than the former. In reviewing faculty responses to online postings, I was impressed with their thoroughness as well as the extreme care that was devoted to understanding the ideas of each student to whom they were responding.

The limitation of class size to a maximum of 15 students fosters discussion that includes every member of each class. The faculty facilitate those discussions and regard themselves as a part of the learning community. The “learning community” concept is buttressed by the fact that students remain in the same cohort throughout the program, although they normally have different professors for each course.

a) Class Visits

The DCP prioritizes understanding of the issues explored within each course theme and reflection, individually and collectively, with respect to those issues. Those priorities were evident in all of the classes I visited, fostered by faculty members who served as instructors as well as discussion facilitators. As one would expect in this sort of program, the students in each cohort were mutually supportive to an impressive degree.

Academically, DCP instructors cultivate student appreciation for each assigned text, although class discussions are not particularly “text-driven.” The students generally appeared to be well-prepared for their classes, although this was not always easy to determine since some students spoke with considerably less frequency than others. Most instructors gently encouraged the less forthcoming students to speak, usually by directing questions to them. Those questions tended to be fairly general (“So, Jean, do you have any thoughts about this?”), not designed to directly elicit direct textual references. Books were generally open and appeared to be well marked.

Seminars were held in classrooms that were small and tight-fitting but sufficient. Students seemed to use that size as an opportunity for intellectual intimacy and mutual support. The classroom atmosphere was informal, but students were focused and engaged. They listened to each other very well, and many of their comments demonstrated an impressive degree of humility; they seemed to be aware to a laudable extent of knowing what they didn’t know.

Class discussions were process oriented, with student contributions playing a key role in every seminar and classroom dynamics attended to in every instance. This approach tends to favor the building of collaboration and group insight rather than debate. This is consistent with program goals, and it generally worked quite well. However, the faculty might want to consider whether more “critical” challenges might occasionally be in order. For example, I heard students in various classes make the following statements, which might be characterized as unexamined clichés: “Western ways of living are uncaring,” “Their (Native Americans’) whole thing was being in harmony with nature and only taking what you need,” “Corporations and the government don’t want you to know...” Those assertions, and others of similar character, went unchallenged, at least in the classroom. While it is certainly understandable that some versions of “challenge” would sit uncomfortably with the sort of cohort building and mutual support for which the program strives, there are more subtle and supportive ways of helping students to become aware of clichéd and possibly inaccurate aspects of their thinking. So, if the faculty regards this as a concern on the basis of their own experiences with DCP students and classes, they might consider whether there are ways of addressing it without undermining the “process” orientation of their classes.

In a similar vein, I would characterize the type of thinking that I witnessed in DCP seminars as more “creative” than “critical,” or perhaps more “synthetic” than “analytic.” Students were routinely, and often impressively, making connections and having insights that had not occurred to them earlier, as well as occasionally mentioning similar moments they had had when preparing for classes between sessions. The texts themselves were rarely challenged; they seemed to be used for purposes of information and as a springboard to discussion, rather than for the purpose of critique. That is, if a student mentioned some aspect of an assigned text with which they disagreed, the response of the

instructor (if any) would normally be along the lines of “Well, you might look at it this way...” That approach, which might be construed as constituting an implicit defense of the text, has both positive and negative features. It is understandable that the faculty, who after all are co-responsible for selecting course texts, would be inclined to serve as advocates for them, particularly if they are able to do so in a non-confrontational manner (which, from my observations, was universally the case). It is also intellectually desirable for students to learn to give as much credence as possible to an assigned text before critiquing it. On the other hand, that sort of practice can lead students to feel that the approach to issues suggested by the texts is to be taken as authoritative, particularly if those texts all tend to point in the same general direction. Occasional comments on course evaluations and in my meetings with students suggested some concern about that. For example, a couple of students stated that the materials in LIBS 382 were one-sided, characterizing the orientation of the course as “globalism and capitalism are bad.” As far I could tell, those students didn’t personally disagree with that orientation, but they also didn’t regard it as exemplifying an optimal educational approach.

I was present for several in-class presentations, notably of senior projects. The senior project is a special part of the DCP, its culminating experience; program materials characterize it as “an opportunity to integrate what you have learned throughout the program and to focus on an interdisciplinary project of particular interest to you.” Students choose their topics with feedback and support from a faculty mentor, offering their final presentations to their instructor and classmates toward the end of LIBS 470. I observed three of those presentations, all of which were at least somewhat interdisciplinary as well as being comprehensive, evidence-based, and heartfelt, although in varying degrees. To the extent that I feel qualified to judge, I would have assessed all three as clearly passing.

The amount and difficulty of reading throughout the course of study seemed appropriate to me, as did the writing assignments. In addition to the actual content of the course materials, students are expected to improve their reading, writing, and listening skills as they progress through the program. Their comments, both in person and on the evaluation form, indicate that they believe the program to have been successful in all of those respects.

b) In-Person Student Comments

In my lunchtime meetings with students, at which the DCP faculty and staff were not present, the most common theme was appreciation for the opportunity that the program presented. This had much to do with the fact that the DCP permits those students to finish their BA degree requirements in a manner that allows them to fulfill their other responsibilities, but also with their sense that they were involved in a worthwhile endeavor that was broadening their intellectual and personal horizons in a decidedly positive way.

Many students noted with approval that the “community of learners” concept is paramount in the DCP. They recognize that they are under the care of knowledgeable and facilitating instructors who support them and their classmates, and expressed gratitude for the extent to which their instructors keep in touch with and respond to them. They stated they receive significant meaningful feedback from their instructors, a view that is confirmed by the course evaluations (see below).

Students testified that the academic program is very challenging -- “I work every day on this,” one of them told me rather emphatically, while others nodded assent – but no one argued that requirements

should be scaled back, although a few offered suggestions for how they might be rearranged in certain courses so that assignments would be more equally distributed throughout the term. Several students said they had personally changed for the better (the word “transformed” was used several times) as a result of the program, with some making statements such as “there’s a shift in the way I think” and others claiming that they had become a better person and/or a better citizen as a result of their experiences in the DCP.

Most students expressed great satisfaction with the administrative support they have received from program staff. They are aware that Susie McFeeters has carefully mapped out personalized plans for graduation, and emphasized that she is exceptionally adept at shepherding them through the process leading from the application to the diploma and responding to a variety of needs and requests. In fact, in one of my meetings with students, the first mention of Ms. McFeeters’s name generated spontaneous applause from all of those present.

In response to my question about why they had chosen the DCP, most students replied that it was because it permits a working life to coexist with degree completion rather than because of the program’s academic content and pedagogy. In fact, several of them claimed to not really know much about the content of the DCP before enrolling, but did so anyway because it was their best or even their only viable option for degree completion.

Several students expressed a desire for more opportunities to connect with their fellow students than their relatively limited time in person and online currently permits. They recognized, however, that their fellow students have busy lives and that it’s not clear how that could happen. My sense was that such comments spoke more to the students’ appreciation for each other than for an actual academic need.

Some students expressed interest in connecting with DCP alumni. I note that a 20th anniversary gathering of the DCP is set for this April, which might help in that respect as well as others, although I’m not sure whether they are invited or what sorts of events are planned. In any case, the anniversary gathering strikes me as an excellent idea on its own merits. If DCP alumni have the allegiance to the program that current students have, continued contact and occasional events of this sort can only help, since the DCP – like virtually all small programs – can use all the friends and advocates it can get.

c) Course Evaluations

Evaluation forms for the DCP are well-structured and comprehensive. Student responses are generally outstanding for all courses and all instructors. The median grade is about 4.5 on a 5-point scale for all categories in all courses, with no category standing out as a negative outlier. For the nine evaluation summaries of recent courses that I reviewed, 93 of 97 enrolled students responded, a laudable 96% response rate. Of the nine courses represented by those summaries, there were only two for which the composite score for all categories was below 4. In neither case was it far below that figure, and in both it improved the following semester with the same instructor.

Student comments on the evaluations testified to the difficulty of the program, and also to its rewards. The knowledgeability and support of the DCP instructors was mentioned with regularity and appreciation, just as it was by the students with whom I met in person.

At the conclusion of the final course, LIBS 470, students are asked for their overall assessment of the DCP and their progress in it. Not every student responded to that question, but those who did were unequivocally positive about it. The following comment was typical: "I highly recommend the program. I found it to be a manageable way to earn a BA as a working adult. The semester was very challenging, yet interesting and often rewarding. Coming out of the whole process with a much broader, more educated view of the world and my place in it."

6) Institutional Support

In my judgment, the DCP currently functions very well academically and, for the most part, administratively as well. However, there are warning signs that that might not be the case for much longer without serious attention being devoted to structural issues. The sustainability of the program depends in large measure on its connections to other parts of the university. It appears to me that it is currently overly dependent on the hard work and dedication of several DCP staff members who are going above and beyond the expectations stated in their position descriptions. This is undoubtedly also the case in many other parts of the university. Still, I believe that strengthening this particular program would not take a substantial amount of reorganization or additional funding, although it will take goodwill, negotiation, and unity and clarity of purpose among all relevant parties.

Formally speaking, the DCP continues to be regarded as a program of the Hutchins school. This is evidenced by, among other things, its embedding in the Hutchins section of the SSU catalog and the SSU website, as a result of which students who complete the DCP regard themselves as Hutchins graduates. However, in practice the "housing" of the DCP within Hutchins is considerably less clear. It is unlikely that the last of the Hutchins faculty to be directly involved in the program, Debora Hammond and Mutombo M'Panya, will have any involvement with the DCP after the current academic year. The Faculty Coordinator, Jack Wikse, is doing an exceptional job of directing the program, but he is well past traditional retirement age and currently serves on only a semester-by-semester contract. While it can and should be hoped that he will continue to serve in that capacity for the foreseeable future, it is somewhat worrying that no obvious replacement is in evidence (unlike the situation several years ago, when Dr. Wikse was available to take over from Dr. Hammond), and that the current lack of academic oversight for the DCP renders it unclear how his successor will be selected and academically supported.

Individual connections between the DCP and the Hutchins Program will not end with the departures of Dr. Hammond and Dr. M'Panya. The Senior Academic Programs Coordinator, Beth Warner, is a graduate of the Hutchins School, as are occasional adjuncts who teach in the DCP. Nevertheless, the relation of the DCP to the Hutchins Program has become less robust, and to some extent less clear, in recent years. Without that relationship or a similar one, the DCP is structurally unmoored, putting it in a potentially uncertain position in the future.

The "central" Hutchins program, as I will call it, is quite similar to the DCP in a number of respects, although there are also notable differences. Like the DCP, that program features four substantial interdisciplinary, theme-oriented seminars that must be taken by all Hutchins students (although Hutchins has three tracks from which students may choose, depending primarily on their career aspirations, while the DCP has only one, as described earlier). Unlike the DCP, the program occupies most of the first two years of undergraduate study rather than the last two, so that the student

populations to whom each program is aimed are quite distinct. Nevertheless, the DCP has far more in common with Hutchins from an academic standpoint than it is likely to have with any other department or school in which it could reasonably be housed.

As things stand at present, the Hutchins School continues to support the DCP in a number of ways. The school has shared its adjunct pool for the purpose of DCP faculty hiring and has likewise been generous in offering classroom space, technical equipment, kitchen facilities, and the like. Dr. Wikse has initiated faculty conversations about the DCP that are welcomed by the Hutchins School and open to all Hutchins faculty; I understand that those have been well attended and have fostered increased mutual understanding between the Hutchins faculty and the DCP. But supporting a program is not the same as housing it.

Having the Hutchins School continue to serve as the academic home for the DCP, in practice as well as in theory, is not without its problematic aspects. The size of the Hutchins faculty has diminished significantly since it was formally transformed from a semi-autonomous school to a department within Arts and Humanities. Its academic responsibilities, however, continue to be extensive, a fact which makes it difficult for Hutchins faculty to be assigned to teach in the DCP. This problem is exacerbated by the Hutchins School's paucity of resources, which were noted in detail in the most recent (2013) Hutchins program review, and by the fact that there is little incentive on the part of either the administration or the faculty of the Hutchins School to devote additional time and energy to the DCP. Hutchins faculty are not likely to want to teach on weekends, in large part because there is much for them to do on weekdays and additionally because the quest for tenure is unlikely to involve extended education. Those factors have led to an increasing trend toward the hiring of non-Hutchins adjuncts to teach in the DCP, which has now reached the point where no current Hutchins faculty teach in the program. Thus, although the staff of the DCP would welcome increased involvement from Hutchins faculty, it does not appear that that is likely, at least for the foreseeable future.

Despite these practical constraints, it seems advisable that Hutchins continue to house the DCP. The other options for doing so of which I am aware seem significantly less desirable. As this opinion was shared by almost all of those at SSU with whom I discussed the matter and is not disputed by anyone as far as I am aware, I will not review those alternatives here, but will instead offer some thoughts about how the relationship between the DCP and Hutchins might be formally strengthened without placing undue burdens on either, or on SEIE.

It is clear that the DCP is a financial boon to the university. A portion of revenues generated by the DCP is allocated to the Hutchins School through Arts and Humanities. I'm not certain whether the current allocation is sufficient for the needs of Hutchins with respect to its responsibilities to the DCP, although I suspect that it is not. A draft of a proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) addresses this issue as follows: "Following the payment for instructors and the calculation of program expenses at the end of each academic year, SSEIE will transfer 20% of the net revenue from the tuition/fee share to A&H at the beginning of the following academic term. In turn, A&H will share this with Hutchins in accordance with California State policy for Extended Education funds, SSU procedure, and the discretionary needs of A&H and Hutchins." I don't have enough knowledge of issues regarding finances to render an opinion as to whether the resulting level of funding would be either feasible or sufficient, nor do I know whether it accurately represents current practice. However, something along these lines is compulsory if Hutchins is to be adequately compensated for its contributions to the DCP as a program within the school.

The establishment of an MOU that specifies appropriate structures for the DCP has been in the works for several years. I believe it to be important that such an agreement be finalized and signed soon, before the structural problems faced by the DCP become intractable.

The aforementioned draft MOU is between SEIE and the School of Arts and Humanities. Such a document might be sufficient for the purposes presented here, since Hutchins is formally regarded as a department within Arts and Humanities. However, if there are good reasons for Hutchins to have explicit formal buy-in and endorsement of whatever relationship to the DCP is approved, perhaps there could be a separate MOU between Arts and Humanities and Hutchins concerning the DCP. I understand that such a formal arrangement exists between Arts and Humanities and the Film Studies program; perhaps the document affirming that arrangement could serve as a model for this sort of “secondary” MOU.

Regardless whether it is decided that there should be one MOU or two, it/they should address issues concerning the Faculty Coordinator and the Faculty Liaison, at least in general terms. The aforementioned draft MOU, for example, states the following: “Hutchins will select a Faculty Coordinator to manage the academic aspects of the program. Should the Faculty Coordinator be selected from non-tenured or tenure-track faculty, a Faculty Liaison will be appointed by Hutchins from among tenured or tenure-track faculty.” This approach seems sensible to me. A Faculty Coordinator who is a consultant and adjunct instructor, as the current one is, has no formal ties to the Hutchins Program. That person’s colleague – that is, the Faculty Liaison – would represent the DCP to the Hutchins faculty and serve on the Academic Senate. The liaison’s responsibilities could also include other matters for which no one is formally assigned at present, such as mediating faculty-student conflicts that cannot be handled by the coordinator, spearheading or collaborating with the Faculty Coordinator on issues regarding faculty hiring, and consulting on course syllabi and general program planning. If a connection between the DCP and Hutchins (or Arts and Humanities) is needed in other respects, the Faculty Liaison could be at least partly responsible for handling them. The Faculty Liaison would presumably report to the Director of the Hutchins School, which would help strengthen the position of the DCP within Hutchins while hopefully adding very little to the Hutchins Director’s already extensive responsibilities.

For most of Dr. Wikse’s tenure as Faculty Coordinator, the position of Faculty Liaison has mostly been filled for in name only, as Dr. Hammond’s work at SSU has increasingly been devoted to another program. This has placed an undue burden on the rest of the DCP staff, particularly Dr. Wikse, while also further weakening the relationship between the DCP from Hutchins. While there is no immediate danger that this will lead to the academic decline of the DCP, continued lack of attention to its structural grounding within the university might well have that effect over time.

During my second visit to campus, I was given the welcome news that a tenured Hutchins faculty member was being considered to serve as Faculty Liaison for next year. I understand there to be several issues concerning that appointment, including the extent to which it can count as “service” for that faculty member and the related question of whether it would entail additional salary from SEIE for that person’s administrative work. Assuming that the Faculty Liaison would be teaching in the DCP, as is probably desirable, the question whether that would be part of that faculty member’s Hutchins teaching load or would involve additional pay was also open. Again, I lack the expertise to navigate the details of this, but I regard the appointment of and appropriate compensation for a Faculty Liaison as an important element in strengthening the placement of the DCP within the Hutchins School and SSU as a whole.

Concerning the Faculty Coordinator, the term-by-term nature of that person's contract is also a potential detriment to the future stability of the program. I suggest that it be stated in the MOU that the DCP Faculty Coordinator is to be appointed for a specific term, along with a stipulation concerning the formal structures for reappointment. If the term of appointment is to be, say, three years, the Hutchins Program would only infrequently need to consider how the next appointment is to take place. If the coordinator is to be a non-Hutchins faculty member, appointment of the Faculty Liaison should also be for a period longer than a single term, and preferably longer than a single academic year.

Both roles have several important aspects. Since the DCP is a tightly integrated program, the Faculty Coordinator needs to develop familiarity with each core course in the sequence in order to facilitate transdisciplinary dialogue with the faculty who teach in the program. The willingness and ability to teach multiple DCP courses, as has been done by all three Faculty Coordinators to date, should also be a consideration in the appointment of future coordinators. Likewise, the Faculty Liaison should have appropriate professional credentials for, as well as interest in, the pedagogy, content, and goals of the DCP. Given the similarities between the DCP and Hutchins, it is to be expected that at least a few current Hutchins faculty members fall into this category, in qualifications if not in active interest.

The above, or something very similar in spirit and content, should be viewed as the minimum criteria necessary for clarifying and strengthening the status of the DCP as a program within the Hutchins School, rather than a program that is tangibly but decreasingly supported by it. If, in addition, there is concern about giving less ambiguous messages to prospective and actual DCP students and faculty about the relationship between the DCP and Hutchins, the following steps might also be considered:

- 1) Have the DCP track included along with the three "core" Hutchins tracks on public posters in Carson Hall, which currently refer only to the "three tracks of the Hutchins Program" without mention of the DCP;
- 2) Ensure that DCP classes and the office of the Academic Coordinator/Advisor remain in close proximity to Hutchins offices and classrooms;
- 3) Embed future DCP program reviews within Hutchins School reviews, as they were until a few years ago. (I understand that the failure of this to happen during the last Hutchins review was an oversight, probably due to the same factors that have led to the current lack of clarity about the place of the DCP within Hutchins.) If the next Hutchins review is taking place within the next year or two, this review of the DCP can be acknowledged in that one, after which the following Hutchins review would include the DCP.

I offer these steps by way of suggestion only. It is important that all relevant parties decide whether the relationship between Hutchins and the DCP is best fostered by these or other possible actions.

7) Conclusion

The evidence that I have seen convincingly affirms that the Liberal Studies BA Degree Completion Program is a valuable one. It serves an important population; it does what it claims to do and does it well. I hope that the suggestions offered in this report will help to ensure the continued success and future health of the DCP. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.