DO IT YOURSELF

A Note for the Faculty

Our DTF has been given summary notes on the discussion about the Provost's office, at the faculty retreat. They are interesting and disturbing. Faculty members are telling the Provost to do all kinds of things that they--members of the faculty--can do and should do for themselves, individually and collectively. My sense is that too many faculty members tend to view us as being powerless, when in fact we have enormous power to do what we think best for ourselves, our students, and the College as a whole.

"Repeat successful core programs," says one. "Organize ways that each person can do very advanced things with a few students," says another. Why does anyone expect a Provost to come in and do these things? We have the power to do them, and if we don't, they won't be done.

Look, in contrast, at the way curriculum development can go when faculty members use their power to implement their ideas. Many people are not fond of Specialty Areas, but maybe they've never been in a Specialty Area that actually works. From the beginning of the College, before anyone invented the concept of Specialty Areas, the scientists and mathematicians have been meeting regularly to design their part of the curriculum and ensure a regular rotation of people through the various programs that have to be offered, or that people want to offer as innovations. This hasn't been done narrowly or selfishly, by the way; we always consider rotation of people into Core Programs and into other areas, and people, on the whole, get their druthers because these things are negotiated quite cooperatively and peacefully. The result of all this is that people are in control of their lives and of the curriculum. Most important, I think, is that people who have been engaging in this process (some of us for 20 years or so) feel empowered and capable of putting curricular innovations into effect without waiting for a Provost or Dean to take the lead. We have gradually developed ways to provide relatively advanced work for relatively small numbers of students; we didn't wait for someone else to do it for us. If people want to repeat successful core programs, they can negotiate with Deans to do it. And I hear my colleagues talking about new models they want to institute, often in cooperation with folks from other areas or with Core.

It is this sense of power and ownership that I want all of our colleagues to have.