



Antioch College Continuation Corporation

Report to the Board Pro-Tem

The Non-Stop Liberal Arts Institute February 13-14, 2009

At the request of the ACCC Board Pro-Tem, Frances Degen Horowitz, Prexy Nesbitt, Everett Mendelsohn, Zee Gamson, and Steve Schwerner constituted a Visiting Team to the Non-Stop Liberal Arts Institute (NSLAI). The Visiting Team was asked to provide a report of its visit that would help the Board Pro Tem have a fuller understanding and a greater familiarity with the work of the NSLAI and its efforts to continue the legacy of Antioch College following the closure of the College.

History and Background

Antioch University closed Antioch College in June 2008. Shortly thereafter, the University signaled its willingness to work with the Antioch College Alumni Association to achieve a separation of the College from the University. At its February 2008 board meeting, the College Revival Fund committed their support of NSLAI and organizational work began immediately. establishing an effort Identified as the NSLAI.

Former Antioch College faculty, students, and staff work intensively to ready the NSLAI to open for classes and other activities in September; it became apparent in October that the College would not re-open in January; at that point it was decided to continue the NSLAI for a second semester, thru June, 2009, in expectation that the College would re-open in September of 2009. Funding was made available by the Antioch College Alumni Association and by other donors through the College Revival Fund. Volunteers and local Yellow Springs citizens and organizations provided substantial in-kind support.

The development of the NSLAI was imbued with the principle of continuing the unique educational legacy of Antioch College in a dedication to classroom, co-op, and community. In its organization and operation the NSLAI mapped itself on a number of the hallmark aspects of Antioch College with an ExCil (AdCil), a ComCil, community managers, many of the same committees. The NSLAI based its operation on principles of collective leadership and participatory governance by faculty, students, and staff while also encouraging the involvement of members of the Yellow Springs community.

Prior to our arrival the Visiting Team was sent extensive and informative materials about course offerings, public programming, community involvement, and the efforts to structure some co-op work experience. During our visit additional information was provided during meetings with ExCil, with faculty, students, and staff and with the Executive Collective made up of four faculty members who serve as the coordinating body for the NSLAI. We also met with personnel in the Development Office.

So as to insure that there was no confusion about the purpose of our visit, at the beginning of every meeting and session it was noted the Team was not asked to make any recommendations nor to render any judgments; rather, our instructions were to convey to the Pro-Tem Board as much as we could about the operation, functioning, and philosophy of the NSLAI.

The schedule of meetings for our visit is attached.

What the Visiting Team Learned and Observed

People

Faculty

There are twelve full-time, five part-time and four adjunct faculty and some volunteers teaching and carrying out NSLAI tasks. Almost all were formerly employed by Antioch College. The composition of the faculty, and thus the curricula offerings were determined by who remained from the College faculty when the College closed. Thus, there are more courses in the social sciences, communications and media, the arts, the environment, and gender studies than in the sciences and languages. Non-paid volunteers, alumni, and retired faculty have also offered courses and workshops. Some have provided significant services, without compensation, in a number of areas and most particularly in relation to facilities and information technology.

The faculty with whom we met emphasized how much they felt they had accomplished under circumstances of scarce resources, making do, being inventive. They expressed a deep commitment to responding to community interest, welcoming and benefiting from having community members in their courses and other activities, and educating students in the meaning of participatory governance and community action and service. In a number of ways the programs, efforts, and activities of the NSLAI have had the effect of re-claiming some of what was once a close and cooperative relationship between the College and the Yellow Springs community.

Staff

There are nine full-time staff members including the two community managers who perform functions one would typically find in a college operation—admissions, registrar, student services, housing, physical facilities, business office, information systems and technology, and administrative assistants. All are professionals and were previously employed at the College. In our meeting with staff they acknowledged the difficulties of working in a situation of extremely scarce resources but also noted the positive effect of moving into the recently improved work environment provided by the new rented renovated space.

Students

There are currently 10 students enrolled full time – taking 12 or more credits; 12 enrolled half-time – 6-11 credits; and 38 auditing or taking five credits or less for a total head-count of 60 students. (See definition of ‘credits’ below.)

Twenty-two of the 60 were enrolled in the fall semester. More than half of the 60 students are Yellow Springs residents. Twelve are from out of the state of Ohio. Twenty-six of the students are of traditional college age –

18-24 years; the remainder are over 25 years. Seventy two percent of the students are female. The 60 students were registered for a total of 340 credits.

In the fall semester a total of 74 students were enrolled, 12 full time, 7 half time, and 55 auditing or taking five credits or less. Three high school aged students, 17 traditional college-age students, and 54 non-traditional aged students were enrolled and registered for a total of 344 credits.

We met with a group of currently enrolled students – about 10 – all of whom would be considered traditional college-age students. One senior citizen who is auditing courses was also present for part of our meeting. All the students expressed enthusiasm for their experiences: deep satisfaction with the courses, their teachers, and the learning opportunities in and out of the classroom. They indicated that the courses were very rigorous, the reading requirements extensive, and the teachers extremely dedicated. Some are hopeful that the NSLAI will continue beyond this semester; others are planning to move on and continue their education elsewhere. All understood that they were studying in a non-accredited institution. Some reported parental support for their enrolling in the NSLAI, or parental skepticism won over; others indicated parental pressure for them to continue their studies in an accredited institution.

The Curriculum

Students enrolled in 30 courses in the fall semester, in 38 courses in the spring semester. Credits for these courses ranged from one credit to six credits with the majority providing one, two and three credits. In addition, tutorials and individual instruction in music, and workshops in a wide variety of topics were available. Credits are defined in terms of traditional standards of number of in-class hours and time devoted to out-of-class assignments over the course of a fifteen-week semester. Credits earned in an unaccredited institute such as the NSLAI cannot be expected to be transferrable to an accredited institution unless the accredited institution decides to make an exception for a particular student based upon evidence of work done and evaluated. Accredited institutions can be penalized for easy acceptance of credits from non-accredited institutions and thus are not eager to accept such credits for transfer purposes.

“COPAS: A course in community, organization, participation, action, and service” was developed to emphasize the importance of community involvement and is considered a requirement for any student planning to “graduate” from the NSLAI. Full time students are required to give 4 hours a week to COPAS service; part time students two hours a week. Service is defined as work done for the NSLAI as well as service to the Yellow Springs community. Each student is provided with a COPAS adviser. This is in addition to an academic and a co-op adviser.

Though not possible to provide a fully developed co-op program, work experiences and reflections on those work experiences are considered part of the required curriculum and efforts are made to enable students to do ‘co-ops’.

(Copies of the scheduled courses will be available at the meeting of the Pro-Tem Board.)

Courses are scheduled over a period of fifteen weeks; Monday through Thursday in three hour blocks in the morning and afternoons from 9:00 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 1:00 p.m. to 4 p.m. Tutorials and Study Groups, community meeting and community council meetings are scheduled from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Tutorials and Study Groups are also scheduled from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday thru Thursday. Friday is reserved for

Executive Council, faculty meeting, community lunch and NONSTOP PRESENTS (see below). The Learning Festival (see below) occurs at week 8 and there is a break at week 9.

A deep philosophical approach to a liberal arts education is evidenced in the written “Introduction to the Nonstop Curriculum” and is described as an ‘open curriculum “designed to provide flexibility and choice” with “course structures that allow faculty to teach from their strengths and to student interest”, “augmented by local villager and alumni contributions.” “Ongoing collaborations, active engagement in self-governance processes and the goal of building a sustainable education community” are cited as guiding principles for the open curriculum.

The visiting team attended an educational demonstration – a class in a team-taught three-credit course entitled “Queer Animals.” Normally scheduled to meet for three hours on Wednesday afternoon, it was specially arranged to meet for an hour during our Friday afternoon visit. Eight traditionally aged college students were in attendance plus the visiting team. A number of the NSLAI faculty were also present. A close reading of a Kafka short tale by the students and some of us on the visiting team was followed by a very engaged discussion of what Kafka was trying to communicate and how the tale could be considered in relation to the definition of ‘other’, the differences between human animals and non-human animals, and Kafka’s use of symbolism and story-line.

A mid-term, weeklong themed LEARNING FESTIVAL, open to the public, includes workshops, presentations, shows, and performances. An ongoing schedule for the community events entitled NONSTOP PRESENTS offers a program of lectures, exhibitions, presentations, performances, film series and daylong workshops.

In describing the NSLAI and the concept of an open curriculum, it is said that the “Nonstop Liberal Arts Institute is more than a new kind of liberal arts institution; it is also a movement that develops a nexus of commitments by those who care about Antioch College and who dare to keep its education alive and in motion.” Imbedded in this philosophy is a dedication to reaching out to the Yellow Springs community, forming mutually beneficial alliances and sustaining relationships.

Commitment to Diversity

The material for the NSLAI includes strong written statement about valuing diversity. There is some but not a great deal of diversity among the faculty, students, and staff and, we were told, little diversity among the members of the Yellow Springs community who have connected themselves to and participated in the NSLAI. A Native American and an African American are members of the faculty; one of the Community Managers is an African American. We did not observe any persons of color are among the students. As part of the outreach efforts of the Community Managers ongoing relationships have been pursued with Wilberforce and Central State University – two predominantly African American institutions – and with Cedarville College – a Christian affiliated evangelical institution.

Infrastructure Support

As it was described to us, the employed staff provide a great deal of the traditional infrastructure support typical for college campuses. The Visiting Team heard a presentation, during a meeting of ExCil, about the efforts to develop NSLAI’s information technology (IT).

The IT coordinator has worked intensively, with very limited resources, to develop innovative systems that support and facilitate a communications infrastructure, and the pedagogical, service, and administrative needs

of the NSLAI. The IT system was characterized as re-imagining the use of a Linux based open source software that is without acquisition cost and is energy efficient. An alternative library has been established that involves bar codes and a catalog. Donated laptops and printers are in use. The staff and faculty report that the computer system now available to the NSLAI, in its reliability, flexibility, and features, is a huge and welcome improvement over what existed at the College prior to its closure. A lack of staff resources limits the further development of the IT system.

Administrative Structure and Community Management

The administration of the NSLAI is grounded in a belief in the value of participatory governance and in the utility of a non-hierarchical, flat administrative organization. Thus there is the four person Executive Collective that coordinates the NSLAI; all decisions are made by ExCil discussions that strive to be collaborative and cooperative manner. There is no President and no Board that needs to approve any decisions. It was noted by a member of the Executive Collective that it was understood that a new Antioch College would have a President and a Governing Board and that this kind of authority structure would be part of a new Antioch College.

Our discussion with the two Community Managers (CMs) was very helpful. Both are recent Antioch College graduates. They emphasized the importance of shared governance as a means of actualizing the ideas of justice and power. They characterized this year's efforts as an exercise in being constantly in survival mode – making do with scarce resources, being by necessity inventive and innovative. They noted, along with others, the importance of COPAS and likened it to required work-study participation. And, as was true in many of our conversations, they mentioned the element of stress and pressure as they attempted to carry on with limited resources

Physical Facilities

Our visit coincided with the almost completion of the recently rented Campus North – a refurbished industrial facility, that is providing the faculty, students, and staff with a 'home' for offices and activities. The architectural planning for making Campus North welcoming and hospitable was made possible by a volunteer College alum. The work to make it ready for use was contributed by students, faculty, staff and community members. About \$57,000 was used from the NSLAI budget to cover the out-of-pocket costs to renovate the space. It is an attractive space and is considered an important anchor for the NSLAI. In addition, in Yellow Springs, some private homes, the Presbyterian and Methodist churches and organizations such as the Odd Fellows and the Senior Center have made space available for classes and programs – some involving rent; others provided gratis.

The lack of the standard campus facilities is considered by some a philosophical adjunct to the determination to make-do with limited resources and to show that the "edifice complex" that characterizes traditional college and university campuses is not essential for providing stimulating and excellent educational experiences. It was acknowledged that some disciplines such as the sciences are quite disadvantaged by the lack of standard laboratories and thus a limiting factor in the curriculum.

Budget and Finances

Information provided by the College Revival Fund indicated an approved budget for the NSLAI for the two semesters at \$1,861,547. In October of 2008 the 10 month budget was adjusted to \$1,595,864 with the lion's share allocated for personnel.

The College Revival Fund's accounting through December show total expenses expenditures at little over \$583,000. During this same period revenue from tuition and fees was approximately \$20,000. Donated funds remaining for the spring semester of the NSLAI equals a little over \$554,700.

A set of equity pay principles were developed collectively that limited the range of salaries for faculty and staff. As a result, some individuals are being paid less than when they were on the Antioch College payroll; others more.

Full time tuition for NSLAI students was set at \$1500 a semester, at \$100 a credit. Had tuition been paid by every student registered for course credits at the rate of \$100 per credit, total tuition revenue for the two semesters would have been \$68,400.

Because the NSLAI is not accredited, students are not eligible for federal financial aid in the form of Pell grants and work-study funds. We were told that in light of the absence of federal financial aid, numbers of students were charged on a sliding scale in accordance with their own resources. Many of the students hold full time and part-time jobs to support themselves. Auditing students not earning credits do not pay any tuition.

Summary Observations and Questions

The Visiting Team wishes to acknowledge the extensive effort that was made to provide us with good information and a warm and sincere welcome. We felt our interactions and listening were extremely beneficial to our understanding of the work of the NSLAI and to an appreciation of the dedicated efforts to continue the core elements that are the Antioch experience while also attempting to innovate as a necessity and in service of the desire to advance an educational vision despite limited resources and constrained circumstances.

While we were not asked by the Board Pro Tem to make recommendations we wish to conclude this report by suggesting some of the questions that the Board Pro Tem might consider if, and when, we have the opportunity to assemble an initial cohort of College faculty, staff, and administrators to plan for a new Antioch College. Specifically:

- What aspects of the NSLAI curriculum and other innovations might be considered in the context of a fully developed liberal arts program committed to classroom, co-op, and community?
- How might we incorporate what has been learned about providing energy efficient, user friendly, and cost-containing IT infrastructure?
- In what programmatic ways might the outreach that has revived the relationships with Yellow Springs community and surrounding colleges be continued and enhanced?
- What can we learn from and incorporate with respect to the kind of nimble and resourceful models that the NSLAI has developed?

Other questions and possibilities will, undoubtedly, come to mind if when, as noted, we have an opportunity to initiate a new era for Antioch College.

This report is respectfully submitted to the ProTem Board by, Frances Degen Horowitz (Vice Chair of the BPT), Prexy Nesbitt (Trustee), Everett Mendelsohn, Steve Schwerner (Alumni Board) and Zee Gamson.

