

September 8, 1969

REPORT ON CHANGES IN CURRICULUM AT ALVERNO COLLEGE, 1964-1969

Within this five year period, two major movements toward changes in curriculum have been undertaken. The first originated with the administration and faculty and was developed from 1964 to 1967. The second involves the entire institution: students, faculty and administration and this is in process right now.

I. Curricular changes developed 1964-67

The curriculum study of 1964-67 was carried on under the direction of a six-member committee consisting of the academic dean and faculty members from the departments of English, history, music, philosophy, and physics. There was a good deal of communication between this committee and the entire faculty, particularly with departmental chairmen. There was also limited communication with students. One meeting with a group of about twenty freshmen and sophomores and another with an equal number of juniors and seniors proved very stimulating to the committee in their work. But the work was primarily that of the faculty and it was by vote of the entire faculty that the new curriculum was adopted in the spring of 1967 for implementation beginning with the freshman class of 1967-68.

The main results of this work on the curriculum can be summarized under eight headings:

1. Larger units of study replaced the numerous small ones that existed in the previous curriculum. Freshmen formerly might take as many as seven separate courses ranging from 1 to 3 semester hours apiece. As a result, their efforts were very dissipated. The new curriculum was a 4-4 plan: four courses each of 4 semester hours are the normal schedule each semester.
2. New inter-disciplinary courses were brought into being: a two-semester course in social science including economics, political science, anthropology, and sociology; a two-semester course in humanities including literature, art, and music.
3. Team teaching became more common, particularly in the two courses mentioned above.
4. Reorganization of courses in major areas took place in order to make best use of the 4-4 schedule. In the case of such professional programs as nursing and music, this also brought with it the tightening of some sequences to release time for students to take advantage of the general education program as fully as possible.

5. One general principle of the new curriculum was that faculty and students together were free to use the time of the course in whatever creative ways they wished. The extent to which this principle is used varies greatly from class to class. Student attendance at classes was no longer a general requirement as it had been previously.

6. Some general requirements were changed. The number of semester hours required in philosophy and theology was reduced. A single course in communications combined the two composition and one speech course that had previously been required. The foreign language requirement was dropped.

7. A senior integrating seminar cutting across departmental lines was built into the curriculum.

8. Departments were encouraged to make more use of advanced placement.

There were virtually no areas of the curriculum entirely untouched by the 4-4 program. In some cases, the change consisted principally of reorganization of material into different units. (For example, a year-long course in physical sciences formerly included concepts from astronomy, chemistry, geology and physics. Now separate four-credit courses in each of these are among the choices available to fill the two-course minimum requirement in science and mathematics.) In other cases, entirely new approaches were used. This was particularly the case when a team of faculty members planned the course together.

## II. Curricular changes developed 1968-69

1. Several interesting experiments with evaluation were carried on during the 1968-69 academic year. A number of the faculty members discussed with their students alternatives to the letter-grade system. Later in the year, they obtained administrative approval to give their students the option of receiving either a letter grade or a short statement of evaluation by the faculty member. In some other classes a traditional grade was given, but only after the faculty member and student had discussed it together.

Although this experimentation took place in less than 10% of the classes, its impact on the entire college went considerably beyond that as the whole question of evaluation came under discussion among many students, faculty members, and administrators.

2. The latest approach to curriculum change is too recent to attempt any full-scale description of where it will lead. It grew out of a suggestion by the joint faculty-student curriculum committee.

In the spring of 1969, this committee looked for a way to initiate a much more total sharing of responsibility for learning, a much greater involvement of students as well as faculty in making learning an exciting, innovative process and in bringing to bear on it the insights of all involved. As a result of their preliminary work, further interest was aroused among students who

volunteered for summer committee work and among the faculty at their Faculty Institute in May. The outcome was "September, 1969" a three-day all-school workshop that opened the year.

A team of four, under the leadership of Judson Jerome from the new Antioch-Columbia experiment, helped get the workshop started. In discussions with administration, faculty, and students they very pointedly raised basic questions about the need for courses, credits and grades and about the need for student involvement for a meaningful learning experience. The first day of the workshop featured an introductory session planned by the students, an all-school meeting with the Antioch team, and group discussions each involving about twenty students and five members of faculty and administration. The second and third days, each class met for an hour and a half to plan together the direction to take. General sessions for freshmen and sophomores, and departmental sessions for juniors and seniors gave an opportunity to pull together some of the most significant ideas emerging from the workshop. The degree of excitement and sense of open-endedness that this engendered is an almost tangible reality on campus at present. What had been an individual effort on the part of some has now the feeling of an all-out venture on the part of all of us together.

A structure for such continued dialogue already exists in the Community Board, a policy making group consisting of students, faculty members, and members of the administration. But the continued vitality of what was begun last week will depend on the participation of many beyond any one committee or group. It is our hope that out of this beginning will come an increasing participation of students together with faculty in the determination of curriculum, of methods of learning, and of new ways of evaluating student performance.

Prepared by,

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