If you would like to read some of the materials that we have been mulling over, please go to Ladd, search under Course: Bates Education Committee (Instructor: Bonnie Shulman) or go to our web site http://www.bates.edu/goals-bates-education-04-05.xml

The Bates community has hosted several speakers recently whose stimulating communications fall on radically opposing sides of issues central to current thinking on the Liberal Arts experience; we were grateful for the opportunity to entertain a range of reaction to some key ideas through these presentations and ensuing discussions with them both.

Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, Core Professor of Philosophy and Women’s Studies at The Graduate School for Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences of The Union Institute & University spoke to a hearty crowd at Bates on January 19th, and met briefly with members of the coordinating committee at breakfast the following morning. Dr. Minnich spoke about interdisciplinary learning, and on how it has transformed, and continues to transform, the academy. She argued that those of us who teach in Colleges and universities must be honest about our commitment to opening minds and hearts, and to preparing young people to make moral decisions. We must not evade this question of morality, however precisely we choose to answer it. Dr. Minnich noted that interdisciplinary learning may take place in many contexts, both within the programs, and in traditional disciplinary classes. She observed that institutions may effect substantial changes, sometimes by taking relatively minor steps. Curricula are more organic than mechanical, so there is no “end point’ for change, and it makes sense to monitor any changes made, over time, making sure that there are resources for addressing problems as they arise.

There will be a curricular poster session for students in the gallery outside Chase Lounge, and corresponding to that held for faculty on December 13th. The posters, which also include one on writing across the curriculum, reflecting information sessions held for faculty last fall, will be on display between February 28th and March 4th. There will be a reception on March 1st. We welcome feedback from all members of the academic community, so if you didn’t manage to get to the December 13th session, or if you are inspired to say something on the basis of another look, please be in touch.
We are grateful to Michael Sargent, Chair, and other members of the College Lecture Committee including our own Marie Hemmelgarn, for inviting Professor Stanley Fish to speak at Bates on February 10th. In a lively and very well attended presentation, Dr. Fish, Emeritus Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Professor of English and Legal Studies, argued that a Liberal Arts education should be justified in terms of nothing except itself. The four or so years’ experience are their own reward, and Professors should stick to teaching the subject(s) in which they were trained, and not have the temerity to dabble in moral instruction, preparation of global citizens, or anything else that falls outside their proper field of expertise. Moral training, civic responsibility, and other serious matters do not belong in the academy. Dr. Fish entertained questions following his talk.

We continue to look carefully at the feedback from December 13th. We look forward to seeing some revised curricular models soon, from our hard working colleagues on the Design Team. After a chance to sift through and discuss them ourselves, we will pass them on to you, our faculty colleagues, so stay tuned!

E-mail someone on the committee, if you would like to talk. We are: John Cole, Dyk Eusden, Leslie Hill, Lynne Lewis, Laurie O’Higgins, Kirk Read, Paula Schlax, Bonnie Shulman, Yang Jerng Hwa, Marie Hemmelgarn, Jill Reich, Pam Baker