

## **ELC RATIONALE**

### **ANTIOCH COLLEGE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY A REPORT FROM THE ANTIOCH RENEWAL COMMISSION**

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Antioch has achieved unique standing and influence among American liberal arts colleges in the 150 years since its founding. From its inception, Antioch broke new ground in its commitment to educate both men and women "without distinction as to privilege." Very shortly after, African-Americans were being educated at Antioch on an equal basis with Whites. All were inspired by first president Horace Mann's ringing admonition to "be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity."

In the 1920s, Antioch pioneered a powerful new direction for American higher education by creating a model for cooperative learning that made work experience a required element in liberal education. Over time, the college has been successful far beyond its size and resources in graduating scholars and leaders who are recognized across the nation for their creativity, influence, and commitment to the public good.

While Antioch rightly takes pride in its distinctive heritage of leadership and accomplishment, the world has changed, and the needs and expectations of today's students have changed too. The Board of Trustees has accordingly convened a Renewal Commission of Antioch leaders and nationally experienced educators to rethink the core principles of an Antioch education, and to propose new directions for the College that will ensure its strength, vitality and renewed reputation for creative educational leadership in an era of heightened expectations.

The Renewal Commission's charge was to create an Antioch College for the future which would incorporate the results of the best research about teaching and learning while honoring and strengthening the College's long-standing commitments to the liberal arts, experiential education and progressive social change.

In this spirit, the Commission has prepared a report that addresses Antioch's educational philosophy and curriculum; organizing principles for community life, self-governance and inclusion; and organizational resources and capacity.

The central vision for the renewed College is a defining curriculum that builds on the College's distinctive heritage and at the same time sets a bold new direction for a liberal arts education. While all elements of the Commission's report include important reforms and recommitments, this new curriculum is groundbreaking - even revolutionary. This bold educational vision is the source of our excitement and of our hope that all the constituents and friends of the College will be newly inspired, just as we have been.

### **Continuing Commitments**

In shaping this proposal, the Commission affirmed three foundational commitments, to:

1. Liberal education as the best and most powerful form of learning for a world characterized by complexity and change;
2. The formation of Antioch graduates who are both prepared and inspired to solve social problems, and win victories for humanity; and
3. The complementarity of classroom, co-op (experiential) and community learning, the so-called "three C's" which have long constituted the curriculum at Antioch College. Together these provide students with the motive and context for analysis, and at the same time, with the foundation for deep learning from experience.

### **The Renewal Plan: Five New Commitments**

To these historic commitments the Commission is adding five additional ones, which together form a unique new context for higher education and an enhanced set of expectations for Antioch College graduates of the future. We are further committed to:

1. Collaborative learning in interdisciplinary team-taught learning communities as the essential context for Antioch education.

Developed and named during the 1980s, learning communities were originally motivated by the pursuit of connected learning. The idea was to reshape at least a portion of the curriculum into topically organized and interdependent inquiry communities in place of individual discipline-based courses which require students to do the work of integration alone, in their heads. Learning communities also provided the opportunity for more student time on task, active learning and community building in the classroom. Later innovators embraced learning communities as a way to reach and engage students, especially first generation students and others who historically have been underserved by higher education. Research has since confirmed that for students in general, participation in learning communities tends to promote student and faculty satisfaction, increase student retention to graduation, and deepen the quality and integration of learning. While learning communities have been widely praised for their educational effectiveness, they constitute only a small portion of the curriculum at most campuses where they have been adopted. At Antioch, we propose to embrace the educational advantages of learning communities, as well as their potential to increase the efficiency and flexibility of our faculty, by building our entire four-year curriculum around a sequence of increasingly specialized and developmentally appropriate learning communities for all of our students.

2. The intentional integration of all of the contexts in which learning takes place at Antioch College.

For over eighty years, generations of Antiochians have reveled in their co-op experiences, and credited them for much of the learning and maturation they achieved at college. But a perennial shortcoming of the Antioch experience is the fact that the integration of co-op learning with classroom and community learning is accidental or serendipitous; few mechanisms exist to ensure that it takes place. In a renewed Antioch, students engaged in co-op will simultaneously participate in learning communities, both in the local "host" community, and, in many cases, on the Antioch campus as well. Students will be encouraged to integrate their academic and field-based learning systematically, with the help of co-op and classroom faculty, as well as staff, employers and other community-based mentors in "host" communities. Antioch will make full use of technological advances that now provide the means to blur the edges of the classroom: to continue academic learning into the work term, or to anticipate the following term while still on co-op.

3. The clear articulation of high expectations for student accomplishment at Antioch, and to reflective practice and outcome-based assessment of student progress.

Years ago, Antioch took the first step away from the constraints of a grades-and-credit mentality by instituting narrative evaluation in place of grades. Now it is time to take the next important stride by evaluating student progress across years, not just across course units, and to do this by means of portfolios and milestone assessments that both guide and document student achievement over time. The new Antioch will set clear expectations for student performance, will develop new frameworks and standards for assessing student progress, and will invest in ways to help the entire community, including students themselves, to make assessment the stimulant for deeper and more powerful forms of learning.

4. Inclusion and intellectual freedom as catalysts for educational excellence and for building skills for social and democratic responsibility.

Antioch has always welcomed diversity and provided public leadership in challenging social hierarchies and exclusions. Now the Commission seeks a new level of diversity and civic maturity for the College within the context of Antioch's storied tradition of social justice and progressive activism. Antioch will create an intellectual and social environment in which all participants take seriously the democratic challenge of learning and working together across multiple forms of difference and in which all participants seek ways to advance the core democratic commitments to intellectual freedom, equality, justice, duty and interdependence. The new vision will catapult the College beyond color and class difference and will make the College a beacon of intercultural and democratic creativity.

5. The creation of a vibrant educational community that intentionally cultivates and assesses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to contribute to intergroup learning, to take responsibility for shared leadership, and to advance constructive change.

Education for leadership is a success story at Antioch, judging from the number and quality of the leaders it has graduated in the past. But the College has never carried out an analysis of the skills and knowledge that constitutes an optimal curriculum for leadership, nor has it implemented a methodology for ensuring and assessing student achievement in this area. Constructing and testing a set of learning experiences which promises to create effective change agents for the nation is a new mission for the College, yet one which carries forward the best of Antioch's history and traditions.

## **A Unique New Liberal Arts Education**

Few of these elements are entirely new. Several have been sufficiently tested at Antioch and elsewhere to give the Commission strong confidence in their effectiveness. What is new and distinctive in the Commission's proposal is the intentional combination of all five into a comprehensive design for undergraduate learning from the first to the final year. We believe that this combination, as designed in the proposal and further refined by the faculty, will reinforce and multiply the individual benefits of each element in the mix. No college in the United States has adopted the particular features we present here as a single coherent mutually reinforcing whole.

The new Antioch curriculum will teach students how to learn with and from others in collaborative learning communities that are diverse, interdisciplinary, problem-based, and tied to action communities in different parts of the United States and the world. Simultaneously, the new curriculum will prepare all Antioch students to take increasing responsibility, individually and with others, for identifying significant problems, and working proactively to discover solutions.

It is the Commission's hope and expectation that Antioch is mapping a new direction for liberal arts education. An Antioch education will be linked integrally and powerfully to urgent problems and to ongoing communities of inquiry, analysis and practical application, while strengthening rigor and relevance within traditionally high academic standards.