

## **Faculty Retreat Summary notes, September 9<sup>th</sup> 2017.**

### **Introduction**

In accordance with the mandate of Pitzer's Academic Planning Committee, APC organized a faculty retreat on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017 to 'identify and prioritize academic goals for the college' (from the Faculty Handbook §IV.F.1.2 on the overall charge to APC). The one-day retreat was structured around feedback from a faculty survey on areas of greatest concern and ones identified by President Oliver as potential priorities for the institution. Six broad categories were identified out of the survey responses by APC as major discussion topics for the retreat:

1. Financial Aid and Admissions
2. Campus Climate
3. Facilities
4. Curricular Strengthening
5. The Consortium
6. Integration of Academic Units

The retreat was further structured to cover these topics in terms of the current state of affairs of each, as well as our projections and thoughts on where we'd like to see the college progress on these topics in the future. We did not in the end come out of the retreat with clear priorities, but had fruitful discussions of these big topic areas. These discussions are summarized below. Some broad, cross cutting themes stood out, including a desire for more transparency in our operations and information sharing across the institution, as well as equity and fairness in resource allocation and costs across stakeholders. Finally, a sense of accomplishment in terms of what we have built and achieved at the institution emerges from the discussion notes, but this is also tempered with concerns about long-term institutional sustainability, creatively and broadly defined, and how to maintain our achievements and build on them into the future.

### **Financial Aid and Admissions**

Discussion ranged over a wide number of topics, including impressions of and potential fixes to the current financial aid and admissions systems in place at Pitzer. Many questions were posed in the group about how our financial aid and admissions processes work in practice, with many participants expressing current ignorance and a wish to know more in order to better assess questions surrounding financial aid and admissions. Members of the group shared experiences with parts of these systems, through working with individual students on financial aid or through meeting our first years in first year seminar classes or through First Gen programming. Faculty participants in this group often noted some dissonance between these incoming students' wants and needs and what Pitzer can and can't provide. They also expressed that without more detailed data, it is hard to extrapolate from individual cases.

In terms of admissions more specifically, these discussions included direct observation of some first year student's 'dissatisfaction' with course offerings, programming and other

limited resources, and that this reality seems to come as a surprise to students when they get to campus. For example, many courses in the catalog are not currently open to first year students, which is a source of frustration for them. This relates to admissions in terms of whether during the admissions process, students get a different message about what they will be able to do once they get here and some concern that our messaging out during admissions does not match up with the reality on campus. Without hard data, participants in this discussion group could not be sure how much of an issue this might be. Observations were shared about some of our admissions events and it seemed like they did a good job describing Pitzer accurately, so it was not clear where the disconnect is happening between expectations and reality.

Other related issues and concerns about admissions surrounded questions about the overall make-up of entering classes. What is the distribution of incoming students across various interests, identities, socio-economic classes and even nationalities, given our growing international student population? How is the distribution changing and what are the recent trends? How might this impact what kind of classes they want to take and resources they are likely to need? Are we prepared every year with each new incoming class to offer the classes they are interested in or support them fully in other ways, like tutoring support for example? The sense of the group was again that this is another source of dissonance that we should get more data about or perhaps do more to help students form more realistic expectations on classes and educational programming, as well as encourage them to take classes in new fields they might not have considered, which is a traditional strength of liberal arts education. Based on faculty anecdotal data, students have become more rigid in their interests over the past few years, less willing to explore what is here. How much should we cater to this versus encouraging the students to try new things and make better use of what we do offer? Should we make Pitzer better fit the students, both in terms of possibly adjusting our course offerings, but also in terms of recognizing that the liberal arts is a 'boutique' and potentially inherently classist undertaking, which we should engage with and consider its limitations. Or should we encourage the students to adapt to Pitzer, in concrete ways like helping form more realistic expectations about classes, but also again in broader ways as part of our overall mission, to teach students who we are, what are our values, especially if they are different from the students' values, to help them grow intellectually and socially, to help them navigate the transition into a new community that has an existing identity and structure.

One concrete idea to address some of these issues included putting together a set of 'prix fixe' menus of course offerings in some key topic areas, like an 'arts prix fixe' set course schedule or a 'social science prix fixe' menu. With more coordination and earlier communication, it might be possible to use this system (or something like it) to predict a bit in advance what first year enrollment might look like, but also to guarantee to incoming students spots in available, appropriate classes. Other colleges have 'summer advising' and other tools to sort out class schedules for their incoming students (like CMC) ahead of time. This could mitigate frustration at Pitzer, and could also be used to encourage students to take classes they might not have chosen otherwise, and other educational objectives could also be built in, for example.

On financial aid, many participants expressed concern about our limited ability to offer financial aid and raised questions asking how serious this limitation is in practice, again calling for more data and more transparency about financial aid. For example, one participant made the observation that we have not increased financial aid in ten years even though we have been actively fundraising for it. Others commented that there are students who do not receive financial aid, but are still resource constrained and cannot buy books, do not have laptops and do not have smart phones, so our cut-offs for aid seem to be missing a segment of our student population that is currently at a disadvantage in terms of resources needed for obtaining an education at Pitzer. Other anecdotal data described our current rules that seem limiting in other ways, like our current policy of taking away financial aid one for one in dollar terms if a student obtains other funding, like through a scholarship or fellowship. Although this will help stretch limited financial aid resources, it also discourages students from seeking these opportunities and does not recognize that existing financial aid packages might actually be too limited, and students need more than what they've got, which is why they applied for outside resources in the first place. It was agreed that more information sharing about our current financial aid policies and practices is needed, as well as a more active feedback mechanism between our financial aid recipients and the institution to find out about potential problems and think of solutions earlier to ease stresses on financial aid recipients.

Suggested solutions or desired outcomes on financial aid involved an internal audit of current spending, both on financial aid as well as how it relates to spending at the college more broadly. Can we save money somewhere and funnel these savings into financial aid? Can we use our resources more efficiently and free up resources for more financial aid in that way? Other ideas were to help students access real resources, like used smart phones or laptops, like a 're-room' process for academic materials, to ease some financial constraints in ways that don't involve raising more funds. Other desired outcomes involved more explicit target setting and modeling of different financial aid levels. For example, our current discount rate is about 25%, in terms of average financial aid given across all students, and has been at this level for some time. Is this the number that we want? If we wanted to increase it, how much more money would we need? The group would like some more formal analysis of these kinds of prospective questions, to facilitate a real discussion of priorities and trade-offs necessary to increase the availability of financial aid.

### **Campus Climate**

The faculty discussions on campus climate considered many different aspects and components of campus climate, describing it in detail from a variety of perspectives (student, faculty, staff, identity groups). The group also highlighted some information needs that will help us to better understand both positive and negative drivers of our overall campus climate and had some suggestions for improving campus climate in the future.

The group identified both strengths and weaknesses about Pitzer that contribute to the climate experienced by different community members. Some strengths that we have are our existing diversity across our faculty, staff and students, our established support mechanisms within Pitzer and across the consortium made up of networks of affinity

groups, positive support from Student Senate to improve campus climate, a community of engaged faculty, students and staff that is willing to engage in conversations about our campus climate and some institutional freedom to explore concerns about campus climate issues with some flexibility and creativity.

That said, the group also identified weaknesses leading to a poor campus climate. For example, an existing survey of campus climate issues for staff is apparently very negative and many comments indicated a concern for staff experiencing a poor working environment in terms of climate. It was also noted by some members that we should evaluate our outside contracting policy and ‘walk our talk’ as an important element of improving staff experience at Pitzer. Group members also related accounts from students and their negative interactions with faculty and staff who don’t recognize how their behavior might impact them. For example, micro aggressions contribute to a poor campus climate for students and also impede their ability to learn and complete their academic program. Lack of transparency and limitations to shared governance were also cited as contributing to a poor campus climate. Less diversity, particularly in STEM fields for faculty, or across socio-economic groups for students, due to our tuition dependence, as well potentially limited ideological diversity, also weakens our campus climate.

There was a general sentiment that the existing strengths identified did not go far enough, with many suggestions made on how to improve campus climate and bolster existing resources. Several suggestions involved simply providing more opportunity to talk and share information across the Pitzer community about campus climate issues. One such suggestion was to produce a video with student testimonials that could be shown to faculty to make them more aware of student experiences on campus. Others suggested more faculty training and efforts to raise awareness around campus climate issues, and also invest in a system to rapidly respond to negative incidents. A working group dedicated to campus climate issues was also suggested as a way to keep attention focused on improving it and working through the many issues raised. Other ideas along this line included creating a faculty-staff solidarity working group, or the development of the ‘Unicorn Resource Center’ to focus resources on improving campus climate. Faculty in the group also noted limited current resources for student wellness through Monsour, and suggested seeking out new partnerships, like the Clinebell Institute.

Data requests from this group included different breakdowns (numbers vs. percentages) of campus demographic data, for students, staff and faculty, including current snapshots and trends, as well as selection data, in terms of the composition of our applicant pools (student, staff and faculty), salary data for administrators and staff, and more information on student positions and feelings about campus climate. This can help us get a better picture of some of the potential factors at work (interpersonal, experiential, distributional) that generate the overall campus climate.

## **Facilities**

The discussion focused on the many challenges the college faces when it comes to its facilities. In addition to the physical plant, faculty discussed the need to address staffing and personnel as an integral part of these challenges. The main problems identified by

faculty were general deferred maintenance, constraints to our curriculum and our mission imposed by facility availability, and a perceived lack of transparency in resource allocation processes at the college.

The question of what is not being delivered from a pedagogical perspective given the current classroom setups we have was brought up. Challenges to specific disciplines such as art and sciences were discussed. According to some faculty, the arts are isolated and suffer from reduced visibility due to the lack of appropriate facilities for the work they do. Arts faculty need support with respect to OSHA (Occupation Safety and Health Administration). In the sciences, the fact that the new Keck Science Department building will only meet its needs as of 2016 was a reason for concern. Faculty brought up the fact that the new Redford Conservancy was not part of KSD's strategic planning process and that its focus on sustainability off sets the needs of KSD. There was consensus on the fact that the shortage of vans is a current limitation to community engagement, a vital component of our curriculum.

Faculty discussed the need to take staffing into account when planning around facilities, especially in fields like Art, Media, Sciences, and Environmental Analysis. Salary constraints as a reason for staff turnover were mentioned as well as a concern for fair compensation for adjunct faculty.

In spite of recognizing that sharing facilities is often very challenging, faculty proposed interdisciplinary approaches as a solution to the situation some fields are experiencing. A STEAM building, which would serve the needs of both the Arts and the Sciences, was mentioned. Faculty also discussed the need to create flexible but heterogeneous classrooms, consider the benefits of nomadic teaching and envision what Pitzer is beyond the physical campus. Strategic fundraising for facilities and a new campus plan are necessary to undertake these initiatives.

### **Curricular Strengthening**

The productive discussion was guided by the idea of considering strengths and weaknesses of our curriculum before identifying primary issues for strategic planning. Discussion participants would like more conversations like this, as well as more opportunities for informal peer conversations about teaching and research. The breakout groups at the retreat discussed a variety of topics, from which the need for maintaining the pedagogically innovative and interdisciplinary edge in the face of enrollment pressures and limited resources emerged as an overarching theme. We believe in our planning we need to focus on our values and educational projects, and not be driven solely by student demand. Four specific aspects of our curriculum were pinpointed as areas of fundamental educational needs.

One aspect concerns data science, or, more specifically, a liberal arts interpretation of data science. There is complete lack of computer/data science classes at Pitzer, along with not enough faculty/curricular support for the human biology major and the other sciences. A possible idea may be to align curricular programming in data science with community and public health, giving this branch an interdisciplinary and very Pitzeresque flavor (science, technology, and society). Pitzer may also benefit from a math and/or

data/computer science resource center, modeled after the writing center. Such a center can assist first-year seminars and provide tutoring.

The second aspect concerns the need for more investment in writing and composition classes. The discussion focused on the best ways to teach writing, including strategies for our growing number of international students. There was support for the current model of having full-time faculty teach first-year seminars and advise those students. At some schools (e.g., Swarthmore) writing is taught through the disciplines rather than in first-year courses, which may be a possible alternative.

The third aspect concerns a diverse array of curricular issues related to ethnic studies, the LGBTQ curriculum, intercultural understanding, and community engagement. Ethnic studies needs strengthening throughout offerings in art, literature, music, humanities, and environment to sustain a diversity of classes within the major ethnic studies. The LGBTQ curriculum is pretty much non-existent at Pitzer and therefore students need to enroll in courses offered by other members of the consortium.

Intercultural understanding, social justice, and community engagement form the fourth identified area of curricular needs. The skills of intercultural understanding is already present, but it is possible that we need to do a better job of cementing it (or selling?) it as a thing. Similarly, we need to improve articulating the pragmatic/vocational advantages of having depth in social justice. Community engagement is already embedded in our curriculum, but again, we can do even better. For example, Pitzer has laid an excellent groundwork in Native American Studies, a model of long-term engagement and learning from community partners. Some of the local tribes have noticed and would like to contribute to it. One idea suggests a full first-year seminar, with the first semester's focus on writing/composition, and second semester classes that focus on intercultural understanding and social justice praxis/theory requirements.

One skill we want all our students to develop is evidentiary thinking, irrespective of their major. That means not just recognizing false information, but also statements that are true but misleading (recognizing when people lie with statistics, for example). It also means breaking out of myopic disciplinary lenses. Our students should be able to read the news and analyze events historically, economically, culturally, sociologically, etc. We can teach evidentiary thinking within our own disciplines, but we want our students to be able to make the connections across disciplines, integrating qualitative and quantitative information. Some of us liked the idea of focusing the FYS on evidentiary thinking rather than writing. Others thought the two go hand in hand, which is more in line with the positive opinion of the current first-year seminar model (see above).

Even though we are good at making due with very little, there is always a danger of losing our innovative edge given institutional pressures, service burden, and enrollment. The underlying problem here is that we cannot teach all the students we have; a potential balance of trade issue. Pitzer benefits from the opportunity to send students to other members of the consortium. But there is always the risk of students getting shut out from other colleges and this potentially impacts the ability to take the courses needed for a major.

In moving forward we need to pay attention to shifts and student pragmatism in taking classes, and think about the asymmetries in our enrollment. We also need a mechanism to support the labor of creating new concentrations or intriguing curriculum that fits student and disciplinary needs, and explore new areas of study. We need data on mentoring, advising, letters of recommendation (the “invisible labor”) in addition to student numbers in courses so that we can work on equity across all faculty. Some of our field groups have average class sizes in the 12-14 range, while other field groups have average class sizes in the 24-29 range. So professors in some field groups teach twice as many students each year than professors in other field groups. This kind of inequity is also unsustainable. We therefore need to bring more equity to our teaching loads, and more resources to the heavily impacted field groups.

We discussed the possibility of going to a 2-2 teaching load, perhaps every other year (2-3/2-2). Our teaching might improve in semesters when we have only 2 courses and we don’t want to lose potential new hires to sister institutions with a 2-2 load. We recognized that lowering the course load would worsen Pitzer’s balance of trade with the consortium, but some of the difference could be covered by long-term adjuncts that are not exploited, but are given opportunities for professional development (as in MLLC’s approach to its adjuncts). The question was raised, if curricular strengthening means adding new lines, should they be added where there is curricular pressure? Or should they address innovative things that we want to do? Finally, we should look at our trustees and seeing how they can lend their expertise to strengthening our curriculum.

### **The Consortium**

Discussion topics included Pitzer’s identity and curricular leadership within the consortium, the relationships different field groups have with peers in their disciplines and departments at the other colleges, consortial resources and support (or lack thereof) for students from diverse backgrounds and with different needs, and the administrative structure of the consortium.

There was wide consensus on the fact that our social justice and community-based approach to teaching, learning, and research is our main contribution to the consortium, and what makes us unique as an institution. Faculty agreed that this is what attracts students from the other colleges to Pitzer, what has made the college successful at innovating and taking the lead in consortial initiatives and programs, and where the potential is to grow in the future. The question of the imbalance in resources among the different colleges was brought up as a possible threat to the success and sustainability of initiatives led by Pitzer. How to create incentives to maximize collaboration with the other colleges when we need it? How to prevent Pitzer from steering programs and projects that are subsequently overtaken by colleges with more resources? When and how should Pitzer be a leader in curricular innovation?

Faculty agreed on several possible new programs that could grow out of existing strengths and that would fit this model of distinguishing ourselves through innovation tied to our identity and core values. These programs included: Critical Criminal Justice, Native American Studies, and Data Science with a social justice emphasis. In terms of

existing programs that should have a strong participation from students from the other colleges in the consortium, Pitzer-run study abroad programs were mentioned.

Faculty shared their varying experiences of collaboration and interaction with faculty within their own fields across the consortium, from informal gatherings and formal and informal coordination of course offerings and faculty hiring to programs that fully work in an intercollegiate manner. While some faculty were satisfied with the level of cooperation with at least some of the colleges, the issue of restricted enrollment for Pitzer students (especially in fields with enrollment pressures) was discussed. Occasional overlapping of the expertise of faculty being hired and an unwillingness to engage in a dialogue to share resources and do curricular planning to meet the needs of majors across the colleges were also discussed.

Faculty agreed on the need to partner with other colleges to address campus climate issues and to provide support to low-income, first generation, and minority students. Some faculty expressed concerns about a perceived lack of leadership and involvement of the administrators from the Claremont University Consortium. The importance of the Academic Deans Committee in initiating, facilitating and sustaining necessary collaboration between the colleges was discussed. The lack of incentives for presidents to work in a consortial spirit, and the possibility of bringing the other colleges into our own strategic planning process were also part of the discussion.

### **Integration of Academic Units**

The discussion involved a number of different topics but mainly focused on centers, field groups, and intercollegiate programs. Existing challenges were identified and discussed, producing several concrete suggestions for future developments and activities. Four main topics emerge from the discussion: 1) better communication between units, 2) desire to pause and reflect on structure and charge of centers and other units, 3) focused programming to better coordinate centers/field groups, centered on our educational objectives, and 4) the vision of a re-organization of field groups.

Collaboration was seen as a way of maximizing resources and improving the outcomes, but collaboration requires good communication across different units. However, a recurrent theme throughout the discussion was the lack of communication, an important but not insurmountable challenge. It was noted that Pitzer College has a lot of expertise in many different areas yet members of our community are unaware of this. Challenges also arise from working in isolation and having unequal/different resources and staff support, paired with apparent competition between centers for advancement funding priorities.

In part, these challenges may have arisen because we might have outgrown our current organizational structure. It was noted that Pitzer has seen a proliferation of centers, and thus Pitzer may need a pause for reflection and re-adjustment before moving ahead. Faculty would like to urge greater faculty awareness of and involvement in centers and programs, being mindful of financial constraints, to maximize mindful and engaged collaboration across academic units. To enable this process, a 3-year moratorium on new centers was suggested, with the exception of the new proposed Quantitative Reasoning



Center. All discussion participants were overwhelmingly in favor of that but we need to think strategically about what will it fall under (student affairs and academic affair), and whether Pitzer College should seek collaboration with CMC. The increase of student enrollment and faculty lines over the past years may be another sign that Pitzer has outgrown its organizational structure. With increased numbers come organizational problems that need to be confronted, especially in terms of field groups. Pitzer needs structures that advocate continuity of centers, programs, field groups, and now is the time to rethink the existing scaffolding, which in some cases appears as relics of an earlier time.

Faculty seem to have no interest in producing an organizational structure like other colleges but want to improve the structure that is in place to better confront the increased numbers of students and faculty. That process includes both rethinking the role and charge of centers/and current structure of field groups. Through time, Pitzer College has done very well not to become bureaucratic, and it's the faculty's wish to remain that way. Organizational improvements to meet the new challenges may include periodic meetings with center directors facilitated by Dean or an Associate Dean, but each center should also rethink/revisit its specific charge, reporting directions, term contracts, planning for openings/vacancies, and their relations to field groups and curriculum. Another task is to determine how to best deal with the problem of succession of directors/longevity of directorship.

Nuts and bolts of organizational structure aside, one can also incentivize better integration by focused programming. For example, the development of periodic themes can guide intersectional conversations for better integration of academic units. Fundraising across centers and programs should support specific initiatives, which is expected to minimize competition and maximize collaborative impact. More broadly, the faculty needs to think about educational objectives, including quantitative reasoning, community, sustainability, and writing in a systematic way, so that academic affairs can improve the integration of the various objectives.

The discussion also produced a new idea of organizing field groups, in the broadest sense. The vision is to restructure ourselves into bigger, interdisciplinary groups ("networks"). It would take what's best about the current system and push it forward. It would limit the role of field groups for facilitating a major and to mount a curriculum, and the field groups would be coordinated by the new interdisciplinary networks. Such networks may consist of faculty in different disciplines, perhaps defined by themes such as Social Responsibility, Sustainability, Local-Global/Intercultural Understanding, and others. Faculty would still be affiliated with field groups, but only for purposes of the major. The networks would be in charge of organizing personnel reviews for APT, comprehensive program reviews, and oversee annual assessments. It's a preliminary idea, and obviously needs a great deal of discussion and elaboration, but it shows a potential direction in re-organizing our structure to meet the new challenges that largely result from Pitzer's growth.