

Annual Committee Report for Experimental College Board

Academic Year 2010-2011

The Experimental College (ExColl) remains a welcoming, academically nimble place to try new curricular initiatives at Tufts. It enjoys high student engagement, and offers egalitarian access to small classes.

The ExColl is an increasingly popular resource for Freshmen because we offer small classes on intriguing topics, available to students without pre-requisites. As such, the ExColl offers a way for our Freshmen to jump-start the small elite college experience that drew them to Tufts in the first place.

Most instructors are recruited from the vibrant community of accomplished professionals in the Boston area. Course topics range among these general areas:

- Business and Law
- Human Rights and Social Change
- World Cultures
- Media and the Arts
- Health and Wellness
- Science and Technology.

GOALS OF THE EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE

- introduce new topics to students at a formative time in their career, without requiring prior experience in the subject area.
- fill gaps in the conventional curriculum.
- contemporize education by teaching timely, situational topics in a small class setting (twenty or fewer students).
- engage students in shaping their own education.
- encourage meaningful dialog between students and faculty

The Board met roughly every two weeks, to discuss policy issues, organize campus events, and choose more than 50 new courses to offer to the Tufts community.

Policy issues: 1) Discussions of the perceived merits and drawbacks of allowing lap-tops in the classroom. The topic is so polemic that it was tabled as a potential campus event for Fall 2011, pending contacting educators in our region with experience in this area of policy. (some claim that the laptop genie is already out of the bottle, rendering debate irrelevant; others point to recent decrees by law school professors banning laptops and mobile devices in their classrooms)

2) The Board discussed the feasibility and value of purchasing a set of Kindle e-readers for use by patrons of Tisch Library.

3) The Board (mostly Robyn Gittleman and Chris Rogers) arranged upcoming discussions with Dean Linda Abriola over ways to attract more Engineering students to ExColl activities.

Campus events:

October 2010: Spearheaded by Program Assistant Ali Mehlsak, ExColl offered a **book release panel** with alum Steve Wermeil, about his biography: Justice Brennan, Liberal Champion (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). Panelists included former ExColl instructors, two former Brennan clerks, and was moderated by President Bacow (ca. 50 in attended).

November 2010: “**Election Night Trivia**”. Politics and government-related trivia, with two teams of faculty vs. six teams of students. (Attended by about 50 people.)

May 2011: “**Student-Faculty Trivia Challenge**” hosted by local pub quiz professional. Teams of faculty/administrators/graduate students to play against teams of undergraduates. (Attendance expected to exceed 100)

New Course Offerings: About 700 students (15% of Tufts undergraduates) take one or more ExCollege course(s) in any given semester.

Fall 2010: A total of **153 course proposals** (includes proposals for new-courses, previously-taught courses, previously rejected courses, and ‘service’ courses sponsored by ExColl –such as Education for Active Citizenship), were submitted for consideration to teach in Spring 2011. Of these, 83 new-course proposals were distributed to 17 subcommittees (each consisting of one faculty member and two students) that interviewed the prospective instructor about their proposed course. Finally, 98 meritorious courses (from among new proposals, re-applicants who had previously taught at ExColl, and re-applicants who had previously been declined by ExColl) were evaluated by the Board. We decided on **24 courses to offer** in Spring 2011, based on subcommittee input, subject area, and teaching style.

Spring 2011: There were **130 course proposals** submitted to ExCollege. Of these, 95 proposals were farmed out to 18 subcommittees. The Board voted on 113 courses, choosing 22 new courses to offer in Fall 2011.

Peer teaching (in independent courses) and peer advising for first-year students (Explorations and Perspectives) are signature programs of the ExCollege. In Spring 2011, we offered **four courses taught by undergraduates**. Each course carried one credit, and was graded pass/fail:

- “Alpinismo: culture and science of mountain climbing”
by Nick Levin and Ryan Stolp
- “Psychology Magic and Performance” by Marcel Babai
- “Investigations in Hypnosis” by Aliza Howitt
- “HBO’s The Wire: TV and the American Inner City”
by Alexander Hart

Collaborative Programming: The ExCollege works with other groups on campus to offer courses and campus events:

- Communications and Media Studies Program (CMS)
- Tufts Institute of the Environment (TIE)
- Tufts Pre-law society
- Environmental Consciousness Outreach (ECO)
- Institute for Global Learning (IGL)
- Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service (TCCPS)
- Tisch Library
- Tufts Univ. Police Department (TUPD)

We appreciate these continuing partnerships.

Next year’s **five student members** of the ExCollege Board include four women and one man. Three are Seniors, one is a Junior, the other a Sophomore. One is an international student. The others are from California, Illinois, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Their majors include Political Science, Psychology, Economics and Computer Science.

Respectfully submitted,
Prof. George S. Ellmore, Chair ExCollege Board
April 29, 2011