Vision for the Future

** Definitions **

“**Strong**: These programs have numbers of students to support the number of classes and faculty in the program; they have sufficient faculty to teach a comprehensive program; they are innovative and willing to change to incorporate new learning styles or new career opportunities; they are actively involved in partnerships or collaborations with other entities within the university and throughout the community.

“**Weak**: These programs have either too few students to remain financially viable or too few faculty to offer full programs; they are static and do not change with changing environments; they are isolated, not involved to a great extent with other programs, the general education, or outside entities.

**Strong Programs**

**Psychology**

This program has two faculty members who teach primarily within the program, plus four adjunct faculty and five faculty who also teach in other programs (primarily education faculty). The program is in the Education College, and many of its courses are exclusively for Education majors. There are approximately 80 psychology majors on campus, one of the larger programs in the College of Arts and Sciences, despite the small number of faculty. This program makes it into the “strong” category due to its work with other programs (especially education, DCE, gerontology, and sociology), its ability to do a lot with relatively few resources, and its academic strength and innovation. The program recently added a research component that has been very successful and has led to students making well-received presentations at academic conferences.

Strengths: Strong academics; partnerships with other programs; get a lot out of a little

Challenges: Need more faculty for a more well-rounded, flexible program; more students need to take the full two-semester research sequence (rather than just the first semester requirement)
**Director of Christian Education**

The DCE program has three full-time faculty and one adjunct. The program has only upper-level classes (plus one sophomore-level “Introduction to DCE” course) and requires application for entry into the program after the sophomore year. The program graduates approximately 16 DCE’s per year. It has also instituted a graduate level DCE certification for students with undergraduate degrees already.

**Strengths:** Strong full complement of faculty; variety of options for the program; strong academics and expectations; good partnerships with churches around the country.

**Challenges:** The difficulty of finding so many churches able to supervise interns every year requires one faculty member to spend a large fraction of his time traveling; the program faces continual perception (even on the part of potential majors) of DCE’s as “camp leaders” who lead songs and play games.

**Biology**

The Biology program serves both traditional majors in biology and biology education as well as the bulk of the health professions programs. The program serves approximately 80 – 100 students with 3½ full-time faculty (one biology faculty member is also a multi-sport coach) and 1 adjunct. The program offers several general education courses, and has developed new course offerings and program options in the past few years. It partners with other departments to serve majors from Health and Human Performance and Psychology, and is in the process of developing an Environmental Science major with the Social Science Department.

**Strengths:** Strong faculty; commitment to academic integrity; service to other departments; innovative and willing to branch out.

**Challenges:** Sub-standard facilities that make it very difficult to recruit students; outside constituents, some of whom acknowledge the strength of the program and others who do not want Concordia to offer a strong Biology program; personalities who have difficulty promoting themselves or requesting more resources; all faculty teach overloads, this limits their ability to work on developing new initiatives.
Weak Programs

Math
The Math program has 3 full-time faculty, an additional two who also teach computer science and often one adjunct faculty; it serves approximately 20-25 majors combined in Elementary, Middle and Secondary Education, plus a liberal arts major. Of these, only about 3-5 per year take the upper-level math courses. The program has changed very little in several decades, except to contract the number of courses offered for general education majors. The program believes in a “one-size fits all” approach to general education and has eliminated or will eliminate all but one course available for non-majors. In its recent hires the department has searched for faculty who will fill perceived gaps in coverage of the discipline, rather than for generalists and those who can reach out to non-majors and undecideds who can grow the program.

Strengths: Academically strong faculty; strong expectations of students; strong embrace of technology.

Challenges: Willingness to serve only exceptional math prospects; unwillingness to partner with other departments or to serve the needs of other departments or the general education; few majors and few options for non-majors.

Computer Science
The Computer Science program has three full-time faculty, each of whom also has at least half their responsibility in administration or devoted to Computing Services. The number of students served by the program has fallen dramatically in recent years, down to only a total of 48 students (in six total courses) in Fall 08 and 24 total students (in six courses) in Spring 09. The program graduates 1-2 students per year. The department has partnered with the Business department to offer an Information Systems program, but it has not significantly increased enrollment in the program. The faculty are strong and committed, but are stretched between teaching and computing services responsibilities and have not changed the core program in several years. In particular, they have done little to incorporate web programming into the program, despite the obvious market for it.
Strengths: Knowledgeable experienced faculty; strong academic expectations; opportunities for students to work with computing services before graduation; students who do go through the program have had no difficulty finding jobs.

Challenges: Faculty stretched between teaching and technical and administrative responsibilities; little innovative change made to program.

Art
Art is a program that could easily fall under the “strongest” category; it is certainly a flagship program at Concordia. The program has over 100 students, a wide variety of degree options, and its students are very successful in competitions. The Art faculty have high expectations and demand a lot from their students. All these qualities point to a strong, dynamic program. On the other hand, the Art program has unique challenges. It has recently lost three faculty members (including the department chair), and has replaced two. A long-time faculty member and former chairman still plays a leadership role in the department, but only at his schedule and in accordance with his particular interests. The members of the department have formed “cliques”, and often do not work well together. Among departments at Concordia, the members of the Art department are noticeably less involved with the workings of the university as a whole than members of other departments. Instead, the Art department faculty are known for pursuing the interests of their department outside the normal channels – going outside the development office for fund-raising, going directly to the president for requests or complaints. This approach has been successful in securing resources for the department, but it has tended to isolate the department from the rest of the university. This isolation can be seen in the lack of partnerships or collaborations with other departments, and in the minimal general education offerings by the department. The students in the department receive admirable counseling and career advice, but the graduates are often not successful in obtaining jobs that make full use of their education. Further, Art students often struggle to succeed in classes outside their program. This may not be entirely the fault of the department, but Art students themselves report that they are unable to put in the necessary time on any other classes but their Art classes, due to the expectations in those classes.
Strengths: Large, well-known program; high expectations for students; good facilities and resources

Challenges: Lack of consistency and community in personnel; lack of involvement with rest of the university; unwillingness to allow students to pursue educational interests outside the program

Current Program Assessment

Currently there are two parallel processes for program assessment. The first process is a planning document that each department writes generally every year or two. This document lays out an analysis of student numbers, faculty loads, course offerings, resource use and needs, plans for the future, and other emphases requested by the dean for the particular year. These documents are generally a description of the department from the department’s point of view, designed to inform an outside reader (generally in the administration). These documents are almost universally produced to put as positive a face on the department as possible, with the exception of resources, where they usually paint a picture of desperate need.

The second process for program assessment is within the context of assessment plans designed to satisfy external accrediting agencies. Each department has an assessment plan that calls for collecting and analyzing and reviewing data, then using the analysis to make changes to programs. This assessment is theoretically designed to inform the departments internally and used to better the program. However, since the assessment is ultimately presented to accrediting agencies like the Higher Learning Commission, in practice the assessments tend to paint a rosy picture. Furthermore, most departments have fallen behind in completing these assessments, leading to a revisit from the HLC.

In anticipation of this return visit from the HLC, all the departments at Concordia are in the process of revising their assessment plans. The goal is to make them: a) more streamlined, so departments are more likely to actually complete them, and b) more directly useful to the departments. This revision process was begun this May, so it remains to be seen how successful it will be.
What is needed is a system where departments are given the time and the support to critically assess their programs. While assessment is a responsibility of every faculty member and every department, too often the shared responsibility of program assessment falls to the bottom of the priority list. The system also needs to allow departments the ability to find and point out weaknesses in their programs, without fear that their resources will be cut as a result, and with the knowledge that the administration will support efforts to strengthen weaknesses and correct problems. There is some hope that this will happen with the new assessment plans being developed by departments for the HLC, since they are supposed to be written in such a way as to be useful for the department. There needs to be more education and more reassurance that the HLC will not punish critical assessments, but only wants to see that meaningful assessment is being done.