

# **Final Report and Recommendations of the Access to Success Working Group**

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**18 June 2013  
(revised 15 September 2013)**

## I. Introduction

“In every child who is born, under no matter what circumstances, and of no matter what parents, the potentiality of the human race is born again: and in him, too, once more, and of each of us, our terrific responsibility towards human life; towards the utmost idea of goodness, of the horror of error, and of God.”

James Agee, a graduate of Exeter and Harvard, wrote that in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. In the summer of 1936, Henry Luce, the publisher of *Fortune*, sent Agee and a photographer, Walker Evans, a graduate of Andover and Yale, to Alabama to document the lives of tenant farmers during the Depression. There these sons of privilege discovered their terrific responsibility to others in a Lear-like epiphany: “[We] have taken too little care of this.”

Throughout its history, Phillips Academy has embraced an increasingly more complex vision of its responsibility to others and of what “youth from every quarter” actually entails: from the graduation of Richard Greener in 1865, through co-education in 1974, to the Strategic Plan of 2004. With the adoption of that Plan, and with the unanimous support of the Faculty, the Board of Trustees committed itself to a needs-blind admissions policy in perpetuity.

Surely, there were many reasons why individual members of the faculty supported the adoption of the Strategic Plan and committed themselves to inclusion and access. Some may have agreed with former Harvard president Neil Rudenstine’s statement that “student diversity [is] valued for its capacity to contribute powerfully to the process of learning... [and is] seen as vital to the education of citizens—and the development of leaders in heterogeneous democratic societies such as our own.” Others may have seen inclusion and access as part of a larger commitment to social revolution. Still others may have wanted to prove that Joel Klein, the former chancellor of New York City Public Schools, is right when he declares that “Demography is not destiny.” But regardless of their reasons, and whether or not they understood the full implications of their support at the time, thanks to the on-going support of the Board, the Academy’s students now bring to it more varied experiences, skills, understandings, and beliefs than in the past.

In January 2011, Head of School Barbara Chase formed the Access to Success Working Group to focus on the implications of the Academy’s renewed commitment to equity and inclusion in light of the 2004 Strategic Plan. Our charge was to explore how we might best ensure that all students to whom we grant access have a genuine opportunity to find success at Andover.

In January 2013, Head of School John Palfrey charged us with preparing a series of recommendations for him, some to be considered immediately and others to be considered

within the new Strategic Planning process. Because these recommendations build upon our principles, our accomplishments, and our challenges, they are included here; understanding them is key to understanding what we envision.

While we are pleased with the fruits of our labor, our work is incomplete. Much remains as we transition our school, its faculty, and its students towards an environment of greater inclusion, equity, and excellence. And just as our understanding of “youth from every quarter” continues to evolve, so too should our understandings of “*non sibi*” and “*finis origine pendet*.” Collectively, our recommendations call on us to reframe our school’s guiding principles for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to see them as demands for an institutional commitment to social justice.

## **II. Guiding Principles of the Access to Success Working Group**

As we began our work, we spent time discussing what we believe and wrote the following “Guiding Principles”:

1. We believe that success is measured by much more than just grades. In our surveys of faculty and seniors, both groups seek to measure success via other criteria, including: having strong relationships with family, friends, and faculty, having a broader worldview, and being comfortable with oneself.
2. We believe that all demographics should be represented across all the spectrums we use to judge success. When looking at any measure of success at Andover, we should see students of a particular ethnicity or socio-economic class among both the least and most successful students.
3. We believe that challenge, struggle, and failure are, with the appropriate response and support, valuable opportunities for learning the importance of resilience, improvement, and grit.
4. We believe that we must give students ample time and support to find success at Andover, while recognizing that Andover may not ultimately be the best fit for any particular student, regardless of his or her test scores, academic record, and background.
5. We believe that all students, from juniors to post-graduates, benefit from deep and serious immersion in subject matter. The foundation of our pedagogy is intellectual rigor. All academic work should strive for intellectual enrichment; we must attempt to avoid work for the sake of work or work to fill time.
6. We believe that success includes embracing and celebrating all members of our community. The differences among us are not things to be hidden or masked; they are things to be learned from. Rather than be immersed in the dominant culture or assimilated to it, students from historically underrepresented populations should see the value of who they are and where they come from, as should the rest of us.
7. We believe that while we may not be able to fully close the achievement gap over the course of a student’s career here, no one should suffer from a preparation gap upon entering undergraduate studies.
8. We believe that we can maintain our standards while accepting that not all students are equally well prepared for success. We can help each student achieve success by focusing on his or her own potential and by interrogating our own skills and practices as teachers and educators.

9. We believe that each member of this community must confront his or her own privilege and entitlement, his or her own biases and beliefs, and that together we must also confront the privilege and entitlement that this community can foster.

10. We believe that the purpose of access and inclusion is change on the personal, local, and global levels. We see access and inclusion as a catalyst for positive change to our institution, those who study and work here, and the world as a whole.

### III. History

Throughout our work, we sought to avoid making assumptions and relying on anecdote. Instead, we collected vast amounts of data—quantitative and qualitative—from many sources and shared that data with the faculty. We then asked the faculty a series of questions to determine where we might focus, and once having determined the focus, we asked the faculty another series of questions to ascertain its collective thinking. Each time we engaged the faculty, we incorporated its feedback into our proposals, which led, ultimately, to our proposals gaining the support of 70 to 80% of the faculty.

#### A. Data

Throughout the last thirty months, we have collected a great deal of information.

Working with former Assistant Head of School Jane Fried, we cooperated with the Academy's first longitudinal study, which follows the members of a class from graduation through their undergraduate careers and beyond. We were also involved in the ninth-grade clinical interviewing study, "The End Depends on the Beginning." Adapting a methodology from Professor Richard Light and applying it to Andover, Jane and the Admissions staff interviewed 25 randomly selected ninth graders about their experiences during the 2010-2011 school year; in addition, they interviewed members of the Outliers group—students who receive a full scholarship—so that their experiences could be compared to those of the randomly selected group.

In the spring of 2011, we surveyed the faculty and asked about the "traits, skills, attributes, and experiences" that an applicant should possess in order to be "qualified" for work at Phillips Academy. We also asked them to identify the "profiles of our students" with whom they felt best prepared and, alternatively, least prepared to work. Finally, we tried to determine not only how the members of the faculty judge whether a student's career at Phillips Academy was a "success," but also how the faculty thought other constituents—a junior, a senior, a parent—might judge whether a student's career was a success. With this comparison, we tried to figure out how different constituencies define success, and how they perceive others to define success.

Additionally, in the springs of 2011, 2012, and 2013, we surveyed the graduating class about its experiences in the academic and non-academic programs. With questions posed by various offices and departments across the Academy—academic departments, the Offices of the Dean of Students and the Dean of Studies, the athletic council, the Office of Community and Multicultural Development, the Academic Skills Center, to name a few—the survey provided an opportunity for us to gather extensive data (approximately 150 questions), which was connected to robust demographic data. The seniors were asked the same questions about defining success that we asked the faculty, and the comparison of the two responses—the disconnect between how the faculty perceives the students and how the students perceive the faculty—was informative.

Other highlights included information about how well prepared students felt as they entered Phillips Academy and how well prepared they perceived their peers to be. Those students who felt very well prepared perceived their peers to be less well prepared, while those who felt completely unprepared overwhelmingly perceived their peers to be better prepared, i.e. the students who felt completely unprepared, who also fell at the bottom of academic performance according to GPA, thought they were alone in their struggles. It was also clear that students whose parents do not hold bachelor's degrees, as well as though who receive financial assistance, felt much less prepared for Phillips Academy than their peers.

Finally, we also began a project analyzing the performance of all students from 2002-2012, but because of challenges of using Datatel, the project was put on hold. We certainly hope the project will be resurrected upon Datatel's replacement. Still, we know that some of the challenges we face on campus echo the challenges we face as a nation. For from the data we have collected and shared, we know that those who receive significant aid, that those who identify as underrepresented students of color, that males, and that those new to the school are disproportionately represented among low-performing students, as measured by GPA.

The Datatel project exposed one of the primary challenges we faced during our tenure. Throughout our existence, a few members of the faculty continued to pose the same question: why were we focusing so much on all students and not just the ones who "struggle"? The argument was that essentially everything is great; we just needed to "tweak" a few things to help 20 to 25 "underprepared" kids. Of course, we recognized, and still recognize, that a group of our students warrant particular attention, yet all is not so simple.

The identification of a group of 20 to 25 students who struggle is based exclusively on their academic performance defined exclusively by grades earned. Given the discrepancy of grades earned across disciplines and across courses within disciplines, coupled with the fact that the average grade earned in the 2010-2011 school year was 4.98, the utility of our grades as measures of success is extremely limited. Given the inadequacy of grades as a means of measurement, along with our increasing emphasis on pushing students to drop courses, to switch to audit status, and to use grades earned to determine pathways through the higher end of the curriculum, how do we know that we are successful even within the limited paradigm that grades equal success?

Moreover, our surveys show that neither the faculty nor our students believe that success at Phillips Academy should be defined exclusively, or even primarily, by grades earned. Far more important to faculty and students are goals highlighted in the 2004 Strategic Plan, among them that students develop their potential and depart Andover as thoughtful, versatile, responsible participants in the global community. Of course, these signs of success, among many others, are more difficult to measure than grades earned, which is

one reason it is so difficult for us to avoid slipping into the rubric of equating grades earned to success at Andover.

The challenges of inclusion, equity, and excellence involve all of our students, from stereotype threat to institutional and societal structures. As external studies demonstrate, *merely* providing more to a target group risks exacerbating the underlying causes of the challenges the target group faces. There needs to be more. And as scholars have said, we cannot isolate the academic from the non-academic. Enhancing study skills or changing pedagogy and curricula alone do not fully address the challenges of belonging, cultural capital, and stereotype threat.

## **B. Accomplishments**

### 1. Transition Program

Phillips Academy is about to launch its third summer transition program, called “Posse ’17,” in which sixteen members of the Class of 2017, all of whom receive full financial assistance, will be on campus as part of Summer Session. More information about this program can be found under “Recommendations.”

### 2. Calendar

The move to terms-of-equal length provides two significant advantages from the perspective of equity and inclusion. First, new students—the students we know struggle the most—receive fall term feedback and grades sooner. Often, students are unwilling to make significant adjustments—going to Academic Skills, attending conference, finding a focused place for study—until they receive their grades. Second, seniors, particularly those who were slower to transition to the Academy, have fall term grades available before Early Decision in the college admissions process, and they have winter term grades available before Regular Decision. The new calendar gives underprepared students more time to demonstrate their “catching-up” to their peers.

### 3. Summer Reading

Our 2012 Summer Reading, Claude Steele’s *Whistling Vivaldi*, was well received by faculty.

### 4. Pedagogy Discussion

In November 2012 and as a follow-up to *Whistling Vivaldi*, we sponsored a Professional Development Day focused on classroom pedagogy, which included “mini-classes.” Faculty were asked to sign-up for classes, taught by colleagues, in disciplines that made them “uncomfortable.” Again, this professional development day was well received by the faculty.

## 5. Academic Review

Also in November 2012, the faculty approved vast changes to the means by which we collect and share information about students as well as to the processes by which we respond to students in academic difficulty; the latter processes were formulated before World War II.

Under the old system, less than 2% of students were being discussed by the faculty; less than 2% warranted collective faculty engagement. This seemed inconsistent, though, with data we collected from seniors, specifically that 23.3% of seniors indicated they “felt uncomfortable or very uncomfortable during their first year at Phillips Academy outside of the academic program” and that 30.3% felt only “slightly well prepared or not at all well prepared” for their first year in the academic program.

The changes the faculty adopted replaces “Academic Review” with a holistic “Student Review,” creates an electronic communication system that efficiently and effectively conveys vital information about a student to a student’s team of faculty supporters, provides timely support to students who are struggling, and strikes a balance of responsibility for a particular student between those who know and work directly with the student and the full faculty.

## 6. Orientation Review

Given the statistic that 23.3% of seniors “felt uncomfortable or very uncomfortable during their first year at Phillips Academy outside of the academic program,” we began a comprehensive review of New Student Orientation, but it did not gain much traction. A rigorous assessment of Orientation is in order.

## 7. Cultural Change

Even without programmatic changes, we sense an evolution among the faculty towards a more robust implementation of the 2004 Strategic Plan; anecdotally, many faculty are expressing a better understanding of issues of equity, inclusion, and excellence than before our work began. Ultimately, this cultural change will be more beneficial and of greater consequence than any programmatic change we might have encouraged.

## IV. Recommendations

### A. Experience Before 9<sup>th</sup> Grade and On-Going Summer Work

All of us go through myriad transitions during the course of our lives. We change where we live; we move from an elementary school to a middle school; we get a new job; we get married; we have children. Transitions can be most challenging for children, and there is extensive research on the challenges students face when moving from middle school to high school. These transitional difficulties are magnified, however, when one enters a school like Phillips Academy, and those difficulties can have a profound impact on the ability of a student to find success. We do not want students to just survive their Andover experience; we want them to thrive.

As we conclude our Access to Success work, we want to focus on student transitions at Phillips Academy. When we consider how to break up these transitional periods, we have decided to look at how summers might be used to give our students more tools to better handle these transitions. Specifically we consider:

- Summer before students arrive for their first year
- Orientation for all students before the start of their first year
- Summer between junior and lower year
- Summer between lower and upper year

While this transition will have varying components each summer including social and cultural, it is important to remember that one of the biggest challenges students from varied backgrounds face is academic. To this end, we believe that mathematics and reading are the key components to ensuring the academic adjustment of our students as well as giving them the opportunity to thrive.

Proctoring the Mock AP exam this spring, where 570 and 590 students sit in alternate rows, gave those present strong visual evidence that students of color remain underrepresented at the highest levels of mathematics at Phillips Academy. Coursework in higher-level mathematics is a requirement for advanced courses in science. Lack of access to this coursework means students are less competitive for programs in science, engineering, computer science and medicine.

In the past two years, the percentage of minority students with warning grades in mathematics at midterm and low final grades in mathematics has decreased significantly. Students of color, however, are still not thriving in mathematics, i.e., they are not earning the grades nor gaining the confidence necessary to take on the challenge of AP Calculus BC. Hence, they are not eligible for the type of coursework in science that gives students a distinct advantage as they enter competitive programs in STEM fields. Further research is needed to see if this might also be the case for students who receive full assistance as well as other students from non-traditional backgrounds.

True success in mathematics results from taking on and meeting small challenges every day. It requires an unusual degree of perseverance to tackle a concept that seems unfathomable and make it understandable. It requires students to retain almost everything they learn – the calculus student still needs to factor the quadratics she saw back in first year algebra. With all these points in mind, it is not surprising that a recent study identified completing a second-year algebra course as the best indicator of whether a student would eventually earn a college degree. In considering the theme of transitions, one of the most powerful gifts we can offer an entering ninth grader is preparation for how to succeed in mathematics at PA.

While all students receive advice on how to study mathematics properly, some are better prepared to utilize this advice than others. Hence, the summer transition program with a strong mathematics component makes good sense as it could help even the playing field for a subset of our students. The goal of the math component of this program should be the development of a wide range of study skills for as coursework becomes more demanding during the lower, upper, and senior years, students need to continually revisit their study habits. For example, structuring 45 minutes of quiet study of algebra each evening may lead to success in Math 190. As the student enters Math 210, an entirely different way of thinking is required to write a formal proof. Quiet, structured, individual study may no longer be effective. At this point, success may require seeing the teacher during conference period or studying with a group of peers. Asking for help, learning to study quietly, mastering learning from peers, reading a textbook with formal mathematics, and preparing for tests that require analysis as opposed to formula memorization are all essential skills that will serve a student well across disciplines.

### 1. Summer before students arrive

Two years ago we began what we had previously dubbed the “Summer Transition Program” which now is referred to as the PA Posse ‘ \_\_\_\_ where the blank represents a student’s expected graduation year from Andover.

In order to select the most appropriate students for this program, we suggest the following set of criteria be used:

- Neither parent has a college degree/first generation to attend college.
- Full financial aid.
- Attended public school.
- Student brought to the admissions “risk committee” for consideration.
- From a US location from which Andover has fewer than three students.
- No family connection to boarding school.
- Student from a single parent home.
- Students from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group.
- Students with diagnosed learning differences.

- Part of a specifically designated program in their local community (ABC, Prep-for-Prep, Prep 9, etc.)
- Low SSAT math scores. Below 70% percentile. Bottom quartile.
- Low SSAT verbal scores. Below 70% percentile. Bottom quartile.
- Low SSAT writing score. Bottom quartile.
- Additional concern raised from folder reading.

Students should meet several of these before they are considered. The Posse program coordinator should both sit on the risk committee and evaluate every application before decisions are made as to which students will be invited into the program. Student selection is a critical factor in making the ninth grade transitions program a success. Is there some aspect of the ninth-grade year that further down the line predicts that a student will not reach Math 590? Perhaps this is a question that the next A2S Visiting Scholar in Mathematics, Nikki Cleare, can help us answer and that will give us insight as to which students should be invited to the transition program.

Another aspect of student selection involves the complications it can introduce in terms of the ability to offer an appropriate program in mathematics. Having a wide range of backgrounds and ability makes it difficult to design a program that meets the needs of all. (Simply enrolling students in regular summer session classes may not have the outcome we desire). Having a more homogeneous population in terms of math ability/background may make the program more effective.

The Posse program has four main components: mathematics, reading comprehension, engagement in issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and varied opportunities for students to “get to know” Andover.

In mathematics, the goal of the first summer should not be advancement in a student’s fall math placement but improvement/development of study skills. The curriculum should challenge the students enough so that they have to study each evening. It should introduce the type of challenging problems that students see in their coursework at PA. Tests should be given that model the way we do assessment in our regular session classes. Students should learn how to study effectively with peers.

Algebra would be the focus of the first summer. For the most successful math students, much of algebra is intuitive. For example, they can see how a quadratic expression factors without listing out all the possibilities. Adding exponents when multiplying bases is an operation they perform without thinking. Continued practice can help a student gain this necessary level of comfort.

Another nice feature of algebra is the range of problems that can be built around a single concept. Students with minimal exposure to algebra could be factoring easy quadratics while more advanced students could factor expressions that are “hidden” quadratics or contain unspecified constants. The quadratic formula can be used to solve simple

quadratics or to classify the nature of the roots of a quadratic. Hence, a single class could serve a group of students headed to any of the 100 or 200-level classes for an initial math placement.

Along with the need to focus on mathematics, we also know that students from working class backgrounds transitioning to Phillips Academy often face a considerable disadvantage in terms of language development. This has been illustrated as a national trend by sociologists, who have found that at formative years, children from working class backgrounds are exposed to approximately half the number of words per hour as their peers from middle and upper class backgrounds. Children living below the poverty line are exposed to one third or even fewer numbers of words. The impact of language deprivation can reach many aspects of a student's scholastic life. Reading comprehension suffers, which can lead to underperforming in science and social sciences as well as the humanities. Verbal reasoning skills are underdeveloped, so constructing reasoned arguments based on logic and rhetoric becomes more challenging. Listening skills are weaker.

Diagnostic assessment of reading skills is a crucial undertaking. At Phillips Academy, faculty frequently identify reading comprehension in conjunction with other study skills as foundational to the success of students in the academic program. A deficiency in reading comprehension can have acute and immediate consequences in the ninth grade, when at least three classes in the curriculum demand strong reading skills: Biology 100, English 100, and History 100. One method of assessment, admittedly imperfect but a first step, would be to evaluate in a comparative light the verbal SSAT scores of our incoming students, considering the scores of the transition students or financial aid students with the scores of the larger PA student population. It is possible that the sub-scores of verbal analogies and verbal synonyms might be particularly useful in identifying students who might need more work in building reading comprehension skills and greater support from the school. On these sections of the SSAT, students would be unable to use context clues to help them ascertain meaning.

On a broad scale, we must evaluate our teaching practices as well. Faculty emphasis on verbal study skills in the curriculum often takes the form of note taking and writing skills. The Lower program of History 200, Religion & Philosophy, and English 200 was implemented to encourage better writing development prior to upper year. Students are expected and taught to write in many different formats including creative essays, analytical essays, journals, and scientific reports. Reading comprehension skills, by contrast, are not emphasized and practiced in the same manner. Although this is a generalization, in some ways the curriculum expects student proficiency in reading comprehension more than it purports to teach it.

There are not easy solutions to addressing this aspect of the achievement gap. Finding more effective ways of improving reading comprehension and vocabulary skills might first entail a comprehensive evaluation of the ninth grade curriculum by a multi-disciplinary

group of teachers—this is a skill that affects learning in every subject. Creative and effective methods of improving student vocabulary ought to be shared, especially since rote memorization of word and definition lists is less effective than vocabulary learned in context.

To address all of these reading comprehension skills the summer Posse program will include comprehensive reading and writing class focusing on readings similar to the ones that students will see in biology, history, and English during their junior year.

In addition to the mathematics and reading/writing course the Posse program will also give students the opportunity to:

- a. Learn the cultural capital required to navigate Andover
- b. Take challenging classes and engage in academic enrichment to help obviate “summer loss”
- c. Participate in a study skills class that can be continued during the school year
- d. Allow students to earn academic credit before the start of the fall term which could allow for one less course in the fall of junior year
- e. Get to know a group of faculty members with whom they will interact during the school year
- f. Complete the course registration for the fall term
- g. Meet other students who will also be attending Andover
- h. Adapt to living in a residential community including learning rules and how to manage time ahead of the fall term
- i. Meet teachers and school administrators
- j. Talk about transitions and the challenges they might face during their first year at Andover

## 2. Orientation program

The PA Posse program will only address the needs of some students, and therefore we need to consider how to address the transition challenges that all students new to Andover will face during their first year. More and more colleges and universities have come to recognize that transitioning from a typical high school to places of higher learning presents students with many challenges and so more and more of them offer extensive orientation programs for their incoming 1<sup>st</sup> year student class. While Andover is only a high school, we face many of the same challenges as we bring a diverse student body with diverse backgrounds into an established community with its own set of rules, culture, and mores.

In order to support all students in their transition we propose a more active and engaging orientation program. The orientation program would give new students the opportunity to:

- a. Engage other new students in a multiday activity with the goal of having them better get to know one another
- b. Participate in an age-based developmentally appropriate orientation program to help students better understand their own identities
- c. Meet returning student leaders and mentors
- d. Acclimate to the campus
- e. Help address stereotyping and micro-aggressions
- f. Arrive on campus before everyone else except student leaders participating in program
- g. Get to know faculty members

The program can also do some of the items that “need” to get done in an orientation program, such as:

- a. Conduct all placement tests
- b. Introduce world language opportunities
- c. Do course selection and registration

This orientation will be for all new students in all grades. The orientation can happen right before the start of the school year or during the summer. There are advantages and disadvantages to both. Orientation for some students (PGs, rising seniors, rising uppers) could take place during the summer and orientation for new juniors and new lowers right before the start of classes.

### 3. Summer between junior and lower year

Having been here for a year, students have a better sense of what to expect from Phillips Academy; however, this does not mean that their transition period is over. As we consider the summer between junior and lower year we would propose a program that could offer students:

- a. English enrichment
- b. Math enrichment
- c. A special course addressing the most common academic challenges students face during lower year
- d. An introduction to college counseling including assigning a specific counselor. Potential college counseling class.
- e. A Leadership seminar on how they can get involved in activities and how this can lead to leadership opportunities
- f. Enrichment classes to support any student weaknesses
- g. Term-contained, credit-bearing classes for students who may have struggled and fallen behind
- h. Continued work with academic support as needed

We should ensure that whatever program is in place for the summer between junior and lower, it has the flexibility to address the individual needs of students since not all students face the same weaknesses. We leave it up to others to consider ways in which to create a program that addresses the above needs while not creating a significant additional cost to the school, and we are confident that there are creative ways in which this can be done.

#### 4. Summer between lower and upper year

During the summer between lower and upper year, a student may have already spent two full years at Andover, but we fool ourselves if we believe that is enough time to make up for the disadvantages many students faced when arriving at Andover and for the difficulties faced by students learning to navigate an institution like ours. This is also the summer before students transition into our traditional college counseling program, which begins in winter of upper year. To that end, we want to offer students flexibility, and so the program could address the following:

- a. Offer advancement/enrichment classes to students for credit.
- b. Begin the college counseling process for the students
- c. Begin the college counseling process for the parents
- d. Provide SAT prep course
- e. Serve as student leaders for younger students in summer program
- f. Offer summer courses to help support any student weaknesses
- g. Offer term contained credit bearing classes for students who may have struggled and fallen behind
- h. Allow students to participate in an overseas language immersion

We recognize the financial constraints under which the Academy must operate, and we also believe that there is a cost effective way to implement these ideas. As an example, in the creation of our Posse program, we have reduced the cost to less than \$4000 per student for a five-week residential program, a lower cost than other Andover and non-Andover programs. We believe that if an idea like the one outlined above is adopted, a small group can work on the design and implementation in a broad and creative way. Our hope is that the supports outlined above will not only help students in their transition to Andover, but also equip them with the tools which will make their next transition, into college, a smoother one.

### **B. The Ninth Grade**

The five-week pre-grade-nine Posse Program should help low-income, first-generation students get off to a stronger start. We will keep track of the Posse group throughout their junior year. In particular, one of the most important features of success for this group of

students is most likely to be the encouragement and support from the classroom teachers. For example, it is all too easy to assume that a struggling student will never enjoy success in mathematics. Long-term success in a STEM field is much more dependent on hard work and perseverance than getting high grades in math as a ninth grader. At the first math department meeting of 2013, instructors brought up two examples of students that failed math classes at PA yet went on to pursue doctorates in statistics. Instructors need to keep these stories in mind when they encounter a struggling student. They need to determine whether it is an issue of placement or whether extra support during the adjustment period to PA will help a student get over what might be nothing more than a bump on the road to success. The idea of making a connection with students is critical in order to give our students the best opportunity at success. A student who feels that a teacher cares about her progress will often work harder in that class. Much progress has been made but much work remains to be done.

The next step is to look at junior year to see how we might continue our support of these students, with the end of narrowing the achievement gap, while striving to improve the early experiences of all students. We suggest the following:

1. An interdepartmental review of the ninth-grade curriculum with attention devoted to the following questions:

- a. Are our ninth grade courses appropriate to our students with respect to their cognitive development?
- b. Are our ninth grade courses appropriate to our students with respect to their transitional needs, particularly the development of essential study skills?
- c. Is the Pass/Fail option in history and English serving students well? If so, should it to be expanded to other disciplines? If not, should it be discontinued?
- d. By the end of Fall Term, might we identify those students most challenged by the transition to Andover and better address some of their needs? We might consider special sections of required courses where more attention can be paid to the teaching of study skills (e.g. something akin to the old model of History 290) or teaching a study skills course offered as a sixth course option. We might also consider special sections of Chemistry 300 or other advanced courses.

2. Consideration of a ninth-grade cluster. This reorganization could have the following benefits:

- a. It would pool the experience of faculty working with ninth graders. It might develop among its house counselors, advisors, and deans an expertise in issues relating to transition.

- b. It would facilitate class bonding. Currently institutional encouragement of a class identity begins largely in the senior year, as the transition from students to alumni approaches.
- c. If the Abbot cluster were converted to a ninth grade cluster (some dorm affiliations would have to shift) it might be possible to envision a common ninth-grade small dorm residential experience, in which house counselors might be able to pay closer attention to transitional needs. Such a cluster might also reinvigorate use of the Abbot campus. Events for ninth graders, from barbeques to study halls, could take place down the hill.
- d. With the new student review system in place, perhaps consideration should be given to whether all clusters should be class-based instead of location-based. We might have two deans per class, so that there are eight persons instead of the current five, overseeing the progress of our students. This might lessen the workload on the deans and, if they followed a class for four years, allow them to develop stronger personal relationships with students in the class.

3. Revamping our current orientation program for ninth-graders (if not all new students) with a focus on matters such as:

- a. Workload.
- b. Skills required to be successful – in particular, the ability to ask for help.
- c. Support resources available.
- d. Placement in math and language, and perhaps English and history.

4. Continuation of special supports for graduates of the summer transition program, which might also be made available to other new students for whom significant concerns arise during or by the end of fall term. These might include:

- a. Either an additional advisor/mentor beyond the house counselor, day student advisor, and/or advisor or a specially selected advisor (for the summer transition program, the coordinator already serves this role).
- b. Peer mentors arranged either through one-on-one pairing or group activities.
- c. Alumni mentors.
- d. Special programming in traditional academic and “soft” skills.
- e. Interventions to minimize stereotype threat and boost feelings of competence

and belonging.

## **C. The Remaining Years**

### 1. Enhancing Cultural Competency

Cultural competency for both teachers and students helps to promote a campus environment that is inclusive, inviting and equitable. If we are all not only aware of issues of inequity and exclusivity but also have the tools and skills to help bridge the gaps that exist within the institution, then we create a campus community that promotes both access and success.

Cultural competency refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and backgrounds. In a school community, this includes developing an understanding of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, geographic origin, nationality, religion, and physical and mental abilities.

Cultural competency comprises four components: awareness of one's own cultural worldview and biases, attitude towards cultural differences and aspects of diversity, knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and cross-cultural skills. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across many cultures and backgrounds.

One important way to close the achievement gap is to ensure that teachers are culturally competent so that they can provide their students with the educational experience they deserve. Culturally competent teachers assure that the curriculum will be taught, that the curriculum will be delivered in a way that is responsive to the collective norms and experiences of the student population, and that the relationships forged between teacher and student is built on respect and sincerity: a relationship where that teacher will assure that their students will not only learn the coursework, but grow as individuals.

Cultural competency for all teachers means recognizing and understanding the norms and tendencies of their student populations that are dictated mostly by societal, ethnic and socioeconomic influences. Cultural competency also provides teachers with an awareness of white dominance and privilege in American society, which is the social arrangement of cultural and institutional dominance imposed on non-whites due to historical events and influences and how that dominance and privilege impacts societal interactions. While we ought to focus on increasing academic proficiency in all areas, we must remember that the initial weapon of the school teacher is the relationship we forge with our students. The common thread in all teacher-student relationships inside and out of the classroom is that they are relationships first, and forging meaningful relationships between teachers and students starts with the cultural competency of teachers.

Simply put, teachers need to be able to get to know their students. That means doing the research and getting the information about our population. First, teachers must look at the demographic data of Phillips Academy. What research do we have to help teachers better understand who is here? Second, teachers must step outside of their comfort zone and engage themselves with getting to know and understand our students: culturally, ethnically and socioeconomically.

Thus, we recommend that the members of the Strategic Planning Task Force find ways to support teachers at various stages of their careers and provide frequent and ongoing professional development opportunities in "diversity training," anti-bias training, and "cultural competence." This work with the faculty will have an impact on all students but in particular students coming to Andover from a non-traditional background.

## 2. Embedding Principles of Social Justice in the Academic Program

Although we prize the autonomy of individual teachers to do what they deem best, we are troubled by the absence of a curricular focus on issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality across our academic program.

Currently, the faculty requires students to engage in these issues only in the PACE program, which adopts a valuable but limited approach: affective education outside the academic program as a means of changing individual behaviors. Individual offices outside the academic program—CAMD, Brace, Community Service, and others—offer important programming, but it is optional and non-curricular.

We believe issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality should be not only addressed in the academic program but also thoroughly embedded in our curriculum, across grades, courses, and disciplines. We envision an expectation that faculty engage students in these vital issues and keep in mind the following principles:

- a. Race, class, gender, and sexuality are substantive and rigorous fields of study. They require definition, evidence, and argumentation. Feminism, for example, means something—or some things—and one can have a more or less valid understanding of it, and this understanding is independent of whether one actually “believes” in it. Opinions based on evidence and analysis are more valid than those that are not.
- b. The curriculum needs to be welcoming to all viewpoints, but it cannot foster relativism. It needs to bring everyone into the material, but over the course of four years, students need to be pushed to see the significance and complexity of these issues.
- c. Our students are interested in “fairness” and “power,” and the curriculum should

challenge them to see how those ideas reverberate across race, class, gender, and sexuality: what really is “fair,” and what really is “power”? As such, the curriculum should explore the entrenched structural and cultural systems that perpetuate the notion that upper/middle-class, heterosexual, white males are the norm—“the default”—and everyone else is outside the norm.

d. The curriculum needs to be hidden; we need to adopt, in the phrase of our colleague, Dr. Tom Kane, “a pedagogy of misdirection.” Because many students believe we are living in a “post-race,” “post-gender,” and “post-class” world, and because many dismiss individual units or courses with an explicit focus on race, class, gender, and sexuality as “politicizing the classroom” or “PC tokenism,” it is necessary to engage students in robust material that is not explicitly about race, class, gender, and sexuality. (Dr. Kane’s course on prisons is a great example of this. Students take the course thinking that learning about prisons is cool, not necessarily thinking that they will be learning about race, class, gender, and sexuality via their study of prisons). It is almost always more productive to present to students that “we are going to be talking about politics today” and then see how race-based perceptions of power influence voting patterns than to present “we are going to talk about race today.”

e. The curriculum needs to help students see the systemic rather than just the individual or personal. We already have valuable avenues for sharing anecdotes with a focus on the psychological. Instead, we need to focus on the structural.

f. All departments and all instructors have a role to play in engaging students in these topics, whether an English instructor reevaluates text selections or a History instructor devotes more classroom time to the history of women or a Biology instructor invites a critique of Sociobiology/Evolutionary Psychology or a Statistics instructor uses demographic data in problem sets or a Physics instructor examines why some students participate more in class than others or a Latin instructor explores Roman slavery or a Mathematics instructor assigns *Hope in the Unseen*.

g. Finally, the curriculum needs to explore the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality rather than treat them as completely distinct topics—as happened during the culture wars.

By embedding these issues throughout the curriculum, rather than creating a new, stand-alone course, we demonstrate a communal commitment to these issues, and we establish that each instructor is responsible for educating our students. But this does not mean we need to each adopt the same lock-step curriculum; instead, we need on-going professional development and a culture of communication and sharing in order to create varied ways in which an individual instructor can incorporate these issues into his or her curriculum.

## V. Conclusion

Among our recommendations that can move immediately to planning and implementation are the three-year summer transition program, the orientation program, and the assessment of the ninth-grade curriculum. The adoption of these three recommendations will improve the lives of our students.

Yet, we continue to believe that for the true promise of Phillips Academy to be fulfilled in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must be more ambitious: more critical of the status quo and more imaginative of how we might evolve. We hope the members of the Strategic Planning Task Force, the administration, and the faculty will consider our other recommendations, all of which involve Phillips Academy committing itself to social justice, and which require the type of substantive change—organizational changes like a ninth-grade cluster, pedagogical changes like on-going faculty development regarding cultural competency, and curricular changes like embedding issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality into the required curriculum—that will improve our school for all its citizens and all those our citizens will one day serve.

Respectfully submitted,

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18 June 2013