Antioch College Fall Tele-Townhall
October 18, 2017

PARTICIPANTS

Tom Manley, President
Rob Hollister ’66, Trustee
James Lippincott, Director of Alumni and External Relations
Kim Landsbergen, Associate Professor of Biology and Environmental Science
Corine Tachtiris, Assistant Professor of Non-Western Literature
Coco Gagnet ’18, Student

EDITED TRANSCRIPT

Purpose of the tele-town hall:

Tom Manley
Antioch was successfully awarded accreditation a year ago last summer. While that Herculean effort was absolutely essential to get us to the starting line, that in and of itself was not going to distinguish Antioch in the landscape of small liberal arts colleges. Nor would it actually position us to really answer the question of a true startup, which is: what need are you currently meeting that's not currently being met?

The faculty, students, staff, and alumni have all been engaged this past year in a process called FACT, the Framework for Antioch College's Transition, which has led to a very exciting point that begins with the approval of the revised curriculum, a new calendar, and a value statement that we believe really positions Antioch to become a new kind of American college.

In the words of Horace Mann, "...we have a chance for a college that's never been seen before."

So now as we begin this fall quarter, the Board of Trustees will be looking at the work that the faculty is proposing, the new calendar, and this new value statement (which really places the ownership of the Antioch student's education in students hands), and collaborating with faculty, the administration, and the alumni to create this new kind of American college.

Question:

*How have the faculty gone about approaching curriculum revisions? What has that process been like?*
Answer:

Corine Tachtiris
The main things that we wanted to do with the curriculum revision was to allow more flexibility for both faculty and students to be able to follow their passions and really teach those passions. We wanted to allow for more agency over what we teach, what we learn, how we interact with each other.

We also wanted to build in more scaffolding for our students, which allows us to have a more rigorous education, especially because we are reaching out to a lot of first generation students, who may not have that preparation.

We have expanded the self-design structure so that all students can self-design. We have a Design-Your-Degree course so that every student who may think that it's not for them can achieve that. We have reduced our breadth requirements; there is still a broad, liberal arts education, but it's less check-all-of-these-boxes. We will have a diversity requirement, a Dialogue Across Difference course, which will allow students coming from different perspectives to be able to communicate with each other effectively.

In the second and third years, students will take advanced methodology courses. For students in their senior year we have expand the number of credits that students can give toward their senior project. These structural changes allow students to pursue something that interests them and that they are passionate about by giving them the curricular space to do that. Co-op will still be there, because that is the real center of the Antioch education. We are hoping to integrate it more by crediting it towards one’s self-design major.

Question from Howard Smith '61 and Erico Frederique '50:

What is Antioch’s current enrollment and how many students graduated this year?

Answer:

James Lippincott
136 students are currently enrolled at Antioch College, including a small and mighty class of 28 first-year students. Over the summer we had 76 brilliant students cross the mound.

Tom Manley
As the college has moved from having almost 100% of the tuition and fees of our students supported by scholarships, we realized that for our long-term sustainability, we need to move from that full-scholarship position to a more blended mix of revenue. We are beginning to ask
students and families to contribute to their tuition. So as we make that transition we are prepared to see our enrollment get smaller until we again build back on that value statement that we think will set Antioch apart from other schools. We are not going to be able to compete with schools based on the fabulous facilities they may offer with climbing walls and so forth, but it will be the quality of our education, centered on the experiential co-op program that will allow us to really set ourselves apart.

Question:

*How will the sciences be incorporated into the new curriculum?*

Answer:

**Kim Landsbergen:**
We have been very excited in the sciences about the potential for this design your degree process. While the details of the self-design experience are still being worked out, the science department has been particularly excited about the potential. In the Bachelor of Science self-design program we would include pathways for the social sciences and opportunities to integrate math, biology, and the environmental sciences as a B.S. option.

Question:

*What do current students think about the proposed curricular changes?*

Answer:

**Coco Gagnet ’18**
There's a lot of excitement around self-design because it lends itself to the projects that are in motion in all of Antioch's spheres. Whether it be governance or co-op, there's a sort of excitability and flexibility to the concept of self-design, that lends itself to the ethos of Antioch.

Antioch’s restructuring of the curriculum transcends a traditional education that's narrowly bound by a major, or a singular discipline. It puts an emphasis on being both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. That is one component of what makes the curricular changes really attractive to current Antioch students.

Question from **Gretchen Schaft ’61:**

*What will Antioch provide students to ensure they will be admitted to prestigious schools for graduate work?*
Answer:

**Corine Tachtiris**
What will set Antiochians apart is that by the time they have completed an extensive research project in their last year they have shown that they are able to articulate research questions and form intellectual pathways. When they apply to graduate school, they can already conceive of a project and they have evidence that they have produced what is almost a master's thesis. A self-design program makes students so much more articulate about their intellectual passions and the pathways that they want to follow to achieve them.

**Kim Landsbergen**
Beyond the curricular updates, co-op already plays a critical role of for students' post-graduate success. The robust co-op experiences students engage in at Antioch provide tremendous leverage in grad school. Combined with the self-designed curriculum and the agency it allows, co-op is a pretty major factor in our students' success.

**Question from Teresa Secules '72:**

*How do we keep the faculty we have?*

**Answer:**

**James Lippincott**
We have outstanding faculty here at Antioch who have been recognized with different teacher awards from SOCHE and other organizations.

**Kim Landsbergen**
The self-design curriculum creates an opportunity for partnership and collaboration between the students and faculty and between the faculty and the faculty. The opportunities for transdisciplinary work is a hook. A lot of work in traditional academia rewards unidirectional thinking. Antioch is diverging from that narrative by providing an exciting place for both faculty and students to do exhilarating interdisciplinary work.

**Question from Lester Schulman '55:**

*With a Freshman class of 28, what are Antioch's chances of survival?*

**Answer:**

**Tom Manley**
An important thing to remember is that our aim is to recruit prospective students and faculty who want to come partake in an Antioch that is **meeting a need in the world now**. There are hundreds of really good liberal arts colleges in the United States today that could provide a whole person education. What is it that Antioch can do that these other schools can't do?

There is no other school that is better prepared to deliver on that engagement, that real world preparation that we have learned through 100 years of doing co-op. There is no other school that can provide students with impact in the world around their passions now. There is no other school that can prepare students to be **world ready, job ready, and graduate school ready** in the way that Antioch continues to demonstrate that it can.

**Rob Hollister**

Antioch will survive because of the power of our vision. Alumni can contribute to this process, by identifying those amazing future students who are looking for the combination of educational opportunities that Antioch provides.

**Question from Patrick Tovatt ’76:**

*How can alumni assist in the restructuring of Antioch’s curriculum?*

**Answer:**

**Tom Manley**

The new calendar that comes along with this revised curriculum is really exciting to us because it opens up two large blocks of time throughout the year. One right towards the end of the calendar year after Thanksgiving up until the first of January and then another large block of time in July and the first part of August. These opportunities will allow faculty, students, staff members, and our alumni who are distinguished in so many fields to propose special courses and special projects that they can bring both to campus or that can take place in other cities around the world. We are very excited about this opportunity because alumni have been asking us and continuing to volunteer their time, their resources, and their great talent to help the college. This will clearly enrich the student experience many fold.

**Question from Terry Baum ’69:**

*What does Antioch have to offer an incoming student who is not clear about what they want to do?*

**Answer:**

**Corine Tachtiris**

In their first year, students will be introduced to all of the disciplines that Antioch has to offer. Students will be working on inquiry, evidence, expression, and application for all of the
disciplines. The breadth requirements will allow students to sample all around and see what might spark their passion. They will also take multiple 'Antioch Seminars', similar to the Global Seminars we have now. In those big transdisciplinary courses students will get to have exposure to team-taught courses and approach a problem from different perspectives that emphasize experiential learning.

In a student's second year, there will be a Design-Your-Degree course, which will really help them formulate their questions of interest. We really want to usher our students through the self-design process, so that we can be reflective, explicit, and purposeful in finding their passions and putting them into practice.

**Question** from Alvin Abrams '56:

*What is the role of community government today?*

**Answer:**

**Tom Manley**

I am looking across the table now at Coco who has been very engaged at Antioch in all three of the 'Cs'—Co-op, curriculum, and community. It remains one of our central foci and the revisions that you are hearing about now are not meant to replace those foundational pieces but rather to amplify and build on them. In the case of community, the thought that Arthur Morgan had is that "small community is the building block of democracy" and through the reforms of Algo Henderson and others by the time you were at Antioch in the '50s, community and shared governance was a critical part of an Antioch student's education. It remains so today, and in fact will become even more explicitly so.

As Rob has mentioned one of the areas of practice is that we have defined which are not expressions of the curriculum persay, that can still be said flows out of the disciplines and out of the rigor that we have, in the arts and sciences, humanities and social sciences. But we have this opportunity to do what Morgan suggested that is to be a "laboratory for democracy" and it makes that an expression that can be both through the curriculum and also through the student experience in shared governance. This Friday, the board of Trustees will actually be meeting starting tomorrow. There's a 90 minute open session for the entire community. It is not a closed board session that trustees will be participating in but it is all about the role of community governance in this new kind of American college and how we can be true to this notion of a laboratory for democracy and how that leads to opportunities to set the balance of justice.

Community government is a foundational piece of the Antioch experience that will be built on and amplified in the curriculum changes. We have this opportunity to do what Arthur Morgan suggested which is to be a "laboratory for democracy". This philosophy will be expressed through the curriculum and also through the student experience in shared governance.
Coco Gagnon ’18
I currently sit on ComCil B which is a think tank for developing a new governance structure for Antioch. I think that the collective vision and mood on campus is that we want all of the stakeholders to be equally represented at the table. It's not just about students and faculty but also staff and alumni and everyone who works to make this community a liveable place and a wonderful place. I think that really falls in line with this overarching ethos in terms of the curriculum and the other expressions of this project in that, nothing is an island; nothing is isolated. All parts are connected to one another and that Antioch is participatory and experiential at its heart.

Question from Howard Yasgur (parent):
As a small college with limited resources, what are you doing to think outside the box?

Answer:
Tom Manley
One of the things that we have done as part of this FACT process—which is a participatory design process very much in the spirit that Coco just described—is to explore how the existing resources of the college (WYSO, the Coretta Scott King Center, Glen Helen, etc.) are opportunities to build the kinds of learning laboratories that can set Antioch apart. All of these resources have the chance of not only supporting and aligning with the mission based education that we are talking about here for Antioch students, but connecting the college to the local community here in Yellow Springs and the greater Miami Valley area.

By strengthening the curriculum through these resources and through the practice areas of sustainability and resilience, around democracy and justice, and so forth, we believe we will be able to increase the support that we receive from foundations and corporations and the wider community.

We believe that we will also be able to offer more entrepreneurial innovative opportunities for our students. I'll just give you one example: among that small but mighty class of 28 that just started at Antioch there is a young man named Aaron Westbrook. He has come to Antioch with his non-profit organization that makes prosthetic devices out of recycled plastic—which he builds on a 3D printer that he also designed and built—and is serving young people from communities around Ohio whose needs aren't being met. This kind of startup within a startup offers opportunities for donors and funders and already people are stepping forward. There was an article about Aaron in Fast Company just a few days ago. So our sense is that a small and mighty college with incredible students that are of the character that Antiochians have historically achieved will be very attractive to funders and will be a source for special projects and programming that will be part of a rich revenue stream that will allow us to have a balanced and sustainable financial future.
Question from Richard Kellaway '56:

Is there space for conservatives and other dissenting opinions at Antioch?

Answer:

Coco Gagnet '18
I totally agree with you about hearing multiple views and engaging with multiple perspectives. At the heart of its ethics Antioch is about hearing multiple views and engaging with multiple perspectives. We have constructed that into our new curriculum, with this idea of Dialogue Across Difference. This class will intentionally engage with the fact that students are coming from a multiplicity of perspectives and backgrounds. It will help students discover how to communicate respectfully and thoughtfully, across those boundaries and contribute to some deeper understanding of one another.

Antioch allows students to develop immense tools to navigate the nuance of having a whirlwind of perspectives in one very small community. This is something that we continue to engage ourselves with in a very genuine way on a daily basis.

Question from Pete Creelman '67

How does the self-design curriculum work in practice?

Answer:

Corine Tachtiris
Throughout the self-design course a student will be able to craft a statement of inquiry which is the intellectual questions they want to address. This is followed by developing a pathway of inquiry which is the courses the student will take to help them answer their statement of inquiry. Incorporated into this, are the co-op and curricular assets Antioch can provide to answer their statement of inquiry in an experiential way.

The student will work with two advisors throughout their academic career. These advisors could be in the same disciplines or across disciplines depending on the nature of their self-design major. Advisors do not have to be faculty they can also be someone working in the assets. This helps to breakdown the divisions between who teaches and who learns.

At the end of the student’s second year and the end of their third year they will revise their statement of inquiry based upon what they have already done and whether they want to make tweaks to that. At the end of that third year they will be articulating a project which is the capstone experience. The student will be work with their two advisors to bring that to fruition.

Kim Landsbergen
Currently self-design is a major that we have as an option right now. So that transition to all of the students doing self-design is really just an expansion of the program that we currently had and that has been very successful. I can give an example of my own conversations and mentorship with students. Today, I met with this student who is really passionate about environmental justice. She is taking my introduction to environmental science class and she and I were having a conversation about her own self-design goals, but also thinking about her post graduation careers and some of the things she wants to achieve. I think the role of that professional mentorship is something that we do very well here. Helping students triangulate their academic goals, their personal, and professional goals to their post-graduation goals is something that we have had experience doing. I think our self-design graduates in the past few years have shown that success.

**Question** posed by several callers and online inquiries:

*How does co-op fit into the updated curriculum?*

**Answer:**

**Tom Manley**

Co-op continues to be in the center of what we do. As we begin to work on what the real difference at Antioch is we recognize that co-op is a wonderful example of the power of experiential education and action. Integrating co-op even more into a strong educational program through coursework, project-based learning, and our curricular assets will be critical. We see co-op as the practice of work and the practice of community in the world. Co-ops can be developed locally but they can also take students nationally and internationally and we are looking to make those connections.

One of our alumni and new trustees Matt Morgan ’99 is helping us develop a program where we will have relationships with nonprofits as co-op organizations. Matt's going to be supporting at least twelve connections with Antioch so that those co-op organizations will have an opportunity to nominate students for admission to Antioch college and if those individuals are accepted they will receive special scholarships. Conversely, students at Antioch will be supported by stipends to do co-ops in those organizations. We are creating a real network of ongoing co-op jobs and organizations that will allow our small college to grow even deeper roots. These relationships will allow students to have experiences that we cannot provide here on campus and to develop **incubator entrepreneurial opportunities.**

**Kim Landsbergen**

I wanted to connect the idea of co-op with the question that was earlier about graduate school, and the critical role of co-ops in the sciences for post-graduate success. Students have taken some pretty powerful co-ops in the last couple of years. A co-op in oceanography at Oregon State working with the federal state department in their arctic program's climate change program. A number of students going to Israel to do biomedical research and radiology. One of
my students recently completed a competitive NSF REU research experience for undergraduates at the University of Alaska doing boreal forest research. These types of robust co-op experiences provide tremendous leverage in grad school. So combined with the self-designed curriculum and the agency there, this is a pretty major factor in the success.

Concluding points:

Rob Hollister
As I listened to Corine, Kim, and Coco’s comments, one of the themes that comes across to me in a very powerful way underscores what’s distinctive about Antioch in comparison to sister institutions. What you typically find in colleges and universities across the country is an overwhelming focus on preparing students to do something later—to get into graduate school, to make a difference with their lives when they get their degrees.

What is dramatically different about Antioch is that from day one, students are involved in the practice of those activities. The combination of rigorous coursework and participation through co-ops and governance adds up to much greater and more powerful student learning outcomes.

Tom Manley
There is no other place like Antioch College right now or on the horizon in the present work of higher education. Antioch works for students because they design their education and they build it with the faculty each step of the way. Antioch is a place where students can own their education, a place that will work for them, a place where education is individually shaped by engaging students in the fundamental challenges of that world.

The recent Hechinger Report article shows how special and different Antioch is, and this is a quality that comes through its alumni generation after generation. I think you can hear it in the voice and the ideas and the excitement of Coco tonight and our faculty as well. The Aaron Westbrook article in Fast Company is another example, and yet just today Atlantic Monthly has a piece about Arthur Morgan and this idea of small community as a building block for democracy, and how those ideas were incubated in many ways through co-op and here at Antioch College. All of that stands to this idea of a place where students can own their education a place that will work for them, a place where education is individually shaped and by engaging them in the world in the fundamental challenges of that world. It works that they own it because they design it and they build it with the faculty each step of the way.

I do not think any school offers greater agency or accountability for an education than Antioch today. That includes that idea of inclusive, shared governance from all of the stakeholders. For nearly 170 years Antioch has been changing lives and we see that as the colleges present and future.