

MOUNT HOLYOKE

Report of the Child Care/Study Advisory Committee

January 2008

BACKGROUND: In the Fall 2006, the College convened a committee to assist in evaluating existing campus programs for children including the Gorse Child Study Center and the StonyBrook Children's Center. The goal of this evaluation was to determine needs of the community for services provided by these programs and to explore if there were alternative ways we could more efficiently and effectively meet these needs. Needs included both (1) the opportunity for Mount Holyoke College faculty and students to conduct research and coursework in a laboratory child study setting, and (2) the availability of full-day, year-round quality programs for young children. Precipitating this review were many factors. The Faculty Conference Committee (FCC) expressed to the administration continued concern about the availability of and access to quality child care programs for College employees and the on-going uncertainty of the financial sustainability of the StonyBrook Children's Center. There were growing needs in the Psychology and Education Department for access to a wider variety of learning environments for child study, research and observation which initiated discussions within the Department about how the current program at Gorse was meeting these needs. The StonyBrook Children's Center submitted a request to the College for significantly increased financial support. And, every department of the College was in the midst of programmatic and financial evaluation as a part of the College's overall budget review process to ensure that College resources were being deployed in ways that were most cost-effective and appropriate to meet the needs of the community.

The College engaged a consultant, Ruth Bowman, to assist with this evaluation. In order to ensure that we had a comprehensive understanding of needs and concerns, we asked the consultant to sponsor several forums with different constituent groups to provide feedback, e.g., MHC faculty and staff, staff at both Gorse and StonyBrook, and parents and students currently using these programs.

In support of this initiative, the Faculty Conference Committee and the Staff Council solicited community feedback by conducting a child care survey with faculty and staff. Data collected through these surveys were shared with the consultant.

Consultant Ruth Bowman submitted her final report to the College in late January 2007. This report was shared broadly with the community. Feedback from members of the community continued to be submitted and considered. Bowman's report concluded that "both Gorse and StonyBrook have evolved in ways that do not appear to meet current and

future needs of the College in the most responsive and efficient ways” and outlined four alternative models on how the College might wish to move forward.¹

As an outcome to this community process, the senior staff asked that a committee be convened and be charged with investigating the feasibility of integrating the operations and function of these programs into one facility. The Faculty Conference Committee, Staff Council, Operational Policy Committee, and the Psychology and Education Department were all asked to identify representative members to serve on this committee.

The Psychology and Education Department was asked to write a summary vision statement reflecting their departmental needs related to child study and research. Understanding the needs of the Psychology and Education Department was critical to exploring an integrated model for child care/study so it was important that the committee hear from the department faculty in advance of soliciting proposals. The Department had several discussions about this, and submitted a vision statement² to the Dean of Faculty and to the Child Care/Study Advisory Committee at the end of May 2007. This vision was included in the Request for Proposals sent to prospective providers.

COMMITTEE CHARGE: The Committee was charged to evaluate the feasibility of integrating child care and child study (research and observation) into one facility and to report back to the senior staff. The senior staff, informed by the work of the Advisory Committee, would then make the decision on how to proceed.

Representative members were appointed and the Child Care/Study Advisory Committee* officially convened in June 2007 to develop its work plan and map a time line for its work on the premise that the committee needed to complete its work by the end of January 2008 in order to enable a reasonable transition plan to be implemented for next fiscal year.

- (1) Prepare Request for Proposal (RFP)³ to be sent to prospective child care/study providers – completed July 2007.
- (2) Identify prospective providers⁴ to include in RFP process – completed July 2007. Committee identified three overarching criteria on which to evaluate and select prospective providers to include in RFP process. Criteria identified as important in considering and selecting prospective providers included: (a) run NAEYC accredited programs for children, (b) have substantial enough operations and resources sufficient to run the type and scope of program we envisioned; and (c) have demonstrated success in running quality, financially viable and sustainable programs with a special interest in prospective providers who have experience in operating programs with an educational/academic component. The committee

¹ Attachment 1: Ruth Bowman Consulting Report – Mount Holyoke College evaluates campus needs for child care and child study, January 2007.

² Attachment 2: Mount Holyoke College Department of Psychology and Education, Lab School Requirements/Priorities, 5/24/07

³ Attachment 3: Mount Holyoke College, Request for Proposal for the Transition and Management of Campus Programs for Children, August 6, 2007

⁴ Attachment 4: Child Care/Study Prospective Provider List

secured the services of a consultant (Mary Brown, BrownRichards Associates, Partners in Family Care – affiliate with the Wellness Corporation which is Mount Holyoke College’s Employee Assistance Program Provider) in identifying and selecting prospective providers who met these criteria.

- (3) Solicit proposals – Requests for Proposal mailed to ten prospective providers on August 6, 2007.
- (4) Bidders’ Conference⁵ - hosted September 10, 2007. The bidders’ conference is primarily intended to provide prospective bidders the opportunity to meet Mount Holyoke College representatives, tour the facilities available for the operation of the child care/study program, and ask questions. Representatives from both Gorse and StonyBrook participated in and presented at the bidders’ conference to provide overviews of the current programs in operation. Seven providers to whom we sent the RFP confirmed their intent to submit a proposal and six of them attended the bidders’ conference.
- (5) Update on Child Care/Study Advisory Committee process sent to OPC, Staff Council and FCC – September 24, 2007.
- (6) Responses to RFP due October 1, 2007. Three providers submitted complete proposals: Bright Horizons, Children’s Creative Learning Centers (CCLC), and StonyBrook Children’s Center. Four bidders who withdrew after the bidders’ conference were: Learning Care Group, Sunshine House, Little Sprouts, and Children’s Choice. The reasons cited by the providers for why they withdrew were either that they felt that their organization was not able to take on a project of our scope at this time given other projects that they currently had underway or that they did not feel confident that they could meet the needs of a project of the scope of ours.
- (7) Committee review of proposals October through mid-November 2007. In order to establish a base line for the criteria the committee would use in evaluating proposals and to create some organization in how we compiled and discussed our comments, an evaluation matrix was developed – Review of RFP Responses for Child/Care Study.⁶
- (8) Select prospective providers to invite for campus visit and host site visits.⁷ Bright Horizons, December 11, 2007; Children’s Creative Learning Centers (CCLC), December 13 and 14, 2007; StonyBrook Children’s Center, December 13, 14 and 18, 2007. Invitation sent to various campus constituent groups to participate in forums during site visits including MHC employee forum, Gorse/StonyBrook parent forum, MHC student forum, and Psychology and Education Department meeting.⁸

⁵ Attachment 5: Child Care/Study RFP Bidders’ Conference Agenda and Participant List

⁶ Attachment 6: Template for Review of RFP Responses for Child Care/Study.

⁷ Attachment 7: Site Visit Agendas for Bright Horizons, Children’s Creative Learning Centers (CCLC), and StonyBrook Children’s Center

⁸ Attachment 8: Invitations sent to constituent groups to participate in site visits

- (9) Collect and review feedback. The committee received significant community feedback. In total, to date, the committee has received over 50 letters and e-mails with feedback from members of the community including faculty, staff, and students, members of the Psychology and Education Department, parents of children in the Gorse and StonyBrook programs, South Hadley and surrounding community members, and MHC alumnae.

CONCLUSIONS: After extensive review of materials provided by prospective providers, further follow up and discussion with each, where necessary, to clarify proposal specifications, and consideration of the range of community feedback received from the onset of campus discussions which initiated in the Fall of 2006, the Advisory Committee decided to conduct further due diligence relating to Bright Horizons as a prospective provider.

The Committee decided not to further pursue the proposals submitted by Children's Creative Learning Centers (CCLC) and the StonyBrook Children's Center.

The Committee could not conclude, with confidence, that CCLC would be successful in meeting the needs of the community. Most notably, they did not demonstrate sufficient understanding of the operational needs of a laboratory school function and, generally, did not listen and appropriately respond to feedback provided to them by the committee and members of the community as they engaged in the various community meetings and forums.

Although the Committee was generally impressed with the vision that StonyBrook presented for the integrated program, significant concerns remained about their financial viability and sustainability. The Committee recognizes and acknowledges community feedback about the desire to retain quality care as a critical component to successful programs for children; however, StonyBrook's proposal and campus site visit reinforced concerns that they would not be receptive to being flexible with the operations and programming in order to meet the fluid and changing needs of the community for care, e.g., operating one infant room versus the potential to operate two as community need for care warranted.

Bright Horizons: The Committee requested additional references from Bright Horizons, beyond what was requested in the RFP process. Bright Horizons provided contact information for eleven colleges/universities with whom they contract to operate a range of programs for children.⁹

Three committee members visited the MIT Technology Children's Center. They had the opportunity to meet with various members of the MIT community including several parents (faculty) of children enrolled at the Center, the Center Director, and the Director and Associate Director for Work, Family and Personal Life, the MIT office which is responsible for managing the relationship with Bright Horizons which operates four children's centers on the MIT campus.

⁹ Attachment 9: Bright Horizons References for Mount Holyoke College.

Numerous telephone reference calls were made by various committee members to other colleges/universities on Bright Horizon's reference list including Cornell University, Roosevelt University, Duke, George Washington University, and Columbia University. Inquires encompassed questions about satisfaction with the accessibility and quality of full and part-time child care; routine, college/university relationship with Bright Horizons vis a vis operations of the Center; financial oversight and accountability; ability of sponsor college/university to exercise oversight of program and willingness on the part of Bright Horizons to collaborate and be flexible in program design and curriculum; and extent and quality of child study (research and observation) activities at the centers.

Overall, the feedback about Bright Horizon was very positive. College and university clients and consumers (parents) spoke about their satisfaction with the quality of care and programming at their Center and of Bright Horizon's general expertise in the provision of quality care and in the administrative details of center operation and oversight, e.g., licensing, safety and health, parent communications, and overall employee satisfaction with their employment relationship with Bright Horizons. A consistent theme in the feedback was that Bright Horizons was flexible and collaborative. Clients spoke extremely favorably about Bright Horizon's desire and willingness to establish an on-going collaborative, working partnership with their college or university. Examples of collaborations included college/university representatives involved in the Center staff hiring process and joint monthly review meetings to discuss and direct a range of issues including enrollment and curriculum. Also a consistent theme was that centers reflected the values and culture of their college or university, as opposed to having a "cookie-cutter" or "corporate" feel to them. In addition to feedback about their working relationship with Bright Horizons and the overall satisfaction with Center operations, advice and feedback was provided specifically relating to the initial contract negotiations process and center transition planning. Clients spoke to the importance of taking the time to clearly and explicitly outline the institution's needs and expectations in the contract with Bright Horizons. We were encouraged to think carefully through what will be important for Mount Holyoke College to be able to continue to exercise control with regard to Center operations and what Bright Horizon's resources are provisioned in support of the Center both during the start-up period and on-going operations. We recognize that this will be particularly important in relation to ensuring that the needs of the Psychology and Education Department faculty and students are met with the laboratory school function.

FINAL CONCLUSION: The Committee was charged by the senior staff to explore the feasibility of integrating the functions of child care and child study into one facility. As a result of the work the Committee has completed over the last seven months, we do believe that a merged program is feasible. Further, if the College decides to pursue this integrated model, we believe that Bright Horizons would be the most viable organization with whom the College could establish a partnership to operate such an integrated program.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: If the College elects to establish an integrated program and pursue a collaboration and contract with Bright Horizons, there will be much work to accomplish both immediately following any decision and in the planning to ensure

successful contract negotiations and minimal disruption in the transition period. In order to support these efforts, the Committee would recommend the establishment of an Oversight Committee which would be charged with such matters as managing campus communications about the decision and transition, guiding the negotiation and contracting process with Bright Horizons to ensure that: (1) the resulting program will meet the laboratory school function needs of the Psychology and Education Department, (2) incumbent Gorse and StonyBrook staff are consulted and engaged in the transition process, and (3) that families who are currently being served by the Gorse and StonyBrook programs have continuity of care for their children.

In addition, it will be essential that the College maintain this oversight committee responsible for maintaining an on going effective partnership with Bright Horizons. This committee would maintain appropriate oversight and control in Center operations as the College deems necessary to ensure the quality of the program and especially in meeting our academic needs.

Members of both the Transition Team and the On-Going Oversight Committee should include, at a minimum, representatives from business and finance and from the Psychology and Education Department.

Members of the Child Care/Study Advisory Committee respectfully submit this report which represents completion of the committee's charge, and, effectively disband as a committee.

***Child Care/Study Advisory Committee Members**

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Lenore Reilly Carlisle, Assistant Professor, Psychology and Education

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