Notes from December 4, 2012 lunch meeting on the liberal arts

Participants: Pete Schumer and Chris McGrory Klyza (EAC hosts), Cynthia Packert, Mike Olinick, Jessica Holmes, Kathy Morse, Louisa Burnham, Stephen Ratcliff, Shawna Shapiro, Leger Grindon, Peter Nelson, Greg Vitercik, Noah Graham

Three major themes emerged from our lively conversation over lunch.

1. **Many faculty expressed concern that increased attention to “the relevance” of a liberal arts education** would take us down the path to vocational training, too much emphasis on return on investment, and even worries of “guaranteed employment.” We also discussed the nature of practicality and the liberal arts: is this primarily a question of demonstrating the relevance of a liberal arts education or of making it more relevant? Several faculty did point out that many of our students need to find jobs immediately after graduation, especially first generation students and those who can’t fall back on parental support.
2. **A related thread revolved around the actual skills and relevance that the traditional liberal arts provide our students.** These included the ability to make connections among fields and issues; critical reading; and critical thinking. Several faculty argued that, especially in a rapidly changing world, a liberal arts degree provides our students with a position of strength over the course of their career.
3. **What do we mean by experiential education?** Several faculty noted that much of our education, such as laboratory work and the arts, is fully experiential. Faculty expressed a variety of opinions about internships, ranging from a desire to do away with current winter term internships (we should not give academic credit for work that is not academic) to improving how we oversee existing internships to extending the ability of students to do internships outside of January.

Note: An excellent idea expressed at the lunch by Kathy Morse: On the college website, in addition to the “how did you get here?” stories about current students, the college should add “where did you go?” stories about graduates 10 or more years out reflecting on how their Middlebury education helped shape and prepare them for their career.