

General Education Redesign update for October 18, 2019

Greetings! More people are starting to participate and that is leading to more ideas!

Niesha and Kirk have visited with more departments during their department meetings this past week. If you'd like your department meeting to have some time to learn more about the curriculum redesign, be in touch with us and we'll set something up!

We'll also be reaching out soon to department chairs to request someone from each department with undergraduate programs to supply someone to the ad hoc council so we can form this as a decision making body as we move forward with consolidating models and laying out what is needed for a new curriculum.

This week's meeting focused a lot on the link between academic advising, career development, and core curriculum.

We discussed some of what three articles on this topic raise for consideration in how we tie these things together through both curricular and co-curricular support for students. Links to the articles and some selected quotes follow at the end of this update. You'll also find the links in the resource links below.

We also had some discussion about naming the curriculum. We tried some creative approaches starting with English words but then restarted the process thinking through ASL signs. We'd like something that captures the purpose of liberal arts education as well as excites people about it. See the ASL update for some of what we developed in ASL. We found our discussion on this influenced by bell hooks' assertion that "education is the practice of freedom" and that education leads to the liberation of one's mind and ability to learn from the world and, in turn, influence the world.

In one of the more creative and most Friday-like moments, we had some impromptu Bison Song adaptations of describing the purpose of General Education. But you'll have to come to the workshops if you want to see that level of fun!

Please note, no workshop this coming Friday Oct. 25, it is the start of the homecoming weekend and the Co-lab is reserved for other festivities. Join in the Bison spirit this weekend and we'll see you on November 1.

Thinking through General Education and Academic Advising

Articles:

1. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jgeneeduc.64.2.0106#full_text_tab_contents

"What Is a Curriculum?"

A curriculum is not just a formal list of requirements; it is an assertion of values, purpose, and commitment (Boyer, [2006](#)). It is an expression of what the faculty holds dear and true—what is worth knowing, conserving, sharing, stewarding, and defending. A curriculum is also a touchstone to which alumni can return again and again as they continue to learn and develop over the course of their lives. And, finally, a curriculum is a public pledge to form certain kinds of people and uphold and pursue knowledge that is valuable both in itself and for the purposes of a life well lived. A curriculum occupies a middle space between ideals and pedagogical practice, between a faculty's aspirations and its attempts to give them shape and reality. Thus, it pushes for what ought to be and recognizes the limits of what often is. It provides a compelling rationale for and clear vision of the purposes of a university education.

In designing and teaching a curriculum we, as a faculty, make normative claims. These claims need to be clear and given content. It matters what we assign our students to read and why; it matters what we have them do in our labs, studios, and libraries. Every course, every assignment, and every exam is a statement about what is worth knowing and what is not. What we teach and how we teach shapes our students' intellectual and moral habits and imaginations. A curriculum needs to be dynamic; it needs to be a subject of constant debate among faculty and students. In this sense, it needs to be a collaborative, shared enterprise undertaken and led, above all, by faculty members dedicated to fostering its broader ends and collectively planning, teaching, and revising its basic elements, from particular courses and labs to broader requirements and literacies. And it must be accompanied by excellent advising.”

2. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jgeneeduc.64.2.0117#full_text_tab_contents

“Students' level of engagement with general education and their grasp of its goals are a problem at many institutions. Academic advising, which is often viewed as having the “signpost” function of directing students to the completion of their course requirements, has the potential instead to be a place where students learn to approach general education with intentionality and especially to see how they can fit its pieces together to form an integrated whole greater than the sum of its parts. Since this will be very difficult (albeit rewarding) work for students, inducing them to engage with it is as challenging as inducing them to engage with any other aspect of general education. A partial solution could lie in treating advising as coursework in its own right, an integral part of general education rather than external to it. This proposal creates challenges for advisers and costs for institutions—which are worth meeting if the institutions highly value integrative learning.”

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“The Role of Advising

How can advising help institutions address this problem? The first answer that many people would offer is that advisers (whether faculty or staff) are precisely the people tasked with explaining the

curriculum to students and helping them choose classes that will meet the requirements. Advisers who are particularly conscientious may also pay attention to the order in which students take these classes and query the rationale for their choice of specific classes. This role that advisers can play may be called the “class selection role.”

Certainly it is desirable that advisers do these things. But advisers will be fighting an uphill battle in trying to engage students in doing more than the minimum to meet requirements. There is another, richer role that advisers could play, in which they serve not as course-selection assistants but as full-fledged educators directly involved in facilitating student learning. Describing and advocating that role is the principal purpose of this essay. (The ideas laid out here are also described, in the context of expounding a theory of advising, in Lowenstein, [2014](#).)”

3. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jgeneeduc.64.2.0131#full_text_tab_contents

“As an adviser and an advising administrator for more than twenty-five years, I regularly talk with students and parents about the difference between getting a degree and getting an education. Of course, I want all of our students to earn a degree, but, more importantly, I want every one of our students to achieve a rich education that is meaningful to them, as individuals, and that not only prepares them for a job or even a career but prepares them to recognize and grasp a host of opportunities that will come to them over the course of their professional lives. When I consider the ideal higher education, it would train people to question and innovate. It would train our graduates to create opportunities and solutions where none seem to exist and would prepare them to tackle the next generation of seemingly insoluble problems: climate change, social injustice, aging populations in a number of leading economies.

When I speak to new students entering the university, I urge them to prepare for the future not the past, to recognize that careers in high demand today may not be in high demand when they graduate. I ask them to consider how they want to prepare themselves, regardless of their major field of study, to address the big questions that will confront their generation because that approach to their education is most likely to provide them with the best preparation for the long term. I emphasize the value of a multidisciplinary approach to their education, and I emphasize the importance of developing a coherent plan for their education that integrates, in an intentional way, their general education requirements, their major and minor requirements, and enrichment opportunities (e.g., undergraduate research, study abroad, leadership, internships and service). I am gratified that this message continues to resonate with the majority of students and their parents, even while I see more and more students intending to pursue technical and professional fields, sometimes less out of interest than out of fear that majoring in one of the traditional arts, humanities, social sciences, or sciences will mean moving back in with their parents after graduation. The message I take from this interest in developing a comprehensive plan is that our students see the value of breadth in their education even though they may not immediately understand the foundational role general education in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences plays in providing that breadth.”