

Institutions whose mission it is to prepare students to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century are not always well served by the persistence of traditional boundaries among disciplines and departments or between the curriculum and the cocurriculum, academic affairs and student affairs, or the liberal arts and the professional fields. In fact, the primarily vertical organization of colleges and universities can create structural impediments to achieving the goals of a twenty-first-century liberal education.

Interdisciplinary programs, learning communities, diversity initiatives, service learning, and other effective educational innovations have arisen out of the need for greater horizontality. The writing across the curriculum movement, for example, is based upon the recognition that students are more likely to become proficient in writing when they are given opportunities to practice their developing skills in a variety of disciplines and settings. Similarly, as the articles in the ongoing Bonner Series on Student Civic Engagement demonstrate, efforts to foster personal and social responsibility are far more effective when they are intentionally designed to maximize curricular and cocurricular coordination.

Leadership and organizational support are required to sustain and expand innovations that integrate teaching and learning across organizational units, however, and as Jerry Gaff points out in this issue, those involved with institutional initiatives that span departments “routinely discover that nobody is in charge

FROM THE EDITOR

of important educational programs. They realize that they must invent structures, design processes, and create leadership positions.” Frustration over the functional disconnect between the vertical organization of colleges and universities and the horizontal forces driving successful educational innovation is expressed through what Richard Keeling, Ric Underhile, and Andrew Wall call “the frequent and increasingly predictable accusation that institutions of higher education operate in ‘silos.’”

Notwithstanding its usefulness as a shorthand description of the problem, the metaphor of the silo is somewhat less helpful for conceptualizing solutions. Whether they’re designed to store grain or missiles, silos are self-contained and sealed for very good reasons. If silos are the problem, if they represent an unsuitable organizational model for institutions of higher education, then their elimination in favor of more integrated, or more horizontal, units of organization would seem to be the solution. But the likely result of such a radical solution would be, to mix the metaphor, to throw out the baby with the bathwater. And in truth, it’s not really the structures that need to change so much as the roles and behaviors of those who inhabit them.

In the business world, where the silo metaphor originated, a corresponding buzzword has been coined to identify a different solution: “unsiloing.” As Carol Hymowitz recently explained in the *Wall Street Journal*, “‘unsiloing’ mangles the noun silo to make an important but simple point: Managers must cooperate across departments and functions, share resources and cross-sell products to boost the bottom line.” Or, to paraphrase, faculty, staff, and administrators must cooperate across departments and functions, share resources, and assume collective responsibility for helping students achieve the outcomes of a liberal education. And it is with this goal in mind that the recommendations for strengthening faculty leadership are offered in the Featured Topic section of this issue.—DAVID TRITELLI

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