

**Notes on  
“A Better Way To Design General Education”  
(Pre-conference workshop,  
17 Feb. 2005, AAC&U Meeting -- Atlanta, GA  
by Diane Pike, Prof. Sociology,  
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Augsburg College tried and failed twice to redesign their GE program. Then Diane came across a video clip from *Nightline* about the design consulting firm IDEO in Palo Alto. She showed us the clip, which had inspired the organization of the group at Augsburg that has made the latest (and apparently successful) revision of GE.

Two of the major issues with Augsburg's GE change related to religion classes in the GE program (Augsburg is a fairly traditional religious college; they went from 3 required to 2 required classes – made the religion dept very unhappy at first) and shift from checkoff diversity requirement to infusion of diversity across program (this was very hard for strong advocates of the original requirement to trust)

The characteristics of IDEO's process, based on video clip and discussion:

- Interdisciplinary team
- No team hierarchy
- Intermittent involvement of a strong leader (mostly to remind of foci listed below) interspersed with times when lack of structure and extreme creativity are encouraged
- Seeking out of appropriate experts
- Testing and refining ideas
- Group empowerment
- Focus on what's buildable
- Team follows a set of process rules, which included
  - Entire group stays focused on overall goal
  - Delay judgement

- Wild ideas encouraged
- Building on others ideas
- “fail often to succeed sooner”

Based on the design team approach and her experience at Augsburg, Diane suggests

- 1) Be mindful of the mission of the institution
- 2) GE revision proposal prepared by a team (Diane suggests 6-7 members), not a committee. By this she means that a committee made up of members who are there to represent the interests of their department or college will be influenced by various types of political pressures, which will be toxic to the possibility of an effective product
- 3) Team prepares and follows a set of rules, perhaps similar to those of IDEO, listed above
- 4) Regarding problems with the current GE program:
  - a) Do appropriate research, including requests for input from all stakeholders, so the team knows all that is empirically knowable
  - b) Clearly articulate problems
  - c) Realize that GE redesign won't solve all problems
  - d) Recognize which problems GE redesign can solve
- 5) Intensive work by team
  - a) Over summer with college/university support, if possible
  - b) In dedicated team space, if possible
- 6) During design, regularly ask, “Who’s gonna hate this?”
- 7) No surprises, no surprises, no surprises: communicate constantly via shuttle diplomacy, including with those who’ll hate it
- 8) Regular group-think checks; watch for and avoid:
  - a) Illusion of morality (“This [fill in the blank] is *so* important...”)
  - b) Illusion of unanimity (because *someone’s* gonna hate it)
  - c) Mind guarding (practice honest communication – don’t avoid communicating with those who will hate it)
  - d) Self-censorship (don’t forget to follow the rules)
  - e) Rationalization
  - f) Negative stereotyping of outsiders (communicate with them, instead)
- 9) Embed outcomes and assessment
- 10) Steering committee [I didn’t understand this one]
- 11) “Teach, don’t toss” the new program to faculty
- 12) Dissemination phase

- a) Lobby
- b) Listen
- c) Count

Diane also stressed that, for Augsburg's (and many other organizations') change, understanding/use of Bolman & Deal's concept of "frames" (see *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*) was crucial. [See also the examples at the bottom of the table which starts on next page.] As explained by Diane, the frames are:

- Structural – organizations exist primarily to accomplish established goals (hierarchy, specialization, procedures)
- Human resources – organizations exist to serve human needs (advancement, careers, professional development)
- Political – organizations are coalitions with differing values, information and perceptions of reality
- Symbolic/cultural – individual differences in understanding matter: how people understand what things (like various curricular features) mean (images, rituals, ceremonies, collective stories)

At each step of the way and with each iteration, it's important to review problems and proposed solutions in the context of the four frames. It is also important to start with an articulation of the problems, then an analysis of which problems are solvable by GE revision – not all will be.

Proposed solutions for problems must address the root of each problem. It's a common mistake, for example, to propose a structural solution to a political problem.

See next page for a list of problems and benefits brainstormed at our Saturday morning workshop. The first problem was broken down into frames as an example before the discussion, and a second problem was discussed in the context of the frames model as shown.

**Scale Matters in General Education Change: Shared Perspectives from Regional Comprehensive Universities  
AAC&U Workshop -- Atlanta, GA  
19 February 2005**

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 John Sollinger, General Education Reform Working Group, Southern Oregon University, Ashland, OR  
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The following problems and benefits were brainstormed during the session. See bottom of table for more information about frames.

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Structural issues</b>	<b>Political issues</b>	<b>Cultural/symbolic issues</b>	<b>Human resources issues</b>
Faculty buy-in for GE reform		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal: Faculty teaching GE aren't teaching in major</li> <li>• Internal: How will change affect FTEs?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I want/was hired to work in my discipline"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most faculty don't understand GE</li> <li>• "I'd love to help, but I only get rewarded for work in my discipline"</li> </ul>
Lack of \$ for change				
Change seen as adding to faculty workload				
General lack of agreement about liberal arts mission				
Assessment/accreditation-driven change instead of mission/goal driven change				

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Structural issues</b>	<b>Political issues</b>	<b>Cultural/symbolic issues</b>	<b>Human resources issues</b>
External political climate: accountability requirements tightening				
Faculty fear of assessment-accountability link				
Unfunded mandates				
Dept budgets funded (or perceived to be funded) by student credit hours				
Faculty say “we just wish it was 1972”				
Programs & depts depend on GE exposure to students				
Faculty see assessment as no benefit, all busy work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not part of official contract</li> <li>• No assessment office</li> <li>• Assessment instruments need to be valid, trusted, believable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment seen as leading toward limitation of academic freedom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not part of social contract</li> <li>• Faculty think they’re already doing assessment</li> <li>• Assessment cried wolf: became trendy a few years ago, was dismissed by faculty for various reasons, but now it’s serious. Really.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No reward -- but disincentives -- for assessment</li> <li>• Not part of retention-tenure-promotion considerations</li> <li>• Faculty avoid involvement out of tenure risk fears</li> <li>• Faculty don’t understand assessment – need faculty development</li> </ul>

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Structural issues</b>	<b>Political issues</b>	<b>Cultural/symbolic issues</b>	<b>Human resources issues</b>
Perceived use (or lack thereof) of assessment results				
Hypocrisy re collection and use of data				
Lack of communication among units				
Lack of GE oversight/director				
Lack of designated assessment office				
Need for/lack of vocal support of GE and assessment by upper administration				
Communication is crucial, with everyone, about everything				
Benefit: at least we know who the players are				
Benefit: Smaller programs are easier to assess well, and it's easier to communicate results to faculty for change				
Benefit: Availability of advice from on-campus professional schools				
Benefit: small enough to comfort students, facilitate success of middling students through familiar, family-like atmosphere near home				

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Structural issues</b>	<b>Political issues</b>	<b>Cultural/symbolic issues</b>	<b>Human resources issues</b>
Benefit: Non trad, first generation students are energizing for faculty				
Benefit: GE structure more likely to be infused across university				
Benefit: general agreement among faculty about liberal arts mission				

**Structural issues:** these relate to registration, physical layout, student services, residence halls, etc.

**Political issues:** may be either internal (departmental/college/university level) or external (parents/citizens/legislators), may include missions or mandates for change

**Cultural/symbolic issues:** these relate to personal, disciplinary, program, or university identity, and to image and recognition

**Human resource issues:** faculty rewards structure, faculty development/enrichment, etc.

## **Participants:**

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