

AAC&U ACADEMIC CHARRETTE
Integrating Goals for General Education
With the Work of Departments
Long Beach, CA March 4, 2004

Thanks again to the members of the superb charrette teams that collaboratively created the following reports. I hope that you will find them interesting and useful—and that you will let me know if I may offer further assistance.

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CHARRETTE GROUP I

What's the problem?

Motivating both faculty and students to “get on board” in supporting the sustained development of academic skills in all disciplines.

What are the design issues?

Building campus-wide consensus with regard to institutional general education goals so that every faculty member accepts responsibility for these goals and for their integration throughout the curriculum.

What design would address the problem?

- 1 Ensure that the mission statement makes clear overall institutional learning outcomes.
- 2 Create a small group (faculty, administration, students, staff) to develop a provocative example of integration between general education and the major, then convene “charrettes” to consider this model and extrapolate from it to other areas.
- 3 Seek governance approval.

CHARRETTE GROUP II

What's the problem?

Developing a strong sense of (a) collective ownership and (b) individual responsibility for general education outcomes that transcends unit identities.

What are the design issues?

- 1 Ensuring broad participation in the design of general education.
- 2 Confirming that major courses in all disciplines further the commitment to general education outcomes.
- 3 Expressing the institutional commitment to general education outcomes in student advising, in faculty recruitment and new faculty orientation, and in syllabi.

What design would address the problem?

- 1 Convene discussions involving all constituents to examine, redefine, and restate institutional learning goals. In order to emphasize the equal value of all contributions, use an outside consultant as facilitator.
- 2 Prior to these discussions, conduct a curricular scan to determine where these goals are furthered—and where they are not.
- 3 Consider in what ways the accomplishment of these goals might be assessed.
- 4 To support a commitment to the broader pursuit of institutional learning goals throughout the curriculum, establish inter-disciplinary faculty learning communities to develop strategies for closer integration.
- 5 Seek opportunities (interdisciplinary appointments, team-teaching assignments, cross-disciplinary requirements) to reinforce and pursue the institutional commitment to integration between general education and the major.
- 6 Reinforce this commitment through faculty orientation, continuing professional development, and advisor training.
- 7 Reward accomplishments through the faculty evaluation and merit system.
- 8 Explore opportunities to reinforce through Student Affairs the university's commitment to general education outcomes.
- 9 Encourage prominent expression on all syllabi of the institution's general education goals.

CHARRETTE GROUP III**What's the problem?**

General education is neither integrated, defined, nor appreciated across any constituency—students, faculty, or administration.

What are the design issues?

Through consultation with all levels of all constituencies, develop overarching learning goals for the institution. Then develop a process for the continual, intentional, community-building reinforcement of these goals throughout the curriculum.

What design would address the problem?

Remember that “if you don’t know where you are going, you are likely to end up somewhere else.”

- 1 Having obtained a neutral facilitator, convene stake-holders: alumni, faculty, corporate leaders, other employers, etc.
- 2 Support this meeting with reports of surveys, focus group discussions, and exit interviews with student groups, graduating students, alumni, stop-outs, etc.
- 3 Use this meeting to reach a short-term assessment of the institutional “product” while committing to a long-term, more thorough assessment.
- 4 Seek from this meeting also a clearly defined time-line for the development of learning goals, for subsequent curricular reform, and for the creation of assessment measures.

CHARRETTE GROUP IV**What’s the problem?**

Creating a real, cross-institutional engagement with the development of core competencies, as opposed to the lip service they ordinarily receive.

What are the design issues?

Create a campus-wide consensus on a small core of values that (a) stand behind a coherent set of core competencies and (b) drive appropriate assessment. Then develop an approach to convincing all faculty, staff, and students that the consistent, across-the-campus pursuit of these core values is critical.

What design would address the problem?

- 1 A faculty committee of the whole considers and, where necessary, redrafts the institution’s general education goals.
- 2 For every course in the curriculum, faculty members define learning outcomes congruent with these goals.

- 3 Reconvene the discussion to assure that the institution's overall goals are achieved across the curriculum in all disciplines. Fundamental to this discussion is the assumption that general education is "foundational" as opposed to "introductory" learning. Because students must build on the foundation, they never leave general education behind them.
- 4 Every course should express at least some of the values of general education: effective spoken and written communication, quantitative reasoning, historical perspective, second language acquisition, etc.

CHARRETTE GROUP V

'What's the problem?

The institution does not clearly communicate the goals, objectives, and significance of general education to its students, its faculty, or its community.

What are the design issues?

- 1 The faculty should play the major role in improved communication.
- 2 Faculty development can provide the means by which faculty members sustain their own exemplary commitment to lifelong learning.
- 3 With themselves as examples, the faculty can develop improved approaches to incremental and recursive learning for students.

What design would address the problem?

In pursuit of a truly comprehensive approach to faculty development

- 1 Create early buy-in to general education outcomes through new faculty orientation.
- 2 Make the pursuit of general education outcomes a keystone of faculty professional development.
- 3 Reward faculty members for the development of new GE courses or the strengthening of instruction in existing courses.
- 4 Employ both faculty and student portfolios to support a genuinely comprehensive and constructive approach to cross-campus general education outcomes.

CHARRETTE GROUP VI

What's the problem?

The institution's goals for general education mirror traditional disciplinary approaches and do not represent a campus-wide commitment sustainable, mutually agreeable outcomes.

What are the design issues?

A stronger sense of institutional community represents a priority.

- 1 There must be more effective communication among the disciplines.
- 2 There must be respect for differences among the disciplines.
- 3 There must be a consensus among all disciplines and constituencies with regard to the institution's overall learning goals.
- 4 These goals must be clearly and persuasively expressed.
- 5 Accomplishment of these goals must be assessed.

What design would address the problem?

Recruit a consultant to lead an on-campus workshop. Use the workshop to secure broad consensus on a few core values. With these values as a point of departure, implement decision-making software to support a campus-wide discussion on curricular reform. Create a trusted team drawn from all constituencies to work with the results and develop a proposal.

CHARRETTE GROUP VII

What's the problem?

The lack of broadly shared responsibility for the overall educational outcomes of the institution has created (a) an incoherent curriculum, (b) resentments about the inequitable distribution of responsibility for general education, (c) rivalries among disciplines, and (d) disputes regarding the allocation of resources. Moreover, the faculty members themselves fail to embody the very educational values the institution claims are important for students.

What are the design issues?

It may be necessary to apply the campus rewards structure to drive a broader understanding of and commitment to the learning outcomes promised by the institution. A first priority must be a wide, collective understanding of those outcomes that transcend disciplinary boundaries.

What design would address the problem?

- 1 Conduct an objective analysis of the institution, defining as clearly as possible the gap between the learning outcomes promised by the institution and those it in fact delivers.
- 2 Create conversations and other interactions among faculty, students, administrators, and other constituencies to assess how this gap should be addressed.
- 3 Once there is consensus on an approach, support it through administrative buy-in, faculty incentives, and constructive outcomes assessment.