

SCRIPT

HEDS UP SESSION

Students that Change the World! Innovative Course-building for Transformative Learning

Good morning. Thank you all for coming today. I am Caralyn Zehnder and I am a lecturer at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

And I am Julia Metzker and I am the Executive Director at the Brown Center for Faculty Innovation and Excellence at Stetson University.

We belong to a grass-roots collective of educators, known as the Innovative Course-building Group or IC-bG, committed to using social and civic issues as a gateway for transformative learning. We are excited to tell you about an initiative that came from the powerful work of this group. We believe this work has the power to transform students and faculty in important, meaningful ways.

So, let's begin ...

This isn't rhetorical, I want you to actually imagine this. Please close your eyes.

Imagine a world where, when a student starts college, they collaborate with fellow students and faculty to explore socially-relevant dilemmas, issues or questions.

Imagine faculty who are engaged and empowered to transform students' lives by designing courses that teach important content and allow students to demonstrate personal and social responsibility.

Imagine classrooms where all students feel a sense of belonging and are engaged in high-impact practices.

Imagine courses intentionally designed so that all students succeed.

If you lived in this world, how would your work be different?

If you haven't yet please open your eyes.

We all know that our society faces complex problems whose solutions will require years of work, collaboration among individuals from different cultural identities and disciplinary backgrounds, and innovative, creative thinking.

Colleges and Universities like ours have responded by promising an education that yields engaged critical thinkers *who are* globally and interculturally competent citizens *with* a robust

capacity for ethical reasoning who *also* have polished their skills in teamwork, problem solving and communication.

And most of this heavy lifting falls onto the shoulders of our general education curriculums.

But how do we deliver on these promises when we know, despite several decades of work, that employers are dissatisfied with the work-readiness of college graduates, public confidence in higher education is waning, and even our own reports show that we are not meeting our goals nor equitably serving all students?

There is a gap between institutional mission statements that assure student success and the reality of student outcomes that are less positive.

And there is a gap between many faculty members' desire to teach transformative courses and their knowledge of and guidance for how to do so.

This may seem like a dismal situation but **there is hope** ... We believe that this dream can be achieved because we have experienced the power of an undergraduate education to transform and open up a world of possibility. We have experienced this as students and as educators. We have watched students build confidence, find passions and make a difference in their world. Based on their courses

We've worked with faculty who want to teach meaningful course that lead to important student learning.

And we now know a lot about what works in education. Decades of scholarship have provided us with important insights and teaching strategies.

We also know that meaningful learning experiences don't just happen ... they have to be intentionally designed.

So, think

What if all courses addressed a dilemma, issue, or question?

What if course learning outcomes were aligned with Essential Learning?

What if all courses incorporated evidence-based teaching strategies?

What if all courses were inclusive of all students.?

What if all courses assessed student learning authentically and transparently?

These questions aren't rhetorical. We've developed a certificate in Course Design for Essential Learning that supports faculty as they build courses that address these very questions. The next institute will be in January 2019 in sunny central Florida. Please pick up a flyer on your way out.

There are a few basic tenets we've adopted ...

Tenet Number 1: Employ evidence-based practice. We think it is unrealistic to expect individual faculty to synthesize and implement the many reports, books and studies that describe best practices in teaching and learning. We've synthesized a great deal of the work from AAC&U and others and translated it into a pragmatic course design institute accessible to faculty at all levels from all types of institutions.

Tenet Number 2: Use social issues to engage. Course framed around complex, contested and capricious dilemmas, issues, and questions (which we affectionately refer to as DIQs) engage students with the wider world while also addressing course goals and learning outcomes. These DIQs act as hooks to grab students' interest, make course content relevant, and provide opportunities to work through complex, interdisciplinary problems - exactly the types of problems we face at local, national and international scales.

- For example, consider an introductory survey chemistry course reimagined as an exploration of the role of chemistry in pollution and climate change.
- A general education sociology course reimagined as an investigation of the local community's food security.
- A general education art course reimagined as a collaborative project with a local youth organization to co-create a public mural celebrating community.

These, and more, are examples of courses that participants design during this institute.

Tenet Number 3: Put students in authentic contexts. Faculty design courses that incorporate transparent assignments and authentic assessments that clarify for students the purpose of their learning and model success in contexts closely associated with their future.

Tenet Number 4: Align with Essential Learning. Faculty deeply examine the Essential Learning Outcomes and associated VALUE rubrics to create integrated assessments.

Tenet Number 5: Build community. Sustainability requires a community of practitioners that encourage and support, make space for reflection, and hold each other accountable.

After completing an immersive 5-day institute, participants leave with the solid framework for a course designed around these tenets. Over the following 12-18 months, they work closely in a learning community with mentors to develop a reflective course portfolio that documents transformative student learning. Successful completion and review of the portfolio, results in a Certification in Teaching and Course Design for Essential Learning.

And then these individuals form a cohort to support, mentor and educate others - growing our community.

We would like to close with a few belief statements:

We believe general education is essential education.

We believe in aligning the work that students do in the classroom with societal needs.

We believe in intentionally designing courses.

We believe in tapping into the wellspring of expertise and humanity that faculty bring to their work.

We believe in building a cohort of faculty with the knowledge, skills, and agency to mentor others in building courses that change students' lives.

We believe that faculty are best positioned to inspire students to change their communities and the world.

Thank you very much for your time.