ABSTRACT

Revision Redesigned: An Accelerated and Collaborative Approach to Curricular Design
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OBJECTIVES

To undertake the first wholesale revision of Trinity University’s curriculum since 1986 and design a student-centered, forward-looking general education requirement in line with our institutional strengths and strategic plan goals. To prepare a generation of graduates who can write and speak effectively, think creatively and critically, and become leaders in a variety of disciplines and industries.

To accomplish our change using an innovative method for realizing institutional change apart from familiar approaches such as top-down, opaque administrative decision-making or appointing a slow-moving faculty committee with limited university representation and resources. Familiar approaches typically fail to engender faculty buy-in and compromise the ability to implement a new vision. In order to design a student-centered curriculum with limited departmental turf battles, we adopted the following values to enable faculty to mutually reframe and complement and ideas and avoid a winner-take-all mindset:

- Inclusivity - Invite many voices, perspectives, and strengths to the table without letting strong personalities dominate (too much)
- Transparency - Structure frequent opportunities to give and receive feedback, document and proactively explain the rationale for all decisions; Appoint a neutral coordinating committee to maintain the integrity of the process (but not the direction of the curriculum itself)
- Pace of work - Balance the process and be attuned to the natural ebbs and flows of the academic calendar with periods of intensive work and opportunities for considered reflection; Maintain momentum and progress over time with regular milestones
- Innovation - Create atmospheres that fluctuate between playfulness and provocations to inspire new ways of addressing old problems and realizing institutional potential; Adopt design thinking principles and practices; Use both technology solutions for information sharing and asynchronous review and efficient and equitable face-to-face protocols; Design safe spaces for faculty to explore new types of courses, pedagogical opportunities, and set the stage for future cross-disciplinary endeavors.

IDEAS LAB COMPONENTS

Participants (22) - A mix of elected (19) and appointed (4) faculty members elected/selected for their creative potential and ability to work collaboratively; Process oriented for the overall faculty by rank, gender, and discipline

Provocateurs / Mentors (4) - National leaders in higher education selected to share expertise and insights, but by definition they have no stake in the outcomes of the ideas lab and are there to encourage bold thinking and clear goals

Outcomes language; Committee makes final revisions; Deliverable: Semi-finalized curricular proposal and rationale

IDEAS LAB OVERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Operations</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Setting the Grand Challenge</td>
<td>Design a general education curriculum relevant for 2022 graduates; Deliver on the first principles established in the Retreat Day</td>
<td>May - September 2011</td>
<td>Circulate the resulting plan; Meet with Assessment Committee to clarify outcomes language; Online Stakeholder Feedback; Coordinating Committee meets; Faculty Develop online resources to document process</td>
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<td>5 - Curricular Revision Packaging</td>
<td>Goal: Refine and flesh out the CIDL proposal and address concerns raised by departments; Provide rationale for changes</td>
<td>May - September 2012</td>
<td>Present resulting model at open forum; Electronic and paper surveys;Provide rationale for changes</td>
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<td>4 - Curricular Development Lab</td>
<td>March 2013</td>
<td>Goal: To identify the most compelling elements and develop one proposal</td>
<td>Deliverable: Semi-finalized curricular proposal and rationale</td>
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<td>6 - Final Revision</td>
<td>Goal: Develop new Course of Study Bulletin language, Student Learning Outcomes, and Course Guidelines</td>
<td>January 2013</td>
<td>Deliverable: Vote of Principle (May 2013) and Final Approval (January 2014)</td>
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<td>1 - Symposium Early September</td>
<td>Goal: Engender a “sense of the valley” and mandate for change presents from highly energizing keynote speakers</td>
<td>Deliverable: Faculty Resolution</td>
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<td>2 - Retreat Day Mid-September 2011</td>
<td>Goal: Define first principles</td>
<td>Online discussion boards to capture campus response; Deliberate: Draft Student Learning Outcomes</td>
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OUTCOMES & LESSONS LEARNED

- The Faculty Assembly unanimously approved the final curriculum in January 2014 (to be implemented in Fall 2015). We attribute the strong outcome to the inclusivity and transparency of the design process. We estimate that 80 of 245 colleagues participated in one of the committees / design labs and nearly all faculty participated in an online poll, the vote, sounding boards, or one or more of the numerous roundtable discussions.
- We found value in varying the groups of colleagues working on each stage of the design, though we had to allow prep time to get all groups to get “up to speed” at each stage of the process.
- Our new curriculum adopted the spirit of our collaborative, reconstructive, and cross-disciplinary design process. Colleagues must cross and transcend traditional boundaries as we implement new Interdisciplinary Clusters and First-Year Experiences.
- We initially underestimated the time it would take the faculty to rally behind the Curricular Development Plan (March) and finalize the Course of Study Bulletin (May). At each stage, colleagues stated that they felt rushed and asked for more time. Yet, we tried not to stray too far from the initial timeline (it was critical to keep the momentum by including deadlines and interim milestones). In our experience, better work didn’t result from granting “extensions” – though additional talk time helped build shared understanding and consensus.
- Our colleagues needed coaching to give a spectrum of feedback. Left to their own devices, colleagues only note “Concerns” and none on minor details, especially with early drafts. By rigorously soliciting “Positive” and “Potentials,” we found that the suggestions were most useful to shaping future iterations. This process did not feel natural at first, but we think it had led to positive culture changes on our campus.

ELEMNTS OF THE NEW CURRICULUM

1. Enhanced First-Year Experience: Take in the student’s first semester, this intensive course adopts a learning community model to instill substantial instructors in writing and oral communication skills, develop an understanding of self and career, and foster an understanding of cultural sensitivity and sustainability.
2. Core Capabilities: Students will develop transferrable skills that enable them to succeed academically at Trinity and in their post-graduate careers. The core competencies are Writing, Oral, and Visual Communication; Digital Literacy and Empathetic Citizenship.
3. Approaches to Creation and Analysis: Students will demonstrate the ability to use approaches characteristic of (1) the humanities, (2) the arts and creative disciplines, (3) the social and behavioral sciences, (4) the natural sciences, and (5) quantitative disciplines.
4. Interdisciplinary Clusters: Students will explore a complex subject of enduring or contemporary significance by completing three linked courses from a variety of departments.
5. Experiential Learning: Trinity is committed to helping students learn to apply knowledge in real-world environments. The new curriculum recommends that all students complete at least one on-experience learning opportunity, which might include service-learning and field-based courses, self-designed projects, internships, artistic works, study abroad, or mentored research.

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ATTRIBUTION

The new curriculum includes a required academic major, a lifetime fitness course, three years of foreign language, and an English requirement.