Key points and ideas that emerged from table discussion (bulleted list of 5-10 points with a couple sentences of description for each):

- Is Liberal Education intended to be content-based requirements or skills development?
  - For example, Mathematical Thinking – are we teaching specific math content or are we teaching students how to think about math (rather solving math problems)? Most people can solve math problems using the computer. There seems to be somewhat of a disconnection with the current Liberal Education requirements. Students need to learn mathematical communication skills.
  - We need to distinguish between content courses and methodology/thinking courses, in which students learn to look at materials in certain ways.

- Distinguish education from training
  - The University should focus on “education” so that whatever our graduates do and wherever they go, they have the skills and ability to the job. We should not be in the business of “training” our students for particular jobs (as they will get on the job training).
  - From the book “Beyond the Skills Gap: Preparing College Students for Life and Work” by Matthew Hora (University of Wisconsin – Madison faculty) and other similar publications, employers want college graduates to have skills such as persistence, being flexible/adaptable, the ability to continue to learn, problem solving, etc. How to be a human, a thinker, a citizen. These should be included in the skills that the Liberal Education should get at.
  - As educators, we should light the fire within the students; help them see things in a different light and get them excited so that they are ready to go to the real world. We should draw from everyday experience – scientific achievements, news of interest, Twitter, etc. Create the “ah ha” moments.
  - Students should leave the University being able to be a citizen of the society, be informed about managing their health care, finances, etc.

- Our society has changed a lot since the University’s Liberal Education curriculum/requirements were developed, we need to be responsive to today’s society and this generation of students we are educating.
  - With the advancement of technology, it has led to an explosion of information. We used to think about how to get information but today, we need to focus more on how to filter all the information that is available to us.
  - We need to help this generation’s students to identify “crud” and develop the ability to find reliable information. They need to learn tip-offs (“sniff test”) for detecting what may be false or distorted information. The Libraries used to offer a module on this and it was very useful. There are many things librarians know that students need to know – they still need this.
  - We may also need to consider the pedagogy as students’ learning style has changed as well. For example, most students find it hard to read through passages of philosophy course materials and would much prefer to have the concept/content be provided to them in significantly less words (such as 140 words). The ability to engage in sustained reading should be one of the goals of Liberal Education. However, some faculty in the group think that we should focus more on adapting to the learning style of today’s students.
  - Students can be overconfident in their abilities and knowledge, so we need to think about how to address that in courses.

- Who gets to determine which specific requirements of Liberal Education are being met through which courses?
  - For example, in a philosophy course, the faculty covers evolutionary biology though history, taking students through a “journey” from ancient Greece to today. The “journey” helps students
realize the development of the tension between evolution and creationism, and that it is more complex than the binary arguments one sees at present. However, the faculty member teaches philosophy and not history or biology, so should the students taking the philosophy class consider it “touching upon” different aspects of the Liberal Education requirements?

- Another example is an algebra course that provides students with the specific skills that are needed to prepare them for the calculus course but does the algebra course really fulfill the mathematical thinking requirements? This faculty member says no, because algebra is just calculations and doesn’t teach mathematical thinking. It (algebra) should have been learned in high school.
- The philosophy course also covers some math “topics” so students may think they have met the mathematical thinking requirement but the math instructor/mathematician in the group would be reluctant to agree that the philosophy course meets that requirement.

- We should design courses that are actually meant to meet the goals of the Liberal Education rather than just check off the boxes required.
- This is genuinely a cross-college endeavor rather than having individual colleges figuring out how each of them can achieve the Liberal Education goals. How can we increase cross-college communication to map out the Liberal Education curriculum even though the current budget model does not help in this regard? Departments and colleges try to get more students in their classes and help increase their tuition revenue but are they truly meeting the spirit/intentions of the Liberal Education requirement? How can cross-college cooperation and collaboration be supported?
- Some of the proposals for Liberal Education courses are deemed to be “bogus.” People are gaming the system and double dipping. However, if they can be developed and vetted through other colleges, we can better ensure that they do what they are supposed to rather than to make it “appear” that they meet the requirements and do so for the wrong reasons/incentives.
- One example of an approach to design courses is ARCS: A = attention; R = relevance; C = confidence; S = satisfying. This is considered to be a “motivational design” approach. For example, a course on the U.S. health system and health insurance is relevant to every student, no matter the degree they pursue (not limited to health sciences students). Students coming into the course may not be interested in the health care system but with the ARCS approach, seeing the relevance to their lives, it helps increase the interest of these students. This also relates to something being stated earlier, that is, to prepare students to become citizens of the society.

Summary of discussion (300 to 500 words):

The University’s Liberal Education curriculum needs to be adaptive and responsive to today’s society. The intentions and goals of Liberal Education also need to be more clearly defined and articulated in order to be helpful in the design of appropriate courses to meet those goals/intentions as well as to determine which existing courses can also fulfill them. It is important that the University finds a way to encourage robust inter-collegiate collaboration on the development and offering of Liberal Education courses in order to minimize unproductive competition and to ensure the quality of the courses.

Employers are looking for college graduates with a set of transferrable skills that are not job specific and they often blame the education system for not properly preparing students to develop these skills. Students need to learn how to find reliable information and detect unreliable sources. They need practice with evaluating text and with complex thinking. In order for the University to prepare our students to become productive citizens of the society and be able to succeed in whatever careers they pursue, we may need to incorporate these transferrable skills into the list of Liberal Education requirements.
We need to consider how to reach students who already think they know the answers and those who come to college with a bias towards specific viewpoints. Methods used by some faculty, for example, historical or ARCS approach mentioned earlier, should be shared with others.

Additional context (characterize level of consensus/lack of consensus, tone and tenor of conversation, other notable aspects of the discussion):

Although the Provost advised not to consider the budget implications in this discussion, specific comments were made by several faculty on how the “economics” have hindered cross-college collaborations and provided incentives for individual colleges to offer their own Liberal Education courses that are questionable in the quality of the instructors who teach them (the use of contract/adjunct faculty), the quality of the course content, and how well they meet the Liberal Education requirements.

There was a good level of consensus among the participants and they were able to “feed off” of each other’s comments as well as relating their own experience with the others at the table.