Recorder’s Summary

Forum date: 2/23/17
Table number: 2

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

**Students are lacking writing skills.**
The current writing intensive structure isn’t working. It’s applied very broadly. That needs to be restructured. Need to incorporate revision into writing. Core problem from not knowing how to write is that students don’t read. There’s no incentive to put more writing in the classroom. Students need to learn how to reflect on their knowledge with words.

**There needs to be synergy between the courses**
Liberal education feel like a little bit of this, a little bit of that. There’s no common ground between classes. Everyone should have some main stream exposure. Giving themes and then having great diversity between each theme means too many class choices. Students taking totally different courses completely kills the idea of liberal education. All students should have a base foundation so they can all have something in common

**What kind of students are we trying to produce?**
A responsible student. Historically, liberal education is the education of the elites. In Greek times, for people who weren’t slaves. Critical thinkers with strong communication skills is a great start. We need to be able to understand the history and know that this happened before. Look from other people’s point of views. Interpersonal and intercultural communication is needed. Thinking about how other people think. Students who can differentiate between causation and correlation.

**Diversity and cultures should be brought on as a core**
It is important to get this intercultural perspective because a lot of students are form this area. There’s not a lot of cultures here because you are surrounded by 85% white kids from rural Minnesota who have been raised the same way. Outside perspective can be found at other schools but here it is very Midwest white kids so it is DOUBLY important to get cross cultural exposure.

**There needs to be more intentional work done with the people who teach the students (professors, TAs)**
There are horrible stories about how marginalized students are being treated in the classroom. Needs to be more than just a one day training for faculty. Can’t recall diversity training when he went to his training. The university should make diversity training available. They are not advertised. Saying it’s ‘available’ is not enough. MORE INTENTION- not just a certificate. Email comes through talking about a training and they delete delete delete. Reframe the diversity training as not just something to check off but this will benefit you in the future.
**We are a mega research institution**

Elephant in the room— with a goal of a research institution, what happens to the undergraduate experience? Teaching and research institutions are different. Delicate balance where education is equally important as research. At the U, we lean towards research. Undergraduate experience is just something you have to get through. The students who gain the most out of their experience are the ones who faculty decide can help them further their research.

**Teaching model should be reevaluated**

Related to core curriculum discussion. Integration in the classroom is more than just imparting facts, it’s the critical reflection of those facts. If staff don’t understand that, then that’s lost. Many of the teachers are graduate students. Where is the accountability to not let JUST grad students teach? Faculty using their time for RESEARCH. Varies between offices on campus. Yes, your priority might be research, but doing a good job teaching is doable.

Summary of discussion (300 to 500 words):

The discussion was very scattered and never moved past the first question. Most of the focus was on what is currently wrong with the liberal education system and not how to fix it. What was brought up was that the system is set up to make students want to ‘just get through’ their lib eds. When any kind of resolution was suggested around a more structured lib ed schedule, transfer students always posed a problem for credits transferring or not. There was talk about how there is a big difference between the variety of lib ed classes and that creates a disconnect from other students taking the lib eds. First year experience classes were proposed as a way for students to feel more connected to each other, but again the problem of transfer students arose. Writing skills was repeatedly brought up, especially reflection. Being able to learn facts is different than reflecting on them and seeing how they apply. Having writing skills to do that would help students apply the facts they are learning. They also mentioned how there is no incentive for giving writing assignments in the classroom. Nobody wants to be ‘that teacher’. The table became especially heated when faculty teaching methods got brought up. The first part that angered them was that there wasn’t enough diversity training invested into the faculty. It was agreed upon that there are diversity trainings offered to staff and faculty, but it isn’t made important as it should be, or isn’t mandatory. The second part of the faculty teaching methods is that grad students are teaching the majority of undergraduate classes. The table said that being a research university, professors are more focused on their research. They view teaching undergraduate courses as a chore. This makes the atmosphere of classrooms not enriching for undergraduate students. If the professor does have a graduate student teaching their classroom, they are not qualified to teach. Also, the grad students are lacking the training that is meant for faculty.
Additional context (characterize level of consensus/lack of consensus, tone and tenor of conversation, other notable aspects of the discussion): The discussion was mostly angry and pessimistic. The people at the table seemed frustrated with how things are now but didn’t propose a way to fix it.