Recorder Summary

Forum date: 3/6/17
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- What are the core features of students that will help achieve University’s mission?
  o Diverse education
  o Ability to identify problems, do research, critical thinking. Active engaged citizens. Not just looking for general knowledge – need to identify learning/development outcomes. There’s a lot of homogeneity in public education.
  o What should students have: empathy, integrity, responsibility, citizenship, engagement, conflict resolution, group process, leadership, identify problem, cultural competency. These things aren’t included yet.
  o How does “ways of knowing” fit into that.
  o What experiences can instill the above values (e.g. empathy).

- Barriers
  o Teaching students to have a conversation. There’s writing curriculum, but no “speaking” curriculum. Speaking in class. How to have a discussion. Should liberal ed counter the “learning for test” method. Question the answer. Students expect to have black and white answers.
  o Encouraging class participation comes down to skills of professor. Teaching productive discussion and empathy is professor’s responsibilities.
  o Not enough faculty training. Participation grades.
  o Existing subjects have knowledge base from specific disciplines that distract/obscure
  o Undergraduates don’t seem to know why they’re taking the core requirements either. Same skills underlying different courses.
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  o There’s a lot of support and teaching for faculty, but they’re not necessarily compelled to be involved in it.
  o The interdisciplinary nature of diversified core makes subject classifications irrelevant.

- How do we deliver learning? Models?
  o Core curriculum required by all students. Harvard model. Courses built around empathy, inquiry, service-learning.
  o Maybe change diversified core from “subjects” to broad ideas like “empathy”.
- **Employers say students are lacking skills**
  - Average intern or new employee lacks writing, initiative, problem-solving.
  - Students cannot articulate what they know. “We’ve taught them a lot of stuff, but they don’t know why it’s important.”
  - Critical reading
  - Goes back to training before college. “Unlearn the freshman”. How to read an article. Might lose some students, but a background in reading and problem-solving will benefit most.
  - Writing should stay.

There was a division evident at the outset of our group’s conversation; faculty who had already participated in pre-planning workshops seemed skeptical of their efficacy, while faculty new to the process seemed enthusiastic. As the discussion progressed, the central question became clear: how do faculty and administration address problems with the diversified core requirements that prevent students from achieving; A) a stronger sense of self through education; B) Marketable job skills; and C) an idea of how the liberal arts disciplines complement each other. All participants were in agreement that the solutions don’t end with updated curriculum, but will require inspired participation from students, more training for faculty, and improved administrative support.

The first step was identifying qualities that CLA graduates should possess. In our conversation, these took the form of more nebulous traits than specific skills. There was a consensus around empathy, problem-solving and group process as central tenets of the CLA education. A large list of barriers to integrating those traits into a diversified core centered around a lack of participation. Faculty cited a lack of required “speaking” courses as part of the reason, in addition to a failure by teachers to encourage participation with anything beyond participation points. The other major barrier we talked about was the student culture around diversified core; students don’t see the bigger picture when completing these general requirements, and get them out of the way as quickly as possible.

In our group, the most popular alternative to diversified core was a set of a few core classes that all students must take (not including transfers) that would foster a sense of solidarity and facilitate student
and faculty conversations about a big-picture, interdisciplinary CLA education. Writing curriculum for these core classes would begin with the aforementioned traits, like empathy, rather than with a specific discipline in mind. One participant in our group described this method as teaching the “wonder” of the subject, instead of the mechanics.