Recorder’s Summary

Forum date: 1-30-17
Table number: 4

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

● Use LEs as “advertising” to attract students
  ○ Especially with smaller departments, LEs are a way to draw more students into taking courses within the department. More students means more money, so sometimes new courses are designed with the sole purpose of covering LEs and sounding appealing to students. However, with more departments reaching out to cover many different LEs, some departments that typically were popular choices are now being overlooked with so many new options (ex- African-American Studies with Diversity and Social Justice)
  ○ Is this a philosophical reason- giving students a well rounded education, or has it evolved into the practicality of more students in your department means more money?
  ○ LEs work for CLA because they align with what we represent and value, but other colleges might not be so happy about this.

● Many different departments offering similar courses
  ○ With practically every department covering a number of LEs, there are plenty of classes that seemingly cover the same topic, as well as the possibility of taking many LEs in one department. However, being taught in a different department can completely change the perspective on the material. Is it good to be taking virtually all your courses in your major department, or is it better to get a variety of teaching methods/topics/philosophies?
  ○ If each department has their own “brand” of LE, is it really an LE? Are students getting a broad education if they are able to take all their classes in one department?
  ○ Could we implement programmatic constraints to keep students from “one stop shopping” all LEs from one/similar departments?
  ○ Who owns the knowledge, and who should be providing it?
  ○ Should courses be 100% about focused on the LE requirement to ensure the students receive comparable education no matter what department they take the LE from.

● Arbitrariness
  ○ Students ask advisors why of two similar courses, one counts for an LE and one doesn’t - depends on what the department submits for approval and what of that actually gets approved.
  ○ Important to retain faculty’s freedom in the classroom - shouldn’t be forced to teach an LE.

● Core Career Competency
  ○ New CLA initiative- competency based model of education.
More about what you have learned than what classes you have taken.
Incorporate this view into LEs - make it less an attitude of “you took this course, therefore you possess this knowledge” and instead make it more about the tools and learning rather than the course itself.

Summary of discussion (300 to 500 words):

Our table began our conversation by talking about how everyone currently interacts with the LE curriculum in their different departments and positions. Different departments view LEs differently, and put more or less value on them depending on the program. For example, some of the smaller departments really utilize LEs as a way to attract students and fill up classes, while other departments have to turn away students, and couldn’t care less if they offer classes that fill LE requirements or not. From an advising standpoint, it was also interesting to consider what a different role LEs have depending on if the student is an incoming freshman or a transfer student, and it might be worth considering if those requirements should continue to be the same in the future. Getting a bit more philosophical, we pondered what defines each core and theme - they are very broad, and almost anything could be considered an LE if you make a strong case for it. Is that a good thing that we offer a wide variety of courses to cover the same LE, or is it negative because it might not teach that core or theme in the way it’s meant to be taught. Along those lines, we thought the “checking boxes” attitude we feel about LEs isn’t what we should be aiming for, and instead try to incorporate more abstract skills into a course. In response to that, we considered CLA’s career competency model, and the cards we have that define each competency. We found these competencies very relevant, and saw them as things that students should be learning in their LE requirements, making it more about what you have learned rather than what courses you have taken. Finally, we drifted back towards what content LE courses should be covering. Should a similar course be taught in different departments (thus in different ways), or should every LE course be 100% focused on the LE requirement?

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

It sounds like the conversation at our table was quite a bit tamer than some other tables
were. Overall, our table did not hate the current LE curriculum, but as the conversation progressed, we kept uncovering different aspects we did not love about it. However, I would say that the tone of the discussion was more hopeful than anything else. For all the criticisms we had about the current curriculum, we were able to come up with at least one or two possible solutions of what an alternative could look like. While it is a large issue and many more discussions will need to be had, we were impressed by the thoughts and improvements we were able to come up with in a short amount of time.