Recorder’s Summary

Forum date: Monday January 30th, 2017
Table number: 5

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

- Creativity
  - Imagination should be encouraged within social topics such as art and literature.
  - Students should learn how to be resourceful with what they are given.
- Breaking Through Barriers
  - There is a difference between linear and lateral learning. How do we extend the learning across departments and functions at the University?
  - The curriculum is currently extremely siloed. These barriers to effective learning need to be broken through.
  - GCC courses are required to have at least two professors from different departments. This is something that should be considered for LE courses. Incentives should be made in order to eliminate barriers. Teachers should be encouraged to teach with others from different areas of the university, not penalized.
- Language Requirements
  - Each student should study one other foreign language during their time at the university. This should be made mandatory.
  - In CLA, this requirement has been known to keep students from graduating on time though.
  - The language courses should focus more on the student’s specific discipline. The learning is currently in isolation. Students do not understand the purpose of the requirement.
  - Immersion is currently how language is taught but this method does not work for the majority of students.
  - Two years of language courses may not be long enough for a student to truly understand the language. This depends on the specific language and what the student wants to get out of it.
  - It has been agreed upon by everyone at the table that language should be required in some way in all colleges.
- Having Fun
  - It should be the facilities’ goal to make students confident in their learning abilities.
  - Students often fear failure and will not take classes that are outside their comfort level. The risk of ruining their GPA is too great. Students should be allowed more space to try new things without the risk of failure.
  - S/N is an option but this is bigger than that.
Students are extremely busy and often do not have time to enjoy new classes. We need to be mindful of their schedules. This generation is much different than ours; most students today are working long hours during the week.

Is the LE requirement list too long? It needs to be practical for the students.

Each course should be able to decide what the S/N passing level is. It should not be the same for all courses at the university.

Students should be having fun!

- Critical Thinking
  - Students should be able to understand complex data and be comfortable with different types of technology programs before entering the workforce.
  - Media competency is something that students lack today. They should be able to interpret different news sources and be able to understand different biases that may be present.
  - Political science should be a requirement within the LE program.
  - There should be more of an emphasis on application of key concepts. This may include a requirement for an internship of some sort. Students should be able to apply what they have learned in the real world, not just read about what should be happening hypothetically.
  - Ethics should continue to be included in the LE requirements. Students should learn how to make decisions for themselves and understand what an ethical life looks like. This requirement should be more philosophical, not focused on religion.
  - The large global issues that are affecting everyone today should be discussed in LE courses. The GCC courses are doing a wonderful job of this.
  - Companies are often the ones driving what is included within the curriculum. They can teach the students the specific systems that they must understand within the company, it is the critical thinking skills that they want the students to have before entering the workforce.
  - Students should be taught how to learn and should appreciate what they learn, even if it does not pertain to their exact job position.

- Writing Requirements
  - Writing skills are essential for students to learn.
  - Some type of thesis defense model should be incorporated into the LE requirements. Students should be able to defend a position within a piece of writing. Also, they should be able to write a research paper on any topic they are given.
  - The writing skill levels differ greatly among students.
  - Students need to be given extensive feedback with their writing.
  - The freshman writing requirement may not be enough. Students who did not take AP English in high school may struggle more than others when in college.
  - Can we incorporate writing requirements into the LE requirements?
  - Writing is critical thinking so it helps students in multiple ways.

Summary of discussion (300 to 500 words):

The table of participants had an engaging discussion that was overall positive and optimistic to what could be done to improve the LE requirements. Multiple topics were discussed but most of
them focused on the first question that was provided at the forum: Beyond disciplinary competency, what are the most important attributes (knowledge, perspectives, and skills) that should characterize U of M graduates and be addressed in a new liberal education curriculum? The main areas that were agreed upon by everyone were the following: writing skills, critical thinking, and a second language.

Pertaining to the writing skills, it was a concern that not all students are able to write a research report or thesis paper when entering the university. A large portion of incoming students have taken AP English at their high schools but this is not offered at all schools, thus putting some students at a disadvantage once they enter their first college writing course. The freshman writing requirement may not be enough for all students. Therefore, writing components should be included in all LE courses in order to continue providing students feedback on their writing abilities.

For critical thinking, a lot can be included within this topic. What everyone kept coming back to though was the idea that the requirements should focus on topics that are relevant to students today. Examples of relevant topics include media competency, technology usage, and equity. These are each things that students must face each and every day and it should be the university’s job to teach them how to deal with these things appropriately.

Lastly, there was a large discussion around the requirement of a second language. Multiple people at the table were faculty members from CLA so they had intimate knowledge about the language requirement that is placed on all CLA students. The entire group was amazed that a second language is not required for all students when living in such a globalized society. The immersion method is currently what is used to teach students a second language and it was mentioned that this may not be the best way to go about it. Many students struggle with this type of learning and often have to delay graduation because they are not able to complete the language requirement. Despite this, a second language is something that should be considered being included as an LE requirement.

Overall, the group thought that the current LE requirements have been effective in teaching students core concepts that are important to learn. There is always room for improvement though and they look forward to continuing this discussion in the upcoming months.

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

The group of people at the table was very polite to one another and allowed everyone to speak their mind. There were multiple points throughout the discussion where everyone would agree on a topic and then they would move on to the next topic of choice. Everyone was positive in their feedback on the current LE requirements and were optimistic when thinking about what changes could be made in the future.