

2008 AAC&U General Education Institute Summary
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University of Minnesota Main Campus
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Summary

Four-day intensive seminar sponsored by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) designed around three themed “tracks” and several concurrent sessions. Institute “faculty” are AAC&U publication authors/researchers and leading higher education consultants. UNLV team members attended all tracks and sessions. As part of the Institute activities, the UNLV team produced a plan for applying knowledge gained at the Institute to UNLV.

Team Members

Bea Babbitt, Director of Assessment
Carryn Bellomo, Chair of Faculty Senate General Education Committee
Stacey Hardy-Desmond, Field Placement Director, School of Social Work
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Dave James, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Programs
Tim Gauthier, Director of Liberal Studies
Carl Reiber, Associate Dean, Sciences

Curriculum: Three Tracks

- **Track 1: An Approach to Learning Improvement**
 - National trend is to shift emphasis from separate learning outcomes for general education and the major toward a more holistic emphasis on “undergraduate learning outcomes” that everyone agrees should be attained by all students, regardless of major. These outcomes become shared responsibility of all departments and courses, guide curricular design and pedagogy, and provide a framework for assessment.
 - Another emphasis of this track was on developing outcomes that are distinct or unique and, more importantly, representative of the particular character of the institution. The following questions were posed several times during the institute: “What about their undergraduate learning experience would two UNLV alumni talk about if they met half way around the world? What would uniquely mark a UNLV graduate?”
 - This track also emphasized the national movement toward increased specification of expected learning outcomes and accountability for demonstrating success in achieving these outcomes. Consistent with this trend, AAC&U launched the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative (<http://www.aacu.org/LEAP/index.cfm>). The LEAP initiative includes a set of essential learning outcomes for a liberal education.
 - Curriculum should reflect what we know about how people (adults) actually learn and process information, including experiential aspects.

- **Track 2: The Process of Reforming Undergraduate Education**
 - Emphasized that reform is a process that involves the whole institution and that the main role of any task force or committee is to *facilitate* the planning process, not be the sole body that develops the plan. Reforming the undergraduate curriculum should be a transparent, open process that involves the whole community focused on student learning, not FTE and turf. The goal is to generate enthusiasm for improving the quality of undergraduate education and to seek consensus and compromise that maximizes faculty participation in the reform.
 - Another emphasis of this track was that models must be adapted to the institution. An institution can not “shop” for a undergraduate education model like one shops for products on the shelf. An institution should also think about differentiating itself from other programs by developing “signature programs” that would be a unique feature of the particular institution.

- **Track 3: Assessment and Communication**
 - Meaningful assessment is dependent upon clearly-defined learning outcomes.
 - Focus on assessment efforts that can lead to improvements in teaching and learning: create authentic assessments of deep learning rather than recognition assessments of factual knowledge (e.g., multiple-choice tests).
 - Models exist for integrating assessment of general education and the major. These models could be readily integrated with our current program assessment process.
 - Establish an expectation for excellence through clearly defined outcome criteria (e.g., rubrics and work samples) that are shared with students.

Other Lessons Learned

- Several state systems were in attendance discussing how to articulate learning outcomes statewide (Oregon, Wisconsin, California State). Statewide articulation appears to be an emerging national trend. AAC&U is beginning an initiative to study this process. If it so desires and acts quickly, the Nevada System of Higher Education has the opportunity to be involved in this project.
- Faculty development is crucial to the success of any general education reform and should be considered at all phases of the planning, implementation, and assessment process. Faculty development should be a valued site of teaching innovation and scholarship, not perceived as something merely for the remediation of “bad” teachers.

Online

- Institute Resources http://www.aacu.org/meetings/institute_gened/resources.cfm
- Institute Curriculum http://www.aacu.org/meetings/institute_gened/institute_curriculum.cfm
- Institute Handouts http://www.aacu.org/meetings/institute_gened/handouts.cfm

Encl.: 3-page UNLV Team Post-Institute Action Plan (report produced at Institute)