

Interim Report from Work Group 2 • Transforming Learning  
July 2, 2007

### SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis was based on continuing group discussions, along with perceptions gathered via preliminary examination of NSSE, FSSE, and HLC survey data.

#### Strengths:

- Students have substantial opportunities for unique learning experiences such as research collaborations and international study.
- Residential nature of our campus promotes communal learning.
- Students have wide access to faculty.
- Faculty are well-qualified, talented and dedicated teachers.
- The breadth of our course offerings is significant.
- Our seniors report, in significantly larger numbers than at our peer or other NSSE institutions, that UW-EC provides **both** a broad education and a significant job-related skill base.

#### Weaknesses:

- Our curriculum does not emphasize connections among disciplines.
- The existing GE program lacks coherence and is too complicated.
- University-wide curricular requirements, including GE along with foreign culture and cultural diversity, comprise an unreasonably large percentage of credits toward graduation.
- Opportunities for students to engage in critical reading, writing and thinking are inconsistent and are sometimes delayed until students reach upper-division courses.
- Although we have very few of the huge-enrollment courses (hundreds of students) that typify large universities, our medium-enrollment courses (50) provide limited opportunities for student engagement.
- A relatively small percentage of students engage in the unique learning experiences (e.g. research) noted above.

#### Opportunities:

- UGEC is extremely well organized now to consider and eventually implement a significant revision of the GE program.
- Many grassroots initiatives are already under way to incorporate interdisciplinary teaching in our courses or to develop new courses that are intrinsically interdisciplinary.

Threats:

- Resource base is insufficient and prohibits the expansion of opportunities for closer faculty-student interactions within and outside the classroom (i.e. small, seminar-sized courses and independent study projects).

This SWOT analysis suggests that we should expand and refine opportunities for all of our students to become actively engaged in their learning. To construct a foundation for this transformation, we should build student capabilities in critical reading, analytical thinking, and writing. We also want students to experience the joy of intellectual inquiry early on in their college careers. We wish to instill a continuation of critical questioning and analysis throughout our students' lives. Our students should understand that today's problems (e.g. societal, moral, professional, intellectual) are best solved through a combination of approaches from different cultural, geographic, and disciplinary perspectives.

### **Key ideas of promise/work plan:**

Our work group has identified four routes through which we can effect the transformation. Each of these will be discussed in detail at successive meetings of our group. The objective is to develop a specific initiative for campus action that corresponds to each route.

#### Routes for Transforming Learning

- 1) Transforming curriculum/enhancing liberal education (meeting of 6/25/07)
- 2) Transforming learning outside the classroom (7/2)
- 3) Transforming faculty so they can develop maximally as teachers (7/11)
- 4) Transforming or transcending the constraints of space, time, culture (7/16)

### **Initiative for Route 1: Transforming curriculum/enhancing liberal education:**

Our first meeting, on *Route 1*, focused on integrating the FYE program into GE, and expanding FYE into a series of 2 (possibly 3) *sequential* courses. This idea stemmed in part from a survey of GE/FYE offerings at a variety of other institutions, including comprehensives, large research universities, and small liberal arts colleges.

The first course (*The Joy of Inquiry?*), would be focused on student engagement – preparing the students for their four years at UW-EC by igniting their intellectual curiosity. The second course (*Engagement for Life?*) would prepare the students for life-long learning and engaged citizenship. Both would be small (perhaps 15-20 students), seminar style courses that would allow for open discussion, ambitious assignments, and academic rigor. They would be explicitly interdisciplinary (often team-taught), and would be focused on “big questions” facing society and/or other academically ambitious topics. Furthermore, they would emphasize and instill the following skills and understandings:

- Rigorous reading—for understanding; for criticism
- Questioning/critical reasoning
- Writing
- Critique/problem solving
- Making connections among varying disciplinary perspectives
- Developing an awareness of value systems

This new “fleet” of small, interdisciplinary courses would obviously be resource-intensive, and we also briefly discussed some possible avenues for staffing these courses. Some indicated that we may have to let enrollments increase in the “standard track” GE courses, but it was noted that such a shift would only constitute partial solution. Another idea was to make a state budgetary request (a.k.a. DIN) for an “innovating liberal education initiative”, which would include faculty lines to staff these courses.

**Further initiatives will be developed and integrated into the “Route 1” plan as we continue our discussions during the month of July.**