Liberal Education Reform at UW-Eau Claire

Why do we need Liberal Education Reform?

- Reinvigorate the liberal arts
- Prepare students for participation in a global economy and our diverse democracy
- Improve student engagement
- Enhance retention and graduation rates
- Promote integrative learning
- Replace what is now considered an outdated system of General Education, the distribution model

Pedagogical Principles

1. Integrative Teaching and Learning

Integrative teaching and learning comes in many varieties: connecting skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences; applying theory to practice in various settings; utilizing diverse and even contradictory points of view; and, understanding issues and positions contextually integrative experiences often occur as learners address real-world problems, unscripted and sufficiently broad to require multiple areas of knowledge and multiple modes of inquiry, offering multiple solutions and benefiting from multiple perspectives.

- Importance:
  - i. Promotes student engagement with complex issues, questions, and problems
  - ii. Teaches students how to draw and assess knowledge from many sources in order to prepare students both for the challenges of a dynamic global economy and for the responsibilities of citizenship.

- Support:
  - i. AAC&U has abundant research supporting integrative learning at a variety of diverse educational institutions.
  - ii. Courses such as Arts and Ideas utilize team teaching in a modular structure to show students connections between Art, Music, and English
  - iii. The Domestic Intercultural Immersion program couples course content with opportunities to apply their knowledge in new situations
  - iv. Faculty teaching in the Blugold Bundles report higher engagement of students as well as personal and professional working with colleagues across disciplines.

2. Outcomes-Based Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Outcome-based teaching and learning starts with statements of how we would recognize if or how well students have learned what is intended (outcomes). Teaching is done in such a way as to increase the likelihood of most students achieving those outcomes. Learners are assessed as to how well the outcomes have been achieved. Outcomes-based teaching, learning and assessment is an ongoing process of establishing measurable student learning outcomes; ensuring students have sufficient opportunities to achieve the outcomes; systematic gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well learning matches experiences; and using results to understand and improve student learning.

- Importance:
  - i. Assessment is the model of best practice and outcomes are an essential element in the assessment cycle.
    - o Learning outcomes that are clearly stated for each program ensure students know what they are expected to learn as a result of a faculty-designed learning environment.
    - o When students see connections through explicit learning outcomes and courses that address the outcomes, their learning is deeper and longer lasting (Suskie, 2009).

- Support:
  - i. Effective assessment "is best understood as a strategy for understanding, confirming, and improving student learning" and as a means for curricular improvement (Higher Learning Commission, 2003). For example, in 2003 the Higher Learning Commission adopted a revised position statement on assessment of student learning, based upon the plethora of research on the assessment of student learning, to reaffirm and strengthen their 1989 position on the value of assessment in higher education.
  - ii. Many researchers agree that the establishment of learning outcomes is essential to successful assessment, which is important because we believe assessment leads to better teaching and learning (see, for example, Allen, 2004; Angelo, 1995; Banta, Jones & Black, 2009; Suskie, 2009; Walvoord, 2010). Over 150 journals publish scholarship of teaching research in a wide variety of disciplines (Indiana University, Center for Postsecondary Research, 2007), and assessment of learning outcomes is an integral component of effective learning.

Structural Principles Underlying Implementation

1. Liberal Education Requirements are common to all degrees

Degrees, colleges, departments, or programs may have additional requirements outside the Liberal Education core requirements, but all students will fulfill one set of Liberal Education core requirements.

- Importance:
  - A common set of Liberal Education core requirements reduces time to graduation for students who change majors, colleges, and/or degrees.

2. Liberal Education Core (formerly the General Education Program) includes all university requirements

All university graduation requirements outside the major must be included within the Liberal Education core. The Liberal Education core combines the previously separated General Education and University requirements into one, unified set of requirements. These requirements include fundamental skills and competencies, breadth requirements, and other university requirements as specified in the Undergraduate Catalog.

- Importance: A purposeful, intentional integration of all requirements (liberal education, university, major) into a single Liberal Education Program both simplifies degree attainment for the student as well as increases the overall educational value by linking previously disparate educational components.