

APPENDIX D

Final Team Report AAC&U Institute on General Education Newport, Rhode Island May 21-26, 2004

Team from St. Olaf College
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Introduction:

The St. Olaf General Education Task Force's charge from our Dean is not to create a new general education program but to review our current one, which has been in place for ten years. We are to look at what is working and what is not, how conditions have changed for students, at the college, in the disciplines, nationally, and in the world. Pervasive changes in all these domains have opened up fault lines in our curriculum. Evidence from students in the form of a student-generated survey of a few years ago, from the Dean in his chapter of our recent self-study for reaccreditation and from the leadership group in August 2003 indicates the breadth of the campus consensus to review the GE curriculum. Our NCA reaccreditation report provides a clear mandate to address assessment and it is logical to do so as part of the review of our program.

The GE Task Force was constituted in January 2004. In the five months prior to the Newport Institute, we:

- reviewed the founding documents of the current GE curriculum;
- examined a consultant's study of our curriculum relative to other GE curricula nationally;
- catalogued the existing assessment materials relative to our curriculum (Dec. 2002);
- received feedback from most departments regarding the strengths and weaknesses of our curriculum in terms of its learning goals, our implementation of it, and its impact on resources;
- held a follow-up conversation with the leadership group;
- began considering the alignment of our mission statement with our curriculum both as whole and attribute by attribute;
- and began to reconceptualize our GE attributes in terms of student learning outcomes rather than in terms of course content as they exist currently in official documents.

- We made our minutes public through the college's web site.

In other words, applying Jerry Gaff's model for curricular reform, we had accomplished quite a bit of work toward fulfilling Steps 1 (Establish Need and Value), 2 (Organize the Process), and 3 (Build Credibility) before arriving in Newport.

The task force has affirmed that the current curriculum provides a sound and flexible foundation for our students' education. We have also identified specific elements that would benefit from revision to help us realize the initial vision of our curriculum. Furthermore, there are ample initiatives currently underway across campus that can be coordinated with this review effort and that will provide sources of support. There are also initiatives that have been proposed and are waiting to be tapped. We must find ways to honor the work of the people who have devoted their time, energy, expertise, and commitment to these initiatives in ways consistent with the St. Olaf education our community creates together.

Plans for Advancing the Project and Sharing Institute Knowledge, Insights, and Expertise Upon Return to Campus

Three of our task force members came to the Institute, four did not; two people not on the task force came to the Institute. Our first step will be to add these two colleagues to the task force for the rest of the summer. This will enable us to more completely share our findings with the task force as a whole.

The Institute has caused us to realize that the job of the current task force is not to complete the reform of our general education curriculum. Rather, in light of our knowledge of the national conversation on liberal education, it is to affirm the achievement of the faculty in implementing our current general education curriculum over the last ten years; to define the salient issues we now face as we move forward; to define the process necessary for addressing these issues; to make recommendations for continued reform work; to pinpoint and honor initiatives already percolating on campus that can move us in the direction of our recommended changes; and, importantly, to begin to change the language and assumptions about general education that exist on campus and that are in part responsible for the limitations of our current curriculum.

Our tasks this summer are: (1) to set the philosophical framework for campus-wide discussion over the next two years; (2) to create a timeline for the process; (3) to point the community in possible key directions; (4) to generate a will and enthusiasm among the community to continue the process.

Here are some lessons we have learned at the Institute and that will guide our effort:

1. Much has changed in the ten years since our current curriculum went into effect: student; the definition of knowledge in many disciplines; the college's

- financial/staffing situation; the national conversation about liberal education; the world situation.
2. In order to succeed in our efforts, we will need engaged faculty, students, staff, and others, including alumni and parents, broadly. We need to build on existing strengths to build/reinforce a culture of shared ownership of the curriculum and collegial learning from each other.
 3. In order to move forward it will be useful to separate discussion on the following: the process of reform; the philosophical design of the curriculum; the implementation of the curriculum, and the assessment of educational goals and outcomes, but also to coordinate the discussion of each of these with the others.
 4. The education of our students would benefit from increased intentionality, which includes coherence across courses, continuity, and sequencing of competencies.¹
 5. It is especially important to align with our college mission statement:
 - Our educational goals throughout the curriculum;
 - The curricula of departments and programs (the new Computer Science major provides a useful model):
 - New curricular and other educational initiatives not only from within departments and programs but in other centers of the college, such as the Center for Experiential Learning, the Center for Integrative Studies, International Studies, and others.
 6. Education at St. Olaf includes the curriculum, but it also includes a wealth of non-course centered co-curricular elements (such as performance, research, experiential learning of all types) and student life shaped by the experience of a residential college. Our mission statement makes this point, but it needs to become more intentionally part of our conversations.
 7. As we revise our curriculum, we must build in appropriate and realistic assessment mechanisms from the beginning and align them with the curriculum (thus providing a coherent response to the most recent NCA reaccreditation

¹ [Some examples we identified in the GE Task Force: MCS-G/MCS-D (outdated guidelines that do not resonate with current world/national conditions; BTS-T (lack of agreement on the appropriate scope/intention of this requirement); MAR (too limited in its definition). Some early thoughts of the Newport group: MCS-G and MCS-D might profitably be broadened and enriched by redefinition as “intercultural competence” and “civic competence”; FOL and MCS could be more closely linked and seen as more continuous with each other; the continuity and coherence among BTS-B, BTS-T, and EIN can be strengthened; MAR could be rethought in terms of quantitative reasoning, consistent with recent “QUAC” initiatives on campus; certain “skills” or “foundation studies” could be more coherently/sequentially integrated into the whole of students’ education; this would potentially include information literacy, oral communication, writing, and perhaps other elements. These are only examples of our thinking at this point.]

- report).
8. One of the greatest services we can perform for our campus is to change the language surrounding teaching and learning, in order to try to overcome the dichotomy that exists between “general education” and “majors,” to provide alternative language for students to use as they progress through their education (rather than “getting rid of GE requirements”), to create intentionality, coherence, and logical sequencing/continuity of competencies. We must also find language that will make it possible for people to talk about expectation of our curriculum, competencies, and learning outcomes in ways that transcend course boundaries and open up the conversation to non-course centered experiences of students.
 9. Following #8, we must find ways to teach students, faculty (veteran and new), and staff across the college how to understand a St. Olaf education and how to talk about it. This relates to the role of advising for our students; of faculty training to be advisors and students training to be advisees; and of faculty orientation, mentoring, and reward systems. We must consider how we help Admissions, Advancement, Public Relations, and other outreach offices to talk about the education we offer to students.
 10. We must work incrementally on our curricular planning and not try to do too much at once. It may be possible to tap into the next round of department/program self-studies to accomplish some of our goals in the future.
 11. It will be important to put into place an improved oversight process for the curriculum that will enable faculty to share their experiences, continue to align their courses with the learning objectives of the curriculum, and monitor the curriculum in such a way that respects faculty work.
 12. We must also put in place mechanisms for periodic review for the future.

Preliminary Timetable

Summer 2004

Beginning at the meeting of June 16, 2004 and continuing through the summer:

- Share our findings with the whole GE Task Force;
- Together prepare our end-of-summer report.

July 14 or 28

- Share our findings, insights, and recommendations with the Dean’s Council.

June

- Also consider ways to begin to align the work of the Associated Colleges of the Midwest ongoing First Year Experience Initiative (AMC-FYE) with that of the GE Task Force but focused on the first year experience of our students.

By August 23

- Complete the report of the GE Task Force for distribution to the leadership group (and to others?)

September 1: Leadership Group Opening Meeting

- A new vocabulary for discussing liberal education at St. Olaf College
- Group exercise and discussion – aligning the mission statement and our learning outcomes
- Analysis of alignment – Where do we “over-align”? Where are we lacking in alignment? What outcomes of value do we achieve that are not specifically stated in our goals?

Throughout 04-05

- New committee/s to be constituted to continue the work.
- Perhaps find “symbolic” ways to begin to introduce the conversation broadly (e.g., possible opening convocation or other public forum[s]).
- Work with various constituencies in a decentralized but coordinated way to discuss and formulate learning objectives; create other forums for conversation; education campus

Throughout 05-06

- Continued CILA-sponsored and other forums for conversation.
- Proposals to Curriculum and Educational Policies Committee (CEPC) as appropriate, and then to the faculty.

By May 05-06

- New catalog statement of educational goals for the 06-08 *Academic Catalog*.