

**Note taking template**  
**Academic Planning Summit**

**January 16, 2015**

**Title of Session: Transforming learning by creating conditions for students to flourish: considerations for a customized student approach**

**Faculty Facilitator(s): Elaine Finan & Kristen Johnson**

**Note taker name: Michele Martel**

**Check one:**

**Morning Breakout 1**    \_\_\_\_\_ **Morning breakout 2**  
\_\_\_\_\_ **Afternoon breakout**    \_\_\_\_\_ **Afternoon breakout 2**

**Ideas proposed/Recommendations**

*Educational reform and transforming education for the future toward a more organic process where the focus is creating conditions under which students will flourish and learning is done within a more customized student curriculum.*

*Video: Sir Ken Robinson discusses shifting the current model of education from a standardized model based on linearity and conformity to a customized model that is personalized to the diverse individuals you're teaching to.*

**How could URI support moving from a linear college experience to a creative process for students that actively involves choice and individualization?**

Overall Theme: How to help students flourish

A big talking point previously in college was about "finding your passion". Today, students and parents are more aware of getting jobs, paying back student loans, etc. The culture today is about going through higher education as quickly as possible- also a big selling point! The current challenge is finding a balance between passion and employment.

Idea: Use more project-based final assignments (works best in small classes) – the entire course generally revolves around this project. Increases student engagement and creativity.

Idea: Expand use of projects like the MBA program has (health MBA): Students are able to self-select on projects, work in teams with associating companies, with faculty acting as mentors.

Agriculture metaphor in education: How can we nurture the organic process in the classroom?

- Barrier: Most students are working as fulltime students- competing responsibilities.

VERY important to include a Student Affairs Viewpoint: University structures currently do not value co-educators working with the co-curriculum. Cannot shift away from the linear model without valuing the effect of co-curriculum on the student experience: must first understand how the co-curricular experiences influence the uniqueness of the education by exposing students to things outside the discipline. Institutional reward structures: need to be clearly reviewed and changed to

value co-educators and co-curriculum. URI does not currently have an effective reward system for the co-curricular aspect of education, e.g., students working successfully with student organizations.

Interdisciplinary partnerships enrich the student experience and can increase student engagement.

Help students identify and connect their passions with a future in the real world. Important to break down discipline barriers to assist students with identifying their strengths and looking outside the “box” of their discipline.

[The Ivory Tower documentary](#): The higher education crisis brings attention to awareness of external forces. Internally, faculty **are** sometimes their own barriers. The academy has more power than we realize via Senate and other structures to make change. “Content coverage (can be) is the enemy”. Constant dilemma between knowledge/content and process/learning. Should be more interested in the learner: students are hungry for engagement and contact. The charge is for faculty to take charge of their students experience and their own individual power to control and influence it.

Important: Think of students as whole people rather than students in a course(s) – think of the process they are engaged in more than the content goals. Should be a dynamic interaction with students.

Barrier: Primary role in this institution is to be a researcher – that’s where the rewards are (fame, fortune, etc). Non-tenured faculty or co-educators are not being compensated for their work, influence on students’ success, or the results of teaching.

Working against institutional and student barriers: Faculty can individually express learning priorities with students. We need to be more engaged in the conversation of educating future educators.

**Notable Issues, Questions, Challenges:**

N/A

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### **How could Robinson's thoughts be applied to supporting a learner-centered education for URI students to foster creativity and autonomy?**

One way to foster creativity is to use interesting and unique approaches in the classroom, but where do faculty go for this training and information (used to be Bette Erikson). Ex: Active learning experiences in class, new active learning classroom in library and new pedagogy, new general education program should allow for a more learner-centered education and offset linear idea of education. Oftentimes, students are motivated by practical solutions, with a linear K-12 educational background, yet all agree that the greatest success for students is fieldwork.

The external message for this generation of students is to make decisions about majors early and stay on track until graduation in 4 years. External pressures include student debt, parents, employers, national messages, etc. Faculty engagement and advising students should help dispel this pressure and empower students to stop and think/rethink their interests and future. Contradictory messages to students/academic culture: employers actually want broad, versatile students coming out of college (able to communicate effectively, critical thinking, etc). Any effort we make to modify a curriculum or philosophy to become less linear will most likely be met with resistance from families and students who are expecting the traditional linear experience. One of the issues is that the starting mindset of students is all wrong: Students should enter university with a passion in mind, *not* with the sole goal to get a job.

Is there an option to become a hybrid institution and provide students with the choice to have a more organic experience?

Engagement: Faculty-student interaction is crucial to a successful student experience. Technology can help to support and improve advising and individual assessment.

There will always be fundamental skill sets that students require within a program, but can more structured (accredited) programs allow for organic movement within their curriculum (capstone courses)?

### **Do we agree that linearity and conformity are problems for URI?**

**YES, and** there is a way to disentrall ourselves at the university level to become less linear but first we should consider that perhaps we have created and support this problem because we invest our resources in administrative functions because it make us comfortable --- RATHER than investing in the students and their learning.

Consider turning our university structure upside down? Suggest that infrastructure (accounting, budgeting, HR) could be outsourced. For example, if we could customize our online learning support and Sakai to provide technology support to faculty and students, we might be able to break the linear model. There is a need to apply resources to the mission-driven areas and provide support for faculty and students.

**Is personalized education is not currently appropriate at every point in our curriculum, what would you need to create personalized experiences? What would have to happen to facilitate the broader use of high impact practices to change the student experience and condition?**

Idea: Change the grading system at URI to disrupt the mindset of the students- change to pass/fail?

Research suggests that students consider connections between student and faculty members crucial to their success in college.

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N/A