

Academic Planning Summit

Session 5 Summary

What is “Liberal Education” for the 21st century? While “liberal education” certainly includes broad understanding of the arts, culture, society, and science, it also embodies a dimension of social responsibility and empowerment that prepares students to actively embrace complexity, diversity, and change and to apply knowledge and skills as responsible citizens.

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What outcomes are you looking for with regard to the following questions?

- A. What are the fundamentals of liberal education and scholarship for the future? What does it mean for all URI students to be liberally educated?
- B. How do we ensure that all students of our students are liberally educated and responsible citizens of the world?
- C. How might general education better address these issues? How can research and scholarship be leveraged to address these issues?

Group’s Consensus/Recommendations

It was difficult coming to an agreed-upon definition of liberal education (as opposed to thinking of this as general education or liberal arts education). Some suggestions include:

- Connected education or education that helps students make connections among their lives, and connect pieces we provide
- Education that provides a multi-pronged approach to look at issues with social dimensions
- Education with the goal of recognizing principles underlying behavior
- Education that has implicit reference to a set of values that supports and recognizes one’s connections to society and a sense of social responsibility.
- Should include scientific dimension
- Intentionally exposing students to variety of ways of thinking; developing critical thinking ability to move away from personal views and treat experience in analytical manner
- Education that exposes one to a wide range of experiences that produces a well rounded individual-expanded capacity as a human being
- Knowledge and Truth-how do we teach people to be responsible citizens?
- Liberal education is liberating-helps my knowledge, mind and sense of identity-frees me to be all that I can be.

Liberal education and general education are not the same thing, although general education can be changed to enhance a liberal education. There was recognition among participants that the current general education program is not effective in producing liberally educated students and needs to be re-designed.

Participants suggested some ideas on how we might reconfigure general education to advance liberal education:

- Develop more experiential learning, project based learning, presentations, collaborative work, skits, study abroad, etc.
- Focus on information literacy, reading, quantitative, critical thinking, skills
- Make cultural changes with regard to the value of general education (e.g., tenure-track professors need to be more involved in this program)
- Build on learning communities for making meaningful connections among courses
- Develop cross-disciplinary freshman seminars----intensive, intellectual, stimulating.
- Have students do internships that might not be major related and early on.
- Use peer teachers in classes. Same idea as mentors in URI101. Peer process is something that needs to be emphasized and it has been noticed that the other students love it.
- Reduce the number of general education choices and expose students to a variety of intellectual opportunities; should be a combination of freedom, flexibility and academic rigor in the first two years
- Establish a global culture on campus-racial diversity/global economies/interacting different kinds of people-promotion of this on campus for the students
- Establish integrating themes in the first two years around which different disciplines could be integrated (e.g., poverty, nonviolence, economic development, etc.)
- Expand Honors Colloquium model to focus first two years on major
- Develop learning discovery teams
- Develop better faculty interactions with students and other faculty

- Try pilot experiments with small groups of faculty with new ideas since re-designing general education from scratch would be too difficult

Notable Issues, Questions, Challenges:

What is definition of Liberal Education? There is still some disagreement here on what this means.

What is the reality of doing these things in these economic times?

What are other Universities doing?

Need to recognize that K-12 education has not provided the basis for cognitive transformation/critical thinking skills.

How do we get our students to have intellectual energy-lively lives? How do we encourage new ideas, exploration, an appreciation for reading?

Professional Colleges- the problem with Accreditation issues (in terms of interdisciplinary studies). What is a liberal education in the realm of all of these different colleges? ALL programs need to be involved, not just A&S

The university needs to value the contributions of all the disciplines in producing liberally educated students

Need to be risk takers as faculty—develop new approaches from the bottom up. How do we encourage this risk-taking?

Need to introduce new blood into the faculty

Need to get full professors and tenure-track faculty more involved in general education