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Table Discussion Notes - Balancing Academic Depth and Breadth

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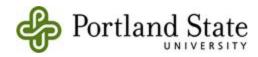
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Winter Symposium 2016 - What Does It Mean to be Educated in the 21ˢᵗ Century?
Wednesday, January 20
8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Ballroom, Smith Memorial Student Union

Table Discussion Notes - Balancing Academic Depth and Breadth

- In addressing our questions we, while valuing our vantage points, must acknowledge the limitations of our perspective (have we experienced job search etc. outside of academia?). We should interview graduates 3-10+ years out as to what elements of their education they value. - Employers
- Current students need to be included in these discussions.
- Re-examine our academic understanding of "breadth" and "depth" to be sure they evolve and are relevant to the students we serve.
- Explicitly address the utility of cross-disciplinary and general education understanding/skills in a time of change.
- Every freshman should have a career exploration experience - job shadowing? Non-obvious career opportunities with majors.
- Life course advising
- How to allow students to exercise choice in exploring classes outside of their majors and the FRINQ/SINQ sequences (music, art, anthropology, intro's). Bring back the tuition plateau.
- Emerging themes:
  - Embrace discomfort
  - CARING about students, each other, and ourselves
- Breadth hampered by students leaving after class which limits student interaction. How do we provide opportunities to interact in-class or outside of class?
- How do we bring in students' experience and knowledge to provide breadth?
- How is what we learn relevant to our lives?
- Model getting out in the community to apply knowledge.
- Logistics - students come in with a plan to have restricted time on campus. Build in opportunities to interact in the student's' time on campus.
- Flexibility of scheduling to provide more campus time.
- Team assignments to require students to network and interact outside of class including use of technology.
- Prepare students to be global citizens:

- We have a number of opportunities for faculty and students to study abroad.
- There is still a need to continue to develop and expand their global reach.
- Many departments are not supporting study abroad, but there needs to be more support.
- Standards across international programs need to be carefully revised.
- Can we do everything? What should we provide as depth?
- Practical nature of student financial concerns is a major issue.
- Students might complain about paying for classes they don't want or don't feel they need to get the job.
- Lives, careers, academic expenses:
  - Our older students already have their plan and want to get through their program to degree. They are focused coming into PSU.
  - Community work experience requirements.
- Navigation of: career trajectory, academic career planning
- Logistics of:
  - Time management
  - Articulation of subject units
  - Focus on skills assessment and improvement.
  - Presentation skills: written, oral, self - as in present
  - Tailored communication
- Practical citizen
- Academic subjects: politics, history, media, etc.
- Clarify from beginning:
  - Relevance of skills and knowledge base
  - Applicability of tasks
  - Defense of the need to know
- Real world team project: academic subject vs. real world entity
- World applicability - take a set of problems - contextualize and reset.
- Making connections: between classes, uni/professional world, define intentionality
- Show future adaptability - tasks and subject areas.
- Skills-based minor - encourage creative major/minor articulation.
- 1-credit freshmen seminar - every week new topic.
- Professional focus: history of profession; issues and practices vis-a-vis ethics; global contextualization of ethical decision-making.
- Problem solving - as a team - teams comprise of opposite types.
- Dichotomy: general human being vs. specific economic role
- False dichotomy in rapidly-changing world.
- Critical thinking is adaptiveness to the roles after graduation (and later in life).

- Breaking down assumptions before building up students with greater comfort with the ambiguity of the world-in-becoming.
- Challenging students to question their assumptions.
- Local = bonding, global = bridging
- Domestic issues are comparable internationally; translating transnationally. "The life" is Portland, but also reflective of global urban environments.
- How does the question change when we look at dramatic differences in completion for lower SES quartile vs. higher?
    - We do need to be able to say, "Yes, you're going to get a job out of this…" how to build in the breadth?
    - Kevin's example of "flipped" degrees.
    - Use application more - frame larger issues in the student's cultural, regional context - enter the curriculum from a place of strength.
- How to engage students who have a more transactional approach to their education? They know they need a Bachelor's degree.
- The question of addressing reading and writing literacy.
    - Not all are well-prepared. What is our role as educators to teach reading literacy and writing?
    - Scheduling - a semester system might help do both, or 4-week courses, one at a time.
    - Scaffolding - also scaffolding (external)
    - Continuity - build coursework across a year.
- Remediation: more courses to serve those who need the math, etc. looking at our assumptions about skills they bring in.
- Majority of our students are junior transfers. They don't have the "traditional liberal arts" structure we offer in freshmen and sophomore.
    - They may be reluctant to branch out for fear of low grade, not passing, etc.
- Does financial accessibility address this?
    - Example from India and Germany - not necessarily, but it would help.
    - Empirical evidence: financial concerns have a significant impact on completion, especially for women.
- The classes that are considered "fluff" or a luxury by both students and the public - need to make a better case in the classroom and the public.
- Pushing to boundaries:
    - From their life experiences - maybe they don't need it from us?
    - Do they need new experiences? - They have already been there.
    - Students come in with a variety of life experiences.
    - Need to make connections and experiences more intentional from FRINQ to Capstones
    - How to deeply engage students?

- ○ Barriers - budget model (Engineering and SBA Capstone revisit? - define the goals for a general education capstone)
    - ■ Try to fit more within.
    - ■ Accreditors are more flexible than previously thought?
- ● Career and citizenry:
    - ○ Technical skill/liberal arts and humanities
    - ○ Employer contribution to conversation
    - ○ Importance of global context, integration in classroom.
    - ○ Engaging international students for intercultural conversations - all diversity = richer experience.
    - ○ Building classroom trust for cultural competency.
    - ○ Integrate global communities
    - ○ Funding options
    - ○ Consequences for rushing through degree - balance career decision making with liberal arts.
    - ○ Change the conversation
- ● Engagement:
    - ○ Challenge of engaging (how do I become engaged across curriculum?)
    - ○ Articulate values of student experience.
    - ○ Opportunities for engagement are aimed toward "traditional" students, how do we meet non-traditional students where they are?
- ● Challenges:
    - ○ Faculty life-experience, particular to academic vs. practitioner.
    - ○ Faculty mentorship linked to community mentorship.
- ● Skill - education: is there a tension?
    - ○ There are connections, does not have to be.
    - ○ Who is responsible to go it out to gain depth?
    - ○ Loan burden
    - ○ Can't it be both?
    - ○ Invoke legislature to refund education.
    - ○ Look at existing literature best practice is available.
    - ○ Create faster, need-based resource redistribution.
    - ○ Be serious on data
- ● Depth vs. breadth or rigor vs. relevance
- ● Depth and rigor will come with the territory.
- ● We have easy access to breadth (via web), but we need to make sense of what's there.
- ● Why dichotomies?
- ● Students can make choices to dabble before diving into one area or not!
- ● Some expectations:

- ○ Being able to engage in the culture of your academic area (comes from immersion, not from a particular collection of courses).
- ○ Commitment to the common good. Being involved in the city is a great contributor to this.
- ○ Be able to think. Convince public of the value of this.
- PSU as a career enrichment, as well as career prep.
- PSU in the city, not necessarily PSU-initiated.
- Student pressures/anxieties: money.
- Basic needs: food, housing, spaces to fulfill these scaffolding of needs.
- More opportunities, but also more costs - digital divide.
- Phone, etc. as leveller, gap - making it accessible.
- Education as having an "app" or "device"?
- Are students missing the point of education as (just) about money? - How to communicate this point?
- Participate in a conversation!!! Bring it to them. Empower/enable students to do this.
- Bod: switch
    - ○ Shaping the path
    - ○ If students arrive with focus on basic needs, who is responsible for finding their connections?
    - ○ Interested in such a way that you can't miss it.
    - ○ By design...can't miss it.
    - ○ Breadth as coming from contact with other students - hard to get at PSU!
- More social spaces? Cohort model?
- Curriculum as structured (guided) or open (flexible)?
- Integration of curriculum? - Model of "learning garden".
- Establishing relevance, facilitate connecting dots, provocation.
- Across years within in a department.
- Student organizations
- Prepare students for careers and global citizens?
    - ○ De-emphasize specific skill (GIs) and focus on more of the liberal arts.
    - ○ Enhance thinking/learning around analytical thinking.
    - ○ Career counseling earlier in academic career.
    - ○ Team-base curriculum development to broaden perspective.
    - ○ How do we transfer PSU's uniqueness to an online environment?
- Economic impacts??
    - ○ Problem solving skills and community engagement.
        - ■ Empower students
    - ○ Easier access to student services so first generation students have the support their family may not be able to provide.

- - Cost reduction - degrees, e-texts, self paced.
- Utility and Eutopia. University needs to foster conversation that combines the two.
- Freshmen and sophomores build the foundation.
- We tend to focus on a career-oriented path. Do students understand the value of humanities?
- Value-based inquiry is what we do and it happens in the classroom every day. What professional skills matter?
- Divide between humanities and non-humanities is artificial.
- Educate parents and students about paths available.
- FLASH - freshman employment program. Out-of-classroom experiences.
- Service-based learning. Value of an urban campus. Civic engagement creates lifelong skills.
- No such thing as a "traditional" student. How do you meet the needs of everyone?
- Consumer model of education. How does this class bring value? Insight takes time! Creative engagement:
  - Spend money = expectations
  - Change the mindset. What do people value?
  - General mistrust of higher education.
  - Marathon, not a sprint.
  - Why four years? Why credit requirements? What parts of online education can we apply to a brick-and-mortar institution?
  - Quality vs. quantity
- Is our goal to educate everyone?
- Who are we serving?
- If our goal is to serve everyone, what does our product look like?
- Practical/technical vs. liberal arts/general education
- Be more flexible and responsive to students' needs - meet them where they are.
- How do graduates give back to community and how do we meet the needs of community?
- Producing world citizens
- What is the role of high school?
- Moving from recipient of knowledge to a produce of knowledge.
- Inclusive excellence
- Role of relationships between faculty and students.
- Important to address issues/questions from international student point of view.
- Interconnectivity of "life", citizen, career.
  - First:
    - Finding support, community.
    - Financial help
    - Giving students agency in their education.
- Focus on career preparation is greater than focus on exploration and general knowledge.

- Economic pressures; lack of emphasis on self-awareness; new dynamics in education at all levels. Lack of preparation at entry.
- The real need for interdisciplinary learning - making connections to solve problems, correlation between skills.
- Relevance of a broad range of skills and knowledge in life.
- The need to put a wider range of disciplinary concepts in play for each student. Embedded in curriculum.
- Hands-on teamwork in every discipline. Teach students how to learn.
- Balance of practical skills and general education.
- Making connections/engagement:
    - Student to student
    - Student to faculty
    - Student to community
- Who are we serving?
    - "Traditional"?
    - Point of view, international students.
- Career exploration and preparedness.
    - Earlier
    - What is our role?
- Citizenry vs. employment
- Interdisciplinary study is important.
- Financial accessibility
- Teaching how to think.
- Structure of learning:
    - Why 180 credits?
    - Why four years?
    - Why semester/one week/one year courses?
    - Structured vs. flexible curricula?
    - Cohort?
- Role of remediation
- How to support students of varied levels of preparedness?
- Shifting from an oral culture to a written culture. - Writing and critical reading.
- Models: pathway programs, dual/co-enrolled
- Choose different language to de-stigmatize remedial and developmental.
- Better advising
- Honors - don't set up elitism, these are part of majors.
- Honors - better advertisement, recruitment
- Address paths to access.
- PSU identity - an aspiration to be the best PSU we can be.