Jan 20th, 11:00 AM - 11:30 AM

Table Discussion Notes - Balancing Academic Depth and Breadth

Portland State University
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.