

Strategies for Curricular Reform
an AACU Workshop, Atlanta, February 2005

with
Howard Shapiro and Michael Mendelson
Iowa State University

The following ideas were generated in small-group sessions by the 40 participants at this AACU work shop. We have categorized the comments thematically within each phase and added comments made during open discussion at the end of the workshop. We hope these ideas are of help to you as you contemplate and/or initiate curricular reform on your own campus. Don't hesitate to contact us with suggestions, comments, or questions regarding any of the following. And thank you for your interest in and contributions to this list.

Howard Shapiro hshapiro@iastate.edu
Michael Mendelson mendy@iastate.edu

Phase I: Define the Nature of the Situation

A. Strategies for defining the problem:

Engage stakeholders, by . . .

- enlisting faculty in developing capstone courses/experiences for all students
- developing faculty commitment to General Education (GE) curriculum and instruction
- generating faculty buy-in by colleges
- cultivating shared ownership by administration and faculty
- engaging established groups in identifying problems
- determining whether established groups or a task force would best address problem
- generating faculty acceptance of curricular change

Identify curricular issues by . . .

- reversing poor student success among work-force students
- addressing inadequate communication skills?
- re-defining GE in response to executive mandates
- generating assessment data on GE curriculum
- increasing flexibility in GE program
- revising GE to accommodate assessment
- addressing lack of satisfaction with learning outcomes by administration

Confront organizational issues by . . .

- improving communication between work-force and liberal arts faculty
- determining whether established groups or a task force would best address curricular issues
- addressing lack of consensus regarding the first year seminar
- presenting compelling need for GE review
- reforming A&S faculty
- developing one committee with input from different disciplines

B. Strategies for supporting learning

Generate discussion by . . .

- raising topic in committees and at dining hall
- creating networks of faculty
- engaging faculty in campus-wide professional development
- conducting focus groups, symposia
- promoting teamwork to develop shared goals
- circulating examples of how other schools dealt with the problem
- supporting faculty/administrator visits go to conferences
- initiate round-table discussion groups
- opening lines of communication to entire college community
- conducting survey/polls
- promoting campus dialogues
- informing Faculty Senate

Generate support by . . .

- developing administrative support for faculty work, including rewards for workshops, travel, credit towards promotion and tenure
- developing support from Provost
- creating liaison with professional school faculty
- charging a committee with coming to consensus on a clear definition of the issues
- using cost-based argument to get attention at administration level
- identifying external resources
- soliciting investment of time and energy by President
- produce a set of learning goals to which faculty agree
- engaging Student Affairs

Phase II: Strategies for developing a curricular plan

C. Strategies for generating a vision

Preconditions:

- draw from existing enhancement plan/mission statement
- don't start from scratch
- engage faculty executive committee (governance body) in process
- look at other institutional models
- include representatives from other institutions in the process of defining the vision

Goals:

- link university's mission to initiative in language faculty feel comfortable with
- develop statement that is comprehensive, transparent, includes strategies for assessment
- keep shared ownership by all units in mind
- retreat to hammer out statement
- shift emphasis toward outcomes through individual program reviews
- consolidate department and professional school vision in common form

D. Strategies for generating a concrete curriculum plan and negotiate differences

Drafting the plan:

- promote department meetings to establish common goals
- promote learning opportunities for early adopters/draft members of leadership team
- generate common principles for all capstones
- develop alternative versions/components of plan to allow for diversity & optional negotiations
- create different groups to discuss outcomes/translate them into a common curriculum
- translate vision into proposed curricular structure with specified learning outcomes

Negotiating differences of opinion in response to the plan:

- don't move forward without universally-shared principles list
 - present plan to faculty and administration with opportunities for wide-ranging input
 - blackboard electronic community (use web tools to interact)
 - Subordinate personal agendas and turf battle
-

Phase III: Strategies for implementation

E. Strategies for demonstrating the viability of the curricular plan:

Planning pilot projects:

- use existing capstones as models
- link curriculum with common principles
- determine parts of plan most likely to succeed through student and faculty evaluation
- support faculty teams in development of small-scale curricular projects
- begin with small-scale projects with faculty from different disciplines
- select an area for accelerated experiment

Conducting initial experiments:

- experiment in honors program
- experiment with scattered pilots, moving to unified approach
- implement alternative components of the plan and assessment

F. Strategies for seeking closure

Reporting results:

- distribute drafts to all faculty, solicit comprehensive discussion
- distribute assessment results widely
- create proposal that combine most effective components
- solicit input on needed revision
- let document evolve at faculty meetings

Making a decision:

- discuss assessment results in symposia for internal and external stakeholders
- invite all stakeholders to participate in final vote

ISUComm: a case study in curricular change

ISUComm is a curricular plan to integrate instruction in the four major modes of communication (written, oral, visual, and electronic), to distribute this integrated, multi-modal approach across the entire undergraduate experience, and to engage faculty from all departments in the process. The initiative developed in the three phases outlined below.

<p>Basic Principles of ISUComm</p> <p>The faculty of Iowa State University believe that communication competence enriches the academic, civic, and professional lives of all our students.</p> <p>To achieve a desired level of competence, we will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ foster active learning and higher-order thinking through regular communication activities ▪ integrate written, oral, visual, and electronic communication to meet evolving demands of information technology ▪ distribute communication instruction evenly across the entire undergraduate experience ▪ engage faculty from all disciplines in the process ▪ support ongoing assessment and faculty development. <p>Lessons learned from the ISUComm curricular initiative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Change is a process, requiring long-lasting partnerships ▪ People must believe that change is needed ▪ People must “own” the curricular change ▪ Fund the deliberation process, not the change ▪ Seek champions, commitment, vision ▪ Define, then ratify a set of general principles 	Phase I	Defining the situation; providing learning opportunities
	Fall 1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ faculty and administration decide to review student communication ▪ external evaluators review communication instruction
	Sp 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ partnerships fostered, ISUComm committee formed ▪ ISUComm conducts survey of 1,200 faculty/100 employers ▪ ISUComm hosts first communication symposium
	Fall 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISUComm regularly informs faculty of issues related to communication education
	Phase II	Developing a curricular plan
	Sp 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ second symposium devoted to discussion of basic principles ▪ faculty ratify the basic principles (see side bar)
	Fall 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ curriculum questionnaire sent to all departments, outcomes distributed widely ▪ curricular discussions held with all college curriculum committees, all deans’ offices, faculty at large
	Sp 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ curricular plan drafted and distributed ▪ forums created to discuss diverse responses to plan
	Phase III	Devising an agenda for implementation
	Fall 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ pilot projects planned, teachers trained, assessment outcomes and evaluation rubrics developed ▪ regular updates distributed via forums, articles, website on evolving features of the curricular plan
	Sp 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ pilot courses offered, assessment initiated ▪ revisions of curricular plan based on pilot experience, assessment, and open discussion ▪ procedures for final deliberations developed
	Fall 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ final proposal drafted, distributed, and discussed ▪ program experiments continue ▪ Nov. 9: faculty and Provost endorse curricular plan

Strategies for Curriculum Reform

This worksheet provides a guide to thinking about curricular reform. The column on the left lists strategies for each phase of the process and includes questions for your consideration; on the right is a place for you to record your thoughts on how best to adapt the strategy to your campus.

With your partner, please

1. begin by describing a curricular issue on your campus that you find of interest
2. next, review each phase of curricular reform and its attendant strategies; record your response to the questions regarding each strategy in the open boxes
3. just before 4:00, prepare to report your responses to the group as a whole

Phase I: Define the nature of the situation

Strategies	Reflect on ways that you can adapt these strategies on your campus.
<p>A. Define the Problem</p> <p>How can you and your campus community work to define the problem related to the curricular issue you have identified?</p>	
<p>B. Support Learning and Create Partnerships</p> <p>How can your campus community create learning opportunities related to your chosen curricular issue and forge the partnerships necessary to begin the process of curricular change?</p>	
<p>Additional notes on Part I</p> <p>How would you adapt these strategies for your use, or what other issues could come into play on your campus?</p>	

Please list the names of the group members	your institution	your email
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____

Phase II: Develop a concrete curricular plan

Strategies	
C. Develop a Vision How can you draft a statement of principles regarding the initiative and then foster its acceptance?	
D. Generate a curricular plan and negotiate differences about it How can you generate a concrete curricular plan, and then promote an open discussion of it that accommodates diverse positions?	
Additional notes on Part II How would you adapt these strategies for your use, or what other issues could come into play on your campus?	

Phase III: Devise an agenda for implementation

Strategies	
E. Demonstrate Viability What kinds of pilot programs and assessment efforts are needed, and how can you document outcomes and distribute results?	
F. Seek Closure What materials are required for a final deliberation of the curricular plan, and what would be an effective procedure for discussing them?	
Additional notes on Part III How would you adapt these strategies for your use, or what other issues could come into play on your campus?	