

WHY ENGAGE IN CURRICULUM MAPPING? Some Thoughts

- **Ensuring Coherent and Meaningful Curriculum**
 - “American college students already know that they want a degree. The challenge is to help students become highly intentional about the forms of learning and accomplishment that the degree should represent” (AAC&U, 2007, p. 29).
 - There is “the tendency to design courses that have little or no relationship to the curriculum that is in place or to the critical skills students need to acquire” (Diamond, 1998, p. 2).
 - Students’ educational experiences are often “disjointed, fractured, and totally unstructured” (Boyer in Diamond, 1998, p. 2).
 - “Then comes GRADUATION. And you wake up and you look at this bunch of courses and then it hits you: They don’t add up to anything. It’s just a bunch of courses. It doesn’t mean a thing” (Willimon & Naylor, 1995, pp. 57-58).
 - “...[C]ollege is meaningless without a curriculum, but it is more so when it has one that is meaningless” (Van Doren, 1943, quoted from Birnbaum, 2004, p. 118).

- **Following Good Educational Practice**
 - “The habits of thinking are to be formed, by long *continued* and close application. ...much more does the training of the powers of the mind demand vigorous, and *steady*, and *systematic* effort” (The Yale Report, 1828, p.7, emphasis added; Bransford et al., 2000).
 - “...[F]ew departments and institutions have developed curricula and pedagogies that *incrementally* foster and assess students’ skills in inquiry and innovation as they advance through a course of study” (AAC&U, 2007, p. 31, emphasis added).
 - “Far too many institutions have established learning outcomes in response to accreditation requirements and to drive assessments without ensuring that these goals are continuously mapped to, and reinforced by, the teaching and learning process *throughout* the curriculum as part of a systematic competency-based approach” (Ewell, 2009, p. 19).
 - “A critical component of intentionality involves making sure students know why they are being asked to learn certain outcomes and reminding faculty who teach to have the discussion with students. It requires making intentions visible not just to faculty, but to students as well” (Kean et al., 2008, p. 6).

- **Supporting Student Learning and Development**
 - Offer “students more than just a course catalog, through comprehensive, personalized services to help them plan their careers and stay in school” (President Barack Obama, 2009, American Graduation Initiative).
 - “Many undergraduates have to create coherence out of curriculum disintegration. ... Arguably, creating coherence is itself good learning, but where some become sense-makers on a grand scale, others are like flotsam in swirling waters” (Knight, 2001, p. 371).
 - “[I]f we were to give students who are declaring their major not only a checklist of the courses they need to complete, but also a map that illustrates where the skills, major ideas, and concepts learned in their beginning courses ... will reappear in their later courses, we would be providing clear evidence that their education does not consist of a set of disconnected courses but, rather, an integrated, connected set of skills and knowledge that is purposefully designed to prepare them for a lifetime of learning” (Doyle, 2008, p. 39).
 - When intended outcomes, instructional strategies, and assessments are aligned, students “have a more coherent picture of what will be expected of them and thus are more motivated because they feel more confident and in control of their learning, as well as their grade” (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 85).

- **Documenting Faculty Professional Responsibility**
 - “Faculty are responsible for establishing goals for student learning, for *designing* and implementing programs of general education and specialized study that *intentionally* cultivate the intended learning, and for assessing students’ achievement” (AAC&U, 2006, Academic Freedom and Responsibility, p.1, emphases added).
 - The mapping exercise allows faculty to “conceive of curricula in a way that honors the critical role to be played by the teacher in structuring (timing, sequencing, emphasizing) events that go in the classroom. From this point of view, [program curricula] should be thought of as courting the multiple possibilities (and constraints) to be dealt with by teachers and students as they work together...” (Hausman, 1974, p. 193).

- **Facilitating Faculty Collegiality**
 - “If higher education is to foster intentional and integrative learning in students, then we ourselves need to become more intentional in clarifying our *shared* purposes and designing curricular pathways that support them” (Schneider, 2008, p. 1, emphasis added).
 - “Academics often suffer the pain of dismemberment. On the surface, this is the pain of people who thought they were joining a community of scholars but find themselves in distant, competitive and uncaring relationships with colleagues” (Palmer as cited in Uchiyama & Radin, 2009, p. 272).
 - “Academic life is often very isolated, and even if this is not the case, few academics actually discuss unit design and teaching practices with their peers. The time set aside for mapping and aligning provides a space for this to occur,...”(Lowe & Marshall, 2004, p. 555).

- **Addressing Accountability Issues**
 - Standards
 - “College standards are becoming diluted and there is a fuzziness about what faculty teach and what is expected from students” (Miller & Malandra, 2006, p. 3/Federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education).
 - “Our problem is not that we do not know how to make assessments and evaluations, but rather that we are not as adept as we need to be in explaining to others what we do, how it works, and why it works” (NASAD, 2009, p. 1).
 - Program Review
 - Bresciani (2006), while analyzing institutional program review policies and practices, reported that 40 percent of the institutions in her sample require that each program provide a diagram that illustrates the connections between the activity or course that delivers an outcome and then further links the course or activity outcome to the program outcome.
 - “[N]early all chairpersons expressed a sense of inadequacy with their department’s curriculum evaluation and assessment practices and with the expertise available within the department to gather and analyze such information” (Stark et al., 2002, pp. 252-253).
 - Academic Quality
 - “Whereas “quality” was once defined in terms of inputs and resources – what the institution *has*—it’s now defined in terms of processes and outcomes—what the institution *does* with what it has” (Wergin, 2005, p. 36).
 - Program Prioritization/Budgeting
 - The need to stretch increasingly scarce resources allocated to higher education continues to lead to “demands for curricular consolidation and coherence to achieve greater efficiencies” (Ewell, 1997, p. 608).
 - Academic managers “need to be more concerned with what students have learned as *a result of their schooling experience* than with what they know and can do regardless of

the source of that knowledge or those skills” (Anderson, 2002, p. 259 , emphasis added).

- **Addressing Accreditation Requirements (SACS)**

- CR 2.7.2: The institution offers degree programs that embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with its stated purpose and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education.
- CR 2.7.3: The institution requires in each undergraduate degree program the successful completion of a general education component at the collegiate level that . . . is based on a coherent rationale.
 - “Coherence is a critical component of a program and should demonstrate an appropriate sequencing of courses, not a mere bundling of credits, so that student learning is progressively more advanced in terms of assignments and scholarship required and demonstrates progressive advancement in a field of study that allows students to integrate knowledge and grow in critical skills” (SACS-COC, 2005, p. 12).
 - FR 4.2: The institution’s curriculum is directly related and appropriate to the purpose and goals of the institution and the diplomas, certificates, or degrees awarded.
 - FR 4.4: Program length is appropriate for each of the institution’s educational programs.

- **Implementing Assessment Program**

- Necessary pre-condition for effective program assessment (Allen, 2004, 2006; Maki, 2004; Driscoll & Wood, 2007)
- “Good Assessment Practices # 2 -- Start with things that clearly work: *Curriculum maps / Capstone courses / Capturing existing assignment as “artifacts” for review*” (Jackson & Johnson (SACS-COC VPs), 2007, slide 35, emphasis added)
- “The alignment of learning goals and curricula is critical. If learning goals are adopted but are not addressed in the curricula, the outcomes assessment process will be worthless” (AACSB, 2007, p. 8).

- **Informing Curriculum Enhancements**

- “The value of this approach is that curriculum design and refinement are driven not by preference, ideology, comfort level or whatever but by the competencies [intended learning outcomes]” (Holloway/CSWE, 2008, p. 6).
- “Curriculum mapping is a valuable process. In many cases, it is the first time a curriculum has been systematically examined to see how the individual courses function in the curriculum” (Hatfield, 2009, p. 3).
- Curriculum map analyses help faculty and administrators “reprioritize learning outcomes, identify other outcomes that have taken precedence because of societal or workplace changes, or reassert their significance as core outcomes by discussing ways to deepen and broaden attention to them in the curriculum...” (Maki, 2004, p. 37).

- **Stimulating Scholarship of Curriculum**

- “It is not enough to *think we know* how and where students learn; asking diligently and frequently to ensure that we have current, complete, and nuanced answers that are relevant and meaningful across the diversity of our students is a commitment that will support greater institutional effectiveness” (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 58).
- “Collective and systematic reflection on the curriculum can only help with a university’s research activities, for such reflection may well lead to research projects and publications” (Barnett & Coate, 2005, p. 159).