ELCE CCVC Meeting

March 24, 2015

*1. How does your program contribute to liberal arts education now?*

We are a part of the EL designation, but we see ourselves as adding more than just that. We provide complimentary experiences to classroom learning that deepen the liberal arts experience, taking what they learn in the classroom and take it to the community. ELCE gives students an opportunity to explore different paths in life, to find out what interests them. For example, you might be a psychology student taking a service learning course and find out you’re passionate about working with older adults instead of kids.

We aren’t faculty, but we work with the academic curriculum all the time, looking for ways to enhance and support the classroom experiences. After studying the theory, the students have “aha” moments as they make the connections in their experience.

EL is quite a learning process for students - you can see that transformation in the students over time. Learning to work independently, yet with the safety net of ELCE staff members and CSB/SJU faculty, students have to problem solve for themselves. In a sense, we believe experiential learning increases students’ tolerance for ambiguity.

One of the overarching philosophies of experiential learning is to provide opportunity for students to learn how to be a community member, a citizen, and have awareness of who their community is and what their needs are. A specific example within ELCE is Community Kitchen, which provides students an opportunity to put real faces to food insecurity. Sometimes it takes the personal experience to fully realize the kinds of things students read about.

*2. Are there ways in which you would like to see your program contribute to liberal education that so far it has not been able to do?*

Ideally, there would need to be more resources for faculty development, making it easier for faculty interested in and invested in developing service learning or other experiential components. For example, our office could be a resource to help faculty revise courses to include EL.

Currently, there are a lot of different ways that students can meet EL designation. Internships, study abroad, community work, through the classroom, service learning. In lots of majors, students are getting several times what they need; others can’t get any.

Are there ways we can work with departments that don’t have EL designated courses to help the students in the major? There need to be more EL designated courses; students are having a hard time meeting this requirement. Every major needs to have a plan for how their students can meet this requirement (i.e. some departments have no designated internship course credits).

Transportation for EL is a big issue for us. Many of the opportunities require that a student have both a license and a car. We have the mini-bus, but that is not meeting our logistical needs. Lots of students don’t have the social capital they need to get the internships. More work could be done to help educate students on the benefit of each EL opportunity, so students can fully engage in the process of choosing which EL is the right for them. Lots of experiential learning opportunities have privilege as an essential part of them – taking unpaid internships, for example, when they need to work.

*3. What else would you like CCVC to know? For example, do you have opinions about the current Common Curriculum that you would like us to know?*

Students are confused by the EL designation and experiential learning more broadly. Undergraduate Research is an example. It’s housed in ELCE, but, it doesn’t fulfill the EL designation. We would advocate that it count; however, we would need more funds for UR. Beyond just UR, there are lots of students who do experiential learning, but can’t find ways to get the EL designation. We have students who do all kinds of experiential learning (Bonner, Community Kitchen, Jackson Fellows, etc.) but can’t get EL credit because the experiences aren’t tied to a class. Students in some of these programs do an enormous amount of work compared to some programs that do receive credit.

Classes can carry EL without having anything to do with ELCE. This can be confusing for students. Some departments have their own experiential learning requirements not connected to ELCE, which causes confusion. Students will come to our office saying they have done experiential learning, but we will have no record of it, because that experience is strictly administered by their department.

It would be nice to see data about how students navigate and complete the EL designation. More communication between the office and faculty who are involved in experiential learning may be helpful.

Are there ways we can highlight for students the value of EL and why it is important for them at different stages of their college career? Need to connect with students earlier. With faculty and staff across the institutions, how can we share important information and partner so that students can be successful and graduate with the EL designation?

If you look at goals, it is about applying what you learn in classroom to outside world – so how many classes do you need to have taken to be able to take it to the world? Can we be more flexible about allowing EL earlier in students’ college career? For example, Theo 111 can be a natural home for service-learning.

The Ethics requirement is confusing from the students’ perspective. Students expect something tied to their major. There needs to be clarification to students about what it is and why they should be taking it. How is Ethics a capstone to the curriculum?