Meeting with Advising – 10/15/2014

**1. How do students navigate the current common curriculum? What are your insights as the people on the front lines?**

Students see the Common Curriculum as a checklist, not as a whole.

They struggle with elective choices – they want it to check a box, to fulfill something or “count” for something – at least a minor or second major.

We see that majors are expanding. We have been cutting back on common curriculum but majors have been expanding. The CCVC needs to think about that. It’s not just a matter of more credits, but of how scripted they are; students’ choices for fulfilling certain things becoming less flexible.

We are happy to entertain a conversation about learning outcomes. We are hopeful that we can focus on what we decide a student should know or be able to do when they leave this place, and design a curriculum around that. It shouldn’t be a territorial thing.

Sometimes it’s hard to explain to students why they have to take certain things. Our understanding of the social science requirement was that it was going to be an intro level course teaching students about social science in general. From my perspective, nothing has changed. Disciplines are still teaching their subjects. We need to focus on educating students about the approach or perspective, social science and why it matters. This will help them understand why they need to take these requirements.

Admissions does explain the value of the common curriculum, so they seem to be aware of it before they come. Once they’re here, why are they asking “why do I have to take this class?” We need to help them articulate it.

Maybe if the curriculum exuded more obvious cohesiveness, it would be easier for us to articulate. What counts for what, AP credits, etc. Something more intentional.

Question from the moderator: Do students see a connection between common curriculum and their major? Response: No, except that they are interested in things that “count” across them, and choosing a study abroad that also counts for CC requirements. They are always saying "what else do I have to do?” They are not seeing their CC requirements as opportunities.

It might help to tie it to liberal learning – if we could all use that vocabulary, it might make more sense by the time they’re seniors.

A lot of students want exemptions or substitutions to common curriculum requirements They want to double major or minor and would prefer to slight the common curriculum in favor of that. They don’t see it as valuable in the same way.

Why are they so passionate about those minors? They assume it does something, but it doesn’t.

We definitely have noticed students graduating early. More due to PSEO and AP which check off common curriculum boxes rather than changes in CC itself.

**2.    Are there ways you would like to contribute more or differently to liberal education?  If so, how could the Common Curriculum support and/or contribute to that work?**

We are hoping that a new CC can be less about distribution requirements, more about what does it mean to be liberally educated, be able to communicate effectively, to be a global citizen, etc. We hope that the new curriculum can solve the PSEO problem – if we don’t have a “Humanities” requirement, it can’t fulfill that.

We want to help our students become better citizens and better voters. Need some civic education.

There are demographic changes, but the issues that we see are not directly related to stereotypically at risk students. Programs that are put in place should be universal programs – not bridge programs to help students at risk. We want things that are good for everybody.

We would like a true First Year Experience program that can serve as an introduction to the liberal arts and the common curriculum. FYE was recommended in our program review. It could be a one credit course in their first semester, lab component on top of FYS, etc. The majority of other schools in our peer group have some type of First Year Experience. This would help students as they transition to college.

Student development is very different on our two campuses. We see men needing it more and getting it less.

Parents expect that FYS will do more to educate about time management, study skills, intro to college. Students don’t know how to do a lot of that, survival skills. We do have a course for international and transfer students, but not for everyone else. We need to discuss things as they happen, and this relates back to some kind of FYE. I got the first exam back, how do I talk to my professor. Session on registration, etc.

Some of our most at risk students are the high achievers – they got through high school with little or no studying, don’t know how to activate those skills. They need to learn how to manage their time, how to get through that volume of work.

There are 19 learning goals in FYS. We are expecting too much of this one class, we need to integrate these kinds of learning across more of our classes.

Two semester FYS is one of the most difficult things for students in navigating the curriculum. Any one topic for two semesters can get boring, especially if you have a faculty member that you might not get along with for the entire first year. Goals could be met through other means. Also a problem because we choose their topic, they don’t have any choice in it.

Related problem of disparity in FYS sections – students are comparing topics, workloads, would be better if they could be more similar in types of assignments, length of reading, etc. Right now is all across the board.

I would like to go back to a global/cultural flag. Needs to be kept in the new curriculum.

Fine Arts Experience is sometimes perceived as a joke – students don’t take it seriously, wait until they’re seniors, show up and check off the boxes. We understand the spirit of the requirement, but often there isn’t a component asking students to reflect on their FAE experiences. There is no accountability, no reflection piece. It should be incorporated into FYS in some way. Not reaching the goals that we want. Not good learning outcomes. Difficult to explain to parents how not going to a visual arts event can hold up their diploma.

Question from moderator: do students ever ask for more from their academic program? Do they want more?

Answer: They want more instruction in certain disciplines – more teaching, not having to work it all out themselves and with small groups. More explanation. The flipped classroom is not working for a lot of them. Sometimes students do ask for an applied writing course.

There is a question about who owns the common curriculum web site. Information about the common curriculum is kind of hard to find on the website. What does it all mean? It would be nice if students could find an articulation of why the common curriculum matters and the connections between requirements. Now it’s like a scavenger hunt. The common curriculum could be presented so that it appears to be more cohesive. There is no catalog that explains the common curriculum. We used to have “Exploring the Human Condition.” We never look at the common curriculum website. The philosophy could be more prominent. There are no videos on the common curriculum website like the departments have. The common curriculum website could be a more dynamic space.

The IC and GE designations should be revisited. Now they are professor specific, not course specific. This is confusing. If the course is meeting the learning outcomes, all sections should be expected to fulfill the requirement.

Options are especially limited with the GE designation. There should be more courses with GE designations. Ideally, these courses would be embedded in the majors. If the majors could provide more, that would be good.

Students grumble about the foreign language requirement. We need a vehicle to explain why it matters. There should be more IC choices here.

There should be support for faculty to articulate the learning goals and outcomes of the common curriculum. How many advisors can articulate the learning goals and outcomes of the common curriculum? We all own the curriculum. Faculty needs support.

In some cases, the supply of courses for non-majors seeking common curriculum requirements is slim. For example, introductory courses for non-majors in the natural sciences. Non-majors seek out Nutrition 110, but there aren’t many other options. Geology is gone. Astronomy is too much physics for some students. ENVR 175 is often filled with majors first. The situation used to be worse with the old Core: two science courses from two different departments. But it is still difficult.