

Colleagues,

I've read Joe's critique of UCC21 (distributed via email yesterday), and while I want to thank him for raising some issues that are likely to come up in the wider deliberations to come, I don't think the points he raises are nearly as damaging to UCC-21 as he does, and as a member of both UCC task forces I would like to provide a response in preparation for Friday's meeting.

1) UCC21 lacks the empirical support necessary for widespread faculty support and success...

I have always considered this issue a red herring, since the charge to both UCC Task Forces was simply to develop goals and a framework for a model program, one that might in fact be unique. Neither task force was charged with establishing how much empirical support exists for various established frameworks (such as Greater Expectations) that might or might not be closely related to our proposals. We were also not charged with conducting our own empirical studies in support of the proposals we are submitting. In my experience this is standard procedure -- reforms of all kinds that have varying degrees of prior empirical support are implemented every day, and some of these reforms turn out to be very successful. Keep in mind that the only alternative for UCC-21 is the status quo (i.e., "UCC-1984"), for which all the extensive empirical evidence says that it is bad and unacceptable. If we want to base our decisions on empirical evidence, the evidence I am familiar with indicates that UCC-1984 needs to be replaced at the earliest opportunity. Empirically speaking, in other words, a program that might work is certainly preferable to one that clearly doesn't.

2) The particular arrangement of UCC21 courses in a tiered system will complicate transferability...

I agree with Joe that determining the equivalence between UCC-21 experiences and those a student might have completed at other schools could be complicated. As it is, similar kinds of equivalency decisions are made now by department chairs and advising center staff (e.g., regarding courses taken abroad). I would suggest that these decisions be made using relatively liberal criteria for equivalence as UCC-21 is phased in during its first couple years. UCC-21 goals are to be pursued recursively, so missing a piece here or there should not destroy the overall result. In the end, I don't see how we can continue with UCC-1984, a program that's bad for all students, just because adopting a better one will complicate some of the course-equivalence decisions for transfer students.

3) Neither Task Force undertook a systematic review of the literature regarding successful models employed at similar universities...

I recall reading descriptions of a number of examples of other core curriculum overhauls (e.g., Loyola of Chicago), and I think what came of that effort was the realization that UCC-21 was going to be different enough from the available comparison models that the time and effort required to identify and undertake a thorough study of other models could not be justified.

4) There has been insufficient attention given to technological and diversity needs within the curriculum...

I agree that these aspects of UCC-21 are sketchy. Given another year we could probably do more, but even then I don't know that these issues can be addressed to everyone's satisfaction.

These issues are being actively debated at nearly all universities nowadays, and I don't think that standard definitions for best-practices or optimal outcomes exist at this point. Nearly all students will be exposed to technology fluency and diversity issues as part of their major programs, and these other efforts have the added advantage of tailoring students' technology and diversity experiences to the goals of their majors.

5) Neither Task Force has embedded assessment in the manner envisioned when the process began ...

In my view the documents we've been working on this summer directly address the issue of assessment. They identify and provide examples of the kinds of learning outcomes that will be expected to show up in course syllabi to make a course eligible for inclusion in UCC-21, and assuming these assignments and other features are implemented when the course is taught these same products (as completed artifacts) will constitute evidence for the course's fulfillment of UCC21 goals. The ideas advanced thus far by individual Task Force members and subgroups are certainly not exhaustive, but I believe they are sufficiently illustrative of relevant products and outcomes that BSU faculty will be able to model, adapt, or create appropriate experiences and assessment outcomes for this purpose.

6) ... UCC21's emphasis on process bypasses precisely what is most important in a liberal education, a content rich in ideas that represent the best of our own heritage and the heritage of other cultures around the world...

This issue was actively debated during Task Force I's deliberations, at least one Task Force I member resigned over the direction we took in this regard, and the list of process-oriented goals that Task Force I submitted was accepted. There is nothing in UCC-21 that stops any instructor from introducing all of the great ideas he or she deems relevant to the course, and I don't see what purpose is served by bringing the issue up all over again here at the 11th hour.

In sum, I support UCC-21 and look forward to the coming discussions.

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