

Retreat Ideas

Our group dealt with three possible ideas: Online courses to address issues in Athletics; 'Making the Big Store Smaller'; and CORE. After discussion, it became clear that we faced three very different propositions. In the case of online courses, we discovered that the university has few of these at present (29) and, while the concept of producing courses in this area has some merit, it appears to us to be too limited to satisfy the president's request for major ideas for development. This does not mean that it cannot or should not be pursued. In the case of changes making the 'big store smaller and more attractive,' we decided that this was already in process and hence not a new direction.

On the other hand, discussion of CORE produced relative uniformity by all attending that the university should approach a rethinking of undergraduate education by asking a basic question:

What characteristics should we look for in the graduates from our baccalaureate programs? What 'outcomes' do we want or expect from the students who successfully complete their degrees at the University of Maryland? What combination of knowledge, abilities, and skills do we want an undergraduate student to possess upon graduation?

By proceeding to evaluate our curriculum from the viewpoint of end result, we will be better able to identify the 'required' courses all students ought to take as undergraduates and better able to ensure that these courses are in conformity with the current values of this university and the global society of which we are a part.

With the above as a starting point, we note that such a 'rethinking' must proceed from the dual standpoint of inspiration by President Dan Mote and Provost Bill Destler from the top and faculty development of the actual plan from the bottom. The faculty chosen for this task must be among the best and those most capable of dealing with this issue broadly rather than parochially. Ideally, this 'Working Group' should also include a few carefully selected members from outside the university and undergraduate students.

The 'charge' to this group should request reasonably specific outcomes and affordable means of accomplishing them in order to maximize the potential for serious change within a reasonable time frame.

Among the benefits and obstacles involved in this process we note: that our current general curricular requirements, while often individually excellent, are less and less attractive to the students we are recruiting today (as well as those we wish to recruit in the near future). Moreover, the amount of credits in courses required (43-46 credits overall for all aspects of CORE, for example) is so large that we cannot increase that amount without incurring great cost both educationally as well as instructionally. If we are to pursue goals such as greater student involvement in the global world and study

abroad, or in interdisciplinary courses, we must do so within the existing resources found in CORE.

Several of our peers including Harvard, the University of Texas at Austin, Duke, UCLA, and Ohio State have already begun a similar process; some have concluded and are currently engaged in implementation. Not all of their approaches are the same or are applicable at Maryland, but some appear to address the question in a way similar to that recommended above – namely, by asking what their graduates should look like.

Specific ideas, such as thematic approaches or course clusters, can become part of the final product.

As you will see from the submission of those pursuing ‘Wicked Problems,’ this suggestion for CORE dovetails almost perfectly with the idea of recasting the capstone experience in thematic ways. Indeed, that suggestion will be dependent on changes in CORE. These two ideas should proceed in tandem.

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