



## SUMMARIES FROM SUMMER STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS

### **Integrating academics, advising, co-curricular activities and residential life: Focusing on student learning across boundaries and focusing on our strengths**

#### **Questions for today's discussion**

1. Discussions over the summer suggested that some Learning Outcomes lend themselves to learning across boundaries in a more straightforward way than others. Considering our current programmatic strengths, are there specific outcomes on which we should focus our efforts and our resources?
  2. What are the structural and intellectual barriers that have kept us from focusing on student learning across boundaries? How do we address and break through these barriers? What support and reward structures for faculty and staff are necessary to facilitate learning across boundaries for all students?
  3. Learning across boundaries requires buy-in from faculty, staff, administrators, students and parents. Focusing on students and parents, how do we articulate the value of learning across boundaries? How can we link learning across boundaries to career outcomes? How can learning across boundaries distinguish us from other institutions?
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#### **Summer Strategic Planning Discussion Topics**

Two sessions related to this topic: June 13 (*Articulating the advantages of a residential liberal arts college and strengthening the links between our pre-professional programs and the traditional liberal arts programs*) and July 25 (*Integrating academics, advising, co-curricular activities and residential life: Focusing on student learning across boundaries*).

#### **Questions asked at the June 13 summer session**

*Note: Only the questions from the summer session relevant to the topic of "articulating the advantages of a residential liberal arts college" are listed here. The remaining question on linking the pre-professional programs to the liberal arts is being discussed by Group 6 at today's retreat.*

1. What are the most important benefits of residential liberal arts colleges? What are the "hidden" advantages of residential liberal arts colleges? Are there significant benefits that are often unreported or not discussed?
2. Does our location make this experience "unique" or "different"?  
During the meeting, participants were divided into groups for a series of topics related to Augustana as a 1) residential and 2) liberal arts college with strong co-curricular dimensions.



### **Questions asked at the July 25 summer Session**

1. Using the framework of the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), what efforts do exist—or can exist—that take advantage of collaboration across academic, advising, co-curricular and residential life domains?
2. How do these work toward supporting students achieving specific learning outcomes?
3. How might Augustana strengthen the experiences and collaborations to more effectively promote these core outcomes?

For this session, groups were formed around the nine student learning outcomes.

### **Summary of June 13 Strategic Planning Discussion**

#### **I. Defining the Liberal Arts and Our Goals for Student Learning**

There was significant agreement on what a liberal arts education is, with a focus on producing alumni who are critical thinkers, engaged, able to question assumptions, able to see the big picture and analyze arguments. Also vital is the ability to see connections between disciplines or subjects and the development of a lifelong interest in learning, in addition to the development of skills to express themselves effectively. Our graduates should ask good questions and know how to find reliable and well-founded answers. Empathy, an ability to care about issues and people, also was valued, as was our ability to provide opportunities for students to question the dominant messages they encounter in society (consumerism, for example). Key words used included negotiation, perspective, interaction, holistic, citizenship, discernment, connections, service and awareness.

#### **II. The Advantages of a Residential Setting for the Liberal Arts**

Here the emphasis was on the value of our model for student life on campus as a feature of our educational paradigm. Participants emphasized contact with mentors, coaches, peers and faculty as a key component of our educational model, one that helped to develop maturity, coping skills, responsibility, accountability and “real world” problem solving. Ability to engage with diverse people (age, background, beliefs, etc.) also is a feature of a residential college.

When compared with large research universities, the emphasis on teaching, the ability for students to be engaged in co-curricular activities and the frequent casual contact with adults in mentoring or teaching capacities were listed as advantages. “After Hours” contact also was seen as valuable.

When comparing online or MOOC (Massive Online Open Courses) experiences to a residential liberal arts college experience, there was a sense of “Wal-Mart vs. boutique store” difference that could be advantageous for Augustana. There was, however, a sense that more intentional connections between the curricular, co-curricular and residential would benefit the college.

#### **III. Our Challenges or Areas for Improvement**

While there were many ideas presented, the key themes that were repeated were those of:

Articulation: Make what we do appealing to 17-year-olds and their parents.

Coordination: Of curricular and co-curricular or residential aspects of the college.

Integration: Of faculty into co-curricular and residential life. “Go to where they are.”

Community: Intentional community building within residence halls and between academic and other aspects of college life.



Particular ideas that involved significant discussion were 1) the use of e-portfolios to highlight co-curricular and academic achievement as a source of skills development, 2) integration of the college's learning goals into every aspect of student life (athletics, clubs, Greek Life, residence halls, etc.), 3) expansion of programming (including academics) into the residence halls and 4) awareness-raising and encouragement for faculty participation in the life of the college during the 5 p.m.-midnight period when students remain active.

A final concern is the seeming doubletalk of employers who claim to seek the very skills that a liberal arts degree conveys, but who still tend to hire those whose majors fit into the narrow confines of the job description rather than those whose education demonstrates the skills which are said to be valued.

### **Summary of the July 25 Strategic Planning Discussion**

The nine Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) fall into three broader, overlapping outcome areas: Intellectual Sophistication, Interpersonal Maturity and Intrapersonal Conviction. As learning outcomes, there is an explicit acknowledgement of development and process for meeting these. Augustana College, as a residential liberal arts college, offers opportunities inside and outside the classroom that promote and challenge students' development. Often, however, these efforts occur outside the awareness of those from other parts of campus or the connection between the broader outcomes and the activities used to facilitate their achievement may not be identified.

Groups were formed around the nine SLOs and the gist of those discussions are presented here. The collection of the groups' suggestions are available in a separate document and provide an excellent starting point for seeing the myriad ways learning outcomes are facilitated through collaboration across areas of campus at Augustana College—and ways to strengthen the impact of these opportunities. See the full set of notes/ideas at: <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B3D1w82LY0v4S1RldVZ2cGhreGc/edit?usp=sharing>.

### **INTELLECTUAL SOPHISTICATION**

I: Understand—Disciplinary Knowledge

II: Analyze—Critical Thinking and Information Literacy

III. Interpret—Quantitative Literacy

Under the broad "circle" of Intellectual Sophistication, Disciplinary Knowledge translates the least obviously to different domains on campus. However, this is perhaps something each discipline needs to address: How is what they do relevant? How is the question "What can you do with that anyway?" answered? The ease of actively applying will differ by field, but worth considering. It may not be a direct application, but yet a means for recognizing the role of disciplinary knowledge outside of the classroom.

Critical Thinking and Information Literacy are, perhaps, at the other end of the spectrum—where everyday actions require critical thinking skills. The challenge here seems to be how to recognize when/where/how these are happening and be able to adequately apply the principles when not being explicitly prompted to do so. The focus of the discussion group was to recommend being more intentional, setting up opportunities and allowing the reflection needed.

Quantitative Literacy presents a challenge because of the specificity and nature of the learning outcome. However, as the group noted, the applicability of this SLO transcends specific class information and impacts daily life. Setting up situations, relying on individuals and offices from all domains, and explicitly relating back were the main objectives.



Together, achieving this set of learning outcomes is facilitated through opportunities and reinforcement that comes from the multiple venues a residential liberal arts college provides. Taking skills from the classroom to students' immediate and connected lives—and making those connections clear and intentional—benefits not only the students but also the communities with which they interact. The opportunities and means for Augustana to do this are already in place. The suggestions and examples presented by the groups show pathways for strengthening and building on these.

### **INTERPERSONAL MATURITY**

IV: Lead—Collaborative Leadership

V: Relate—Intercultural Competence

VI: Communicate—Communication Competency

Interacting with others and doing so effectively are key, uniting aspects of the outcomes combined under Interpersonal Maturity. Providing a diversity of opportunities and reinforcing connections were the themes reflected in the discussions—and many examples were provided. Missing from the suggestions was a clear identification of development—that these competencies are part of what students need to gain while at Augustana College; therefore the sophistication of the activities will need to develop over time.

With this set of learning outcomes, the difficulties were not in finding applicability or connections outside the classroom, but ways to reflect back. Exposure to different cultures or viewpoints is not enough for intercultural competency, much less mastery. Being placed in a leadership role does not make one an effective leader. Integration across domains (e.g., through careful choices of Augie Reads, community service/volunteering, integrating academics with OSL) help facilitate all of these. One thing to note is the inclusion of the full community in developing these outcomes—there is much to be gained by discussions such as the strategic planning ones from the summer for bringing people from all parts of campus to learn together.

The admonition to “take communication outside the classroom seriously” is vital. In each case, we should be prepared to reflect back, to correct and, most importantly, to model it in all that we do. The shortcomings are illustrated in the lack of instruction provided on how to give presentations, for example. For each of these areas, the groups discussed things that were not discipline-specific. As with Quantitative Literacy, there may need to be help from relevant departments to provide resources for others to be effective at doing the actions needed. However, that does not mean communication studies needs to provide new required courses.

### **INTRAPERSONAL CONVICTION**

VII. Create—Creative Thinking

VIII. Respond—Ethical Citizenship

IX: Wonder—Intellectual Curiosity

There are many outlets for these kinds of activities, but here is where the connections back to academic, much less disciplinary, knowledge and skills can become most tenuous. Yes, people volunteer and work to solve problems, but are they encouraged to use creative reasoning to do it? “Closing the circle” with student groups' activities also may not happen.

A theme here is that there is already much happening in the intrapersonal learning outcome realms, but the quality is varied, the educational experiences are not often directed back to students, and the disciplinary skills are left out of the mix. Some ideas to reinforce creative thinking, for example, included specific competitions.



Ethical Citizenship emerged in many ways as a specific example of issues raised in the other outcomes' discussions. As such, the comments and suggestions incorporate much of what is described elsewhere. Explicitly making external and ongoing connections (e.g., via alumni) and providing true reflections were noted as necessary components to making this a meaningful learning outcome.

Similarly, the Intellectual Curiosity group identified a number of shortcomings that occur when ideas and such are not reinforced outside a specifically graded exercise. Going back through the other discussions, opportunities do exist to reinforce, but that's where we fail to make the connections and therefore to help maintain the excitement/wonder. The Intellectual Curiosity group summed up the main points of their discussion in this way: "In general, we think, all offices and procedures of the college need to send a repeated message that students need to construct a self that's responsible, mature, dedicated to growth in skills and intellect. They need to learn that there is more to a full life than a full wallet."