SUMMARIES FROM SUMMER STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS

Liberal Arts in the 21st Century: Beyond traditional campus and calendar-bound learning models; exploring the potential of new interdisciplinary programs that align with the mission and the times and connect with our student's career goals

Questions for today's discussion

1. Are there other programs or concentrations we should be offering? Explore more with technology?

2. Many of our discussions have focused on what Augustana students learn outside of their majors, if not what's learned outside the classroom. Are there effective ways to certify the quality and worth of those experiences and communicate those achievements?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of proposing certificate programs? How do you see them best fitting with the mission of the college and our Learning Outcomes?

4. Are our processes and structures for proposing and evaluating innovative ideas appropriate and sufficient? Are there models that would better help us think about our curricular offerings as a whole?

Summary of Strategic Planning Conversations To Date

Previous campus discussions have addressed how liberal arts colleges and higher education in general are evolving and how Augustana might respond to those challenges and changes, if not lead.

On Nov 7, 2012, a group of about 50 faculty participants met in two separate sessions to discuss new interdisciplinary programs and to identify ways we should use technology and online learning mechanisms (e.g., blended learning, partnering with similar institutions) to improve our effectiveness without compromising our commitment to our residential liberal arts mission. In addition, several faculty and staff members gave us or sent feedback (either in other sessions or via email). We also have had additional discussions on adopting new pedagogies such as blended learning in our courses as well as experimenting with online learning on a limited basis for courses that better lend themselves to such pedagogy.

These discussions have been wide-ranging, and people have had many ideas to share. A brief summary is provided here:

New interdisciplinary programs

One recurring suggestion is to develop some set of certificate programs that add interdisciplinary depth or certain skills in addition to the traditional majors. Several versions of this have been floating around, including a kind of "mini-minor," as a "major enhancement" and skills-based certificates.

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Examples include:

• Global Studies Certificate

• Business Certificate for non-business majors

• Sustainability Certificate

• Non-Profit Management Certificate

• Web Design Certificate

Ideas for several new interdisciplinary programs also have come up, as majors or minors, either in the discussions or in subsequent emails. It is important that we ask whether these programs could bring us new students who might not consider us because "they feel they do not see their interest reflected in our curriculum":

• Museum Studies

• Human Physiology

• Public Health

• Polar Studies

• Chinese Studies

• Archeology

No matter whether new programs are added, the conversations have revealed other ideas for connecting students to interdisciplinary options and identifying their worth, such as:

• Use advising as a means of directing students to interdisciplinary study and certificates.

• Create a well-advertised "point person" for contract majors and minors.

• Create major "enhancements"—sort of mini concentrations to add to existing majors.

• Create partnerships with other schools to build interdisciplinary programs (e.g., language/area studies).

Uses for technology

The technology group discussed the following three questions:

• Where are our "gaps" in student learning support or "opportunities" in student learning experiences that, if filled, would improve our efforts to retain and graduate students who are engaged?

• Given what we already know about the ways in which technology and online mechanisms can impact student learning, which of these "gaps" or "opportunities" might realistically be addressed with technology or online learning resources?

• Of the potential uses of technology and online learning resources already discussed, which possibilities could realistically be embedded into our existing practices to ensure sustainability and improve our educational effectiveness and efficiency?

The discussions to date have led to conversations about support courses or supplemental courses in math, reading and writing that would rely on technology; other software programs that support foreign languages and overseas study (MANGO) and "specific skills" (Excel, Outlook, LYNUS); blended learning and faculty support necessary to flip classrooms; and courses that might be conducive to online learning such as some accounting courses, business statistics, etc.

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The technology group organized its thinking around three points, from which the rest of the discussion relates:

• Using technology to assist students in preparing to succeed pre-college or pre-course.

• Using technology to enhance the experience during college.

• Using technology to strengthen the assessment and feedback loop of improvement at the college.

1) Using technology to provide supplemental instruction for specific types of students. While that could be an incredibly broad conversation, we talked specifically about remediation for students who struggle in math, reading/writing and college academic success skills. There already are many resources available through a variety of services that, with the support of a facilitator or "life coach" type of individual, could help a number of our students who struggle upon arrival at Augustana.

2) Taking fuller advantage of the technology that we already have at our disposal in terms of both assignments and feedback. Several people talked about ways in which they use technology to get away from locking their homework calendar to the class meeting time calendar and therefore allowing for more precise and targeted learning strategies. This also included using technology more effectively for providing students with feedback.

3) More generally taking advantage of technology for content delivery and thereby freeing up faculty to focus their class time on higher order thinking. Of course, this is really not much different than flipping the classroom. This discussion quickly moved to what many faculty see as the primary obstacle to making these moves—infrastructure, training and time to make these changes. We got bogged down in this discussion pretty quickly, which perhaps reinforces the need for a legitimate educational technologist who can bridge the teaching and learning and pedagogy with the appropriate uses of technology rather than having someone who may know only what tools exist.

4) Partnering with other institutions. One person talked specifically about partnering with other institutions to deliver courses together that would be accessible to students at all of the institutions in the consortium. This sounds interesting for a variety of reasons both in terms of specialty expertise and content-heavy courses that virtually everyone teaches. The problem, of course, is resolving the calendar differences between most other small colleges and us.

5) Taking advantage of value-added side effects of increased technology in teaching. An outgrowth of this kind of work would be that we would have a lot more student data from which we could assess learning and potentially identify student experience differences. However, managing that data and manipulating it to be useful for analysis could be more or less plausible depending on a variety of issues.

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