

Summary Report from
Second Sessions of the Bradley University Campus Conversations Series (BUCCS-2)

The Office of Teaching Excellence and Faculty Development and the Undergraduate Research Committee recently held the second set in a series of conversations for faculty, administrative and professional staff. The intent of these sessions is to provide an opportunity for members of the Bradley community to share ideas and insights on issues affecting the mission of the university. BUCCS provides a forum for campus-wide dialogue on issues relevant to all sectors of the university.

The process design for BUCCS-2 remained the same as that used in the pilot sessions in BUCCS-1. Participants, working in small groups, exchanged ideas on two questions. The opinions recorded from the most recent conversations (which included 51 returning and 26 first-time participants) are summarized below. For both BUCCS-1 and BUCCS-2, the summary report was developed using broad themes that were reflected across all three conversations for each topic*.

- ***Question 1: One common theme that emerged from BUCCS-1 was our desire as educators to produce graduates who are critical and creative thinkers, life-long learners, and mature, productive, socially responsible citizens. Where would you assess that we currently stand on achieving this ideal? What needs to be done to the current curricular and support structures (if anything) to achieve this ideal?***

Participants approached the first question from several perspectives. One critical concern voiced during the first of the three conversations centered on the lack of a “list” of measurable skills that students would need in order to achieve the ideal student profile. This theme was picked up by participants in the other two conversation sessions who thought that producing this list would allow those involved in curriculum development to link specific courses to these ideals. Further, all participant groups thought that mechanisms to assess most of the concepts faculty identified as desirable (life-long learning and curiosity were cited in particular) were not available/being used in current assessment/evaluation processes.

According to the participants, the areas that will require more emphasis to achieve the ideal included the following: emphasizing more innovative, multidisciplinary ways to introduce critical/creative thinking skills into the curriculum (a frequent complaint of students relying too much on computers and electronic sources of information without the tools to be able to distinguish the quality of the information); developing a more cohesive core curriculum based on ‘themes’; focusing on life skills development, including leadership and responsibility; incorporating/requiring global studies by capitalizing on study abroad opportunities and promoting interaction with the international student community; restructuring of general education requirements; incorporating writing requirements and topics related to ethics into many more courses; and publicizing the current myriad opportunities for student engagement (e.g., scholarship, creative production, service learning, externships and internships) using a variety of mechanisms.

From a teaching perspective, participants cited time, current workload demands placed on faculty and students, resources, the current model for tenure and promotion, and an inconsistent climate in support of change as areas that need to be addressed before the ideal can be achieved.

- ***Question 2: Which aspects of the current environment (student and faculty composition, institutional culture, community partnerships, etc.) can help us achieve our goals for the Bradley graduate of 2010? Which serve as barriers?***

More than one group of participants mentioned the following as particular strengths that can help achieve the goals for the Bradley graduate of 2010: dynamic faculty and administration that consistently model the behaviors promoted as ideals for Bradley students; the size of the university and class sizes; focus on diversity; current structure of writing intensive courses; opportunities for student engagement that are available (e.g., internships, practica) that arise from our strong community connections; the technology available to the university community; and potential for cultural change. Specific programs/groups cited that can positively influence our ability to achieve the goals for the Bradley graduate of 2010 were Study Abroad, Institute for Learning in Retirement, the Graduate School and Bradley Alumni.

Participants perceived the following factors as barriers toward achieving our goals: student culture (e.g., narcissism, lack of ethics or maturity, focus on grades rather than learning); tendency of currently structured programs/curricula to force students into specialized areas of education/training rather than exposing them to broader areas; devaluing/not exploiting the general education curriculum; no means to assess students at the time of graduation and post-graduation on “who they are as people”; opportunities for community association, study abroad, and integration of technology into curriculum not fully exploited; lack of buy-in/willingness to change and inertia among faculty/administration; limited geographical and cultural diversity of students and faculty; funding/resources for all departments and gaps in funding and resources between departments; time needed to integrate these plans; ‘silo’ mentality discourages cross-disciplinary work; university’s current focus on following a business model of efficiency; past failure to put discussions into action; subtle roadblocks that make collaboration between faculty difficult; and, adjunct professors are not integrated into the faculty.

*Those wanting to view the full set of ideas compiled should refer to the BUCCS website, www.bradley.edu/BUCCS/