

The Bradley University Campus Conversation Series (BUCCS) developed as one initiative from an opportunity provided to the University from the Council on Undergraduate Research. A team of six faculty members, one from each college and one team coordinator were selected to attend the first *Initiating and Sustaining Undergraduate Research Programs* held at Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, CA in October 2005. This CUR Workshop was designed to provide an opportunity for colleges and universities eager to establish undergraduate research programs a forum for the following:

- to review models (that include a broad disciplinary scope) of effective undergraduate research (UR) programs;
- to provide access to resources related to establishing and sustaining UR programs;
- to begin a network of UR program directors and mentors to ensure successful UR program development.

After returning from this workshop, the Bradley team agreed on three goals to accomplish during its first year that would facilitate the process of institutionalizing undergraduate research:

- prepare a white paper for campus-wide distribution that summarized the advantages of developing an UR program and highlighted current campus efforts;
- seek to develop a campus office for UR;
- develop a campus conversation series to discuss in broad terms institutionalizing undergraduate research.

BUCCS began in January 2007. By this time, the original Committee on Undergraduate Research had been expanded to include persons who had worked on the Special Emphasis Report to the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and other interested faculty and staff members. Of note, the Special Emphasis had been designed to further faculty/students collaborations. The Committee on Undergraduate Research reinterpreted that charge to reflect building a campus culture of student engagement (which refers to experiential and service learning projects; consulting; participation in problem-based learning, practica and internships; cross-disciplinary collaborations; and research and creative production with faculty, staff and other professionals).

The impetus for BUCCS evolved and was presented as one that would stimulate discussions across the University on issues that could affect what Bradley is in the future. The process design for the initial conversations evolved from two pilot sessions attended by faculty and staff from across campus. In late September, nine faculty and staff members met to settle on a format and possible conversation topics. In November, 33 people from the Bradley community participated in the first campus-wide discussions (“pilot version”) concerning desired outcomes for students receiving a Bradley education. Based on group comments, three questions from this pilot conversation were collapsed into two that became conversation starters for three open meetings held at the start of the spring semester. The opinions recorded from these recent conversations (which included 79 participants), while not identical, contain many similar ideas and beliefs. What follows is a thematic summary of ideas generated across all three conversations for each topic.

BUCCS 1

- **Question 1: What are the skills, attributes and core knowledge that would characterize a model graduate from Bradley University in the year 2010?** Summarized, key points were as follows:
 - ✓ Knowledge and Practice: Expectation that our students will obtain better than average basic knowledge, content knowledge and competency in their respective disciplines; also that they will acquire critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills, ability to apply technologies, communication skills (oral, written and other languages), knowledge of mathematics, and ethical thinking and practices.
 - ✓ Citizenship: Expectation that our students will obtain the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to engage effectively in collaborative work, that they will actively participate in their communities, and that they will understand and act upon their responsibilities as global citizens.
 - ✓ Character and Professional Development: Expectation that our students will construct a personal and professional identity that includes leadership skills, ethics, respect, deliberateness, balance, time management, as well as the humility and the desire to engage in lifelong learning.

- **Question 2: What courses or experiences should we have in support of the development of the core skills, attributes and knowledge that should characterize the model graduate from Bradley University in the year 2010?** Summarized, these experiences were as follows:
 - ✓ Active Learning: promote the development of curiosity, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communications, and cross-disciplinary connections.
 - ✓ Life Learning: provide literacy across disciplines, address ethical issues, develop knowledge of and skill with technologies, and prepare students for the realities of the workplace through internships and other job related experiences.
 - ✓ Scholarly Learning and Involvement: challenge students to engage in the problem-solving process that is a part of scholarly work; encourage active involvement of undergraduate students with faculty in research and creative production.
 - ✓ Service Learning: require community involvement making Bradley's work supportive of and important to the well-being of greater Peoria.
 - ✓ Global Learning: encourage study-abroad experiences and the acquisition of competencies required of global citizens; foster the study of culture, language, the environment, politics, and economics.
 - ✓ Participants expressed the need to incorporate many, if not all, of the above expectations both within the general education curriculum as well as within the respective major disciplines. They also voiced the benefits of creating common experiences for freshmen as well as capstone courses for upper classmen.

BUCCS 2

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 responding to 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 curricular 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, of note, was the 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 curriculum based on 'themes'; focusing on life skills development especially in the areas of 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 conversation 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, particularly internships and practica that arise from the strong community connections BU has forged; the technology available to the university community; and potential for cultural change. Specific programs/groups cited that will 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 of narcissism, lack of ethics and maturity and 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 (likes BUCCS) into action; subtle roadblocks that make collaboration between faculty difficult; and, adjunct professors are not integrated into the faculty.

BUCCS 3

Task 1: A common theme that emerged from our previous conversations is the need to revisit how our core curriculum supported the development of the ideal graduate. List and describe curricular models, related to general education, theme education or core curricula.

The models articulated and sketched reflected a great diversity in opinions and ranged from traditional, Silo approaches tied to specific colleges/disciplines to integrated experiences that blur the boundaries between disciplines. The following descriptors for the models emerged during the deliberations of several groups: cross disciplinary approaches, requirements for core course material to be integrated into higher level courses, experiential learning, promotion of global perspective, requirements for one core course each semester throughout college years, thematic grouping of courses, skills development focus, and requirements for at least one course from each college. Core competencies that were repeated across several groups included writing, basic math, speaking and critical thinking.

Task 2: Select one of the curricular models from the list generated during Part 1. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the model as you currently understand it. What additional information would you need to determine how this model would support the development of the ideal graduate?

Key questions that arose during this part of the discussion primarily involved pragmatic matters (impact of the Illinois Articulation Agreement, accreditation questions, accommodation of transfer students, budget support, resources needed, changing current student and faculty culture, questions related to guidelines for tenure and promotion) and logistic concerns (class size limitations, timeline for change, plan for integration into entire college experience, placements for service/experiential learning, evaluation and assessment problems, development of the core courses without engaging in “turf” issues).

BUCCS 4

Task 1: Review the list of student learning outcomes derived in BUCCS 1. Then study the four core curriculum models provided. Your task is to determine how these student learning outcomes could be addressed within the framework of each of the individual models. The core models were derived from BUCCS 3.

Model A has no specific core requirements. Students are encouraged to pursue a broad education and to “sample” liberally from many areas of study before declaring a major. There are no distinctions between “majors” and “non-majors” courses, though many upper level course prerequisites serve to

gently channel students into a narrower field of study at the upper level. All freshmen are required to take a tutorial course in their first semester, which integrates critical thinking, problem-based learning, written and oral communication, and other basic skills. Tutorials are taught in every department on campus; specific content in the tutorial section varies widely. All courses at the institution are writing intensive and promote discussion and student/faculty interaction.

Model B has a list of required areas of knowledge in which all students should be conversant. These knowledge areas are divided into a number of categories, and students must select one or two courses from each category. Courses in these categories are expected to adhere to the specific principles outlined for their respective categories.

Model C is similar to Model B, but has a category of Practical Application Courses that support faculty-student collaboration in research, service learning, and project based courses.

Model D is comprised of knowledge bases and skills that students should have as educated persons. All freshmen must take a two semester course in communication. These courses cover grammar, rhetoric and communication skills in both oral and written communication. The freshman and sophomore years have several required courses, such as US history, World History, logic, ethics, mathematical systems and reasoning and governance in a globalized world. The purpose is to assure that students have the core knowledge and skills. Students declare a major at the end of their sophomore year. All majors have a core set of courses that are required with some electives, taken primarily in the senior year.

Participants endorsed Model B and Model C most often as “good” general education models.

The BUCCS Committee, now separate from the Committee for Student Engagement, continued to meet over the summer. A draft plan for campus conversations was developed in May for implementation during the Fall Semester, 2007. The University Conference in August, 2007 was designed to continue the campus conversation trajectory. Other topics chosen for focus were ‘exploring student engagement,’ ‘choosing a curricular model,’ and ‘assessment and evaluation.’ Because of a focus on critical thinking (stemming from faculty attendance at a summer conference on this topic, which was then carried into the Fall Faculty Forum), the original conversation series timeline was revamped. BUCCS 6, following a similar framework to earlier BUCCS was focused on critical thinking. BUCCS 7 is focused on effective communication.