EQUITY, EXCELLENCE AND SIGNATURE WORK

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) held its centennial meeting in Washington, D.C. in January 2015. The theme of the conference was, “Liberal Education, Global Flourishing and the Equity Imperative.” The emphasis on equity follows a recent AACU publication, “America’s Unmet Promise: The Imperative for Equity in Higher Education.” Throughout the conference there was a call to make equity a clear part of any higher education reform. We will not be excellent without an intentional effort to address persistent inequities in our educational system. Most of the conversation about equity centered on students and student outcomes. Participants were encouraged to look at data disaggregated by race and ethnicity—as we do at the institutional level—and identify strategies to address unequal outcomes. This is certainly something we can pay attention to at all levels. Who is successful in courses and why? Who has exposure to high impact practices? In areas where we show strength in our general education/core competencies outcomes, have we looked to find out if there are consistent differences? These are questions we can ask to make sure that we are “equity-minded” in our approach to education. There was also a call to stop blaming students for the unequal outcomes associated with the treatment of groups that historically and currently are marginalized. We will not improve student outcomes if we believe there is nothing that can done because of inequities in the education of students before they reach post-secondary education.

The lack of diversity in the faculty ranks was also a topic of concern. We were asked to engage in a critical review of practices, policies and structures that are presumed to be race neutral but contribute to persistent inequities. We describe our institution as diverse, but how deep is the commitment to diversity? How much leadership have we shown on diversity issues? How do our outcomes, across the board, reflect our institutional values? I believe this should be a major topic for reflection and action in academic affairs consistent with our belief in academic excellence. Consider adding this topic to your unit’s agenda for discussion.
EQUITY, EXCELLENCE AND SIGNATURE WORK

While the link between equity and excellence was the main focus of the meeting, a secondary focus in many sessions was on getting students to create “signature work.” This concept is likely to become as ubiquitous as “high impact practices” in higher education conversations. Many institutions are moving beyond a checklist of courses for graduation to an effort to get students to integrate and apply what they have learned and to document their learning, often in electronic portfolios. The benefits of portfolios as a vehicle for reflection and learning are well-documented in the arts. Any of the faculty or students in our creative arts disciplines can explain why the portfolio approach has been a beneficial educational strategy. More disciplines are embracing this approach so that students can see, throughout their scholastic journey, how they are developing and how multiple experiences are contributing to that growth. Some institutions are using the portfolio for all students—regardless of major—as part of a strategy to foster student persistence and understanding of the impact of their education. The portfolios also capture experiences that students have as part of a drive to increase civic engagement by having students work on real world problems as well as efforts to provide students with work experiences through internships, practicums and clinicals. Many disciplines at CCP foster student civic engagement. Examples include Habitat for Humanity’s “Alternative Spring Break,” which started as part of a Leadership Institute project; the Nursing department’s foot clinic for the homeless; the Dental Studies program’s “Sealant Saturdays;” the Fox Rothschild Center for Law and Society’s award-winning “Wills for Heroes” initiative. The list goes on and on. All of these experiences could be intentionally integrated with the broader general education/core competency of Responsible Citizenship and captured as part of an institutional effort to show students the value of these experiences as part of their degrees. While we do not have a consistent approach to internships, many disciplines do facilitate work experiences for students. Photographic Imaging students, for example, have done “pro-bono” work creating videos for nonprofits. They get work experience that they can add to a portfolio and they are helping nonprofits that cannot afford the services that students provide under the direction of a faculty member. Much of the good work that we do is done quietly and not publicized, sometimes not even in our own institution. Can we help students plan and capture this information as part of a cohesive academic experience?

AACU is laying out an aggressive and proactive plan for higher education as they start their next 100 years. Their ideas are consistent with our current plans but can expand our strategies. Please consider this an invitation to participate in a conversation about equity, excellence and signature work as we start our next 50 years.
A draft of the Monitoring Report for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) was posted and available for comment from February 2nd—February 16th. The report responds to the three concerns expressed by MSCHE following submission of our Self Study and the Team visit during Spring 2014. Those issues were: (1) implementation of a documented and sustained assessment process, in all programs, that uses multiple measures of sufficient quality to provide direct evidence of student achievement of key learning outcomes; (2) steps taken to promote a culture of assessment, including evidence of support and collaboration among faculty and administration in assessing student learning and responding to assessment results; and (3) evidence that student learning assessment information is shared and discussed with appropriate constituents and is used to improve teaching and learning (Standard 14). The report addresses each issue and provides supporting evidence. Evidence includes the new SharePoint electronic repository for easy access to documenting use of assessment to improve teaching and learning; the Assessment Conference held in January 2015; new and/or revised documents, procedures and job descriptions; additional staff; and much more. A final version of the report will be posted by March 1.

Thank you to everyone who has worked so hard to demonstrate our institutional commitment to assessment for improvement.

UPDATE ON THE MONITORING REPORT FOR MIDDLE STATES

10,000 SMALL BUSINESSES AT CCP

This article was written by Margaret Berger Bradley.

“It was the first time I actually left the business to work on the business. I learned I could be a leader and not just a laborer.” Though Janet Stechman, fourth-generation co-owner of the delicious Anastasi Seafood in the Italian market, hadn’t been in a classroom for almost thirty-five years, she quickly found a rhythm as one of 28 in her Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses cohort in the spring.

She and 134 others have now graduated from Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program since the College began offering it in May 2013. Another 35 are deep in the intensive educational experience and working toward an April 2015 graduation.

This College program provides entrepreneurs with access to a practical business management education in a special peer-learning environment. Small business owners spend 12 weeks—roughly 100 hours—in the classroom engaged in an entrepreneurial business curriculum designed by Babson College and facilitated by a team of Community College of Philadelphia faculty led by Wayne Williams. The coursework is supported by a powerful peer-learning model and the support of business advisors who coach the scholars throughout the experience. In fact, we are clear that these 100 hours are matched by another 100 hours outside of the classroom focusing on the coursework.
The team is clear with each applicant that the educational experience is an investment in the business owner. Janet knew we were investing in her so she could invest in her business. Her business is the case study she worked on throughout her experience.

We select business owners who have companies that are poised for growth. Unlike many start-up resources in the region, this experience is for a business that has proven itself—ones that are at least two years old and have at least four employees. These businesses have more than $150,000 in annual revenue, and some have revenue that exceeds $4 million. In fact, on average, businesses in the program are more than 15 years old and have generated more than $1 million in revenue. The goal is to invest in those business owners running companies that could grow to create jobs and increase revenue in the area. That economic development goal is what drew Goldman Sachs and its Foundation to this philanthropic agenda.

The curriculum covers all elements of vetting a growth opportunity: understanding an opportunity versus an idea (including understanding one’s own core competence, the market and competitive positioning), knowing your financials and focusing on metrics, leadership, managing people, marketing and selling, focusing on operations and financing the growth. Throughout, there is a focus on effective, efficient and compelling communication. If Janet couldn’t communicate her growth opportunity, how would anyone join her in this pursuit?

The peer experience delights many of the scholars. Working in growth groups of five to six individuals, these business owners learn from others with wildly different backgrounds and companies. What they find is how much they have in common and how much they can support each other. In fact, more than 75% find some ways to work together. With our 10,000 Small Businesses team’s support and encouragement, the alumni have formed an alumni association. Ninety of the 135 came together to celebrate the New Year. They recognize the value of this national 10,000 Small Businesses network (which is active on LinkedIn), they come back for alumni clinics and networking opportunities and they refer peers to future cohorts.

So beyond the first years’ success of this program and the accolades the College has gotten, what might 10,000 Small Businesses lead to next? Goldman Sachs has committed to Philadelphia for five years. What we learn and the relationships we develop are the College’s for as long as we are able to nurture them.
We know we have these business owners—most of whom were not familiar with the College—who have now had a special, full-scholarship experience, an experience some have called ‘transformational.’ So how do we develop these relationships?

We know that we are doing a wonderful job teaching this modular curriculum. Are there elements we would want to use in other ways?

We have continued to improve the peer-learning and business-advising components of the experience. What may we learn from that experience that may be relevant for other elements of College life?

We’ve engaged business owners ranging in age from their early-20s to their mid-70s, some who have had no more than a high school degree and others who have either a JD or PhD. We know that entrepreneurship is both a mindset and a skillset. How might we grow and nurture these traits among Community College students?

We have several years ahead of us to learn from this Goldman Sachs investment in the College. We have an opportunity to ask questions early and explore whether there is a growth opportunity for us here, too.
Communication Studies

The Communication Studies faculty plan for assessment of student learning outcomes (SLOs) illustrates a multi-pronged approach, thoughtful reflection on results and identification of strategies for improvement, even when the benchmarks were met. The following article is copied with some modifications from a report by Craig Strimel, Curriculum Coordinator for Communication Studies.

The Fall 2014 Communication Studies assessment included three separate projects. The first project was a review of course syllabi, checking for inclusion of the established course student learning outcomes. The second project involved assessing one program learning goal from English 115, Public Speaking (and a course SLO that is not discussed in this article). The third project involved providing students in English 117, Group and Team Communication, with a survey of all student learning outcomes for the course.

A total of 14 faculty who teach courses in the Communication Studies Program participated in various aspects of the assessment. They collected sample syllabi and assignments from 16 different faculty, conducted reviews of the collected material and engaged in discussions about the results in three face-to-face meetings. In order to encourage wider participation in the overall process, they posted all results of the assessments on their Canvas page for Communication Studies and Mass Media faculty, and two additional faculty participated in that context.

For project one—review of syllabi—a benchmark of 100% was set. The benchmark was set at that high level because faculty are required to include departmentally-approved SLOs on syllabi and all program faculty are provided a copy of departmental policies. The review showed 90% of the syllabi included the correct SLOs. One syllabus had SLOs but they were not the departmentally approved ones. Faculty who either did not include
the correct SLOs or had no SLOs at all were given a copy to give to the students in their classes and were reminded that the SLOs must be included in the future. Review of syllabi is an important step in making sure that the departmentally approved outcomes are informing instruction.

Project two involved direct assessment of student work. Faculty rated achievement of the program SLO: “Demonstrate a functional proficiency in oral communication, including one-on-one conversation, small group communication, and public speaking.” Faculty teaching five different communication courses provided assignments and samples of student work for review. Results of the review across multiple assignments and different faculty supported that students are meeting the expected program learning outcome at an average of 88.4%. However, the faculty agreed that the SLO is vague and should be reconsidered; that there would be some benefit to looking at assignments at different points in the semester to look for growth; and that there should be more agreement about expectations for the first graded assignment (the one for which there was great variation in assessment). Even though students seemed to meet the benchmark, faculty identified areas for improvement.

Project three was an indirect assessment of course SLOs that involved surveying students on their perceptions of mastery of the course SLOs for English 117—Group and Team Communication. Students rated their mastery of eight SLOs on a five-point scale and were asked to provide a brief example of when the outcome was addressed in the course. Results showed that on average, 74% of students reported at least basic mastery for the eight SLOs. The lowest reported SLO showed that only 58% reported basic mastery. The instructor plans to revise his approach in relation to the three lowest SLOs.

The Communication Studies faculty approach to “closing the loop” illustrates a collaborative approach that identified promising topics for consideration to improve teaching and learning.

**UPDATES/ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Rel Dowdell (English) was interviewed January 15th on WURD (900 AM). He discussed the multi-award nominated film *Selma*.

Ji Gao (Mathematics) attended and gave an invited talk at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the American Mathematical Society. The meeting took place in San Antonio, Texas, January 10-14, 2015. The topic of the talk was: N- Dimensional U-Convexity and Fixed Point for Non-Expansive Mappings in Banach Spaces.

Karen Vargas, part-time aide in the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management (CAHM) program was awarded a full scholarship to continue her education at Drexel University. Karen—a CAHM alumna—graduated from the College with dual degrees in Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management. She is also a graduate of the School District of Philadelphia’s Careers through Culinary Arts Program (C-CAP). Drexel University and the C-CAP program recently formed a partnership to award C-CAP graduates scholarships to pursue a bachelor’s degree in the Hospitality or Culinary Arts discipline. At Drexel, Karen will pursue a Hospitality Management degree with a Business minor. She starts the program in Fall 2015.

On March 30, Dr. Richard Frei will present his Lindback Lecture: “*The Pygmalion College: Bringing Community College of Philadelphia to Life through the Management of Student Expectations.*” Dr. Frei is the 2014 Lindback Award honoree for distinguished teaching at the College.

On April 11 the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management (CAHM) faculty will host an ACF (American Culinary Federation) Certification Practical Cooking Exam in the CAHM kitchens for regional chefs. One CAHM student will be paired with each chef participating in the Cooking Exam to assist him or her with the required preparation and set up during the exam. Through their participation in the Cooking Exam, the CAHM students will learn the appropriate steps necessary to complete the cooking portion of the two-part exam.

CCP, along with the 13 other Pennsylvania Community Colleges, is participating in a new website—College Credit Fast Track. The goal of the site is to help students to obtain college credit based on prior work or life experience, through faculty evaluation of a digital portfolio.

**Addition:** In the January 2015 newsletter, we welcomed Elizabeth (Liz) Majewski to the Academic Affairs Office. We failed to mention that Liz holds a B.S. in Business Communication from Chestnut Hill College in addition to her being a graduate of CCP.