

Drake Curriculum Assessment Committee (DCAC) Summary Report for 2013-14
Submitted to Senate Exec: 6 May 2014

Membership: Bruce Gilbert (Chair), Chuck Phillips, Ronald S Bakari, Carrie E Dunham-LaGree, Jerome A Hilscher, Todd Hodgkinson, Kathleen Richardson, Amy G Vaughan, Eric Manley. Ex officio members: Art Sanders, Kevin Saunders, Stephanie N Majeran

Overview:

DCAC met throughout the 2013-2014 Academic Year: a total of five formal meetings. They also met in September with Charlie Blaich and Kathy Wise, from the Center of Inquiry at Wabash College (some members attended as many as three of these sessions)

DCAC focused on:

- Reviewing and making further suggestions to Faculty Senate based on the University Curriculum Committee's recommendations for Curricular Reform
- Collaborating with the Center of Inquiry at Wabash College and reviewing their findings
- Reviewing NSSE data, both in the aggregate and as it applies to specific Colleges
- Reviewing NSSE data as it applies to Writing and Engaged Citizen
- Ongoing assessment of Information Literacy and Critical Thinking
- Collecting and reviewing information from focus groups of students, especially as they relate to the Drake Curriculum (in coordination with the Student Senate Academic Affairs Committee)
- Addressing other aspects of the Charge from Faculty Senate Exec 2013-2014 (see Appendix I, below)

Themes:

- Drake students continue to have challenges in the area of high-level analysis and information synthesis (examples being: analyzing an argument for its flaws, or marshaling evidence to make a case). These challenges are consistent across data points (based on both self-reported measures such as NSSE and the Drake Student Survey, and more limited but coursework-based assessment of Information Literacy AOI and FYS examples). Also, written communication skills (both in terms of the demands of the Drake experience and students' abilities to produce quality written output) were identified as an allied concern. The committee recommends continued efforts to design and implement development workshops and resources to address these areas of challenge.
- DCAC feels strongly that evidence-based analysis must be brought to bear on any ongoing or future efforts at curricular reform. DCAC notes that the UCC curriculum review committee reviewed assessment data and recommends continued progress in using student learning outcome assessment in the curricular review process.
- DCAC recognizes the need to continue to build the connection between faculty/staff development and assessment. For example, DCAC endorsed the creation of a Center for Teaching and Learning (a recommendation of the Wabash report) in the belief that a Center would present a positive locus for curricular improvement and assessment.

Goals for 2014-2015:

- Making suggestions for incremental, near-term improvements in the Drake Curriculum, including: a preliminary statement on Experiential Learning; the exploration of both existing and potential options to highlight student's academic accomplishments, and the establishment of "priority outcomes" in order to distill the essence of the current set of outcomes, as well as reflect the evidence gathered to date (see "Themes," above)
- For the ongoing work of reviewing outcomes, DCAC should use a curriculum mapping effort as a way to ground its work in reviewing outcomes and recommending "priority outcomes" (contact DCAC Chair Gilbert or Kevin Saunders if you would like a preliminary copy of such a document). This work will also consider the existing data that we have to identify areas of challenge/strength/need.
- Establishment of an open "assessment dashboard" that will provide ready links to completed and ongoing assessment efforts, as well as relevant samples of student work
- Continued assessment of student work as it relates to the Drake Curriculum, according to already-established schedule. DCAC recognizes that several colleges/schools currently have systems for engaging in this work. The committee plans to initiate a review of the impact of these systems on current assessment and curricular efforts at Drake.
- Preparing for HLC Visit, 2017-2018 (See Appendix III, below)
- Specific recommendations for faculty development and further faculty discussions (especially in those areas highlighted under "Themes," above)

APPENDIX I: Annotated "Special Charge" for DCAC

2013-14 Drake Curriculum Analysis Committee

Charge from the Senate Executive Committee (September 2014)

"As the Senate Executive Committee has charged the UCC with considering potential changes to the Drake Curriculum, it is cognizant of the critical connections between curriculum and assessment.

"With these connections in mind, the Senate Executive Committee has charged the Drake Curriculum Analysis Committee with the following:"

(Chair's note: Comments on progress in these areas are in italics. Many of these updates may appear to be incomplete, but a) this was an ambitious agenda that was not realistic to complete in one year (although the groundwork has been laid for much progress in these areas next year), and b) the ongoing work, coordination, and discussion with and about the UCC process took a considerable amount of the Committee's time and effort.

- "To ensure that assessment efforts are connected to student learning, review existing assessment processes at Drake University and investigate alternative models for assessment. The Senate Executive Committee is particularly interested in data about how peer institutions achieve faculty-driven assessment and accountability."

Comments: DCAC ("the Committee") participated in sessions with the Wabash group, wherein Drake's

assessment processes underwent considerable scrutiny. Partially as a result of the conversations that occurred after receiving the report, DCAC endorsed the ongoing strategic discussions that we hope will lead to the establishment of a “Center for Teaching and Learning at Drake,” as a method of “closing the loop” and improving the assessment environment at Drake. (Note that this was the Wabash group’s primary recommendation.)

As to how other institutions achieve faculty-driven assessment: There is wide variance in governance and structure. For example, both [Butler](#) and [Creighton](#) have much more centralized assessment structures (both are chaired by an administrator).

Although not a direct peer, St. Olaf’s approach ([and Web presence](#)) are of interest, for two main reasons: They take a collaborative approach (that is largely an extension of their Curriculum Committee); and they recently passed (and are a recognized model for) the HLC process.

- “To make recommendations for revision of current assessment processes in ways that focus on outcomes”

Comments: In reviewing the Wabash report, the Committee agreed with the report in terms of the overall difficulty of timely and meaningful review of the current system of roughly forty learning outcomes. Therefore, the Committee has agreed to work on identifying a smaller number of “priority outcomes” that a) data suggest are areas of challenge for students, and b) represent “baseline” expectations for every Drake’s student’s experience with the Drake Curriculum. We hope to get these recommendations to Faculty Senate (as part of an overall package of recommendations) in early Fall 2014 (see “Goals” section, above).

- “To investigate potential assessment tools that will assist in efficient sharing and review of student work. To ensure that any proposed revisions to assessment processes or adoption of new tools for the purpose of assessment are driven by faculty needs and priorities.”

Comments: The Committee is unlikely to endorse a University-wide platform for eportfolios or other standard assessment tools; such technologies are both expensive and often too complex to be used systematically by faculty. Instead, the Committee intends to concentrate on identifying methods for capturing, promoting, and preserving samples of student work. The Committee intends to ensure that any such processes demand very little to no direct impact (in terms of time and inputting effort) on faculty productivity. Recommendations in this area will be forthcoming (next year) in the area of an “Assessment Dashboard” (see “Goals” above).

- “To re-examine DCAC’s committee description with particular attention to reporting structures and implementation responsibilities. The Executive Committee is particularly interested in reporting structures and implementation processes that involve direct lines of communication with the UCC, the Senate Executive Committee, and the academic units.”

Comments: While the Committee has not spent a lot of time reviewing this description, it should be pointed out that such conversations may have been premature had they been pursued this year. This is due to the impending HLC accreditation process (a process that is now much more cyclical, and will repeat every five years, instead of every ten). There has been talk of charging existing committees with

some of the HLC tasks; these broader concerns need to be addressed before a wholesale re-write of the existing charge of the Committee is undertaken.

- “To coordinate with the chair of the UCC and the Senate Executive Committee to ensure that DCAC’s work is in alignment with ongoing conversations about the potential revisions to the general education curriculum.”

Comments: The Committee spent a great deal of time on this goal. The Committee’s Chair met with the UCC Chair and the President of the Senate on several occasions; since the UCC Chair is also a member of the Committee, he gave an update on the UCC process at multiple meetings; and, ultimately, the Committee discussed the report and recommendations of the UCC, and forwarded some ancillary recommendations to Senate Exec (see Appendix II).

Appendix II: Motion forwarded to Senate Exec

From: Bruce Gilbert

Sent: Tuesday, April 01, 2014 8:53 AM

To: Senate Exec members

Subject: Motion approved by DCAC

Senate Exec:

The Drake Curriculum Analysis Committee met yesterday, and approved the motion that is listed below. As Chair, I am forwarding this to you (working with UCC on their processes was a specific part of our updated charge; note that the Chair and Vice-Chair of UCC are on DCAC)

As an FYI, as part of our charge and ongoing efforts to improve the existing Drake Curriculum environment, it is likely that specific recommendations for improvement in already-identified areas of concern (e.g., experiential learning, learning outcome consolidation/prioritization) will be forthcoming from DCAC in AY 2015.

MOTION: That DCAC supports the following **recommendations** for curricular reform and improvement, and endorses forwarding these recommendations to Senate for their timely consideration. Prologue: The Drake Curriculum Analysis Committee (DCAC) appreciates the efforts of the University Curriculum Committee (UCC) in filing its recent report to Faculty Senate. After a discussion session that included the UCC Chair and Vice-Chair, DCAC makes the following additional recommendations:

DCAC recommendations for Senate consideration:

- a) The Senate should reaffirm its commitment to a Center for Teaching and Learning to help “close the loop” on curricular assessment activities, and should ask the administration to provide an update on its timely creation no later than Fall Semester 2014. (*Note that this was the primary recommendation of the Wabash report.*)
- b) That, per the UCC's recommendations: If Recommendation 2 (Task Force creation) is adopted we specifically request student representation; and recommend that assessment and delivery of all components of the Drake Curriculum be included in any review.
- c) DCAC Support: DCAC supports the overall goals of the UCC report. We hope that if a Task Force is created, that there will be direct connection to ongoing assessment processes and ask that DCAC members be actively considered as members and as integrated resources for the Task Force.
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Appendix III: Foregrounding the Upcoming HLC Visit

Kevin Saunders reported after a recent visit to HLC Conference in Chicago; below is a distillation of his report and the subsequent DCAC conversation (21 April 2014 meeting)

- The “formal” HLC site visit will be in 2017-2018; however, the Drake documentation should be prepared well in advance of that visit
- HLC has expanded their criteria by creating one New Criteria (thus moving from four to five total)
- Criteria III and IV are both about teaching and learning; IV (the “newest” criteria) is primarily about assessment. This has been a problem area for several institutions already.
- Drake will have to Collect evidence and synthesize: The entire report (less the QI) has to be no more than 35,000 words total (this would be a fraction of the size of our previous report)
- How do we (Drake) structure ourselves to deal with this challenge? Traditionally, we've formed separate groups. Can we embed some of this in existing groups? If so, what does that suggest about workload (since most of the affected groups already have full agendas?)
- In the area of “best practices,” St. Olaf is seen as a model (see link, above)
- Overall, this will be a more cyclical (and shorter) process (every five years)
- The summer Learning Symposium will be used as an opportunity to foreground this issue.