Developing a Four-Year Integrated Core Curriculum: Advice for Avoiding the Pitfalls and Building Consensus for Change

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Seton Hall University's president, Monsignor Robert Sheeran, presented a challenge to the Faculty Senate in fall 2001. He urged us to work together to develop a new core curriculum for the university, a "signature Seton Hall experience," that would embody our place as a Catholic university in the new millennium. In response to his challenge, the Core Curriculum Committee (c c c) was elected by the Faculty Senate in November 2001, with faculty representatives from all undergraduate colleges across the university. Some members of this committee had participated in a faculty seminar held the previous summer that focused on the core curriculum and approaches to general education. The discussions at the seminar concerned the history of the core curriculum at Seton Hall, the ideals of a core, and concrete suggestions regarding possible futures. Each of the participants in the seminar wrote an essay about the core curriculum, and these became an immediate resource for the faculty committee.

The committee began its deliberations with the knowledge that past attempts at curricular reform at Seton Hall had met with little success. Particularly within the College of Arts and Sciences, the university had a thirty-year history of charging various committees with developing reform plans, only to have the carefully constructed proposals voted down or tabled at full faculty meetings.

This is the story of how the Faculty Senate ccc developed a strategic approach to curricular reform that would avoid the pitfalls of the past, build consensus for change, and result in a new four-year core curriculum for all undergraduates at the university.

Recognizing the "Depth of Change"

Aware of how previous attempts at general education reform had been repeatedly rejected by the faculty, the members of the ccc began their deliberations in November 2001 with a full realization of the daunting task before them. Susan M. Awbrey has observed that faculty and administrators, when approaching educational reform in colleges and universities, often reduce the task to simply changing the formal organizational structure, including "elements that are observable, rational, and related to the structure of the organization, including span of control, hierarchy, mission, goals, objectives, operation policies, procedures, programs, and practices. This is the formal, visible organization. It is in this realm that organizations focus most of their time and energy when dealing with change" (2005, p. 4). She argues, however, that the formal changes to be achieved are only "the tip of the iceberg." There is another level of organizational change that is perhaps more critical to the successful reform of general education, the informal organization or the "level at which the institutional culture operates. This level is made up of elements that are affective and that relate to the psychological and social characteristics of the organization. This is the informal organization that is made up of elements such as power and influence patterns, personal views and interpretations of the organization, interpersonal relationships, norms, trust, risk-taking, values, emotions and needs" (p. 5).

In short, successful reform in academe requires an understanding of the following: the informal value systems at work; the various groups within the university and the norms of those groups, particularly those with an interest in the outcome; the pockets of power and the amount of influence to be expected from each; the various perspectives that exist regarding general education and the need for reform; and the extent to which trust between various players is available in sufficient quantities to bring about reform. In early discussions, the members of the ccc came to realize the significance of these factors and strove to develop a strategy that would take into account the depth of change necessary for successful adoption and implementation.

Seton Hall University comprises eight colleges or schools, six of which offer undergraduate degree programs. These six are the College of Arts and Sciences, the largest college in both student enrollment and number of faculty; the College of Education and Human Services; the College of Nursing; the W. Paul

Stillman School of Business; the John C. Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations; and the School of Theology. Similar to the situation on many campuses, most of the required general education courses are offered within the College of Arts and Sciences. Not surprisingly, then, most previous efforts at general education reform took place within and were rejected by the Arts and Sciences faculty.

In 1992, the Faculty Senate was created "to represent that faculty on all matters which affect the South Orange faculty as a whole and to help inform faculty opinion on matters of campus-wide importance, [including] establishment and review of a core curriculum for the university" (Seton Hall University, 2006). This broader faculty engagement in curricular development meant that the ccc could approach general education reform at the university rather than the college level, and it presented the ccc with an opportunity to craft an approach that might circumvent previous core curriculum development attempts within the college that seemed doomed to failure almost from the start. Finally, it is also important to understand the existing curriculum structure we were about to try to change. Like many institutions that claim to have a core curriculum, Seton Hall actually had a series of distribution requirements that varied from college to college. A survey of the various college cores early in the process revealed that Seton Hall students took exactly three courses in common, although some students were excused from one or two of these by virtue of having taken Advanced Placement and similar courses in high school or as a result of being in the university's Honors Program. These courses were College English I, College English II, and University Life.

In the first three or four months after the committee was formed, the members of the ccc spent a great deal of time in conversation regarding a suitable approach to our charge. We immediately resisted the urge to create the perfect plan, knowing the fate of past efforts employing this strategy. The committee members were also concerned about the turf wars that might erupt if the early strategy focused on the specific courses a student would take and/or particular content that should be included. Toward that end, the question "What does every educated person need to know?" was henceforth struck from our deliberations. Rather than focusing on content, we decided to focus on student outcomes, posing the question that would guide our work over the course of seven years: "What do we want our students to become?" This broad question permitted faculty to engage in conversations about general education and the purpose of a liberal arts education without raising concerns about departmental courses or hires. Having adopted an approach that we hoped would overcome initial resistance and avoid territoriality, we next set out to develop a plan for initiating dialogues with the various campus stakeholders in order to craft an answer to this question.

What Do We Want Our Students to Become?

As Jerry G. Gaff observes in "What Is a Generally Educated Person?": "My experience is that curriculum committees or task forces tend to rush too quickly into the design of a new curriculum. It is important to take enough time to discover what is common among the faculty and to secure basic agreement about what they think students should learn and about what qualities should characterize a high-quality, coherent college education" (2004, p. 5). Determined both not to repeat the mistakes of the past and to secure the kind of "basic agreement" Gaff describes, the c c c spent a good deal of time its first year deciding how best to engage members of the campus community in wide-ranging and meaningful conversations on the purpose of general education at Seton Hall University. The committee ultimately decided to host a series of town meetings focused on the following questions:

> What values do we want our general education to embody?
> What values make Seton Hall University unique?
> What do we want our general education program to help our students become?
> What student and faculty development are necessary to accomplish this?

The first of these town meetings was held in July 2002, about eight months after the c c c had begun its work. After a general introduction we asked those present, a group that consisted of both faculty members and administrators, to work in small groups to discuss the questions and develop a list of responses to each. We then asked each group to share its results—both their answers and the issues that had been raised—and we recorded the results. This strategy of keeping an ongoing record of the conversations at what became a series of town meetings proved invaluable, both as evidence that the core was in fact a response to what faculty had asked for in general education and as a way to track the growth and development of ideas that would emerge as themes later in our new core courses. By design, no attempt was made to come to consensus on answers to these questions, nor did we encourage participants to develop solutions to address issues raised. However, as if to echo former attempts at curricular reform, some participants were eager to develop a clear-cut plan right on the spot. Instead, we amassed all the various perspectives and concerns and then adjourned to a reception.

At our next meeting, the members of the c c c reviewed the outcomes of this first town meeting, grouping the responses into various categories, such as values, needs, outcomes, reflections on current approaches, and so on. Based on this, we then developed an agenda for a follow-up gathering of faculty and

administrators, which was held at the beginning of the academic year (fall 2002). We decided to begin this second town meeting by setting the scene with presentations on current approaches to pedagogy and student advising. Members of the c c c gave brief presentations on topics that included advisement and guiding students through self-discovery, pedagogy, academic literacy, information literacy, and model core curricula. We then held break-out sessions focused on questions specifically designed to intensify the discussion about general education and bring it to the next level, including whether having a common core was a Seton Hall University value, how we might use the curriculum to produce the kinds of students we imagined, and the values essential to a core curriculum.

We again adjourned to a reception, purposely avoiding—for the second time—any attempts to come to consensus or design a new core curriculum. We held one more town meeting one month later, this one more narrowly focused on general education, where we discussed architectural considerations. We adopted the now familiar format of presentation, break out into small groups, and, of course, reception to close.

Here is a brief encapsulation of what we learned about our faculty and university community from those three meetings. First, there was broad consensus that what we wanted our students to become—and this was our guiding question—was "thinking, caring, communicative, ethically responsible leaders with a service orientation." Next, we learned that the core vision we were examining had broad support across campus. Student affairs personnel were very interested in contributing their expertise in order to make sure that the "distinctive Seton Hall experience" extended beyond the classroom. Library faculty were already involved in information literacy and research skills development and would welcome more faculty members to partner with them in bringing disciplinary research skills into classes. Instructional design staff from the university's Teaching, Learning, and Technology Center were very interested in lending their expertise in order to ensure that information technology could fully support faculty initiatives. The town meetings also affirmed values that faculty believed were important to a Catholic worldview: a sense of inquiry, wonder, and equity; ethical decision making; service toward others; working in groups; and living in community. Finally, the town meetings pointed to several ideas that might be incorporated into a signature Seton Hall experience. It should be a four-year experience; it should involve the development of important academic skills; it should include the development of values important to a Catholic worldview; instruction should take place in small classes; it should provide a multidisciplinary experience; and it should incorporate pedagogical best practices. With this feedback from the general meetings, we decided that it

was time to move the discussion from the level of the university to that of the local community, that is, to the individual academic departments.

However, now that we were beginning the discussion of actual core content, we also began to hear from detractors, particularly from faculty members who thought that things were fine the way they were. In response to this, we decided that it was time to ascertain the feelings of individual faculty members. Thus, as we embarked on the series of neighborhood meetings with all undergraduate departments, we also designed and implemented an electronic survey to give faculty the opportunity to tell us how they really felt about a core curriculum. A schedule of department meetings was developed, and individual ccc members volunteered to facilitate the dialogue with specific departments. A common PowerPoint presentation was developed by the committee and used as the basis of department discussions. After researching various institutions, we had identified two models of core curricula: the St. Bonaventure model, with its common core and a Core College, and the Alverno College model, with general education infused throughout the college curriculum. The last three slides on the common presentation opened the door to discussions of these possible core models. The survey instrument, in the meantime, was designed to give faculty the opportunity to comment on the current core curriculum, its strengths and weaknesses, as well as give their views on any new proposed core curriculum. Keep in mind that at this point there was no proposal on the table. Faculty members were just reacting to the idea of a new core. This was the end of the second year.

As we expected, the survey indicated that some faculty fully supported a new core, others felt that only minor modifications to the existing distribution requirements were needed, while a third group expressed dismay that any changes to the present general education program were being considered: If it's not broken, don't fix it! We received the same type of feedback from the neighborhood meetings. Faculty began to express their concerns about credit allocation, the logistics of interdisciplinary programs, class size, and the availability of adequate resources for hiring, faculty development, and implementation. In addition, the committee began to see support or lack or support for a new general education program dividing along disciplinary lines. While faculty in the humanities and social sciences were generally more supportive of the initiative, faculty in the natural sciences and professional schools tended to be more skeptical of the need for reform. This resistance was attributed to the size/number of credits and overall lack of flexibility in the major programs in those fields, much of this stemming from accreditation requirements. Finally, some faculty who were heavily engaged in research were not interested in increasing the amount of time they spent on teaching since this would take them away from their own

academic endeavors. When faculty and students left campus in late spring 2003 for the summer break, we had our work cut out for us. We were now two years into the process, had yet to design a signature experience, and already had a portion of the faculty opposed to our proposal.

Administrative Leadership for Institutional Change

Drawing on our experiences at the summer seminar held in 2001, the feedback from faculty, administrators, and students from town and neighborhood meetings, the survey results suggesting that faculty wanted a core that incorporated both a common core and the infusion of skills throughout the curriculum, and additional research on models of general education acquired by the committee over the first two years of its existence, a subcommittee of the ccc designed a proposal for the transformation of general education at Seton Hall University. The subcommittee proposed a twenty-one-credit signature experience for all Seton Hall students, "The Odyssey of the Mind, the Heart, and the Spirit." It proposed four new core courses, one in each year focused on Seton Hall's mission, on the personal dimensions of self and community, and on global perspectives emphasizing leadership in the greater community, culminating in a capstone course centered on the transformation of culture. These newly developed courses, together with the university's first-year writing courses and the one-credit University Life course, would be the new signature general education experience, modeled on the St. Bonaventure approach that had been presented to faculty in the neighborhood meetings. In addition to a common set of courses, the ccc recommended the development of a portfolio of educational skills infused into each major program. These skills included writing, reading, communication, information literacy, numeracy, and ethical analysis. Each undergraduate discipline would be charged with designing a curriculum to intensify and assess each of these skills.

The proposed core curriculum was a marked departure from previous general education requirements: General education would now be under the direction of the Faculty Senate rather than the purview of the individual schools and colleges; the new core would be interdisciplinary, taught by faculty from across the university; there would now be twenty-one common credits for undergraduates, as opposed to the seven credits in the previous system; and the infusion of core proficiencies would provide ongoing reinforcement of important skills and not just onetime instruction in introductory courses. As Susan Steele notes in "Curricular Wars": "The administrative reality is simple: If curricular change is to be effective for the students who take the courses, the faculty members who develop and offer them, and the institution that is

committed to both, content is a very small part of the equation" (2006, p. 161). Recognizing this, the ccc also took the opportunity to propose two other, related changes to undergraduate education at the university. The proposal called for the introduction of comprehensive tuition, as opposed to the existing per-credit tuition policy, and a reduction in the total number of credits required for a Seton Hall degree from 130 to 120. These recommendations were included with the core proposal for two reasons. First, the existing policies were seen as putting the university at a competitive disadvantage with peer institutions that had already adopted these changes. And second, the proposal for flat tuition would enable the university to forecast revenue more accurately, perhaps providing additional funds for academic affairs, including the new core and other academic priorities.

Clearly, the change being proposed by the committee constituted a major curriculum or holistic change, "characterized by a unifying and coherent philosophy of education" (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1977, p. 257). The Carnegie Foundation has identified several groups or individuals holding major responsibility over curricular change within a university, including governing boards, academic leaders, departments and colleges, students, and accrediting agencies. As the plan moved from approval through adoption, each of these played a significant role in the process and the outcome. Achieving consensus on campus for the new proposal was going to require a strategic and Herculean approach.

The Role of University Leadership

As a diocesan university, Seton Hall has a two-tiered governance structure similar to that of other Catholic colleges and universities, with both a Board of Trustees and a Board of Regents. The Board of Trustees has ultimate responsibility for maintaining "the essential character of the university as a Catholic institution of higher learning" (Seton Hall University, 2008); it also elects the members of the Board of Regents, the body responsible for the overall management of the university, including the establishment of all degrees and programs. In the exercise of its governance role, the Board of Trustees asked the Board of Regents to apprise the trustees on the Catholic nature of the proposed university core curriculum. It was necessary to strike a balance between, on the one hand, academic freedom and the faculty's role in curriculum development and, on the other hand, the regents' governance role in establishing academic programs and the trustees' governance role in maintaining Seton Hall University's Catholic character. Although there was some involvement by the Board of Trustees, the university's Board of Regents played a far more significant role

during the planning and implementation process, particularly the Academic Affairs Committee of the board. Taking its lead from the sitting provost, the board committee has either given or withheld support for the core over the six-year process. This will be discussed in more detail below.

The president of Seton Hall, Monsignor Robert Sheeran, initiated the current curricular change process on campus with his challenge to the faculty to create a signature experience for Seton Hall students. As the c c c proceeded with its work, the president continually assured the faculty that adequate resources would be forthcoming if the faculty were successful in bringing about curricular reform. Statements by the president at the annual faculty convocation, at periodic senate meetings, and during meetings with faculty leadership provided a source of political capital that the c c c could spend from time to time when needed to bring skeptical faculty to the table. During several critical junctures, the president sent broadcast e-mail messages to the entire university community expressing his support for the core and his continued commitment to financially backing its full implementation. In addition to his promise to provide institutional and financial support for the core curriculum, during this same period of time dialogue between the Executive Cabinet of the university and the Faculty Senate led to the president's review of faculty salary levels and his commitment to bring them to parity with those of peer institutions. That this movement took place at the same time as the faculty were moving to implement the new core curriculum provided encouragement for the pro-reform contingent on campus. The eventual salary adjustments bought a tremendous amount of goodwill on campus, creating a more favorable atmosphere for reform.

Within Seton Hall's governance structure, the provost serves as the chief academic officer. During the six years of general education reform, four different individuals served in this position. This clearly presented a challenge to the work of the committee and compromised its ability to bring about major institutional reform. The c c c successfully negotiated with the first provost for initial support of the core process, including the appointment of a graduate assistant to the senate, funding for conference and meeting attendance, and a small budget for supplies and meeting amenities. As the work on the core intensified, the committee requested additional funds to compensate those creating the curriculum. It was at this point that the relationship between the faculty leaders of the Faculty Senate and c c c and the Provost's Office began to show signs of strain. It was one thing for faculty to voluntarily agree to work on curriculum development and suggest proposals for change. Now, however, those same faculty were requesting allocation of university resources along with the power to determine how those resources were spent. Within the existing structure of shared governance on campus at that time, there was no precedent for Faculty Senate control

of university resources. Before this dispute could be resolved, however, the first provost was replaced; this occurred at the end of the second year of the process.

After a national search, the second provost joined the university in fall 2004. With his strong endorsement of the proposed core, the initiative moved forward quickly. The provost made presentations to the Board of Regents on the ability of this proposal to fundamentally transform undergraduate education at the university. As a result, the board wanted to see results—and quickly. This put the second provost in the position of encouraging the faculty to ratify the new core and move forward with implementation as quickly as possible. In his monthly address to the Faculty Senate in January 2005, barely five months into his administration, this provost called for the senate to vote on the core proposal at its February meeting. This move came as a complete surprise to the leadership of both the senate and the c c c. In retrospect, this decision provided the impetus needed to move the reform effort to the next level, since the strategy of engagement and dialogue now seemed to be stalling movement toward implementation. At its meeting on February 4, 2005, the Faculty Senate voted to approve the principles for a new core curriculum.

An interim provost, the third academic administrator during this process, culled from outside the university, held the position next, and what was expected to be a six-month tenure lasted almost two years. Unfortunately for the faculty leading the initiative, this third provost was not immediately convinced of the benefits of the new core curriculum. This was probably the darkest period for those championing curricular reform at the institution. Provost #3 expressed strong reservations about the efficacy and eventual success of the proposal to the Board of Regents, the Executive Cabinet, the deans, and the faculty rank and file. Thus began eighteen months of difficult negotiations, while the c c c worried that all its hard work might now have been in vain. The c c c was challenged on almost every front, from content of courses to rollout plans to staffing concerns to funding. For example, under this provost there were two changes to the proposal that made the work of the c c c especially difficult and threatened to undermine the entire project. Under the two previous provosts, the plan had been to roll out the core in phases over several years, piloting the first course while creating the second course, approving the first course while piloting the second and creating the third, and so forth. The third provost under whom the c c c carried out its work required that all three courses be approved by faculty curricular bodies at the same time, thus threatening the timetable that had been developed for rolling out the core and also weakening institutional support, particularly with the Board of Regents and the president's Executive Cabinet, a body that included all the vice presidents of the university and the provost. The second change was a recommendation by the Executive Cabinet to the

Board of Regents that the rollout of flat tuition should happen in isolation from implementation of the other parts of the core. This was primarily due to financial considerations. The c c c believed that separating the comprehensive tuition change from the remainder of the core proposals also jeopardized the rollout of the new core, since funding had been predicated on determining the most appropriate tuition rate. The relationship between the senate and the Provost's Office hit a new low.

However, just when things seemed most grim, the university conducted a successful search for a permanent chief academic officer during the 2006–7 academic year. Thus, starting summer 2007, the c c c found itself working with its fourth provost since efforts had begun on the new core. This new leader proved much more positive about the potential benefits of a university core and worked with the c c c to strengthen the budget, streamline processes, and support the core with the Board of Regents, which was starting to ask tough questions about the rollout of the courses and the cost benefits of a university-wide core curriculum. This support was invaluable at a time when those involved with the core were beginning to believe that it would never come to fruition. For example, this provost instituted an incentive system whereby faculty teaching in the core were awarded $750 in additional development funds to use toward conference costs and other academic expenses; simultaneously, academic departments were awarded $750 for each section they covered above and beyond, and this money was added to their normal operating budgets, giving them funds for speakers and other projects they would typically not have been able to afford. Ultimately, this provost's commitment to the primacy of academics and his willingness to find the funding to make it work made him an ideal proponent for the new university core.

Faculty Leadership for Institutional Change

While Seton Hall's new university core curriculum officially came into existence in spring 2005 with the passage by the Faculty Senate of the core principles, in the six subsequent years the workload of the c c c increased, not decreased, as it moved from curricular development to implementation. Working through a subcommittee structure, the committee turned its attention to the major tasks that needed to be accomplished to achieve the goals of the core. These included curricular development of the three common courses, now called the Signature Courses, and the development of a model for rolling out the courses; further development of the universal proficiencies and creation of a faculty development program for infusion of these proficiencies into courses; continued development of literacies and methodologies; the development of an assessment

model for the new core; and the creation of various subcommittees to work out the details of staffing, funding, overseeing curricular adjustments in the various undergraduate colleges to bring them into alignment with new core requirements and the reduction of credits required for graduation to 120, and creating student policies for special populations, such as transfer students, dual degree students, and so on. In its report to the academic community on integrity in the college curriculum, the Association of American Colleges outlines the obstacles to and incentives for faculty taking responsibility for the curriculum on college campuses (Project on Redefining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees, 1985, p. 9). The authors describe curriculum committees as "skillful at cosmetic tinkering that puts a new and fashionable face on old practices and programs" and as "seldom innovative" (p. 9). How is it that the c c c on Seton Hall's campus did not fall victim to these tendencies? In this section we outline how the faculty leadership of the c c c were able to avoid these obstacles and embrace their responsibility for the general education curriculum on campus.

First, the structure of the change process in this current effort was radically different from that in the past. The change efforts that failed in the 1970s and then twice again in the 1990s had been attempted within the College of Arts and Sciences, the largest undergraduate college on campus. The business of core development at the college takes place within the Educational Policy Committee, which reports to the full faculty at quarterly meetings of the whole college. Any proposal for change needed the support of a majority of the full faculty of the college, nearly two hundred strong. With this structure for curricular reform, the proposals were almost doomed to fail from the start since any motion to table the resolution or take a vote could end discussions on the proposal at any time. And this is exactly what had happened in the past. The new proposal was to be brought through the Faculty Senate, a body of between thirty and forty individuals representing their colleges on academic, compensation, curricular, and other issues. Thus it was the membership of this body that would be responsible for ultimately approving or rejecting the proposal.

In her discussion of strategies for curricular revision at Duke and Rice universities, Alison Schneider explains how voting rights contributed to the success of the effort on the former campus while leading to the defeat of reform on the latter:

> The entire Rice faculty votes on curricular changes. At Duke, the decision rests in the hands of the 60-member Arts and Sciences Council. What's more, Rice makes its faculty vote twice on a curricular change. The first vote passed by a 3-to-2 margin. But a month later, the plan failed by the same ratio. "Like all proposals at Rice, this one was hostage to who came

to the faculty meeting" (quoting a Rice faculty member). . . . Apparently there were a few ringers in the crowd. . . . But there were no wild cards in the pack at Duke. The Arts and Sciences Council is a known quantity, and the curriculum committee won over key constituencies early in the game. (1999, p 15)

Past curricular reform efforts at Seton Hall were never embraced by the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, always succumbing to the vagaries of this body. With the move to the Faculty Senate, the ccc was able to work at the university rather than the individual college level, thereby broadening the scope of the discussions.

Second, the climate on campus was more favorable for a discussion of general education and reform than it had been in the past. There had, to some extent, been a turnover of the old guard on the faculty, those who were resistant to change, as well as an influx of junior faculty, many of whom were either more inclined toward reform or more involved in their research and less inclined to create obstacles. The president's challenge came on the heels of a very successful summer seminar on general education that had been attended by many senior faculty members across campus. Some of these participants eventually became members of the ccc, through either election or subsequent appointment. Next, there was a perceived need to do something regarding the curriculum, as the university had recently begun to slip in the rankings of colleges and universities and experienced several years of declining admissions. All of these factors contributed to a climate ripe for curricular reform.

A third factor that contributed to the success of the ccc and its ability to bring about curricular reform was related to the membership of the committee itself. Too often curriculum committees are no more than a reflection of the values and norms of the departments they represent. Faculty members on such committees are generally expected to represent their particular interest group and "protect their disciplinary turf" (Project on Redefining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees, 1985, p. 9). Although the members of Seton Hall University's ccc were faculty members drawn from departments, each of the committee members had a strong commitment to general education and curricular reform. There were few times during the six years of development and implementation when disciplinary boundaries became an issue in the committee, and for the most part individuals were able to transcend these boundaries and work together for the good of the whole. The members of the committee became champions for general education reform and retained their commitment through the years from development to passage to implementation.

Just as the ccc's members were important to the eventual success of the project, the initiative was also favored with outstanding leadership. Two co-chairs of the committee were elected at the very first meeting. One of these leaders was a thirty-five-year veteran of the faculty, with previous stints as acting provost, dean of Freshmen Studies, acting dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and chair of the Faculty Senate. The cumulative experience of this individual through these varied appointments became invaluable to the work of the committee. He had an intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the institution and, quite frankly, knew everyone on campus and could be the committee's ambassador when necessary. The second co-chair, although only a faculty member for about six years, was a public administrator by training and had spent many years as an administrator in various government and nonprofit organizations. She was able to successfully steer the work of the committee through the development of a subcommittee structure, oversight of a rollout plan from passage through implementation, and charting and tracking the tasks to be accomplished. At any given time there were over one hundred tasks to be accomplished and monitored through what lovingly came to be referred to as the "scary chart."

Perhaps unique to the curricular reform effort at Seton Hall, there has been extensive overlap between the leadership of the Faculty Senate and the ccc through the years. For example, one of the co-chairs of the ccc was simultaneously chair of the senate from 2002 to 2005 and has since served as chair of the senate's Compensation Committee. One of the more active members of the ccc, who recently became its co-chair—replacing the thirty-five-year veteran, who went on to head the university's Honors Program—took over the leadership of the senate in 2005 for two years. She now serves as chair of the senate's Program Review Committee and continues to be an active member of the Executive Committee. The willingness of the leadership of the ccc to also serve as leaders within the senate has resulted in a linkage between faculty priorities and core curriculum priorities that has propelled both sets of priorities forward. This meant that discussions about issues such as faculty compensation and course loads could be held in conjunction with discussions about the new core curriculum, to the benefit of each. Msgr. Sheeran, who charged the senate with creating a unique Seton Hall experience, was also aware of the costs of such an endeavor, both in dollars and in time. From the outset, he promised to give his full support (read "funding") to a core that was unique and that built on the richness of the Catholic intellectual tradition. Armed with a core that provided a four-year common experience for students, including two Signature courses that spoke to that vision, he was able to fulfill another goal: increased faculty salaries.

Finally, knowing full well that strategy might ultimately prove more important than content, the ccc developed an approach toward the passage

and implementation of the plan designed to win over as many faculty members and administrators on campus as possible. This included meetings with areas such as Enrollment Services, University Advancement, and Student Affairs, as well as more informal outreach efforts. Whenever we were made aware that someone had questions or concerns, we identified the committee member best suited to reach out to that person or group; and armed with a set of materials—a core "cheat sheet" being just one piece—contact was made, and the results were brought back to the committee. It was also significant that so many of the committee members were active in other committees on campus. As a result, it became almost impossible to be at a meeting or gathering and not have a member of the ccc there. This meant that we could address problems, especially the inevitable rumors, head-on and do regular damage control.

Moreover, a very important strategic approach to curricular reform was the willingness of the committee to compromise on the perfect plan in order to win over key constituent groups. For example, early in the implementation process and soon after the principles of the new core had been approved by the Faculty Senate, members of the Educational Policy Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences began to raise concerns about the number of faculty that would be required to teach the common courses and the feasibility of recruiting sufficient faculty to meet the course demand. After several joint meetings, the ccc proposed a revision to the original plan to address these concerns. The motion adopted read as follows: "Revise proposal for core to include two signature courses to be taken by all students with the requirement that all students take a course in their junior year (in or outside their major) that is specifically tailored to be a follow-up to the themes developed in the first two courses" (Faculty Senate, 2006). Similar compromises were made regarding the proficiencies and literacies that formed the competencies and capabilities portion of the new core. All of these factors resulted in the "curriculum committee [becoming] the most exciting and challenging committee on campus" (p. 10). Working for little more than bagels or sandwiches, the committee sustained its commitment for over six years and spread its enthusiasm for reform around campus. The ccc members genuinely believed in their mission and held steadfast to their goal of creating a signature experience for all undergraduates on Seton Hall's campus.

Lesson Learned

According to W. Brock MacDonald, "The literature indicates that colleges and universities that have revitalized their core programs successfully and relatively painlessly have done so because they recognized and accepted the

inevitable conflicts involved, and made a concerted effort to arrive at the necessary compromises via an open and collaborative design process" (2008). This has certainly been the case at Seton Hall University. In the course of this ten-year-long process, we have learned a number of lessons we believe can help those at other institutions who are hoping to revise or implement a general education program. What follow are some strategies to keep in mind when undertaking curricular reform:

1. *It helps to have the support of the president.* If the impetus for change does not come from a high-ranking university official, it is important to enlist that support from the outset. It is also crucial to involve faculty leadership, especially those involved in faculty governance, if curricular change is going to get past the talking stage.
2. *Engage faculty in early discussions regarding curricular reform.* A summer seminar, such as the one we organized, is a low-risk way to initiate conversation about the existing state of general education on campus and generate ideas about what a new core curriculum might look like.
3. *Create a curriculum committee strategically placed within the university.* If you have an active faculty governance organization, creating a committee within that has several advantages: interdisciplinary and cross-college representation, a process for initiating and dealing with large-scale change, and a broader perspective about curricular issues. If working through faculty governance is not feasible, any core curriculum committee should consist of faculty representatives from across the university, including administrative units and student government.
4. *Attract champions to the core curriculum committee.* Since curricular change can take years, it is important to involve at least a few faculty members who have experience with large-scale change and are committed to the process for the long haul. Attracting energetic supporters is also important. Maintaining the enthusiasm of the team can be accomplished in a number of ways, including celebrating accomplishments. Even providing simple refreshments at meetings can help people feel appreciated and gear them up for the tasks ahead.
5. *Create overlaps between the curriculum reform effort and other faculty priorities on campus.* Curricular reform is very difficult to bring about even in the best of circumstances. Linking changes in the curriculum to other issues important to faculty—such as compensation, faculty development, course loads—can help propel both sets of priorities forward. It is also important to have close communication between

faculty leadership and core curriculum leadership. It is even better if folks can serve dual roles in the process.

6. *Create opportunities for discussion with university leadership.* Regular meetings with the provost and faculty leaders, periodic meetings with the Executive Cabinet, and meetings with the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Regents are all ways to keep university leadership aware of the process, the progress being made, and the direction the core curriculum is taking.

7. *Solidify university-wide support.* All stakeholders must be continually involved in the process. Reach out to administrators, board members, students, alumni, and staff on a regular basis, establishing a reliable contact at each level. Any core committee must keep its ear to the ground and respond to an issue raised by a stakeholder group in a timely fashion.

8. *Communicate, communicate, communicate.* It is very difficult to keep everyone informed on a large campus. Develop approaches for communicating progress on curricular development to the entire community. In addition to the town and neighborhood meetings already mentioned, an electronic newsletter can provide regular updates to faculty and administration. Articles in the campus newspaper and other in-house periodicals can help advertise strategic points in the process. Finally, a core curriculum Web site—especially one that contains key documents and an overview—can be a way to keep all stakeholders informed, both those around from the start and new members of the community.

9. *Recruit senior faculty and administrators to become involved in implementation.* Any new core curriculum should engage senior faculty with first-year students in the classroom. To achieve this goal, senior faculty will have to be aggressively recruited to teach core courses and to infuse proficiencies into their existing courses. Do not overlook the role that upper administrators, deans, and associate deans can have teaching in the new core. Setting criteria for core faculty early on—such as possession of a terminal degree—can demonstrate your commitment to the highest standards for core teaching.

10. *Provide incentives for faculty involvement.* Take advantage of various funding sources on campus—including the IT division and faculty development initiatives—to acquire resources for piloting and implementing core components. This can include stipends for curricular development, committee work, and core leadership; release time for core

work; access to instructional technology for core participants; and funds for travel to conferences related to the work of the core.

11. *Provide support for faculty to teach "outside of their comfort zone."* Course reductions, stipends, and faculty development programs can all be used to incentivize faculty to participate in the new core curriculum. A faculty preparation program specifically targeted toward those who have not yet participated in the core project can be a way to ease faculty concerns and get greater buy-in.

12. *Be aware of those opposed to curricular reform and find ways to meet them halfway.* Throughout the process there will be challengers and dissenters who will try to derail curricular change, however extensive. Engage your opponents in dialogue, invite them to meetings, address their concerns head-on, and be prepared to make compromises. Of course, these should never compromise the curriculum itself, but having palatable alternatives to the original plan means that you can respond quickly and effectively to challenges.

13. *Revise guidelines for tenure and promotion.* It is very important that the guidelines for tenure and promotion be revised to elevate teaching and pedagogical successes to a more prominent position in the process. If we want to develop better teachers and engage full-time faculty in general education initiatives, we must reward them for their efforts. The "research first" model discourages good teachers from becoming involved in pedagogical change on campus.

In many ways, the story of curricular reform at Seton Hall University is one that continues today. Part of this is by design, since a primary goal of the ccc was to develop a living core, one that could be responsive to a changing world and the needs of faculty and students. The central components of the new core—the Signature courses, the College English courses, and University Life— were officially rolled out in fall 2008. The Core Proficiencies were an additional requirement as of fall 2010, and the Core Literacies are a work in progress. In addition to the lessons learned listed above, another is the value of patience. The new core was seven years in the making, two years more than we thought it might take when we set out. In the process, we have learned more about one another as colleagues and teachers, we have affected change at every level of the institution, and we have engaged members of the Seton Hall community from the top administrators to the office staff in conversations that have been challenging and stimulating. While there is a deep sense of accomplishment, we also look forward to many years of continued dialogue as more faculty teach the core courses, infuse their courses with the proficiencies, and create Signature III courses. The journey has just begun.

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