

2

Reform at Franklin Pierce College was first envisioned as a revolution. As the reform progressed, it became a dynamic evolution, responding to changing needs.

The Franklin Pierce Plan

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The March 19, 1990, minutes from the Curriculum Committee at Franklin Pierce College, note, "After reviewing the history of deliberation, time and effort (the Committee has been at this since late August), the Committee voted that our report to the faculty, at the April meeting, shall be the following: 'Our search into core reform has been non-conclusive, and after consideration, we have chosen to call a moratorium upon the subject.'"

We were not going to talk about core reform because we could not find any common ground. Since we could not agree on what a core curriculum should accomplish, we could not agree on what its basic components were. After eight months of discussions during the 1989–1990 term, only two written responses to the dean's proposed curricular changes had been submitted. In an undated memo to the faculty, the chair of the Curriculum Committee summarized the situation in the following way: "There is apparently little enthusiasm among the faculty for revising the core in the proposed manner." The faculty at Franklin Pierce turned out to be not much different from many others, which, as Sandra Kanter (2000) described, "holds strong beliefs about what students should learn in college, and [whose] discussions about the curriculum inevitably turned into abstract debates about what an educated person should know" (pp. 6–7). John Thelin (2000) writes that some critics of academe "portray curriculum change as a kind of slow, painful death by boredom, a process drawn out over long meetings, finally expiring in the form of tabled motions" (p. 12). These critics were on the mark if we look at the reality at Franklin Pierce. Franklin Pierce College is a progressive four-year residential liberal arts college enrolling about fifteen hundred undergraduates in Rindge, New Hampshire.

In spite of the recommended moratorium, Franklin Pierce pushed ahead with its efforts to reform the curriculum, and indeed a revolution was under way. The inertia was overcome by several critical events. The resignation of one vice president and dean of academic affairs led to the hiring of a new dean, Richard Weeks, who was to provide the necessary leadership to effect real curricular reform. The institution also wanted to distinguish itself from its peer institutions and to begin planning for its own long-term health and growth.

Barriers to Reform

The list of barriers to curricular change included inertia born out of tradition and taking the form of comments along the lines of, “We’ve been doing it this way for years. What’s wrong with that?” or “We’ve always done it this way, and no one was complaining.” A unionized faculty with a strong tradition of autonomy, a penchant for beating the drum of academic freedom, and an inherent distrust of administration engendered a resistance to change imposed from above and made faculty reluctant to move ahead. Fear played a large part in the equation—not just the risks that might be involved regarding turf and the reallocation of resources, but also the risk that comes with having to do something new or different. For an older faculty (the average age in September 1990 was 48.6), who had been at the institution for over a decade (the average term of service at that time was 11.6 years), change meant more work and felt like an indictment of their own abilities in the classroom. They had been working with a distribution system for some thirty years, lecturing in their classes, and no one had said it was “bad.” Now they felt they were being called inadequate.

Another significant obstacle had to do with faculty demographics. In 1990, there was a noticeable lack of midrange faculty—those who were not junior and thus had earned some stature on campus but were not senior and prone to be part of the entrenched position. (Faculty who came in at the lowest level of assistant professor typically moved up to full professor at the end of ten years.) Curricular change relies on these midrange faculty to take a leadership position. Their stature keeps them from feeling vulnerable or deciding that the politic thing to do is get along with the “old guard” and thus ensure their tenure, and their newness relative to the old guard makes them more open to change and perhaps less fearful of it.

A lack of institutional self-confidence also created great difficulties too. Franklin Pierce faculty had long heard from students that it was “just Franklin Pierce College” and had bought into this attitude—a sort of, “Well since we’re just Franklin Pierce, we couldn’t possibly be doing something really great” mentality.

Finances were sure to be a barrier. The new curriculum would require more faculty and faculty development programs to help existing faculty become familiar with active learning pedagogies, writing across the

curriculum initiatives, team teaching skills, and how to be interdisciplinary. Whether internally or externally funded, there would be a significant cost to developing, implementing, and sustaining such a program.

The New Curricular Plan

Under the direction of Dean Weeks, a new curricular plan was designed, discussed, and voted on by the faculty in a span of seven months. The original Integrated Core Curriculum consisted of forty-four credit hours. It would be thematic, integrated, sequential, distributed over four years, with component courses required and not elective, and for the most part team-taught and interdisciplinary. The Integrated Core was also designed to feature a collaborative pedagogy, incorporate a community service component, and use portfolio assessment as a means of evaluating both the program and students' personal development.

In early 1991, a core group of interested, committed faculty was appointed by Weeks and the chair of the curriculum committee to the Pierce Plan Committee. This group, which was to lead the process of review and revision of the Pierce Plan prior to its adoption, was heavily weighted toward junior faculty, although it included a few senior faculty members. At its annual spring meeting, the board of trustees approved the new curricular plan, and implementation began immediately. The curriculum transition team (CTT) was appointed and began planning for the implementation of the Pierce Plan. This CTT would "dissolve, when in the judgment of the Dean Weeks, a permanent structure, led by a Pierce Plan Director and including a majority of the component coordinators, can be constituted." The CTT was dissolved in December 1991, and the Core Steering Committee met for the first time on January 15, 1992. During the summer of 1991, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) invited Franklin Pierce College to participate in its Engaging Cultural Legacies program. In addition, two National Endowment for the Humanities grants for faculty development and curriculum design were secured (one grant for the 1991–1992 term and one for the 1993–1994 term), adding cachet and credibility to the new curriculum and allowing for a series of grant-sponsored summer workshops and on-campus visits by various course consultants.

The AAC&U project connected Franklin Pierce with Charlie Reed and North Carolina's Queens College, and the NEH grants allowed us to bring in John Nichols of St. Joseph's College in Indiana to help with course design, development, and implementations. Nichols is a Distinguished Teaching Professor at St. Joseph's and a senior fellow in the Association of American Colleges and Universities Greater Expectations Initiative. Starting in the fall of 1991, pilot sections of the first-year courses were run and assessed, and in the fall of 1992, with much public awareness, a new liberal education core experience began. This curricular reform, called the Pierce

Plan, articulated Franklin Pierce's general education intentions: the Liberal Education Core Requirements

should foster, to the greatest extent possible, a common liberal education experience for Pierce students. The purpose of this approach is not to promote a common set of conclusions, but to make possible a broad discussion among students and faculty of important issues. The theme of the core program is "The Individual and Community." This theme provides an internal unity to interdisciplinary investigations from many perspectives. . . . All emphasize the acquisition of knowledge and skills that will empower students to attain the Goals of the Franklin Pierce College Experience by the time of graduation. All core courses have significant writing components and opportunities for oral expressions by students. All will endeavor to engage students at their level and bring them to greater academic and intellectual competence.

The Curriculum Ten Years Later: Review and Reform

More than ten years have passed since the Pierce Plan was approved and the pilot sections were run. Two more deans have graced the stage. A provost is now directing the show, and a second core coordinator is in place.

The Individual and Community Integrated Curriculum has all of the components that general education aficionados espouse. It is a common experience required of all students regardless of major and is spread over four years. It constitutes somewhat more than one-third of each student's program for graduation. It has a first-year seminar, for graduation credit, that emphasizes academics, civic engagement, and transition to the institution. This seminar houses the academic advising for first-year students and leverages retention by helping students to make a strong, early connection to a faculty member, a peer group, and the institution. An assessment program for both students and the curriculum itself is in place and has led to curricular innovations. The new curriculum was poised to meet accreditation standards and in fact received high marks from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges in the 1998 visit. There is a senior capstone experience so general education truly encompasses the full scope of the undergraduate experience. The program promotes interdisciplinarity, civic engagement, and active learning. Faculty from a variety of disciplines teach together, design courses together, and learn how to negotiate and cross disciplinary borders. According to student course evaluations, all courses are meeting with the approval of no less than 50 percent of the students enrolled, and most were meeting with a 70 to 80 percent approval rating.

Alongside these positive program outcomes a number of concerns lingered from the program's inception and, in the push for revolution, had remained unresolved. The concerns most often voiced were that the core was too big, too costly to deliver, relied too heavily on adjunct faculty, and did not allow for enough choice; moreover, there was not enough faculty

ownership of the core. In April 1999, the vice president and dean of academic affairs, Billy Horton, established the Core Review Committee whose charge was to gather information to assist with a thorough evaluation of the various pieces of the core curriculum—its syllabi, staffing, pedagogy, team teaching, decision making, interdisciplinarity—and an economic analysis of the various methods of delivering the core, including an analysis of the use of part-time and adjunct faculty and disparities in divisional participation in teaching in the core. The committee would act as a recommending body and after a twelve- to eighteen-month review would perhaps propose revisions to the program.

The impetus for this review came from the college's "Northeastern Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Self Study Report" (2000) that made several observations about the performance of the college relative to NEASC Standard 4—Programs and Instruction. (NEASC standards provide guidance for colleges and universities to guide them in the accreditation process.) Among those observations was a concern that Franklin Pierce had not taken enough notice of or done sufficient evaluation to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the integrated curriculum. The self-study also noted concerns that had persisted since the program's beginnings and were contributing to faculty and student frustration with the core. Some of the salient issues were a widespread uncertainty about the purpose and content of the first-year seminar, the inadequacy of resources for faculty development and the hiring of sufficient full-time faculty to staff both the core and the majors, and concerns about the sequencing of courses.

This Core Review Committee began its work in April 1999 and continued through April 2001. An interim report to faculty was presented in August 2000 at the fall faculty workshop. Response from the workshop was reviewed and incorporated into the subsequent work of the committee. A final report was prepared by Horton and presented to the faculty in June 2001. This final report had no specific proposals for revision or change to the Individual and Community Integrated Curriculum.

In August and September 2001, the Core Review Committee reconvened at the request of the newly appointed vice president and provost, Suzanne Buckley. It was time for action. The committee met on August 28 to discuss an action plan and timetable and was asked to decide what Franklin Pierce values and what it can afford for its core and to ensure compliance with NEASC recommendations and requirements. The final goal, according to Buckley in an e-mail to members of the committee on August 21, was to have an "academically excellent, fiscally sound program that complies with NEASC requirements." The recommendations of the August 28 meeting were presented to the college community on September 11, 2001. On-site and on-line forums about the recommendations began on September 21 and concluded on September 26. The Core Review Committee met in early October to review these materials and on October 12, 2001, crafted a final set of recommendations that included the following:

The theme of Individual and Community will remain, be embedded and assessed in courses approved for general education. The total number of program credits will be 38.

1. Senior Liberal Arts course is to be eliminated
2. Portfolio Assessment Seminar is to be eliminated.

Portfolio Assessment exercises and Capstone reflection will be embedded in redesigned, existing upper level courses.

3. The Social Science Division will create a new course based on a combination of the existing two Science of Society courses or continue to offer both courses. Students will select one Social Science course for a total of three credits.
4. The Business Division will create and offer one course. The course will include social science methodology and subject matter, for instance, inclusion of macro economic issues.
5. Three versions of IC101 will remain.
6. College Writing I and II will remain.
7. Natural Science will be maintained at eight credit hours.
8. Foundations of Math will remain for three credits.
9. The Arts will be maintained at three credit hours. Experiencing the Arts will be replaced with a menu of three courses. This menu could include Experiencing the Arts.
10. Humanities will be increased from six credit hours to nine with a menu of six courses. This menu could include American Experience, Twentieth Century, Ancient and Medieval Worlds, Reason and Romanticism, and Philosophy and Religion classes.

This set of recommendations was presented simultaneously to the Core Steering Committee and the Curriculum Committee. The Core Steering Committee was unable to come to any consensus with respect to the recommendations and settled for a series of individual comments on various portions of the recommendations. The Curriculum Committee agreed to the revisions proposed by the Core Review Committee and the provost made the formal announcement of the changes on December 12, 2001.

A Core Implementation Committee was appointed and began the work with a re-visioning of the existing Fifteen Goals of the Student Experience. These goals were distilled and compressed into three overarching “Goals of the Student Experience,” given the acronym “TeaCH,” which represents:

1. Tolerance and Community: Be able to articulate their own attitudes and values and recognize the persistent tensions between self and community; demonstrate understanding and respect for views and cultures differing from their own by working collaboratively and participating in community affairs.

2. Content Literacy and Integration with Critical Analysis: Be effective writers and speakers, combine a mastery of pertinent mathematics with knowledge of the methods and aims of modern science, and be adept at using modern information resources. Students should have a substantive understanding of the way artistic expression, historical, natural and cultural contexts in a global setting shape and enrich our communities and our individual lives. Students should become active participants and leaders in their communities, with a developed sense of ethics that encourages civility, tolerance for differences, and a commitment to a life of collaborative work and learning.
3. Holistic Preparation for Leadership and Lifelong Learning: Be able to seek and apply knowledge in a holistic manner for the rest of their lives and to serve as responsible citizens and leaders in local, regional and global communities.

Following months of discussion, commentary, and reworking not only by the Core Implementation Committee but also the teaching faculty, faculty voted on February 12, 2003, to replace the existing fifteen goals with these three goals. These TeaCH goals would apply to the entire Franklin Pierce College experience and would not refer just to the goals of the Individual and Community Integrated Curriculum. They would be institutional goals—goals of both the core and the majors. In response to these goals, each of the Individual and Community Integrated Curriculum components revamped its component goals to reflect and amplify these TeaCH goals.

All this has been accomplished as a prelude to more comprehensive, effective institutional review and assessment. The other details of implementation—new administrative structures, new course development, on-line assessment, and portfolios—are in process with the hope of piloting new courses in the 2003–2004 term to better align with the revised goals and help create a more meaningful experience for students. Two courses will be phased out with certain components of the courses adopted in existing courses. In addition, new senior capstones in the majors will be revised to better integrate the majors and the Individual and Community Curriculum. There is much work to be done, and undoubtedly additional negotiation and conversations will occur.

Conclusion

In the light of the more than ten years of curricular reform at Franklin Pierce, we have seen revolution followed by evolution; a large-scale overhaul of a long-existing distribution program occurred and in the years that followed, small-scale tweaking of the new Individual and Community Integrated Curriculum became the norm. When the curriculum was assessed in a holistic way nearly ten years later, the resulting curricular reforms were relatively modest. Recommendations for more sweeping

changes (among them, reducing the humanities requirement to six credits or the natural science requirement to year credits, dropping the Individual and Community theme, or jettisoning the first-year seminar) were not supported by the faculty and in fact proved to be rather contentious. The Core Review Committee, and the faculty as well, settled for small, politically less painful recommendations.

Although it is not yet clear what is to come and whether the newest iteration of the Individual and Community Integrated Curriculum will be successful, I must admit that in my role as core coordinator, I am plagued by mixed feelings. I am saddened by the proposed elimination of the sophomore and senior general education-specific courses (portfolio assessment and senior liberal arts seminar), and I am concerned about whether a new administrative structure that houses the Individual and Community Integrated Curriculum courses in the academic divisions will promote ownership as is intended. I worry about how coherence will be maintained, what sort of sequencing options might develop, and that the writing across the curriculum efforts will be for naught. I worry about maintaining a distinctive, credible program. I could spend a great deal of time or energy dwelling on these worries, but I have chosen not to do so and instead take solace in the fact that all curricular reform is ongoing and that nothing about our curriculum must be etched in stone unless we as a faculty choose to do so. On September 29, 1993, Ernest Boyer, who at that time was the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, spoke to the faculty, staff, and students of Franklin Pierce College on the issue of "Individualism and the Community." In his address, he remarked on our new curricular program:

What you have created here, it seems to me, is an essential conversation. . . . There is no single way by which integration must occur. There are literally dozens of models that can stir vital inquiry within the academy. . . . While there is no single way for colleges to resolve the general education question, what I fear most is that we might stop debating it. Because in the end the greatest value of debating general education is not in the certainty of the outcome, but in the quality of the discourse. . . . I hope you continue the debate understanding that the virtue is in the continued search for larger meanings.

Curricular reform is never easy, and in my experience there is no one-size-fits-all model to pass along. Moreover, truly exceptional programs are not static but able to change over time just as an institution changes. I want to underscore the necessity and benefit of the process itself, the inclusion of all constituencies on campus, the need for good civil communication, and a willingness to work collaboratively. Curricular reform is difficult. It is frustrating, and much of the time it is agonizingly slow and incremental. You may periodically think you truly dislike some of your colleagues. Maybe you do. You will question your sanity, and perhaps with good reason. In the end, you

will not be able to satisfy everyone, but you will be able to craft a program that maintains your institution's mission and professes your institution's values—if you can articulate that mission and those values. As you emerge from the process, you will anticipate and appreciate the evolving nature of general education. And maybe another revolution will not be necessary.

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