

Preliminary Report of Selected Findings from the DU Faculty Survey
about the Common Curriculum
12/22/17

The General Education Review and Inquiry Committee
contact: Doug Hesse, Chair, dhesse@du.edu; 1-7447

On November 3, 2017, the General Education and Review Committee sent 714 DU faculty a survey about aspect of the common curriculum, with a follow up reminder distributed on November 7. We received 181 responses, with 160 of them deemed more or less "complete." 45% of respondents were from AHSS, 17% from Natural Sciences and Mathematics, 13% from Undergraduate Academic Programs, and 7% from Daniels. There were fewer than 5% each from Engineering, Morgridge, Korbel, and the Library.

The survey asked about the value and perception of the common curriculum across campus in a mixture of multiple choice and open-ended questions. Faculty responded extensively to open-ended questions, each receiving more than 70 replies, averaging more than 45 words. On December 5, GERI reviewed responses, and below we report some findings.¹

1). About 42% of faculty who teach Common Curriculum Courses agree that they make connections between their courses and others in the Common Curriculum, while about 34% disagree. About 34% of all respondents perceive that their colleagues make deliberate connections between the Common Curriculum and the major, while 32% perceive they don't.

Q4 - When I design and teach Common Curriculum courses, I make connections/relationships between my courses and others in the Common Curriculum.	%	Count
Strongly disagree.	10.43%	12
Disagree.	23.48%	27
Neither agree nor disagree.	23.48%	27
Agree.	26.09%	30
Strongly agree.	16.52%	19
Total	100%	115

¹ Results from all multiple choice questions are available on the GERI portfolio site.

Q6 - It is my perception that colleagues in my department or program make deliberate connections between the Common Curriculum and courses/requirements in the major.	%	Count
Strongly disagree.	13.13%	21
Disagree.	19.38%	31
Neither agree nor disagree.	33.13%	53
Agree.	20.63%	33
Strongly agree.	13.75%	22
Total	100%	160

2). Faculty undergraduate advisors place more emphasis on explaining to students the practical requirements of the Common Curriculum than they do explaining the theory behind it, although over 60% do explain the theory and outcomes.

Q7 - As an advisor to undergraduates, I devote time and attention to making sure students understand the theory and outcomes of the Common Curriculum.	%	Count
Strongly disagree	5.41%	6
Disagree	19.82%	22
Neither agree nor disagree	13.51%	15
Agree	33.33%	37
Strongly agree	27.93%	31
Total	100%	111

Q8 - As an advisor to undergraduates, I devote time and attention to practical matters of helping students find courses which meet requirements.	%	Count
Strongly disagree	3.60%	4
Disagree	8.11%	9
Neither agree nor disagree	3.60%	4
Agree	34.23%	38
Strongly agree	50.45%	56
Total	100%	111

3). Only 23% of faculty perceive that undergraduate students understand and/or value the theory and outcomes of the Common Curriculum.

Q9 - I perceive that most undergraduate students understand and value the theory and outcomes of the current Common Curriculum, taken as a whole.	%	Count
Strongly disagree	9.09%	13
Disagree	32.87%	47
Neither agree nor disagree	34.97%	50
Agree	18.88%	27
Strongly agree	4.20%	6
Total	100%	143

4). Faculty perceive that DU faculty better understand and value the Common Curriculum than do students, but still the majority of responses were either ambivalent or negative.

Q10 - I perceive that most DU faculty understand and value the theory and outcomes of the current Common Curriculum, taken as a whole.	%	Count
Strongly disagree	7.69%	11
Disagree	22.38%	32
Neither agree nor disagree	30.77%	44
Agree	37.76%	54
Strongly agree	1.40%	2
Total	100%	143

5). The survey asked faculty to rate how strongly the Common Curriculum should play a central role in achieving the Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes (the broad outcomes to be achieved through majors/minors, electives, co-curricular work, and general education.) Faculty agreed or strongly agreed that the Common Curriculum should develop Quantitative Reasoning (82%), Communication (90%), Intellectual Engagement and Reflection (88%), and Engagement with Human Diversity (83%). They also agree, to a somewhat lesser extent, that it should develop Community Engagement (66%) and Disciplinary Knowledge and Practice (53%). We speculate that more faculty regard these last as a function of the major/minor, not the Common Curriculum, and this speculation was born out in written comments.

Table appears on next page.

Q. 11: Along with Majors/Minors, electives, and co-curricular activities, the Common Core helps achieve DU's Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes. Please rate your agreement that the Common Curriculum should have a central role advancing the following outcomes:			
Quantitative Reasoning: Students describe quantitative relations and apply appropriate quantitative strategies to examine significant questions and form conclusions.	Strongly disagree	6	4%
	Somewhat disagree	3	2%
	Neither agree nor disagree	17	12%
	Somewhat agree	38	26%
	Strongly agree	81	56%
Communication: Students develop considered judgments and craft compelling expressions of their thoughts in written, spoken, visual, technologically-mediated, and other forms of interaction.	Strongly disagree	6	4%
	Somewhat disagree	4	3%
	Neither agree nor disagree	5	3%
	Somewhat agree	18	13%
	Strongly agree	111	77%
Intellectual Engagement and Reflection: Students demonstrate a commitment to self-sustained learning and cultivate habits, including self-discipline, self-reflection, and creativity which make such learning possible.	Strongly disagree	4	3%
	Somewhat disagree	8	6%
	Neither agree nor disagree	6	4%
	Somewhat agree	26	18%
	Strongly agree	101	70%
Engagement with Human Diversity: Students critically reflect on their own social and cultural identities and make connections and constructively engage with people from groups that are characterized by social and cultural dimensions other than their own.	Strongly disagree	6	4%
	Somewhat disagree	9	6%
	Neither agree nor disagree	9	6%
	Somewhat agree	34	23%
	Strongly agree	87	60%
Community Engagement: Students consider their relationships with their own and others' physical and social communities as they engage collaboratively with those communities.	Strongly disagree	3	2%
	Somewhat disagree	18	12%
	Neither agree nor disagree	27	19%
	Somewhat agree	46	32%
	Strongly agree	51	35%
Disciplinary Knowledge and Practice: Students demonstrate breadth and depth of knowledge within at least one discipline including the fundamental principles and ways of knowing or practicing in the discipline(s).	Strongly disagree	12	8%
	Somewhat disagree	14	10%
	Neither agree nor disagree	28	19%
	Somewhat agree	42	29%
	Strongly agree	49	34%

Open Ended Questions

Two open-ended questions invited respondents to clarify their answers to multiple choice questions, but three asked them to address broad questions. We developed a coding scheme for each question, featuring broad categories that were further broken into specific types of responses. Following is a high-level overview of the findings. Clearly there would be benefits in further analysis, and several thoughtful extended comments merit further discussion.

1). One open-ended question asked, "In your view, what are the strengths of the current Common Curriculum at DU?" There were 76 responses. We found that the strengths faculty listed fell into six categories:

- Structure and Tradition
- Specific Courses/Requirements
- Philosophy/Goals
- Student Benefits
- Faculty Benefits
- Institutional Benefits

By far the strengths most frequently mentioned cited the Common Curriculum's Structure/Tradition and Specific Requirements. Several faculty noted the breadth and diversity of courses offered to students, as well as the requirement's flexibility, which they saw both as a benefit to student and to faculty. Many cited FSEM, ASEM, and the combination of those courses as "bookends," and several cited the writing requirement.

2). Another open-ended question asked, "In your view, what aspects of the current Common Curriculum at DU could be improved?" (78 responses.) We found that aspects for improvement fell into five categories:

- Naming/Branding/Marketing
- Size, Scope, Philosophy
- Specific Skills to Develop, Specific Courses or Elements
- Pedagogy, Advising, Faculty Actions
- Institutional Practices

Many faculty mentioned the insufficiency of current efforts to explain the Common Curriculum to students. In particular, the names of various requirements (AI, SI, etc.) were consistently deemed confusing or unhelpful. Several called for clarity in explaining the CC to students and faculty. Several called for better integration and synthesis. Nearly 60% of responses called for specific courses (or types of courses) to be included in or excluded from the Common Curriculum. Mentioned several times were the 3-course science sequence and the languages requirement, but there was no consensus.

3). A third question asked, "What is a question or idea that you think important to be considered during the review and possible revision of the Common Curriculum?" (78 responses.) We found that questions or ideas for consideration fell into eight categories:

- Curriculum (course requirements)
- Marketing (how general education is perceived)
- Pedagogy (how courses are taught/program delivered)
- Student Interests/Concerns
- Faculty Interests/Concerns
- Assessment
- Goals and Purposes
- Relation of Program to Rest of Curriculum

Most responses reiterated points raised in previous responses. 58% asked for specific courses to be considered, 34% requested clarification/improvement of the goals and purpose of General Education, and 20% mentioned the relationship between general education and the rest of the curriculum.