
The 2006 General Education Curriculum:
“Making Connections”:

Student, Faculty, and Advisor Perceptions

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Data Collection Activities

- Part of a comprehensive evaluation of the “Making Connections” Curriculum and related academic enhancements that followed the initial 2006 cohort through graduation in 2010. Information reported here was compiled from:
 - Focus group with Student Government leaders and others interested in the curriculum -- Fall 2009
 - Interviews with faculty participating in cluster programs -- Spring 2009
 - Focus groups (5) with academic advisors -- Spring 2010
 - Interviews with 2006 cohort as graduating seniors – Spring 2010

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Student Reactions

- Not clear about the purpose of the curriculum and framework
- Requirements difficult to figure out especially for 1st year students
- Supplemental Education requirements difficult to fulfill
- Liked the concept of Cluster program but hesitated to take courses because of unavailability of required courses and uncertainty about future offerings
- Curriculum restricts ability to take enough courses in the majors

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Student Recommendations

- Special advising needed for students who come in with lots of AP credits – could use help with course selection since they start the curriculum at a different point than students with fewer requirements already met through AP
- Offer more courses in cluster programs and publicize broadly
- The curriculum offers many options that require students to be self-directed and diligent, and most students are. However, many students make unwise choices and as a result perform poorly in some courses and fall behind in meeting other requirements. Provide timely support for students on probation and others who are struggling, and tailor advising to their needs.

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Student Suggestions for C-TOPS

- Emphasize the purpose of the curriculum, not just the requirements;
- Provide more individualized guidance in course selection and registration targeting the needs of students with varying levels of preparation.
- Reevaluate the advice being given to new students about Approaches and Connections course requirements they will need after year one.

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Feedback from Interviews with the 2006 Cohort on “Making Connections”

“The best part of my academic experience has been being able to make connections outside of academics.” Senior, Exercise & Sports Science

In general, students reported making connections across:

- Multiple disciplines in their academic experiences,
- A broad spectrum of social and personal topics encountered in their academic coursework and out-of-class learning activities.

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Students' Overall Reactions to the Curriculum

Number	Responses	Percentage
Ambivalent	60	57.7%
Positive	18	17.3%
Negative	17	16.3%
No Answer	9	8.7%
Total	104	100%



Ambivalence

- Liked the idea of liberal arts education but did not want to be forced to take specific courses;
- Just took many courses to fulfill requirements
- Felt some of the general education courses were a burden but saw the value of taking them in the end
- Too many required courses
- Some students who had many AP credits felt that their college experience was cheapened.



Student Feedback on the Most Positive and Negative Aspects of the Curriculum

Positives:

- General Education courses laid solid foundation and broad knowledge base for all majors
- Opportunities to explore different courses in all areas
- Enjoyed even the courses they were forced to take

Negatives:

- Felt forced to take courses in subjects they were not interested in
- Some courses were redundant and a waste of time

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Faculty Perceptions of the Cluster Courses Program

- Concept of Cluster Program well-received by faculty.
- Issues with implementation:
 - Availability of faculty and courses
 - Process of determining what should be included in a cluster
 - Departmental support for developing and offering these courses is not guaranteed
 - Student learning outcomes difficult to assess

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Suggestions for Cluster Programs

- Give faculty the flexibility and freedom to design the courses; some constraints on contents
- Allow students to appeal to substitute related courses
- Allow more courses to be used in each Cluster. Maximum of 8 now; need to allow more courses to be counted to increase availability to students.
- Provide resources and incentives to faculty for course development and teaching, since cluster courses are labor-intensive.

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Faculty Comments on Curriculum

- Difficult to understand for students, faculty and department advisors
- Frustrated about limitations on how courses can be counted to meet requirements under the major curricular components (Foundations, Approaches).

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Academic Advisors' Responses

- Sound rationales and goals for the 2006 Curriculum
- Contents of the curriculum are better organized and more relevant than old curriculum
- Great administrative support
- Not surprised by the practical issues with the implementation
- Interpretation of goals into course requirements is too rigid
- Issues are being resolved – “Making Corrections”

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Other Advisor Observations

- Most students see boxes, not “Connections”
- Students have to make “Strategic Connections” to get multiple requirements fulfilled with same courses
- Difficult for students to navigate the curriculum
- Students in Social and Behavioral Sciences seem to make more connections among courses and disciplines; more difficult for students majoring in the sciences

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Academic Advisors' Suggestions

- Reform regulations for accepting AP and other credits earned by examination
- Reconsider the 8-semester graduation policy – too difficult for students from rural high schools with few AP credit opportunities, students with disabilities, etc.
- Monitor carefully the implementation of the new PeopleSoft degree audit system to insure accuracy
- Allow students more flexibility to choose courses that fulfill the intentions of the curriculum goals, even if they are not identified as meeting requirements.

