

Report on USG Core Curriculum Initiative Retreat
Feb. 4-5 2008 in Athens, Georgia

Retreat Overview

A combined meeting of faculty committees charged with carrying out the USG Core Curriculum Initiative was held in Athens, Georgia. Participants spent an intensive two days focused on creating and debating conceptual models for the USG Core Curriculum Framework. Approximately 45 members of the Core Curriculum Competencies Committee, the Curriculum Design and Assessment Committee and the Steering Committee were present. By the end of the retreat, participants selected two conceptual models for further review and feedback across the University System of Georgia.

Project Overview

At the opening of the retreat, Drs. Dorothy Leland and Susan Herbst provided an overview of the USG Core Curriculum Initiative. They noted that the University System of Georgia Board of Regents has asked the committees to create a new USG Core Curriculum framework responsive to students' 21st century learning needs, and they reviewed important objectives that the framework should seek to accomplish:

1. The framework is intellectually compelling and coherent;
2. The framework has a strong global emphasis, with attention to living with diverse others, communication skills, and quantitative reasoning;
3. The framework includes 6-10 areas of study ("subject areas") and also identifies skills/values/processes that will be emphasized across the core curriculum ("threads");
4. Each subject area has a limited number of learning outcomes that are important enough to serve as system-wide student competency expectations;
5. The framework is general enough to allow for significant campus level creativity in determining how to develop institutional core curricula consistent with the framework and also responsive to differing student populations and institutional missions;
6. The framework facilitates student transfer between USG institutions; and

7. The framework includes assessment measures (tools, rubrics) to guide institutions in determining if students are achieving system-wide competency expectations

Brainstorming Curriculum Framework Models

The retreat focused exclusively on objectives 1, 2, 3 and 5. Participants were challenged to be bold and creative and to invent curricular models consistent with these objectives using the following template as a guide.

Theme

(Paragraph description of the unifying focus of the core and the rationale for this focus)

Areas

(Sketch of subject area categories that express and develop this theme)

Threads

(List of skills, values, processes that will be repeated in multiple courses across the core)

Participants initially joined one of five groups to develop possible models. These models were then presented to participants as a whole, who then grouped models into several clusters based on their similarities. Models were further debated and refined and by the end of the retreat, participants selected two models for broader input and review by faculty across the USG. One of these very preliminary models is organized around the theme of “From Self to Global Society.” The second focuses on the theme “Framing Worldviews in a Global Environment.”

Participants agreed that some features of a third model, organized around the theme of “Resolving Complex Problems through Multiple Literacies,” might be considered as work on creating a new USG Core Curriculum Framework proceeds.

Next Steps

- *Late February 2008*—two preliminary models and a feedback instrument will be posted on the USG Core Curriculum Initiative website. Committee members, chief academic officers, and faculty will be notified as soon as these documents are available and invited to respond to the feedback instrument.

- *March/April 2008*—combined committees will review feedback and based on this feedback select a single model for revision and further refinement responsive to the feedback received.
- *June 2008*—2-3 day retreat of combined committees to further refine work and address unresolved issues

Other Issues Discussed

- Participants noted the need for faculty and curriculum development support once a new Core Curriculum Framework is adopted. Dr. Herbst promised to be a strong advocate for funding.
- The current USG Core Curriculum Framework has more credit hours than the core curricula typically found across the nation. It is possible to imagine a 24-36 credit hour USG core, which would allow USG institutions to add an institutional core. This option would require creative solutions with respect to facilitating student transfer.
- The expectation is that the new Core Curriculum Framework will include assessment protocols but not require common assessment instruments. This will be an important topic for further discussion and deliberation.
- The current USG Core Curriculum Framework includes prerequisites for the major. Clarity about such prerequisites remains critical for student transfer even if they are not technically a part of the new framework.