

## **Issue: Improve Student Connection Between General Education Courses and Disciplinary Studies; Improve Critical Thinking and Science and Reasoning Skills**

- More cohesive General Education connected to the rest of the curriculum
- Connect general education to disciplinary studies to allow student to make a smooth transition between the content areas of the two
- Thematic General Education
- Incorporate active learning strategies into all courses
- Enhance information literacy

First year experience courses introduce new students to the expectations of their University, the purpose of Gen Ed, and the liberal arts. They can also be used to focus on developing critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills and serve as a link between the general education curriculum and disciplinary content.

Enhanced advisement can reinforce expectations for students and help them plan for the transition between Gen Ed and disciplinary studies.

Centralized advising center set up to offer training, incentives, accountability and peer mentoring to streamline the advisement process. Incorporate student evaluation of advisors similar to instructor evaluation at the end of a course term. Increase frequency of advisement sessions, such as at three to six times a semester to keep open communication and increase mentorship between students and advisors.

Incorporate undergraduate research that builds on the foundation of general education and the specifics of discipline-based research and learning.

Capstone courses encourage critical thinking, a synthesis of disciplinary content, original research and faculty mentorship through a student's program.

Active learning strategies incorporated into general education classes allow students to interact with the content in active, engaged ways. In addition, the teacher-scholar model can provide a means by which faculty and students work together and collaborate to increase that student interaction with the content through participation in independent research, original thought and classroom activities.

Creating and offering general education courses around a theme (global citizenship, going green, etc.) has produced increased learning, critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills.

Learning communities can take a number of different forms from living/learning groups that combine academics and residential life around a theme to simply a cluster of classes linked by an interdisciplinary theme such as "Cultural Competence in a Global Society," "Making Ethical Choices in a Changing World," or "Borders, Boundaries, and Belonging," to service learning opportunities that link the classroom and community service through themes such as "Civic Engagement" or "American Democracy" projects. Learning communities provide increased student engagement to their academic program and to the university.

Freshman interest groups can be a form of or introduction to a learning community. Freshman interest groups (FIGs) of about 15-27 students can be geared towards the different needs and interests of that group. Students are immediately placed with peers and given a more personal introduction to university life to maximize their success.

Service learning is the intentional integration of course content and community service within a single course or a group of courses. Service learning helps students to create connections between their university studies and the larger community and can be tied to learning communities, capstone courses, freshman seminar/orientation, or other Gen Ed elements.

Information literacy is defined as "the ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand."

## **Issue: Improve Overall Student Engagement With the Campus and the Curriculum**

- advisement,
- learning communities
- freshman interest groups, and
- student development/leadership opportunities

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Increased opportunities for original student research beyond classroom assignments creates mentor relationships with peers and faculty. Events to present student research and honor scholars benefits both students and the university by celebrating academic success.

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Improved campus atmosphere can boost student engagement. By reevaluating or changing campus environments, the campus can become more desirable to students and draw them out of private spaces, such as the dorm, into the community and makes for a more connected campus environment.

**Issue: Increase connections and opportunities for service learning and international and cultural studies**

- Service learning and experiential learning opportunities
- Cultural studies/international experiences

Service learning is the intentional integration of course content and community service within a single course or a group of courses. Service learning helps students to create connections between their university studies and the larger community and can be tied to learning communities, capstone courses, freshman seminar/orientation, or other Gen Ed elements.

Global learning concentrations in class work can be achieved through the creation of undergraduate programs in specific areas such as African studies, Asian studies, German studies, or European Union studies or by creating a requirement for the integration of global content in pre-existing programs and courses. Global learning is important to help students become more competitive after graduation and to increase a sense of involvement in the world-wide community.

Improved study abroad opportunities would make the most of connections the university already has or could make with other universities, countries, and contacts worldwide. Increasing the number of study abroad options, decreasing cost for students and promoting study abroad on campus can help students have more cultural awareness and gain new skills.

Learning communities can be a great way to incorporate a service or global learning focus by creating themed communities that focus on a certain aspect of global learning, ethics, service, or cultural awareness.