The University/College in 2015: Imagining What It Might Be

Participants at a weekend workshop were invited to share their one 'best take-home idea.' Many of these were sparked during an afternoon of cluster discussions with academics and architects exploring what the college or university of the future would be like if its policies, programs, practices (and physical plant) signal that the community is taking student learning seriously, is aware of research on how people learn. Excerpts from their best ideas are presented here to catalyze further explorations of the future of the 21st century learning environment. Learning to ask the right question was a persistent 'aha' idea.

The major resource for this workshop was: *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, a seminal 1999 report from the National Research Council.

Visions of the Undergraduate Learning Environment in 2015

- It is one dedicated to building global communities of life-long learners, one in which disciplinary lines are blurred and becoming permeable. I see this as strongly connected to the mission of liberal learning. So my intent is to return to my campus and to begin to 'paint the story' of a different kind of community, one that is difficult to define or describe—what does an environment for preparing life-long learners look like? I don't know, but I do know these are important questions to ask.

- My best idea is to organize the university/college of 2015 through "learning communities" focused on problem-based learning, instead of the traditional discipline-based departments (i.e., instead of a "general education curriculum" committee, we would have inter-community committees for organizing programmatic activities).

- A learning community in which student and faculty learning occurs without boundaries of time, space, discipline, and– especially– institution (K-20 collaborations), all of which is demonstrable.

- My vision is of an institution that takes seriously the interdisciplinary nature of the 21st century learning environment– where there are no boundaries, and where everything is transparent.

- As an architect, if I were an educator, my best idea is that the collaboration between the disciplines should be promoted, and that a flexible and social education should be developed that promotes the ability of students to flourish in an ever-changing world, one in which they will have to adjust much more than we have had to.

Facilities for Undergraduate Learning in 2015

- I think the most innovative learning environments for the future will telegraph and showcase the kind of learning that is happening—that the spaces are transparent, so as to educate and inspire the broader community.

- I am increasingly convinced that the growing desire for flexibility of space against the crunch of funds is creating a fantastic opportunity for institutional transformation. I am asking myself (and will be asking my colleagues) "is this the right time to do something dramatically creative, or should we continue just to tweak around the edges of change?"

- The question I am bringing back to my colleagues (as chair of the computer science department) is: "how might our spaces look different if we took research on how people learn seriously, in the context of what we already know about how our students learn?

LEARNING SPACES COLLABORATORY

Pedagogies for Undergraduate Learning in 2015

◆ My 'aha' moment was the potential of using problem-based learning PBL at the freshman level, so students learn from the very first day the processes of experimental design, collaborative work, etc. I learned about how PBL in first-year courses helps students grasp the breadth of applications for what they are learning and to realize for themselves the gaps in what they know, what they can do. This would give students opportunity for 'real-life' learning experiences, avoiding beginning their undergraduate career simply learning about theory and concepts.

◆ I am going to challenge my students in more explicit and intentional ways to learn what they can using their own resources and resourcefulness, going to think more deeply about what a 'cognitive apprenticeship' might mean in my setting and about my responsibility for scaffolding faculty learning.

◆ The use of jigsaws to bring different perspectives to addressing a problem, and the process of taking the best ideas from different groups to share with the larger group (see report on Friday evening session), This looks like a very effective way to generate/share ideas and especially to improve communication between members of the community who have different roles and perspectives

Students in 2015

◆ The importance of the voice of students (a range of student voices) in institutional discussions about priorities for the future. We should realize that these would be opportunities of mutual benefit. Not only would we benefit from a deeper understanding of who our students are, how they think, how they perceive their work and their future, but students would have opportunities for a richer educational experience. Hopefully, they would learn about planning processes (decision-making processes) that are interactive, involving people with diverse perspectives, in different spheres of responsibility, about how to negotiate and renegotiate toward problem-solving. This could build a new kind of community on our campus, one visibly supportive of deeper learning. We should be treating institutional change as learning opportunities (perhaps for all of us, not just for students).

◆ In addition to the general/fundamental theme that pedagogy needs to be more engaging, the best idea is of anticipating the students of the future and emphasizing the need to deliberately and individually make connections between the background of students and their emerging aspirations. This "whole student" development involves all elements of the institution— faculty, pedagogy, curriculum, facilities, etc.

◆ Encourage faculty to get to know their students and help them identify and achieve their goals. Encourage students to be curious about the world around them and to come up with ideas that can solve the inequalities and challenges that confront them and their world. Help students be responsible citizens of our world and to realize that their actions matter to society. ■