

Chapter 7

Skills and Values: Designing and Implementing the Core Curriculum at Flagler College

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will provide an overview of the formation and implementation of the new Skills and Values Core Curriculum at Flagler College. It will discuss the emergence of the ideas that led to an ambitious and innovative Core Curriculum at the institution – from the strategic plan of the College, to several AACU workshops and meetings, to faculty roundtables and meetings. An examination of the shared governance process that led to acceptance and implementation of the curriculum will provide ideas and guidance to other institutions. It will detail the implementation of the interdisciplinary curriculum, participation of the faculty, design of dozens of new classes. Finally, it will describe the unanticipated impact of the Core in helping secure state funding for Classical and Liberal Education that has supported the hiring of new faculty and growth of the program.

INTRODUCTION

The cost-model, curriculum, and enrollment in many institutions of higher Education has faced considerable disruption in the past decade. COVID-19 exacerbated challenges already faced by many small liberal arts college – especially declining enrollment and structural deficits. Prior to the pandemic, many institutions had been reforming their general education curriculum, addressing the question of “why is

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this relevant” posed by many students and parents. Indeed, in a culture that tends to view higher education as a venue for skills and jobs training, it is not altogether surprising to receive questions about the practical application of general education classes that explore history, philosophy, literature, ethics, etc. The spiraling costs of higher education and a competitive marketplace (with a dwindling number of traditional age students) has also led many institutions to explain why a general education program is necessary. COVID’s immediate impact on enrollment and resultant financial strains further heightened the urgency to reform and rebrand general education programs.

It was in this context that Flagler College undertook to build and implement a new general education program that stresses skills instead of subject areas, and values that will shape a student’s lifelong learning. Designing a general education program that emphasizes futureproof skills and timeless values was a direct response to the “why” question, and a dramatic departure from previously established programs. Its designation as “CORE” was deliberate: a name that has historical resonance in higher education, but also allows the college to message that “skills and values” are at the core of a student’s education.

This chapter will offer a case study in designing and implementing a general education program that responds to longer-term cultural skepticism of liberal-arts based learning and proactively addresses direct questions as to why such a program is necessary and how it will benefit students in the long-term. It assumes the reader will have professional knowledge about the state of higher education in the United States during the first decades of the 21st century, and an acquaintance with issues pertaining to general education. It will describe the process of design and implementation at a liberal arts college with shared governance. Several factors critical to success will shape the narrative: agreement by administrative and faculty leadership that the program would emphasize skills rather than discipline specific knowledge, an established timeline, and collaborative committee leadership that sought broad faculty consultation and consensus in shaping the details and structure of the program prior to debate and revision in the faculty senate.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Established in 1968, Flagler College is a highly ranked private liberal arts college located in St. Augustine, FL with an enrollment of approximately 2,600 students (U.S. News Best Colleges) and 120 full-time faculty. Like many institutions its size, the budget is enrollment and tuition driven.

The Core Curriculum of Flagler College is the institution’s signature General Education program. Simply known as the “CORE,” it is a streamlined thirty-three

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