

Curriculum and Culture 2011

Joseph E. Saliba, Ph.D., Provost

We welcome many new faculty to our community today, and we take pride and pleasure in the accomplishments and gifts of many others who have joined us in recent years. There are also some here this afternoon who have been at UD for quite a long time, including me.

Over the many years I have been part of this University, I have witnessed a remarkable succession of changes. I have seen Father Roesch move the University from the relatively spare and simple place it was when he began as president into an institution of impressive strength and depth. Bro. Ray Fitz devoted himself to building the reputation of UD, but more importantly he made sure that we earned that increasingly glowing reputation. He did so with singular modesty and dedication, and through his inspiring embodiment of the Marianist way of life.

The driving force behind the most recent chapter in this story of growth is President Curran's combination of vision, imagination, and leadership. Without those qualities, and his ability to build creatively on the legacy he inherited, we would not be the exceptional place we have become. Always looking ahead, he is also mindful of the strengths we draw from our past and the inspiration of your work in the present. He has been, and he continues to be, a transformative President of the University of Dayton.

The main thing that has distinguished each of the three presidents I have known is that each one has made major contributions toward changing the culture of our University. At the same time, they renewed our commitment to principles and practices that have sustained and distinguished us from the beginning.

Today I want to talk with you about another and critically important moment of change in our University culture, one to which every single one of you can contribute.

I think you will agree that we have no more important job than delivering a sound, challenging, and meaningful curriculum. This is literally our *raison d'être*. Nothing else we do matters very much if we don't do that well.

But I want to be clear that I do not see curriculum as a fixed set of programs and courses. Instead I see it as an extensive kit of parts and tools and building supplies for constructing an education. To look at it another way, there is no such thing as an off-the-rack, "one size fits all," curriculum; custom tailoring is always required. To use yet another metaphor, curriculum should be an organism that interacts with its environment, responding, adapting, and evolving.

We are always addressing curriculum renewal and innovation across the University. But today I want to talk with you about the current status and future prospects of our work in one particular area of curriculum development, the Common Academic Program.

To begin, I want to express my gratitude to all those (116 of you to be exact) who have been deeply and enthusiastically involved in constructing the CAP through your development and delivery of 28 pilot courses and related important work with the CAP Faculty Institute. I hope that what I say today will inspire you to raise our ambitions even higher. I also want to acknowledge those of you who have worked so hard to bring us to the point at which these pilots and proposals and preparations have become possible. But some of you may not know much about the CAP, and I know there are others who feel they have no part to play in it. So I especially want to address those who feel uninformed, ambivalent, or excluded.

I will argue that all of us – not just a few, but *all* of us – are responsible for making this a curriculum that is creative, flexible, challenging, and rewarding for faculty and students alike.

We are not merely tinkering with or tweaking what we already have. We are building a new educational structure that will be a major feature of our identity as a University. It

will define many of the ways in which we work. It will also influence the ways in which we think and talk about ourselves as the University of Dayton. This is our future and the future of many who will come after us. In short, what we are doing through the medium of curriculum building is nothing less than changing the culture of our University.

Let me explain why I believe the CAP is crucial to this change in our culture.

First of all, let's agree that the CAP should never become a block of courses and requirements that remain unchanged from one year to the next. To put it another way, the CAP should not be a matter of Research & Development that is followed by a finished product. The essence of the CAP must be R & D itself. It should not be a product so much as a continuing process of experiment, innovation, and change. More than anything else, the CAP should be a living idea that takes many different forms and that can be interpreted in countless ways. Just because we begin with a certain framework does not mean it should still be in place, in just the same form, twenty years from now, or even in ten or five years.

To put it simply, we are creating the CAP in order for the CAP to change us as faculty. That in turn will enable us to change the nature of a UD education.

In the last several years I have been purposefully articulating a vision of UD as a comprehensive university. But I have also noted that it is not enough just to be a comprehensive university. We need to reflect our comprehensive reach and grasp in our curriculum, just as we need to reflect our Marianist values and our Catholic beliefs. And I believe that the CAP provides a fresh opportunity for us to make manifest the reality of our comprehensive university.

Before I go any further, allow me to state that I don't very much like the designation "Common Academic Program." To me the name does not suggest a contemporary, innovative, and distinctive approach to learning. I realize that no title will please everyone, but I will take this opportunity to ask for your suggestions for an alternative

name to the CAP, one that better reflects what we want it to be. For the sake of clarity, however, I will continue to use the nomenclature of the CAP in this address.

Whatever it might ultimately be called, the CAP ought to reflect the comprehensive and distinctive nature of our University. This new curriculum should include, for every undergraduate, significant elements of learning from each of the professional schools in partnership with the College of Arts and Sciences. I realize that opportunities for doing this exist within the Crossing Boundaries component of the CAP. I therefore ask that Crossing Boundaries include the professional schools more fully, but I am also asking for additional opportunities to be explored elsewhere in the CAP. And I am particularly asking that the professional schools and the College become fully cooperative and equal partners in this process.

At this point I would like to suggest a context in which I would like to see the CAP develop. I refer to the fundamental question that has long been associated with the Humanities Base of our present General Education Program. “What does it mean to be human?” I want to open that question to the entire University, and I want to propose that it is perhaps the most important question we can ask of ourselves and our students at a Catholic and Marianist university.

By asking everyone to address this question as part of a comprehensive approach to curriculum, I am seeking to expand the ways in which it can be answered. By bringing together many different responses, by working and arguing and debating and learning together, I believe we can generate a new understanding of the distinctive nature, quality, and value of a University of Dayton education.

The central word in this question – “mean” – calls us to examine the nature of “meaning.” We might begin by asking about the many different meanings of the arts, the humanities, the sciences, the social sciences, business, education, and engineering. All of these are intrinsically and fundamentally human activities. I believe it is our

responsibility, as well as our great opportunity as a comprehensive university, to address them as such, in the context of what they mean to individuals and communities.

By making the question, “What does it mean to be human?” central to our work in shaping our new curriculum, we would contribute in powerful ways to the ongoing process of defining and exemplifying our identity as a comprehensive Catholic and Marianist university.

This approach would renew our commitment to transformative education. It would help us to integrate student learning and faculty scholarship, while at the same time it would promote faculty learning and student scholarship. It would demonstrate the enduring value of rooting a UD education in both faith and reason. It would emphasize practical wisdom by cultivating the ability to bring critical and constructive perspectives to a full range of human issues and to recognize their moral and ethical dimensions. And it would enable our students to develop collaborative skills that would help them to build community and value diversity.

I believe that the new curriculum we are creating will be more cohesive and more powerful if it includes these elements of a contextual framework based on a profoundly important and unifying question and a clear focus on our unique identity and our distinctive mission.

Now I would like to provide another example of a way in which the CAP can work for us toward changing our culture.

If you think of education within a major as a vertical axis and general learning as a horizontal axis, we should emphasize that our purpose here at UD is to address the entire area contained within the ever-expanding circumference of a circle that contains both axes.

With this image in mind, consider the way in which General Education is currently presented to students through major degree program narratives and outlines. With few exceptions, the narratives focus exclusively on the major discipline. The outlines list all the courses within the major up front, with a generic list of the Gen Ed requirements at the end. This arrangement implies that these requirements are essentially added on in order to complete a certain total number of credit hours. Like a sales tax, they appear to be part of the price a student is obliged to pay for a degree.

Neither the texts nor the outlines suggest that General Education provides content that is worthwhile in its own right, let alone that it demonstrates an approach to learning that is designed to cultivate a lifetime of thoughtfulness, critical thinking, and unending curiosity. But this is exactly what we should ensure that the CAP becomes: an enlightened and enlightening approach to learning.

At this point I would like to explain why I believe we need to add another element to the CAP. I am referring to what I would call Global Learning.

In addition to understanding relationships among our various academic disciplines, our students need to understand relationships among different cultures. And we need to ensure that they acquire that understanding.

Our students will need to interact knowledgably and respectfully with people from around the world. They will need to navigate cultural differences with sensitivity, recognize distinctive attributes of their own cultures, and gain insights about how they are perceived by others. These abilities must be cultivated right here on campus at the University of Dayton, as well as through greatly strengthened and expanded connections with international programs and partners. We cannot afford for such opportunities to be arbitrary add-ons. And with regard to education abroad, we certainly cannot afford to pursue this on a more or less ad hoc basis, let alone as a form of vaguely educational tourism. But no matter how thoroughly we improve education abroad, we also need to focus on ensuring that Global Learning becomes a prominent feature of a UD education

right here at home. I therefore ask that Global Learning be infused through every academic discipline in our comprehensive university and that it become a key part of the CAP.

Related to Global Learning, I would add the suggestion that we rethink the nature and role of language education at UD. I am well aware that our excellent language courses and programs go well beyond the vital, foundational concerns of teaching vocabulary and grammar. I would like to consider the possibility of expanding our Language Department to include Global Languages and Cultures and to become a major contributor to the Global Learning initiative I have touched on here today and, therefore, to the CAP I have been describing.

Another aspect of the commitment that President Curran and I are making to this transformative process of creating a new approach to curriculum is a plan to add 45 full-time faculty to the University within the next three to four years. This will be accomplished in several different ways including reallocations, the consolidation of some adjunct faculty positions, as well as completely new hires. Much of this enhanced faculty strength will be directed specifically toward the advancement of the CAP.

In addition to our commitment to bringing new faculty to UD, we are equally committed to a greater investment in the development of those of us who are already here, including our valuable adjunct faculty. We currently pursue many good programs and projects in the area of faculty development, but we could and will do a better job in the future.

Before I wrap this up, let me provide a concise summary of the actions I would like us to undertake in support of our efforts to build new ways of thinking about and delivering a curriculum.

1. I ask that all of us – not just a few, but *all* of us – engage in the development of the CAP. The CAP will succeed when it is understood as the nexus of a UD education and when everyone has a role to play in it.

2. In concert with the eventual introduction of the CAP, I would like to see every single degree program narrative and outline reconstructed in such a way as to make it explicit that the CAP is the foundational, unifying structure of undergraduate learning at UD. In other words, it should become impossible for anyone to see a UD education as a sequence of major courses plus other stuff that has to be gotten out of the way.

3. I ask that every major include Global Learning as a component of its degree program and that it become an essential element of the CAP.

4. I look forward to working with all the deans on a plan to add 45 full-time faculty to the University to support our most important initiatives and address some of our most pressing needs. And I am eager to see good results from renewed efforts at faculty development.

I would like to conclude by explaining that everything I have said in this address is rooted in my own experience in addition to intellectual conviction and administrative responsibility. The trajectory of my youthful learning took me from Lebanon to Brazil to France to Dayton, Ohio. English, which I still mistreat rather badly, is my third language. I became an engineer by way of playing soccer, and I have worked at every sort of job imaginable at one time or another. But the most meaningful contributions to my eclectic and always unfinished education have been those things that drew me out of myself and connected me with people and ideas I would never have encountered had I done only what I thought I wanted to do. I owe a particular debt to this great Catholic and Marianist university not only for taking me in and enabling me to grow, but also for challenging me and stretching me to become more aware of the world around me and better able to appreciate and value the perspectives of others.

We grow relatively little through what I would call closed-loop relationships, which is to say dealing exclusively with people very much like ourselves. We grow much more through the effort to build and understand relationships with people who do not have backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and experiences similar to our own. A university

education should combine inward-looking disciplinary focus with outward-looking exposure and comprehension.

Our role should never be one of responding only to a student's personal interests to the exclusion of everything else. We are not a search engine seeking to identify what each user likes and then designing our feedback to cater only to those preferences while excluding everything that does not fit their particular algorithm.

We are in the business of changing lives. It is our job to push our students out of their so-called comfort zones. They need to learn that there are no easy answers to the most difficult questions and that ambiguity and doubts and humility are part of becoming a more fully aware and compassionate human being. This is the kind of learning that arises from venturing into unfamiliar territory and wrestling with vexing problems. It comes from making conceptual leaps from one idea and discipline to another and from finding out how people think who are different from us. A student who never struggles with anything hard is a student who learns little.

These are some of the reasons why it is so important that our new approach to building and experimenting with curriculum inspires curiosity, enables us to discover and create relationships among different disciplines and cultures and cultivates a lifelong interest in learning.

Someone once said: "The best way to predict the future is to create it." So let us use the present to create together a curriculum for the future, one that will be innovative, flexible, challenging, and rewarding for faculty and students alike.
