

Minutes: Reinvention Center Midwestern Regional Network Meeting
May 18, 2001

The first Midwestern network meeting of research universities sponsored by the Reinvention Center took place on May 18, 2001 at the University Club of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois. It was attended by 31 faculty and senior administrators from 15 public and private institutions. A list of attendees is attached.

Wendy Katkin, Director of the recently-established Center, opened the session by introducing herself and providing background on the Center's founding and on the factors leading to this meeting. The purpose, she explained, was to explore the merits and feasibility of creating a regional network made up of faculty and senior administrators from research universities within the same broad geographic area. In addition to the Chicago meeting, the Center has held similar meetings in New York City, Washington D.C. and San Francisco. Collectively, the four network meetings have been attended by approximately 140 participants from 70 public and private universities. There has been fairly equal representation of colleagues in the sciences, social sciences and humanities; few attendees have been from engineering and virtually none have been from the arts. While the New York and DC meetings had significant representation by private as well as public institutions, the Chicago meeting, like the one in San Francisco, was dominated by public institutions. Nine institutions represented (along with the University of Wisconsin at Madison, the University of Chicago and Penn State) belong to the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) and their VPs for Undergraduate Studies and other senior level administrators already have extensive contacts; this might well affect these institutions' interest in and relationship to the Center. At the same time, the six universities that were present that are not part of the CIC felt they might benefit from an association with the Center.

Dr. Katkin explained that when the Reinvention Center was created a year ago, she was given three years to determine whether a Center focusing exclusively on research universities made sense and, if so, what its role might be. After a year of visiting campuses, talking with colleagues at universities, professional societies and government agencies and attending meetings of education-oriented organizations like the AACU, AAHE and Project Kaleidoscope, she has determined that indeed such a Center could fill a critical gap and have many functions. Her reasoning was based initially on the observation that most existing organizations focusing on undergraduate education are geared primarily for four-year colleges. These colleges, however, start out with different assumptions and have needs and interests that are quite different from those of research universities. As a result, the organizations have generally failed to engage administrators and especially faculty from research universities, though, as some participants noted, the AACU in particular in the past three years has been making efforts to cast its programs so that they are of greater interest to research universities.

Dr. Katkin has become further convinced of the value of an organization made up exclusively of research universities by the enthusiastic response the Center has received to its initial invitation to the first round of regional network meetings and by the nature and quality of discussion that has taken place at all the meetings thus far.

Dr. Katkin envisions the proposed networks as small communities made up of colleagues from institutions that face common challenges and who might benefit from working together and sharing experiences. Her model is the group of ten research institutions that received the NSF RAIRE (Recognition Award for the Integration of Research and Education) awards in 1997. Over the past three years, faculty and administrators from these institutions have met informally

on numerous occasions, have come to know one another personally and with reference to many of their programs, and have become valuable resources for one another on a wide variety of issues.

Following the opening comments, a representative from each institution present was asked to provide a brief overview of the institution and to identify a pressing issue or educational aspect that the Center network might address. Several common issues emerged:

- Diversity: Research universities tend to have remarkably diverse undergraduate populations. This diversity encompasses race, ethnicity, social and economic backgrounds, interests, talents, expectations, and goals. One of the major challenges is how to engage the full range of students.
- First-year experiences: Universities generally are struggling to find ways to structure the students' first year experience so that they gain the critical foundations that will prepare them for their subsequent studies and develop "habits of mind" that will serve them throughout their college and future careers. The question is how to shape the experience so that it achieves these goals. The two most commonly cited approaches have been through the introduction or expansion of freshman seminars and the establishment of living learning communities which integrate the students' academic and social experiences. One institution (Ohio State) has recently created a VP for the First Year Experience.
- Specific disciplinary or programmatic issues: Those identified include: enriching the experience of students in honors programs; creating better mechanisms to improve the basic skills (particularly in math and writing) of all students so that they are able to engage the academic component of their education; globalization of the curriculum; incorporating capstone courses in all majors; expanding research opportunities; and addressing the needs of transfer and commuter students and students who work.
- Expanding teaching resources: Others besides faculty can contribute to undergraduate education. Many universities are developing strategies and models for involving advanced undergraduates, research faculty, and research librarians in undergraduate teaching and learning. At some campuses in the UC system for example librarians participate in advising as well as in the supervision of research projects in such areas as bibliographic development. At Northwestern University, the libraries are connected with residential programs.
- Improving pedagogy: Two issues dominated: how to use technology effectively and "without reinventing the wheel," and expanding problem-based teaching and learning.

The group selected four issues for more in-depth discussion during the afternoon: General Education, Creating Community, Engaging the Faculty, and Assessment.

- General Education: Many of the institutions present have recently revised or are in the process of re-examining their general education requirements. Two goals underlying many efforts are 1) to better connect general education with students' subsequent studies and 2) to incorporate research and experiential teaching and learning into large, introductory courses. The most commonly-cited challenges are: getting faculty who have a strong disciplinary focus to buy into teaching general education courses; achieving greater coherence among general education courses by, for example, bringing together the faculty who teach these courses; and structuring the curriculum so that it is integrated, yet gives students flexibility.

A critical question is who “owns” general education. Frequently, and particularly at institutions where undergraduate education is the province of individual schools and colleges, the unit or group that sets the requirements is distinct from the unit responsible for delivering the required courses. As a result, there is frequently a “muddying” of original intent. In most cases, the Faculty Senate is responsible for approving general education requirements across different colleges, while departments within the Arts and Sciences have responsibility for delivering the required courses.

Several institutions are grappling with ways to change not only the definition of general education, but also the ways students might satisfy the requirements. At Case Western Reserve University, for example, a task force has recently proposed replacing the traditional distribution course model with a set of “literacies” that can be satisfied either by courses or by co-curricular experiences such as service learning. The literacies include: information, political, economic, and scientific literacy as well as “numeracy” and “traditional” (reading and writing) “literacy.” In addition, there is interest in developing a core course that will give all students a common academic experience. One proposed theme for such a course is “concepts of culture,” to be studied from different disciplinary points of view. About 70% of the faculty endorse this new approach; 30% are more skeptical: “In theory it sounds nice, but how can we implement it?” Similarly, the University of South Dakota is implementing new interdisciplinary programs within a framework that includes service learning and other co-curricular experiences in addition to courses.

A major question is how to staff new general education initiatives. Some campuses are adding instructional staff, but this is expensive and not always desirable. A better approach is to engage existing faculty. At Northwestern, two English professors re-cast an American Literature course that they had taught for many years into a daily conversation about that day’s subject. Despite the large class size (300 students), students were engaged because they saw the professors disagreeing with each other and in turn felt free themselves to comment and disagree.

UCLA gives grants to teams of faculty members to develop general education “clusters” of courses organized around a theme, to be offered for at least three years. The clusters may involve any combination of subjects so long as they satisfy at least two general education requirements. Current clusters are designed to take advantage of faculty’s special interests and have such varied themes as aging and the 1960s.

Alan Kalish from Ohio State suggested that the Center could serve an important clearinghouse function by compiling a standardized list of successful general education initiatives that can be shared with interested members of the group. The Center has links to general education programs at research universities on its Web site:
<http://www.sunysb.edu/Reinventioncenter/resgened.htm>
Please send us links to your programs if they are not listed here.

- Creating a sense of community: This is a major concern, particularly on large campuses, campuses that are split up physically, campuses where responsibility for undergraduate education is divided among different units, and campuses with significant numbers of commuters and or non-traditional students. Many universities have been trying to overcome students’ sense of isolation by creating living-learning communities and other programs to bring students together in smaller groups. These efforts require forging new/better partnerships among academic and student affairs and residence offices. On most campuses, special programs typically reach less than half of all students; virtually all campuses are

trying to increase the numbers. Campuses with large numbers of commuters are experimenting with programs that match commuters with residence halls or with non-commuting students who belong to the same program that they do.

Mechanisms that have been effective in fostering a sense of community include: encouraging student affiliation/ identification with a particular program (such as a women in science program) or with the unit in which the student enrolls; holding special campus-wide events that students are likely to remember; creating pleasant lounges where departments may have gatherings that are open to both students and faculty; and sponsoring activities that increase faculty-student interactions. On some campuses, faculty routinely take students to lunch. The “French Floor” at the University of Kentucky has weekend activities, featuring food, to which both faculty and community members are invited. At most campuses efforts to foster a sense of community are focused on the students’ first year.

A major barrier to creating community is the absence of a similar sense of community among the faculty. While faculty often collaborate in their research, too often they do not talk to one another about what they are doing in the classroom. Such conversation however can be very valuable. It is important to provide forums which bring together faculty from different departments, such as those who teach courses predominantly to freshmen or general education courses. Ohio State for example convenes first year faculty, to talk about “Who are our freshmen and what are we doing for them now and what can we do better?” Notre Dame’s Freshman Learning Experience brings together faculty from different disciplines to discuss such issues as how to work with large classes.

- Engaging the faculty: There are numerous diverse demands on the faculty’s time and energy, and the enthusiasm and support for efforts directed at undergraduate education vary widely by department and school. At the same time, faculty increasingly are being asked to give greater attention to undergraduate teaching and take on new responsibilities. These include: re-thinking their general education and large introductory courses, adopting new pedagogies, learning to use technology effectively, supervising students in research and creative activity, and playing a role in academic advisement. There are two major obstacles. One is the belief among faculty that although the administration is “talking the talk,” undergraduate-oriented activities are not given much weight in the tenure-promotion process. Institutions are attempting to address this perception by revising promotion and tenure guidelines and instituting new rewards that recognize faculty contributions in this arena. A second obstacle is the faculty’s not knowing how to change. While most research universities now have a teaching center, faculty participation is often limited. The most successful centers have been proactive in working with faculty and departments.
- Assessment: Four questions dominated: What do we assess? Who determines that? How do we carry it out? How do we convince faculty that assessment is important? There was a sense within the group that universities rather than state legislatures should be providing the answers and the tools. Universities have many resources upon which they can draw, namely researchers who specialize in evaluation, institutional studies offices, and offices such as student affairs that routinely gather data. Often the data is there but is not collected or analyzed in ways that are useful. Certain disciplinary associations, such as the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), base their accreditation on assessment of campus programs; as a result most campuses with an Engineering college have a local expert on assessment who can be drawn upon to provide models of workable assessment practices in other disciplines.

Survey

At the behest of the Boyer Commission, the Reinvention Center recently conducted a survey of approximately 90 research universities to determine the extent to which the Commission's ten major recommendations have been part of research university agendas in the past three years.

The recommendations related to:

- Opportunities for research and creative activity
- Inquiry-based teaching
- Collaborative learning
- Freshman seminars
- Integrated first-year program
- Instruction in writing
- Instruction in oral communication
- Capstone courses and senior projects
- Teaching assistant training
- Faculty rewards promoting excellence in undergraduate education

The findings show that research university faculty and administrators are talking and thinking about the way undergraduate education is conceived and delivered to an extent they had not previously done. Four interests have received the greatest attention: 1) Expanding research/creative activities and making them the centerpiece of undergraduate education at research universities; 2) providing a first-year experience that promotes active learning and critical skills development; 3) revamping general education; and 4) improving students' writing abilities. Teaching resource centers have been established to help faculty improve their teaching. Beyond the classroom, the main focus has been on creating small social and academic communities that make large research universities more welcoming and manageable for all undergraduates, but particularly for first year students. Thus far most university efforts have been directed at the best students; the challenge for almost all is to reach a wider spectrum. The problem is particularly acute at public institutions which have more limited resources.

Supportive leadership and structures and resources are necessary to bring about substantive change. Faculty buy-in is also needed. The survey data suggest that campuses have revised their promotion-tenure guidelines to give greater recognition to efforts directed at undergraduates and rewards have been put in place on many campuses for faculty who go the extra step. Most faculty however continue to see research as the critical factor in promotion/tenure decisions and in their gaining national recognition for themselves and their departments.

Possible Center and Network Activities:

At the three prior regional network meetings, it was determined that the networks, working independently and in collaboration with one another, might engage in several activities:

- Collaborating to influence funding agencies. Speaking as one, for instance, network members might "lobby" the National Endowment for the Humanities to provide supplementary research grants to undergraduate, similar to those granted by the National Science Foundation. Their collective voice has the potential to yield greater results than one school can accomplish on its own. The NSF has indicated its interest in funding consortium activities related to undergraduate science education.
- Working with disciplinary societies to offer programs on undergraduate education at national and other meetings

- Holding a joint meeting with educational associations such as the AAC&U
- Serving as a clearinghouse and disseminating information on best practices, for example, through the Center Web site and through manuals, to be produced by network study groups.

All three groups determined to have second meetings.

How the Midwest network might function and what it might do was less certain. The presence of the CIC differentiates this group from other regions since subgroups within the CIC—including VPs for Undergraduate Education-- already cooperate and share information. For institutions that belong to the CIC, participation in the Reinvention Center network might duplicate the CIC function. Several suggestions were put forward. One was to organize the networks by theme or issue rather than by region. That would enable, even encourage, colleagues from CIC and other institutions to participate in network groups that were of interest to them. Setting up list-servs to address these themes would facilitate communication across regions. A second suggestion was to disband the Midwest group altogether and to invite non-CIC institutions from the Midwest to join other regional groups; CIC institutions that were interested would also be welcome in other groups. A third suggestion was to create a small Midwest network made up of non-CIC institutions. Finally, the Reinvention Center could establish a working relationship with relevant CIC groups. That way, the “collective wisdom” of the CIC could be useful for all the Center networks, and the CIC would be knowledgeable about Center activities.

While the future of the Midwest group and the relationship to the CIC has not been resolved, since the Chicago meeting several faculty from CIC institutions have indicated a desire to be involved in Center activities and to attend meetings elsewhere if the Midwest group disbands. Colleagues from Case Western Reserve, which does not belong to the CIC, attended the Northeast regional meeting in June. We would appreciate hearing your thoughts on this subject.

In response to the “homework” assignment that campuses submit three issues they would like the network to focus on, six subjects stood out:

- The First Year Experience
- Retention
- Assessment: What kinds of results (“outcomes”) do research universities look for and how do they measure them?
- Curriculum reform: 1) Finding better ways to teach both fundamental skills of numeracy, literacy, and critical inquiry across the curriculum as well as the kind of basic knowledge educated citizens ought to have; 2) Identifying effective ways of coordinating general education requirements across schools, especially on campuses where schools control their own requirements
- Involving busy teacher/scholars in undergraduate research
- Integrating research universities’ research and teaching mission

Network members or other colleagues at their institutions interested in working on any of the above issues should contact Dr. Katkin. Bibliographies and other background information on these or other topics are welcome as well.

ATTENDEES:

Case Western Reserve University

Samuel Savin, Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Glenn Starkman, Associate Professor of Physics
and Director, President's Commission on Undergraduate Education

Lee Thompson, Associate Professor of Psychology
and Director, Task Force on General Education

Angela Woollacott, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Indiana University

Julia Bondanella, Acting Director, Indiana University Honors College, and Professor of French
and Italian

Michigan State University

Barbara Steidle, Assistant Provost, Undergraduate Education

North Dakota State University

Alan R. White, Dean, College of Science and Mathematics

Northwestern University

Stephen Carr, Associate Dean, McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science

Robert Coen, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, College of Arts and Sciences

Stephen Fisher, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education

Gregory Light, Associate Director, Searle Center for Teaching Excellence

Ohio State University

Marilyn Blackwell, Associate Professor, Germanic Languages and Literatures

Alan Kalish, Director, Faculty and TA Development Center

Sally Rudmann, Associate Professor, Division of Medical Technology, School of Allied
Medicine

W. Randy Smith, Vice Provost

University of Illinois at Chicago

Mary Glenn Wiley, Professor of Sociology and Director, Special Academic Programs

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Keith Marshall, Associate Provost

University of Iowa

Lola Lopes, Associate Provost, Undergraduate Education

University of Kentucky

Phillip Kraemer, Dean of Undergraduate Studies

University of Michigan

Constance E. Cook, Director, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching and Associate Professor of Higher Education

Lester Monts, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Professor of Music

Shirley Neuman, Dean, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

Robert Owen, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education

University of Minnesota

Laura Koch, Associate Vice Provost for First Year Programs

Richard Skaggs, Associate Dean for Academic Programs, College of Liberal Arts

Craig Swan, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

University of Notre Dame

Eileen Kolman, Dean, First Year of Studies

Barbara Walvoord, Director, Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning

University of South Dakota

Donald Dahlin, Vice President, Academic Affairs

Royce Engstrom, Dean of Research and Graduate Education

University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Anthony Ciccone, Director, Center for Instructional and Professional Development