

The Education Initiative – Short Version

Developing an Integrated Model for High Impact Education for UC San Diego

Department Chairs' Meeting
May 11, 2012

Research has determined that certain educational practices can be called high impact because of their direct connection to student success. These practices include: first year seminars, common/core experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects.

We seek to adapt, tailor, and stretch the current best thinking about successful educational strategies to suit our campus and students, to achieve the following.

- Undergraduate students will have ready access to an integrated and clearly articulated educational experience that will support their intellectual, academic, cognitive and social development by capitalizing on our campus's strengths. This will include a curriculum that makes available to all students the high impact practices.
- Graduate students will participate in a comprehensive preparatory program that, in addition to guiding them in conducting research, will also help them communicate effectively, expose them to a range of possible careers, provide them with mentoring opportunities (both to be mentored and to serve as mentors), and otherwise develop them to be engaged leaders in academe and beyond.
- Faculty will have clear and comprehensible access to the latest research on learning and teaching, and will be provided the resources to learn how to incorporate it in their classes.

Research has also shown that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of students' learning and personal development. Students who are actively engaged in academic activities inside and outside the classroom display increased performance, retention, and overall satisfaction with the college experience.

The campus provides a variety of opportunities for disciplinary and co-curricular engagement, but there is room for greater coherence among these activities and classroom instruction. Access is decentralized, and is often difficult for faculty and students to navigate. Additionally, our culture is one in which each instructor "owns" the teaching and learning process for those courses/activities she or he oversees, thus leading to an environment in which there are no agreed-upon expectations for what constitutes success for our students. That some students are able to navigate this culture and, with the help of committed faculty and staff, devise a program of study and set of experiences that allow them to achieve many of the learning outcomes detailed above is not enough. Campus needs to address this issue vigorously to ensure that the majority of our students will leave the university prepared to make a positive difference in their profession, community and world and capable of responding to the social, technical, and global challenges they encounter.

Undergraduates

UC San Diego's departmental and college system provides a unique foundation on which the campus can build. The colleges provide many of the advantages of a small, intimate liberal arts community, including built-in learning/living communities and support services in which many of the intellectual and personal skills described above are honed through linkages among the major department, general education, and co-curricular experiences. At UC San Diego majors are developed within, and overseen by, faculty in academic departments. Thus, the conversation to reformulate critical learning outcomes for each student must necessarily include faculty with the critical expertise in their own disciplines and fields, and include both the colleges and departments.

More specifically, a real or virtual Center for Educational Engagement would provide access to current campus support organizations as well as additional infrastructure that expands support to undergraduate students and instructors. Components of the core facility could include, but not be limited to:

- Writing and Oral Communication
- Learning Skills/Tutorial Support
- International Education
- Career Development
- Academic Computing and Media Services
- Community Engagement/Service Learning:
- Assessment

Graduate Students

Many aspects of the planned educational paradigm for undergraduates will similarly benefit graduate students, but specialized activities are also required. It is increasingly obvious that many, if not most, of our graduate students neither aspire to nor can expect to secure positions as tenured faculty at Research I universities, i.e., they cannot become clones of their advisors. This does not imply that we are training too many graduate students because the skills acquired through graduate training in general, including traditional doctoral programs, are sought after and suited to a variety of additional career paths – ranging from working in an educational institution that focuses predominantly on teaching rather than research, through positions in private industry, to leadership roles in policy arenas, government and the arts. The ability to identify important problems, amass and then synthesize large volumes of evidence to support a specific course of action, generate new knowledge and disseminate it, and act in a highly autonomous fashion to direct one's own learning and that of others are all skills that are fostered by the process of developing a thesis or dissertation. At the same time, faculty often feel hampered when advising graduate students on so-called "alternative" career paths since many of them have had little or no professional experience outside the academy. Some central effort to provide graduate students with increased exposure to transferrable skills of value both inside and outside the academy would be worthwhile. This could include workshops on organizational dynamics, personnel management, public speaking, the fundamentals of finance, improved writing skills, and other topics to be identified by a broadly-based advisory group drawn from inside and outside the University.

We also must recognize the special place of the graduate student as both learner and teacher. Many of our students will make critical contributions to the education of undergraduates, and thus, like faculty, should be provided with tools to make them more effective in this role, and better able to foster student engagement. This aim can be realized with the assistance of a reinvigorated Center for Teaching Development. Training in how to become an effective teacher will benefit all graduate students, no matter their career goal. However, for those who wish to place special emphasis on their preparation for a teaching career, developing a certificate in university teaching as an adjunct to their discipline-based studies and research would be a tangible sign of their special commitment and training, and would enhance their prospects for employment.

The scope of this effort, if fully realized, will not be the result of quick fixes, though it could proceed incrementally. A critical success factor is the unequivocal support of the Executive Vice Chancellor, Dean of Graduate Studies, Associate Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education, divisional deans, department chairs, and college provosts. This necessitates a full and open campus discussion while allocating adequate resources to ensure that the vision we develop can be realized. Just as important will be the bottom-up, grass-roots support of faculty and professional colleagues who can envision a different model and are committed to working towards meaningful change.

The reality of managing change, the distributed nature of the campus, and the need to respect the institutional culture (and disciplinary sub-cultures), even while seeking common ground on principles and metrics for success all argue for a measured and systematic approach.

Who will be involved?

All faculty who want to be. A steering committee has brought us this far, and Committee on Committees has provided us names for a larger faculty working group. Contact Kim Barrett or Barbara Sawrey with questions or for more information.