Rethinking Pitt's General Education Curriculum

Faculty Assembly Overview

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Structure...

Strategic & Intentional Vision (VP-UG)

Office of the University Registrar

Curricular Reform, Institutional Policies (AVP Inclusive Excellence)

Pre-Health Advising Center (Director)

Educational Outreach Center (Director)

Student Success Hub and Advising & Mentorship (Director)

Academic Support Services for Student Athletes (Director)

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https://www.undergradstudies.pitt.edu

What is Inclusive Excellence?

The active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in people, in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase students':

- ✓ awareness,
- ✓ content knowledge,
- ✓ cognitive sophistication, and
- ✓ empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions.

– American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)

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Plan for Pitt

Our People

the Action

1 Create an inclusive and equitable campus environment—one that welcomes, values and embraces the diverse perspectives of every member of our community.

Recruit, develop, retain and promote a diverse body of students, faculty and staff.

Create a culture and welcoming community that promotes belonging, enables full participation and encourages individual exploration.

Add opportunities for students, faculty and staff to connect with their peers in meaningful ways.

Bolster mentorship and sponsorship opportunities for all, particularly historically underrepresented groups.

Review and revise institutional policies to augment equitable practices and eradicate inequitable ones.

Regularly evaluate diversity, equity and inclusion efforts to inform policy and practice.

2 Protect academic freedom; institutional independence; and the associated rights, responsibilities and privileges.

Foster an environment in which all campus community members' contributions are sought out and valued in the pursuit of knowledge.

Facilitate the sharing and exploration of intellectual differences and protect and preserve the pursuit of truth and its dissemination.

Ensure a respectful classroom environment that enables students to engage with new ideas and concepts and expand the bounds of their understanding.

Help students critically evaluate information and develop informed opinions about complex topics.

Encourage faculty members to pursue areas of research, scholarship and creative expression that are of personal and professional interest; follow their work to its logical conclusion; and contribute their insights to the broader profession.

3 Enrich the student experience with transformative opportunities to learn, grow and thrive.

Enhance and expand academic and social support systems that prioritize the well-being of students and reduce barriers to and stigma around accessing these resources.

Revise programming and curricula, where applicable, to better support student creativity, connection and wellness.

Prioritize engagement that facilitates connections with new people and ideas.

Ensure the student living experience is safe, affordable, and meets student needs.

4 Enhance the employee experience through robust talent development as well as transformative opportunities to collaborate, engage and advance.

Accelerate efforts to offer competitive compensation and benefits to both new and current faculty and staff and emphasize talent retention.

Enable faculty and staff to grow within their career paths and recognize the full range of professional contributions as part of career advancement.

Expand and incentivize talent development and mentoring for faculty and staff.

Promote policies and programming that prioritize employee health, well-being and sense of belonging.
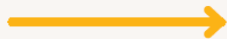
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Plan for Pitt

Our Programs

the Action

1 Enhance graduate and professional offerings in terms of their reputation, relevance and impact.

Incentivize and support innovation, risk-taking and interdisciplinary approaches.

Amplify strong programs, improve offerings that would benefit from reinvigoration, and identify opportunities for new or innovative offerings.

Enhance learning experiences and career development opportunities for doctoral, graduate and professional students.

Grow the number of faculty and students nominated for national and international awards and celebrate those who win.

Implement a comprehensive communications and marketing strategy for graduate and professional offerings.

2 Create more preeminent teaching, learning, scholarship and research experiences.

Prioritize student skill development in areas such as critical thinking, communication, leadership, data analysis, intercultural and global competency, and collaboration.

Enhance academic support systems to support personalized learning paths.

Optimize access for all members of the campus community to participate fully in the exchange of knowledge.

Facilitate opportunities for students at all levels to engage in research, scholarship and creative endeavors.

Expand the number and type of global and interdisciplinary learning opportunities within and beyond the classroom.

Promote and recognize excellence in teaching and curricular innovation.

Optimize technology to enhance curriculum and classroom experience.

3 Increase our participation and presence in multidisciplinary, solution-sized research projects.

Enhance policies and support structures that advance research innovation and promote complex and interdisciplinary team research.

Grow partnerships with the private, philanthropic, civic and nonprofit sectors—locally and globally—and aid scholars in navigating these new partnerships.
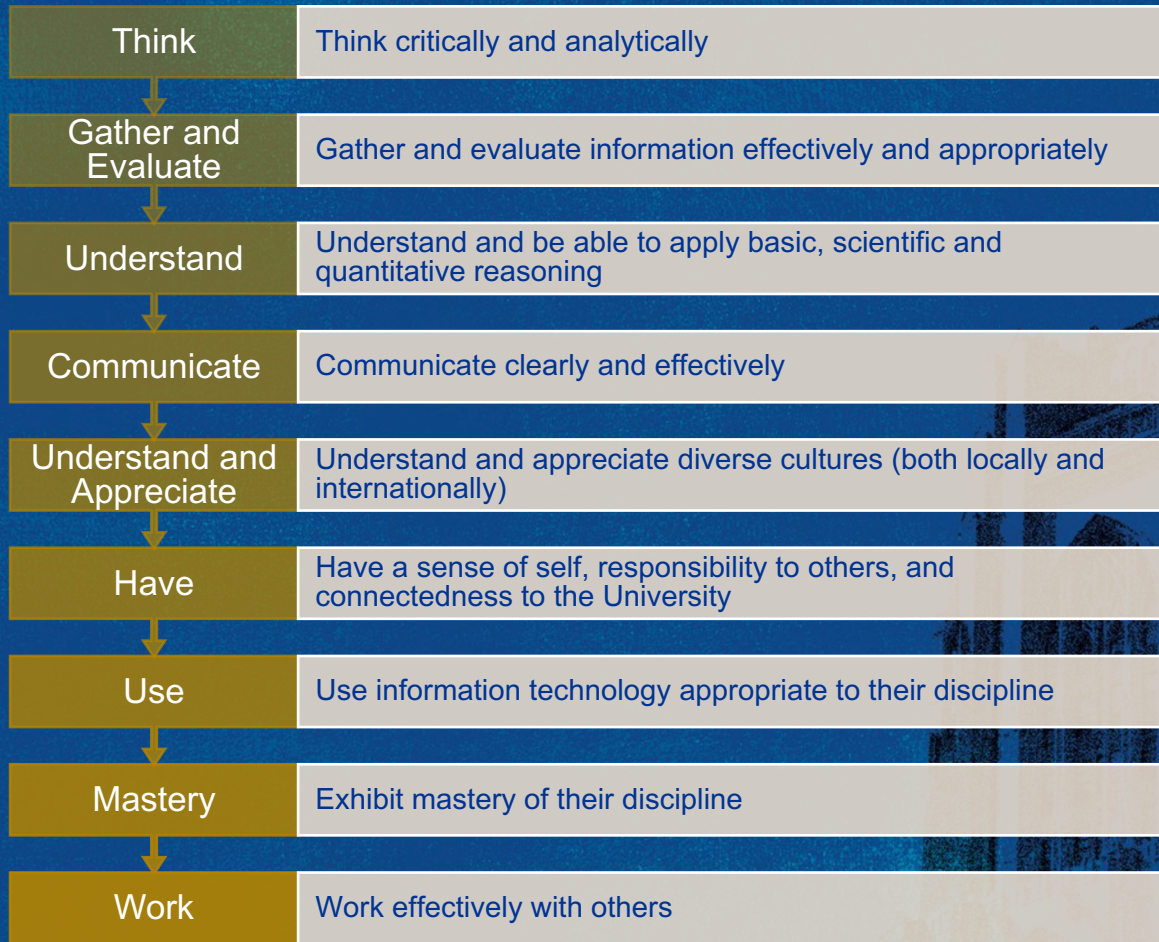
Recognize and value contributions to team discoveries as equal to individual findings.

Improve data-driven research infrastructure and digital solutions.

Create and share knowledge that can underpin breakthrough solutions.

Make local to global connections in research and create and expand global research collaborations and networks.

COD Defines Pitt General Learning Outcomes (in 2006!)

Think	Think critically and analytically
Gather and Evaluate	Gather and evaluate information effectively and appropriately
Understand	Understand and be able to apply basic, scientific and quantitative reasoning
Communicate	Communicate clearly and effectively
Understand and Appreciate	Understand and appreciate diverse cultures (both locally and internationally)
Have	Have a sense of self, responsibility to others, and connectedness to the University
Use	Use information technology appropriate to their discipline
Mastery	Exhibit mastery of their discipline
Work	Work effectively with others

Current Status of Gen Ed @ Pitt

- General Learning Outcomes are becoming outdated
  - Outdated relationship to equity and inclusion
  - Outdated language around data literacy and critical evaluation of information
  - Weak connection to ethics

- Little to no connection between Gen Ed (GERs) and Learning Outcomes

- All six first-year admitting schools espouse their own GERs (and upper-division schools include them via prerequisites)

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Issues with Current Status

- Vulnerable in future accreditation evaluation

- Hampered in developing transfer/articulation partnerships
  - Transfer rates have decreased nearly every year for a decade
  - We are being out-competed in facilitating pipelines

- Inter-unit (school/campus/institution) overly complex

- Extended time-to-degree
  - Over past 4 years 150 students:
    - Took > 6 years to graduate (many with far more than 120 credits) or
    - Have amassed 120 credit and *not graduated yet*!
  - Artificially deflates graduation rates
  - Increases debt load

- Many AAU peers are forging ahead (Ohio State, BU, SUNY)

➢ "As Beth McMurtrie writes in this issue, it comes down to thinking hard about a fundamental question: What is the purpose of the whole undergraduate experience your college offers? The time is ripe for that thought exercise because policymakers are demanding an answer. But you can't just tell them that a broad-based liberal education creates problem-solving innovators and engaged citizens; you must say how."

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

May 26, 2023
$7.99

Gen Ed Is Broken

'Why am I taking this class?' Colleges need better answers.

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University of Pittsburgh Self-Study 2022

Submitted to The Middle States Commission on Higher Education

University of Pittsburgh

➤ We excelled in "fostering a supportive and inclusive educational environment that is focused on holistic and individualized approaches to learning…that empowers our students to lead lives of impact" (19).

➤ In our pursuit of inclusive excellence in education, we have adopted innovative approaches to teaching, research, and community engagement that nurture an "inclusive ecosystem of learning that seeks to build awareness, challenge ways of thinking, [and] address inequities" (19).

Motivations for Gen Ed Reform

Explore Curricular Innovation Across Pitt's Schools and Campuses

- Build on lessons learned from faculty who have championed unit-level Gen Ed review/reform

- Identify student learning outcomes; explore connections to Gen Eds and pathways to majors/minors

- Consider how successful elements of first-year curriculum may be adopted Pitt-wide

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Motivations for Gen Ed Reform

Academic Equity & Inclusive Excellence

- Facilitate opportunities for students at all levels to engage in research, scholarship, and creative endeavors (*Plan for Pitt*)

- Reduce the credit burden for completion, esp. for students who change degree paths (intra-campus transfers)

- Improve transfer (Pitt inter-campus transfer, access/affordability for those coming from community colleges, simplify articulation agreements)

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Motivations for Gen Ed Reform

Good Pedagogy

- Simplify degree planning for students and advisors

- Shorten time to degree

- Increase graduation rates

- Encourage students' exploration and creativity across schools/disciplines leading to interdisciplinary research opportunities

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Motivations for Gen Ed Reform

Increased Transparency

- Leverage shared governance to define common learning outcomes across schools and campuses.

- Advise students toward cross-disciplinary connections, experiential learning, study abroad/away and other high-impact practices.

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Motivations for Gen Ed Reform

Improved Accreditation Compliance

- Demonstrate compliance across all schools and campuses (not just a few) with Middle States Commission on Higher Education Accreditation Standards and Requirements of Affiliation, especially:

  "assessment of student learning and achievements [that] demonstrates [they] have accomplished educational goals consistent with their program of study, degree level, institution's mission, and appropriate expectations for institution of higher education."

  MSCHE Standards for Accreditation
  https://www.msche.org/standards/

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Opportunities:
Students, Faculty, Advisors

- Promote student agency, flexibility, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit.

- Offer students more integrative understanding of core knowledge, skills, and awareness while developing competencies for professional success.

- "Expand the pathways to enable traditionally underserved residents to participate in success" (*Plan for Pitt*).

- Streamline transfer process for students from regional campuses into Pittsburgh-campus schools.

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Opportunities: Students, Faculty, Advisors

FIGURE 12

Employers do not believe most graduates possess the level of preparedness needed for workforce success.

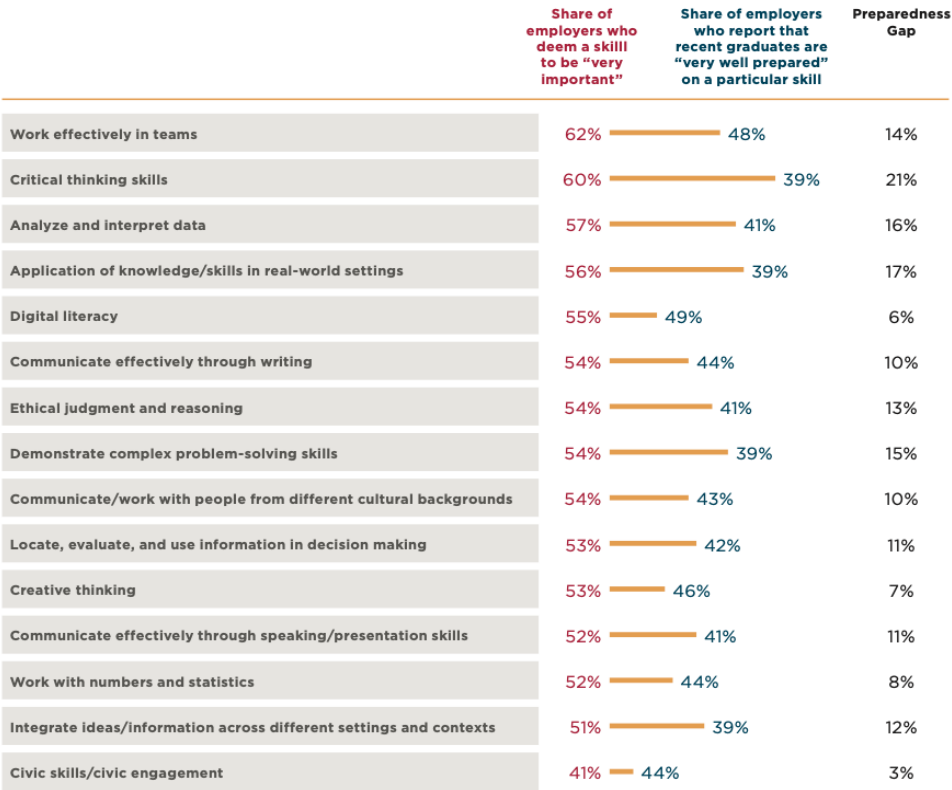|	Share of employers who deem a skilll to be "very important"	Share of employers who report that recent graduates are "very well prepared" on a particular skill	Preparedness Gap
Work effectively in teams	62%	48%	14%
Critical thinking skills	60%	39%	21%
Analyze and interpret data	57%	41%	16%
Application of knowledge/skills in real-world settings	56%	39%	17%
Digital literacy	55%	49%	6%
Communicate effectively through writing	54%	44%	10%
Ethical judgment and reasoning	54%	41%	13%
Demonstrate complex problem-solving skills	54%	39%	15%
Communicate/work with people from different cultural backgrounds	54%	43%	10%
Locate, evaluate, and use information in decision making	53%	42%	11%
Creative thinking	53%	46%	7%
Communicate effectively through speaking/presentation skills	52%	41%	11%
Work with numbers and statistics	52%	44%	8%
Integrate ideas/information across different settings and contexts	51%	39%	12%
Civic skills/civic engagement	41%	44%	3%

Define Measurable Learning Outcomes

- Develop unified Gen Eds that lead toward intentional ESSENTIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT of all Pitt students that can be assessed across schools.

"Employers have consistently reported that although a solid majority of college graduates may be prepared to succeed in entry- level positions, far fewer have the full set of skills needed to advance or be promoted. The only way for campus leaders and educators to truly know if students are prepared to enter the workforce is to assess where students are on outcomes—at the beginning, middle, and end of the college journey" AAC&U--*How College Contributes to Workforce Success* (2021).

Next Steps

•What excites or motivates you about this opportunity?

•What are your initial thoughts and questions?

•How can we work together to:
 ➢ review existing landscape and benchmark?
 ➢ develop thoughtful recommendations?
 ➢ solicit appropriate feedback and approvals?
 ➢ anticipate and plan for change?
 ➢ create a sustainable approach to operationalizing and assessing expected outcomes?

Next Steps

- Currently Engaging Leadership Across Schools/Campuses

- Build a Representative Taskforce
  - Curricular Design Working Group
  - Operational/Implementation Working Group
  - Administration & Assessment Working Group
  - Advisory Groups

- 3-year Timeline
  - Launch Taskforce Spring 2024
  - Engagement & Benchmarking 2024
  - Models Review, Discernment, Feedback, Approval 2025
  - Plan and Prep Pilot Year 2026

- Communication
  - Website, Email
  - Regular Updates & Feedback Loops
  - Storytelling

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Thank you!

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