Rebuilding Undergraduate Curriculum in Languages and Cultures of Asia Using Internet Benchmarking, 2001-2002

A Case Study

► Unit(s):
Languages and Cultures of Asia, College of Letters and Science

► Customers of the Process and Their Needs:
The faculty needed a way to make decisions about reconfiguring the undergraduate curriculum and determining requirements for the LCA major.

► Problem/Opportunity Statement:
The Department was restructured and renamed in 1999. The former Department of South Asian Studies, which had focused on India and Pakistan, became the Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia (LCA), including within its scope three geographic regions—South, Southeast, and Southwest/Central Asia. The task of the assessment team was to create a coherent undergraduate curriculum that bridged the geographic regions and the disciplinary approaches of literature, religion and culture. While peer institutions had comparable programs, it was not possible in terms of time or money to travel to other campuses to learn more about their curriculum. The solution to the problem was to use the Internet to learn about alternative possibilities for the curriculum and to benchmark these programs at other institutions.

► Changes Made:
1. Faculty met and came to agreement on broad statements of what students should know, understand, and be able to do upon graduating with a four-year degree from the department of LCA. They compared the current departmental requirements with those outcomes.
2. Heather Sonntag, a graduate student, researched 24 peer programs via the Internet. Initially, she had identified the questions of interest through a brainstorming process with the Curriculum Committee. The benchmarking study of other programs’ goals and requirements required 75-80 hours. When faculty members requested sample syllabi from other programs, Heather sent the requests via e-mail and found the other programs to be responsive to those requests.
3. An Alumni Survey was created and made available via the Internet as well as an Undergraduate Exit Survey. Among the items on these surveys were questions regarding achievement of the outcomes the faculty had identified for the program such as functional language proficiency.

► Results to Date and Expected:
Changes made to requirements for the undergraduate major included requirement of coursework in each of the three regions of Central and Southwest Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. A learning outcome identified by faculty had been the ability to compare one region of interest with another. The department now requires that courses focus on the flow of ideas between and among the societies of these three regions in contemporary and historical periods.
► **Lessons Learned:**

1. Heather Sonntag, the graduate student who assisted Professor Uli Schamiloglu, chair of the curriculum redesign committee, said that sitting in on meetings with the Curriculum Committee and the faculty enhanced her awareness and understanding of the project.

2. Interacting with others involved in assessment (University Assessment Committee and other departments) was useful for networking.

3. LCA’s interest in emphasizing literature was rare among other programs.

4. The use of EXCEL spreadsheet for recording answers to benchmarking questions facilitated recording and comparison of data.

5. Much can be learned about the variety of options for studying about Asia by studying other university offerings found on web sites.

► **Next Steps:**

Monitor feedback from student surveys and take action as appropriate.

► **Contacts:**

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