

**Achieving Mission Learning Outcomes through the Drake Curriculum  
Proposal  
Feb. 20, 2006**

Report prepared by  
Nancy Reincke, Kathleen Richardson, Lon Larson, John Burney

Drake University has the opportunity to better achieve student learning by tying our mission outcomes to the Drake Curriculum. The Higher Learning Commission, which will visit Drake in 2008, makes it clear that each institution must clearly understand its own mission and deliberately craft programs to achieve that mission. It is in our control as an institution, however, to determine that mission and to clearly identify the distinguishing characteristics of Drake. Last year faculty, staff, and students joined in a process of carefully elaborating the learning outcomes to be drawn from Drake's mission statement. Now we are engaged in a multi-year process to insure that we intentionally pursue those outcomes in our academic and co-curricular programs.

This report presents the first stage of that process. Faculty and staff involved in developing it are excited about the possibility of reaching across the lines of the Drake Curriculum to make a joint effort to achieve an active pedagogy that enhances responsible learning and critical thinking. We also believe that an attempt to achieve reflective practitioners and engaged citizens through a sophomore year experience and revised senior capstones can create a distinctive identity for Drake-educated students and help us begin to realize the promise of the integration of liberal and professional studies. These revisions will help students to achieve a clearer understanding of the purposes of their general education courses. Collaboration among faculty will enrich our own roles as teachers as we share expertise and pedagogical strategies. All, faculty, staff, and students, will have the opportunity to take greater ownership of the goals of the Drake Curriculum.

This first stage will allow us to intentionally pursue development of key mission goals, while at the same time provide valuable experience as we move to discuss other areas of the Drake Curriculum. In the next two years the University Curriculum Committee will work with the Criterion 3: Student Learning and Effective Teaching and Criterion 4: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge committees to design the process to review other areas of the Drake Curriculum, and to suggest additional methods to develop and sequence experiences and courses to achieve our learning outcomes. This report was shared with the campus community in November 2006 for discussion by colleges and individual comments – these comments were posted on a website. We have incorporated some changes into the draft in order to reflect that feedback.

**The Background:**

In 2004/05 the Criterion 3: Student Learning and Effective Teaching and Criterion 4: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge committees, in consultation with the University Curriculum Committee and Director of the Drake Curriculum, came together to analyze the achievement of student learning outcomes called for by the Drake mission statement explication (as approved by the Faculty Senate in November 2004 and the Board of Trustees in January 2005) and map them on the current general education

curriculum. The committees then charged summer study groups to deepen that discussion in four areas and return with recommendations for practical and “teachable” models for achieving the student outcomes called for in the mission explication. These outcomes are essentially our institutional “promise” to students. As such the project meets several specific needs in achieving Goal 1 of the strategic plan to ensure the excellence, currency, and appropriateness of academic programs.

The committees identified gaps between the current curriculum expectations and the new outcomes as well as a lack of a common understanding of the outcomes required in certain curriculum categories. Rather than tossing out the current curriculum, we determined that we could achieve key outcomes by developing a more consistent understanding of definitions and evaluation rubrics across Areas of Inquiries, as well as adopting pedagogical strategies to engage students in their learning. Several benefits will result.

- Common pedagogical strategies for achieving effective collaboration, critical thinking, and communication will allow us to be intentional in achieving the liberal arts skills and dispositions called for in our mission statement.
- Strategies that are applied across disciplinary lines will increase the likelihood of student learning since students will encounter the concepts in more than one course.
- Providing a developmental sequence within the Drake Curriculum will permit more depth in the development of intellectual skills and dispositions, since students will be asked to apply their knowledge rather than just see each general education course as simply a requirement to be checked off.
- A common understanding of outcomes will provide students with the context for the general education requirements, and aid them in understanding how their general education courses relate to their major programs, and to co-curricular programs.
- A common understanding of outcomes will allow faculty to better assess whether students are achieving learning under the Drake Curriculum and to discuss improvements.

It will take 2-3 years to carefully review the implications of the mission outcomes for all the Areas of Inquiry. Eventually, evaluation criteria will need to be reviewed for each area. The Criterion groups determined to start the process in the four key areas given below while the University Curriculum Committee begins the larger process of reassessing the defined criteria for each area. It should be understood that the implementation of these first recommendations should lead to additional study and proposals for tying together other key areas of the curriculum. More than 20 faculty and staff participated during the summer and fall of 2005 in studying these four areas of outcomes. Although the four members mentioned above were responsible for drawing the group reports into a draft for consideration by the campus community and then the University Curriculum Committee, all members of the summer study groups were able to read and comment on all the reports and this draft. They included Paul Morris, Kris Crabtree-Groff, Ericca Sadoris, Linda Krypel, Jim Romig, Beth Younger, Bruce Gilbert, Colin Cairns, Jennifer McCrickerd, Jayne

Smith, Chrystal Stanley, Amy Wisniewski, Matt Esposito, Bill Boal, Maura Lyons, LaRhee Henderson, LouAnn Simpson, Ronda Menke, and Sue Wright.

Group 1: Collaborative and Responsible Learning.

This group researched pedagogical models to achieve the mission statement outcomes related to students taking responsibility for their own learning, developing an ability to value the input of others and working collaboratively within groups to solve problems.

Group 2: Critical Thinking, Research, and Communication of Knowledge.

This group researched pedagogical models to achieve the mission statement outcomes related to students developing a holistic concept of critical thinking.

Group 3: Responsible Global Citizenship.

This group researched pedagogical models to achieve the mission statement outcomes related to making students “engaged global citizens.”

Group 4: Reflective Practitioners.

This group researched pedagogical models to achieve the mission statement outcomes related to making students “reflective practitioners.”

The full reports of each group were made available for any faculty, staff, or students who wished to consult them. This final recommendation has taken that input, as well as the multiple strategies discussed in the initial reports and attempted to draw them into an integrated proposal for discussion and potential approval by the University Curriculum Committee and the Faculty Senate.

**We make the following recommendations:**

**A. On Collaborative and Responsible Learning:**

Research demonstrates that students develop as collaborative learners who take responsibility for their learning and retain more of what they learn when they are more fully engaged in the learning process. Thus we recommend that this statement of active learning pedagogy be adopted for the Drake Curriculum and that a coherent faculty development program to achieve the best practices in active learning be initiated for faculty who teach in the Drake Curriculum.

The pedagogical statement below is an attempt to articulate for the Drake Curriculum a working definition of active learning and guiding principles for incorporating as much active learning as possible within the Drake Curriculum. Just as we ask our students to be self-reflective about their learning, the Drake Curriculum asks us to be self-reflective about our teaching and intentional in how our courses achieve the outcomes specified by our mission. We understand that many factors influence the level of active learning that takes place in our classrooms, including class size, class format and the training of individual faculty. We understand that we can all benefit from faculty development in pedagogies emphasizing active learning methods. Even though a class may still be by-

and-large a lecture class, faculty might experiment with a number of techniques to vary the learning. Part of the faculty development workshops will be devoted to means to improve improving these more traditional methods as well as discussing more interactive pedagogies.

***Recommendation 1: Adopt the following Statement of Pedagogy to guide the development and approval of courses in the Drake Curriculum.***

The purpose of the Drake Curriculum is to provide students with a meaningful liberal education. Drake students will gain the breadth of knowledge and skills necessary to successfully function in a complex and rapidly changing world. The Drake Curriculum helps to prepare students for meaningful personal lives, professional accomplishments, and responsible global citizenship.

There is considerable variation among courses that fulfill requirements in the Drake Curriculum. Given differing class sizes and learning outcomes, a variety of teaching methods and learning activities are performed within Drake Curriculum courses. However, there are certain pedagogical principles that guide teaching and learning within this curriculum.

The guiding principle is that, no matter what pedagogical strategy is used, instructors are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of that approach and take steps to increase active learning. Whether classes are primarily lecture-based or discussion-based, instructors are expected to use active learning methods appropriate for that strategy. Active learning encompasses both independent and collaborative activities and helps students acquire and practice the habit of critical thinking. Active learning is augmented by authentic assessment in which students are asked to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes.

With its emphasis on both personal fulfillment and social responsibility, the Drake Curriculum encourages teaching methods that promote self-knowledge and self-development as well as knowledge about and responsibility toward others. As much as possible, the Drake Curriculum encourages an interactive, student-centered pedagogy in which students take responsibility for constructing knowledge and making meaning from that knowledge. Assignments encourage students to collaborate with each other and their instructor in generating goals and exploring significant issues, thus taking responsibility for the learning of their classmates as well as for themselves.

The core elements of active learning desired in Drake Curriculum courses include:

- active exchange of ideas among students and instructors
- engaging students in inquiry and problem solving
- connecting and applying learning to real world experiences
- collaborative and small group work
- peer critique and faculty-student conferences
- methods of classroom assessment that provide instructors with early feedback on student comprehension of material and acquisition of skills.

## **B. On Critical Thinking, Research, and Communication of Knowledge.**

In order to pursue active and collaborative learning, students need to be able to critically evaluate and apply knowledge, not just memorize and repeat knowledge. Active learning pedagogy helps develop students as collaborative learners who respect diverse viewpoints, but it is also important that they are able to apply rational or logical analysis to critically evaluate arguments and engage in inquiry and problem solving. While the Drake Curriculum has a number of individual categories that address elements of critical thinking, a more comprehensive approach across several areas will help students to learn and apply the method.

***Recommendation 2: Adopt the following model of reasoned analysis and teach it in several Areas of Inquiry to promote the development of critical thinking by students.***

All classes in the Drake Curriculum encourage the development of critical thinking skills. The need for critical thinking crosses all disciplines. Nurturing such thinking is at the heart of what we do as a university. Critical thinking is integral to the development of students as responsible learners and engaged citizens of a global community.

Students should encounter a variety of modes of knowledge and critical thinking. Each major program teaches critical thinking as appropriate to its discipline and the Drake Curriculum exposes students to a several valid approaches to knowing. However, the Drake Curriculum makes a particular intentional effort to guide students to acquire the skills for rational analysis and argumentation that is purposeful, rigorous, self-reflective, and based on a careful consideration of evidence.

Critical thinking is not learned automatically. It requires explicit instruction and guided practice. At the same time, students must be encouraged to think and work independently. While rational analysis and argumentation may be present to some extent in all levels of the Drake Curriculum, faculty will design active learning assignments or incorporate explicit research projects that develop rational analysis and argumentation in the First Year Seminar and these Areas of Inquiry: Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, Historical Consciousness, and Engaged Citizen. Students will learn to

- 1) clearly define a question or problem.
- 2) gather information that is relevant to that problem.
- 3) rigorously identify assumptions and preconceptions, including their own, that influence analysis of that problem.
- 4) organize and prioritize the information to develop a rational argument that:
  - a. states a clear claim or thesis.
  - b. provides reasons for holding that claim.
  - c. provides relevant evidence to support each reason.
  - d. considers alternative explanations in reaching a conclusion.
- 5) communicate that reasoned argument effectively in speech, writing, or other medium as appropriate.
- 6) realize that results are tentative and open to revision.

Teaching critical thinking is most effective when faculty adopt best practices in pedagogy and both teachers and students pursue clarity, accuracy, fairness, and mutual respect in their discussions.

### **C. On Responsible Global Citizenship.**

Evaluation of the current Drake Curriculum found that our efforts to achieve outcomes related to developing responsible global citizens are somewhat fragmented. Pressures to provide enough courses did not permit a great deal of coherency in the development of programs for the Engaged Citizen category of the curriculum. Thus, at times the courses were not designed to achieve the broader learning outcomes called for in the mission explication. However, sharpening the definition of the category, lifting all classes to sophomore standing and above, and creating a distinctive Sophomore Year Experience focused on responsible global citizenship could have several benefits.

- Most of the Drake Curriculum consists of individual courses and topics; the Sophomore Year Experience creates a common experience for all Drake students.
- The Sophomore Year Experience puts a distinctive stamp on Drake's curriculum while intentionally pursuing several of the core outcomes of the mission through both content and pedagogy.
- A powerful common experience in the sophomore year could help students become aware of and engaged in public issues.
- Focusing curricular and co-curricular programs on the same significant global issue and theme encourages continued learning outside the classroom and emphasizes that learning occurs in many ways; it prepares the student for life-long learning.
- Placing the Engaged Citizen courses at the sophomore level allows classes to go into more depth on critical public issues, creates a mix of majors for interdisciplinary learning, and enables students to be better prepared to do significant experiential learning.
- As we connect the communication and critical thinking skills taught in the Engaged Citizen to those begun in FYS and continued in some of the individual AOIs, we provide students the chance to integrate and demonstrate foundational skills.
- An interdisciplinary program at the sophomore level would enhance the integration of liberal and professional studies by bringing students from a variety of majors into a common process of inquiry.

It should be noted that we are not adopting a narrow definition of engaged citizenship. The mission explication clearly calls for engagement that recognizes both the "larger goals of stewardship inherent in their professional endeavors," and in which students "assume responsibility for the common good of local, national, and global communities." Thus while a part of this is fulfilling "responsibilities as citizens in a participatory democracy," the communities involved should be thought of in a larger sense than just political. The Engaged Citizen category, when combined with additional support from other Areas of Inquiry, will help students to further develop the knowledge and skills to be actively engaged in any community, whether that means an academic discipline, a

church, a charitable organization, a parent's group, a political party, or any other type of group that attempts to engage for the common good.

***Recommendation 3: Add language (in italics below) from the Mission Explication to the description of the Engaged Citizen AOI.***

“Drake students learn to participate effectively in democratic processes. Democracy relies upon the participation of an engaged, knowledgeable and responsible citizenry. As preparation for active participation in public debate, Drake students learn to evaluate the mix of diverse values and interests that influence democratic decision-making. *In a sophomore level course, students have the opportunity to bring diverse disciplines to bear in further developing the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that will lead them to be active stewards working for the common good of local, national, and global communities.*

This requirement is fulfilled through coursework that challenges students to critically reflect upon the social, economic or political institutions and issues that shape the choices they face as citizens. Instructors *will* provide students with opportunities to model democratic practices or public engagement through participatory activities organized in the classroom and/or community. *Engaged Citizen courses require sophomore standing and a prerequisite of successfully passing one Drake Curriculum History AOI or one International and Multicultural AOI course.*”

Note: Advisers would have to help guide students to properly sequence their course choices during their first two years. But since students are required to take two courses from the Historical Consciousness category, it does not appear to be an undo burden to ask that one of them or a multicultural course be taken during the first three semesters. The requirement holds the promise of providing students more practice with critical thinking skills and more background knowledge on global issues before they enter an Engaged Citizen course.

***Recommendation 4: Review and re-approve current courses to ensure congruence with the AOI description and encourage the development of new courses for the Engaged Citizen category.***

All new proposals and courses that are currently approved for the Engaged Citizen AOI will submit to the University Curriculum Committee a statement indicating the manner in which they meet the outcomes stated for the category. More specifically, the statement will address the ways in which the content and pedagogy of the course engage students to achieve one or more of these outcomes:

- Learn to evaluate the mix of diverse values and interests that influence democratic decision-making.
- Establish skills, knowledge, or dispositions that will lead them to be active stewards for the common good.
- Critically reflect on the social, economic, or political issues that they will face as citizens.

- Learn democratic practices or public engagement through participatory activities organized in the classroom and/or in the community.

***Recommendation 5: Incorporate the Engaged Citizen AOI as Part of a Sophomore Year Experience.***

The Sophomore Year Experience will focus the campus community on the discussion of a significant public issue or theme each spring semester. Although we will need to provide flexibility for those students who cannot take their Engaged Citizen (EC) courses as sophomores in the spring by making several sections available each fall; we will plan to offer the bulk of EC courses in the spring semester. New courses and existing courses will be designed to engage students in the exploration of the annual theme, and co-curricular programs, presentations and workshops will involve the larger community in the discussion. In order to create the opportunity for an integrated and enhanced learning experience for students, we recommend these elements:

- a. Faculty development workshops will be held with all EC instructors in order to help them design assignments to build on the critical thinking and communication skills introduced in the First Year Seminars and other areas of the Drake Curriculum, to learn creative ways to engage students in the discussion of significant public issues, and to share successful active learning and service learning pedagogies.
- b. Each spring, six to ten new courses will be developed and taught tied to the major public policy issue or theme that is identified for exploration that year. Regularly taught Engaged Citizen courses also will address the theme directly in their content and/or indirectly by having students encounter the theme through co-curricular experiences: attending on-campus speakers, discussion groups in residence halls, special workshops, etc. Note that some of the special thematic courses eventually may enter the rotation of regularly offered EC courses.
- c. Study abroad experiences may be developed where they lead to reflection upon the core outcomes of the EC category. Note: Short-term study abroad experiences, whether between semesters or after the end of the spring semester, may be developed to satisfy this requirement.
- d. Development funds will be used to create substantial co-curricular programming and special events connected to the theme (speakers, workshops, films, plays, etc.), often in collaboration with student life.
- e. The EC classes will stress having students take some ownership of and responsibility for their learning. On one level, each EC class will involve students through active learning pedagogy. On another level, students will be involved in the processes to select the annual theme and programming. An Engaged Citizen Committee, composed of faculty, staff, and students, will identify the annual theme, and then work with the UCC, colleges, and relevant Centers to plan faculty development workshops on both content and active learning strategies for EC courses as well as identifying and

coordinating co-curricular programming on the theme for the spring semester each academic year.

Thus the Engaged Citizen category in the Drake Curriculum is a mix of specially designed thematic courses that may be taught only once or twice and regularly repeated courses, all on topics of democratic engagement and/or significant public issues that have local, national, and global dimensions. As such, a student may take an EC course at any time after they fulfill the prerequisites. However, we will make a special effort to create a community discussion with the Sophomore Year Experience, which will combine special curricular offerings with substantial co-curricular programming during each spring semester.

#### **D: On Reflective Practitioners**

The Senior Capstone is the culminating academic experience of the Drake Curriculum. It requires students to demonstrate mastery of the knowledge they have acquired in their disciplines and of the broader abilities of the general education curriculum. In addition, the capstone should encourage the development of students as *reflective practitioners*, keenly aware of their ethical responsibilities as professionals to the larger society. To these ends we recommend the following elaboration of requirements for senior capstones.

***Recommendation 6: Add the following criteria for Senior Capstones: “The Senior Capstone is a rigorous experience that intentionally addresses three elements: experiential learning, reflection, and the integration of general education abilities with disciplinary knowledge and skills.”***

The University Curriculum Committee will work with academic programs to flexibly implement the new criteria. Academic programs should experiment with innovative and creative ways to incorporate these elements into their capstones:

**Experiential learning:** The capstone includes an active, hands-on/minds-on concrete project or experience. The experience — research, practice, performance — allows students an opportunity to work independently, make decisions, develop an idea, and/or demonstrate creativity.

**Reflection:** Students are required to reflect on their capstone project and its implications. Both in framing and executing the capstone project, students are encouraged to view it within a larger professional, disciplinary and cultural context.

**General education:** The capstone integrates the general education abilities — for example, writing and speaking, critical thinking, ethics and the qualities of an engaged citizen — with the major.

**Capstone Days:** To emphasize and celebrate the significance of the capstone, the university reserves a time period near the end of spring semester during which classes are canceled and public presentations of capstone projects take place. The public presentation provides an opportunity for the community to see the academic activities of students and for younger students to better understand the outcomes of their education.

Administratively, the Senior Capstone is an all-university activity, with responsibility for the capstone shared by the university and departments:

**Sharing responsibility:** The university is responsible for establishing the overall goals and expectations of the capstone experience, while each academic major and program is responsible for designing the activities and requirements of its capstone.

**Support:** The university provides support to the departments in enhancing their capstones. This support may include workshops and faculty development programs, financial resources for materials, and a commitment to keeping the student-to-faculty ratio low in capstone courses. Designing activities for the capstone and assessing student performance should involve most, if not all, of a program's faculty members. In addition, capstones should be considered just one part of a "senior experience," that might include such elements as internship or practicum experience, community service, career planning, and networking with alumni.

**Prior approval:** To encourage greater consistency among university capstones, the University Curriculum Committee reviews and approves capstone courses.

**Assessment:** The university and departments share responsibility for assessing the achievement of general education learning outcomes in the capstones. However, assessing and grading the performance of individual students in a capstone lies with the faculty of the academic program.

#### **E. Implementation Timetable**

We believe that implementation of these recommendations will provide a richer learning experience for Drake students and permit a more intentional achievement of several key mission outcomes. Therefore, we urge immediate consideration and action. Faculty development is key to support these changes in the Drake Curriculum.

If approved by the University Curriculum Committee and the Faculty Senate, we would collaborate to develop the program with this tentative initial timeline:

January-March 2006: Discussion by the university community, approval by the University Curriculum Committee and Faculty Senate. Budget proposals for faculty development funds for FY 2007.

Summer 2006: Faculty Development program on active learning pedagogy and the model of critical thinking. Open to all Drake Curriculum faculty, these workshops would particularly point at introduction of these programs with the First Year Seminar courses. Preliminary workshops on models of active learning for the redefined Engaged Citizen category.

2006/07: UCC review of courses currently taught for the Engaged Citizen Category and revision as needed. UCC Task Force review of senior capstones with recommendations on revision. Creation of an Engaged Citizen Committee with faculty, staff, and student representation and the identification of first Sophomore Year Experience theme for development of courses to be taught in Spring 2008.

Summer 2007: Faculty development program on Sophomore Year Experience/Engaged Citizen courses. Faculty development program on revision of capstone experiences. Faculty development workshops for new FYS instructors.

2007/08: Implementation of all recommendations.

**F. Resources and the larger Drake Curriculum evaluation:**

Adequate human and financial resources will need to be committed by the institution order to achieve real curriculum innovation. Thus, in collaboration with the Provost, Lon Larson and John Burney have submitted a \$100,000 Strategic Improvement Plan for the 2006/07 budget year for faculty development and program assessment to accomplish curricular change. Determination on faculty resources would follow through the implementation process.

As stated in the introduction, it is important for the University Curriculum Committee to work with the Criterion Committees to develop a plan for the continuing evaluation of outcomes in the rest of the Drake Curriculum. Part of that consideration might be whether by developing a more focused curriculum we could free faculty for the development of innovative courses and learning experiences that meet mission outcomes. Thus, we are willing to work with the UCC to help create a process for further review of the Drake Curriculum in summer 2006.