

Curriculum II Strategic Plan Final Plan Due 1 May 2009

Section 1

1.1 Mission and vision, and goals

Overview of the Program

Curriculum II is the core curricular option for general education at Gustavus. Like Curriculum I, Curriculum II introduces students to different ways of knowing, providing a breadth of knowledge and understanding which complements the more specialized study represented by the student's major. Curriculum II, however, provides an integrated approach to general education. It focuses on the development of the intellectual and cultural traditions originating in western Europe, the exploration of values, and especially the relationship of the individual and community. Intercultural comparisons are also integrated into the program.

Curriculum II is, as one alumnus put it, "liberal arts education at its best." Students are encouraged to see connections between various fields and to think critically about themselves and their traditions and beliefs. They are challenged to address such questions as "What has brought us to think as we do? Who am I and what do I value? What is 'the good life'?"

Typically each year 60 incoming students elect to fulfill their general education requirements through Curriculum II. In any one year 20 sections of 10 different courses are offered, and over the last 10 years 16 departments from all divisions of the college, in addition to the Chaplain's office, have participated in the teaching of Curriculum II.

Mission

General Education at Gustavus Adolphus College is one expression of our commitment to helping students develop their potential as persons, establish habits of life-long learning, and cultivate capacities for reasoned and responsible citizenship. In our tradition as a church-related liberal arts college, students study a broad spectrum of disciplines to develop their whole persons: body, mind, and spirit.

In Curriculum II students develop knowledge and demonstrate understanding of the artistic, literary, religious, philosophical, and scientific heritage of the western tradition, and explore the values that led to the development of democracy and other key facets of our society. Curriculum II encourages the appreciation of interdisciplinary connections and the relationship between past and present. Study of foreign languages furthers the students' understanding of themselves as part of a global community. Curriculum II challenges students to identify and develop values, to realize that those values are related to social and cultural norms, to appreciate other value systems, and to relate these insights to their fields of study and the roles they will play as citizens of the

world. Curriculum II also encourages personal health and fitness, and competence in quantitative and analytical reasoning, writing, and speaking.

Curriculum II is one of the best embodiments of the college's mission, nurturing almost all of the elements enunciated in the college's Mission Statement. It helps promote an international perspective by requiring language study and encouraging study abroad. It is designed to be interdisciplinary. Like Curriculum I, it requires a course to help foster "a mature understanding of the Christian faith." But Biblical Tradition, taken in the students' first semester, is reinforced by an examination of values, ethics, and faith throughout the program, especially in Individual and Morality and culminating in the Senior Seminar, where students discuss ethical issues in the contemporary world and write a final paper on the development of their own values and their impact on what they see of their future. Curriculum II classes are especially effective in promoting the open exchange of ideas and the individual pursuit of learning since the classes are discussion oriented and students have a common base of knowledge and an unusual level of knowledge and trust of each other, resulting in deeper and more candid discussions. Some students and faculty have suggested making Curriculum II an honors program because the courses are challenging and the program attracts some of our best students. But because of its combination of challenge and the support provided by being a small community, the program both pushes and supports all of its students to attain their full personal and intellectual potential. Because of the values emphasis, it also prepares them for "fulfilling lives of leadership and service." Alumni attest to Curriculum II's effectiveness in developing in them a passion for life-long learning.

Curriculum II's special contributions to the totality of the college are numerous. In addition to being a particularly good embodiment of liberal arts education and the college's mission statement, Curriculum II makes Gustavus unusual. Few other colleges offer its students the choice of two general education programs, and most of the colleges offering a core curriculum program do not have such extensive four-year programs, especially if they are not honors programs. Although Curriculum II is not an honors program, it still attracts some of our best students, as indicated by the number of Curriculum II students elected to Phi Beta Kappa. In a 2003 poll of the National Merit first-year students, Curriculum II tied with Music for the highest number of mentions as an influence on the student's decision to enroll at Gustavus. Curriculum II students also are particularly active in leadership and service at Gustavus, being elected to the Guild of St. Ansgar and the Guild of St. Lucia in disproportionate numbers compared to their percentage of the student population.

Vision

Curriculum II must build on its present strengths. It takes consistent attention and hard work to keep the very best aspects of the program thriving. The program will continue to develop in students a historical perspective. To quote from an earlier rationale for the program: "It is as true of the person interested in science or social sciences as of the person interested in art, literature or history itself, that a "historical sense" – characterized by T.S. Eliot as "a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" – more than any other aspect of our education liberates us from narrowness,

parochialism and chauvinism.” The connections between courses, many of which were established in the founding of the program, will continue to teach students the interconnectedness of all knowledge and we will look to create even more of these connections. This emphasis on looking at questions through the various lenses of different disciplines will remain a distinguishing feature of the program. Strength of community is vital to the success of the discussion oriented learning that characterizes almost all courses in Curriculum II. The trust and bonds between students, within and between cohorts, will continue to be developed through a variety of activities. Finally, the attention to moral and ethical questions that has been built into several courses, culminating in the senior seminar, will continue to lie at the core of the program and we will search out new ways to renew this emphasis.

Though there may be a myriad of ways to enhance and supplement Curriculum II as described above, a few recent initiatives at Gustavus are well suited to both its strengths and needs. First, service learning has become established at Gustavus as a central and distinguishing feature of what we offer our students. Turning ideals into action is a logical extension of the moral and ethical emphasis in Curriculum II. Although service learning has begun to be incorporated into the Individual and Society course, it could be more regularly expected of our students. Another growing area of interest at Gustavus has been expanding our students’ global perspective. Although students in Curriculum II have always been required to take more foreign language and studied abroad at greater rates than Curriculum I students, there is still room for improving their exposure to and understanding of a global, especially non-western, perspective. We might want to revisit the possibility of a non-western requirement, and at least review the systematic inclusion of non-western material in our courses. Finally, greater diversity of both faculty and students would improve the program in a variety of ways. We will search out new strategies and venues for recruiting diverse faculty and students to Curriculum II.

Goals

Goal 1: Promote the liberal arts through a signature program that embodies the liberal arts tradition, integrates multiple ways of knowing and educates students for the twenty-first century in a learning community of students and faculty.

Goal 2: Help students to understand and engage with the world to make a difference.

1.2 Programs

Not applicable

1.3 Support relationships

Curriculum II depends on faculty from many departments to staff its courses and to participate in the curricular and extra-curricular activities that make it a thriving community of learners. Below is a list of the courses in the Curriculum II program and the departments (arranged alphabetically) that have typically staffed individual courses in recent years:

Historical Perspective I CUR-100: Classics
Historical Perspective II CUR-110: History
The Individual and Morality CUR-120: Philosophy
The Biblical Tradition CUR-140: Religion
The Individual and Society CUR-210: Education, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology/Anthropology
Musical Understanding CUR-220: Music
The Visual Experience CUR-230: Art and Art History, Classics, English, Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures, Philosophy
Theatre Arts CUR-240: Theatre/Dance
The Literary Experience CUR-250: Classics, English, Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures
The Natural World CUR-260: Biology, Education, Geology, Physics
Senior Seminar CUR-399: various, including Chaplain's Office and Library

A key contributor to the Curriculum II program is the Administrative Assistant in the Office of the Provost (currently Leslie Weber, taking over from Kathy Scholl), who manages many of the organizational operations, assisted by two student assistants who are Curriculum II students.

Chaplain Brian Johnson has also contributed to the program in a number of ways: teaching courses, participating on retreats, and hosting regular Curriculum II BBQs at his house.

Section 2 Strategic Review

2.1 Strategic issues

I. Strengths

The Curriculum II program is felicitously aligned with the mission of the college in both its conceptual design and its execution. Among its great strengths are the cohesion, full engagement and clear sense of common purpose that its faculty and students share. The Curriculum II program offers a model of learning that encourages independent thinking and intellectual curiosity. Its integrated curriculum is particularly suited to developing a coherent understanding of the liberal arts and exploring their interrelations. Curriculum II attracts faculty who favor interdisciplinary approaches; collectively, they bring considerable interdisciplinary and global expertise to the program. The program enjoys broad college-wide support and enthusiastic support

among its alumni. It makes key contributions to each of the five core values that undergird the college's mission:

1. Excellence

In the last external assessment of the program (2003), the external reviewers (Margaret Downes and Mel Piehl) characterized Curriculum II as a "strong signature program", describing it thus:

In its Curriculum II, Gustavus Adolphus has what all colleges struggle, not always successfully, to establish: a "signature program." Such a program serves as the most obvious proud feature on the public face of the institution, expressing the core of its character and its commitment to the values proclaimed in its Mission. A signature program attracts a student body and a faculty ready and willing to fulfill those values; it also helps to focus alumni, and the wider public, on the points that inspire the whole college.

Curriculum II is a strong signature program, serving as a wonderful embodiment of Gustavus Adolphus College's mission of church related liberal arts higher education. Curriculum II's students, accepted for their professed love of learning, experience rigorous and joyful education in a bonded community of learners, and thus provide heart to the whole campus.

Curriculum II serves the college's commitment to academic excellence in the following ways:

Its students: Curriculum II offers its students a rigorous, rich and conceptually integrated framework for a liberal arts education in a learning community that fosters a love of learning and encourages students to excel. Although Curriculum II is not an honors program and does not select participants on academic merit, a disproportionate number of Curriculum II students attain academic distinctions such as induction into Phi Beta Kappa and national scholarship awards, and the students and faculty in the program give high marks to the academic enrichment that the program offers. Many Curriculum II students take on leadership roles on campus. The program develops writing skills, emphasizes the reading and analysis of primary texts, and cultivates in-depth discussion and student-centered learning.

Its faculty: Curriculum II also offers faculty the considerable benefits that arise through participating in a cohort of intellectually curious faculty and students who share in an integrated curriculum. Many faculty report that their Curriculum II classes are among their most rewarding teaching experiences, and that teaching in Curriculum II and interacting with Curriculum II colleagues has led them to develop innovative courses and enriched their scholarship.

The college: Curriculum II typically attracts students who are eager to engage in serious inquiry and who are invested in their education. The program is known as a distinctive feature of the college, and is frequently cited by students as a factor in their choosing Gustavus; recommendation by Curriculum II alumni also contributes significantly to recruitment. Curriculum II also makes significant contributions to the vibrant academic life of the Gustavus community as a whole. As the external evaluators noted (p. 2),

“Curriculum II appears to benefit the whole campus, as the program’s energy and accomplishments are spread by its students’ and its faculty’s involvement in non-Curriculum II classes and activities.”

2. Community

Community is a particular strength of the Curriculum II program. Students take a sequence of courses as a cohort; over the course of these shared courses, they develop relationships of trust that encourage mutual respect and the open and vigorous exchange of ideas. An endowment through a National Endowment for the Humanities grant allows the program to offer a rich array of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that enrich the academic experience, build community, and foster mentoring relationships between faculty and students.

3. Justice

The program places a particular emphasis on questions of values and the individual’s roles and responsibilities within the community. Students gain an understanding of the historical contexts out of which our concepts of justice have developed, from Hammurabi’s Law Code, the first charter of rights, to Aristotelian ethics. Indeed, ethical issues are a major component of almost every course in the sequence; by the end of the program, students have viewed the issues of justice from a number of disciplinary perspectives.

4. Service

The program’s emphasis on values and consideration of ‘the good life’ offer a compelling call to a life of service to the greater good. The retreats for freshmen, juniors and seniors, provide regular opportunities for vocational reflection, including talks by Curriculum II alumni engaged in service to their communities. The Curriculum II Senior Seminar offers a capstone course in which students explore their own values and the influences that have shaped them, and consider the practical implications of living out these values in their future lives. Many Curriculum II students actively participate in service learning projects while at Gustavus, and a number of alumni serve in volunteer programs (e.g. Teach for America, ELCA Global Mission, Lutheran Volunteer Corps, Jesuit Volunteer Corps, and the Peace Corps) or enter professions of service to others.

5. Faith

The program offers many opportunities for exploring faith. In the Biblical Tradition course, students gain an understanding of the social and historical contexts in which the Jewish and Christian faith traditions developed, and hone the analytical skills that equip them for scholarly engagement with the Scriptures. Indeed, the program offers a sustained exploration of the intersections between faith and learning from a variety of disciplinary perspectives – for example, the Individual and Morality course investigates a range of moral problems, while the Natural World course examines epistemological

questions of how we know what we know. Students writing papers for the senior seminar frequently find that their religious beliefs (or lack of religious beliefs) form an integral part of their articulation of values. The program offers co-curricular opportunities for reflection on issues of faith such as a weekend retreat at Blue Cloud Abbey. The program also seeks to foster an understanding of the diversity of faith traditions both within the curriculum (e.g. the Historical Perspective I course studies Greco-Roman religions and Islam) as well as in its co-curricular offerings (e.g. presentations on Buddhism).

The program is well served by a permanent endowment through a grant by the National Endowment for Humanities. This endowment funds a wide array of enrichments to the program, including retreats, cultural events (e.g. visits to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and to theatrical productions), faculty retreats and course development.

II. Weaknesses

Some of the same elements that are strengths of Curriculum II are also its weaknesses. Its integrated curriculum, in which students take a prescribed set of courses in an established sequence, offers fewer course options and less scheduling flexibility than its counterpart, Curriculum I. Since students can only join the program in their freshman year and since students are free to drop out at any time, attrition is a concern. The reasons that students most frequently cite for dropping out of Curriculum II are the heavy workload, scheduling conflicts, and the lack of choice and/or flexibility inherent in the curriculum. Some students have also found the program's focus on a liberal arts tradition rooted in western civilization restrictive.

An integrated program such as Curriculum II depends for its success on a faculty that can invest time and thought into making the integration a reality (e.g. through regular dialogue, retreats, and the leadership provided by the program director). Similarly, a learning community requires an active commitment by faculty and students alike to building community and participating in co-curricular activities. The program continues to benefit from a committed cadre of faculty, administrative staff, and students, but the retirement of original core members of CII faculty and increasing demands on the time of newer faculty from competing demands is a real and growing threat to the continued success of the program.

Staffing is another concern. Like other non-departmental programs, Curriculum II relies for its staffing on faculty with departmental teaching obligations, and staffing courses has frequently been a challenge.

Finally, it is perhaps not surprising that a program that enrolls only a small proportion of Gustavus' students (with a maximum capacity of 60 entering students, i.e. less than 10%) and is taught by only a few of its faculty, faces the continuing challenge of combating misconceptions, building support for the program, and equipping faculty to offer informed guidance to advisees within the program.

2.2 Barriers

The college needs to develop a holistic plan for staffing its general education programs. Faculty hiring decisions (including replacement positions and new lines) must

respond to the needs of the general education programs as well as those of individual departments and programs, and the expectation that new hires will contribute to the general education programs must be clearly articulated and put into practice.

Section 3 Strategic Initiatives and Recommendations

Goal 1: Promote the liberal arts through a signature program that embodies the liberal arts tradition, integrates multiple ways of knowing and educates students for the twenty-first century in a learning community of students and faculty.

Strategic Initiative: Strengthen the academic program at Gustavus and advocate for the value of a liberal arts education.

Tactic (e.g.) Collaborate with other constituencies on campus (e.g. Center for Vocational Reflection, Hanson-Peterson Chair for Liberal Studies, departments and programs) to provide programming (e.g. lectures, workshops, fora etc.) that enhance the academic program, explore liberal arts perspectives, and articulate the value of a liberal arts education.

Tactic (e.g.) Consider instituting regular lectures organized by Curriculum II, with student and faculty respondents.

Tactic (e.g.) Offer opportunities for the intellectual development of faculty (e.g. lunchtime conversations about ideas).

Tactic (e.g.) Offer a reading in common book for CII students and faculty and guests.

Strategic Initiative: Recruit and integrate new faculty into the program.

Tactic (e.g.) Working in partnership with the Provost, make a commitment to regular participation in Curriculum II a consideration in allocation and approval of new faculty lines and appointment of new faculty hires

Tactic (e.g.) Recruit current faculty members who have not yet had the opportunity to teach in Curriculum II and would like to do so.

Tactic (e.g.) Support course development (e.g. through course development grants) and offer regular opportunities for CII faculty to enhance the integration of their individual courses into the curriculum as a whole.

Strategic Initiative: Strengthen the interdisciplinarity of the program

Tactic (e.g.) Engage in continuing curriculum assessment and development to enhance the interrelation of courses and foster interdisciplinary approaches (e.g. through student evaluations, curricular planning, faculty retreats, team-taught courses, especially between faculty in different disciplines, sharing of course syllabi, developing a reserve shelf of course texts).

Tactic (e.g.) Provide a course release for a new CII faculty member to sit in on other CII classes, read books from other CII courses etc.

Strategic Initiative: Enhance the visibility of the program both within the college community, alumni, and the broader public.

Tactic (e.g.) Enhance the program's presence on the web by creating a content-rich and visually appealing website show-casing co-curricular activities, course content, student work, student achievements, and offering testimonials of students, faculty and alumni of the program.

Tactic (e.g.) Rename Curriculum II (so that the name communicates the program's identity and strengths).

Tactic (e.g.) Promote awareness of the program within the Gustavus community as a whole and among prospective students.

Tactic (e.g.) Develop a Curriculum II newsletter (print and web-based).

Goal 2: Help students to understand and engage with the world to make a difference.

Strategic Initiative: Fully integrate diverse perspectives and the study of global cultures into the program's curriculum.

Tactic (e.g.) Review all recent Curriculum II syllabi and discuss with faculty ways in which intercultural perspectives can be brought more fully into the program's curriculum.

Strategic Initiative: Increase the diversity of the students in Curriculum II and of its faculty.

Tactic (e.g.) Conduct information and recruiting presentations for Curriculum II at secondary schools in the Twin Cities.

Tactic (e.g.) Increase outreach efforts to attract a culturally diverse student body.

Tactic (e.g.) Provide tutoring support and mentoring to help students succeed and avoid attrition.

Tactic (e.g.) Articulate the principles underlying the ethical and cultural traditions that have gone into the development of the polity (e.g. democracy, freedom of speech) that support intercultural respect and understanding

Strategic Initiative: Explore options for providing service learning as part of the program's curriculum.

Tactic (e.g.) Encourage service learning as a component of the Individual and Society course.

Strategic Initiative: Expand opportunities for students to use alumni who are serving their communities locally and internationally as a resource.

Tactic (e.g.) Use a newsletter to create a more active and engaged network of Curriculum II alumni willing to help a new generation of Curriculum II students.

Section 4 Assessment

For many of the specific tactics under the strategic initiatives the director of Curriculum II must simply report annually whether they have been successfully completed. In other cases it will be necessary for the new director of Curriculum II, in consultation with the Curriculum II faculty, deans and provost, to set the specific terms of the desired change. It would seem most effective if the new director of Curriculum II proposed a realistic timetable, over the course of his three year term, for the successful realization of tactics selected from those mentioned here.