

Brief History and Overview of IUPUI General Education and Principles of Undergraduate Learning – August 2005

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Provided by Sharon J. Hamilton to IUPUI Academic Affairs Committee Chair Betty Jones on 8-12-05

Foreword

The emergence of a coherent, intentional program of general education at IUPUI has followed a fitful course similar to most developments at this still-young urban university, formed in 1969 through the merger of a number of graduate professional programs with brand new schools in the arts and sciences. For more than a decade, ideas have flamed brightly only to fade; consultants and national reports have been eagerly embraced only to lose their urgency as spring semesters gave way to summers; committees have labored only to have their reports languish; and yet there has been a determination and constancy among small numbers of faculty from many different fields and professions who have persisted over the years to the point now of creating a solid framework for all of undergraduate education. Even as the participants have changed, there has been a continuous dialogue and seriousness of purpose to the discussions.

The promise of the latest stages of this transformation is great, and the Principles of Undergraduate Learning embraced by the faculty as a whole have taken on specific meaning and context within the 15 or so schools offering undergraduate degrees. IUPUI has implemented a plan for general education with a strong, clear purpose and sufficient flexibility to accommodate the extraordinary range of students who pursue baccalaureate and associate degrees in the state's richest variety of program offerings.

Through its Principles of Undergraduate Education with their emphasis on demonstrated student learning outcomes, IUPUI is about to begin a new era in its development. We are establishing the bedrock foundation on which the future of undergraduate education can be built. Unlike most colleges and universities with a century or more of tradition and evolution, IUPUI has had to invent itself and its principles quickly, reversing the historical evolution of fundamentals from a historic core to new programs and degrees as they are added.

At IUPUI, we have been building inward from the well-established professional programs with their graduate orientation to form a new, vital core in the traditional arts and science disciplines. The result is a conceptual framework that integrates and links the professions with the arts and sciences out of both practical utility and a commitment to ideals and values that define the purpose of baccalaureate learning. Our Principles of Undergraduate Learning have been designed to serve as a foundation for both further education--whether in the professions or in the myriad forms of life-long learning--and for use in leading productive lives as citizens and workers.

This necessity of looking inward from the professions to what is honestly shared by all programs has allowed the faculties to work together across disciplines and professions to determine what elements and what relationships are essential--and thus define the coherence, purpose, and shared values of baccalaureate education at IUPUI. The Principles of Undergraduate Learning belong to all faculties alike, and provide the tools necessary for the decades ahead when American higher education must accommodate an unprecedented range of interests, an increasingly diverse and mobile student population, an explosion of new information, and mediated forms of learning which affect the very structure of traditional higher education.

To the casual observer, the history of general education at IUPUI may appear disjointed and even contentious. Yet there is a continuous thread of an idea and a harmony of discourse, which have linked each of the separate efforts and produced a structure which should serve this campus well for a long time to come. It has emerged as a commitment of the faculty to student learning and to developing student potential to its fullest. This core idea--and thread--has been wrapped with other ideas in the processes of debating the means and ends of general education, of accommodating electronic learning and distance education, of understanding the importance of assessing student performance and linking student work to overarching goals, of giving meaning and purpose to degrees in ways that do not depend on continuous enrollment or to residency at a single place, and of considering the very diversity of the faculty itself, including the role of adjunct and part-time colleagues.

We begin the new millennium confident that we are providing our students and our institution with the basis for distinction and success. The Principles will endure, but they will be used and honored in our ability to change quickly to meet the real needs of students and of society as we continually assess our own performance and seek ever to improve. The Principles of Undergraduate Education are the framework in which we place individual courses, through which we create new degrees, and by which we attract new faculty who share our optimism about the future of higher education in one of the world's most promising urban research universities.



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Preface

Taking the Roads Less Traveled

The task of designing and implementing a coherent institution-wide program of general education seems to be one of the most formidable challenges we face in higher education. In fact, faculty on many campuses elect not to confront this issue at all. They recognize how divisive it can be for scholars from a variety of disciplines to try to reach agreement in defining the knowledge and skills all students should develop as foundation for the major and for life-long learning. So they simply provide a list of introductory courses in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences and require students to take two or three courses from each category. A primary justification given for this approach is that students will be exposed to a variety of ways of knowing and will make their own meaning of the collective experience.

Colleagues at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis have confronted the challenge directly--bringing faculty from twenty-something schools as disparate as medicine and music into discussions about the meaning of undergraduate education. As described in the *Introduction*, this process took nearly a decade to complete. Committees were appointed, reports were written, exceptions were taken to one or more aspects of the content, and subsequently this sequence of events had to be repeated with a new committee. In the midst of this process IUPUI was visited by a team representing the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools--our regional accrediting body--and told by team members that the approach to general education that was underway was not promising: It would take too long to complete and indeed agreement might never be achieved. The team was correct that completing the process would take time, but finally, in 1998, six Principles of Undergraduate Learning (PULs) were approved by the Faculty Council.

IUPUI faculty took another road less traveled in deciding to integrate the PULs with the learning outcomes for each major, thus enabling students to practice and strengthen their generic skills throughout their years at IUPUI. To accomplish this integration might have taken another decade. But conversation about the Principles was so widespread and had been underway for so long that nearly everyone on campus had heard of them by the time they were approved. Some schools with disciplinary accreditors to satisfy, notably Nursing and Allied Health Sciences, had already begun to integrate the PULs with their own curricula by 1998, and most others were considering ways to do so by the time the Principles were formally adopted.

By far the easiest way to assess learning outcomes in general education and the major is to purchase a standardized test and provide for its administration centrally so that faculty do not have to assume much of the responsibility for it. IUPUI faculty would have none of that; from the outset they have insisted on developing their own assessment mechanisms for their general education-infused majors.

Since IUPUI has no campus-wide curriculum committee, no central group has the authority to approve curricula. In the absence of a body to review and approve courses that should enable students to learn the PULs, each school is responsible for recommending the

course of study that will do that for their students. In this environment it behooves us to take stock from time to time of the schools' progress in integrating the PULs with their curricula for majors and in assessing student achievement of the Principles.

Thus in 1999 we undertook a study of the implementation and assessment of the PULs within the individual schools that constitute IUPUI. To carry out this work we appointed three senior faculty, all of whom had participated in the early campus discussions of general education that ultimately led to the adoption of the Principles. For the last year these Faculty Associates for Undergraduate Learning have worked with the Director of Campus Writing to document the progress associated with the PULs in the schools.

Not surprisingly, the status of implementing and assessing the Principles is uneven when viewed from a campus-wide perspective. Faculty in the Schools of Nursing, Allied Health Sciences, and Engineering & Technology are farthest along the path. But with the implementation of the Principled Curriculum, both Liberal Arts and Science faculties are beginning to build a solid foundation for development and assessment of the PULs for students in all majors.

This is a decades-long work in progress. Our next task must be to ensure that the data derived from assessment are employed in every discipline to improve instruction and curricula continuously. We are indebted to all the faculty who have devoted their time and energy over the last ten years to the difficult work of achieving agreement on the PULs among their colleagues. Now we are grateful to Sharon Hamilton, Director of Campus Writing; and to David Bostwick, Rebecca Van Voorhis, and Richard Ward, the Faculty Associates for Undergraduate Learning, for describing progress on the intermediate steps of integrating the Principles in the majors and assessing student learning thereof. The 2001 E.C. Moore Symposium provides a showcase for some of the most noteworthy accomplishments in this connection that have occurred in the schools to date.

We are still some distance from our goal of establishing a robust scholarship of teaching, learning, and assessment at IUPUI, that is, faculty activity that provides students with a strong foundation of knowledge, skills, and values but also seeks direction for continuous improvement through the collection of evaluative data and reflection on the implications of the findings for practice. We invite others to travel this road with us, either as evaluators who can make recommendations along the way for improving our program or as participants in a similar approach to general education and assessment on their own campuses.



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Introduction

A Brief History of the Principles of Undergraduate Learning at IUPUI

In 1991, the Council on Undergraduate Learning, comprised primarily of deans of academic units responsible for undergraduate education, and the Academic Affairs Committee of the Faculty Council established a Commission on General Education to “oversee development of a centrally coordinated approach to general education for undergraduates at IUPUI” (General Education at IUPUI: Report to the Campus Community, October 1993). Prior to 1991, design of the general education curriculum for students had been the responsibility of each school.

In its earliest deliberations, the Commission identified three possible approaches to general education:

1. the *distributive approach*, which defines required areas and specifies requirements within those areas;
2. the *core curriculum approach*, which involves the development of a set of courses required of all majors; and
3. the *process approach*, which focuses on the learning experiences of students and coordinates those experiences across disciplines to provide all students with knowledge and skills considered appropriate by the faculty.

While the campus had been employing a more or less *distributive* approach, there was no guarantee of commonality of general education experience. A *core curriculum* had been explored and then rejected by the School Liberal Arts and the School of Science. The Commission therefore chose the *process* approach because it seemed most likely to succeed at IUPUI, a campus organized almost thirty-five years ago “from a collection of well-established professional schools and (at that time) less well-established undergraduate programs” (General Education at IUPUI, October 1993).

A *process* approach to general education necessitates widespread and ongoing involvement of faculty. Consequently, within the first two years of its formation, the Commission involved more than two hundred IUPUI faculty in the following six initiatives:

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| 1. First Annual Symposium on General Education | April 1992 |
| 2. Report to the Faculty | September 1992 |
| 3. Faculty Study Groups on General Education | 1992-93 Academic Year |
| 4. Second Annual Symposium on General Education | April 1993 |
| 5. Report to the Campus Community (the “Blue Book”) | October 1993 |
| 6. Open Faculty Forum on General Education | November 1993 |

Concurrently, “outside forces and institutional pressures” influenced the work and plans of the Commission. The 1992 NCA accreditation team strongly urged the IUPUI campus to identify desired outcomes for general education that were amenable to meaningful assessment. This required the inclusion of academic unit administrators and curriculum committees throughout the decision-making processes and initiatives of 1992-93. During

the summer of 1993, members of the IUPUI Commission on General Education participated in what was, at that time, the annual Lilly Endowment Workshop. During the intensive two weeks of this workshop, the team synthesized the two years of deliberations by faculty and administrators and, based on the conclusions of the faculty study groups, developed a “description of an approach to general education that support[ed] the institution’s mission and a plan for reconciling the process approach with the NCA’s recommendations” (General Education at IUPUI, October 1993). Out of these deliberations came the initial set of eight Principles of Undergraduate Learning (Working Draft: General Education at IUPUI, October 1993):

1. Higher order thinking involves uses of reading, writing, speaking, quantitative reasoning, and computer technology. Students develop these ways of learning in all general education courses.
2. Critical thinking requires the ability to integrate knowledge and experience. Students learn integration through exploring their own values and intellectual commitment and demonstrating their expertise in a discipline as it applies to a context wider than the discipline.
3. Intellectual adaptability requires familiarity with ways of thinking and knowing in a range of disciplines.
4. Self-awareness increases ability to learn from and about others. Through curricular and co-curricular activities, students learn about themselves as whole human being, i.e. their intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual selves.
5. Knowledge is constructed and verified through collaboration. Collaborative learning gives students a voice in creating knowledge.
6. Engagement in co-curricular activities outside the classroom builds community in order to advance learning. Students become part of the University community by participating in campus activities.
7. Understanding our culturally and ethnically diverse society includes learning about conflicting values, traditions, and histories, and developing empathy for others. Students develop this understanding through coursework, service, co-curricular activities, and work experience.
8. Service beyond the self is a way to achieve meaning. Through regular service, students learn how to enact their personal and civic responsibilities to others.

While a few schools and academic universities began to integrate these eight principles into their curricula, most schools did not accept the principles in this first iteration.

In 1994, the Council on Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) was formed, initially to explore the possibility of a merger between the two schools. When CLAS realized a merger was not possible, the Council turned its attention to curricular commonalities

between the two schools, and, in 1995-6, began work on a common “core curriculum.” During these CLAS conversations, the Dean of Liberal Arts condensed the eight principles of undergraduate learning into five, eliminating explicit attention to service learning and co-curricular activities, and moving collaborative learning into prefatory comments. CLAS agreed upon this set of five principles as a foundation for its core curriculum, and began to call its proposed curricular structure “The Principled Curriculum.” This proposed core curriculum, based on five Principles of Undergraduate Learning, was approved by the respective Faculty Assemblies of the School of Science and the School of Liberal Arts in 1998.

Concurrently, discussions about the Principles of Undergraduate Learning were occurring among many different campus committees and academic units. A General Education Advisory Committee was formed in 1994 to replace the Commission on General Education, and it began work to have the Principles approved by the whole campus. In the course of these conversations, many faculty proclaimed the need for ‘Values and Ethics’ (which had been embedded in ‘Understanding Society and Culture’) to have its own explicit, separate Principle. In late 1997 to early 1998, the five Principles of Undergraduate Learning became six, as ‘Understanding Society and Culture’ and ‘Values and Ethics’ became discrete principles. These six Principles of Undergraduate Learning (the current PULs) were approved by the IUPUI Faculty Council in 1998.

With the campus-level approval of the PULs and the Schools of Liberal Arts and Science approval of the Principled Curriculum based on the PULs, the next step was to make explicit the role of the PULs in undergraduate education across the campus. Schools and academic units were asked to show, in their annual reports of student learning, how the PULs were integrated with the course goals and learning outcomes of academic programs. By 1999, most schools had explicitly integrated the PULs into their curricula, and described this integration in the annual report of student learning submitted to the Office of Planning and Institutional Improvement. The final step (to date) has been to gather specific information on how the PULs are taught, learned, and assessed in each school and academic unit, and to identify some exemplary best practices employed by faculty. In the spring of 2000, three Faculty Associate positions were created in order to collect and collate this information campus-wide. These Faculty Associates, working with the Director of Campus Writing, met with faculty and administrators from every school and academic unit on campus to determine how their curricula advanced student understanding of the PULs in relation to specific course and program requirements. Their work forms the major part of this progress report.

During the summer of 2000, three summer institute teams met to explore three different aspects of the undergraduate learning experience at IUPUI: the Diversity Inquiry Group; the Asheville Institute Team, and the AAHE Summer Academy team. The Diversity Inquiry Group began work to produce an annotated bibliography on pedagogical strategies, course and curriculum approaches, and classroom behaviors that seem most effective in creating a welcoming climate for students. In essence, they were finding ways to integrate several aspects of two of the six PULs in their work: “Understanding Society and Culture” and “Values and Ethics.” Their work will continue throughout the 2001-2002 academic year, but some of their preliminary work is already reflected in the matrices and narrative of the

relevant PULs. The Asheville Institute Team identified a set of courses that is now being called ‘the empirical core’: general education courses required by most schools and academic programs. What they discovered, not surprisingly, is that this empirical core could be very easily mapped to the PULs. This mapping, while not currently in an explicit graphic form, is a next step for implementation. The AAHE Summer Academy identified 25 Gateway Courses (those courses most commonly taken by students during their first two semesters at IUPUI, a list very similar to the “empirical core”), with a focus on ways to improve the learning experiences in these courses. One of the ways being discussed is to make the coherence of the general education structure more apparent to the students with a focus on the PULs as the foundation for learning.

That leads directly to another initiative directly related to general education, the implementation of the PULs, and the documentation of student learning in relation to the PULs: the IUPUI Student ePortfolio. Currently moving to beta testing phase, the student electronic portfolios are designed for students to track and document their learning experiences at IUPUI, beginning with the PULs, and then moving into the work of their chosen major or professional school.

With so many initiatives in their developmental stages, this can only be an interim report of our progress toward implementing a plan for general education at IUPUI. However, it is a plan built upon the work of hundreds of faculty over the past ten years, with structures in place for continued growth and coherence, and with the ultimate goal that student learning at IUPUI will indeed exemplify excellence in terms of documented learning achievements not only in the major but also in foundational and transcendent areas of knowledge and skills: the IUPUI Principles of Undergraduate Learning.



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