



A Call to Action:  
*Curriculum and Learning*  
*At Georgetown*

**Curriculum Conversations (Phase I)**

Executive Summary of Themes and Directions

Next Steps

Timeline

Provost's Ad Hoc Working Group on the Curriculum

Georgetown University

March 27, 2009

## *A Call to Action*

Every educational interaction is an opportunity to challenge students to higher levels of achievement. A successful curriculum will make these opportunities plentiful and engaging, for both students and faculty. Faculty want to be sure that students who graduate from Georgetown have learned from us, made the most of these opportunities, and acquired for themselves critical skills, knowledge, and habits of mind and heart that will serve them well throughout their lives. Faculty and administrators together bear the important responsibility of confronting the challenges presented by the world our students are entering and asking whether we are shaping a curriculum that responds to them.

Understanding how – and how well – we approach the design and delivery of a challenging educational experience was the topic of conversations for an ad hoc working group on the curriculum convened by the Provost during 2007-2008<sup>1</sup>. This document is a summary of those conversations, accented by a few particularly pointed comments by participants, and it invites response from the Georgetown community about how we all may best move forward.

Helping to set the stage for our working group were the original 1996-1997 and more recent 2007 Intellectual Life Reports. Those reports, themselves calls for action, underscored communal concern about the nature and role of our curriculum. In our current conversations, we shared many concerns and questions about whether the curriculum may be over-structured, and bottom-heavy (and in some quarters requirement-heavy); and we were concerned whether there are too many lower-division courses that, while doing excellent work at introducing disciplines, may not be doing enough to give students a challenging and enlivened foundation for passion, depth, and integration in their learning. The ambitious may have too little opportunity to gain altitude, while those without clear initial direction may have too few opportunities early to be inspired to rise to the challenge.

The working group also agreed that the way forward was not to propose a monolithic alternative (a “new curriculum”). Rather, by understanding the strengths and specific potentials of Georgetown’s educational programs, the working group shone light on particular opportunities for change. The fact is that we must talk now to effect. We must act. We cannot keep on “muddling through.” Beyond these general points of concern, the working group concentrated on a few key, recurring themes:

- General education and the lower-division experience
- Writing and communication
- Research and a culture of inquiry
- Scientific and quantitative literacy
- Religion and faith in a liberal education
- Integration and integrative learning

The working group also discussed a set of questions related to Georgetown’s distinctive character and the ways that it should shape expectations for the curriculum. These ideas to a large extent come under the heading of “formation.” Georgetown is successful when the students who pass through its halls encounter

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the Provosts ad hoc Working Group on the Curriculum were: Professors Paul Almeida (MSB), Patrick Deneen (Government), Charles King (Government/SFS), Patrick O’Malley (English), Deborah Phillips (Psychology), Jordan Sand (East Asian), Cristina Sanz (Spanish & Portuguese), Ed Soule (MSB), Christopher Steck, SJ (Theology), and Jennifer Swift (Chemistry). Associate Provost Marjory Blumenthal and Assistant Provost and Professor Randy Bass joined the conversations, as did three students who were a constant reminder to us of just how well Georgetown does its job now: Mahen Gunaratna, Zachary Bluestone, and Nadia Khan.

and are shaped by teachers and experiences that set out consciously and respectfully to make education a process of formation as well as transmission. The liberal arts are themselves about formation, where the rigors of critical and creative thought should unfold through the inspiring engagement of the formed character with the world beyond our walls.

The most familiar language for this vision of education arises from the traditions and practices of education under the aegis of the Society of Jesus, which have evolved and endured over four hundred years. Additionally, there is on all sides in American higher education an emerging language that recognizes an opportunity and an obligation to take seriously questions of character and formation.<sup>2</sup> The Jesuit tradition of *cura personalis* and educating the whole person strongly expects teachers and institutions to know and understand well the students who come to them, to work with those students to find and shape the students' own best selves – or, better, to give the students the opportunity to find those selves and to collaborate with them in the shaping that will bring them to their own goals as citizens and leaders.

Critical and creative thinking, analytical reasoning, inquiry and reflection are all at the core of formation; around that core the working group discussed the role of five domains of formation that give particular meaning to intellectual development in a university and at Georgetown in particular: ethics, citizenship (national, global, digital), leadership, wellness, and faith and spirituality. None seems amenable to being addressed merely through required courses; each needs to be part of the conscious ambition of all the active shapers of a university culture – faculty, students, Student Affairs, academic staff, Campus Ministry, and so on; and each needs to be embodied in different, mutually reinforcing activities of four years on the Hilltop.

Cutting across the working group's discussions of problems and potential solutions was the recognition that *how* we do what we do may be as important as the *what*. This is the focus of a sister entity, a separate and ongoing Committee on Student Learning (CSL),<sup>3</sup> chaired by Professor (and Assistant Provost) Randy Bass. The spirit of the CSL is embedded in the practices of seeking more accurate knowledge of how Georgetown students perform and applying that knowledge to motivate and make change. CSL may play a key role in following up on concepts presented here – the ideas in play and ideas that might be worth trying on through curricular experiments and/or examination of the impact of those experiments on our current curriculum.

The financially challenging nature of these times makes this an especially propitious time to be thinking in creative and innovative terms. There will not be the luxury to wait until all things are back to normal to move forward, because no one knows what the future holds or what normal might mean. It is worth asking ourselves what five years from now, for example, we might wish we had done five years before. How might we wish we had responded to new conditions that asked us to think carefully about excellence, mission, capacity, and our core practices? Indeed, Georgetown's ability to emerge with greater excellence through these challenging times depends in large part on our ability to keep these conversations about renewal moving forward and to act in reasonable and generative ways.

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2 Our use of “formation” here shares its spirit with a similar usage in the study released from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, titled *The Formation of Scholars: Rethinking Doctoral Education for the Twenty-First Century*, where “formation” is a complex process that “points not only to the development of intellectual expertise but to the growth of the ‘personality, character, habits of heart and mind’ and ‘the role that the given discipline is capable of and meant to play in academe and society at large’” (8). Calibrated for undergraduates, formation is intended as a term encompassing what it means to inhabit one's knowledge fully and in relation to self and the world. Similarly, in *Our Underachieving Colleges*, Derek Bok writes of expectations that colleges and universities prepare their students to be good citizens, leaders, and ethical decision-makers.

3 For 2008, the membership of the Committee on Student Learning included Derek Goldman (Theater and Performing Arts), Amy Leonard (History), Norma Tilden (Writing Program, English), Paul Roepe (Chemistry), Arik Levinson (Economics), Sandeep Dahiya (MSB), Elizabeth Stephen (SFS), Mark Rom (Government), Teddy Svoronos (student), Christine Fraser (student), Heidi Elmendorf (Biology), Anna de Fina (Italian), Michael McGuire (OPIR), Marjory Blumenthal (Associate Provost), Katie Driscoll (Provost's Office), Mindy McWilliams (CNDLS).

It is well-understood that ultimately new resources are needed to realize these ambitions. Discussions about resources will continue throughout this process; there are considerable efforts underway, for example, to align curricular transformation with appropriate parts of the capital campaign. Yet modest resources can also stimulate much creative activity. And it is often the case that the best pedagogical and curricular innovations – although requiring resources for reinvention – result in shifting where faculty, students, and the institution put their resources. We should see this moment as an opportunity, if not an imperative, to improve what we do. Acting thoughtfully and collaboratively, we must view this as a time for invention.

Georgetown is an institution of multiple ambitions at every level, with overlapping communities of remarkable students who arrive each year. To do them the greatest favor, faculty and administrators need to learn not to ask whether we can make change happen but to press the question, “What would it take?” Georgetown students have great ambitions, beliefs, and energy, pursuing diverse forms of excellence – in research, social activism, athletics, the arts, spiritual growth, service, campus governance and spirit, etc. How can we tap into this energy and enthusiasm and better integrate it with the life of the mind? Doing so means pushing at obstacles and resistance, including our own inner skepticism and resistance, and that means framing our teaching and our students in a vision that accepts limits only with the greatest reluctance.

There is every reason to expect success. The size and scale of the institution allows a focus on students and student-faculty relationships that many institutions are denied – allowing an interconnection among faculty, students, and administrators impossible at many larger places. Georgetown’s historic and continuing mission as an institution draws from Catholic and Jesuit thought, which focuses on the whole person and the optimism that every student can and should achieve at the highest level possible. Our history bespeaks a faculty and a faculty culture that takes educational success seriously. We cannot let that distinction slip away.

### ***Executive Summary: From Conversation to a Call to Action***

What follows is an executive summary of the working group’s discussions, organized as a synthesis and a set of imperatives and foci for change. These do not constitute a proposal or set of proposals for particular changes in the curriculum, but dimensions of the curriculum that deserve focused discussion, analysis, and ultimately, action. There are many points of entry into this conversation. Some themes will resonate with curricular discussions already taking place within departments, programs, and schools, or with current practice. Some may be seen as provocations for local conversations. Some can best be taken up as cross-campus discussions, recognizing shared responsibilities for certain learning goals and curricular objectives (such as those relating to general education). To that end, new working groups will be formed to focus on certain key areas (described more fully below). The sum of anticipated discussions will not be a grand plan, but a coordinated set of efforts, large and small, that will move Georgetown toward greater coherence, clarity and challenge in the curriculum.

### **Principles of Curricular Improvement and Change:**

(1) *Highest Expectations* – Our aspirations for the distinctiveness of the undergraduate curriculum should be no less ambitious than for the research enterprise. A distinctive undergraduate curriculum, as well as signature ways of delivering that curriculum, is as important to maintaining Georgetown’s position among select research universities as our research portfolio is. Where possible we need to re-imagine and strengthen the distinctive qualities and opportunities of an undergraduate experience in the context of a student-centered research university.

(2) *Distinctive Identity*—We should revisit what makes us distinctive historically and currently, and comprehend how that distinctiveness best serves us in this moment. We should strengthen and renew what it means to build on the Jesuit and Catholic traditions of “educating men and women for others” in the 21st-century. In measuring Georgetown against and competing with other elite institutions, we should ask what we retain as our signature identity, principles, and emphases in the curriculum. How does institutional identity drive our expectations for the formative qualities of a Georgetown education?

(3) *Coordinated improvement* – *The forces of renewal are ongoing but not enough.* It is certainly not the case that Georgetown’s curriculum has remained unchanged for 30 years. Faculty continually review and revise syllabi, develop new courses, and propose new majors or minors. These forms of progress too often occur in isolation. The perennial cycles of improvement could be greatly enhanced if we did a better job of coordinating them with one another. What might happen if we cooperate across departments and program units to deepen our goals, articulate our rationales, and build more on our own successes and those of other departments? Could a more concerted effort at curricular revitalization result in the realization of more important ambitions?

(4) *Transparency* – *We should make our goals more visible at every level.* Why do Georgetown’s courses, majors, or other academic programs look the way they do? Why do we ask of our students what we do – what do we and they think will result when they elect our course, our major, or more generally to matriculate at Georgetown? At each level of the curriculum, we need to explain why we do what we do and what that means for our students. How can students be purposeful designers of their own education, in the context of a curriculum where its goals and possible pathways have not been explained them? Articulating rationales is not only best practice; it is being demanded by accreditors and other outside entities seeking greater accountability from higher education. The more Georgetown faculty take initiative here, the less they risk being subject to outsiders’ demands.

(5) *Clear Objectives* – *we can no longer abide by offering a general education without rationale, goals, or assessment processes.* Clearly related to the challenge of making goals visible, we should pay particular attention to general education requirements. All Georgetown undergraduates are expected to take a small set of courses, which constitute the University’s general education program; individual schools may also add courses to that set, in ways that support the mission of each school, which then blend with their respective core curricula. Especially with regard to the universal requirements, the only readily apparent rationale for these offerings is that they are required – a tautology at best. It is time to be explicit about why those are Georgetown’s requirements – about the goals of individual courses and of the set as a whole – and to take stock of how well the courses and the set work.

(6) *Continuous Improvement*—*We should aim not for wholesale change but innovation and experimentation, knowledge about what works, and processes for ongoing improvement.* There is much that works about a Georgetown liberal arts education, but a curriculum should not run on autopilot. At every level, we should be talking about, revisiting, and strengthening our curriculum, and in particular, general education and those dimensions that contribute to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts for our students. At the course level, this means innovation in content and pedagogy; at the department level, this means a keen eye for coherence, relevance, and effectiveness of offerings; and at the school and campus level, this means oversight with a holistic quality, attentive to the totality of the experience of an undergraduate in the College, the School of Foreign Service, the McDonough School of Business, or the School of Nursing and Health Studies.

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*I have to admit to being a bit wary of identity-talk when it comes to the mission of our university... I worry that a discussion about our identity really doesn't help us in answering the bigger questions: what is distinctive about a Georgetown education and what do we aim for our curriculum to do?... [R]ather than worry about identity leading practice, shouldn't we aim for a kind of barefoot phenomenology? What is it that seems to define our educational practice at the moment, what bits of that do we find laudable, and how can we make the laudable parts even richer? Of course, doing that would entail a conversation about what we as a community value – and perhaps “values” is what is really meant by talk of our “identity.” But I'm simply nervous about beginning with identity and working backward, as it were, to practice.*

*– Curriculum Working Group Member*

*I don't think we have to think of identity-talk as essentialist, in that the Catholic and Jesuit tradition is a “present, living reality” an “organic and dynamic worldview.” I agree that a process that is top-down or determinative from identity to practice would be inadequate. At the same time, “barefoot phenomenology” will only get us so far. First, our Georgetown reality “on the ground” is too complex to portray in any easy and adequate fashion. Choices must be made about which facts are revelatory or important, which can be ignored. Indeed, we have to look to those things we're already doing well. But, as the Intellectual Life Report indicated, what we are doing poorly has also been important in our conversation. We're going to have to decide when we want to invest more in doing certain things well, when “doing something poorly” means we make changes, and when “doing something poorly” means that it's not our thing.*

*– Curriculum Working Group Member*

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## **Directions for Curricular Change and Improvement:**

Below are several directions for change indicated by the working group's discussions. Following the naming of each area comes a set of possible responses through revision and innovation. The emphasis here is on “possible.” These are not recommendations but provocations, possible paths of action to be taken up locally and collectively, in discussion and experimentation.

(1) **The Curriculum too often is bottom-heavy and introduction-heavy.** If we are to renew the curriculum, it should begin with an examination of the ways that the first two years of learning establishes a foundation for students to develop as independent and engaged learners; properly done, we can ensure that courses in the lower division have intrinsic merit for a liberal education, as well as providing foundation for increasing depth in the majors, as well as more advanced levels of general and elective learning.

### How might we respond?

- Redesign introductory courses to be more clearly and consistently the foundation for higher-level courses. Emphasize inquiry-based and active learning as early as possible.
- Rethink aspects of general education so that some courses are designed for upperclassmen, allowing students to structure their undergraduate paths with more flexibility and to approach topics with different levels of sophistication. Can we imagine course experiences that introduce subjects to students who bring well-developed critical thinking and reasoning skills with them?
- Expand seminar offerings to assure that not only do all first-year students have a seminar experience, but also that upper-level students in all programs, with more experience and knowledge, have opportunities for intensive seminar experiences that help to deepen and integrate their learning.
- Expand capstone experiences so that a greater percentage of students are undertaking theses and senior projects; expand what we mean by capstone or thesis projects to include digital media and alternative forms of academic work, as well as collaborative and interdisciplinary projects.

(2) **We should respond to demands to increase certain areas of the curriculum while maintaining and, if possible, increasing flexibility.** Georgetown has the thinnest science requirement of any of our peers, and we must begin requiring science courses for MSB and SFS. Similarly, we recognize the need to expand the ways that we emphasize writing and communication iteratively throughout all four years, and within all disciplines. As discussions move forward it is likely that new learning goals for the curriculum will emerge. Through creative and thoughtful course design we can find ways to raise our expectations for the curricular experience and preserve flexibility in student choice.

### How might we respond?

- Re-imagine the criteria for general education to include intensifying certain areas (e.g., writing, quantitative literacy, inquiry skills), realized through integration with current courses in a broad range of disciplinary courses.
- Leverage the strengthening statistics capacity of the Department of Mathematics to provide a focal point for the growing number of departments and programs addressing quantitative and computational methods with increasing rigor.
- Pilot new general education interdisciplinary science courses for students in MSB and SFS.
- Build up the current general education requirement in writing to include a substantial focus on writing within the disciplines.
- Bring together science faculty with faculty who teach social science and humanities courses to develop a strategy for phasing in more science for non-science majors.

(3) **The overall culture of learning at Georgetown demands strengthening, including, but not limited to, increasing exposure to inquiry and research early in the undergraduate career.** Increasing the culture of learning also means doing more to enhance the active intellectual engagement of all students from the very first weeks of the first semester. More opportunities should exist for students to be introduced to different approaches to intellectual depth and immersion; especially in the first two years students should have introductory opportunities to form and pursue their own questions, and engage in extended inquiry, reflection, and problem-solving. Strengthening the culture of learning requires looking both at opportunities for depth in the majors and at foundations in the lower division.

### How might we respond?

- Expand opportunities for students to experience early and intensively the nature of disciplines and fields as active conversations around matters of significance.
- Expand opportunities to tie academic learning to intellectual opportunities elsewhere on campus. Make it a regular practice for students to attend lectures, films, or presentations on campus and communicate linkages to courses for many such programs.

- Expand opportunities for inquiry and research across the campus. Broaden our definition of research to include applied and action-oriented research. In support of this expansion, broaden GUROP into an Office of Undergraduate Research that can work in multiple ways across the campus to embed research experiences of all kinds across all four years and mentor students into appropriate pathways.
- Expand opportunities for international undergraduate research (the current GUROP-Abroad) and service-immersion experiences.
- Expand already successful small-scale programs that engage students with Georgetown special collections, the Library of Congress, and other cultural and archival resources in D.C.
- Develop more ways to bring upper classmen who have been successful at research and other kinds of immersion projects into contact with lower classmen, perhaps in the context of general education and other lower division courses, through peer teaching and peer mentoring.

*I often hear the phrase that Georgetown is a 'student-centered research university' – though I am increasingly concerned that we have no general consensus on what that currently means or can mean in the future. Does this mean that some departments/programs/units should be 'student-centered' and others more focused on 'research'? Does the 'student-centered' pertain to undergraduates and the 'research' fall just in the domain of graduate programs and faculty? Or are student-centeredness and research activity supposed to coexist within all programs?*

*-Curriculum Working Group member*

*I'm far less enchanted by the language of 'knowledge creation' than is widely the case. This reflects our own assumptions about what we, the faculty, should be doing in our roles as specialists within the research model. It poorly or at least incompletely reflects what a student is likely to be experiencing (or should experience) in the course of four years at a place like Georgetown, which is discovery and wonder. I don't expect my students to 'create knowledge' so much as, more often than not, rediscover enthusiasms and make new discoveries that have probably been made thousands and even millions of times in the past, but that doesn't matter because it is exciting and enlarging each time a new student discovers them.*

*-Curriculum Working Group member*

**(4) We should do more to create an environment where students can be self-directed and innovative with their own learning.** At some level, thoughtful students should have room to dissent from the curriculum and find alternative pathways; there should be multiple ways for particularly self-directed students to excel. We should create more means, and fewer barriers, for students to express a sense of entrepreneurship and inventiveness through their learning.

#### **How might we respond?**

- Expand and strengthen the ways that we advise students. Find ways to connect students with mentors early in their time at Georgetown. Develop mentoring opportunities distinct from advising on requirements and registration.
- Formalize additional pilots with student-designed and student-led courses (faculty-sponsored but not taught by faculty).

- Recognize and experiment with alternative pathways through general education that might enable students to self-design, put together their own combinations of courses, and propose unique ways of achieving general education goals.
- Expand the ways that Georgetown syllabi and (where possible) course materials are visible for students (and others), to help students make more informed course choices and create a more visible context for the whole curriculum.
- Consider greater flexibility in creating combinations of majors to achieve more integration; explore removing barriers to double majors (or minors) across schools; expand opportunities for students to engage in self-designed majors.
- Expand the use of new Web-based media and social networks to build communities among students and faculty, on campus and beyond.

**(5) We need to give students more opportunities to integrate knowledge across courses as well as integrate academic learning with experience, for both intellectual and personal development.** Students do not only learn through courses; they learn through a variety of extra- and co-curricular activities where potential connections to academic programs are often unexploited, such as through the local cultural engagement that accompanies study abroad. Indeed, activities like study abroad, undergraduate research, or community-based learning have been called “high impact activities,” primarily because they serve an integrative function. A critical part of a Georgetown education should be the opportunity for integration between the curriculum and co-curriculum, life activities and academics, as well as heart, mind and spirit. This will be all the more powerful if there are structured occasions – inside and outside of the formal curriculum – for students to engage in these integrative opportunities.

#### **How might we respond?**

- Create more structured and rigorous ways for students to write about and reflect on experiential learning inside and outside courses. Create more opportunities for integration of knowledge, from the first year on, emphasizing it as an important quality of mind and condition for excellence in learning.
- Develop electronic portfolio pilot programs across the campus, experimenting with ways to provide students digital contexts to link their academic work with the full range of life and learning outside the classroom.
- Explore ways to facilitate the use of video and other new media, as well as oral communication, into the work expected in a wide range of disciplines. Social networks, new media, and publicly shared intellectual work are rapidly becoming key outlets for students who want to integrate their learning with social engagement and experience.
- Develop a Georgetown *teaching opportunities program*, parallel to GUROP, to support placement, training, and mentoring undergraduates interested in teaching and education; early successful programs at GU have shown teaching opportunities in disciplines, on and off-campus, are powerful opportunities for integration.
- Intensify efforts at the reinvention of study abroad to be more connected to academic learning, utilizing new social media and video, and creatively engaging returning seniors in processing their abroad experiences.
- Develop more options to connect students and courses to Washington, DC (e.g., to the University’s programs aimed at strengthening educational outcomes in the Ward 7 region)

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*If we played the word association game and you said 'learning,' I would say 'integration.' Psychologists define learning as integration of newly acquired knowledge into previous knowledge organized in schemata. If you said 'teaching,' I would say 'integration.' Educational research shows that students learn more efficiently when information is presented through experiential means and when both information and experience feed each other across the components (subjects or courses) of the curriculum. This is why K-12 teachers work in groups, look for common content threads and approach them in different ways from their different subjects. I think we should do as much of that as we can in college, where we all, students and researchers, are trying to understand complex phenomena. Any complex phenomenon needs to be approached from an interdisciplinary perspective. Compartmentalization of knowledge is a problem in academia and at Georgetown, and as a consequence, our students go through courses that seem to share only one thing: that they are required.*

*– Curriculum Working Group member*

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**(6) We need to address, collectively and thoughtfully, the nature of “formation” in the Georgetown undergraduate experience.** Students graduate as young adults, and they need education that prepares them to be effective citizens and leaders, including insights and some mastery in such areas as ethics, wellness, intercultural competence, and faith and spirituality as shaping interactions with intellectual development in the well-lived life. The curriculum, as a whole and in its parts, should express how these elements of formation build on and integrate with the essence of a liberal education that embodies the capacity for critical thought, analytic inquiry, and empathy.

#### **How might we respond?**

- Explore and expand ways within courses (such as through proseminars or Ignatius Seminars) and outside (e.g., programs like the Center for Social Justice’s First-year Orientation to Community Involvement) that students consider the elements of formation in their own learning.
- In the spirit of integration, complement traditional coursework with more projects that connect students to a community (which could be, but need not be, Washington, DC); emphasize the centrality of these kinds of experiences early.
- Expand curriculum infusion programs like the “Engelhard Project” that link issues of mental wellness and health with intellectual material in courses.
- Respond to student concerns about increasing awareness and education about diversity in the curriculum through thoughtful engagement with difference where it meshes with intellectual material.
- Consider how course and program goals may support aspects of formation and make that explicit. Most disciplines have hopes for what their student might know and be able to do as well as value; yet there is often little opportunity for discussion about what it means to hold certain value propositions within knowledge domains. Where do students learn to think about values and their scientific knowledge? Or the ways that humanities knowledge can engage social issues? How can we make these opportunities vivid and substantial for students?
- Provide more opportunities for students to explore “big questions,” including (perhaps especially) late in their careers here as seniors.
- Provide more opportunities for students who are interested to find connections between study and spiritual growth.

## *Proceeding through Dialogue, Inquiry and Innovation*

All of the working group's conversations, in one form or another, renewed a sense of shared responsibility for the curriculum, one that built on (and reached across) the creative autonomy of departments, programs and units. Shared responsibility for the curriculum suggests a new way of thinking about curriculum as a set of practices that sustain vitality through robust cycles of innovation and assessment, supported by and inspiring better transparency of our intentions. Dialogue about the curriculum will be successful, fruitful, and sustainable if it takes place in a climate where we, as a community, do all of the following:

- Experiment with new approaches (testing our hypotheses about what we value about what we do and what we want for our students).
- Be intentional, articulate and transparent about goals.
- Find key leverage points where maximum benefit comes from minimum effort astutely applied.
- Learn from experience: learn from projects and successes that could model on a small scale an effort that might then scale up and out.
- Learn from others: make expertise portable across the campus, and importable from other settings where it has been validated.
- Aspire to systematic improvement, privileging coherence and congruity, where our goals and claims, and the evidence of our living up to them, are regular reference points for strategic discussions at every level.

These conditions seem ever more necessary for a reasoned and sustained conversation about change, as well as a normative way of doing business. They are also consistent with the broader agreement in higher education about the most effective forms of curricular renewal and strategic change.<sup>4</sup>

### **What more might we know?**

It struck the working group over and over again that rational improvement of the curriculum depends in large part on having more information. Here are some of the questions that emerged as worthy of pursuit. Some questions are best asked through campus-wide inquiry; others can be fruitfully explored locally.

- Do we know enough about how our students perceive the overall formative impact of a Georgetown education? Are there easy ways to deepen our knowledge?
- What more should we know about the student experience of general education? If we could articulate a set of goals for general education that would be transparent to students, what might they say about the courses they take and their relative contribution to those goals?
- How do students develop key skills and abilities, such as writing, quantitative literacy, critical and analytic thinking, creative thinking and problem solving, etc. in our curriculum? What more could we know about student development in these key skill areas? For example, what more might we know about how student writing improves in their first year and then again after that? What do we know about quantitative abilities across the curriculum? Are there questions like these that might be pursued at the departmental level as well as across the campus?

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<sup>4</sup> See for example the joint projects in systematic improvement of undergraduate education of the [Teagle](http://www.teaglefoundation.org) ([www.teaglefoundation.org](http://www.teaglefoundation.org)) and [Spencer Foundations](http://www.spencer.org) ([www.spencer.org](http://www.spencer.org)) in which Georgetown is already a participant; see also the recently adopted [COFHE statement](http://www.assessmentstatement.org) ([www.assessmentstatement.org](http://www.assessmentstatement.org)) on "Assessment: A Fundamental Responsibility," which Georgetown endorsed as a COFHE institution.

- How are general education courses defined as a particular kind of learning experience, other than being introductory to disciplines? How are they different from other courses? Should they be? Do faculty share certain expectations for how general education courses introduce students to certain habits of mind, for example?
- What more might we know about our students' pathways through the curriculum? What more should we know the patterns of student course choices where choice exists? For example, do students in the college choosing Ignatius Seminars tend to choose certain kinds of courses through the rest of their general education and open electives? What about students who come in with different combinations of AP credit?
- What more might we know about the ways students now achieve or strive for integration in their learning? What are the sites of significance for them to make connections across their fields of study, between lower and upper division learning, and between coursework and experience?
- What small-scale curricular projects help us reinvent and renew the dimensions of the curriculum that express our identity?
- Where are the effective commonalities in the curriculum, either experienced by all students or by students in particular schools or programs? What more could there be? What curricular experiments might we undertake around common texts or shared questions?
- What are student attitudes toward tolerance, diversity, and intercultural or inter-religious understanding? We have some data; how might we build on it? How can the curriculum shape these attitudes? Should it? How should the faculty respond to the belief of many students (including the Student Commission for Unity) that the curriculum should do more with diversity and intercultural understanding?

## Steps to Action

Where then shall we now go? We should not wait for another decade to bring us another turn at the Intellectual Life Report, nor should we only converse. The hope is that this Call to Action will be seen by all as an invitation to enter the conversation.

This summary is being published in dual form, with every intention of using it to continue a conversation and to suggest what we judge – after a year and a half's rehearsal in our own conversations – to be the most fruitful areas of exploration and discussion. Printed (or printable), this summary will be widely distributed and made available for discussion among the institution's members and friends: faculty, staff, students, administration, alumni, parents, donors, and well-wishers.

At the same time, this summary is being posted on a Website with blogging capability (<http://digitalcommons.georgetown.edu/blogs/call-to-action/>), to encourage discussion in that medium as well. Comments of every sort will be welcome, but there will also be the capacity to identify particularly trenchant remarks and move to engage them in active working groups and new initiatives.

The Provost will encourage conversation locally by asking departments and other units to relay through their annual reports which areas seem particularly convergent with current concerns and interests. Local conversations, beginning with discussions within departments or programs, might start to engage the themes that matter most locally. Ideally, reports from those conversations will bubble up and out through the various communication channels associated with this summary and through regular governance channels as well.

Through the Committee on Student Learning (CSL) and others working with and across the schools, the Provost anticipates the formation of targeted working groups taking up certain strands suggested here. Working groups related to writing, undergraduate research, science for all students, and integrative learning

may be among the first to get underway. In association with this work, the Provost plans new “Research & Development” initiatives, where resources allow (and new resources can be obtained), generating experimentation with curricular directions, along with deepened inquiry into student learning and the impact of our curricular practices.

Taken together, these steps to action will generate momentum around curriculum renewal in ways that fit our culture and these times.

### *Next Steps: A Timeline for Change*

Looking ahead to the next two years, the timeline looks something like this:

2008-09:

By the end of this academic year (2008-09), with the distribution of this Call to Action, we will have begun a process to launch a number of working groups to begin work in earnest in Fall 2009. These groups will begin to look closely at current practices and opportunities for expansion, including bringing to the surface data about the effectiveness and ongoing vitality of our current curricular practices.

2009-10

By the fall of 2009, this executive summary will have begun to grow by thoughtful accretion to become a record of the next stage of conversations and further data gathering and analysis, a blueprint for development and transformation in these areas.

Throughout 2009-2010, the faculty and key administrators will continue to expand curricular renewal and innovation projects, working closely with development activities to raise resources for investing in renewed curricular directions.

In Fall 2009, a focused campus-wide conversation on general education goals will convene, and will articulate by the end of the year how general education courses might be embedded in a more intentional process of design and assessment, looking at the development of abilities and dispositions in students as well as knowledge, and having a better sense of how well we are achieving this in whole and in parts.

By the end of the 2009-2010 academic year, all departments and other credit-offering units will have posted clear and public statements of their goals for student learning, cognizant of them in curricular and resource planning. This is an extremely important goal for our Middle States accreditation visit, for which preparation ramps up in 2010.

Throughout 2009-2010 we look forward to having greater alignment about crosscutting goals and learning designs and increased transparency of departmental and unit-based curricular goals, which will be articulated publicly by the end of that academic year.

2010-2011

By Fall 2010, we should be in a position to convene a third phase of curriculum renewal where we consider campus-wide changes to general education and other dimensions of the curriculum that transcend individual schools. By this time we hope to have traction around the initial phase of initiatives, better mechanisms for gathering unit-level evidence of impact, and articulated goals at every level. By this time we also hope that we will be in a better position to understand the convergent opportunities that fund raising and development efforts will afford the directions we have laid out.