

Notes from Social Sciences Discipline Workgroup Meeting #1 July 26, 2007

Hillary Fuhrman welcomed everyone and introduced Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) staff present. Deputy Commissioner Paul Wagner informed those present of the tremendous need to improve communication between K-12 and postsecondary education.

Ms. Fuhrman proceeded with the rest of the introductions and then presented the goals for the meeting following the slide on p. 3.

Today's Goals

Particular attention was paid to:

- 1) The context of the current discussion on curriculum alignment.
- 2) The urgent need for this work to be done:
 - a. Need to address the tremendous gap between K-12 and higher education
 - b. 35% - 40% of postsecondary students in Missouri need remedial work
 - c. Curriculum alignment is an integral part of any strategy to increase student success in postsecondary education.
- 3) The overall vision for these meetings is for faculty (the experts) to communicate how to reduce this percentage.
- 4) The importance of collective decision-making for this process

It was emphasized that those present were in charge as they were the experts in their field. The MDHE staff was simply there as facilitators to help the group focus and define their next steps. One of the necessary outcomes for this meeting was the selection of two representatives to serve on a Steering Committee.

National Curriculum Alignment

“Curriculum Alignment” is a “nebulous phrase” that is played out across two areas:

- 1) Secondary to Postsecondary Alignment
- 2) Postsecondary Course Alignment

Resources were passed around for those present to look at and discuss later. (See Resources Handout)

“Secondary to Postsecondary Alignment” is of particular concern as the expectations between secondary and postsecondary educators are so vastly different. Secondary curricula do not necessarily lead to postsecondary success, even though 90% of students profess interest in continuing on to postsecondary education. It was mentioned that the State Board of Education revised standards last year which led to the coordinating Board of Higher Education (CBHE) revising the 42-hour General Education Block.

Assessment was described as being a gatekeeper between secondary and postsecondary education. MODEC and placement tests were discussed as examples. The wide range of

scores that were acceptable by various postsecondary institutions made preparation for these tests problematic. Students do not currently have a clear message as to what they need to do to prepare for college.

The discussion was turned towards concerns with “Postsecondary Course Alignment”. Paramount concerns were:

- 1) Differences between course numberings and standards
- 2) Differences between institutional missions, goals, and related standards

Resources aimed at correcting these differences were passed around. These included examples of state initiatives from Colorado and Illinois as well as The American Math Association of Two Year Colleges (AMATYC). Some of the more developed state-level alignment work involves course competencies, outcomes, and contents. Much of this work has been mandated by state law. In Missouri, the Department of Economic Development has been working hand-in-hand with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and MDHE to maximize the value of student learning to insure the future of the state’s economy.

National Context/Drivers

On a national level, much of curriculum alignment has been driven by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Spellings Report “A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education.” Concern was raised that NCLB does not emphasize enough the skills that a student needs to have to be prepared for life after high school.

The Spellings Report has promised that it is not another NCLB for higher education. Instead, it is focused on increasing accountability, affordability, and accessibility to postsecondary education. The regional accrediting bodies such as the Higher Learning Commission have responded to this national conversation by relating accreditation and assessment issues. They are particularly concerned with assessing student learning outcomes and discerning the real value of what students actually learn.

Dual credit was a concern of those present. Some were worried at the lack of oversight at dual-credit courses being taught in high schools by high school educators. It was mentioned that high schools that could not even prepare students for college should not be teaching college-level courses. Another problem was that many of these dual-credit programs lack the marketing necessary to attract majors to that particular field of study. It was decided that the work of those present today could help develop solutions to these concerns. The standards that these discipline groups develop will become mandated by law, thus ensuring better supervision and assessment of dual-credit programs. The Committee on Transfer and Articulation (COTA – a subgroup of the CBHE) is also interested in developing and enforcing dual-credit standards. With the phasing in of unit-record data systems at DESE, a more detailed analysis will become possible.

Historical Curriculum Alignment in Missouri

The Missouri K-16 Coalition was formed in the mid-90s to coordinate alignment from secondary to postsecondary education. While some very good work was started and lines

of communication were opened across sectors, it was driven by administrators and was not inclusive of faculty involvement or knowledge.

In 2005, a General Education Policy and Matrix were developed. As part of this, credit transfer guidelines were created to facilitate transfer among Missouri higher education institutions. This project was again primarily administrator-driven. The results were broad and its applicable courses were left up to the individual institutions

DESE had developed Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) in 2000 because of NCLB. More recently, they have begun the work of revising these standards, transitioning to Course Level Expectations (CLE's) at the secondary level. The assessments associated with the revised CLE's would potentially compose anywhere from 10-20% of a student's grade. These evaluations would replace the MAP. The first of these exams will roll out by the 08-09 school year. These exams have been created primarily with input from secondary educators, with very little input from persons in higher education. Discussion ensued regarding the impact these exams could potentially have on curriculum.

MoDEC entry level competencies were also mentioned. The work done with this is going to be considered as a good starting point. It is again imperative that faculty be involved with whatever competencies/assessments are created next. DESE's "Grade and Course Level Expectations" was also referred to—it was reiterated that all students that graduate from high school should have at least the same level of general competencies, whether they plan on going on to postsecondary education or into the workforce. The Department of Economic Development has also been pushing for this as the vast majority of jobs in the state are on their way to becoming knowledge-based. This shift in the economic sector means that for state citizens to be employed, they will need to have the same competencies as their peers who continue into postsecondary education. It is becoming increasingly difficult for those without some sort of higher education to be able to find well-paying jobs. Traditionally, high schools have not been geared towards either track. Dual credit courses have also been problematic.

Current Missouri Drivers

Of particular importance to the current discussion is the Math, Engineering, Technology, and Sciences (METS, but also commonly referred to as STEM fields) Coalition, or the "Missouri METS Coalition". Formed by Governor Blunt, this coalition is concerned with the future of Missouri's economic development in METS fields. A summit last year included leaders in the business world who delivered recommendations to the Governor. These recommendations focused on the need to improve curriculum alignment across the board in METS subjects. They recommended that such alignment be particularly focused on math as this subject was often the gatekeeper to engineering, technology, and the sciences. These recommendations, in part, led to Senate Bill 580 and the creation of the P-20 Council. This council involves the Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE), the Coordinating Board of Higher Education (CBHE), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and the Department of Economic Development (DED). DESE has made a particular commitment to align with MDHE.

Thus the work that will be done in these meetings will also inform the work that DESE does.

The recently passed Senate Bill (SB) 389 is the catalyst that drives this specific project on curriculum alignment. Section 173.005 states that

*The coordinating board shall establish guidelines to promote and
58 facilitate the transfer of students between institutions of higher education within
59 the state and shall ensure that as of the 2008-2009 academic year, in
60 order to receive increases in state appropriations, all approved public
61 two- and four-year public institutions shall work with the commissioner
62 of higher education to establish agreed-upon competencies for all
63 entry-level collegiate courses in English, mathematics, foreign
64 language, sciences, and social sciences associated with an institution's
65 general education core and that the coordinating board shall establish
66 policies and procedures to ensure such courses are accepted in transfer
67 among public institutions and treated as equivalent to similar courses
68 at the receiving institutions. The department of elementary and
69 secondary education shall align such competencies with the
70 assessments found in section 160.518, RSMo, and successor assessments;*

Of particular concern is the need for alignment between DESE and MDHE. At this time, 35% of students in Missouri higher education have to take remedial courses. This is cause for significant concern. These courses do not offer college credit and cost the state significant amounts of money. Those who must take these courses have a far lower chance of ever completing an undergraduate degree. Of course, these statistics vary by the selectivity of an institution. For example, at some selective/highly selective institutions, students who would typically be placed in a remedial course are offered other solutions, such as tutoring, that are not tracked in the same way.

Curriculum Alignment Organizational Structure

Senate Bill 389 mandated the creation of faculty-based discipline workgroups covering mathematics, sciences, English, social sciences, and foreign languages. After these faculty-based workgroups have met and determined the scope of the work to be done, two members from each workgroup will become a part of an over-arching steering committee. This steering committee will be composed of faculty members, administrators, and MDHE staff. While the official charge of this steering committee has not yet been developed, one of their primary goals will be to coordinate the efforts of the various discipline workgroups and to compile documents and recommendations for the MDHE Commissioner to present to the CBHE. While there is urgency to move forward to meet the timeline stated in the legislation, the work of the discipline workgroups and the steering committee will not be tied to a concrete timeline until a better understanding of the scope of the work to be done is gained.

Vision

One of the key purposes of this meeting is for the faculty to tell the MDHE what their vision is. Once the faculty decide the scope of the work, MDHE will issue a “formal charge” meant to sanction the work of the English Discipline Workgroup. The vision of the MDHE for these meetings is to smooth transitions:

- 1) from secondary into postsecondary education (increase success and lower remediation rates)
- 2) among higher education institutions for those who do not finish the 42 hour general education block or those who go through transfer “swirl” or concurrent enrollment.

The decision of what course(s) to include as “entry-level” for a typical college freshman is up to participants in these discipline workgroups, particularly the knowledgeable faculty, to decide. At this point, it may be helpful to discuss what curriculum alignment is and is not:

Curriculum alignment today is an opportunity to influence public policy. Curriculum alignment is not a road to across-the-board assessment. The goal here is to realize and to demonstrate that local institutional autonomy and accountability can work well together, and that there is no need for a single statewide blanket assessment.

Much of the information that state legislators receive is anecdotal and may or may not be in tune with what is going on at state institutions of higher education. This is an opportunity for us all to make our legislators more aware of what is actually going on with the state’s higher education institutions. It is an opportunity for us to have a say in determining and creating public policy. The MDHE staff is here to serve you and to help you achieve your goals. It is up to you to decide how detailed or how broad the core competencies are.

The work being done today to align curriculum is not a hidden attempt to develop statewide assessment tools. If individual institutions wish to do this, there is room in the mandate for them to do so. The goal with this work is to create a unified voice to communicate what is needed and expected of students going into postsecondary education. It was reiterated that there is a need to continue to raise rigor and set standards and send clear messages about expectations to high school students and DESE.

The workgroup broke for a working lunch during which members discussed the direction of the workgroup.

After lunch, discussion resumed on the entry-level and exit-level competencies.

One of the concerns raised was the hierarchy of rigor within General Education courses. Some social science courses are simply much more rigorous than others. This was problematic for some professors who held their students to higher standards than other professors. It was reiterated that those present would be able to decide on a minimum level of rigor and that this level would be clearly communicated to DESE and

postsecondary institutions as a result of these meetings. The question that was posed to participants was: “What do freshman need to be successful in postsecondary education in *your* courses? What do *you* want to tell DESE? What “habits of mind” (i.e. critical thinking) should be developed?

As far as entry-level social science courses are concerned, it was determined that US history/government was the only direct commonality between high school and college. Even this subject was approached in a wide variety of ways among institutions. In order to clarify the process of aligning social science curricula, the question was raised: “What college courses should be considered to be important for the purpose of developing exit/entry competencies?” Discussion about this continued throughout the rest of the meeting.

Participants were concerned at how DESE was going to be brought on board and convinced to align with what faculty decided upon. It was reiterated that DESE *wanted* to know what the CBHE and MDHE expected of them. DESE is aware of the high rates of students immediately entering college that need some form of remediation and that this is very problematic. Furthermore, SB 389 requires that they comply with what the CBHE recommends based on these meetings.

It was brought up that some K-12 teachers needed to be reeducated. Participants were particularly concerned at the inability of rural districts to recruit quality teachers. Continuing education for high school teachers was deemed a necessity. Participants realized that the high school teachers they were complaining about were the same students that they had graduated with degrees to teach high school. Ways of remedying this were discussed. It was agreed that faculty in postsecondary institutions needed to be more clear with their students as to what they expected them to teach in high school in order to prepare students better for college. They agreed that high school teachers needed to teach their students basic reading and writing skills. Several participants agreed that they were doubling as English teachers in their college courses. They also wanted to communicate to their students who were going to be high school teachers that they needed to teach high school students basic “habits of mind” such as analytical thinking, note-taking and study/research skills, discipline, respect for deadlines, and the ability to adapt. It was reiterated that preparedness for college in these areas was the same as being prepared for the workforce. Participants were also concerned that students were not well-educated on the concept of plagiarism.

All were concerned that the rates of postsecondary remediation needed to be decreased significantly. They realized that they needed to raise their standards and encourage DESE to raise their standards as well. Concern was raised that the social sciences were getting ignored in K-12 because of NCLB. In order to better prepare students for entry into college social science courses and/or the workforce, discussion ensued regarding what it meant to say “we wish entering freshman knew how to read and write”. It was mentioned that the social science disciplines could inform the work of the English discipline workgroup. It was also suggested that CLE be compared to “Social Sciences: Knowledge and Skills Foundations” (54-65, *Standards for Success*).

Concern was raised about the difficulty in convincing students across the board about the importance to their career of reading and writing. Also of concern was teaching students with no motivation to learn, who were just in college because they were expected to be there. In response, it was recommended that remedial courses should be transferred to the senior year of high school when many students take a break from academic rigor. It was mentioned that some in Missouri were interested in becoming an American Diploma Project state. This would increase the rigor in high school and aid in the decrease of remediation in postsecondary institutions.

Concern was also raised regarding what assessment projects this work would lead to. The MDHE assured participants that these workgroups are not geared towards creating blanket state-wide assessment tools. The purpose of this work is to send a more unified message to secondary schools and potential college students about what would make their experience in postsecondary education more successful. All decisions regarding assessment will be left to the discretion of individual institutions.

As there were so many social science disciplines represented, it was agreed that participants would be divided up into groups of:

History (US, Western, and World)
Geography
Anthropology
Psychology
Sociology
Economics
Political Science

More representatives will be sought from list serves, college deans, etc... Each workgroup will look at their own syllabi, learning outcomes, national work, and how two and four-year institutions mapped onto one another. They will individually consider the exit/entrance competencies for their discipline. Each group will designate a head to decide on further meetings. MDHE is willing to host these meetings if necessary. It was agreed that exit/entry competencies would be decided on before the next social sciences discipline meeting at the beginning of October.

Ms. Fuhrman explained that she was working to secure a course management system (Sharepoint) to facilitate discussion and document sharing. Ms. Fuhrman stated that she would send out an email with further information.

The next meeting will be decided on at a later point. The larger steering committee representatives are Deborah Greene and Roger Jungmeyer who will split the job of representing history, and Richard Miller who will represent all of the other social sciences.