

# Th'Ink Well

Quarterly Newsletter from the Center for Teaching Excellence

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## The New University Core Curriculum \* *Kathy Malanga*

The new general education core curriculum, also known as the University Core Curriculum (UCC), is set to start in Fall 2011. The project has been in the works for about three years. Faculty and students had expressed many concerns about the General Education program, according to Kathy Malanga, co-chair of the UCC Council for the past two years, hence "It was time to look at it and make changes."

The new UCC program introduces a number of changes. The UCC is an outcomes based general education program organized around six areas –Personal Well-Being (Area One), Expression (Area Two), Ways of Knowing Area Three), Diversity & Justice( Area Four), Community & Civic Engagement (Area Five) and Global Awareness (Area Six). Students will have choices within each of these areas adding both flexibility and the opportunity to pursue areas of interest. Areas Four, Five and Six also have the possibility of being integrated with the major. Writing and technology intensive requirements will help insure that students possess the skills essential for academic and professional success. This will reduce the number of general education credits required, so students can have a chance to add to their majors or take a minor.

The best part of the UCC process has been seeing faculty come together to discuss general education goals, according to Kathy Malanga. Many have exchanged ideas about general education objectives and discovered a lot of potential in the UCC program. It will be interesting to see how faculty integrate the different areas of study, including diversity, global awareness, and community and civic engagement.

The worst part of the UCC process has been the enormous amount of time devoted to meetings. Keeping everyone on the same page has been a real challenge. Faculty cannot make each meeting, but everyone needs to be updated on all of the changes along the way.

The program will take a few years to completely implement, as there are a lot of behind-the-scenes aspects to the process, including setting up the classes with the Registrar, planning for advisement, working with the Admissions Office, the Council of Chairs, Marketing and Public Relations and Information Systems. With the UCC, the University is moving toward an online course submission and review process linking course submission and approval with Banner and ultimately posting content on the new UCC webpage. ([www.wpunj.edu/ucc](http://www.wpunj.edu/ucc)). Although not all faculty will teach UCC courses, the Core has already had a positive impact on the overall WPU community. It encourages us to engage both faculty and students in an ongoing discussion of the importance of liberal educa-

## Students Thoughts on Current GE Courses

The CTE conducted a short survey among thirty-six WPU students taking undergraduate courses this Spring. The survey asked students to share the best and worst part of General Education courses. When focusing on the best part, students indicated that

- ♦ GE courses provide students with and expand their basic knowledge (15 of 36)
- ♦ GE courses add variety to course schedules after students join their majors (12 of 36)
- ♦ GE courses ease the work load for students (8 of 36)

When focusing on the worst part, students indicated that

- ♦ GE courses are of no interest to students (14 of 36)
- ♦ GE courses simply give extra work to students (11 of 36)
- ♦ GE courses are a total waste of time (5 of 36 students)

It is interesting to notice that the negative and positive opinions are almost evenly divided. By and large, upper-level students shared more opinions than lower level students and expressed less interest in GE courses.

## Faculty Thoughts on the UCC Program

In March 2011, we sent an email to faculty inquiring about their views of and hopes for the new UCC Program. We basically asked them three questions,

1. Have you submitted any UCC Course Proposal? Why (not)?
2. Do you think the UCC will impact you, your courses, or your Department? How so?
3. What kinds of support will you need once UCC changes are implemented?

Twenty two faculty members (11 male: 11 female) replied to our query. Most respondents had submitted or were planning to submit UCC course proposals. Half of the faculty replying to our email said believed the program would have a positive impact on their Departments or courses; one third viewed its impact as negative. One third (mostly women) worried about the need to support advisement; nearly half saw a need for workshops that might offer developmental support.

Three adjuncts responded to our query with further questions. None of them had heard much about the UCC Program; all of them worried about implications for their jobs.

## Faculty Participation in UCC Curriculum Development

As of fall 2010, WPUNJ had 380 full time faculty. 183 were female and 197 were male. 294 were tenured, 82 were tenure-track, and 4 were non-tenure track (one year appointments).

In March 2011, we visited the WPUCC site used by faculty to submit their UCC course proposals. The site listed a total of 155 proposals submitted by 81 different faculty members. Here are some of the insights gathered from the data posted:

- ♦ 55% of the total UCC proposals submitted by March were submitted by female faculty.
- ♦ 72% of the proposals submitted by March were submitted by tenured faculty
- ♦ Nearly half of all the courses were submitted by HSS faculty (72 HSS, 36 Arts & Com; 4 Bus; 2 COE; 41 SC&H)
- ♦ Most professors submitting UCC courses, submitted one or two courses; the maximum submitted by a single faculty was 9.

## Faculty and Student Voices

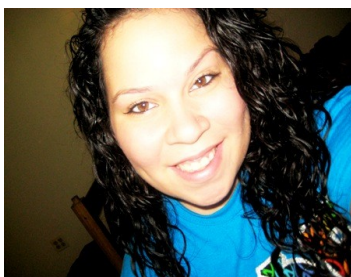
### Faculty Voice\* *Pradeep Patnaik, Biology*

When I was in graduate school – one of the most challenging classes I took was a course on protein folding. I had just come from 3 years in film school into a graduate program in Molecular Biology and I felt I had bitten far more than I could chew. But Snyder's class – even at the ungodly hour of 8 on a winter morning was enthralling. He presented a set of ideas or a hypothesis then asked 4 - 6 students to come up to the board simultaneously and, working independently, design an experiment to test it or work through a problem that he set up. In most cases he got 6 wrong answers or experimental approaches that were so ungrounded in reality that they would have no chance of succeeding. He would then walk each of us through our misguided approaches trying to understand why we got it so wrong. Probing for the source of conceptual errors he would find deeper misconceptions – and sometimes deeper ones yet – reaching down at times to things one should have known from freshman biology! I try this sometimes in my graduate class in Molecular Biology (coaxing students to the blackboard with the carrot of 'participation points') and it can be very effective.

Sometimes I also award 'participation points' for simply answering questions in class. Students get an index card at the beginning of the course and I sign or initial their card every time they provide a correct or plausible answer to a question I preface as being for 'participation points'. Not all questions are prefaced that way – just ones that address critical central issues or require students to apply concepts to new and unusual situations. Here they get no points for incorrect answers – but many students will say something – even when they are unprepared – on the off chance that they will hit the correct answer. Thus, the questions have to be pre-thought and I mostly seek critical details or explanations to a phenomenon or experimental result rather than something that can be guessed from 2 or 3 choices or answered with a simple yes or no.

When the conditions are right, student participation can be a highly rewarding experience.

### Student Voice\* *Stephanie Hernandez, Senior, Women & Gender Studies*



To educate individuals is a difficult and time consuming endeavor. The professors who want you to learn, and who make it a point to make sure you do, are the professors you never forget.

There have been a handful of professors at William Paterson University who have truly made an impact on me as an individual. However, one in particular will always stand out because it was in a subject I dread: mathematics. This professor was determined not only to teach the students in the classroom, but to help them retain lessons. Every week this instructor would give a quiz on the material covered during the previous week. If you did poorly on the quiz, you were allowed to retake it before class on the following week. The professor was always in the room an hour

early, and made sure to review what you did wrong when you handed in the quiz. You could take the quiz as many times as necessary, always using the same strategy but solving different problems.

This professor wanted students to learn the concepts. If you failed the class it was because you didn't try, not because you didn't have opportunities. This instructor understood that students don't fail because they want to, but because they don't understand the material. I didn't feel incompetent or incapable of solving a problem. Finally, there was someone who knew how to teach math and did not make me feel as frustrated as I had always had in the past. This is one of the greatest professors I have had at William Paterson University.

## 2010-2011 Faculty Reading Circle \* Marilyn Gasior, Special Education & Counseling

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The Center for Reading Excellence sponsored a Faculty Reading Circle in the fall of 2010. Ed.D. Adjunct Professor Marilyn Gasior (COE) led the Circle which included four other faculty and staff members. The first book selection was *Thinking in Pictures*, authored by Dr. Temple Grandin, Assistant Professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University, who being diagnosed as autistic, has offered great insights on people in the autism spectrum. The participants read her book and then met to discuss their thoughts and insights on learning styles of this population and implications for learning and teaching. The conversation broadened as they shared learning strategies found to be effective in college classrooms.

The Circle selected Stephen Fallow's and Kemal Ahmet's *Inspiring Students-Case Studies in Motivating the Learner* for their spring 2011 reading. The book presented various case studies from an array of colleges and universities, involving students in various courses. The participants noted similarities and differences, and recognized commonalities in teaching strategies within their varied content areas.

The ultimate goal of the Faculty Reading Circle is to provide the best possible instruction to WPUNJ students. If you want to join a Faculty Reading Circle next semester, contact the Center for Teaching Excellence at 973-720-3684.

## Goodbye & Welcome

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As of July 1, 2011, Dr. Pixy Ferris and Dr. Maria Villar will no longer be co-directors of the Center for Teaching Excellence. We would like to welcome Drs. Jim Hauser and Bob Rosen who will be co-directing the CTE during this coming year. We wish the best to them and to Gina Aloe, our wonderful graduate student assistant!!!