

## Fifty years of Curricular Flow

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As the river yields its mists to the rising sun, it seems to be waking but in truth it never slept for the river spent the nocturnal hour full of movement and life. Careful observation in the developing light reveals the myriad streams flowing within the river. The main current moves strongly through the twists and bends down the geographic slope of the earth, slowing at the sides, producing eddies and backwashes. Obstructions create ebbs and flows separating the currents for a period of time and distance. The nature of the riverbed and its banks cause currents to appear and disappear at times with noisy swirls and at other times with no sound or fury. Within the banks of the College of Liberal Studies, interdisciplinary streams of curriculum flow within the broad river of disciplinary thought, knowledge, and wisdom. As independent yet somehow interdependent dependent courses flow side by side, above and below, enfolding and unfolding, barely touching or intermingling, swirling into divergent currents only to converge with other streams, the multitudinous streams of this curriculum has flowed through fifty years. Perhaps the river can serve as an appropriate metaphor for the College of Liberal Studies curriculum which has a rich tradition of offering innovative and interesting courses joined into a cohesive curriculum over the last fifty years. This curriculum has invited the learner into deep engagement with provocative issues that were germane for the times and for the future and opened up intense interactions with passionate and deeply knowledgeable professors. Seminars such as “Roots of Chaos: The Cultural Antecedents of Political Upheaval in the Twentieth Century”, “Music and Popular Culture During the Swing Era”, and the “Ethical Frontiers on the Sciences and Humanities” and courses from “Art and Medicine” to “Police and Policing” have

arrested the learner's attentions and piqued their interest in a distant rivers of knowledge beyond their current banks and horizons. This stream of curriculum was delivered in a manner that made education accessible for the non-traditional student, whose education had been interrupted by war, family responsibilities, or jobs and thrust those learners into worlds and realities beyond the scope they arrived with. Inspired students struggled with issues and elements of rigorous research to write such thesis on topics that varied from a creative thesis called "Bathgate, the Bronx: 532 East 164<sup>th</sup> Street" a fictional depiction of life in a high-rise tenement based on history and done with short prose and poetry, to one entitled "La Virgin de Guadelupe in Chicano Popular Culture: Images in Art and Literature" or another entitled "Chocolate, Beer and Politics: A Case Study of Ethnicity in Belgium" clearly a historical case study but underlying the history was a solid ethnographic study of a culture. The rich tradition of liberal studies curriculum continues to inspire students thinking using a scaled up process designed to incorporate a unique blend of structure, technology and active learning philosophy.

Just as a river has many sources of flow, some permanent and some sporadic, every person of the College is involved in curriculum development and contributes to the end product. Each pours themselves into the stream in the effort to transfer into a course the knowledge, understanding and passion of the subject matter expert until the stream coalesces into a product that inspires the student to learn and apply fully their unique gifts to the river upon which they journey. The college uses a structured process with multiple entry points, internal and external evaluations and reviews by faculty committees, an approval process that reaches from the Associate Dean to the Oklahoma Board of Regents in some cases, and participation in University curriculum and course approval and review processes. We continuously seek to align our courses with the Curriculum Development Mission of coordinating people and resources in the creation,

enhancement, and maintenance of a continuously improving set of courses that are used to deliver high quality programs and degrees that ultimately transform non-traditional students through interdisciplinary studies. Our goal is to create significant learning experiences that contain more than just an aggregation of content materials and resources - extending to the student a product that reflect intentional design. We seek to incorporate principle centered guiding values into our curricula :

Rigor – Curriculum that embodies strength, depth, and breadth in the content and learning strategies.

Agility – Curriculum that is pragmatic in multiple ways with a long term view.

Profitability – Curriculum that adds value to all constituents – students, faculty, college and society.

Significance – Curriculum that majors on the major constructs, concepts, ideas and issues in the students' lives.

Inspiration – Curriculum that exploits the tension between passion and reason through human interaction.

Our process has resulted in curriculum that is effective in quality control and improvement and efficient in production cost. The courses themselves are easily maintained, revised, or converted with class management incorporated into the standardized syllabus and content framework provided to subject matter experts. The use of standardized frameworks for design and development assures the courses are consistent in navigation and overall design, enabling students to focus on their learning rather than on the mechanics of the technology and navigation. Flexibility and creativity are maintained by allowing faculty to change up to 25% of the course through the Desire 2 Learn learning management system. The reiterative portion of

the process encourages an active learning orientation and consistency in workloads with few constraints on faculty creativity or scholarship. The majority of the content is delivered on web pages, thus it is not dependent upon a particular learning management system, and is easily accessible by a variety of browsers, and operating systems. Delivered in this manner the content requires a minimum of administrative and faculty overhead. The basic content of a course can be delivered online, by CD-ROM, as a hybrid or face to face with a minimum conversion effort. The CLS development process ensures low vulnerability – program emphasis can be redirected easily and quickly, scheduling can be as simple or as sophisticated as desired. It also provides high scalability – multiple sections, multiple instructional approaches and finally the curriculum can be customized and delivered under extraordinary circumstances in alignment with the major reason for the college’s existence – student accessibility.

In essence the challenge for curriculum development over the next 25 years will be to provide a cohesive and interactive curriculum that enables and empowers the learner in their increasing professional, personal, and civic responsibilities in a tumultuous and perhaps polarized world. The College of Liberal Studies is uniquely positioned to meet that challenge in the coming years as a result of our process and commitment.

The river at dusk reflects the setting orb of the sun and the mist once again shimmers across the surface. As darkness ensues, the river continues to inform those who listen carefully to the voice of the College of Liberal Studies curricula, the energy and passion of the staff, administration and instructor feeding streams of course content. The movement of knowledge and thought continue through time, rounding human culture and relationships as water smooths and rounds the stones in a riverbed. Banks of ignorance give way to rushing waters of research even as the currents sculpt them, no paradigm spared. The flow of knowledge deposits grains of

truth even as the river deposits grains of sand along its path and at its confluence. Through the analysis of philosophy and process it is apparent that as we celebrate fifty years of the College of Liberal Studies the non-tradition distance education program continues to provide a vital flow of insight and knowledge through the collaborative efforts of unique individuals venturing forth in non-traditional interdisciplinary liberal study.