Bookends Workgroup

Initial Report | January 31, 2022

Bacc Core 2.1 Committee

Summary

One of the Bacc Core Reform project goals is to ensure the Bacc Core is consistent with best practices in general education. By this standard, Oregon State's current Bacc Core requirements are deficient in several ways (despite some notable strengths). The Bookends Workgroup proposal is designed to address four of these deficiencies. Specifically, these deficiencies are in the areas of new student ("first-year") experience, capstone synthesis, team problem-solving, and career preparation. To address this, the Bookends Workgroup recommends that the Bacc Core include a New Student Transition course, requirements related to career preparation, and a Capstone Synthesis class.

Brief Background

The Bookends proposal is consistent with a great deal of research on best practices in general education. The American Association of Colleges and Universities has put together a comprehensive overview of essential learning outcomes[1], and high-impact practices[2] that research suggests should be instantiated in undergraduate curriculum. *Among these practices are teamwork and problem solving, and synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized study.* In addition, they highlight the status of *First-Year Seminar, and Experiences and Capstone Courses and Projects* as high-impact practices. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) has likewise identified a set of seven core competencies[3] that prepare college students for success in the workplace and lifelong career management. Among the competencies are *career and self-development* (i.e., career-related development), *teamwork, and critical thinking* (including gathering and integrating information from diverse sources and information).

The last two Bacc Core reviews have also emphasized some of these goals. In 2002[4], the review indicated that faculty wanted a "teamwork" or collaborative problem-solving requirement in the Bacc Core. The 2010 review committee[5] recommended that collaboration be one of OSU's Learning Goals for Graduates. The 2010 report also recommended the adoption of a *Core First-Year Experience*.

In addition, students continually remind us that they expect employment to be an outcome of a college degree. UCLA's annual survey[6] of freshmen entering four-year colleges and universities indicated 85% say they are going to college to get a job. Taking classes and completing a major is only one component of launching and sustaining a career. Although OSU has a robust career services unit, we have no means of assuring that students will take advantage of it, especially early enough while at OSU for it to be maximally beneficial. Anecdotally, career services advisors say that a large proportion of students do not show up for career-related services until well into their senior year.

Finally, the Goals for General Education[7] adopted by the Bacc Core Reform Committee specify that "students will use multiple modes of inquiry, within and across a variety of disciplines" and that "students will gain professional skills and competencies designed for adaptability, longevity, and integrity in a global workforce." The Bookends proposal is designed to help the Bacc Core meet these goals.

Bookends Proposal

The Bookends proposal is composed of three recommended categories of courses or learning opportunities. These are as follows.

I. **New Student Transition Course (the "beginning bookend")**

The proposed new student transition course is intended to be accessible by both new Freshman and Transfer students. It has four goals:

1. **Orient** students to OSU and show them how to find a "path" to their degree and life goals. The subcommittee terms this "wayfinding." It involves orienting students to OSU resources, an overview of the purpose of OSU's curricular structure, in particular the Bacc Core; and initial career preparation.

2. **Build Community** by introducing students to faculty and peers from across the university. The goal is specifically, to cut across college and major boundaries, such that students interact and work with people outside of their home academic unit. Such interaction is designed to foster community at the level of the university, increase commitment to the university (that is, organizational commitment), and allow students to build personal ties to other students and faculty. The latter is particularly important for transfer and Ecampus students, who can sometimes feel isolated.

3. Engage in **team problem-solving with an academically diverse set of students.** The goal is to have students use critical thinking for problem-solving in teams. This instills in students the belief that they can solve problems from the beginning of their time at OSU, and do so with people whose backgrounds differ from theirs and who might not see things the same way they do.

4. Start learning **different "modes"** of approaching issues and problems. Academic disciplines and the students who gravitate towards them tend to think about problems and problem-solving in certain ways. These modes of problem-solving differ from discipline to discipline. Students need to learn to approach problems in flexible ways.

The New Student Transition Course is designed to be a low (~2) credit course. It is not designed to replace current college- or major-specific new student or career courses, or to replace START. Colleges and majors with their own new student programming would want to think about certain things that could be left to the Bacc Core course or where reiteration across programming would be useful. There would not be an "opt-out" for colleges to simply use their own course since that would be counter to goals 2 and 3 above. Consistent with research on new student courses, the course will have academic content (In the form of the problem-solving activity) in addition to the "wayfinding" component. Although advisors and GTAs can be integrated into the course, instructional faculty should lead the course. The specific problem is the focus of the course can (and should) vary from section to section. It is possible that sections will become overloaded with students from a particular major or college, either inadvertently or intentionally. To avoid this, students could either be assigned to specific sections centrally (that is, students enroll in the course but not in specific sections) or there could be a stipulation that students enroll in sections taught outside of their major.

II. **Beyond OSU (the "spine" of the book)**
This component of the proposal consists of career-related activities that students can fulfill in a variety of ways. The overarching scheme is for students to *explore* career possibilities, *prepare* for a lifelong career path, and *connect* with career-related people and resources outside of the university. It is designed around the career services activities currently packaged as Beyond OSU, but can also integrate career-related activities run by colleges and majors. Students could fulfill the requirement by completing zero-credit or for-credit career-related courses, completing online modules, doing internships, attending career-related presentations, or attending career fairs. The intention is for students to be able to access a flexible array of choices. This requirement will in most instances, be at least partially integrated into majors and involve programming within the college or major. However, there will be central university opportunities as well.

III. **Synthesis (the "end" bookend)**
The Synthesis requirement takes the form of a senior-level course. The architecture of the course is as follows:

1) The course is based on **team Problem-solving.** Students problem-solve in teams, using the higher-level thinking that they have acquired in their OSU education. This will be instantiated in the learning outcomes for the course. Although this course isn't designed to be directly linked to the New Student course that students took, students should be able to see their progress from the New Student course and engage in problem-solving in a more sophisticated manner. This course is designed around the

"Wicked Problems" approach to policy, where the problem to be solved is difficult because of its resistance to a solution. The intention is for these problems to be socially important and of necessity pertain to multiple disciplines and multiple approaches.

2) The course will be **project-based**. However, it is not necessarily required to be the type of hands-on experience that sometimes occurs in major capstones. For instance, it could involve the creation of a policy recommendation.

3) The course will involve **teamwork with disparate others**, including students and faculty from other disciplines. It could potentially include other stakeholders such as alumni. To achieve this, the subcommittee recommends these stipulations:
> a) Courses must be accessible to non-majors
> b) Courses cannot be done in one's own college
> c) There are no prerequisites except that students must be seniors.

4) Students use **different modes** of approaching problems, as in I above. However, the use of modalities should be more sophisticated than in the New Student course.

5) Students should **synthesize learning** from across the Bacc Core. The goal is for students to recognize threads from across their courses and consider the ways in which different Bacc Core requirements might inform their approach to problems.

The Synthesis course is not intended to replace traditional capstones currently in use in some majors. It is a replacement for our current Synthesis requirements but not the same as those courses. It is anticipated that the array of courses will involve a wide variety of problems and requirements.

Oregon State University