

BUILDING BRIDGES TO ENHANCE DEGREE AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Academic Chairpersons Conference 2020: Proposal

Description of Session:

This presentation will describe the process utilized to conceptualize, design, and develop innovative hybrid curricula that depart from both traditional outcomes-based and process-based designs. Faculty from various disciplines collaborated to create new academic programs that emphasize a student goal-directed approach and reflect graduate outcomes that align with actual and emerging employment trends. Using ongoing feedback from community advisory board members and based on current evidence regarding desired employee attributes for all graduates, interdisciplinary groups of faculty designed hybrid academic programs to meet the needs of unique student groups as well as emerging career opportunities.

Over the past decade, faculty from several professional programs at this Catholic Franciscan university with a strong liberal arts foundation identified four subgroups of undergraduate students whose needs were not being optimally met by traditional academic majors. These groups included: 1) students wanting to attend a graduate program in Physical Therapy, Physician's Assistant, Occupational Therapy or Medicine and needing a Bachelor's degree with specific pre-requisites; 2) students desiring an entry level degree in healthcare and/or a career in a healthcare setting but NOT desiring a role in direct clinical care; 3) students from within the university with undeclared majors or those unable or unwilling to continue progression in a previously-declared healthcare major; and, 4) students with an Associate of Science degree in allied health areas who require a Bachelor's degree for upward mobility. To meet the needs of these variant student groups, several new curricula/programs were developed and more are in the brainstorming phase.

Specific objectives for this session include:

1. Identify unique student subgroups in higher education who do not "fit the mold" of more traditional academic majors.
2. Describe the use of community advisory boards in identifying unmet employment needs and emerging trends in the workplace.
3. Apply knowledge of transferrable learning skills and existing curricular components to create innovative interdisciplinary academic programs, thereby increasing graduates' marketability in the 21st century workplace.

Chairpersons from a number of disciplines in the College of Professional Programs have successfully collaborated and continue to do so to develop innovative academic pathways and degree programs to meet needs of both students and employers, primarily working with already existing resources, established courses, and faculty expertise. A discussion of challenges and solutions related to new program development and interdisciplinary collaboration will be included in this presentation, using specific examples. The process of "building bridges" for new programs and overall curricular enhancement is an on-going goal at this university, and presenters will share graduate outcomes and employer feedback to illustrate the effectiveness that such hybrid programs may have in meeting both student and employer/workplace needs.