

Alfred University team works to revamp requirements

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It's back to school for a team of five professors and the dean from Alfred University's College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (CLAS); the AU team was one of 36 chosen from across the country to participate in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)'s annual Institute on General Education and Assessment. Their goal: To create a better general education curriculum and requirements for Alfred University (AU) students enrolled in liberal arts and sciences majors. The Institute will be held June 6-9 at the University of Vermont. AU's team, consisting of Luanne Crosby, professor of music; Susan Morehouse, professor of English; Kerry Kautzman, associate professor of Spanish; Chad Harriss, assistant professor of communication studies, and John D'Angelo, assistant professor of chemistry, along with Mary McGee, dean and professor of religious studies will spend the three days working on a plan to revamp the general education requirements within the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Much of what they hope to accomplish was identified during the recent CLAS faculty retreat, said McGee. "We want to work on articulating connections among courses, practices and goals within our curriculum that are significant, but latent; in making those connections apparent, we can begin to explain the benefits of these connections to ourselves and our students, and make these connections deliberate and relevant to our goals." As an example, she said, many courses within CLAS require group work among the students, something that is valued by many employers, but "we have not purposefully stated the value of group work in our educational goals for students." The CLAS team also wants to connect the rationale for the general education curriculum and requirements to the intended benefits or outcomes for students. The goal, she said, is not to expand the number of courses CLAS students need to take to satisfy their general education requirements, but to construct a program that gives students greater flexibility, and one that is exciting and appealing to students. The team will also work on establishing a faculty committee to lead the reform initiative and to create "a structure for the maintenance, oversight, and assessment of general education, including a review of new courses, requirements and programs," said McGee. What they hope to learn from AAC&U facilitators and other colleges' teams is how students elsewhere perceive general education requirements; what their strategies are for designing and implementing general education reform; what assessment models they use that are faculty-designed and faculty-friendly; how they use data from national surveys in their discussions and planning; what kind of first-year programs they offer and how they are integrated into the general education program and "if they have general education models that are more than just a creative disguise" for the distribution course "laundry list." AAC&U's 2010 summer institutes are designed to address a variety of ways the central challenge facing higher education - ensuring that all students achieve the high-quality liberal arts education they need and deserve," said AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider. "Each year, we are inspired by the exciting and innovative ways these institutions are tackling the challenges of improving liberal learning outcomes for all their students." For 20 years, AAC&U's Institute on General Education and Assessment has provided hundreds of colleges and universities with the formative and collaborative space to advance general education reform and its assessment on their campuses. Campus teams come to the institute to develop, refine and advance intentional curricula, engaging pedagogies, effective assessment, and long-term sustainability of efforts. All AAC&U institutes offer campus teams a time and place for sustained collaborative work on a project of importance to their campus, along with a curriculum focused on important trends, research and best practices, and a resident faculty of educational experts.