International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education 2021, Volume 33, Number 1, 62-72
http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/ ISSN 1812-9129

Delivering the Promise of the Liberal Arts Through Curricular Coherence and Integrative Advising

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Liberal arts colleges promise undergraduates a holistic education that builds life-long skills such as critical thinking, written and oral communication, and quantitative and information literacy by encouraging students to engage in courses across the curriculum. Yet too often, we do not offer students enough support in developing coherent pathways and integrating what they learn, and that promise is diminished. With Teagle Foundation support, The Five Colleges of Ohio (Denison University, Kenyon College, Oberlin College, Ohio Wesleyan University, and The College of Wooster) and Allegheny College joined together over four years to investigate and implement structural supports to help students create a broader and more coherent roadmap to their educational experiences, including first-year gateway courses to introduce pathfinding techniques, course concentrations to emphasize connections across fields of study, and online mapping and advising tools linking courses, co-curricular opportunities, and careers. The collaborators also involved faculty in rethinking their crucial advising roles in a more integrative way. This instructional article describes the fundamental shifts institutions made to enhance curricular coherence and integrative advising as well as the lessons learned from setbacks and successes that informed ongoing initiatives.

Project Background and Institutional Contexts

Before the close of the January 2014 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), representatives from six campuses—Allegheny College, Denison University, Kenyon College, Oberlin College, Ohio Wesleyan University, and The College of Wooster—held an informal gathering to discuss a request for proposals from the Teagle Foundation: Faculty Planning and Curricular Coherence. We invited all members of the six institutions at the annual meeting who were interested in this project to gather for our discussion. Turnout was so strong that we could barely fit around the large table we had reserved. Thus began a five-year collaboration of faculty and professional staff at six institutions, all drawn to the idea that we could enhance student experience of curricular coherence at our institutions by working together and sharing our ideas, experiences, challenges, and successes. In retrospect, the crowded table of educators eager to share, learn, and develop new strategies served as a model for our experience during our planning and implementation grant periods.

In many ways, the six institutions were a natural cohort for this work. All six are high-touch residential liberal arts institutions in relatively close geographic proximity. Five of the institutions were members of The Five Colleges of Ohio consortium, with a solid history of shared interests and collaborations. These five institutions had also, at various times, collaborated with Allegheny College and are members of the Great Lakes Colleges Association. So we were a group that was poised to work together on this project. We were also keenly aware that our students were facing new challenges as they looked forward to an uncertain future, knowing that they needed to prepare themselves to live in a rapidly changing world and move into careers that did not yet exist or that would exist in entirely new ways. As institutions long committed to excellence in teaching and research, we were convinced that the liberal arts model would provide students with a strong yet flexible foundation for this uncertain future. At the same time, we were also—each in our own ways—responding to AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative by intensifying our focus on high impact practices identified in the LEAP report (e.g., participation in learning communities, service learning, study abroad, internships), which can improve student learning outcomes while preparing students for successful careers (AAC&U, 2011). However, we wanted to do more to shift our institutions' capacities to serve our students and deliver on our promise to students. So, we went to work and identified interrelated strategies to prepare students to excel throughout their lives.

Teagle's request for proposals invited applications that focused on strengthening curricular coherence in the major or the general curriculum. Given our institutions' existing focus on structural and intellectual coherence of the major areas of study and the close guidance students received from faculty within their majors who serve as their teachers, research mentors, and advisors, we were in agreement that our focus would be on the general curriculum. We should note that at our institutions there is formally no separate general education curriculum. Instead, courses that a student takes that do not count for that student's major or minor area of study can be considered part of that student's general curriculum with only a small number of exceptions at some institutions. Our challenge, then, was not that we each had a set general curriculum that we wanted to make more coherent for students, but that

we had courses that counted in various ways for students depending on their own progress through the institution, and we wanted to offer students coherent pathways through this significant part of their coursework. At the same time, we also wanted to help students make intellectual and practical connections for themselves in their curricular and co-curricular work.

In order to achieve these aims, we identified three components to the overall project. The first, *structuring curricular connections*, was an initiative that focused directly on developing structured paths through the general curriculum both at the institutional level and across multiple campuses. Inspired by Ohio Wesleyan's experience with cross-divisional networks of courses organized around common themes, partners wanted to explore the creation of similar networks on their own campuses. The second, *finding and sustaining connections*, supported the effort to create structured pathways by developing online mapping tools to identify connections in each institution's curriculum and across the curricula of multiple institutions. By design, this work built on Oberlin's ObieMAPS, an online mapping tool that helped users identify connections among curricular areas and subject expertise across the campus. The third, *focusing on students*, complemented the efforts to provide structured pathways through the general curriculum by developing forms of support such as integrative advising and the strategic use of electronic portfolios to enhance students' abilities to integrate their overall educational experiences, learning from the work already undertaken in these areas by Denison and Wooster.

Efforts to create meaningful change inevitably entail challenges and disappointments. What is key, however, is to recognize challenges and respond creatively. Our experience was no different. The following offers (a) a description of the three grant strategies in more detail, (b) an account of challenges encountered as well as successes, and (c) examples of course corrections we made along the way. Because we learned from challenges and successes, the sections on the three strategies each begin with an account of one or two institutions' challenges and responses to those challenges—experiences we all learned from and took account of in our individual initiatives. Attention is given to the challenges here because in our experience the process of innovation and change was often not as straightforward as we had anticipated. This is not unlike other similar initiatives. Budwig, Michaels, and Kasmer (2014/2015), for example, described challenges in implementing Clark University's initiative to increase "integrative learning and effective practice" (p. 20). Our challenges are shared in the hope that others might learn from them and how we responded. Overall, our initiatives led to successful innovations and changes on our campuses, so some of those are indicated as well.

Literature Review

In 2007, the National Leadership Council for LEAP issued "College Learning for the New Global Century," a report on the LEAP initiative two years after it was launched by AAC&U to re-envision liberal learning in the 21st century. The report designated integrative learning as an essential learning outcome for this new vision of undergraduate education. *Integrative learning*, defined as "the ability to make, recognize, and evaluate connections among disparate concepts, fields, or contexts" (Huber, Hutchings, Gale, Miller, & Breen, 2007, p. 46), was at the center of our work on this grant project. Reflecting on the challenges students face making sense of a complex world of information, Debra Humphreys (2005) observed that "integrative learning is essential to prepare students to deal effectively both with complex issues in their working lives and the challenges facing the broader society today and in the future" (p. 30). Further, as AAC&U (2015) made clear in its report on general education, the general education curriculum is particularly important for integrative learning because it offers students the opportunity to integrate their learning across multiple fields, something that "helps students build the broad and integrative knowledge they need for their careers" (p. 5).

The National Leadership Council for LEAP (2015) also identified a central problem with higher education: the lack of a coherent educational plan for students. Instead, students "are working to cobble together a sufficient number of course that will enable them to meet the required number of credits … necessary to earn a degree" (p. 29). The report noted that responding to this concern required concrete effort to help students connect their intentional learning experiences across the curriculum as well as their learning in the classroom with activities outside the classroom (p. 37). As Robbins (2014) argued, however, "integral liberal learning involves planned, strategic programming of educational opportunities for students" (p. 28), suggesting a key role for academic advising because "academic advisors stand at the crossroads of all curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular avenues available for students" (p. 29). White and Schulenberg (2012) also noted the significance of academic advising for helping students "thin[k] about the larger purposes of their educations," arguing that "when academic advising is conceived and supported as an academic endeavor," it can help students "integrate their educational experiences, reflect on their learning, and articulate and demonstrate their growth" (p. 11).

Component #1: Structuring Curricular Connections

From the beginning of this project, our work rested on two convictions. The first is that the curricular coherence that matters most is the coherence that each

student achieves by integrating their learning and developing a coherent understanding of their education. The second is, as Randy Bass (2012) argued, that we cannot leave the work of integrating learning across the curriculum solely up to students. Instead,

> we must fully grasp that students will learn to integrate deeply and meaningfully only insofar as we design a curriculum that cultivates that; and designing such a curriculum requires that we similarly plan, strategize and execute integratively across the boundaries within our institutions. (p. 32)

However, the challenge we encountered was how to do that in ways that work for our institutions. Do we create formal structures, or do we help students identify and explore the connections that exist across curricular and co-curricular boundaries? The experiences of two partners, one who took a highly structured route, and one who took a relatively unstructured but guided approach, and the outcomes for each are described below.

Ohio Wesleyan University: Structured Connections

The first, a highly structured approach, was already underway when we began the grant project. Indeed, Ohio Wesleyan's (OWU) innovative course networks, combining coursework and co-curricular activities, served as the inspiration for each institution's early work on structuring curricular connections. These course networks were one part of OWU's signature program, the OWU Connection. Course networks were organized around a common theme, allowing students to study a topic or problem from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and to integrate the perspectives into a coherent and complex understanding of the topic. The idea was not that each institution would recreate OWU's model, but that each institution would explore the best ways to structure pathways for students through their non-major work to enhance their ability to examine topics or issues from a variety of perspectives, while also using this as an opportunity to at least partly complete general education requirements.

Of particular interest to the partners was OWU's model of connecting co-curricular activities with the course networks, something participants had uniformly described as especially rewarding. As the grant partners were commencing this work, OWU was examining its early assessments of the course connections program. What OWU learned was that while student learning and faculty teaching experiences were positive, students found it difficult to complete all of the elements of the course networks. Faculty also found it difficult to sustain the connected co-curricular activities given the range of demands on their time. This led OWU to rethink the concept of course networks. Instead of offering structured networks driven by synergies in faculty expertise, the faculty decided to guide students to help them make innovative connections in their own journeys through the OWU curriculum and experiential learning opportunities. This effort inspired a more comprehensive review of the college ecosystem, including attention to structural obstacles to collaboration for both students and faculty. It also included a review of faculty workload and faculty evaluation processes as well as broader questions about strategic planning and faculty governance.[1] After conducting this thorough institutional review, OWU developed a plan for better and more sustainably integrating the OWU Connection. Recently, the faculty approved a newly tightened definition of what it calls a *connection experience*, which places emphasis on experiential learning and individualized student reflection.

Allegheny College: Student-Developed Connections

If OWU initially sought to help students link curricular and co-curricular activities in a highly structured way, Allegheny College's approach to fostering linkages between students' curricular and co-curricular work was less so. The approach centered on concentrations, a new program designed to help students link academic pursuits of the classroom with opportunities in career education, internships, study away, civic learning, and community programming. Concentrations encouraged students to organize their educational experience around a theme and supplement that effort with relevant co-curricular activities. Students gathered together courses, events and performances, research projects, presentations and lectures, workshops, study away experiences, and other activities and focused them on a specific societal issue or challenge. A total of six concentrations were developed: Law and Policy, Food Studies, Peace and Conflict, Science and Society, Inequalities, and Health and the Human Condition. Operationally, students interested in one of the concentration topics would meet regularly with faculty and staff in a group advising setting. Students were to demonstrate a pattern of participation in relevant curricular and co-curricular offerings, and then produce a series of reflections on those experiences that connect in an overarching narrative. Ideally, the narrative would take the form of an electronic portfolio and inform the student's pursuit of post-graduate opportunities (i.e., fellowships, graduate school, or career), but the student's participation in a concentration *per se* would not be documented on the transcript.

[1] See Ferren and Paris (2015) regarding the need for "appropriate governance structures" so that "efforts to implement and extend integrative liberal learning are sustainable and institutionalized" (p. 13).

Instead of being structured by the faculty, however, concentrations were intended to be student-centered and developed, and they were designed to help students to more coherently connect work they were already engaged in. This required an attitudinal shift on the part of the students from completing requirements to connecting learning experiences and thinking about how to apply their liberal arts learning to career/life/flourishing beyond college. In developing concentrations in this way, Allegheny sought to provide faculty support for student initiative but not a fixed set of required courses or experiences. For some students, this model of making thematic connections across their curricular and co-curricular work without the structural support of required courses was successful. For many students, however, there was not enough structure. This experience led Allegheny to ask how to develop institutional structures that foster student ownership of a coherent educational experience, rather than hinder engagement/exploration through requirements or rigid structures.

Allegheny College: Shift to Student Advising Courses

Allegheny's wrestling with this question led it to focus on the group advising that had supported the Concentrations program. In these meetings, faculty and staff had been successful in helping students to better link their coursework with various other high-impact learning opportunities they were pursuing. Allegheny decided to formalize this group advising work and developed two new group advising courses, Gateway 100 and Gateway 300. Gateway 100, Who Are You and What Do You Want to Become? is aimed at first- and second-year students and is designed to help them investigate curricular and co-curricular opportunities related to their interests and develop appropriate pathways so that these opportunities build upon and enrich one another. Gateway 300, What Have You Learned and Where are You Going? is aimed at third- and fourth-year students and designed to help them develop a personal narrative of their college work as well as articulate a clear professional goal and a process by which they might achieve it.

Both Gateway 100 and Gateway 300 are 1-credit courses offered on a pass/fail basis, and both are taught by a team of one faculty member and one member of the staff. Concentrations became options that students can complete in relation to a connected Gateway 100 course, or they can complete a Gateway 100 course that is open in its focus. Overall, student feedback to the Gateway 100 and 300 courses has been overwhelmingly positive, and students felt strongly that these courses provided them with the space and guidance to explore their interests and education in ways that might not otherwise happen.

These two initiatives, in complementary ways, explored the practical limits of structured pathways and guided pathways designed to enhance curricular coherence. Their experiences helped other partners in the choices they made regarding structuring connections for students. Oberlin, for example, decided to expand on its offerings of its own version of concentrations, which are essentially interdisciplinary minors. These concentrations are composed mostly of courses already offered in the curriculum and typically include a required overview course and a culminating experience. The College of Wooster pursued a different path and chose to enhance curricular coherence by reviewing its overall curriculum and revising its general education requirements for graduation.

Component #2: Finding and Sustaining Connections

This section highlights the experiences of two institutions, Oberlin College and Kenyon College. The first, Oberlin, had already developed a highly innovative, searchable online mapping tool that charted curricular content and area expertise across the institution, which served as an initial model for online mapping tools for the grant. The second, Kenyon, developed an entirely new online advising and comprehensive institutional mapping tool to enhance students' ability to design coherent pathways through the institution and connect those pathways with co-curricular and experiential opportunities. Both examples illustrate the importance of identifying connections not only for students but for all stakeholders at an institution, but their differences also illustrate what is required to effectively support curricular coherence and integrative advising.

Oberlin College: Mapping Curricular Connections

A key to strengthening curricular coherence is the ability to identify curricular connections. Historically, information important to curricular coherence, such as course content and faculty areas of expertise, was organized largely by disciplines reflected in department and program structures. With the growth of interdisciplinary fields and multidisciplinary approaches to traditional fields, it is now often less apparent where curricular connections exist. Oberlin had developed an interactive web-based tool, known as ObieMAPS, that mapped the curriculum as well as faculty and staff expertise by location, time period, theme, and language. ObieMAPS made the links among courses, faculty, and staff readily visible by storing information by course topic and intellectual or artistic project rather than by disciplinary field. Interest in ObieMAPS was strong, and Oberlin was prepared to share this tool widely.

Here again, there were lessons to be learned. The first lesson learned was that, while Oberlin had developed the tool with open source software and was willing to share its unique integration of this software, ObieMAPS itself was designed to be integrated with a variety of proprietary software programs at Oberlin for information feeds and other functions. This meant that sharing of the ObieMAPS software would be challenging at best. At a workshop on ObieMAPS attended by IT professionals from partner institutions, it became clear that partners would be better served by developing their own programs than by trying to mesh a version of ObieMAPS with their own software support services.

The second lesson learned was that ObieMAPS had been designed to identify curricular connections, and for the most part it was exceedingly good at doing this; however, it had not been designed with an interface that encouraged its use for academic advising. It soon became apparent that partners wanting to use online mapping tools would need to develop or use online tools that incorporated mapping capacities but were designed to function as advising tools as well. Eventually, Oberlin decided to discontinue support for ObieMAPS because of its limited advising capabilities and instead adopted an online advising tool with capacities for curricular integration, electronic portfolios, and ease of connection across institutional offices.

Kenyon College: Comprehensive Online Integration

Kenyon College's vision for its online tool was expansive. Seeking to ensure that its students would feel empowered and supported in creating, connecting, and completing their academic and related objectives, Kenyon developed Kenyon Compass in collaboration with Pragya Systems. Kenyon Compass was designed to facilitate the integration of all aspects of a students' educational experience. This comprehensive online tool identifies connections not only across campus—including many campus offices that provide services to students—but also among community and service learning opportunities, internships, and other high-impact practices. This multifaceted tool also includes a robust course and catalog search function to assist students and faculty in course planning and registration.

Kenyon Compass also allows students to connect their curricular and co-curricular activities to career planning, allowing them to easily see connections between coursework and other learning experiences such as summer research fellowships and internships. Moreover, it provides data about the paths from particular majors to careers as well as experiences reported by recent alumni, so students can trace career trajectories based on these data and alumni experiences. For example, Kenyon Compass users can explore what percentage of recent history majors have attended law school, pursued careers in secondary education, or become journalists.

Key to Kenyon's efforts in the development and implementation of this comprehensive online tool for campus-wide adoption was its early articulation of goals and objectives as well as transparency throughout the process. Stakeholders were encouraged to offer suggestions for improvement, and developers of the tool sought to address questions as they arose.

Component #3: Focusing on the Student

As important as it is to provide curricular structures to increase curricular coherence, and to make it possible for students and faculty to identify connections that exist, steps must also be taken to help students integrate their learning and develop a coherent understanding of their education. Integrative learning occurs, above all, when students make connections across varied learning experiences and contexts. Because advisors stand at the nexus among curricular, co-curricular, and experiential learning opportunities, they are best positioned to help students make choices that build on their previous experiences and courses. They are also well placed to ask students to reflect on their learning and experiences in relation to their interests and aspirations. Advisors can challenge students to tackle complex problems and be adaptable, and they can initiate and shape integrative learning by helping students make reasoned choices and reflect upon their learning. To support integrative learning, then, helping students achieve a sense of coherency requires attention to academic advising and tools that support advising.

The College of Wooster: Advising Electronic Portfolios

At the start of the project, the grant partners wanted to learn more from Denison University and The College of Wooster about the work they had already collaborated on to design holistic, integrative advising programs, and also on the strides The College of Wooster had made in using educational portfolios as a way to make the outcomes of liberal education visible to students and to help them integrate their own educational experiences. We were particularly interested in the possibilities that a strategic use of student electronic portfolios could play first in enhancing students' abilities to intentionally map out a path through the curriculum and co-curricular opportunities, and then in encouraging them to reflect deeply on their educational experiences.

Wooster's strong commitment to using electronic portfolios to enhance students' educational experiences focused on first-year students. After a successful pilot program, Wooster implemented the use of electronic portfolios for academic advising by all first-year students. This support included an intensive orientation

session with faculty and peer mentors to help them establish their portfolios as well as continued work with their academic advisors during their first year. What Wooster learned over time, however, was that once this level of support diminished, students were less likely to continue using their electronic portfolios. One factor that likely contributed to this drop in usage was that the portfolios were not integrated with the course management system, so they felt like an add-on to users. They also did not appear to meet a perceived need on the part of students. So, after a 3-year implementation period, Wooster decided to redirect its efforts away from electronic portfolios for advising and towards rethinking advising and advising tools from the student perspective.

Because of the grant project, partners were able to learn two things from Wooster's experience. First, it demonstrated that even with strong institutional support, advising tools are only helpful if students find them to be so. For the partners interested in using electronic portfolios for advising, the message was clear that a stand-alone version was not likely to be successful unless students saw it as helpful. However, Wooster's response to this experience was also instructive. If students did not see the value in electronic portfolios for advising purposes, Wooster wanted to know what they would find valuable. To determine this, they organized a summer research group composed of four students and two faculty and led by associate deans of academic advising. The charge for this group was to take a design-thinking approach to determine how faculty and staff could advise and mentor students so that they could develop an integrated academic plan that would help them achieve the college's learning goals and prepare them for their future. The research group learned that students were open to advising tools but did not want them to replace the close relationships they had with the academic advisors. They also wanted tools to be integrated into systems they already used. As a result of this research, Wooster modified its advising guidelines for faculty who teach in their First-Year Seminar program and serve as first-year student advisors and decided to explore the integration of advising tools already being used into their course management system.

Denison University: Integrative Advising and "The Wheel"

Denison's work on integrative advising in the project included two components. Denison had already begun to shift its academic advising to a more holistic, integrative model though the development of a group advising approach called advising circles. These *advising circles* are one-credit courses in which a faculty member meets with a group of first-year students over the course of a semester to guide the students through their transition to college and help them understand the importance of developing a sense of coherence in their curricular and co-curricular work. This program includes faculty development with training on how to guide integrative learning. Over the first few years of the grant project, interest grew to the point that currently over 75% of the first-year class takes an advising circles course. The program also grew to include an emphasis on mentoring in addition to advising, with support to help faculty and staff develop as effective mentors to promote integrative learning and assist students in connecting their learning with their academic, personal, and professional growth. Early evidence suggests that participation in an advising circle is viewed positively by students and may raise the first-year retention rate. The growth of advising circles demonstrated the importance of helping students integrate their educational experiences.

To support students further, Denison developed an advising tool designed to both facilitate their curricular planning and increase students' ability to see connections across their myriad experiences. Called "The Wheel," the tool was developed by the offices of the Provost, Student Development, and First-Year Programs in collaboration with Information Technology. The Wheel is based on Denison's four learning goals for students and expands to identify the core learning outcomes associated with each goal. As an electronic tool, students can enter the curricular, co-curricular, and experiential learning achievements that contribute to their learning outcomes and goals. This creates a visible representation of their ongoing achievements that can serve as the basis of advising and planning activities, inform future choices, and help connect learning experiences with personal and professional goals.

The Role of Assessment in Advancing the Project

Our project included ongoing assessment of both student and faculty attitudes toward and adoption of curricular coherence practices. An institutional researcher led and evaluated separate surveys of student groups on five campuses in 2015 and 2017, and one survey of faculty on each campus in 2017. These surveys helped campuses assess faculty-buy-in, how students and faculty understood and defined curricular coherence, and whether or not students were discussing and pursuing strategies of coherence independently. As a result, we were able to observe positive shifts in students' thinking about (a) the value of advising; (b) relying less on fellow students in choosing a course outside their major and more on their advisor; and (c) a growing appreciation of the

value of general education courses in skills associated with the liberal arts, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and transferring knowledge to new situations. For example, students generally reported relying more on their advisors regarding course selection in 2017 than in 2015. In addition, appreciation for the value of general education courses was higher in students who participated in grant initiatives than for those who did not.

Essential in this shift of thinking was more consistent advocacy for the general curriculum and the liberal arts by faculty, which was reported by both faculty and students. Faculty survey responses included identification of what they did to help students understand the value of connections between courses in their advising, their course syllabi, and the design of courses where the content progresses from one to another. Faculty also articulated the need for continued evaluation of their college's curricular structures to help students make connections and engage in courses across the curriculum. In addition, faculty responses indicated support for helping students build intentional learning plans to thoughtfully navigate their courses of study, which will in turn prepare them for post-graduate success. Finding a common way to describe coherence and developing a consistent set of arguments for deeper and intentional engagement in courses outside the major in two principal points of contact between faculty and students—syllabi and advising—emerged as a post-grant action item for our campuses. Such an action will not only incentivize students to embrace diversifying their studies intentionally but can also supply arguments to share with family and future employers about the "what" and "why" of their education.

The Role of Cross-Institutional Collaboration

The collaborative structure of this grant experience served participating institutions extremely well. Having the opportunity to learn about challenges and successes from other institutions reinforced our appreciation of the value of working closely on aligned goals with creative, dedicated, and generous partners. The individual activities undertaken by each campus were developed to meet the needs of each campus, but they were often inspired and informed by the work of other partners. With this structured opportunity to learn from one another, we were able to direct our energies on initiatives most likely to succeed, thus making our work more efficacious overall. Because our collaboration itself was so successful, a few words are in order about the two key collaborative elements: (a) the multi-campus workshops and (b) the leadership management group and how it supported our work. Finally, it is important to reflect on the role The Five Colleges of Ohio consortium played in supporting our work under this grant.

Leveraging Collaboration: Multi-Campus Workshops

Overall, we held seven multi-campus workshops—three under the planning grant and four under the implementation grant. Each of our planning grant workshops focused on one of the three initiatives of the grant. However, to inaugurate our work on curricular coherence under the grant, we began our first multi-campus workshop with a surprisingly broad and ranging discussion of what is meant by curricular coherence. This discussion proved instructive throughout the grant process. We learned from the discussion that, while we could develop a common vocabulary around curricular coherence, coherence as a concept is elusive and its meaning is highly dependent on context and use. In other words, we learned that we were embarking on a project during which we would have to continually articulate what we meant by "coherence" relative to each particular context, whether in conversations with students and faculty or in our assessment instruments.

We also had four multi-campus workshops during the implementation grant period. Information about the workshops can be found in Appendix A. Participants at these workshops included a mix of faculty and staff who attended several workshops as well as those who attended only one but were involved in grant-related initiatives on their home campuses. Campus representatives issued open invitations to the multi-campus workshops, but they also targeted faculty and staff who served on key committees or who had shown particular interest in campus initiatives to attend the workshops. For each workshop, one or two campuses took the lead in developing the agenda with substantial input from representatives from each campus. Each workshop featured a keynote speaker or workshop facilitators who addressed curricular challenges from the perspective of higher education and invited participants to engage new ideas. Each workshop also included reports by campus representatives on grant initiatives, a session designed to allow faculty and staff from the six partner institutions to learn from one another, and dedicated time for attendees to gather with their colleagues from their own institution to discuss ways that their initiatives could benefit from workshop content. These gatherings also laid the foundation for fruitful future collaborations by fostering many connections among faculty and staff across participating institutions.

Leveraging Collaboration: Associate Deans and Provosts Management Group

We knew from the start that maintaining strong lines of communication would be essential to moving forward with our projects, and it was necessary that such communication was led by institutional

representatives empowered with moving forward complex project elements, from new online advising systems to the design and listing of new courses. In order to accomplish these goals and stay on plan, we developed what we considered to be an essential practice: a monthly conference call of our associate deans and provosts group, the principal investigator, the grant institutional researcher, and the Executive Director of the Ohio Five. Having these regularly scheduled opportunities for discussion strengthened our work, whether it concerned the generation of ideas for multi-campus workshops or support for individual initiatives. About half of each conference call was devoted to campus reports. Several of the individual initiatives undertaken by campuses were shaped by the campus updates on these phone calls, after which representatives would consult with and sometimes visit partner campuses to learn more about initiatives or to undertake joint ventures. Representatives also strategized on ways to help faculty reflect on and buy into campus initiatives. In short, these monthly calls fostered a sense of community that encouraged creative collaborations in addition to providing team support. (See Appendix B for the management group members.)

Leveraging Collaboration: The Consortial Factor

Officially, The Five Colleges of Ohio served as the fiscal agent for the grant. That in itself was an enormous benefit to the project. Having the consortium coordinate the financial operations removed that burden from any one of the six campuses and thereby fostered a sense of equity within the group. However, the value added did not rest solely on the fiscal management provided by the consortium but benefited from its consortial connection in two additional ways. First, with extensive experience in guiding collaborations, the Executive Director[2] was a steady source of both practical knowledge and what can best be thought of as a guiding vision. The practical knowledge included experience not just with fiscal matters but also with the best practices for planning group events, some of which were attended by as many as 90 people from the six institutions. Even more important was the guiding vision that the director provided, helping the campus partners shift perspective or focus in on details in order to address challenges both large and small. Secondly, the consortium provided a pathway to top decision makers at the five colleges. The principal investigator and the associate deans and provosts group were regular participants in meetings of the Ohio Five Academic Committee of deans and provosts. Results of the report were also brought forward to the Five Colleges of Ohio Board of Trustees, which consists of the presidents of the five member institutions. These conversations in turn strengthened the support for grant initiatives across the board.

Changing the way that an institution structures its curriculum, how faculty talk about the curriculum and its goals, and the tools and practices of academic advising are not for the faint of heart. An institution aspiring to do any of the above often instinctively turns to the field looking for examples or advice. In our case, approaching these ambitious issues together, over time, allowed us to fashion individual solutions appropriate to each campus culture while sharing in a common purpose of curricular coherence to create opportunities for integrative learning for students. We gained strength and courage to experiment, scrap, and redesign unproductive ideas, and move forward quickly when we found common productive ground. As we helped our students and faculty find meaningful connections in their course of study, together we, in the words of the Ohio Five motto, "accomplished those things together that we could not do alone."

Conclusion

We began this project with a commitment to enhance curricular coherence by supporting integrative learning for our students on three fronts: structuring curricular connections, finding and sustaining connections, and focusing on students. Through these components, we explored ways to (a) create pathways through the general curriculum; (b) use online tools to make visible curricular, co-curricular, and experiential learning connections; and (c) help students develop intentional and coherent understandings of their own educational experiences through individual and structured advising. While we did not put it this way at the time, it is now clear that the three components of our project were scaffolding to support integrative learning so that integration would be "not an isolated event but a regular part of intellectual life" (Huber, Hutchings, & Gale, 2005, p. 6) for our students. Our rich collaborative experiences in this work, with our partners and with key stakeholders on our campuses, strengthened our efforts to help students develop a capacity for integrative liberal learning. As Ferren and Paris (2015) pointed out, "Integrative liberal learning catalyzes a process of intellectual and personal growth by providing students with opportunities and guidance to make sense of the world and their place in it" (p. 2). In other words, our work on this project enhanced our ability to deliver on the promise of the liberal arts.

[2] Over the course of the grant, we had the opportunity to work with two Executive Directors: Susan Palmer was the Executive Director during the first half of the project, until her retirement; Sarah Stone was the Executive Director during the second half of our project.

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Author's Note

The grant collaborators and I would like to acknowledge The Teagle Foundation for its generous support of our work to enhance curricular coherence. The Teagle Foundation's leadership in supporting the growth and development of the liberal arts through collaborative work is extraordinary, and our institutions are grateful for the opportunities that their grant created. We would also like to acknowledge the guidance that we received from our program officer, Loni Bordoloi Pazach.

I would like to thank the recent members of the associate deans and provosts management team whose work brought our project to a successful conclusion and whose ideas and reports contributed to this article, as well as the former members who developed and launched early grant initiatives. Please see Appendix B for a full list of the management team members.

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Anyone wishing to review the survey instruments referenced in this article is welcome to contact the author for this information.

Appendix A
Multi-Campus Workshops

August 2015, Kenyon College **Facilitator:** Randy Bass, Vice Provost for Education and Professor of English at Georgetown University **Topic:** Ways that liberal education can renew itself in a rapidly changing landscape, emphasizing the distinctive qualities of higher learning in a global digital ecosystem.
August 2106, Denison University **Speaker:** Michael Roth, President of Wesleyan University **Topic:** How liberal education will help students face the challenges of the 21st century.
August 2107, The College of Wooster **Facilitator:** Ann Ferren, Distinguished Fellow of the Association of American Colleges and Universities **Topic:** Curricular coherence and integrative learning from the student perspective.
August 2108, Oberlin College **Facilitators:** Randy Bass, Vice Provost for Education and Professor of English at Georgetown University, and Christopher Steck, SJ, Associate Professor of Theology at Georgetown University (co-chairs of Georgetown's curricular committee) **Topic:** Sustaining initiatives and cultivating a culture of innovation and implementation.

Appendix B
Associate Deans and Provosts Management Team Members

Most recent members of the associate deans and provosts management team whose work brought our project to a successful conclusion and whose ideas and reports contributed to this article: Terrence Bensel and Patrick Jackson, Allegheny College; Catherine L. Dollard and Paul A. Djupe, Denison University; Jeffrey A. Bowman, Kenyon College; Elizabeth Hamilton, Oberlin College; Ashley N. Biser, Ohio Wesleyan University; Bryan T. Karazsia, The College of Wooster; and Sarah Stone, Executive Director of The Five Colleges of Ohio.

Former members of the management team whose work contributed to the development and early phases of this project: James R. Pletcher, Denison University (retired); Ivonne M. Garcia and Brad A. Hartlaub, Kenyon College; Steven Wojtal and Tabassum Haque, Oberlin College; Barbara S. Andereck and Martin J. Eisenberg, Ohio Wesleyan University (formerly); Henry B. Kreuzman III, The College of Wooster; and Susan Palmer, Executive Director of The Five Colleges of Ohio (retired).