Learning Across Blocks Working Group
Interdisciplinary learning with greater agency to faculty and students

Block 4 Report (12/14/22)

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Our conversations through the past year have highlighted the following (problems to be solved):

a) creating more integrative and interdisciplinary learning
b) greater focus on relationship between students and faculty, and among ourselves
c) solutions that solve multiple problems (subtractive instead of additive)
d) giving greater space in the curriculum for students to work on meaningful/project-based solutions to perennial and contemporary problems
e) solutions to current general education challenges
f) better outcomes for flexibility leading to better mental health

With these thoughts in mind, we suggest two immediate solutions:

I. To increase two-block course offerings with special emphasis on those that are interdisciplinary (inter-departmental) or meet general education requirements. We encourage all possible iterations that solve any of the above problems

II. Going back to two-block FYE model

All our proposals below are designed to increase collaboration and connections among faculty, students and staff, to provide additional time in the schedule for students to choose courses interesting them, and to promote justice.

Proposal 1. Big Questions Focused Education – Synergy Semesters + Senior Projects

We imagine multiple four-linked blocks (synergy semester) that meet during a semester to cover what we consider are the ultimate goals of general education.

Ideally, these will focus on answering a big question - perennial or contemporary - linked by issues of justice.

Students will need to take one such semester to cover general education requirements.
The students will participate in a senior project (focused on half block and block 32) to propose solutions to pressing problems (externally and internally facilitated).

These semesters may cover language and global education that should be available to all students.

This option for general education would decrease the requirements for general education.

This option may include some introductory courses students would normally take, decreasing the burden on departments while providing innovative and creative ways of teaching introductory courses.

We also propose that double majors in the same division be eliminated.

Proposal II: Synergy Semesters with Language Requirements

We envision synergy semester as discussed above with an overlay of a minimum of two blocks of language requirements and some opportunity for study abroad built-in.

Proposal III: Synergy Semester with Language and Distribution Requirements

We envision a synergy semester solving many problems listed above, but if we are worried that students may not sample all divisions, we could overlay the requirement that students take some minimum number of courses in each division.