

Purdue Teaching and Learning Listening Session Summaries

Over the course of the spring 2018 semester, Provost Jay Akridge and Senior Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning Frank Dooley held nine listening sessions with over 100 members of the campus community. These sessions continued a conversation that originated with members of the Teaching Academy and Associate Deans for Undergraduate Education. Participants were given some general prompts and a report on the future of undergraduate education from the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, but the discussions were unconstrained by any formal structure. The primary focus was to better understand participants' views on the future direction of undergraduate education at Purdue, key elements in building a strong culture of support for teaching, and what they perceived as opportunities and challenges in our teaching mission.

Rather than grouping participants by college or department, the listening sessions included people who hold similar roles within the university. At times this meant that the conversation focused on issues of particular relevance to people in that role, but some topics came up across multiple sessions. The nine groups were:

- Staff reporting to the Senior Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning
- Staff reporting to the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management and the Vice Provost for Student Life
- Staff who work within a School or College
- Faculty and staff who work in other areas that serve the entire campus, such as Diversity & Inclusion, the Honors College, ITaP, and Libraries
- Graduate student teaching assistants
- Non tenure-track faculty
- Assistant Professors
- Associate Professors
- Full Professors

The Program Director of the Boiler Success Team took detailed notes during each conversation, which are summarized on the following pages. No attribution is given and participant names are not included, so that the conversations could be as candid as possible. We are grateful for the participants' willingness to share their time and insights with the campus community.

Teaching & Learning Staff

March 20, 2018

- Purdue is already doing many things well – every bright idea in the report, we have it somewhere on campus, but not all students have access.
- There is a lot of excellence trapped in individual departments or Colleges. In part this is because “centralized” is sometimes seen as a four-letter word at Purdue. Not everything should be centralized, but some challenges can’t be solved by one department. University leadership needs to say what they see as a problem and take some action centrally rather than leaving it up to departments.
- We may want to take time to study what we’re doing well, where our gaps are, and where we can differentiate ourselves.
 - We pay for SERU but is anyone using that data? Or Gallup data?
 - Why are students choosing Purdue? Should we try to attract those students or be all things for all people?
 - Can we gather data from exit interviews?
- When it comes to faculty involvement in student success efforts, they are hearing mixed messages and that is hurting us. If success and retention go up, it’s going to impact GPA. So if we hear that just means grade inflation, that is really hurting our efforts with faculty. We should be saying really loudly that rigor and inclusion aren’t mutually exclusive.
- How do we get faculty on board with student success? It would help if we could change the conversation from teaching to learning.
 - IMPACT is all about connecting the dots, so learning outcomes, teaching, and assessment are all aligned.
 - What are our expectations for faculty to engage in things like SI or IMPACT and should we hold accountable those who refuse to focus on student learning?
 - How can we encourage that mindset as we train graduate students and bring in new faculty members?
 - If we want good teaching to matter for tenure, we need to find ways to measure it, and we need primary committee members to value it.
- We need to be careful of not asking assistant professors to do more and more – can we think about “instead” rather than “too?” Consider approaches like “vertically-integrated projects,” in which faculty mentor graduate students who then mentor undergraduates. We need to find ways for supporting/mentoring undergraduates to benefit the faculty member’s career as well as the student.
- Nationally that there is a feeling of universities becoming vocational and losing sight of all the other purposes and benefits of a residential learning experience.
 - At Purdue we are seen as excellent in terms of career preparation, so we are in a good position to lead the conversation about all the other benefits of a college education.
 - Most of our students do have some kind of meaningful professional activity prior to graduation but they do struggle to communicate what they are learning. We need to provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning.

Associate Professors

March 26, 2018

- There is a lack of incentive to focus on teaching at both the individual level (merit pay, promotion & tenure) and at the department or college level (funding, prestige). Sometimes there's even a disincentive where faculty are discouraged from focusing on teaching. Without changing the incentives it will be difficult to change the culture on campus.
- It also matters what kind of teaching we're discussing. In many departments most of the effort actually goes to teaching students outside the major, which is a service to the university that doesn't always seem to be rewarded.
- A big challenge is figuring out how to measure good teaching. We know that course evaluations are biased but there are concerns with other options as well such as peer review or teaching portfolios. However we know there are biases related to grants and research as well and we don't let that stop us from measuring research productivity.
- If we do establish metrics for quality teaching, how do we identify those who need help (since there is little incentive to self-identify) and how do we respond?
- Even when faculty are promoted based on teaching, it's usually because they do research on teaching and learning, which is different from just being an excellent, effective teacher in the classroom. How do we value that as well?
- We could look at student outcomes as a metric for teaching quality/effectiveness:
 - First destination data from CCO: what jobs did students get and what does that indicate about the knowledge and skills they gained at Purdue?
 - How do we look beyond six months out of college? Students live for a long time after they graduate and their first job isn't necessarily the best measure to use.
 - Could investigate how students do at Purdue after taking a class with a specific professor. Are they more likely to graduate/be retained if they took your class?
- Need to keep in mind how much we are asking of faculty. They need to be excellent researchers and excellent teachers, and things like mentoring undergraduate researchers, creating teaching portfolios, or figuring out how to use active learning with a large class take a lot of time.
- A focus on grade inflation is challenging on several levels.
 - It could be that Purdue has had less grade inflation than other institutions because there is less of a focus on teaching here, so if we start to emphasize teaching more but departments hold the line, they will be punished with worse evaluations.
 - Other departments would say that if they do invest in quality instruction and follow best practices in teaching (such as use of portfolios and revision vs. grading first attempts), grades will likely go up and then they'll be criticized for grade inflation.
- Most instructors would rather not shut off Wi-Fi in classrooms since it is needed for many pedagogical technologies. However some do have individual class policies around use of laptops.

Enrollment Management & Student Life Staff

March 27, 2018

- There is a lot of student learning that happens outside the classroom, whether it's something formal like leading a student organization or something informal like having a meaningful conversation in the residence hall. However:
 - These kinds of learning experiences are very difficult to track or report on.
 - There are so many different things going on across campus that we don't all know about, so there are some redundancies and missed opportunities for connection.
 - Students don't always make connections with what they learn outside the classroom so it's important to provide opportunities for reflection.
- It would be very helpful to have more direction from senior university leadership so there was more of a unified vision and set of goals around student learning (both curricular and co-curricular). Leadership is especially important when it comes to deciding on metrics and tools used to record and/or evaluate student learning.
- We need a conversation about how we legitimize different forms of student learning outside the classroom, and it would help to include the people who are involved with data analysis and reporting involved in the conversation from the start.
- Neither the internal memo nor the national report talked about student wellbeing, but that element is critical to student success and needs to be included.
- There are many ways that faculty connect with the world of student affairs:
 - Many student organization advisors are faculty members, and there is often overlap between what they teach in class and what the organization does.
 - Now that mentoring is a key requirement for tenure, the percentage of University Residences Faculty Fellows who are teaching faculty (rather than staff) has grown from 20% to 44%.
 - Faculty members often reach out to ODOS when they don't feel equipped to handle student issues.
- Student Life should be an important part of the conversation when we're thinking about the value of a residential education.
- Aggressive enrollment growth has an impact on co-curricular activities and services as well as classroom space. People in these areas usually have specialized knowledge about what to expect in terms of the effect of enrollment growth.
- Is there a general understanding across campus about who our vulnerable students are and how we can best support them?

Assistant Professors

April 2, 2018

- Many new Assistant Professors need help with the basics of getting started as an instructor. People are helpful when you ask questions, but how do you even know what to ask?
Participants specifically mentioned not knowing about:
 - How to create a syllabus or how to use Blackboard
 - The CIE and what support it can offer instructors
 - Course evaluations – that they exist, or how the department uses them
 - Purdue culture and how to connect with this group of students
 - The need for different kinds of support as you get more experience teaching
- Graduate student training does not necessarily include learning how to teach. If we care about good teaching, then that needs to start with how we train future academics. Partly it's about culture but it's also about specific training for course TAs.
- Given the lack of training, mentoring around teaching is even more important but the quality is uneven across Purdue departments. It really depends on the individual mentor, so it would be helpful if there were guidelines about what to cover. Some mentors are willing to take time to give critical feedback, but other times the support is less helpful.
- A lot of concerns come down to differences across departments and their leadership. It might be helpful to bring departments together to share what they're doing around teaching, what is working and what is not.
- When starting out as a new instructor, it would be helpful to know how your class fits in with the curriculum – what students are expected to learn in pre-requisite courses and what they need to know for future courses. One way to learn this sort of information is by participating on a curriculum committee, but not all departments invite new faculty to join those committees.
- Faculty who want to be promoted on teaching are expected to be involved with the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning, but not everyone has experience in that area and not all departments know how to evaluate that kind of research. At the same time, faculty who do specialize in SOTL may find that their research is not taken as seriously or that they're expected to contribute more in service to the department.
- To be prepared for the class of 2030, we may want to look at the innovations happening in the world of K-12 instruction because that is how our future students will be expecting to learn.
- It is possible to do both teaching and research well, but be wary of asking too much of new assistant professors. At an R1 institution there are certain research benchmarks you have to hit and many of us came to Purdue for research.
- Other issues that were brought up:
 - Concerns about lack of space for active-learning classrooms and “touchdown space” where students can go between classes.
 - Lack of basic equipment available to instructors.
 - The need for resources that support student mental health.

Graduate Student Teaching Assistants

April 9, 2018

- There was quite a bit of discussion about which graduate students actually teach and why:
 - Some departments do not allow graduate students to teach, so if those students want teaching experience they have to find it in other departments and may be missed when it comes to sharing information and resources.
 - Students on fellowships aren't eligible for TA appointments so it can be challenging to get experience. Possible solutions include volunteering or creating an independent study course to get credit for teaching.
 - Sometimes students feel pressured into "volunteering" to serve as a TA for their advisor if he or she does not have a TA already.
 - In some departments only master's degree students teach, not PhD students.
 - Departments vary in whether graduate students receive the same amount of support for being a TA vs teaching independently.
 - Is there a conflict of interest in that graduate students want teaching experience but undergraduates want opportunities to connect with faculty members?
- In most cases, graduate students do not feel that they have a lot of support or training as new instructors. They can get help if they ask for it but often don't know who to ask or what kind of help they actually need.
- Those who have participated in CIE workshops found them helpful but wished they knew about the opportunity earlier in their teaching career. Some thought participation should be mandatory but others worried about the time commitment especially early on. One student suggested making the workshops available over the summer if they aren't already.
- Participants had several ideas for how to support/train new instructors:
 - Getting feedback from peers or assigned faculty mentors who observe them in class.
 - Volunteer as a TA for one semester and then take on the official role the next semester.
 - A student in Education reported that her course coordinator meets weekly with instructors to review lesson plans, discuss common concerns, and review prior year's course evaluations to be prepared for issues that might come up.
- Several participants reported hearing from faculty that teaching is not rewarded at Purdue and that research should be prioritized; faculty who are able to do so get course releases so they don't have to teach at all and can just focus on research.
- Participants suggested hiring some faculty who are teaching specialists, and having them teach introductory courses. Then later in the curriculum students can learn from research faculty.
- Consider that the lack of respect for teaching is a "field problem" as much as a Purdue problem, but possibly Purdue could start to shift norms by paying attention to teaching motivation and ability when hiring new faculty.
- Undergraduate research should be promoted as much as possible, since many participants were unaware of all the research opportunities available when they were undergraduates.

Non-Tenure Track Faculty

April 25, 2018

- A common concern is that students are showing up for class unprepared to learn the material, even if they passed a pre-requisite course. You can't provide individual support for every student so there needs to be a programmatic way to address this problem.
- It would help to know early in the semester which students are likely to struggle.
 - Possibly we could use Blackboard to say that if you do poorly on an early assignment, you should take advantage of available resources.
 - It would help if struggles could lead to an improvement plan like in industry.
 - One PPI major has a new curricular structure that includes a way to monitor student engagement and react quickly when students fall behind.
 - We could possibly make better use of juniors and seniors as TAs or mentors.
- Another concern is that students often do not take advantage of existing resources.
 - Many students seem to lack self-regulation skills or meta-cognitive skills. They don't even know how to study or how to approach the class in order to be successful.
 - Would it be possible to have students take some kind of inventory early on that is referenced in multiple classes?
 - Could we make better use of Forecast data or portfolios so that future professors can know better how to help individual students?
- One instructor uses a Learning Styles inventory at the start of each class to help students understand their learning preferences.
 - Other instructors questioned the research behind learning styles or whether it is feasible to adjust your instruction to meet student preferences.
- There seem to be a growing number of neuro-atypical students in class who may have trouble adjusting to a different level of resources in college compared to K12.
- Several participants were concerned about student mental health.
 - Many provided (second-hand) reports that students are turned away from CAPS, are asked to wait a few months before an intake appointment, or are told to access other resources like inpatient treatment. *[Note: Since this time, additional CAPS staff have been hired and wait times are regularly monitored.]*
 - Participants witness high levels of student anxiety over testing, even when the assessments are low stakes.
- Participants shared a few observations about life as a non-tenure track faculty member.
 - There is no path for promotion for continuing lecturers.
 - You aren't considered part of the faculty even after teaching for years.
 - Resources such as space are hard to come by and once allocated, can still be taken back.

College-based staff

April 26, 2017

- Internships are an important way for students to develop professional skills but there are several areas of concern.
 - It is challenging for international students to gain internships because many companies look at them as a pipeline to full-time work but won't sponsor students for visas.
 - Krannert has created a position for establishing internship opportunities in China.
 - There is a major divide between students who can get well-paid internships and those who have to take unpaid internships, including student teachers.
 - The College of Liberal Arts has a scholarship fund for students with unpaid internships but it remains a challenging situation.
 - To truly benefit from an internship, students need a learning component where they can reflect on how it relates to past and future learning.
- It seems that there are not enough resources available to provide students with the level of career guidance that they need.
 - It might help to add more connections to the curriculum as Science did with their teamwork core requirement.
 - Career services can be better connected with academic advising and student life.
- Diversity and inclusion was a major concern of the group.
 - Non-URM students need to engage on this topic, and not just by checking a box to meet a requirement.
 - Faculty and staff also need to be engaged; University of Minnesota has faculty/staff learning communities to discuss diversity and inclusion issues.
 - This is related to the idea that study abroad participation is not a Band-Aid for global experience. True reflection and follow up are necessary.
 - Whatever we do needs to be done well and we should engage experts.
- Participants discussed some frustration with how teaching is valued at a research institution like Purdue.
 - Could there be a track for teaching specialists who are passionate subject-matter experts and teach the first few years in order to engage students right away?
 - Recent exit interviews suggest that students are frustrated with teaching quality.
 - One example shared about a faculty member who created a year-long opportunity for new faculty to learn how to teach; seems to be successful so far.
- Have we thought about the new generation of students who will be attending Purdue, and whether we are prepared to meet their expectations about how they learn? This generation is all about experience, and part of the Purdue experience is living on campus so we need to provide that opportunity for all students.

Full Professors

April 30, 2018

- There is very little incentive for faculty to care about or spend time on student success initiatives, because tenure and raises are focused on research accomplishments.
 - Those who do engage do so because they find it personally rewarding.
 - The incentive system does not mesh well with institutional goals or the work that needs to be accomplished.
 - However, if you tie raises or other incentives to teaching you won't necessarily get faculty to be better teachers; they'll just do what it takes to *look* like they're better teachers. Really the issue is about creating a culture that values teaching.
 - There has been some culture change especially around mentoring but for the most part, expectations about research haven't changed, there are just additional expectations around teaching/mentoring.
 - For tenure, teaching really means scholarship of teaching & learning.
 - Graduate training does not emphasize teaching or value job placements anywhere other than R1 institutions.
- There are differing views on whether it is good to hire non-tenure track faculty to focus on teaching. If they are only here for a semester or two that is a problem, but there has been some success when instructors have renewable contracts and a promotion pathway.
- We need to find a way to get input from students when courses aren't going well. They should feel empowered to share concerns but also understand the process which should usually start by reaching out to the instructor before escalating.
- What do we do about bad teachers? Departments can try to limit the damage they do but often they are assigned to introductory classes, or are given more teaching responsibility if research output is low.
- It is important to consider how we engage students, especially early in the semester.
 - Many students seem to do well with experiential learning.
 - The learning community approach seems to be effective.
 - The message some faculty are hearing is that lecture is bad, but students learn in different ways so no one approach is best and sometimes lecture is appropriate.
- Pressure to increase enrollment means there are not enough resources to follow best practices, either in the classroom (large classes opportunities for engagement) or in terms of support staff.
- Students need opportunities to experience diversity in all forms.
 - Many underrepresented students say they never see faculty who look like them.
 - Hiring committees say they value diversity but more effort is needed to reach out to candidates and encourage them to apply.
 - It's important for students to develop social consciousness.
 - Some institutions require courses on diversity but Purdue does not.

Campus-wide Programs

May 4, 2018

- What expectations are there for faculty to become good teachers, and what resources are available to support them?
 - Many resources are available but tend to attract those already interested and those who want any funding associated. We are not very proactive in reaching out to those who might need help but not seek it.
 - Why isn't the College of Education more involved? At Penn State their faculty development opportunities are mostly faculty-led but Purdue is staff-led.
 - Are candidates and new hires asked about teaching experience/expertise?
 - When faculty win research awards, are they expected to translate their research to the undergraduate classroom? (Doing so is challenging so faculty might need help with this.)
 - Do faculty know how to teach in a culturally inclusive way, and do they understand student development and various student identities?
- What is the value of the residential campus, and are faculty engaged in that way?
 - Some concern about online classes not providing opportunities for engagement with faculty; will students develop meaningful relationships?
 - If meaningful, authentic interaction with students is an important part of a residential campus, do many faculty ever interact with students outside of class? How engaged are faculty in the residential campus?
 - Rather than limit online opportunities, ensure online learning is a valuable experience.
 - Faculty teaching online tend to be receptive to help because it is new to them; many will bring what they learned into their face to face classes as well.
- Important to consider the meaning of a degree to students themselves. Why are they here? Are we a business providing a product? The purpose of learning is more about the process, learning what you don't know, than about finding an answer to one question.
- If industry feedback suggests that students lack professional skills, can we amplify the T-model?
 - It's possible to assess/measure professional skills but no coordinated effort so far.
 - Incorporating professional skills into a class is ideal, but take more time (development and subsequent grading). Some classes add components like teamwork without instruction or support so it's actually a negative experience.
 - Does the "Degree in Three" model limit opportunities to develop professional skills?
 - Students talk about being provided with leadership opportunities but that is not the same as recognizing and responding to a need for leadership.
 - The report says that learning from and engaging with faculty from underrepresented groups prepares students to work in a diverse environment, so our lack of faculty diversity might be hurting students.
- Once we decide what our priorities are, how do we influence change in a system with distributed leadership? We need to consider both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in figuring out how to engage faculty who wouldn't normally choose to engage outside of research.