



Curriculum Development in Higher Education: Faculty-Driven Processes and Practices

Peter Wolf, Julia Hughes eds; Jossey-Bass, 2007.

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I like this volume's title! It is so important that curriculum development be seen and practiced as a process rather than the lumping together of random courses. It is essential that this process be managed by faculty --- the constituency whose major responsibility, teaching (theirs) and learning (their students'), and its success, so greatly depend on the quality of the curriculum. I am also fascinated by the fact that all of the contributors to this volume practice at Canadian institutions, and that the examples provided are of Canadian practices; this because the volume obviously describes a system different from the U.S. one, yet it is motivational because there are so many similarities between the two systems.

The volume presents a variety of perspectives on curriculum development, from the program level to institutional and regional levels. One of its greatest contributions may be the introduction of SoCP --- the Scholarship of Curriculum Practice as a significant area for faculty engagement. As is often the case in higher education, we practice by emulation rather than by applying our skills as researchers ("trained skeptics"), our curiosity as life-long learners, or our 'authority' as academics. Few faculty have been trained in teaching college, and fewer yet have been formally introduced to curriculum development. The possibility of elevating a key academic function -- the development, continuous assessment, and ongoing refinement of curricula -- to a scholarly enterprise led by faculty is both promising and exciting.

The chapters in this volume are autonomous articles describing and assessing curricular activities at a number of institutions and at a variety of levels within the educational structures. Some of the common threads among the chapters include a focus on faculty's roles in the complex process, the reciprocal and practical relationship between curriculum development and faculty development, the continuous nature of effective curriculum development, and the benefits of collaboration between faculty and a variety of other entities.

Chapters 2 through 8 describe and discuss curriculum development activities in specific settings. They include: a faculty development center's involvement and curricular alignment of course objectives and content (Ch. 2); a grants program to encourage and support departmental-level curriculum development focused on the process of student learning (Ch. 3); curriculum development as an ongoing process (Ch. 4); the role of administrators in the process (Ch. 5); and, interdisciplinary and collaborative projects (Chs. 6, 7, 8).

Framing this collection of first-hand experiences are three chapters devoted to the 'big picture' aspects of curriculum development and the necessary role of faculty. Chapter 1 sets the context and frameworks for curriculum development, and describes SoCP and the requirements for its success. Chapters 9 and 10 close the volume with a broad-ranging discussion of the key elements necessary to a successful curriculum development program. These include commitment of time, resources and organizational will, the need to overcome long-established barriers to progress, the changing roles of and reward systems for faculty, and the need to view course development and re-development in a new light.

This volume should be owned by every faculty member, every academic department, and every academic administrator. Though the specific settings described may not directly parallel all programs, the strategic and structural frameworks, approaches, and techniques are relevant to any academic program. It is an approach that brings together institutional and unit agendas, a focus on quality and student learning, and the centrality of faculty's role.



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