

Comprehensive curriculum reform in higher education: collaborative engagement of faculty and administrators

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Abstract

This case study explored the phenomenon of a four-year collaborative curriculum review process between administration and faculty at a higher education institution. Two research questions from a higher education administrator's perspective were explored: How did the curriculum review team experience the comprehensive curriculum review process? How did the faculty and administration collaborate during the comprehensive curriculum review process? The primary data for this study were generated from in-depth interviews with 10 curriculum review team members. Findings emerged were: A collectively shared guiding vision for the curriculum provided a strong foundation for the comprehensive curriculum review process; Embracing curriculum as a shared responsibility among faculty and administration led to widespread participation; The collaboration of various groups within the institution in the process promoted organizational change; Cultural issues regarding people and organizational structure served as barriers to the collaboration process, simultaneously the curriculum team's sense of community strengthened the curriculum review process. The study provides recommendations to administrators responsible for oversight of the curriculum review process and the educational institution's resources.

Keywords: curriculum, higher education, faculty and administrator collaboration, case study, grounded theory

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is a fundamental matter for the “well-being and effectiveness of higher education” (Barnett & Coate, 2005, p. 7). No matter how you define curriculum (e.g., learning experiences, contents, objectives, courses, etc.) (Hyun, 2006), it is one of the most significant matters in higher education; however, little attention has been given to the evolution of curriculum and its review and transformation in the institutions. This current study adds to the higher education curriculum literature by looking at a case study of a four-year curriculum review process in a theological education institution of higher education in the United States. This study does not present a model for curriculum review; rather describes a higher education institution’s phenomenon of a comprehensive and collaborative (among faculty members and administrators) curriculum review process as a case study derived from grounded theory.

Collaboration in the change effort is a challenge in higher education, in particular, with comprehensive curriculum reform. Curriculum modification to existing courses or content will not always lead to the desired reform even though a collaborative approach has been the foundation of the process. Comprehensive and collaborative curriculum requires a “full examination of how academics conceive their role and how the curriculum itself is defined, analyzed, and changed” in the process of curriculum review (Toombs & Tierney, 1991, p. 9).

According to Cohen, Feters, and Fleischmann (2005, p. 324), radical curriculum reform is challenging because it requires time and widespread participation, which are fundamental challenges in the higher education institutional culture. The current study built on the research of Cohen et al. (2005) by focusing on a radical curriculum reform process that engaged the university community including faculty and administrators and spanned over four years. The higher education institution for this particular case study was the Ashland University’s Ashland Theological Seminary in Ohio, USA. This current study adds to Wolf and Hughes’ (2007) research on the role of faculty in curriculum development by examining a collaborative effort not only among faculty but also among faculty and administration.

Purpose of the Study and Its Significance

The primary purpose of this case study guided by grounded theory was to investigate and derive meaning from an exploration of the phenomenon of the comprehensive curriculum review process at Ashland Theological Seminary. Although curricular revision in other professional areas has also tended to focus on content, some professional areas of study have looked at curriculum review as a process, in particular, Slattery’s (2006) work in K-12 curriculum and other studies in higher education curriculum (Barnett & Coate, 2005; Burgess, 2004; Hyun, 2006; Jones, 2002; Seymour, 1988; Shapiro, 2003; Toombs & Tierney, 1991; Walkington, 2002; Wolf & Hughes, 2007). This study built on that literature with a specific look into the experiences of a curriculum review team.

The secondary purpose of this case study was to deepen the understanding of the collaborative process between faculty and administration during the curriculum review and revision at the university. The nature of the higher education profession promotes individuality (Toombs & Tierney, 1991). Historically, the teacher-centered paradigm has dominated higher education. More recently, as faculty have begun to embrace a learner-centered paradigm, faculty collaboration has been encouraged (Toombs & Tierney, 1991). One specific area that affects collaboration is the institution’s exercise of shared governance. Most literature focuses on faculty

sharing the governance over the curriculum, concentrating on degree programs rather than individual courses (Wolf & Hughes, 2007). This current study focused on shared governance not only among faculty but also among faculty and administration in comprehensive curricular reform.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Characteristics of Postmodern Curriculum

Doll's (1993) extensive study of postmodern curriculum provides some insight into higher education curriculum. Since it is ever-changing and evolving, postmodern curriculum could be referred to as curriculum-in-action (Barnett & Coate, 2005, p. 3). Curriculum development is not seen as permanent but as creative and fluid. Postmodern curriculum development does not focus on specific steps in curriculum development but instead on the relationships of people involved in the process of creating curriculum (Tierney, 1989). This means that emerging curriculum is a nonlinear process with no master plan or rationale for curriculum. Postmodernism accepts the chaotic, the "emergent currents of change" (Hunkins & Hammill, 1994, p. 41). Slattery's (2006) postmodern view for curriculum and his interest in religion, spirituality, and culture also speak to the field of higher education. He identified three main elements of postmodern curriculum: (a) a focus on community cooperation rather than corporate competition, (b) a holistic process perspective rather than separate parts, and (c) a multilayered, interdisciplinary curriculum, which includes the integration of theology (pp. 108-109).

Comprehensive Curriculum Reform and Its Complexity

When looking at curricular revision, it is important to note the difference between making small changes to curriculum and engaging in comprehensive curriculum reform. Educational institutions commonly make small changes to curriculum, which typically involves faculty making changes to individual courses or changes in teaching methods (Cobb, 1990). Faculty tend to focus most of their time and energy on staying up-to-date in their field, expressing less interest in other components of the curriculum (Toombs & Tierney, 1991, p. 22). Many faculty prefer to select the courses they want to teach, the content they want to teach, and how they want to teach it due, in part, to the nature of academic freedom and autonomy (Innes, 2004, p. 259). What is less common is a comprehensive curriculum change where the focus is on how the parts fit together. Some institutions' hesitations to whole curriculum reform are generated from an unwillingness to embark on a major change because of the complexity and challenges involved in such an effort (Cobb, 1990). Burgess (2004) indicated:

The value of complexity theory, which emphasizes how design may emerge from participant groups rather than from a centrally managed plan, is discussed, along with the danger, given the time constraints, of chaos. Overall, there is an emphasis on the need for educators to understand the competing and at times contradictory forces in curriculum design, to enhance participation by the range of stakeholders involved. (p. 164)

After the goals for the curriculum are set, the leaders need to welcome the creative and unplanned events that will emerge amidst the complexity. Effective leaders will engage in a

flexible process that unfolds over time rather than a process that is predetermined (Burgess, 2004).

Challenges of Comprehensive Curriculum Reform

Institutions face challenges when attempting to engage in comprehensive curriculum reform including time and cooperation. Time is one of the constraints to whole curriculum reform. Adequate stakeholder participation in the curriculum review process takes time. Burgess (2004) encouraged curriculum designers to not miss the opportunity for wholesale curriculum reform because of time constraints. Instead, give the complex process adequate time so that the curricular changes are significant and lasting. The process may take years and much collaboration in order to build the understanding required among the various stakeholders to reach meaningful change. Cooperation is another challenge facing comprehensive curriculum reform. This cooperation is especially important in the design and development phase and is characteristic of postmodernism (Doll, 1993; Walkington, 2002).

When looking at curricular revision in the higher education environment, one must consider the influences that affect change as well as barriers that might inhibit change. Three major influences on curricular change include: external influences, organizational influences, and internal influences (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p. 331). These influences are necessary to understanding the collaborative effort of faculty and administration in a curriculum review process. The two main challenges to innovation include structural impediments “relating to the characteristics of the organizational framework” and cultural impediments that “determine how people in the organization act” (Seymour, 1988, p. 5).

External Influences on Curricular Change

Higher education curriculum has historically been considered the work of the faculty. More recently, however, external influences such as society, government, alumni, and others are affecting curriculum development and the curricular change process (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, pp. 98-100). Accreditation bodies expect more from educational institutions especially in the area of assessment of student learning. This external influence has caused a number of educational institutions to engage in curricular review in an effort to identify the desired student learning outcomes (Alstete, 2004; Lucas, 2000; Wolf & Hughes, 2007).

Organizational Influences on Curricular Change

In addition to the external influences, a higher education institution must address the organizational influences that affect the educational change process and the degree of collaboration. Some of the structural barriers to change result from the typical design of higher education institutions, which includes separation by disciplines with many units making decisions within the larger institution (Innes, 2004, p. 259). Also, educational institutions are known for being slow to make decisions (e.g., academic affairs’ complex and long governing process of reviewing and approving curriculum updates, initiatives, etc.) (Mortimer & Sathre, 2007). Higher education leaders find it quite challenging to bring change at the level of the institution due to the large numbers of natural barriers that are already in place in education.

Three major factors promoting organizational change include financial stability, a shared vision, and an appropriate organizational infrastructure. Taking these into consideration may help address some of the barriers to change. Providing resources and incentives for faculty is critical to the educational change process (Innes, 2004; Jones 2002; Walkington, 2002). Building a shared vision is the second factor promoting organizational change and can address the barrier of formalization by providing faculty input into the decision-making process (Burgess, 2004). The complexity of human behavior also affects the organization and its change efforts. An academic dean has to work with this complexity especially when dealing with curricular issues related to the students' academic success and unit accountability (Hyun, 2009). Myers (2006) said, "No dean wants to instigate a turf war among faculty members and their guilds, but curricular revisioning almost always leads to such a moment unless a rapprochement can be reached via a faculty's shared vision and understanding of a common mission" (p. 35). Myers further stated that evaluation of the learning goals associated with the curriculum generates dialogue and critical reflection on major issues. This evaluation process, "moves any adjustment of a curriculum into a shared process instead of defining each course as only the effort of one faculty member" (Myers, 2006, p. 39). A common vision and shared decision making can break through the complexity of human behavior and promote change.

The role of shared governance is another organizational factor that must be considered in curricular change efforts. Collaboration regarding decision making can have a vast impact on an educational institution's ability to implement curricular changes. Shared governance is often a challenging and slow process in higher education but a necessary one (Kezar, 2001; Mortimer & Sathre, 2007; Smith, 2002). According to Mortimer and Sathre (2007), "Shared governance means formulating and implementing meaningful ways to engage large numbers of people in the sharing process." Faculty, administrators, and boards are "the major governance partners who bear the burden for sharing and making shared governance work" (p. 113). Mortimer and Sathre did not advocate for the elimination of professional control for these various groups but recommended a modification that would allow for more flexibility as institutions are consistently pressed by external influences to be engaged with more constituencies and be held more accountable.

Shared governance requires mutual respect and submission, effective communication, and the recognition of the corporate responsibility for curriculum. Curriculum is a corporate responsibility that must be shared by the collective faculty of the educational institution (Aleshire, 2005; Mortimer & Sathre, 2007). In relation to curricular issues, Mortimer and Sathre (2007) go further to say that "A program of study is not just a faculty responsibility, but a responsibility of the institution as a whole" (p. 55). They argue that this partnership is necessary in order to avoid what they refer to as a "chain of events...programs of study that often emerge and are not the result of systematic planning" (p. 57).

Internal Influences on Curricular Change

The educational change process is largely affected by the individuals involved in the change. Researchers who study the issue of change in education identify the individual as an important factor in the process (Lashway, 1997; Seymour, 1988). The attitudes of people often affect the change effort. Two groups of individuals exist: those who are the targets of change and the agent of change (Zaltman & Duncan as cited in Seymour, 1988). Internal influences such as

the change agent or process leader, the leadership team, faculty, and the larger community affect curriculum development and change (Stark & Lattuca, 1997).

Change Agent or Process Leader - A coordinator or change agent needs to be identified early in the curriculum change process and have the skills to keep the process moving forward as well as the time and authority to lead (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). The organization must identify a responsible facilitator (leader) who can mobilize stakeholders through open dialogue and various communications and “spearhead the redesign and implementation of a learning-centered curriculum” (Hubball et al., 2007, p. 99). These individuals must have strong administrative ability, leadership skills, and political skills (Seymour, 1988) as well as a good understanding of what curriculum is and does for learners individually and collectively (Hyun, 2006).

Leadership Team as Change Agents - During the early part of the curriculum review process, a core group needs to be designed to oversee the process. Walkington (2002) recommended a wide variety or breadth of representation when assembling a team beyond faculty-only members. This includes senior management, department members as well as representatives from the field, professional organizations, accreditation committees, the student body, and other groups. The wide representation of stakeholders will ensure a breadth of experience and knowledge for the change process.

Faculty - Providing opportunities for open and frank discussion with faculty in the design and development phase is essential. The leadership team needs to seek ample input from the faculty and staff since collaboration will likely assist with implementation. A system of reporting back to the leadership must be in place so that everyone’s input can be considered. Creating a sense of ownership means that all ideas will be documented and considered at some point by the larger group (Walkington, 2002).

Campus Community - For change to occur, the educational organization must involve the people in the process. Although faculty expertise is the key at the design stage in the curriculum change process, involvement by the entire staff encourages a holistic approach to curriculum development. The leadership team must take time to hear all sides and opinions. When individuals are able to contribute to the process throughout the change effort, their level of ownership increases, which leads to successful and sustainable implementation. When members of the organization are involved in the decision-making process, they feel empowered and often will be more committed to the change proposal (Walkington, 2002). An organization’s culture also affects curriculum development and the change process.

Role of Culture in Curriculum Development

Education reform requires reculturing rather than restructuring (Fullan, 2001). Simply changing the course offerings or content or adding pre-requisites will not lead to solid educational change. Culture plays a major role in curriculum development. Few topics of discourse have caused as much controversy in higher education as the topic of curriculum (Tierney, 1989). The challenge with the concept of culture is that it is not easily understandable or apparent to organizational participants because people define culture differently. In addition, cultural impediments are often more difficult to identify than structural impediments and therefore, more challenging to overcome (Seymour, 1988). Culture impacts the educational change process at the institutional, departmental, and faculty levels.

Institutional Culture - A curricular change process is in large part affected by the institutional culture and whether that culture welcomes change. In looking at institutional culture,

it is important to examine institutional identification and administration's role in the curriculum review process. Higher education administrators have a critical role to play in creating an institutional culture that welcomes change. Strong institutional leadership recognizes the need to create a culture of trust within the organization. Administration must also dedicate institutional resources to the curricular change effort during both the development phase and the implementation phase. Administrators must also be active participants and leaders in the process by showing support for the change agents and the change process (Jones, 2002).

Departmental Culture - Departmental culture is the second type of culture affecting educational collaboration and change. Departments are the major unit of organization in higher education. Faculty loyalties tend to lie with their discipline and not necessarily with the educational organization, which can make organizational change a challenge (Innes, 2004).

Faculty Culture - Faculty culture also impacts curricular change. Educational beliefs and the disciplines of faculty are critical factors that must be considered in a curriculum review process (Toombs & Tierney, 1991). Faculty operate in four interdependent cultures that influence their beliefs and attitudes: the culture of the institution; the culture of the national system of higher education; the culture of the academic profession; and the culture of their discipline. These issues of culture make it difficult for faculty in higher education institutions to engage in "true" curricular revision. The cultural forces in higher education push against a shared vision, shared learning outcomes for students, and shared goals for a coherent curriculum (Tierney, 1989). The existing body of research on the process of higher education curriculum review focuses primarily on the role of faculty in the change effort. Faculty are encouraged to have shared governance over the curriculum in order to have ownership at the degree program level. However, no current body of research exists on the shared governance of faculty and administration over the curriculum. This case study addressed shared governance and the process of curriculum review as a shared responsibility within the educational institution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

This case study explored two questions: 1) How did the curriculum review team experience the comprehensive curriculum review process? and 2) How did the faculty and administration collaborate during the comprehensive curriculum review process?

Theoretical Framework for the Research Methodology

Research methodology for this study was guided by the theoretical framework of grounded theory to explore the phenomenon of the curriculum review process in the various perspectives of faculty, administrators, and the researcher. Through an examination of the curriculum review process, the researcher generated theories surrounding the phenomenon of the case. Developing theory from the data served as the main purpose for using grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Because of the researcher's desire to see what theories could arise from the curriculum review process, grounded theory was chosen as the methodological guide. Grounded theory allowed for the research questions to emerge during the process. Other key characteristics of grounded theory helped deepen the understanding of the research inquiry, in particular, theoretical sampling and theoretical sensitivity. As a method of data analysis,

theoretical sampling involved the joint process of data collection, coding, and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher actively participated during all stages of the research process as themes consistently emerged that required revision and further development.

This research focused on a single case study of a phenomenon taking place in the real life educational context at Ashland Theological Seminary (ATS). ATS is a graduate division of Ashland University located in northeast Ohio, USA and is the largest seminary in the state. ATS' primary mission is to prepare men and women for Christian service to the church and the world.

Role of the Researcher

One of the authors of this paper served as the chair of the four-year curriculum review process, which became the case for this study. As associate academic dean at the institution, the researcher was an administrator leading and facilitating the process. The choice to study one's own work setting allowed full access to the curriculum review process and enabled engagement in an in-depth analysis of the case. Thus, the research questions were explored from an administrator's perspective.

Methods of Data Collection

This study used two of the three most common types of data collection for qualitative studies: document analysis and interviewing (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). This study also used personal journals. Documents included e-mail exchanges, meeting minutes, and curriculum design materials. Self-reflection and a personal journal provided the researcher an opportunity to share reflections during the process of data analysis as well as her perceptions as the leader-facilitator of the process. The primary data were collected through interviews with members of the curriculum review team. Interviewing the curriculum team members helped identify what was going on during the process, how individuals or groups of people participated, and their understanding of the curriculum review process.

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects, the researcher interviewed 10 curriculum review team members one-on-one: five faculty members and five administrators. Although a total of 14 people served on the curriculum review team at some point during the four-year process, all 10 interviewees were serving on the team at the conclusion of the process except for one. That team member served on the curriculum team for three years prior to becoming president of the seminary. The researcher chose to interview the president given his length of service on the team and the perspective he could offer as seminary president. A semi-structured interview guided by a list of open-ended questions was used at the end of the four-year curriculum work. Pseudonyms were used for the participants' names to ensure confidentiality. Each interview was approximately one and one-half hour in length. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Data collection, coding, and analysis were occurring simultaneously. A large amount of data existed regarding curriculum content; however, this particular research was primarily focused on the experience of individuals who were directly involved in a comprehensive curriculum review process.

Constant comparative method coupled with theoretical sampling: Constant comparison allowed the researcher to probe deeply into the data to gain familiarity with the data (Creswell, 2003; Hatch, 2002). This process provided a way to compare incidents in order to generate and identify categories. Analyzing data using the constant comparative method served to help confirm or disconfirm how well the theory could be applied to the curriculum review process. As the researcher analyzed the data and identified various theories, other data sources were revisited to help fill in missing pieces as theories emerged and took shape. In the process of constant comparison, theoretical sampling emerged (Mertens, 1998).

Three Types of Coding - The various documents and transcripts from the case study were reviewed and analyzed using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Open Coding – It was used to identify, name, categorize, and describe the phenomena found in the e-mail correspondence and interview transcripts. Each page and line of the interviews was numbered to identify and locate the original data easily. After getting a general idea of the major categories indentified from the e-mail correspondence, the researcher coded incidents, ideas, and events from the first interview transcript. Each highlighted item was given a category label. Using the list of major themes already identified from the review of literature, larger categories were identified.

During a final read through of the first interview transcript, several emerging themes were identified coupled with a conceptual name and description that encompassed both the categories and the larger items derived from the literature review. A table to display an example of the open coding results was created and presented in Table 1 (Appendix).

For this example of open coding, “Curriculum Defined” was one of the major emerging themes. All 10 interviewees defined curriculum as having an “Intended Impact.” Seven of the interviewees defined curriculum as “Entire Experience.” The definitions were combined into one: “Curriculum as Entire Experience with an Intended Impact.” The quote that best encompassed that definition was included, “Curriculum that is carefully considered, well defined, and clearly organized.” The second frequency column indicates that the interviewees identified that particular overarching theme 21 times. This is an overall number, not one based on the number of interviewees.

Axial Coding - After breaking down the data into parts during open coding, the researcher reassembled the data in new ways through axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). The relationships and connections between the categories and subcategories were identified using constant comparison of one piece of data with another. The researcher looked specifically at the properties and dimensions of the categories to discover how the dimensions gave the categories further specification, and then looked for connections between the various categories and subcategories, asking questions regarding how one category related to another category in an attempt to make sense of the data. Visual representations were designed to depict the larger emerging phenomena and related categories. Specific categories were listed under each phenomenon or theme and indicated the frequencies or number of interviewees who identified that particular concept. The more people who identified a particular issue, the more weight given to the concept. Axial coding resulted in five visual representations of the overarching themes that represent the connections among the major themes. These themes supported the answers to the research questions.

Selective Coding - The third form of coding used was selective coding, which is “The process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating

those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 116). The researcher was then prepared to integrate the categories to form a grounded theory. The goal in selective coding was to take the information in the figures and develop a grounded theory. During selective coding, the core categories or themes were used to organize other categories and properties. In this process, the researcher related the core concept or overarching theme to other categories in an effort to validate those relationships and support the conceptualization of the theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The visual representations created using axial coding resulted in five overarching themes from the research including: a collectively shared guiding vision; curriculum as a shared or corporate responsibility; collaboration of various groups in curricular change; cultural issues as barriers to collaboration; and the sense of community and connectedness among the curriculum team members. Major themes and categories were connected to each of the overarching themes to show the relationships of the categories to one another and to the larger overarching theme. Triangulation of the data from e-mail correspondence, personal reflection, and personal journals was used to more fully explain some of the assertions and to provide more definition for those assertions or overarching themes needing more development. Selective coding delimited the theory to five main variables. The delimitation of the analysis to those significant variables provided the groundwork for theory development. As a result of selective coding, several assertions were constructed that served as the findings of this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding 1 - Shared Vision

The participants collectively viewed that a key factor contributing to the institutional level comprehensive curriculum review process was a collectively shared guiding vision that was co-constructed by the curriculum team, which was composed of both faculty and administrators from the early stage of the process. A guiding vision served as the philosophical foundation for the institution’s curriculum. For example, one administrator who served on the curriculum team emphasized the necessity of a guiding vision as a foundational component. When offering advice to others who may engage in curricular reform, he said, “Make sure you lay down your outcomes, your picture of what you want at the end first. Ask what it means that our product is our students. Do this before you start talking about courses, before you start talking about curriculum. Lay down the philosophical base first...that is imperative” (Interview #5).

This finding furthers Burgess’ (2004) and Myers’ (2006) emphasis on the need to build a shared vision through collaboration given that there is usually much diversity of opinion and competing interests. This finding also provides a look into the collaborative process of the faculty and administrators, in particular, the curriculum team members as they reached consensus on the guiding vision and philosophical foundation. For example, one faculty member said that the adoption of the new curriculum model by the faculty and administrators “was sort of the affirmation of the philosophical side of things” and served as the primary guiding vision for the curriculum review process (Interview #1). The major guiding force for this curriculum review process was the new curriculum model that served to guide the entire review process as well as the design of the new curriculum. Identifying expected student learning outcomes advanced the collective curriculum work (e.g., Briggs, 2007; Hubball et al., 2007; Steele, 2006) that

emphasizes the value of engaging in curricular reform, which goes beyond courses no matter the various pressures presented.

Finding 2 - Shared Responsibility

The curriculum team collectively voiced that a higher education institution should embrace curriculum as a shared responsibility among faculty and administration as indicated in Figure 1 (Appendix). This process requires widespread participation and collaboration.

Shared Governance: Curricular oversight is typically the role of faculty only, and many studies have encouraged the necessity of faculty shared governance (Kezar, 2001, Mortimer & Sathre, 2007; Smith, 2002). This means that faculty must share concern for the degree program, not just for individual courses. Purposefully having faculty and administrators involved in the curricular efforts in this institution increased the corporate understanding of what needed to be done in the design and implementation stages. Shared governance among faculty and administrators over the curriculum is critical to the curricular change process. A program of study is the responsibility of the institution as a whole, not just the faculty (e.g., Mortimer & Sathre, 2007). During the interviews, all of the curriculum team members indicated that the experience of having a curriculum team made up of faculty and administrators was positive. For example, one faculty member identified some of the benefits of administrator involvement including “the administration having a greater understanding of the part the curriculum plays in the shaping of students’ [learning]; in our [faculty] part of understanding the role administration plays and how they facilitate so much of what we [as faculty] do and how much we take for granted...So I felt it was a win all the way around” (Interview #10). The administration was also supportive when it was time to fund the implementation of the new curriculum. Another faculty member addressed specifically the administration’s collaborative effort with faculty saying that is was “hard to draw the distinction between who was administration and who was faculty” (Interview #9). Regarding the co-involvement of faculty and administrators, all of the curriculum team members indicated that the benefits far outweighed the challenges.

The researcher served as the administrator who chaired the curriculum review team, which may have had a confounding result on this finding regarding collaboration. This finding could be an intertwined matter given that the key administrator led the process and studied the process as the topic of a dissertation. However, the researcher made an effort to be as objective as possible during the interview process. Before interviewing the team members, the researcher wrote responses to the questions so as not be influenced by the interviewees’ reflections. The researcher also waited approximately six months after the conclusion of the review process to answer the questions and interview the team members. This waiting period allowed the researcher and the interviewees some emotional distance from the process in hopes of providing more objective feedback. This finding regarding the value of collaboration also points to the benefits of a higher education administrator having a deep understanding of a long-term collaborative curriculum review process with faculty. For the institution as a whole, this understanding could lay the foundation for an ongoing commitment to shared governance in higher education curriculum work as well as in other areas.

Widespread Participation: This institution’s curriculum reform had a process of both breadth and depth of participation, which reinforced the importance of an emphasis on widespread participation (Cobb, 1990; Doll, 1993; Walkington, 2002). One administrator was realistic in saying that the participation by all departments was not ideal and could have been

improved. However, many curriculum team members expressed a desire for continued interdepartmental dialogue as a part of collaboration. Similar to Burgess' (2004) discussion, one curriculum team member identified the fluid and flexible nature of the process as key to its success and recommends that "administrators not worry about having the whole process figured out upfront. Keep your process fluid" (Interview #5). The process also remained recursive; the process spoke back to itself consistently as the team maneuvered a rather complicated endeavor.

Finding 3 – Collaboration

The third major finding of this study speaks to the willingness of various groups within the institution to collaborate during the comprehensive curriculum review process in an effort to bring organizational change. Collaboration within the curriculum review team was the key to the institutions' curriculum reform effort. All 10 interviewees indicated there was benefit to having both faculty and administration involved in the curriculum review process. The seminary promoted institutional collaboration primarily by providing time in faculty meetings for curricular discussion throughout the first three years of the process. According to the curriculum team members, one of greatest benefits of this process was both inter and intra departmental collaborations. One academic department, in particular, was able to put into action, similar to Aleshire's (2005) notion, that the faculty must keep the larger goals of the curriculum foremost. The department used the "open hand" approach allowing all courses to be up for consideration. Intradepartmental collaboration was another important component of this change process at the institution. For example, one administrator on the curriculum team said that his department is "one of the more unified departments on campus now. And I contribute that totally to the curriculum review process; it really got us talking about what was going on in our courses, because nobody really knew what the others were teaching" (Interview #2). As Roy et al. (2007) advocated, this inter and intra departmental collaboration led to a change in the departmental culture as well.

Finding 4 – Cultural Challenges

The involvement of a variety of people in the collaborative effort of faculty and administration in the comprehensive curriculum review process proved fruitful. However, cultural issues surrounding those same people and structures also served in some ways to impede the process as indicated in Figure 2 (Appendix). This irony rests in the fact that some of the positive cultural aspects of the process contributed to collaboration while also serving to impede the process. This finding identifies cultural issues that impacted the curriculum revision process. It also speaks to the collaborative effort of faculty and administrators by identifying some of the cultural barriers such as people and structure.

Faculty Barriers: The faculty culture served as a barrier to the collaborative curriculum review process through some personal challenges, problems with the composition of the team, and interference with the process. The faculty at times found it difficult to operate outside the ingrained faculty culture. This supported Tierney's (1989) idea that faculty face internal challenges when operating in various cultures: the culture of higher education, the culture of the institution, the culture of their academic profession, and the culture of their discipline. Faculty realized that it was difficult to engage in "true" comprehensive and collaborative curricular revision because of cultural forces pushing against a shared vision, shared learning outcomes,

and the design of a coherent curriculum (e.g., only faculty owns the curriculum not administrators nor a shared ownership with administrators; academic freedom; individualized faculty award for tenure and promotion; and highly specialized academic disciplinary thinking and professional engagements that lead to a fragmented culture of academic affairs including the curriculum practices as well as the value systems in both spoken and unspoken cultures in the academy). Some faculty struggled with what Fullan (2001) refers to as reculturing or the ability to rethink their roles and actions. Some faculty were not able to open the door to collaboration with administrators. Some faculty were ready to move forward with the new curriculum while others chose to focus on what they determined was wrong with the process. As indicated by Mortimer and Sathre's (2007) work, it is common to have a few committed individuals express their opposition to a proposal in an effort to halt the approval process.

Process Leader's Barriers: Most of the research consulted for this study recommended that a faculty member lead this type of process (Hubball et al., 2007; Seymour, 1988; Walkington, 2002; Wolf, 2007). However, many of the characteristics that they identify as essential for someone leading this process center on administration and leadership. One administrator on the curriculum team said, "Select a leader who clearly knows curriculum and knows educational institutions and has the skill set to pull people together and get them working together" (Interview #7). The process leader's skill set was not enough to convince some faculty that an administrator could lead the curriculum review.

Curriculum Team Barriers: The curriculum team also faced a number of challenges that worked against the process of collaboration. The goal was to enable change that would become a natural part of the organization's culture as suggested by some researchers (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Fullan, 2001; Innes, 2004). Reaching beyond the culture of the curriculum team with the change effort was difficult. Although communication and participation at all levels of the institution were highlighted as strengths that increased collaboration, one half of the team members interviewed said that there was a lack of clarity regarding their role on the team and the curriculum review process. Another mistake was not providing adequate resources to the curriculum team and the process. Faculty serving on the team should have received a course reduction or compensation for their efforts, which is necessary in this type of change process (Hubball et al., 2007; Walkington, 2002; Wolf & Hughes, 2007). This study should serve as a reminder to institutions planning to engage in this type of process to provide the resources upfront rather than relying on a high level of intrinsic motivation.

Departmental Barriers: As Seymour (1988) indicated, the negative effect of departmental loyalty on institutional change and the historical departmental structure in higher education provide natural, structural, and mental barriers. Faculty loyalty to their departments and their disciplines can also cause challenges to collaboration. For example, one faculty member who was interviewed wanted to encourage other schools to consider building trust early in the curriculum review process especially since academic institutions are by nature a competitive environment (Interview #1).

Finding 5 – Sense of Community and Connectedness

The curriculum team members' sense of community and connectedness among one another contributed positively to the curriculum review process. This relational component was instrumental in both the design and implementation of the new curriculum as indicated in Figure 3 (Appendix).

This finding spoke to the effect of culture on the curricular change process. When asked about what motivated their continued involvement even in the midst of great struggle, all of the curriculum team members identified their commitment to the institution. In addition, the curriculum review team and team leader identified their connectedness with one another as motivation for continued involvement in the four-year process. For example, when the process was emotionally difficult, one faculty member stayed involved because of “the sense that what we [curriculum team] were about was really necessary and important. We had an opportunity to make significant changes at a fundamental level” (Interview #8).

This particular finding is similar to Toma’s (2005) study; a strong sense of belonging within the institution encourages people to demonstrate loyalty to the institution, to cooperate with one another, and to have a strong sense of connectedness. Another reason for such loyalty to one another was the formation of the group as a true team. Bensimon and Neumann (1993) identified this type of group’s culture as one based more on a sense of unity and connectedness. The group in this study seemed to have respect, concern, and appreciation for one another, which are characteristics that create a true team. One faculty member stayed on the team throughout the process because of “loyalty and faithfulness to the institution...I thought it [curriculum review process] was quite important to the institution and pretty fundamental to our identity....Also, loyalty to the other people involved in the process” (Interview #1).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

A number of studies have looked at the connection between organizational learning and organizational change (ASHE, 2002; Bauman, 2005; Bensimon, 2005; Kezar, 2001; Kezar, 2005). This study furthered the understanding of how groups engage in organizational learning by looking specifically at the work of the curriculum review team. The curriculum team engaged in organizational learning by creating a culture known as a “community of practice” (Bauman, 2005). This approach supported Bensimon and Neumann’s (1993) idea of a group or team taking a learning approach rather than a task approach to an assignment. When forming the curriculum team, the facilitator specifically invited those who would provide a unique perspective either because of their understanding of theological education, excellence in teaching, or experience in pastoral ministry. An open invitation was extended to anyone who wanted to join the team. The few who expressed interest were welcomed onto the team. In addition to what the team members could give to the process, the researcher discovered from the interviews that most chose to participate because of what they could learn or glean from the process of thinking and working together for the betterment of the seminary. This motivation supports Bensimon and Neumann’s claim of taking a learning approach to the process. The goal of the group or team was to engage with one another in a way that members were motivated and committed to the process and to one another. This research study furthered the idea of community of practice and culture by specifically looking at the curriculum team’s culture of learning.

Another conclusion drawn from the study is that collaboration among a variety of groups within the institution created the opportunity for educational change. Engaging the educational community in the curricular change effort helps create a common vision and a culture that supports the institution’s educational efforts. Addressing the potential barriers in the educational change effort ahead of time helps an institution plan more efficiently and effectively for curricular change.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, recommendations are categorized according to the various groups that might benefit from them. These recommendations were derived from the interviews with the 10 curriculum team members.

Recommendations to Administrators:

- Provide supportive leadership for the curriculum review process.
- Based on the institution's mission, lay an overarching philosophical foundation by first identifying the desired student learning outcomes.
- Select an appropriate process leader who has the skill set to guide the process, whether that is a faculty member or an administrator.
- Cast the vision and clarify the process for all involved addressing participation, decision making, authority, and roles for all groups.
- Understand and respect the role of faculty in relation to curriculum development.
- Provide resources and support for members of the curriculum review team through course reductions and/or compensation. Provide opportunities for faculty development to aid in the implementation process.

Recommendations to Faculty Who May Serve on a Curriculum Team:

- Know upfront the time commitment that will be involved.
- Capture the collective vision of the curriculum reform by engaging in conversations on the mission and/or philosophical foundation of the institution.
- Be comfortable with the realization that curriculum is not limited to a course one regularly teaches.
- Work on communication and building relational trust among faculty and with administration.
- Realize that true organizational change takes time and requires patience with the process.
- Recognize teaching as a corporate task and responsibility, not an individual one (Aleshire, 2005).

Recommendations to Curriculum Team Chair or Co-Chairs:

- Consider having curriculum team co-chairs – one faculty member and one administrator.
- Build a strong foundation by involving the entire institution in parts of the process, especially the foundational components such as a new, revised, or reinvigorated curriculum model and shared expected learning outcomes.
- Equip the curriculum review team. Inform all participants upfront that the process will be lengthy if the goal is more than switching around courses.
- Communicate with the curriculum review team so that the members clearly understand their role on the team and as a department liaison.
- Give attention to personal self care since the process will likely be extremely challenging and emotionally charged. Take time for personal reflection and rest in order to avoid burnout.

Recommendations to Members of a Curriculum Review Team:

- Begin with in-depth dialogue on the characteristics desired in an educational institution's graduates rather than a discussion on courses to ensure that the focus remains on the degree program and the student.
- Set the tone for the process recognizing that real change requires reculturing, not just restructuring (Fullan, 2001).
- Take the lead at the department level in creating a greater sense of community and a shared understanding of the department's work during the process.

Recommendations for Further Study:

- Role of culture in curricular change – An entire study could be conducted looking only at the cultural aspect of this process.
- Organizational learning and organizational change - The sense of community and connectedness among the members of the curriculum review team in this study was a unique outcome as well as a component of the process. Looking more in-depth into the role of community in the workings of groups in learning organizations could be interesting.
- Curriculum review process - The role of departments in this study impacted the process and the outcome; some for the better, some not. An entire study could center on the role of departments in a curricular change effort.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Example from Open Coding Results

Emerging Themes	Definitions, Categories	Examples (Interviewee's Words)	Frequency # of Interviewees	Frequency # of Times Theme Mentioned
Curriculum Defined	Curriculum as Entire Experience with an Intended Impact	Curriculum that is carefully considered, well defined, and clearly organized. [Intended Impact]	10	21
		Collection of educational experiences that come together to form the bases of a degree or degree programs. [Entire Experience]	7	

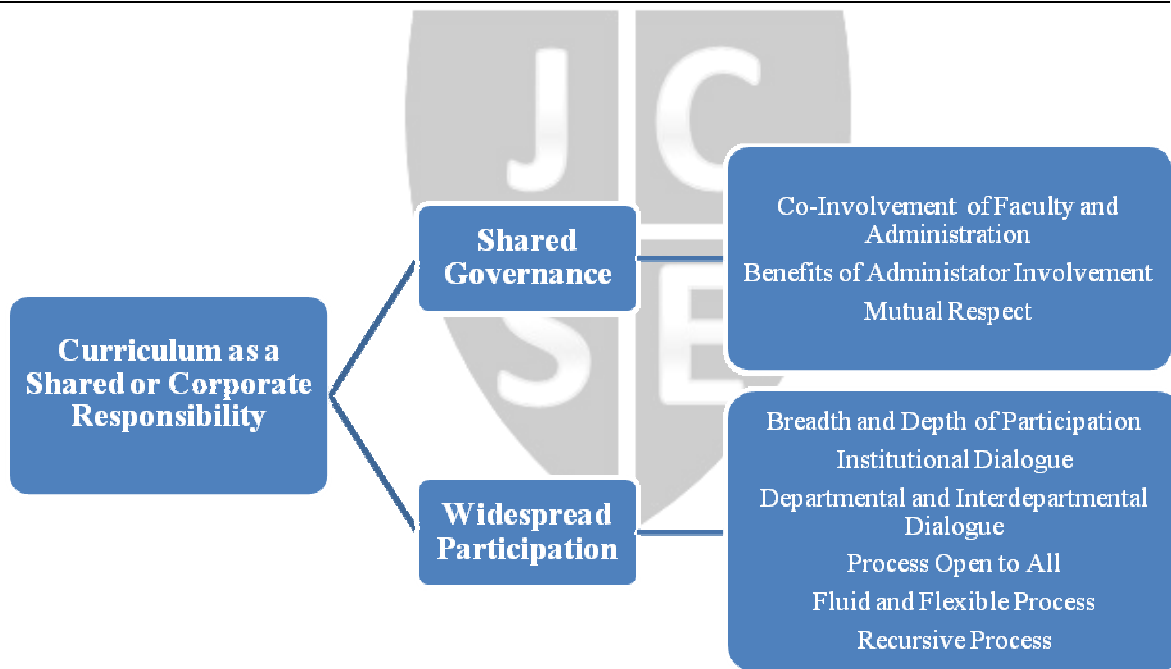


Figure 1. Curriculum as a shared or corporate responsibility of faculty and administrators.

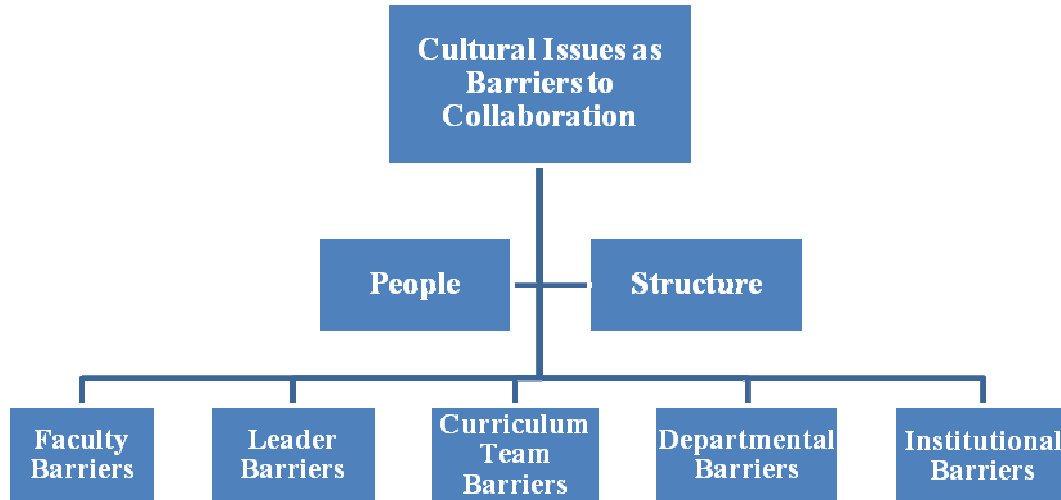


Figure 2. Cultural issues of people and structure as barriers to collaboration during the comprehensive curriculum review process.

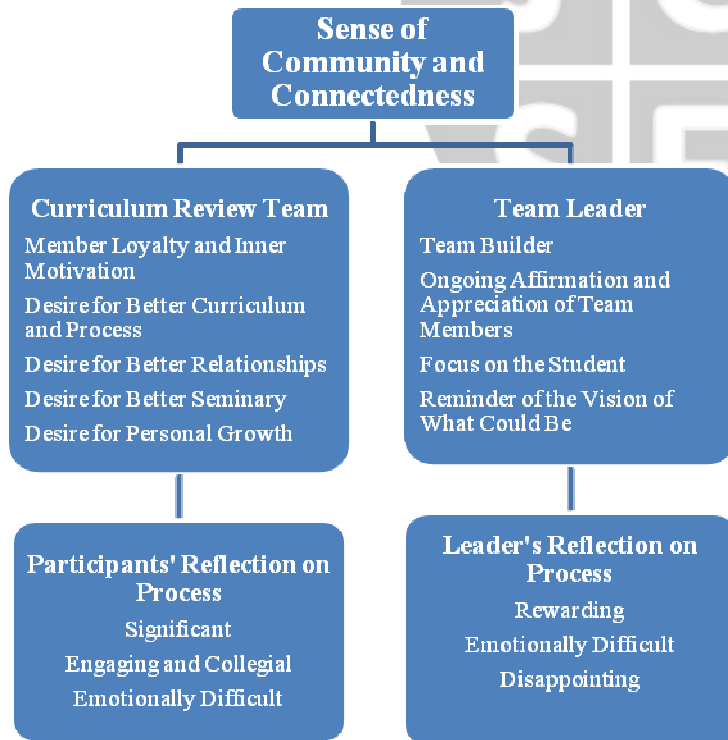


Figure 3. A sense of community and connectedness among the curriculum team members as a strength of the process.