

**Committee on Liberal Education**  
Report on Assessment, Responsibilities and Faculty Development  
April 2003

In August 2002, Provost Ronald A. Crutcher appointed the Committee on Liberal Education and asked it to address two subjects. The first concerned the external review of the Miami Plan made nearly three years ago by Drs. Ann Ferren (Radford University) and Cynthia Margolin (San Jose State University). Their report contained many recommendations for enhancing Miami's liberal education program. The University's Liberal Education Council (LEC) responded to their recommendations--implementing some but deferring others when it seemed to the Council that more wide-ranging conversations among faculty in departments and divisions should take place before decision and implementation. The second subject concerned the state of our liberal education program, which, in August 2002, was ten years old. It seemed appropriate to Provost Crutcher that the Committee on Liberal Education consider whether the most effective support and coordination of a mature plan might be different from what had worked well for a new plan.

The Committee on Liberal Education met often in the 2002-2003 academic year to respond to the Provost's charge. A working assumption in all deliberations was that the Miami Plan for Liberal Education was a distinctive and valuable curriculum for Miami University, and that it would remain a major emphasis for the University of the future. The focus of the work of the Committee was to identify ways to enhance the effectiveness of the Miami Plan.

After considering a myriad set of suggestions for improvements and possible changes, the Committee identified the following four major themes:

- Determine ways to enhance the quality and rigor of Miami Plan courses--especially Foundation courses;
- Determine what kinds of assessments should be used for Miami Plan courses and what group should assume responsibility for assessment findings;
- Determine what types of faculty development are needed to support the liberal education program at Miami;
- Determine ways to streamline the administration and management of the Miami Plan, with emphasis on deciding what groups are best suited to carrying out various responsibilities. Following the external reviewers' suggestions, the committee wished to change one role of the LEC from monitoring and oversight to facilitation and the promotion of excellence.

In December 2002, the Committee prepared a report for the First in 2009 Coordinating Council on the first of the above themes ("Quality and Rigor of Miami Plan Courses"). The present report focuses on the last three themes, although some recommendations from the first report are included here for the sake of completeness. Each of the three themes will be discussed with recommendations made in each part of the following report.

## Assessment

Since the inception of the Miami Plan, the assessment focus has been primarily on individual courses. We believe that the time has now come to broaden our assessment goals to include the Plan as a whole and to consider aggregate student outcomes, while not abandoning the assessment of individual courses. Clearly LEC cannot accomplish this broader assessment alone; rather the task will require the cooperation of individual faculty members, departments, and divisions in addition to LEC. The Committee found it helpful to break assessment plans into three areas: student learning outcomes, student perceptions, and course/curriculum design and structure. Different facets of these three areas will be assessed at the global (all university) level, the divisional level, the department level, or the course level. In all cases, the findings should be disseminated to the appropriate decision-makers and used for continuous improvement.

Assessment of student learning outcomes should take place primarily at the global and the course level. The global level assessment should focus on the four principles of the Miami Plan. We recommend that Miami monitor the development of our students' skills in critical thinking, in understanding contexts, in engaging with other learners, and in reflective thinking which leads to action. There are several ways to do this, including examining a cohort of students each year via portfolios of their work, or surveying alumni, employers and graduate schools on how our students are continuing to apply liberal education principles to their professional or vocational development. Some divisions and departments are already doing this latter type of assessment, but we need to do better in disseminating the information. In addition to this globally focused assessment, individual instructors should be encouraged to examine student outcomes at the course level. This will require faculty to determine what the tenets of the Miami Plan (critical thinking, etc.) mean in their disciplines and how they can measure the level at which our students have mastered these skills. The University should continue to provide an Assessment Coordinator in the Office of Liberal Education to assist faculty with this task, and LEC should assume the primary responsibility for global assessment of student learning outcomes.

Assessment of student perceptions of the Miami Plan will involve, for example, determining whether students understand the goals of the Miami Plan (thinking critically, understanding contexts, engaging with other learners, reflecting and acting), and what they see as differences between their Miami Plan courses and other courses. Some of this information can be acquired using existing student questionnaires such as NSSE and HERI, but we will need to think carefully about our sample of students to make sure they are truly representative of the university student population. Divisions should suggest areas or subjects about which they would particularly like to have data, and the resulting data should be distributed more widely than it has been in the past.

The assessment of course/curriculum design and structure should involve LEC, divisions, and departments. LEC should collect and analyze data on Miami Plan enrollment trends, class sizes, teaching loads, and course availability. LEC should attempt to answer questions such as, “What are student course-selection patterns? On what basis are students selecting their Foundation courses? Do we have sufficient courses in each area of the Foundation? and Is the ideal of a coherent curriculum being realized?” At the divisional level, committees should monitor the design and implementation of Miami Plan courses. They should also consider how each department within the division contributes to the Foundation and to Thematic Sequences and, if necessary, negotiate changes through discussions with deans and chairs. Departments should consider the structure of their own contributions to the Miami Plan. They should also consider whether their courses satisfy Miami Plan goals, whether they represent an appropriate level of rigor, and whether their multiple sections of Miami Plan courses are divided appropriately in size. Departments should also provide opportunities for faculty to work together to share pedagogy and inspiration.

We recommend that the traditional assessment of individual courses become the primary responsibility of departments and be completed through the Program Review process. Because Program Review already asks departments to report on departments’ contributions to the Miami Plan, it seems logical to include assessments of how individual courses are meeting Miami Plan goals. Departments already provide reviewers with copies of syllabi of most departmental courses in order for the reviewers to assess the contemporaneity of the curriculum. This practice should continue, but for Miami Plan courses additional information should be provided. Such additional information might be in the form of course portfolios including copies of typical assignments and student work. It might include end of course student surveys or faculty reflections on how they address each of the goals in the course. Divisions should be involved with this process and to that end should identify a group (divisional LEC) that will facilitate the review of Miami Plan courses. The Academic Program Review Committee may want to work with the LEC Assessment Coordinator to aid departments in carrying out these assessments. As with all of Program Reviews, departments should keep in mind that the goal is to find out what they are doing well and what they can improve.

#### *Recommendations on Assessment*

- *There should be three tiers of assessment for the Miami Plan: global assessment of student learning outcomes, global assessment of student perceptions, and assessment of course/curriculum design and structure;*
- *The responsibility for the assessment of individual courses should be mainly left to the departments and will be carried out via the Program Review Process;*
- *Each division will identify a group that will serve as a divisional LEC. This group will help facilitate the review of courses offered in the division via Program Review, will provide a preliminary review of new Miami Plan courses, and will encourage participation of units within the divisions in providing excellence in the Miami Plan. If possible, members of divisional LEC committees should be current members of the*

*University Liberal Education Council (the value of such liaison or coordination should be obvious);*

- *LEC should assume responsibility for the global assessment of student learning outcomes and the assessment of student perceptions. An assessment coordinator in the Office of Liberal Education should facilitate these activities and encourage sharing of assessment information in a manner that will lead to continuous improvements in the Miami Plan;*
- *Working with the Office of the Registrar, LEC will also collect data on an annual basis on items such as enrollment trends, class sizes, course availability, and staffing.*

### **Faculty Development**

The Miami Plan has evolved into a mature and broad curriculum in which students complete about one-third of their undergraduate coursework. During the past decade, faculty spent a considerable amount of time designing and implementing new or revised courses. While the Plan will continue to evolve and change, the major push to bring the liberal education curriculum on-line is complete.

We recommend that in the next phase in the evolution of the Miami Plan a major focus should be on faculty development. The Office of Liberal Education and LEC should design and implement faculty development programs that support teaching that deepens and expands students' learning. All of these efforts should be implemented in conjunction with the Committee for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT). Specifically, these programs should help faculty:

- increase their understanding of how students learn and how to enhance student learning;
- be informed about the Miami Plan principles and how to incorporate them into courses  
(especially new faculty, temporary faculty, and TAs);
- expand their knowledge and use of “best practices” instructional approaches related to the  
four Miami Plan principles;
- use innovative and creative methods for challenging an intellectually capable student  
body; and
- use classroom-based assessment tools to better understand what and how well students are  
learning.

In addition to the above efforts that focus on individuals, faculty development efforts should also occur at the department level. At this level, each of the four Miami Plan principles can be articulated and related to student learning outcomes that are appropriate for the discipline and that are embedded into course syllabi. Departmental participation in

faculty development forms the basis of authentic assessment of student learning and empowers individual faculty members.

#### *Recommendation on Faculty Development*

- *The LEC working with CELT should develop university-wide faculty development programs that help achieve the objectives of the Miami Plan and that focus on the issues described above;*
- *Appropriate faculty development needs to be provided at the department level where faculty are most likely to participate. LEC and CELT should work with departments and divisions to develop these opportunities.*

#### **Administration of the Miami Plan - Responsibilities of Groups**

A successful liberal education program requires the efforts of many people and groups. Minimally this includes faculty in departments, academic divisions, the University LEC, the CELT, and support from the Office of the Provost. Discussions within the Committee dealt with determining what activities are essential for the success of the Miami Plan, and then assigning responsibility for the activity to the most appropriate group. We recognize that while assignment of the primary responsibility for an activity is necessary, cooperation must occur between the various groups in order to provide best results.

The Committee developed some guiding principles on deciding what group should be responsible for an activity. The Committee believed that the departments and their faculty were best suited to assume primary responsibilities for the Miami Plan courses and sequences they offer. Academic divisions need to play a more important role in supporting the plan, and to that end the Committee recommends that each division identify a group that will serve as a divisional liberal education committee. This might be a new group or a current committee, such as a divisional curriculum committee. The role of the University LEC should shift to one that is more global and facilitating, and less monitoring in its orientation. LEC would still have the primary responsibility of the management of the Miami Plan; however, it will need to rely more on the work of departments and the divisions to achieve success of the Plan. An important role for LEC will be to facilitate the work of faculty, departments, and divisions in carrying out their responsibilities. LEC will also be in a unique position to share information among the various groups. CELT will serve an important role in working with LEC to provide faculty development programs and opportunities that are needed to meet liberal education objectives.

Listed below is a summary of the main responsibilities and activities recommended for the various groups. Included are some of the recommended activities from the December 2002 report on Quality and Rigor of Miami Plan Courses, and more details on those items are available in the December report.

## *Recommended Responsibilities and Activities by Group*

### *Liberal Education Council*

- Provide more personal engagement, motivation, and facilitation for faculty and departments in promoting a high quality Miami Plan;
- Approve new Foundation courses, Sequences, and Capstones;
  - ▶ Develop a checklist for what new course proposals should include;
  - ▶ Consult with individual faculty on proposal development;
- Approve changes in the Miami Plan subject to University Senate approval;
- Coordinate global assessment of the Plan;
  - ▶ Assessment of student outcomes for Miami Plan goals, feedback to academic units;
  - ▶ Assessment of student perceptions for Miami Plan goals, feedback to academic units;
- Work with CELT to provide needed faculty development (see earlier section for details);
- Provide models of excellence for Miami Plan courses and disseminate these in appropriate ways;
  
- Provide an introduction to the Miami Plan for new students during Summer Orientation - ensure that students understand the role of the Miami Plan and intellectual challenges associated with it;
- Annually assess the following:
  - ▶ Monitor enrollment trends, availability of classes;
  - ▶ Monitor national trends in liberal education;
  - ▶ Consider appropriateness of principles, depth and breadth of curriculum.

### *Committee on the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching*

- Work with LEC to develop and provide faculty development opportunities to support the Miami Plan (see earlier section for details)

### *Departments*

- Assess Miami Plan courses during Program Review;
- Ensure quality and rigor in Miami Plan courses;
- Provide agreements on levels of expectations for Miami Plan courses;
  
- Provide incentives for faculty to teach rigorous courses;
- Ensure that faculty are rewarded for teaching Miami Plan courses, meeting levels of expectations and Miami Plan principles;
  
- Mentor new faculty who are teaching Miami Plan courses;
- Involve senior faculty in Miami Plan courses.

### Academic Divisions

- Identify a committee (divisional LEC group) that will facilitate discussions and activities regarding the Miami Plan; facilitate the assessment of Miami Plan courses and sequences during Program Review; provide a preliminary review of Miami Plan course proposals; ensure that divisional LEC groups have members with previous experience on Miami Plan matters; and facilitate communication between the divisional LEC and the University LEC;
- Work with units to increase the percentage of Miami Plan courses taught by “regular” faculty;
- Work with units to establish guidelines for class sizes for Miami Plan courses - recognizing that some classes will continue to be large; however, students should have at least some small classes in Foundation courses;
- Ensure appropriate access for students to Miami Plan courses

### Implementation

The role that the Miami Plan plays in the intellectual development of Miami students is great, and opportunities to improve the effectiveness of the Plan deserve serious attention. We believe that implementation of the recommendations in this report will take an important program at Miami to an even higher level of excellence.

We propose that the Office of the Provost coordinate the efforts of LEC, CELT, COAD, and departments to implement the preceding recommendations.

### Members of the Committee on Liberal Education:

Robert Benson, Architecture  
Philip Cottell, Accountancy  
William Gracie, English and Liberal Education  
Patrick Haney, Political Science  
Jennifer Kinney, Sociology and Gerontology  
Mark McPhail, Interdisciplinary Studies  
Timothy Melley, English  
Christine Noble, Engineering and Applied Science  
Katherine Schaab, Undergraduate Student Representative  
John Skillings, Arts and Science (Chair)  
Jerry Stonewater, Liberal Education (Ex-officio)  
Beverley Taylor, Physics (Hamilton)  
Richard Taylor, Chemistry and Biochemistry