Innovation and the Independent College

EXAMLPES FROM THE SECTOR

EXPLORE INNOVATION OPPORTUNITIES IN:

1. Athletics
2. Career Connections
3. Community Engagement
4. Consortial Arrangements
5. Cost Containment
6. CURRICULAR REFORM
7. New Academic Programs
8. New Student Populations

A REPORT BY

THE COUNCIL OF INDEPENDENT COLLEGES

Read the full report at www.cic.edu/InnovationsReport.
The signature activity of the Council of Independent Colleges’ initiative, Securing America’s Future, was a series of eight workshops hosted by CIC member presidents on campuses across the nation in 2016–2017. The goals of these workshops were to help member colleges and universities prepare for the future more effectively and become more engaged in promoting the value of the liberal arts and of independent colleges and universities. These gatherings brought together teams of presidents, chief academic officers, other administrators, and faculty leaders to explore key trends in higher education and society, the pressures that individual colleges and universities face, and potential solutions that can be pursued by their institutions. Approximately 500 campus leaders from more than 120 CIC member institutions participated in the workshops.

This module is part of a larger report, Innovation and the Independent College: Examples from the Sector. As a whole, the report presents an overview of the major points of discussion held during the workshops and references hundreds of examples of mission-driven innovations shared by the colleges and universities that sent teams to the workshops. Each module of the report is designed to be useful on its own, however, as a description of innovations in a particular area. I encourage you to distribute this module to trustees, faculty and administrative leaders, campus planning committees, and other constituents who might be aided in their efforts to lead change on campus—and then share the rest of the report. The full report and the other modules are available from the CIC website at www.cic.edu/InnovationsReport.

CIC staff members and I are well aware that many additional CIC institutions are improving the quality and efficacy of education in imaginative ways. I encourage CIC institutions to send these innovations to http://bit.ly/CICinnovates. These examples will be added to the online version of the report so that others may learn about these promising projects, too.

Richard Ekman
President
Council of Independent Colleges
March 2018
Teach and learn traditional liberal arts content using new curricular structures and methods of delivery

Periodic review and revision of the curriculum has long been the standard practice in American higher education. Changes in disciplinary fields, pedagogical practices, faculty interests, and student demand all contribute to the need for each institution to reconsider, from time to time, both the content and the delivery of its curricular offerings.

In the current environment, new factors also contribute to this healthy practice of institutional self-reflection. Entirely new fields of study, such as genetics, nanoscience, behavioral economics, gender studies, and digital animation have developed in recent decades, and faculty members have debated whether and how to incorporate them into the curriculum. To fulfill their missions of preparing students effectively, colleges and universities must remain current with new epistemological developments.

In addition, a number of long-standing traditions, such as distribution requirements, “general education” expectations, disciplinary boundaries, and even the distinction between the “academic” and “student life” domains are all open to examination. Institutions are seeking to streamline the students’ path, emphasize the development of cognitive skills, and more intentionally recognize the roles of experiential and co-curricular learning.
CHALLENGES: This opportunity helps address several challenges for independent higher education: widespread misunderstanding among students, their families, and policy makers about the value of the liberal arts; the perceived need to revise traditional business models; the need to clearly distinguish nonprofit private from public institutions, from for-profit private institutions, and from each other; and preparing students for careers through academic programs that include substantial liberal arts content.

Most of the following examples were provided by CIC member institutions and the expert presenters who participated in Securing America’s Future workshops in 2016–2017. They represent distinct but replicable responses to common challenges facing other independent colleges and universities.

CREATING DISTINCTIVE CURRICULA

At Dominican University of California in San Rafael, faculty members developed the “Dominican Experience” as a distinctive model characterized by integrated advising (including peers, faculty members, other advisors, and alumni); self-directed work on a signature project; building relationships with community members; and the development of a digital portfolio. The faculty then re-aligned the existing curriculum to match these new emphases.

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Bethany College in rural Lindsborg, Kansas, has a distinctive general education program that capitalizes on its geographic location by emphasizing its Missional Directions of Excellence in discovery, reflection, and vocation; servant leadership; global citizenship; and sustainable living. Its Bethany Pathway emphasizes the total student experience that blends curricular and co-curricular learning, that is documented in an e-portfolio. Requirements include a two-year exploration of the community surrounding the institution, a focus on educational outcomes rather than particular courses, a living-learning community in the first year, and minors in each Missional Direction.

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In Baltimore County, Maryland, Goucher College recently revised its general education program to
replace distribution requirements with an integrative interdisciplinary program (“Goucher Commons”) built around inquiry-based learning. In particular, students are now expected to develop proficiency in three areas designed to “make them ready for the jobs of the future”: writing, data analytics, and foreign language and culture.

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- Goucher Commons,
  http://bit.ly/2E5Gds1

In San Antonio, Texas, University of the Incarnate Word faculty eliminated courses that were not essential to the core curriculum, with the objective of moving away from a collection of courses to a more coherent curriculum. All students soon will have a degree plan that includes fewer electives and a higher probability of graduating on time.

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- Incarnate Word Advising Resources,
  http://bit.ly/2s8iPZ1

Virginia Wesleyan University in Virginia Beach undertook a curriculum mapping project to
streamline academic programs, closing the gap between 100- and 200-level courses and 300- and 400-level courses, focusing on the importance of advising, and using this “scaffolding” approach to enable more students to benefit from experiential learning, including study abroad.

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Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, introduces all students to financial literacy in the first-year seminar. Wilson also offers a debt buyback program for students who complete the financial literacy training, excel academically, and complete their bachelor’s degree in four years or less.

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Coker College in Hartsville, South Carolina, has changed its class schedule to allow faculty members to teach for an hour each Monday and Wednesday and for two hours every other Friday instead of the traditional Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes for 50 minutes. Faculty will use the Friday block for “pedagogical innovation and deeper student learning.” The goal of the A Coker College (SC) biology class can do fieldwork on Fridays thanks to a new class schedule that allows professors to incorporate hands-on activities, in-class assignments, and videos.

Photo credit: Jennifer Borgo, Coker College
change is to find ways for the college to “engage students and integrate its liberal arts and pre-professional mission.”

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The Culver-Stockton College faculty members in Canton, Missouri, reviewed the curriculum and changed the college’s academic calendar to support the experiential learning that is part of its distinctive mission. Faculty members developed a 12/3 semester calendar that Culver-Stockton President Kelly Thompson says “enables students to gain an understanding of other cultures by choosing a domestic or international course for a full semester, summer experience, or part of the three-week block.” Students take three or four classes in a traditional format during the 12-week term and then use the three-week term to focus on one intensive class, an internship, or travel. According to Daniel Silber, vice president for academic affairs, “We used the introduction of a new calendar to transform the curriculum and made changes to general education that focus more on experiential learning. It allowed us to transform the [campus] culture.”

ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMS

According to a 2016 survey conducted by Learning House, Inc., 61 percent of CIC member institutions offered one or more online degree programs and 90 percent offered at least one online or hybrid course. Webster University, with a home campus in St. Louis and additional locations around the world, was an early adopter of online education and now offers 30 graduate degrees fully online in addition to 22 certificates and eight undergraduate degrees fully or partly online. Approximately 9,500 students take at least one course online each year, and many traditional undergraduates take online courses to increase the flexibility of their schedules. Webster is moving from asynchronous forms of instruction—appropriate for widely-scattered students—to more sophisticated synchronous systems.

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THREE-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS

Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York, offers a highly-structured three-year degree program that enables students to save a year’s tuition and enter a career or graduate school a year earlier than usual. The program is available for most majors and does not require summer classes or online courses. Hartwick designed the program so that students can still experience the kinds of high-impact pedagogical experiences that are typical of smaller independent colleges, including internships, engaging in research with a faculty member, and study abroad.

LEARN MORE
• News Articles on Three-Year Degrees, http://nyti.ms/2E3FI1u and http://wapo.st/2E480ce

University of Charleston in West Virginia offers three-year undergraduate degree programs in business, physician assistance, and several other majors. When the university reset tuition rates in 2012, a Fast Track initiative to encourage three-year degree completion was launched as a complementary approach to reducing student costs.

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• UCWV Tuition Reset, http://cnnmon.ie/2EHEEkW

Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida, launched a three-year degree program in 2009 with the goal of making the “undergraduate degree fast, flexible, and financially friendly.” The university also offers a 3+1 master’s program in all majors except education and music and a 3+3 law program in conjunction with partner institutions.

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LINKING PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS WITH THE LIBERAL ARTS

Many independent colleges link traditional liberal arts programs to training in the professions. Two examples are Houghton College in Houghton, New York (with an applied physics BS program), and Agnes Scott College in Atlanta, Georgia (with a business management major and a post-baccalaureate pre-med program).

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St. Louis College of Pharmacy
in Missouri converted a year of its undergraduate professional program to liberal arts courses “to help make pharmacy humane” and to maintain the college’s unique niche among pharmacy schools. This counters the general trend in pharmacy education, which emphasizes narrower professional training at the graduate level.

LEARN MORE
• St. Louis College of Pharmacy Liberal Arts Integration, http://bit.ly/2EWtDzv

OTHER IDEAS AND ADVICE

Additional examples of curricular innovation may be found in a series of research briefs prepared by CIC as part of the Project on the Future of Independent Higher Education on competency-based education, interdisciplinary education, learning communities, career preparation and the liberal arts, and online learning.

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• CIC Research Brief, www.cic.edu/SecuringResources

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

• Does the curriculum reflect current understandings of how students learn most effectively—including new expectations and epistemological habits arising from a world of digital networks?

• Does the general education curriculum reflect the faculty’s best collective judgment about what all students should know or has it evolved to become a mix of courses championed by individual departments?

• Does the general education curriculum preserve or extend the institutional mission?

• Should the general education curriculum be competency- or performance-based (that is, based on specific outcomes that every student should achieve for a lifetime of learning)?

• How can academic affairs and student affairs work together to offer students maximum opportunities to achieve agreed-upon learning outcomes?
ABOUT THE WORKSHOPS

CIC’s *Securing America’s Future: Workshops for Leaders of Independent Colleges and Universities* marked the final phase of an effort that included two earlier initiatives. The first initiative was *Securing America’s Future: The Power of Liberal Arts Education*, a public information campaign to highlight the effectiveness of study in the liberal arts and the contributions of the independent higher education sector. The second was a *Project on the Future of Independent Higher Education*, which brought together a steering committee of 22 CIC presidents to consider the challenges faced by the entire sector and fresh approaches for the future, in light of the particular qualities and missions of independent colleges and universities.

After two years of fact-finding and deliberation, the steering committee of the *Project on the Future* specifically called for a series of workshops around the country, viewing this step as “the most effective mobilization strategy.” The activities in 2016–2017 closely followed the plan the steering committee envisioned. This report draws upon both the formal presentations and informal exchanges that took place during the *Securing America’s Future* workshops.

CIC would like to thank the representatives of more than 120 colleges and universities who participated in the *Securing America’s Future* workshops. They provided most of the examples of innovation included in this report, through their comments at the workshops or in subsequent evaluation surveys. Whenever possible, all innovations have been independently confirmed using public sources. Any misstatements of fact or inadvertent mischaracterizations are the responsibility of CIC.

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ABOUT CIC

The *Council of Independent Colleges* (CIC) is an association of 767 nonprofit independent colleges and universities, state-based councils of independent colleges, and other higher education affiliates, that works to support college and university leadership, advance institutional excellence, and enhance public understanding of independent higher education’s contributions to society. CIC is the major national organization that focuses on services to leaders of independent colleges and universities and state-based councils. CIC offers conferences, seminars, publications, and other programs and services that help institutions improve educational quality, administrative and financial performance, student outcomes, and institutional visibility. It conducts the largest annual conferences of college and university presidents and of chief academic officers. Founded in 1956, CIC is headquartered at One Dupont Circle in Washington, DC. For more information, visit [www.cic.edu](http://www.cic.edu).

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