

Kathleen G. Kerr, James Tweedy, Keith E. Edwards and Dillon Kimmel describe the Curricular Model for Student Affairs work and explain how it has changed their approach to their work, their students, and their colleagues.

By Kathleen G. Kerr, James Tweedy, Keith E. Edwards and Dillon Kimmel

Shifting to Curricular Approaches to Learning beyond the Classroom

TEN YEARS AGO, IN OUR ROLES IN RESIDENCE life and housing, we (Kathleen, Jim, and other colleagues at the University of Delaware) were struggling. We knew we should be demonstrating how the staff and associated resources of the residence halls were contributing to the educational aims of the university, but our assessments of students' learning repeatedly indicated little impact of significance. These findings held true even after we modified the programs and activities we offered. We were left wondering and worrying: If we could not demonstrate educational value from traditional programs, should we continue to utilize resources and staff time to offer them? Clearly, something had to change.

Determined to actualize our dedication to student learning, we looked to American College Personnel Association (ACPA)'s seminal work from 1994, *The Student Learning Imperative*, which redirected those of us in student affairs, where student services and development had traditionally been the focus, to look at student learning. Working together, we prioritized learning by creating and implementing a curricular approach to fostering learning beyond the classroom.

We called this a Curriculum Model (CM) because it reflects the intentionality, structure, and sequencing that is applied in the design of academic majors and individual courses to college experiences beyond the classroom—sometimes referred to as cocurricular or extracurricular. A CM holds those experiences beyond the classroom, and their facilitation, to the same expectations of pedagogical design as any learning endeavor on a college campus.

Over the past 10 years, the CM has caused a seismic shift at our campus and others across the country, but it is not rocket science. What is new, and what we have learned since first writing about the CM, is that sometimes, the most simple, straightforward application of knowledge results in change that is both challenging and powerful. Back then, we were naive and innocent and did not fully understand that this new model would change so much of our work and shift the entire paradigm of how we approach our roles on campus and, in fact, how we view ourselves as educators.

We have implemented the CM on our campuses along with hundreds of other colleagues on other campuses. Collectively, those involved in shifting to

a CM have learned through courageous innovations, messy mistakes, collaborative sharing of ideas, and even fortuitous luck. Lessons learned over this time have shifted how many of us involved in applying this approach think about many key elements, strategies for implementation, and engaging campus partners. Perhaps most importantly, we've learned the value of applying this approach beyond residence halls to all of the learning opportunities that occur beyond the classroom in career centers, student conduct, orientation, health promotions, student engagement, and many other places on campus. There is tremendous potential when synergistic efforts across departments support shared learning goals to benefit student learning.

Traditional Model vs. Curriculum Model

TO FOSTER STUDENT LEARNING OUTSIDE of the classroom, the CM connects scholarship, research, and previously disparate constructs and understandings about learning theory, assessment, pedagogy, learning outcomes, organizational change, and much more. In addition to achieving student learning outcomes, this approach offers a more cohesive and successful means to most efficiently utilize campus resources. Table 1 summarizes the differences between a traditional edu-

KATHLEEN G. KERR serves as the Executive Director of Residence Life and Housing and has a secondary appointment as an Assistant Professor at the University of Delaware. She is also a past President of ACPA, College Student Educators International.

JAMES TWEEDY is the Senior Associate Director of Residence Life and Housing at the University of Delaware and focuses his professional energies on exploring the connections between residence life staff inputs into the student experience and student learning and development gains.

KEITH E. EDWARDS is a speaker and consultant on sexual violence prevention, men's identity, social justice education, and curricular approaches. He is also a leadership coach who helps individuals and organizations realize their fullest potential.

DILLON KIMMEL is a Complex Coordinator for Residence Life and Housing at the University of Delaware and directs the educational efforts of a residential complex staff serving approximately 1,100 first-year students.

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ational approach to learning outside of the classroom and the CM.

K-12 educators and faculty in higher education have long used curricular methods to achieve greater learning gains from their students. No effective teacher would serve up a buffet of options and allow their students to choose at will, with no sequence or order. All of us must strive to avoid what Shaun Harper and Ste-

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phen John Quaye describe in their Introduction to *Student Engagement in Higher Education* as the "myth of magical thinking." We should move beyond a pervasive but unfounded belief that learning happens outside the classroom because we plan with good intentions and offer activities that students enjoy. Instead, the CM applies knowledge we have acquired about how students learn best to ensure that we are contributing to the learning that occurs at college.

When we developed the CM in 2006, we (Kathleen G. Kerr and James Tweedy) wrote an article for *About Campus*, "Beyond Seat Time and Student Satisfaction: A Curricular Approach to Residential Education," that provided a full rationale for shifting away from the traditional approach to this new curricular approach. This publication sparked interest then and continues to drive conversation today. In addition to that publication, we wanted to share what we were learning about

TABLE 1 Traditional Approach vs. Curriculum Model

Traditional	Curriculum
Identifies list of general topics or categories that students could be exposed to	Clearly defined and more narrowly focused educational goals are tied to institutional mission
Often based on reaction to recent needs displayed by students	Based on scholarly literature, national trends, and campus assessment data assessment of student educational needs
Student leaders or student staff determine the content within the categories and the pedagogy	Clearly defined learning goals and delivery strategies are crafted by professional staff
Determining effective pedagogy is often the responsibility of student leaders or student staff members	Lesson plans or facilitation guides developed by professional staff provide structure to guide student/peer leaders or student staff members
Focuses on who will show up to publicized programs; evaluated based on how many students attend	Utilizes a variety of strategies to reach each student; assessed based on student learning outcomes and effectiveness of the strategies
Sessions stand alone, disconnected from what has come before or what will come after, and vary by each student leader or staff member	Content and pedagogy are developmentally sequenced to best serve the learner
Often in competition with other campus units for students' time and attention	Campus partners are integrated into the strategies and content, and pedagogy is subject to review (internal and external)

learning and about ourselves as educators and to discuss this new approach with our colleagues working in residence life and housing. So, in early 2007, the University of Delaware, along with ACPA-College Student Educators International, hosted the first Residential Curriculum Institute (RCI). In the 10 years since the publication of “Beyond Seat Time” and the first RCI, this idea of a CM has been developed and clarified through design, implementation, and assessment on many campuses and through the engagement of the faculty and participants of the RCI.

Making the Shift to a Curricular Approach

THE SHIFT TO A CURRICULAR approach to student learning beyond the classroom is not superficial. Over the past 10 years, we have learned that we need be clear about the breadth and depth required when transitioning to a CM so that those moving to this approach do not simply reword previous campus programming categories into learning goal language and continue on with business as usual. After making many mistakes ourselves and seeing others fall into these common traps, members of the RCI faculty developed the Ten Essential Elements of a Curriculum Model to help clarify the substantial nature of this shift, listed in Table 2.

A CM begins with an educational priority rooted in institutional mission and purpose. Educators then

break down this educational priority into well-defined learning goals and learning outcomes, which then guide the development of strategies that educators (professional staff, student staff, student leaders, peer

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educators, etc.) use to facilitate learning in a developmentally sequenced manner. They develop lesson plans or facilitator guides to support peer leaders or student

TABLE 2 Ten Essential Elements of a Curriculum Model for Learning Beyond the Classroom

	Essential Element	Brief Description
1	Directly connected to institutional mission	Learning goals are tied to institutional educational priorities such as general education, history, mission, and culture.
2	Learning goals and outcomes are derived from a defined educational priority	The primary educational aims of a unit are focused, interconnected, and clearly articulated.
3	Based on research and developmental theory	Educational content and strategies are grounded in student development theory and learning pedagogy.
4	Departmental learning outcomes drive development of educational strategies	Educational strategies are determined based on what can best facilitate each student achieving the department learning outcomes.
5	Traditional programs may be one type of strategy—but not the only one	Strategies like intentional conversations, community and organizational meetings, service initiatives, social media engagement, and campus events are structured to help achieve the learning outcomes.
6	Student leaders and staff members play key roles in implementation but are not expected to be educational experts	Student leaders and staff members are considered to be facilitators rather than designers of educational strategies.
7	Represents developmentally sequenced learning	Educational content and strategies build upon one another for a coherent plan both across the academic year and the full college career.
8	Campus partners are identified and integrated into plans	Multiple units with intersecting goals work together to develop educational strategies that complement the student experience and advance the institution’s mission.
9	Plan is developed through a review process	A regular review process (internal and/or external) is developed to get feedback from key partners and experts on content and pedagogy.
10	Cycle of assessment for student learning and educational strategies	Assessment is focused on student attainment of learning outcomes and the effectiveness of strategies in a cycle of continuous improvement.

facilitators—both in terms of content and use of sound pedagogical approaches. Afterwards, educators systematically assess learning and strategies using a variety of well-established assessment methods. These components are collectively included as part of an overall educational plan. We see each aspect as important and have seen many approaches weakened when components or elements are omitted.

As Educators, We Are Forever Changed

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS AND THE components of an educational plan have not only changed our work but also how we think about our work and our own roles as educators. As we came to better understand the impact of the CM on our practice, we began to view our workplace as a canvas. The expectations a supervisor gives are a checklist for painting on that canvas—don’t make a mess, only use certain paints, don’t make

anything too unusual, and finish by the end of the day. The painting represents your practice. It may be of a beautiful tree or perhaps a simple trunk with branches and leaves.

As we immersed ourselves in the CM, we came to understand how to connect what were previously disparate pieces of knowledge about learning outcomes, assessment, pedagogy, and learning theory. It was as though someone came up and said, “You’ve been wearing the wrong prescription glasses for the last ten years. Wear these now.” All of a sudden, we see that our canvas is actually a section of a larger tapestry. That tree we painted on our canvas is a small part of a much larger institutional fabric. We can see intricacies and nuances we had never noticed before—the depth of color, the foreground, all the other trees, and the horizon come into view. And the checklist that guided our painting of our tree is gone because we can now see how hiring practices, staff training, educational strategies including programs, crisis management, and

everything we do is part of the fabric of the tapestry—not just the painting of the tree.

Once we recognized the scope of the tapestry and how to connect our education aims to the campus vision for student learning, we began to occupy new spaces and places on campus so that we could interact with other campus educators. These spaces might be the faculty commons with colleagues in different departments, the general education committee, a faculty senate meeting, or faculty institutes. Wherever it is, once we saw the tapestry, we were compelled to connect our part of the fabric to the whole.

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On one campus, we learned of a student affairs staff member who served on the university Faculty Senate General Education Committee for 15 years. For the first seven years or so, they were more of a bystander to the work of the committee as they didn't yet see the relationship between their work and that of colleagues on the academic side of the house. But the implementation of the CM changed all of that. Once they could connect the dots between what they were offering outside of the classroom and the institution's general educational goals for students, they became a leader on the committee, articulating a desire for the campus to look holistically at the student's experience. The deputy Provost appointed this individual along with five faculty colleagues to provide leadership to the campuses' general education reform movement. This group led a 12-month-long effort with the Faculty Senate committee resulting in a successful reform of campus general education. Until this individual saw the institution's educational mission as theirs to help accomplish, they did not think they had a role on the committee.

The reason the CM is still thriving after 10 years and being implemented on more and more campuses is this: Once you see the tapestry, you can't unsee it. As your focus shifts to understand the educational mission of the broader institution, the traditional hit-or-miss approach is no longer acceptable as a mechanism for enhancing student learning.

Ten Years Later: Lessons Learned

IN OCTOBER 2016, ACPA HOSTED the 10th Annual RCI with more than 300 participants from over 90 campuses. On each campus, the CM is uniquely applied so as to align with the campus' mission and purpose; thus, the intended student learning varies from campus to campus. Yet, we do see consistent data of increased student learning and stories of transformation of individuals and campus communities. We hear about higher degrees of student participation as campuses are able to give students a clear vision of the intended learning gains. We also hear of significant reductions in campus conduct interventions (regularly 30% and even as high as 50% reductions) in the first year of implementation as a result of reframing and better articulating what it means to be in a community guided by learning. We've seen an increase in student persistence, satisfaction, and sense of belonging. Campus crisis management becomes more proactive and less reactive because of the increase in purposeful and guided individual interactions that are regularly at the core of the strategies campuses implement as part of a CM approach. Rather than await reports of student crises and asking residence life staff to follow-up after the fact, residence life staff help drive successful early interventions because of facilitated roommate agreements, mental health outreaches, substance abuse conversations, and other CM strategies.

This approach is energizing and reinvigorating to professional staff. We hear newer professionals exclaiming, "I finally get to use my master's degree," as they move into the scholarly grounded content and pedagogical structure of the CM approach. The extensive formalizing of educational plans and assessment structures also helps institutions maintain the gains and minimize the need to start over when there is staff turnover. The structure of this approach means that each staff member doesn't have to be an expert in everything to be effective, but it does encourage individual team members to develop unique areas of expertise to further the development of the curriculum by the unit or office. For example, many campuses have established Curriculum Assessment Committees to coordinate unit assessment initiatives and related professional development. Returning staff members

train newly hired ones, who join the committee and help instill and reinforce an assessment culture. We have also seen committees dedicated to developing curriculum inclusion and identity initiatives that also utilize a mentorship model of bringing new staff along in content areas. Collaborative team approaches that are essential to a CM lead to both efficiencies and help in sustaining the cycle of learning that must be a part of any commitment to ongoing improvement.

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The work of the CM is important and has resulted in significant change at campuses across the country. A decade of this work has yielded many lessons. We have identified five that have shaped our practice as educators and, in some cases, call for an evolution of the CM revolution.

Lesson 1: Shifted Paradigm Results in Shifted Mindsets

NOT ONLY HAS THE CM shifted how we view things, but our mindsets have had to shift as well. We’ve had to shift from setting goals that would be easy to reach and validated by our assessment to cultivating *aspirational realism* and aiming for something that might just be a bit out of our reach and challenging, yet within the realm of possibility. We have also been inspired by *Essentialism*, a term first coined by Greg McKeown. We can’t be all things to all people. This can overwhelm and lead to paralysis. This concept has helped complicated content and approaches become organized, streamlined, and prioritized.

With the traditional educational approach, we would set numerical goals for campus programming

and attendance—easy to implement and count but a strategy that produced very little in terms of desirable outcomes for students. When the CM was first implemented, we worked toward the highly aspirational goal of developing engaged citizens. This was an energizing goal to work toward but was unlikely to be attainable with limited time and contact points with students. Now, with an aspirational realism framework and a spotlight on what is essential, we still have an eye toward similar complex learning domains, yet we focus on building blocks within our locus of influence and capacities. This might include educating students on civil discourse strategies when they encounter conflicts with fellow students or helping students reflect on the implications of their actions on the greater community when they are charged with a policy violation *and* when they participate in service. With this approach, we need to extend professional grace to our colleagues and ourselves as we learn, innovate, experiment, and push our own learning edges.

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When we first identified student-learning assessment as an essential element, we really did not understand the importance of viewing ourselves as scholar-practitioners. In *A Guide to Becoming a Scholarly Practitioner in Student Affairs*, Lisa Hatfield and Vicki Wise note, “we must reflect critically, see ourselves as both teachers and learners, and come to know ourselves within the process of research itself” (p. 5). In our experiences with the CM, this view is key to success. With this comes a sense of *positive restlessness* as we constantly celebrate what has worked but also seek to do better and learn from our mistakes to benefit students. A key part of this approach is that it is never finished. We are constantly in the cycle of design,

implement, assess, redesign, re-implement, reassess, and then repeat. We've had to let go of designing assessments as a defense that our work is good and we are personally worthy and instead focus on how assessments can help us learn from our failures.

Lesson 2: Always Have Your Periscope Ready

THE HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE IS always changing, and as educators aiming to impact student learning, we would be foolhardy not to be constantly scanning the environment. Always having our periscope up means attending to what is occurring in higher education nationally, what scholarship is telling us, but also attending to the shifts—as slight as they may be—in our institution's educational priorities. Demographic changes, aspirations of new leadership, and institutional finances can all impact the curriculum and how it is designed and implemented. To this end, it is important to design a CM in a way that it can be nimble and able to adjust to the changing needs of the institution and student population.

For example, we were interested in better supporting students from marginalized identities based on recently gathered assessment data showing a gap in their feelings of connectedness at the institution. Through the CM process, we were able to identify and work with several key campus stakeholders committed to diversity work and experts on the belonging process for students from marginalized identities. Together, we developed campus initiatives such as the First Generation Student Network and additional assessments to both support students from marginalized and minority populations and engender cultural competence among all students.

Lesson 3: Students Are Key Partners

A FUNDAMENTAL TENET OF THE CM is that students are not educational content and pedagogy experts, so campus educational experts should not give them the responsibility of designing learning experiences without proper support and guidance. We certainly do not ask the least experienced and least trained team member to shoulder such a burden. For example, a student peer mentor working for the campus wellness office should not be tasked with designing a program series to address bulimia any more than a resident assistant (RA) should be tasked with designing diversity awareness programs. However, that doesn't mean that students don't have an important role to play in the educational process. In the last 10 years, a growing body of research by

George Kuh and others has pointed to active learning and student engagement as best practices for educators throughout higher education. This growing understanding of student engagement has led some campuses to shift resources to allow students greater ability to invest time and energy into engagement beyond the classroom.

For example, recognizing that engagement is a powerful pedagogical tool, professional staff members at the University of Delaware have increasingly added strategies to our CM that seek to individualize the student experience, where students are the initiators and play active roles, while staff serve as facilitators and reflective guides. This affords students more ownership; they connect meaningfully to high-impact practices shown to increase student success in college, such as study abroad, service learning, and undergraduate research, and they engage in reflective conversations to help them make meaning of their engagement.

One of our many student engagement strategies has been to shift the majority of our programmatic resources to fund student-initiated events. Professional staff members have designed various funding categories, processes, and pre- and postreflection tools to connect to learning outcomes. Student staff members, such as RAs or Peer Mentors, use conversation prompts provided to them by professional staff members to talk with students about their talents and interests, encourage them to develop a community event, and assist them as they apply for funding via our Student Initiative Fund. One first-year student described their experience planning and hosting their own event in this way:

[Planning the event] taught me how to connect with people and meet new people. It was really helpful because we saw what went well, what needed to be improved upon next time, and I think all of that can tie in to my major, math education. You have to find ways to make your students interested while still doing what you need to do. You have to try to connect with them in ways that are meaningful to them to get them engaged.

Following the event, the RA again sits down with the student to reflect on its success, using a guide provided to them by a professional staff member: What went well? What might you do differently next time? How does this experience relate to your goals for the semester? Where else can you have impact? What's your next step in taking leadership on campus, and how can I help? This process happens approximately 1,000 times per year on our campus, and our assessment focuses on understanding how such an approach and reflection process influences feelings of belonging

(our data shows it has a significant impact) and other learning outcomes. We are less concerned with the type of event put on by the student and more concerned with the impact that making a contribution to the community has on the student.

Lesson 4: Partnerships with Stakeholders Are More Crucial than We Knew

IN ORDER TO DEVELOP GREATER degrees of collaboration and partnership, institutions using the CM have needed to shift their language and practices to more fully and accurately communicate with a wide audience. Instead of collaborations and partnerships being driven by unit and department needs, the CM approach shifts so that the student experience drives collaborations to achieve intended learning and to provide the best strategy, content, and timing for the student. This shift allows for the better integration of student affairs work while simultaneously scaffolding learning opportunities and eliminating redundancy.

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Like some other campuses, the University of Delaware has worked to adopt this partnership approach through the creation of centrally located Engagement Centers. These Centers have been created in close concert with campus partners to provide hubs of activity for initiatives identified as being strategically aligned with CM aims, such as academic enrichment workshops and activities designed to increase cross-cultural dialogue. As a department,

we offer proximity to students and the ability to help connect individual students to these Centers based on need; our campus partners provide content expertise in areas we deem valuable for achieving specific outcomes.

If all of our student life staff members and other out-of-the classroom colleagues view themselves as educators and can readily quantify the value of educational opportunities and demonstrate related results, we will fare well when faced with questions about return on investment, contributions to learning, and other measures of value within and external to the academy.

The better all of us are at aligning the work we do to holistically support shared learning goals, the more likely we are to achieve desired learning outcomes and use university resources efficiently. We should not be replicating initiatives but rather working strategically to support existing ones when our expert colleagues in areas such as career services, multicultural affairs, and health promotion are planning them.

Lesson 5: The CM Has Utility Beyond Residence Halls

ULTIMATELY, THERE IS NOTHING ABOUT the CM that precludes it from being utilized for the entirety of the learning experience beyond the classroom. If all of our student life staff members and other out-of-the-classroom colleagues view themselves as educators and can readily quantify the value of educational

opportunities and demonstrate related results, we will fare well when faced with questions about return on investment, contributions to learning, and other measures of value within and external to the academy. If place really matters—and being here on this campus matters—we must be able to prove it and prove it in measureable student learning. The CM, applied to all learning opportunities beyond the classroom, allows us to prove it with campus-specific assessment data. The major changes in higher education over the last decade and through the next require that none of us remain as we are.

The CM invokes a commitment to holistic learning, high-impact practices, and collaborations between student affairs and academic affairs. Applying it moves us from teaching to learning and from focusing on diversity to excellence and equity for all. What is new and what we have learned over the last 10 years is that, sometimes, the most simple, straightforward application of knowledge results in a paradigm shift that is both challenging and powerful. What we have heard at every ACPA RCI since 2007 is that this is revolutionary—not because the 10 elements are new but because we as a profession have not done a good job of acting in a way that the research and scholarship about students tells us we should. We have not actualized more than two decades of learning through our practice. Until now. The CM offers a process and structure to guide student affairs educators to where the scholarship has been pointing since 1994.

Everything Changes

WHEN THE CM WAS FIRST created, we did not understand the implications it would have on all aspects of our functions and operations. With a decision to make student learning the center point of the student affairs unit and define operational success through the lens of student learning assessment, every element of our organization transformed. Where once we sought to hire administrators and programmers, now we look to hire student staff who can facilitate reflection and professional staff with a background or interest in educational design. Our feedback cycles transformed from numbers-based (did you reach your programming goals?) to outcome-based (what indicators exist that student gained intended outcomes as a result of your leadership?).

We continually ask ourselves about the traits, skills, and knowledge required for each member of the team to serve as an educator. We know that if students do indeed learn better when they know what we

are asking them to learn, then our means and methods of communicating to students must change. The ability to clearly articulate goals for student learning serves as a magnet for like-minded campus partners from all sectors who see commonality with the unit's vision.

The fact that everything changes does not mean everything changes at once. The first change for everyone involved in this transformation is deciding unequivocally that we are educators. That assertion requires that we have a clear view of what stu-

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dents should learn and a set of informed strategies about how students best learn in our unique learning environments. When we develop ways to assess these areas, the dominoes begin to fall in sequence as the organization and the individuals transform practices.

We are not the same people, practitioners, or educators that we were 10 years ago when we started this journey. We know more about student learning, our institutions, our students, and the CM. Successes, and especially failures, are powerful learning tools as is the ability to see a model in action on multiple campuses. While the foundations of the CM remain worthy, and the Ten Essential Elements are still essential, the model—as it has evolved—has even more capacity to magnify the educational potential that exists beyond the classroom.

NOTES

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