

MSCF Minute



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Widgets

by Kevin Lindstrom, MSCF President

As an economics undergraduate I was introduced early to the term “widget.” Back then the internet was just a gleam in Al Gore’s eye, so the term had nothing to do with a software application. Instead, widget was used to describe a generic non-entity, often the fictional product of a manufacturing process. I spent four years hearing about widgets on an almost daily basis. While the term was nebulous by design, I came to understand that widgets were largely interchangeable and relatively worthless.

In other completely unrelated news, the system workgroup on long term financial sustainability recently released a set of draft recommendations. Among them was, “Create a common core curriculum for use throughout the colleges and universities.” As you ponder this recommendation, you may have several questions. I know I do. First amongst mine regards how this recommendation, from this group, fits with the current transfer pathways effort underway. If we’re going to have a common curriculum shoved down our throats, then we certainly don’t need to spend a pile of time, effort, and money on transfer

pathways. That we are, in fact, spending time, effort, and money on transfer pathways leads me to wonder if the left hand knows what the right hand is doing. I recently raised that question with the Board of Trustees.

You might also wonder why a financial sustainability group is making curricular recommendations. After all, we have an academic planning group currently functioning as part of Charting the Future. To my knowledge, they’re not talking about common curriculum. Maybe the financial sustainability group isn’t making recommendations from an academic perspective, but from a fiscal one. I encourage you to consider the financial implications of a common curriculum.

In other completely unrelated news, the system has proposed a dual path credentialing mechanism for concurrent enrollment instructors. The second of the two paths would involve activities that would count in place of graduate credit. These non-credit, non-transcript activities would clearly represent an erosion of the current standard. From the “tail wags the dog” school

of policy-making, the only offered rationale for this move is to quickly circumvent the recent Higher Learning Commission stand on concurrent enrollment credentialing. After all, the system’s own data shows that over 80% of current concurrent enrollment teachers do not meet the established credential.

The prevailing notion that it is better to change the credentialing standard than strive to meet it should signal to all the system’s regard, or lack thereof, for credentialing. While we see credentialing as a quality and professionalism issue, others view it as a nuisance. Still others are actively working to erode the professionalism we strive to bring to our classrooms, labs, libraries, and counseling offices. Again, I encourage you to consider how an erosion of credentialing standards can serve a number of agendas, including saving money.

If you believe the “completely unrelated” claims above, we need to talk. Because when we say “faculty”, some think widget.

Postscript: As these conversations continue, be on the lookout for creative

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reframes. If “common curriculum” meets with enough resistance, it’s likely to re-appear under a different label. We’ve seen that before.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

Thursday, May 5
Credential Fields

Friday, May 6
Meet and Confer

Tues-Wed., May 17-18
Board of Trustees

Friday, May 20
Student Affairs Council

Friday, June 3
Executive Committee

Monday-Wed., July 25-27
Summer Leadership Retreat

