Minutes of The Implementation Meeting

In attendance:  Sondra Cuban, Gail Goulet, Sherry Haskins, Rose Pettitt, Mariam Rashid, Christina Van Wingerden, Rudy Vendiola

Welcome and Overview

- Dr. Sondra Cuban welcomed committee members and gave an overview of the AHE Community of Practice and the Learning Outcomes (these are things we are trying to emphasize in our program and things we care about):
  1. Social Justice - Connecting this to leadership for the purpose of implementing equitable practices and policies. Equitability puts more emphasis on the students who are marginalized in some societal way, underrepresented or other students who just are actively struggling.
  2. Inquiry Based Learning – All of the courses start out with questions like-what issues are puzzling to you?-what do you feel passionate about?-what do you want to research? Often this is action research which is taking that theory stuff you’re reading about as a student and going into the community and working with community partners, which is about institutionalizing community engagement.
  3. Literacy – Not as one type of literacy which is just reading and writing but looking at literacies in terms of their layered meaning; i.e. critical literacies (gaining critiquing skills) or information literacies (using library resources).
  4. Identity, Reflection and Diversity – Issues of identity help people become aware of and honor the many different identities that people express and to reflect on those issues. Diversity is central to our program; it’s a 21st Century learning skill to learn about diversity and cultural competence which is necessary in terms of skills, knowledge and disposition in every educational policy.

Dr. Cuban reviewed the AHE Learning Outcomes and gave a short overview of the meeting focusing on: leadership, research, and support structures--how to better engage these areas and address questions that we have as well as entertain any new issues. These were three major issues from our last advisory committee meeting and members gave their input and recommendations:

1. Leadership
   Presentation: Concentrating efforts to make leadership a more explicit aim of the program. This is happening more deliberately in the initial orientation for new students as well as supporting a community of practice and networking with community partners as well as alumni through a variety of means. This includes service learning, a new Facebook page, the annual retreat, and through the Graduate Student Advisory Committee (GSAC) activities. Integrating greater professional development opportunities through the new required Field Experience course (AHE 592), assisting students to either gain a foothold in a professional setting with which they are not familiar or to dive deeper into a project and improve a practice in a setting they know. Moving in this direction with regard to institutionalizing
community engagement through new service-learning courses, action research, and related courses. These are expected to give students opportunities to develop their leadership potential with regard to social justice in and surrounding their communities and tests their academic knowledge in real life situations—important especially for those students with less work experience. To do this, we have questions regarding:

- The extent to which we have the capabilities to sustain a database and liaisons to assist the process of matching (or not), plugging in, and expanding expertise?
- How to make service-learning doable for students working full-time?
- Use the annual retreats and alumni events to carry community engagement leadership forward programmatically and connect to policies in Woodring and WWU?

Discussion: The long-term effects of our program on WA state. In fact—recent AHE graduates are teaching in the Human Services program, and which means all those Human Services students will go out to be case managers and will have amazing results with clients out there. The people, the workers, are on the front lines—they know what’s going on and they are in leadership positions. What we say about leadership does infiltrate out and makes a really big difference and it really changes things. We use the principles and theories in this program, like Assessment, especially in professional work. The AHE lens questions how do adults learn is different, and people are now taking and using this. It’s transferring over and making a difference.

Match it with community engagement in action research and service learning. These are all related to taking the theory and putting it into practice, but in a way that demonstrates that leadership, and how do we make service learning doable for people who work full time like at a community college? Should we encourage them to do this service learning or action research in their own organizations or outside of their organizations to get a better perspective and involve alumni too?

In surveying current AHE students and alumni, they all wanted Diversity as the theme of the retreat. Should we incorporate something with alumni—like doing a panel of alumni to invite them to have a role for greater networking and involvement? Current student always want to hear from alumni about how they are using this degree. If they're participating, you’ll pull them in. You could ask some alumni to contact current students in the program.

2. Research

Presentation: We are making research a greater focus in AHE curriculum, teaching and mentoring. This emphasis was confirmed in a recent AHE survey we conducted on current students with a majority (68%) saying they thought research was important to their careers. Faculty are mentoring Graduate Assistants and Work Study students to take on faculty research activities and learn about, and gain training, in research from the ground up. A curriculum review has been undertaken to ensure that action research occurs in every course so that students are able to conduct research in a variety of circumstances and for diverse topics. AHE 501 has been changed to focus on being a research consumer and analyzing existing research, while the sequential course, AHE 571, focuses now on doing research and an added new focus is on evaluation methods. This will be beneficial for those students wanting further higher education opportunities, such as doctoral programs, as well as those who are entering management and policy as well as administrative positions.
Furthermore, AHE 588 (the culminating course in AHE) has been made more rigorous to emphasize being a scientist-practitioner. We have completed the curriculum review of all required courses and now ensure that action research is core to each course. This year and last year’s survey of students have indicated research is important to students we have further questions about its applicability:

- How to better communicate to students about the importance of research and the extent to which it is?
- How research rigor can be captured and used for the program in assessments especially in new courses that were updated, 501, 571, and 588?

**Discussion:** Students have to have questions -- to make anything meaningful in graduate school, you have to have questions. And those questions can come from the students’ professional and personal lives. And then to implement those, how to do research. Students should have options in learning about thinking about and doing research. They get a chance to think about it, critique and read about the newest research and what they want to implement in their programs in the 501 course, and then the 571 course is about doing research. AHE 588 is the capstone course at the end of the program where the students show their knowledge and this course is now more rigorous; there’s been some push back from the students but we wanted to challenge them now to show their more mature thinking through issues in the field. So we’ve actually got more processes in this course. This has been good--students appreciated being challenged to show the diverse ways they are thinking through things. So the questions are: how to better communicate with students about this research challenge rather than we’re just trying to make their lives hard; how to better prepare students and how to better communicate that to them and how to make this rigorous in all our courses.

### 3. Greater Support Structures For Students

**Presentation:** We are creating greater support structures for students. This is happening through a new mentoring program that is being developed by GSAC (led by the GA) to assist all students in persisting and developing themselves further in AHE. This was originated during an AHE seminar on mentoring and which developed into a student retreat where students and alumni shared their knowledge of mentoring and made further recommendations for applying good practices to AHE. The AHE program is also developing a lifecycle pathway for students from their status as ‘prospective’ to ‘admitted’ to ‘current active students’. Tracking and collecting data is yielding greater knowledge about the diverse factors that lead to persistence and completion in the program. This has led to questions regarding informal mentoring, recruitment, an “expressive” community, and ways to improve online learning, and contact with instructors:

- Consistently students say they want more contact with instructors; this seems most important for online sessions in a given 10 week period—what are ideas for this?
- As we recruit more Human Service students who are revenue based, how can we offer them more scholarships and increase our revenue capacities?
- In what ways can we offer more mentoring on an informal level especially to those who are most marginalized or those who are academically struggling? For example can advisory members be available for this, or alumni? How can GSAC be further bolstered to support and mentor these students?
- In what ways can we create inroads for students to express their concerns and needs?
**Discussion:** how do we create better support structures for our students? Most of them work full time, have families and are students - so they have busy lives. So for our classes in a ten week period, we have two or three sessions that are face to face and the rest of the sessions - up to seven sessions- are online. One of the recent comments we hear from students is they want to constantly be in contact with their instructor. So especially with online sessions, how do we create more of a sense of support for students---many students have the assumption that when you’re face to face with the instructor, it’s more beneficial. This is an issue with all online or blended programs that generally students and/or community disappear. They can produce a state of being in a “third space” where people do or don’t have those close emotional or social presence. We need to establish better support for our students (with the workloads we have). How can we can accomplish this (with the limited resources we have) so students feel they are getting the best they can? There’s an emotional component to this in that students feel they need to “see” their instructor and check in with them. Maybe the instructors could have online “office hours” so students know they can go online at a certain day/time with their web cameras and see their instructor and connect with them if they have questions. This would give students more of a feeling of support and contact. This is ultimately a compliment. But what about peers as important to their learning too---getting the students to see the wealth of knowledge in their “community of peers” and to help students see this is equally as important for their learning? This shouldn’t continue to be a problem. More face to face sessions? Do the students really want more? The students do their readings, post some questions and then the students respond to each other—this seems to work very well and promotes a strong community. Also each week there is a little video on Canvas to go over the week and they see the instructor which is working well.

Another thing is ways to create more resources for students like scholarships. We’re recruiting more Human Services Program students which are revenue students; we need to help them afford the program. In what ways can we have more open doors for students to express their concern about the program: to help and support any students with concerns about the program without feeling intimidated, to express concerns in a small program and/or to feel empowered?

In order to have a real community of practice that we’re advocating, people have to have an expressive outlet to say what they think. Where is the avenue for complaints when students’ individual experience is not doing good? As leaders, we need to accept and respond to student feedback by making changes. We could do this in round tables in smaller groups for students that are very safe and welcoming. This is a good option for students who may feel intimidated about speaking directly to an instructor. What about ways to achieve this so that they are not losing their oral skills, to orally communicate? There must be a foundation of trust. You have to facilitate anger and frustration but you want to hear about what is not going right for them. Small groups you form online is also a good place for students to share with one another and a place you can build trust.

The people that have been through this and have some trust, are not as easily influenced by another student who may be negative. One more piece to this is these are great ideas to have a drop off box, small groups, online forum or other place to receive student feedback. But also letting students know there have been changes made due to their input so they see we are responding. If the students are in groups, they can draw up a group agreement and decide how they will commit to each other and then they all sign it. We can have an online Qualtrics survey with questions to assure student anonymity and we could expand the questions to gauge depths of concerns.