



# CREATING A BASE FOR CHANGE

Lessons from the Department of Communication Studies  
and  
The School of Design

Christina Sabee

# Quick Background of Curriculum Revision Projects

## Communication Studies Department

- Department Vision Retreat in Fall 2014 – begin major redesign
- Apply for Teagle mini-grant in Spring 2015
- Build on Major Redesign from 2015-2016
- Submit Final Major Changes in Fall 2016
- New Major Implemented in Fall 2017!!

## School of Design

- Development of Mission and Core Learning Outcomes Spring 2016
- Apply for Teagle mini-grant in Spring 2016
- Through Teagle FLC, focus on integration of portfolio course to BSVCD major
- Begin programmatic change conversations in January 2017 retreat
- Ongoing program work continues . . .

# Shared Challenges in Communication Studies and Design

- “Ownership” of curriculum and/or courses
- Desire for Historical Consistency
- Disagreement on appropriate learning outcomes in shared courses
- Inconsistent application of program learning outcomes throughout programs of study or sub-discipline areas
- “Defensive” reaction to any proposed changes in courses (that they teach)

*“the necessary first step in rethinking our approach . . .  
Was to reconsider not just what we teach, but why we  
teach it . . .”*

*-- (Summit, 2010)*

- Start at the beginning!
  - *What do our students need to know when they graduate from our program?*
  - *What do we do that we believe helps them the most?*
- Leave the courses aside for at least the first few discussions
  - *Focus on the Mission and/or Program Learning Outcomes*
  - *Keep it BROAD in early discussion*

# Using a Systemic Approach to Understanding the Major

- Acknowledge that this is “personal” for faculty
- Use the “Toddler Technique” (i.e. ask WHY? And ask it many times)
- Respect that some discussions will be based on personal experience even when evidence is presented

# What does Systemic Questioning Get Us?

## Communication Studies Department

- Shared understanding of program learning outcomes
- Move from faculty-focused to student-focused
- Appreciation of different approaches

## School of Design

- Renewal of focus on the Design Process
- Move from faculty-focused to student-focused
- Thoughtful preparation and consideration of the importance of sequencing.

# Example of Retreat with Systemic Questioning

- Retreat Purposes
- Assess the current strengths of the department
- Brainstorm and prioritize long-term visions and opportunities for the department
- Develop strategies and actions for messaging department programs

# Example Continued . . .

- **Current Assessment of Communication Studies**
- *Guest Facilitator, Shawn Spano, SJSU Communication Studies Dept.*
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- The Communication Studies Field
- What are the key themes and salient points from the “wall of meaning”?
- What, if anything, is missing? What, if anything, would you add?
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- Communication Studies at SFSU
- What are our current strengths as a faculty?
- What do we do that makes us proud?
- What do our students come away with from a Communication Studies major?

# Example Continued . . .

- **Long-Term Visions for Communication Studies at SFSU**
- Based on the current assessment of Communication Studies, we will brainstorm future visions and opportunities for the department.
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- Scenario: It is fall semester 2020 and the Communication Studies Department at SFSU is thriving, having achieved a level of success that exceeded everyone's most optimistic expectations (faculty, administrators, students, and staff).
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- Question: What is happening in the department that is contributing to the success? What is not happening in the department? Be specific.

# References

- Summit, J. (2010). Literary history and the curriculum: How, what and why? *Profession*, 141-150.
- Chen, V. (2014). Dialogue as transformative practice in the coordinated management of meaning. In S. W. Littlejohn & S. McNamee (Eds.) *The Coordinated Management of Meaning: A Festschrift in Honor of W. Barnett Pearce*. (pp. 163-181). Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.