

# Summer 2023 report from the Student Learning Committee (SLC)

## August 1, 2023

### The SLC's membership

- Co-chairs: Bethany Miller (Director, Institutional Research & Assessment) and Joan Ostrove (Director, Serie Center for Scholarship and Teaching; Professor, Psychology)
- Members: Nancy Bostrom (Associate Director, Assessment), Angi Faiks (Director, Library), Jen Guyer-Wood (Executive Director, Career Exploration), Cynthia Kauffeld (Professor, Spanish & Portuguese), Mike McGaghie (Associate Professor, Music), Sonia Mehta (Associate Professor [NTT], Educational Studies), Minerva Muñoz (Dean, Institutional Equity)

### Our current situation

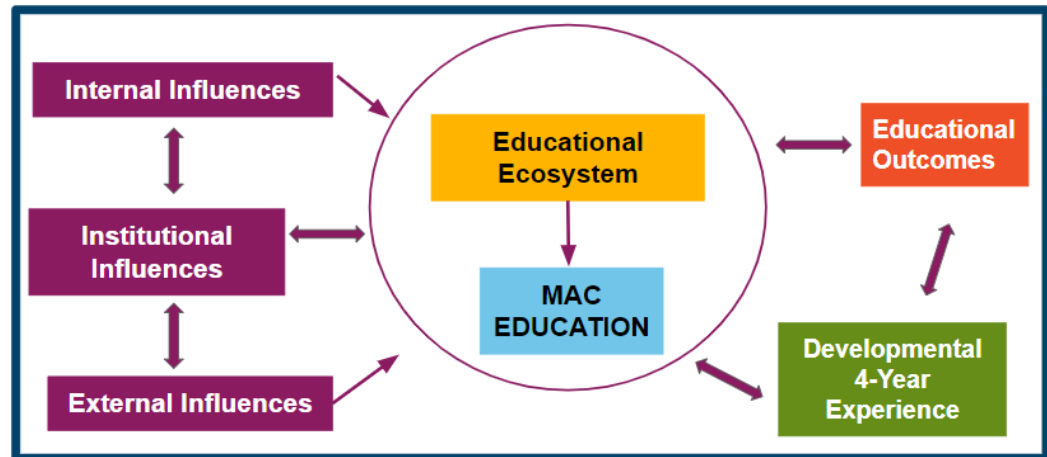
- Our new Strategic Plan affords us the opportunity to re-think our purpose and reimagine educational outcomes that are better suited to our current contexts, including the broader sociocultural context (e.g., all forms of injustice, climate change, AI, declining confidence in higher ed, etc.).
- As the strategic plan process motivates us to re-imagine the curriculum/co-curriculum\*, we must necessarily re-imagine our statement of student learning and our college-wide educational/learning goals in an iterative process, to ensure they accurately reflect our values and goals for students:
  - In what ways do/could mission-driven, college-wide educational goals/outcomes inform and shape the curriculum/co-curriculum?
  - In what ways do/could a re-imagined curriculum/co-curriculum inform and shape our college-wide educational goals/outcomes?

\* we believe it will be important to have an extended conversation about what we mean by “curriculum” so that it can include the critical, intentional educational and learning experiences that are currently thought of as part of the “co-curriculum;” we will use this combined term here to emphasize that we mean both, and we look forward to continued discussion

### Our working framework / Theory of change

- Our work has been inspired by, among other things, two books: *Shaping the College Curriculum* and *Becoming a Student-Ready College*.
  - *Becoming a Student-Ready College*:
    - the authors use the term “ecosystem ... to describe the symbiotic relationship among educators at individual institutions”
    - and they note: “if we think of postsecondary institutions as an ecosystem, then we are envisioning interdependent entities that can either thrive or fail through individual action and shared responsibility”
  - *Shaping the College Curriculum* provides a framework for placing our educational ecosystem within a broader, ever changing sociocultural context that impacts everyone in the Macalester community (and beyond)

## Framework for a Mac Education in Sociocultural Context



- Benefits of this model:
  - It emphasizes the interdependence and interconnectedness of the work we all do individually and collectively to serve the college's mission and to support holistic student success
  - It reminds us to consider various contexts before finalizing our educational outcomes and before building structures
  - It conveys the idea that none of these are static – they evolve and because they're all interconnected, when one component changes, it should prompt us to re-examine our structures, policies, and practices
  - It gives us an interconnected framework by which to assess holistic student success and institutional robustness/health

## Our process

We are using the “Ecosystem” framework to guide the following work:

- **Examine INTERNAL Influences: Ground ourselves in existing institutional data using an equity-focused lens**

### **Sources of internal influences from existing institutional data:**

#### Data/ Resources we reviewed in Summer 2023

- *Strategic Planning retreat data (200+ faculty and staff)* including free responses to 1) what is the purpose for a Mac education and 2) what are the knowledge, skills, perspectives and habits of mind we want all Macalester graduates to take with them
  - **Purpose of Mac Education** responses: Word cloud



- Ideas for meta themes based on the **Purpose of Mac Education** responses, taken from Jesse Rude’s initial coding:
  - **Individual success, thriving** (e.g. personal development, enable personal growth or liberation, skills for thriving in adulthood, decision-making skills, skills for coping with adversity, developing confidence, pathways for future opportunities, etc.)
  - **Liberal arts, transferable knowledge, skills, perspectives, habits of mind** (e.g. broaden one’s perspectives, nurture curiosity and/or creativity, learn how to learn, self-directed lifelong learning, critical thinking/analytical skills, communication/writing skills, etc.)
  - **Contributions to the larger world** (e.g. enable contribution to wider community, foster global citizenship, encourage ethos of service/responsibility/social justice, become leaders and change-makers, improve the world, change systems of power, etc.)
  - **Human connections** (build community / relationships, improve interpersonal skills and empathy, engage and learn from diverse viewpoints/persons, etc.)
  - **Build depth/disciplinary expertise**
- We note that national data about what employers are looking for matches up well with these meta themes, e.g. teamwork, communication, critical thinking, analysis. Employer interest in civic engagement is on the rise.
- We also note the presence of themes in our data related to skills that have been identified as critical for meaningful international/global engagement: collaboration, creativity, intercultural competence and citizenship, emotional self-regulation, wellbeing, and digital literacies.

Data / Resources we plan to review in Fall 2023

- *Survey responses from entering First-Year students* that lays out their expectations, interests, and goals for their Mac education and beyond.
- *Student responses to a campus climate survey*: data were analyzed in spring 2023 but have not yet been shared broadly.
- *Student survey responses* to questions about the liberal arts.

- *Classroom Community and Connectedness Project Data*: student input into what is working well to build community and what are the barriers to community in classrooms at Mac
  - *Student Focus Group data*: students from various affinity groups participated in these focus groups in 2021 which were hyper focused on the student's experiences at Macalester College.
  - *Institutional data on student performance and outcomes*: we will review disaggregated institutional outcomes including financial aid/grad debt, major actualization, High Impact Practices involvement, co-curricular engagement, grad rates, etc.
- **Examine INSTITUTIONAL influences: Rethink Mission, Vision, Values and their relationship to Educational Outcomes**

- Educational outcomes should reflect a college's mission
- Students, faculty, and staff have been articulating ways in which the words "multiculturalism," "internationalism," and "service to society" reflect an increasingly antiquated set of frameworks that neglect issues of social justice, power and privilege, and geopolitical dynamics at both the local and global levels.
- As we begin to reimagine our educational goals and outcomes for students, it's clear that there are tensions between our mission and the ways we currently articulate and live out our educational purpose. ***Rather than working to align our educational outcomes with our current mission, we should seize the opportunity to ensure that the mission itself is aligned with our community's current vision and values.***

#### Meet with members of other summer Strategic Planning groups

- To date we have met with:
    - Britt Abel (from Becoming a Student-Ready College): Connections between student educational goals/outcomes and the ideas that are developing related to the First Year Experience; universal design, i.e. treat every student as a first-gen student in 2023
    - Duchess Harris (from the EPAG Curriculum strategic planning task force): What does it mean to be a Mac student? A Mac grad? How has your academic learning and living here helped prepare you for whatever is next?
- **Examine EXTERNAL influences:**
    - **Read *Becoming a student-ready college*** (in June 2023)
    - **Seek support and inspiration from other institutions**
      - Attended the virtual 2023 AAC&U Institute on General Education and Assessment (IGEA) in June.
      - Explored and discussed [statements of student learning / gen ed curricula / student learning outcomes from other schools.](#)
        - Looked for what was different (because so much is similar, e.g. critical thinking, communication, etc.)
        - Highlighted what was different or ideas that reflect emerging Macalester-relevant themes

## Our motivating questions/directions for our work

- **Should/can we develop a *community-level* statement that expresses the educational environment we want to create, rather than a “Statement on Student Learning”?**
  - Can we develop a statement of principles, values, and guidelines for the *entire* community about how we want to be together as we learn and teach and engage with one another?
  - How can we develop a culture of collective responsibility and accountability (for our learning and teaching, for our relationships with one another, the learning environments we create, etc.)?
  - What does it mean to be in authentic connection/relationship to one another and to the broader communities that Macalester is part of?
  - How can the mission serve as a compass by which we can continually find and come back to our shared values, that can inform how we welcome new people to our community, that can help make space for restorative justice practices when our shared values or guidelines are violated, that can shape hiring practices for staff and faculty, and that can - as stated above - directly inform educational outcomes for students?
- **Incorporate process-, development-oriented / affective (in addition to primarily cognitive outcome- or product-oriented) educational outcomes ?**
  - Our current set of college-wide outcomes do not incorporate the kind of transformational learning we hope that a Macalester education will support, nor do they center the joy of intellectual inquiry.
  - We need to work toward educational goals that motivate and guide student learning, and that are responsive to student needs, adaptive to social change, and conducive to creative, holistic, generative student inquiry rather than those that are narrowly prescriptive.
  - We think it will be important to disrupt the ways in which the language and structures (i.e., a “check-box” approach to requirements) related to outcomes may lead to a consumer-driven/transactional focus of education. Outcomes can give families an idea of the concrete and transferable knowledge, skills, and perspectives students will gain, but it is also important to connect these to a larger purpose.
- **How can we build a statement of student learning that is responsive to the range of students/student experiences we want to cultivate at Macalester? How can we meaningfully center student agency and encourage transformational learning?**
  - Consider ways in which we can authentically center and guide students as co-creators in the classroom, of their educational experience, and of the ongoing development of the broader Macalester education.
  - Consider a “design your own” outcome that students develop with close, ongoing guidance from their advisors.
  - How do we also guide students in experiencing not only the Macalester we promise but the Macalester they are promising themselves?
  - How can we support students (and staff and faculty) to be comfortable with ambiguity? To recognize the importance of, and the need to participate within, a system of interdependence?

- We know from incoming student data that students are eager to explore and learn many different things. How do we sustain and build on this spark of curiosity and exploration?
- How can we remind students of the excitement of why they chose Macalester? How does the Mac community help them to thrive, how to map their learning pathways, how to be an active agent in their own learning?
- How can our statement of student learning support students to learn and be curious and thrive and be joyful and playful?
- **What are the implications of re-imagining educational goals/outcomes for our advising infrastructure/process?**
- **What aspects of Macalester's culture - broadly conceived and including students, staff, and faculty - will need to change if we are going to change (honestly and meaningfully) our goals for student and community learning and if all other aspects of our strategic planning are really going to work?**
  - Need to change culture of busy-ness and overwork
  - Need to change the idea that if you're not doing everything you're not doing it right (including, in the case of students, not double or triple majoring, having lots of concentrations, etc.)
  - Need to create space for international students, faculty, and staff and U.S. students, faculty, and staff of color in particular to articulate ways in which the Macalester culture affects them
  - Need to demonstrate (through curriculum/co-curriculum, allocation of space, budgetary decisions, admissions and hiring and retention practices, etc.) **who** (and what) **matters** at Macalester. ***We want everyone to know that they matter here.***
- **How many educational outcomes/goals should we have?**
- **Where can we have hard and honest conversations about what we aren't going to do anymore?**

## Our next steps

- Continue outreach to other strategic planning working groups
- Engage broader community in our conversations (e.g., academic departments via department chairs; students via MCSG and other student orgs; SAC)
- Develop a map of curricular and co-curricular connections that respond and reflect the mission/vision of Macalester learning (perhaps at the January strategic planning retreat), and facilitate a follow-up a discussion and articulation of what we mean by "curricular"
- Consider attending other AAC&U workshops/conferences