

**Content Analysis of “Idea Gathering” Sheets
From Brown Bag Dialogues on the Learning-Centered University**

**California State University, Northridge
Spring 2004**

Seven brown bag dialogue sessions were held in the spring of 2004 to initiate a conversation about becoming a more learning-centered university. The sessions were led by the president, provost, and vice president for student affairs, and attended by more than 100 faculty, deans, department chairs, and staff from both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. Approximately 80% of participants had attended one or more of the speeches given by William Plater earlier in the semester.

At the end of each session, participants were asked to complete an “Idea Gathering Form” before leaving. The form asked the following questions:

1. Did you attend either of the William Plater presentations on March 18/19?
2. When you think about enhancing learning at csun, what do you think are the most essential issues or ideas?
3. What are we already doing that can serve as a model or foundation in our efforts to become a more learning centered university?
4. What do you consider the most significant potential impediment(s) that might block or stall our efforts to become an increasingly learning-centered university if we don't address it (them)?
5. If we could reach out to any resource (individual authors, individuals in particular roles, teams from other institutions, national organizations, etc.), what more would you like to learn about what others nationally are doing, thinking, or saying about building and sustaining a strong institutional focus on learning?

The Several themes emerged from the data as a whole:

- **Student learning** was seen central to the mission of the university, with a focus on:
 - Student responsibility for learning (Plater's “intentional learner”)
 - University's responsibility to meet diverse, individual student needs
 - Faculty responsibility to use pedagogy and curricula that engage students
- **Faculty engagement, roles and rewards** are critical components of the change process.
- **Culture change** is what we're attempting, and it will require:
 - Engagement and buy-in of faculty, staff and students
 - Overcoming fear, resistance to change, and turf issues
 - Faculty and staff development
- **Faculty and staff would like to learn from on-campus resources, as well as from comparable universities** that have successfully implemented these models. They are interested in learning about the change process, learning-centered practices, and effective pedagogy.

- **Curriculum, goals, accountability, and outcomes** were mentioned somewhat less frequently than other topics, but many participants described these as issues that we will need to address.
- **Communication, collaboration, and conversation** will be needed to develop an understanding of what it means to become learning-centered, and to develop and implement a coherent, integrated curriculum and outcomes measures.
- **Resources, time, and workload issues** were of concern, especially in the context of a declining resource base. These issues affect faculty and staff morale and openness to change.
- **The role of leadership and administration**, while mentioned less frequently, emerged as being an important consideration.

A more detailed summary of the data is included on the following pages.

Detailed Summary Of Responses To Each Question

1. DID YOU ATTEND EITHER OF THE WILLIAM PLATER PRESENTATIONS ON MARCH 18/19?

Date	Primary/Invited Group	Attended Plater sessions?		Total Participants Excluding Leaders
		Yes	No	
April 14	Faculty	2	1	5
*April 19	Faculty	9	1	15
April 26	Faculty	5	3	11
May 11	Faculty/CELT Board	14	5	22
May 12	Dept. Chairs, Deans, Associate Deans	4	1	12
May 17	Dept. Chairs, Deans, Associate Deans	18	1	23
*May 21	Student Affairs Staff	15	5	25
	Total	67	17	120

*Number of participants on these dates was estimated based on RSVP list.

Themes

The following summary includes only themes identified by multiple participants. In general, themes are listed in order of prevalence, with the most frequently described first. A representative sample of the comments is also included for each.

2. WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT ENHANCING LEARNING AT CSUN, WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MOST ESSENTIAL ISSUES OR IDEAS?

Student Learning

The largest group of comments focused on student learning:

- **Intentional Learner:** “Students need to be empowered to learn, to take charge of their own learning.”
- **Student Engagement:** “Engaging students in becoming interested in learning – helping them see how a liberal education is vital to their interests.”
- **Pedagogy that Engages Students:** Pedagogy, active learning, experiential learning, service learning, new teaching paradigms, and innovative teaching strategies. “Creating a learning environment for students conducive to achieving their goals.” “Improving actual learning experiences for students in the classroom.”
- **Focus on the Individual:** Knowing our students as individuals, understanding them and how they experience CSUN, reaching out to them, and connecting with them. This includes learning styles, functional/ability levels, and cultural/socioeconomic diversity. “Understanding our students; who they are, what they’re dealing with [in] their lives. How can we better connect with them in our classes, in our student support programs unless we are better tuned into their goals, dreams, and needs?”

Curriculum

- **Relevance to Students:** In addition to knowing our students as individuals, many participants felt that it was important to make the curriculum relevant to student needs, interests, and goals. “Making undergraduate education relevant and useful to students.”
- **Goals of Liberal Education:** Some comments reflected the discussion about the goals of a liberal education (communication, critical thinking, etc.) versus students’ desires for job preparation, e.g., “Cultivating basic skills; i.e., writing and oral communication; development of critical thinking skills.” “What types of skills do we want our students to acquire so that they can be successful in any job – skills that apply to any major?”
- **Integrated, coherent curriculum:** “Connections between what happens in individual CSUN courses.”
- **Need to link curriculum and co-curriculum:** “The need for integration of learning across areas. The idea of transparency between areas and across campus.”

Accountability and Outcomes

- **Clearly defined goals and outcomes:** “Need to be clear about our goals, i.e., graduation rates, employability or learning.” “Faculty need to be clear about their own department/university’s expectations (goals, learning outcomes).” “Clear course objectives; realistic outcomes; community/workforce link.”
- **Link to outcomes:** “Demonstrate that learning has taken place.” “That changes have practical, tangible outcomes.” “Focus on learning outcomes as much or more than the mode of delivery per se.”

Faculty

- **Faculty engagement, roles and rewards:** Comments addressed the need for faculty to become more engaged in student learning. “Engage faculty in the broad understanding of the university’s mission.” “For faculty to come out of their mode of thinking and learn about our students – their academic ability, learning styles, personal issues.” “Good faculty, varying pedagogy, deep concern about students, high levels of interest in the student.” “Building rewards, psychic or otherwise, for faculty engagement.”
- **Faculty development, learning, and culture change:** Participants acknowledged the need for faculty to learn new pedagogy and a new culture: “Enculturation of tenured faculty to support university goals and student-learning outcomes; enculturation of new faculty to the university culture and goals without being in conflict with older colleagues.” “Faculty development – possibilities of new approaches.” “Faculty development – changing the teaching paradigms.”

Leadership/Administration

A few participants commented about the role of central administration, deans, and chairs: “Buy-in by deans and chairs – trickle down – belief at the top and support.” “Organizational change among staff administrators, students and faculty is a significant undertaking. Understanding the dynamics of organizational change/socialization will be ‘key’.”

Collaboration

- **Institutional focus:** “University-wide knowledge and buy-in to a whole program, not just one small piece of a program.”
- **Integration/Cross-Division and Cross-Departmental Collaboration:** “Developing outcomes; working cross-functionally to develop structures/processes to make that happen.” “Collaborative effort across all areas.”
- **Conversation:** “Communication/focus group/engaging conversation”

3. WHAT ARE WE ALREADY DOING THAT CAN SERVE AS A MODEL OR FOUNDATION IN OUR EFFORTS TO BECOME A MORE LEARNING CENTERED UNIVERSITY?

Existing Practices:

- **Pedagogy:** Some participants described existing practices, including student engagement pedagogy techniques, constructivist learning, using “teachable moments,” experiential learning across areas.
- **Curriculum and Assessment:** assessment, portfolios for seniors/grad students, student outcomes with rubrics, assessment committee, requiring new course proposals to include assessment strategies.

Efforts in Colleges and Departments:

- **Collaborative planning focused on specific courses:** Several participants said their departments have meetings of faculty who teach the same course. For example: “We are meeting in the department to align standards with courses, with assignments, with

assessment. We are developing course notebooks, which are given to full- and part-time faculty and meet with them – coordinator assigned per course.”

- **The College of Health and Human Development** was mentioned several times, e.g., “HHD organized a ‘Learning Centered Colloquium’ to discuss, define and develop what a L.C. college looks like – developing a web site.”
- **Other Departments/Colleges:** Others were mentioned (once each): “Educational Psychology Department students are cohorted by options. Most of the options have clear outcomes and assessments.” “Library team is more proactive in research instruction.” “Religious Studies as a model department for teaching undergrads.”

University-Wide Programs/Initiatives (Academic Affairs):

- **CELT** was mentioned most frequently, and was praised for the quality of its programs, with particular mention of workshops on assessment, grading, writing, and supporting pedagogy.
- **Teachers for a New Era** was mentioned frequently, for example: “TNE focuses on pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Understanding of this shapes one’s teaching. We have study groups – volunteer time to reflect on our teaching.” “TNE relates teacher performance to student learning.”
- **PACE** was mentioned several times. For example, “PACE offers courses at times when students are available to learn.
- **Michael D. Eisner Center on Teaching and Learning in CoE** (also mentions Michael Spagna)
- **EOP and Academic Advisement Centers**
- **Service Learning** was mentioned in almost every session.

Programs in Student Services

- **Collaboration** with other units, e.g., “We (SD&IP) and other Student Affairs departments very much try to collaborate and integrate our programming into student’s lives. We do this by classroom interaction, etc.” “Generally speaking, partnerships; LLCs, Matador Involvement Center, learning communities.” “Having staff interact on a regular basis with classes.” “We have developed strong relationships with high school counselors in our service area.”
- **Outcomes as focus in Student Affairs:** “Divisionally the development of learning outcomes in helping to shape our focus on learning.”
- **Living Learning Communities**
- **First Year Experience (FYE)** program/committee
- **Others:** The spring “College: Make it Happen!” conference organized by Student Outreach & Recruitment; UNIV 100, peer education programs, mentoring

Dialogue/Conversations

Several participants listed various types of conversations, such as: “small focus groups,” “group work with research,” and “brown bags, orientations, workshops, grants, ‘ideology.’” One noted that “we are talking, thinking, grappling with significant issues facing

us. More of us (numbers of us) need to be engaged in this process, through dept-level pedagogy conversations.”

One participant noted that “a wide variety of individual efforts are underway. We need to find ways both to highlight (publicize) and reward these. The more we see ourselves as already a learning-centered university, the easier change will be.”

4. WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL IMPEDIMENT(S) THAT MIGHT BLOCK OR STALL OUR EFFORTS TO BECOME AN INCREASINGLY LEARNING-CENTERED UNIVERSITY IF WE DON'T ADDRESS IT (THEM)?

Attitudes. The most frequently mentioned barriers were those related to attitudes:

- **Lack of Engagement, Buy-in, Commitment.** Many comments described a lack of commitment by faculty, staff and students. Examples include:
 - “The ‘buy-in’ from all departments and faculty. Some are on the right track; however, some feel that their ways are overtly correct—this may be, but effective change and integration could help.”
 - “Shifting focus and understanding of what we do might be seen by faculty as one more imposition/demand. Need to find a way to get faculty buy-in.”
 - “Students need to be involved in the process [culture change] to be sure their expectations match with faculty.”
 - “I’m uncertain of what percentage/proportion of our liberal arts, science and math (undergrad) [faculty] are committed to the concept that good teaching must be ‘measured’ by student learning.”
- **Inertia, Fear or Resistance to Change**
 - “Change departmental cultures.”
 - “Need to address culture change... Students need to be involved in the to be sure their expectations match with faculty.”
 - “Inertia”
 - “Fear of change – environmental, cultural (institution)”
 - “Fear of reprisals if things don’t go well and students don’t measure up.”
 - “Fear (professors’) of loss of control.”
 - “Perception/attitude that the faculty’s role will be lessened.”
- **Turf Issues**

Participants described conflicts between academic departments and also between divisions (i.e., Student Affairs and Academic Affairs):

 - “Turf war among departments; the mentality that’s narrowly focused on the individual faculty members or areas rather than the education and needs of students.”
 - “Ancient attitudes about faculty supremacy in the classroom.”
 - “Narrow-minded thinking. Thinking that no one else/dept. can do my job better.”
 - “Protecting one’s ‘territory,’ not willing to teach what you know.”

Faculty Roles & Rewards

Many comments pertained to the dichotomy of teaching versus research as well as the need to reward faculty for good teaching and for engaging in the change process. Others expressed concerns about diverting faculty from research, and about a lack of time or increased workload that might result from this change. Examples include:

“Not elevating the process of teaching/learning to the same status of ‘research’ in the T&P process.”

“Emphasis on discipline-based research and publications for tenure, rather than on teaching, despite what is said in Section 600 and/or at meetings.”

“Need for faculty to do what a university faculty does – research; realistic assessment of faculty work distribution.”

“Inadequate time for faculty to interact, experiment and redesign.”

“Overwhelming faculty”

“Faculty’s initial reaction will be that this is just more work.”

“If we don’t reward, or learn to better reward, faculty AND staff too in ways other than \$\$\$!”

Lack of Understanding

Faculty, staff and students need to understand the concept and benefits of a learning-centered university. These comments also imply the need to clearly articulate our vision and goals:

“Faculty, students and staff not fully understanding what learning-centered entails.”

“Must clearly articulate what a learning-centered university is and this needs to be reinforced often.”

“Lack of understanding about what the benefits of the paradigm shift would be”

“Lack of understanding of where we are headed with this – too much emphasis on policy”

Student Issues

Some of these comments suggested that students need to change, but many recognized the need for the University to change in order to meet student needs. One even identified as a barrier, “blaming the students for their shortcomings.”

- **Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners:** These comments indicate that because our students are so diverse in so many ways, we need to address their individual needs, for example:

“We need to even more effectively recognize the diversity and meet all learners’ needs”

“Seeing students as individuals with individual needs and individual skills and learning processes.”

“Lose students who don’t fall into a particular group/style”

“Student preparedness”

- **Student Responsibility /Motivation for Learning:** Many participants commented the need for students to take responsibility for their learning and for the University to find ways to help them do so, for example:
 - “Student’s attitude toward personal responsibility”
 - “CSUN’s tendency to be a drive-thru institution flies in the face of student ownership.”
 - “Motivating students to learn”
 - “It is difficult to engage students in learning outside class – can’t create a learning community.”

Resources

Many participants commented on lack of resources, and some suggested that resistance often reflects a fear that resources will be inadequate. Three subsets of resource issues emerged: financial, time/workload issues, and other resources.

- **Financial Resources.** Examples include:
 - “Financial implications” “Fiscal resources”
 - “Large class size”
 - “Perception/attitude that ...more resources are needed”
 - “Few resources - zero new coordinators to facilitate curriculum development.”
 - “Need to address culture change, which requires resources.”
 - “The impact of the State budget and the fear and division it causes across the institution.”
 - “Morale around shrinking resources – the perspective that we cannot possibly do things differently b/c we can’t even do what we are currently doing.”
- **Time and Workload Issues.** Examples include:
 - “Lack of time and energy to implement change”
 - “Little time for faculty to collaboratively plan “
 - “Workload (faculty)”
- **Other Resource Issues**
 - “FTES models, space”
 - “Need data bases”

Communication/coordination.

Participants commented on the need for communication and coordination across units, and the “silos” that make coordination difficult. Examples include:

- “Interacting across the depts. to develop S.L. O. [specific learning objectives]”
- “Communication is the most important and effective process of learning [the LCU committee thinks this means that we need to communicate the intended outcomes to students].”
- “How to coordinate advising efforts to give uniform, quality advice.”

“Our administrative structures and silos”

Administration and Leadership

A few participants wrote about the importance of leadership, and also the cumbersome nature of some of our administrative processes:

“If we look at the turn-over in administration on this campus in the past 10 years, it would appear that this could be a real challenge to have an ongoing/consistent set of values and priorities that must guide this change.”

“Leadership has to truly understand its role (long term). Active involvement by staff will be well received if done properly. We need to be sure that the goals and means are clear and well activated.”

“Hierarchy – needing ‘permission’ to help students; cumbersome administration tasks/processes”

“We have too many tasks before us that are more procedural than substantive: audits, reports, etc., which may often—if not always—be necessary but whose execution disproportionately consumes our time. The ironic outcome is that those measuring processes occupy so many resources that we end up reporting less achievement.”

Curriculum Issues

A few participants commented on curriculum issues as barriers:

“The effort at establishing assessment and learning goal can be so laborious that they limit incentives to change”

“The curriculum can be outdated; therefore, difficult to remodel to contemporary post-modern learning”

“Disciplinary “standards” for inputs”

“Need for grades/units”

“Placing so much importance on academic credit as the only important indication of learning”

“Silos – departmental and curricular (too many boxes). Hierarchy -> faculty -> students”

5. IF WE COULD REACH OUT TO ANY RESOURCE (INDIVIDUAL AUTHORS, INDIVIDUALS IN PARTICULAR ROLES, TEAMS FROM OTHER INSTITUTIONS, NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, ETC.) WHAT MORE WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN ABOUT WHAT OTHERS NATIONALLY ARE DOING, THINKING, OR SAYING ABOUT BUILDING AND SUSTAINING A STRONG INSTITUTIONAL FOCUS ON LEARNING?

Learn from Other Institutions

Many participants suggested that we learn from other institutions that have implemented learning centered models. A few examples are included here:

“I think hearing what discipline specific faculty at other institutions are doing and what they found worked and didn’t would be helpful.”

“Identify nationally programs that prepare students for successful university studies, jobs obtained after completion of program with success in the job. What types of institutions are seeing more success and why.”

“Campus that has just gone thru WASC under their new standards.”

“Bring in additional campuses involved in the ‘Greater Expectations’ report.”

“How have other institutions made it work at a department level? Has any one connected dept. work with total institutional effectiveness evaluation in a successful way? What technologies, if any, have others found useful or critical to this process?”

“Have other institutions focus on particular skills they want their undergraduates to embody and how they integrate the teaching of their skills in the undergraduate curriculum.”

People, Books, Organizations

Some participants suggested specific resources, which are listed here:

- Peter Senge – the Fifth Discipline
- AAHE type program but on campus
- Cliff Adelman, Department of Education
- Marilyn Moats Kennedy – changing demographics on the workforce
- Bill Glasser’s *Quality Schools*; Johnson City NY Schools (nationally recognized) which started the OBE initiative in the mid-60s
- Mel Levine – “A Mind at a Time”, “The Myth of Laziness”
- The new education advisor for the Province of Ontario, former head of OISE and recent advisor to Tony Blair’s govt. In the U.K.
- Countries outside the U.S.? other fields besides higher ed. M. Baxter-Magolda
- Competency-based learning being developed by AUPHA (Assoc. for Univ. Programs in Health Admin.)
- Syracuse University
- The Claremont Colleges
- Evergreen State College in Washington State
- UC Santa Cruz
- “Nat’l Ass’n of Student Personnel Administrators Journal” article from summer 1974 entitled “The Universal Sausage Company”. (Tsheitlein?)
- Investigate resources available (programs) in professional organizations – it may be useful in an attempt to get faculty involved

Change process

Some participants wrote that they want to learn more about various aspects of the process of change:

“How a campus community defines, claims, and repeatedly touts (!) its excellence”

“Explain the incentive and motivators that produce change agents”

“How to bring about an enthusiastic cooperative committee faculty interested in change without financial reward”

Motivation and Pedagogy:

Some participants want to learn more about teaching, learning and pedagogy:

“Ways to motivate and increase students’ taking responsibility for their own learning”

“Steps of implementation at class level”

“How does this model embrace/adapt to multiculturalism and diverse life experiences of our students?”

“Strategies for implementing and measuring success at moving towards a learning centered university.”

“I would like to know what makes good teachers good and is there something that I can learn from them. “

“I am a concrete thinker – I’d love to see teaching/learning techniques”

“Successful practices in motivating students”

“I would be interested in what K-12 and cc’s are doing. What they are doing today will ultimately effect the CSU later”

CSUN Resources

Several participants indicated that we should make greater use of CSUN resources, and “to learn more from those in this room.” Some specific examples are:

- Exposure to what is going on in national organizations is terrific and important for growth – but let’s not overlook the great resources here on our own turf. Let’s highlight them more.
- No names in particular, but I think it might help to use CSUN resources rather than importing “experts.”
- EOP – Bridge program At CSUN. Team of Arlinda Eaton, Bev Cabello, Raejan [?] Curtis were terrific in helping COE to better understand assessment
- Let and encourage faculty to observe each other outside of the RPT process