CHAPTER ONE

CURRICULUM: AN ACADEMIC PLAN

Ask any college student or graduate "What is the college curriculum?" and you will get a ready answer. Most think of the curriculum as a set of courses or experiences needed to complete a college degree. Some will refer to the total set of courses a college offers, others will mean the set of courses students take, and a few will include informal experiences that are not listed in the catalog of courses. Some may include teaching methods as part of their definitions, while others will not. At a superficial level the public assumes it knows what a college curriculum is, but complex understandings are rare. Even those closely involved with college curricula lack a consistent definition. A few may point out that we cannot define curriculum without reference to a specific institution because college and university missions, programs, and students vary widely in the United States.

Over the years, we have solicited definitions of curricula from faculty, administrators, graduate students, and observers of higher education. Most people include at least one and usually more of the following elements in their definitions:

- A college's or program's mission, purpose, or collective expression of what is important for students to learn
- A set of experiences that some authorities believe all students should have
- The set of courses offered to students
- The set of courses students actually elect from those available

- The content of a specific discipline
- The time and credit frame in which the college provides education. (Stark & Lowther, 1986)

In addition to the elements that provide the primary basis for an educator's definition of curriculum, individuals often mention other elements, sometimes including their views of learners and learning or their personal philosophy of education. Faculty members with broad curriculum development responsibilities typically mention several elements in their definitions and may be more confident about which of those elements should be included or excluded.

These instructors seldom link the elements they mention into an integrated definition of the curriculum. They tend to think of separate educational tasks or processes, such as establishing the credit value of courses, selecting the specific disciplines to be taught or studied, teaching their subjects, specifying objectives for student achievement, and evaluating what students know. Probably the most common linkage faculty members address is the structural connection between the set of courses offered and the related time and credit framework. Colleges and universities in the United States have emphasized the credit hour since the early 20th century, having modified the Carnegie "unit" first introduced into secondary schools in 1908 (Hutcheson, 1997; Levine, 1978). Curriculum change efforts in the United States often focus on structure because numbers of credit hours and other structural dimensions of curricula are common to all fields. In fact, some observers believe that the most common form of curricular change is "tinkering" with the structure (Bergquist, Gould, & Greenberg, 1981; Toombs & Tierney, 1991), for example, changing course listings, college calendars, or the number of credits required for graduation. Although discussions of curricular reform seem to focus on these structural dimensions rather than on the overall experience envisioned for students, when legislators, policy makers, and the general public talk about "improving curriculum," they have something more in mind than structural adjustments. To them, curricular changes should result in substantive improvements in student learning, and colleges and universities should be able to demonstrate such improvement. Today, demands for accountability and increased scrutiny of higher education call for greater consensus on what we mean when we say "curriculum."

The Need for a Definitional Framework

Since the mid-1980s the extensive literature urging educational reform has focused on the ambiguous term "curriculum." This word has been frequently modified by several equally ambiguous adjectives such as "coherent" and "rigorous" or

linked with processes such as integration. Is it the set of courses offered that lacks coherence or integration? The choice of courses made by the students? The actual experiences students take away from the courses? The teaching styles and strategies chosen by the professors? Or all of these? To discuss curriculum reform meaningfully, we need a working definition of curriculum to guide discussion and help us determine what needs to be changed.

The lack of a definition does not prevent faculty members, curriculum committees, deans, academic vice presidents, instructional development specialists, institutional researchers, and teaching assistants from regularly making decisions about curricula. These individuals talk about "curriculum" with the untested assumption that they are speaking a shared language (Conrad & Pratt, 1986). This illusion of consensus becomes a problem when groups with different views come together to work for curricular improvement. In such circumstances, participants often argue from varied definitions and assumptions without spelling them out, particularly in working groups that include many disciplines. Such discussions can be frustrating and even grow contentious. For these and other reasons, curriculum development or revision is typically not a popular task among college faculty.

Many faculty and administrators will resonate with the definition of an undergraduate curriculum as the formal academic experience of a student pursuing a baccalaureate degree or less, particularly because this definition is broad enough to include learning experiences such as workshops, seminars, colloquia, internships, laboratories, and other learning experiences beyond what we typically call a "course" (Ratcliff, 1997). This definition may remind them that a curriculum, from the student perspective, is a very particular set of learning experiences. Yet, to provide a framework for productive discussions and wise decisions, faculty and administrators need a more precise understanding that can help them identify the specific aspects of curricula that must be addressed. Should we adjust the content of a curriculum or use different teaching methods to build student competencies? Should we consider new methods of delivery, such as distance or online learning, to reach different student populations? Should new assessment procedures be adopted to better measure student learning and thus inform curricular revisions?

Most definitions are too general to be very helpful to faculty and administrators faced with the task of curriculum development or revision because they do not identify the many decision points that, together, produce a specific curriculum. Overly general definitions hinder the ability to communicate the intentions of a curriculum to students, to evaluate it effectively, and to make the case for particular changes. Definitions, of course, are not prescriptions. Defining the term curriculum does not mean that everyone must agree on the content to be studied, how it should be studied, or who should study it. It does not mean that everyone

must agree on the specific skills or outcomes students must achieve. Our higher education system is characterized—indeed distinguished—by diversity of programs and institutions that serve different students and different needs. A definition of curriculum that can be applied across these differences is required.

Defining Curriculum as an Academic Plan

To remedy the lack of a comprehensive definition of curriculum, we propose the concept of the "academic plan." Plans, of course, can be variously successful once they leave the drawing board. Our goal in conceptualizing curriculum as an academic plan is to identify the critical decision points that, if effectively addressed, will enhance the academic experience of students.

A plan for any endeavor incorporates a total blueprint for action, including purposes, activities, and ways of measuring success. A plan implies both intentional and informed choices among alternatives to achieve its intentions; in this sense, it strives for the ideal. The intention of any academic plan is to foster students' academic development, and a plan, therefore, should be designed with a given group of students and learning objectives in mind. This focus compels course and program planners to put students' educational needs, rather than subject matter, first. The term "plan" communicates in familiar terms the kind of informal development process recognized by a broad range of faculty members across academic fields.

The academic plan definition implies a deliberate planning process that focuses attention on important educational considerations, which will vary by field of study, instructors, students, institutional goals, and so on. Despite such variations, the notion of a plan provides a heuristic that encourages a careful process of decision making. Every curriculum addresses each element of the plan described below—whether conscious attention has been given to it or not, whether a deliberate decision has been made, or whether some default has been accepted. Thinking of curriculum as a plan encourages consideration of *all* of the major elements, rather than attention to singular aspects such as specific content or particular instructional strategies.

In our view, an academic plan should involve decisions about (at least) the following elements:

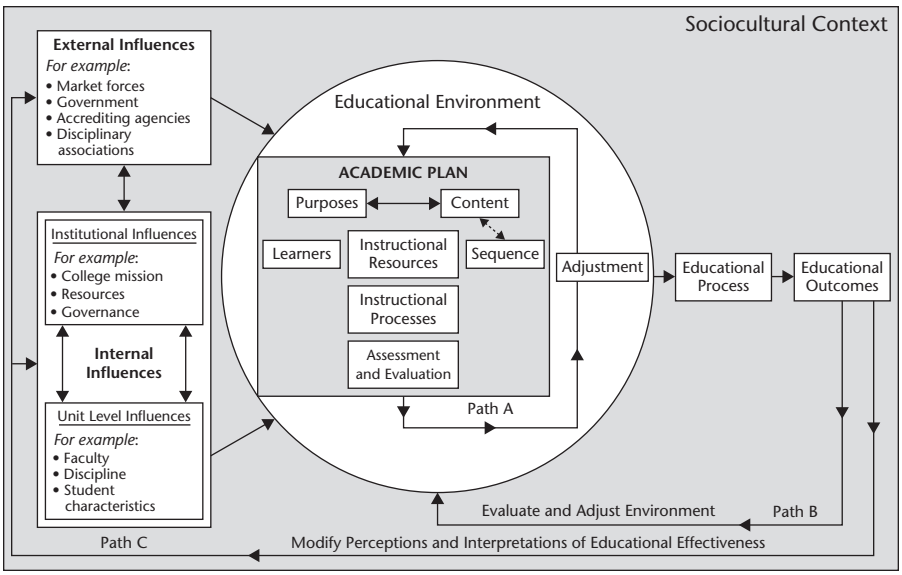
1. PURPOSES: knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be learned
2. CONTENT: subject matter selected to convey specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes
3. SEQUENCE: an arrangement of the subject matter and experiences intended to lead to specific outcomes for learners

4. LEARNERS: how the plan will address a specific group of learners
5. INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESSES: the instructional activities by which learning may be achieved
6. INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES: the materials and settings to be used in the learning process
7. EVALUATION: the strategies used to determine whether decisions about the elements of the academic plan are optimal
8. ADJUSTMENT: enhancements to the plan based on experience and evaluation

This set of elements provides a definition that is applicable to all levels of curriculum. An academic plan can be constructed for a single lesson, for a single course, for aggregations of courses (for example, a program or major), for broader organizational groupings of majors (such as schools or colleges), and for a college or university as whole. Moreover, defining a curriculum as a plan allows plans at these several organizational levels to be examined for integrity and consistency.

The model of the academic plan, however, includes more than the eight elements that define the plan itself. As we show in Figure 1.1, our complete model makes explicit the many factors that influence the development of academic plans

FIGURE 1.1. ACADEMIC PLANS IN SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT



in colleges and universities. In the first edition of this book (Stark & Lattuca, 1997), we divided these influences into three sets, building on work published by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1977) and that of Joan Stark, Malcolm Lowther, Bonnie Hagerty, and Cynthia Orcyzk (1986). In this revised edition, we clarify the nature of these influences by further elaborating the role of social, cultural, and historical factors on curricula, faculty, and learners.

Our slightly revised model of "academic plans in context" emphasizes the influence of sociocultural and historical factors by embedding the academic plan in this temporal context. Within the sociocultural context, we include two subsets of influences, divided into (a) influences external to the institution (such as employers and accreditation agencies) and (b) influences internal to the college, university, or educational provider. We further divide internal influences into institutional-level influences (for example, mission, resources, leadership, and governance) and unit-level influences (such as program goals, faculty beliefs, relationships with other programs, or student characteristics). These distinctions acknowledge the many levels (college, department, program, or course) at which academic plans are created and implemented.

Internal and external influences vary in salience and strength depending on the course, program, or institution under study. In Figure 1.1 we portray these specific influences as interacting to create an educational environment. We place educational processes and outcomes outside the educational environment for planning but within the larger sociocultural context. We recognize a multitude of influences that are beyond the control of planners, such as the attitudes and preparation of students who enroll in a course or program and the social and cultural phenomena that affect perceptions in a given time and place.

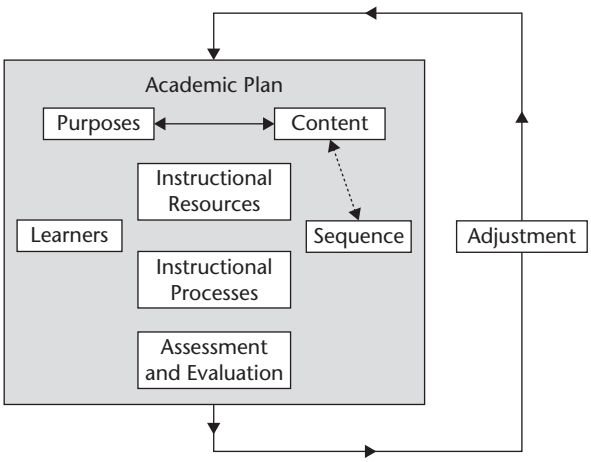
Figure 1.1 also shows the evaluation and adjustment processes both for a plan (Path A) and for the educational environment (Path B), which may itself be affected by the outcomes of academic plans. Finally, in Path C, we suggest that external and internal audiences can form perceptions and interpretations of the educational outcomes that may cause them to modify the kinds of influences they exert.

In the following sections, we elaborate on each of the main components of our model, discussing first the elements of the academic plan and next exploring the different influences on the plans, planners, and planning processes.

Elements of Academic Plans

Figure 1.2 isolates the elements of an academic plan. From interviews with faculty members we know that purposes and content are nearly always closely related elements of academic plans in the minds of instructors (Stark, Lowther, Bentley, Ryan, Martens, Genthon, & others, 1990). We illustrate

FIGURE 1.2. ELEMENTS OF ACADEMIC PLANS



this relationship with a double arrow in Figure 1.2. Frequently, instructors also link content with a particular sequence (or arrangement of content) as they plan. We show the relationship between content and sequence with a dotted double arrow to indicate that, while these elements are often linked by instructors, they are not consistently connected. We have arranged the other elements in their approximate order of consideration by college and university faculty members based on reports of how they plan (Stark & others, 1990). For example, faculty members tend to consider learners, resources, and sequence simultaneously, but after purposes and content.

We have not inserted additional arrows into the academic plan model because we do not wish to imply that all curriculum planners do or should carry out their planning activities in a particular sequence. In fact, instructors reasonably make decisions in different orders and do so iteratively rather than in a linear fashion. This is especially true as they revise courses or programs based on their experiences in the classroom. In the following sections, we briefly describe each of the eight elements of an academic plan.

Purposes: Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes to Be Learned

Discussions about college curricula typically grow out of strong convictions. Thus, we have placed the intended outcomes, which we call purposes, as the first element in the academic plan. The selection of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be acquired reflects the planners' views—implicit or explicit—about the goals of

TABLE 1.1. STATEMENTS OF EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE COMMON AMONG COLLEGE FACULTY

A.	In general, the purpose of education is to make the world a better place for all of us. Students must be taught to understand that they play a key role in attaining this goal. To do this, I organize my course to relate its content to contemporary social issues. By studying content that reflects real-life situations, students learn to adapt to a changing society and to intervene where necessary.
B.	The main purpose of education is to teach students how to think effectively. As they interact with course content, students must learn general intellectual skills, such as observing, classifying, analyzing, and synthesizing. Such skills, once acquired, can transfer to other situations. In this way, students gain intellectual autonomy.
C.	Education should provide students with knowledge and skills that enable them to earn a living and contribute to society's production. I believe a fundamental role for me as an instructor is to help students achieve their vocational goals.
D.	Education should involve students in a series of personally enriching experiences. To meet this broad objective, I select content that allows students to discover themselves as unique individuals and thus acquire personal autonomy and improved self-concept. I discuss appropriate activities and content with students in an effort to individualize the course.
E.	In my judgment, education should emphasize the great products and discoveries of the human mind. Thus, I select content from my field to cover the major ideas and concepts that important thinkers in the discipline have illuminated. I consider my teaching successful if students are able to demonstrate both breadth and depth of knowledge in my field.
F.	Whatever the curriculum, it should help students clarify their beliefs and values and thus achieve commitment and dedication to guide their lives. For me, the development of values is an educational outcome as important as acquisition of subject knowledge in the field I teach.
G.	Education should cultivate the latent creative talents of students. To help achieve this, I give my students maximum freedom to explore their own ideas as well as constructive opportunities to interpret the works of creative individuals.

From: Stark and others, 1990. Reprinted by permission of the University of Michigan.

postsecondary education. Research demonstrates that college faculty members in different fields hold varying beliefs about educational purposes (Braxton & Hargens, 1996; Smart, Feldman, & Ethington, 2000; Stark & others, 1988). Table 1.1 includes several broad statements describing some of these views. The second purpose listed in this table, "learning to think effectively," is a commonly espoused purpose, but in any faculty group there are likely to be strong proponents of other statements as well. Some purposes will be strongly endorsed at one type of institution and minimized at another type. Considering a curriculum as an academic plan can direct attention to these differences in basic purposes and

aid in the identification of underlying assumptions that can interfere with shared understandings of curricular goals.

Content: Subject Matter for Learning

Educational purposes can be achieved in many ways. For example, it is difficult to argue that any field has a monopoly on encouraging intellectual development or effective thinking. Similarly, values and ethics can be taught using different subject matter. The academic plan model acknowledges that some instructors typically select subject matter to facilitate learning, but the separation of the first and second elements of the plan emphasizes that purposes (or desired learning outcomes) and subject matter are not synonymous.

Although not identical, subject-matter goals and educational goals are interdependent. Moreover, faculty members teaching in specific fields are more likely to endorse certain educational beliefs than others and to view their disciplines in ways related to these beliefs (Braxton & Hargens, 1996; Cross, 2005; Smart, Feldman, & Ethington, 2000; Stark & others, 1990). For example, professors in social science fields are more likely than those in physical sciences to endorse Purpose A in Table 1.1, "making the world a better place for all of us" (Stark & others, 1990). Furthermore, faculty from different fields define desirable educational outcomes such as "thinking effectively" in different ways (Donald, 2002). These disciplinary differences, in both intent and meaning, complicate discussions of the curriculum. Placing purposes and content in the academic plan as two different but interacting elements allows us to emphasize the distinction and aids discussion.

Sequence: A Curricular Arrangement

By curricular "sequence" we mean the ways in which subject matter is arranged to facilitate learning in an academic plan. We emphasize here not the mechanical and bureaucratic devices by which colleges organize their relationships with students (such as credit hours) but rather the assumptions of instructors about how knowledge is conveyed and learned. For example: Is historical material presented chronologically or thematically? What basic mathematical concepts and principles are students expected to learn before moving on to more complex topics in engineering? Does a practice component accompany theoretical presentations in a teacher education program? Are students introduced to a broad picture, such as how inquiry is conducted in biology, before delving into advanced topics? In any discussion about sequence, educational benefits and instructional rationales should drive discussions about subject matter arrangement, rather than the reverse.

Learners: Student Characteristics and Needs

Discussions about purposes, content, and sequence, like discussions about other elements of an academic plan, must be informed by knowledge of the abilities, previous preparation, and goals of learners. Although there is little danger that faculty members will forget the sequencing typical of their discipline, some may overlook the specific students for whom the curriculum is intended. Yet whether a curriculum "works" may depend on whether the plan adequately accounts for students' goals and needs and addresses students' preparation and ability. Stated another way, educators and students have their own goals and intentions. The interaction between the goals and intentions of instructors and those of students requires attention if an academic plan is to succeed. Student motivations to learn are influenced by their interest in the topic and their judgments of its relevance, as well as the instructor's ability to stimulate interest and demonstrate relevance (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

Instructional Processes: Learning Activities

Instructional processes are often discussed separately from curricula, but we include them in the academic plan because the method of instruction influences student learning. In colleges and universities, instructors are often unfamiliar with or uncomfortable with teaching strategies (other than lecturing) that are effective in both large and small classes. We believe that faculty members will expand their repertoire of teaching strategies if such choices are consciously recognized as part of curriculum development and based on knowledge about learning.

Instructional Resources: Materials and Settings

Curriculum discussions do not always include considerations of learning materials, such as textbooks and media, or settings, such as classrooms, laboratories, course management platforms, and practicum sites. Yet educational programs are frequently structured by these resources. Sometimes they are the primary consideration in an academic plan. Faculty members may, for example, sequence a course according to the organization of the selected textbook or allow class size and the configuration of the classroom to determine their use of discussions or small groups. As importantly, resources such as textbooks, supplemental reading materials, and visual aids (for example, slides of artwork) are cultural artifacts laden with meanings that may or may not be fully recognized. Consider, for example, how different students may react to a textbook that only uses the pronoun "he" or an anthology that only includes authors from the West. Because these

artifacts, tools, and resources shape learning—whether we recognize this or not—they must be purposefully considered as part of any academic plan.

Evaluation: Assessing Plans and Outcomes

In the past twenty-five years, evaluation of the curriculum, through both program review and assessment of student outcomes in specific courses, has become increasingly important in higher education. Effective assessment is viewed as critical because educators must understand how well students have made sense of what they encounter in courses or programs. We consider assessment of student learning in the context of a course to be most directly connected to instructional process. Evaluation, in contrast, is a broader term that encompasses activities such as self-study and program review as well as assessment (Stark & Thomas, 1994). The term evaluation also implies that judgments will be made regarding the overall effectiveness of a course or program. In the academic plan terminology, evaluation involves considerations of the suitability of all of the plan elements.

Typically, academic program review is viewed as a separate process from curriculum planning, but the best time to devise an evaluation is when the goals and objectives of the program are being clarified and the program designed. We suggest also that the list of elements we have defined in the academic plan helps to draw attention to the students' perspective in the evaluation process. Evaluation plans often emphasize educators' goals as measured by student achievement rather than acknowledging and assessing the extent to which plans address relevant student goals as well.

Adjustment: Improving Plans

Curriculum development and change efforts that include appropriate evaluation plans can be used to improve both the plan and the planning process. The academic plan model calls attention to this component of the curriculum development process and of the revision process. Careful specification of the elements of an academic plan can help to identify which aspects need improvement when the plan is revised.

Contextual Influences on Academic Plans

Understanding a curriculum requires more than an examination of its different elements. To grasp why, and often how, a particular curriculum is organized, we need to consider the contexts in which it was created and implemented. In a

larger sense, a complete picture of college and university curricula in the United States (or any other country) requires a sense of how and why these institutions evolved over time.

Contemporary colleges and universities in the United States derive their structure and purposes from several western European models of higher education whose impact can still be seen today. The English and Scottish residential colleges emphasized character development inside and outside the classroom, and their influence is still felt in the emphasis on general education requirements and the co-curriculum of some institutions. Later, the German university model promoted disciplinary specialization for both faculty and students and transformed the educational experience by creating curricula based on the pursuit of inquiry and new knowledge. This influence resulted in the organization of major fields. To this mix, the French *grandes écoles* contributed the ideals of meritocracy and professorial autonomy, encouraging a form of higher education that stressed rigorous intellectual training for the professions (Lattuca, 2006a).

External Influences

As a growing nation, the United States borrowed heavily from other countries' higher education systems, but it also created its own structures, norms, and values. The emphasis on both liberal and professional education in undergraduate education in the United States, for example, is unusual compared to the programs offered by most African, Asian, and European universities, which focus on professional education. The emphasis on broad access to higher education was unique to the United States until the latter part of the 20th century but now has been widely adopted in Western Europe as well as throughout North America (Wittrock, 1993). The critical point is that institutions and curricula serve social needs and change as national, cultural, and other needs evolve. In the 1970s, for example, U.S. colleges and universities responded to the influence of the civil and women's rights movements. These movements began outside the academy, but as students and faculty members joined these causes, both groups promoted changes in curricula. Today, academic programs in women's studies and ethnic studies are found on many college and university campuses: courses in disciplinary majors often incorporate the perspectives of African Americans, Latina/os, women, and others who had been historically excluded from higher education.

We could name countless other sociocultural influences on higher education—language, family structures, television, the Internet, computer technologies, to name a very few. Our goal, however, is not to create an exhaustive list but rather to note that, depending on the academic plan under consideration, different sociocultural influences come into play.

External influences is our encompassing term for factors such as market forces, societal trends, government policies and actions, and disciplinary associations that exist outside colleges and universities. Curriculum planning is subject to the influence of disciplinary associations (for example, the National Communication Association, the American Chemical Society), media (for example, The *U.S. News & World Report* annual college rankings issue), funding agencies that support curricular and instructional reform (for example, The National Science Foundation), and regional and specialized accrediting agencies that have increasingly focused on the specification and assessment of student learning outcomes.

When designing their courses and programs, some instructors believe they need not be overly concerned about external influences, but may be more attentive than they realize. Enrollments, the state of the job market, and social needs may seem muted because their influence often is filtered through such groups as accreditors and professional associations. External groups such as employers, however, exert strong and direct influences on academic programs in community colleges, for-profit institutions, and some professional fields (for example, accounting). Liberal education is also subject to the influences of groups advocating dramatically different themes, including internationalization, civic engagement, and interdisciplinarity. The question of what knowledge is most worth having takes on new meaning in a pluralistic and global society with diverse educational institutions.

Defining curriculum development as a planning process helps us identify the elements of a plan that are particularly sensitive to external forces. For example, decisions about purposes, content, learners, and instructional resources are more often subject to pressure from external constituencies. Choices of instructional processes and evaluation approaches are more likely to be influenced by forces internal to the institution.

Internal Influences

As noted earlier, we divide internal influences into institutional-level influences and unit-level influences because academic plans are developed at several levels. Although we discuss them separately, we stress that institutional-level and unit-level influences are interrelated (to varying degrees depending on the curriculum in question), if not always consistent or complementary.

Institutional-Level Influences Most academic programs we will discuss exist within institutions and are thus supported by organizational infrastructures. Aspects of these infrastructures, particularly college mission, financial resources, and governance arrangements, can have a strong influence on curricula. Although

infrastructures support the planning and implementation of academic plans, this support varies depending on the centrality of the specific course or program to the college or university mission, as well as on resource availability, advising systems, opportunity for faculty development and renewal, and so on. For example, some courses are linked to a wide variety of departments and programs because they are "service" courses needed by students in a number of degree programs. Service courses are influenced strongly by this interdependence. Courses without such linkages can be planned more independently.

Unit-Level Influences We distinguish between institutional-level influences and unit-level influences, which are characteristic of the organizational unit where the academic plan is created. Unit-level influences may most directly affect the selection and sequencing of content and the choice of instructional processes. Instructors' backgrounds, educational beliefs, and disciplinary training are particularly strong unit-level influences. Student characteristics, when recognized, are also influential. Unit-level influences vary in salience and intensity at various levels of curriculum development and in different kinds of institutions. When an instructor works alone in planning a course, some influences, like personal beliefs about how students learn, may be more potent than when a group of colleagues plans an entire program.

In thinking about the curricular planning process, we need to consider many types of influences simultaneously, since they do not operate independently. The influences we describe as "external" and "internal" all occur within the sociocultural context. For simplicity's sake, we say that the interaction of these many influences produces a dynamic environment in which curriculum plans are developed—as the following examples illustrate:

- Faculty members consider their educational beliefs and values, their views of how humans learn, and labor market needs to produce a set of educational objectives for a program.
- Cultural beliefs about the purposes of higher education and institutional missions influence choices of general education subject matter.
- Knowledge of instructional techniques, technology, and available materials, as well as publications of a disciplinary association, influence faculty choices of instructional processes.
- Leadership by deans, associate deans, and chairpersons influences the use of results of evaluations of academic plans for improvement, as does the allocation of organizational resources for data collection, accreditation criteria, and public policies, such as state mandates for accountability.

These examples illustrate that an academic plan is not the product of totally rational and context-free deliberations but rather results from a complicated process embedded in a larger, complex, and somewhat unpredictable set of contexts.

Constructing Plans: Curriculum Development

To make the most of the opportunity supplied by our definition of curriculum as an academic plan, we distinguish an academic plan itself (a curriculum) from the iterative process of planning (curriculum development). Defining a curriculum as a plan calls attention to the need for a planning process, helps to identify parts of the plan that are subject to specific influences, and reveals intervention points for productive curricular change. Each of the eight elements of the plan implies an associated decision:

1. PURPOSES: choosing educational goals and objectives
2. CONTENT: selecting subject matter
3. SEQUENCE: organizing content appropriately
4. LEARNERS: accommodating characteristics, goals, and abilities of learners
5. INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES: selecting learning materials and technologies
6. INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESSES: developing learning and teaching activities
7. EVALUATION: assessing student outcomes as well as learner and teacher satisfaction with the plan
8. ADJUSTMENT: improving both the plan and the planning process

Breaking down the planning process in this way enables us to ask questions about the process itself and begin to develop agreement about who bears responsibility for it. For example, we might ask such questions as:

- Who constructs the plan? (Who are the curriculum decision-makers operating at each curriculum level?)
- How is the plan constructed? What knowledge of curriculum planning do faculty members bring to the task? What knowledge do they need?
- What premises or purposes undergird the plan? Are these purposes representative of individuals, faculty views in general, or of specific disciplines?

- Whose interests are considered in the plan? Are students included? To what degree are specifications of accreditors, employers, and other external agents attended and accommodated?
- How is the plan described or represented both formally and informally? How is it articulated to students?
- What educational outcomes are achieved by different types of students? How will we know how various types of students experience the plan?
- Who decides when changes in the plan are needed?
- What provisions are made that changes in the plan can be made promptly?
- What expertise must leaders have to guide the planning process?

Answering these questions invariably includes discussion of the many influences on curricula discussed earlier. For example, the planning process may be hindered by lack of available information on learner goals or characteristics, or by lack of contact with local employers who could provide important information for planning a vocational or professional program. As instructional processes are considered, it may become apparent that faculty members need more knowledge about research supporting particular instructional strategies. Decisions about assessment of student outcomes, for instance, may be influenced by the availability of assistance from teaching and learning centers, professional development funds, or an institutional research office that collects and analyzes data concerning students, alumni, and institutional operations.

Evolution of the Academic Plan Concept

Perhaps because higher education in the United States is so complex and diverse, few scholars have attempted to develop comprehensive frameworks about what is taught, why, and how. However, several researchers and theorists in both higher education (especially Clifton Conrad, Paul Dressel, David Halliburton, and William Toombs) and K–12 education (especially Geneva Gay, George Posner, Joseph Schwab, and Hilda Taba) have struggled with how to think about curriculum issues and we have built on their work. These scholars have influenced our thinking about college and university curricula.

Broad Curriculum Frameworks

One of the most prolific analysts of college curricula was Paul Dressel (1971, 1976, 1980; Dressel & DeLisle, 1970; Dressel & Marcus, 1982). Over a career of sixty-five years, he moved steadily toward a conceptualization of curriculum as a comprehensive academic plan. Dressel frequently tested his ideas and conceptual

frameworks, and often re-formulated and clarified the ideas of others (for example, Phenix, 1986). Yet, there is little evidence that his work informed empirical studies of the curriculum, perhaps because his normative views did not provide an open framework to guide thinking.

Dressel directly addressed the element of the academic plan that we call purposes, arguing that, while affective development is an important correlate, the primary purpose of college instruction is to promote students' cognitive growth. Further, the primary objective of emphasis on cognitive growth is to make learners self-sufficient thinkers and lifelong learners. Dressel further asserted that attention to the structure of the disciplines is essential if students are to achieve the appropriate higher education outcome. In his view, the disciplines are artifacts of human intellectual development that serve as organizers of human history and experience. Consequently, they represent useful and essential classifications for organizing teaching and learning; the educated person must know about the objectives, methods, concepts, and structures of disciplines and their interrelationships. This view of the proper content of higher education led Dressel to express the hope that students would read classical works for the satisfaction they received. But he also realized that individuals are unlikely to acquire knowledge, skills, or values unless they attach some importance to what they are learning. He did not, however, provide guidance for those wondering how to motivate students who find little satisfaction in learning or do not see its benefits.

Although he wrote before developments in cognitive psychology that many now consider foundational, Dressel presaged the need for the learner to associate new and prior experiences. He believed that colleges and universities should provide a structure and arrangement for learning—that is, to develop instructional processes—that help learners integrate what they learn in a course and to relate that to other courses and experiences. Dressel also devoted much attention to the evaluation of students, of teachers, and of programs. In *Improving Degree Programs,* he observed:

> An ongoing program evaluation that transcends courses should attempt to find out what students have gained from a course or program, what elements of the program have been successful or unsuccessful in promoting this development, and what aspects of the course, content, resource materials, and experiences need to be revised to maintain vigor and enthusiasm. This form of evaluation produces information that tends to modify instructional materials and processes and also the manner in which they are conjoined into courses. In an integrated, cumulative curricular experience, evaluation must be a major structural component, but it cannot be the sole instrument for developing or maintaining such a program. (Dressel, 1980, p. 57)

Ultimately, he argued, evaluation should become a review of the actual outcomes of a course or program and a reflection upon the processes, content, and instructional patterns used. His flow model of steps in course and program development and evaluation (1980) included attention to internal, organizational, and external influences on college curricula. Finally, he noted that information about unintended outcomes of curricula, as well as evaluation of their intended objectives, should be considered in any adjustment processes.

Our debt to Dressel is great. Whereas a number of scholars have connected two or three elements of what we call an academic plan, Dressel discussed in detail nearly all of the eight elements we identify and also acknowledged some of the important influences on curriculum development that we include in the academic plan concept. In this sense, we continue the work Dressel began, applying it to the process of curriculum development—that is, the development of academic plans.

Just before we began to outline the academic plan concept, Clifton Conrad and Anne Pratt (1986) published a non-prescriptive curriculum model. Like us, they viewed the development of a curriculum as a series of decisions or "options." They called some of these options "curricular design variables" and, following William Toombs, divided them into content and form. Internal and external influences on curricular in this model are "input variables" that are considered by those involved in the curriculum development process (such as faculty, students, and administrators). These decision-makers produce two types of outcome variables: curriculum design outcomes and educational outcomes. In our terms, curriculum design outcomes are the decisions that shape the academic plan.

Conrad and Pratt recognized that planning is not a linear process and acknowledged the importance of academic fields, external stakeholders (like the professions and employers), and interest groups in curricular decision making. Their model is comprehensive and highly specific, identifying six different interest groups and the particular perspectives they bring to the curriculum development process. Among these interest groups, Conrad and Pratt include faculty members, whom they view as bringing disciplinary and expertise orientations to the task of curriculum planning, and students, who bring concerns about curricular relevance and transferability. Administrative groups, the model suggests, have responsibility for supporting curriculum planning, as well as monitoring budgets and costs. We agree that such perspectives come into play in curriculum planning processes, but we streamlined the academic plan concept in the belief that a more parsimonious model may have greater utility for guiding practice. The academic plan model allows us to acknowledge the variety of perspectives that exist among, as well as within, interest groups and additionally to suggest ways in which these perspectives can be accommodated and utilized.

Curriculum Design Frameworks

By definition, both "academic plan" and "curriculum design" imply deliberate decisions about desired relationships among settings, students, purposes, and processes. Consequently, the process of creating the plan involves more than getting a few people with different views to compromise; it involves consideration of many influences and circumstances. A few frameworks serve as lenses through which to examine attempts at systematic curriculum design. The concept of "design," for example, can be employed to discuss both curriculum planning and curriculum analysis (Toombs, 1977–1978; Toombs & Tierney, 1993). Design is a process that involves deliberate decisions about curriculum and can be understood by faculty members in diverse fields ranging from art to engineering. By curriculum "analysis," William Toombs means design in reverse, that is, the process of analyzing the curriculum plan to determine whether it contains the assumptions, structures, and activities necessary to meet the objectives (1977–1978). Toombs and Tierney also laid out three essential parts of the curriculum design process to be acknowledged and considered: the context in which the design is developed; the content that is to be taught; and the form or decisions that are made about the design. This work served as the basis for the contextual filters model of course planning (Stark, Lowther, Ryan, Bomotti, Genthon, Martens, & others, 1988) that was used to interpret national data on course planning activities of faculty members. Other useful course design frameworks have been proposed by Robert Diamond (2008), George Posner and Alan Rudnitsky (2006), and Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2005). Although these models come close to implementing a view of a curriculum as an academic plan, they focus on the activities of the planners rather than providing a comprehensive understanding of academic plans themselves.

Other curriculum frameworks focus on the processes and politics of curriculum change. David Halliburton (1977a, 1977b), for example, developed a reasonably complete and useful framework for viewing curriculum planning in higher education. In his view, curricula become obsolete because (a) the role of education changes with respect to broad historical and social needs, (b) new trends occur within the higher education system itself, and (c) the disciplines undergo paradigmatic shifts or changes in accepted assumptions. Halliburton categorized curricular change as typically occurring according to one or more of three processes of curriculum planning: (a) mechanism or statics (a process of tinkering or curriculum maintenance rather than overhaul); (b) dualism (curriculum change that swings from one popular trend or focus to another), and (c) knowledge-ism (a focus on changes in disciplinary content).

Halliburton stressed his belief that academic fields, which reflect the assumptions, values, and habits of their practitioners, play a large part in determining

which change process is used. Others have shown, however, that local contexts act as filters, modifying the influence of academic fields at both the course level and the program level (Stark & others, 1988). At the program level, resource allocations, structures, and leadership may be equally crucial frames or filters (Seymour, 1988). At the institutional level, competing societal and political interests may also serve to filter the influence of academic fields. Instructors' orientations to their academic fields are likely to be potent influences at all levels of curriculum planning, but may be manifested in somewhat different ways at various levels of the academic plan.

Drawing on the work of others, Halliburton (1977a) argued that systematic curriculum planning needs a built-in process for curricular change, should be articulated across levels, and should include evaluation. Current processes are bound to assumptions about teaching and learning and thus limit the ability to create effective academic plans. Escaping these assumptions "will depend upon our learning to see the curriculum as a process that is subject to change, and our discovery of how to bring about change" (Halliburton, 1977a, p. 45).

At every turn, observers have noted the important associations among educational purposes, instructional processes, and change processes; the strong impact of the disciplines on each of these; and the influences of forces both external and internal to the university. The academic plan concept is an attempt to tie together meaningfully ideas that are repeated throughout the literature on curriculum. Curriculum planning, however haphazard, occurs. The academic plan concept encourages faculty members and leaders to carry out curriculum planning as an intentional and informed design process.

Advantages of the Academic Plan Model

Historically and currently, debates about the purposes and content of college education have produced much rhetoric but little real understanding or consensus. Multiple definitions of curriculum are both cause and effect of this rhetorical excess. Our definition of the academic plan includes the major elements and influences that regularly surface in discussions of the planning, implementation, evaluation, or improvement of teaching and learning. Without prescribing specific curricula, the academic-plan-in-context framework provides a conceptual umbrella that can accommodate the plans constructed for diverse fields, including liberal arts disciplines and professional fields as well as vocational programs taught in community colleges and by for-profit providers. The academic plan concept, however, has additional advantages.

- *Promotes clarity about influences on the curriculum.* As an academic plan is developed, educators are subjected to influences from many quarters. Both planning and implementation occur in a specific context composed of influences from inside and outside the institution. Once these contextual influences are recognized, faculty and administrators can assess how the context will or does affect academic plans. Awareness of this educational environment is important if meaningful plans are to be constructed and enhanced over time. Any comprehensive model of academic planning must identify the influences within the sociocultural and historical context to be recognized and accommodated.
- *Helps separate facilitators and constraints from educational assumptions.* When curriculum is viewed as a plan, faculty and administrators can recognize both facilitators and constraints for what they are, rather than confusing them with basic assumptions. This recognition is particularly useful in separating instructional process decisions based on constraints due to materials, settings, and structure from the decisions about desired educational outcomes.
- *Focuses attention on decisions to be made.* In distinguishing the plan from the process of planning, we focus attention on the decisions being made rather than the content of those decisions.
- *Guides planning at the lesson, course, program, and college levels.* The definition of curriculum as an academic plan is applicable at all levels. A plan can be constructed for a single lesson or module, for a single course, for groups of courses (usually called programs or majors), and for a college or university as a whole. Defining curriculum as a plan urges faculty and administrators to consider the consistency and integrity of plans within and among these various levels.
- *Encourages explicit attention to student learning.* The definition of curriculum as an academic plan is consistent with current understandings of student learning. Attention to the elements of the academic plan can help faculty members understand the importance of student needs, clarify expectations for students, encourage student engagement, and aid assessment of student achievement by clearly specifying educational purposes, content, and processes.
- *Offers a dynamic view of curriculum development.* The academic plan concept assumes that all plans are subject to evaluation and adjustment; iterative improvements are an expected part of practice. Evaluation is more likely to be useful—and seems less daunting—when it is viewed as a normal and periodic process that produces results relevant to solving particular problems. Unlike the static definition of curriculum as a set of courses, an academic plan implies strategic decision making as conditions—student goals, social needs, accreditation standards, resources, and so on—change.

There is no one way to construct an academic plan. In keeping with the diversity of postsecondary institutions and learners in U.S. higher education, there are many possible processes. Some variations in processes are associated with disciplines, others with institutional or program missions, and still others with leadership styles. This diversity exists, in part, because as the plan is developed, planners are subject to influences from internal and external influences. Thus, both planning and implementation of plans occur in specific contexts. As we shall show in the next chapter, awareness of this educational environment is important if meaningful plans are to be constructed and enhanced.