Design Thinking Accelerated Leadership

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Design Thinking and Accelerated Learning
Trey Mireles, CAP Connected Editor

Imagine you are starting a new academic program. You want it to be innovative and successful. You plan on using current research and data to design the best program possible. You have built a team to help you successfully build the program and roll out the program only when you feel it is completely ready to go. Sounds like a great plan... right? Possibly... but is there a better way?

Let's examine the plan in a little more depth.

1. **You want it to be innovative and plan to use current research and data to help you innovate.**

Gathering current research and data are important tools to help make decisions.
However, if you are looking to be innovative, to be first to the market with a new concept, idea or program you are already behind those who gathered the research and data. Innovation is not replicating what others have done, it is finding creative solutions.

What about gathering data from the students themselves? That has to lead to innovative ideas... right? Not really. Think about the greatest innovations in history... they came as solutions to problems we didn't know we had.

Continue to stay up to date on current research, continue to survey your students AND get to know the students themselves. Interview them, talk with those who have the most direct contact with students, learn more about their history, their current needs and their future plans. Invest in developing a small sample of qualitative data to develop creative solutions to problems that the students don't realize they have.

2. You will not roll out the plan until you are sure it is ready to go.

Have you ever tried something new? Of course. We all have. And in doing so I can guarantee there were bumps in the road that caused you to adjust and adapt. Attempting to create a perfect program to roll out to a mass audience is a significant investment and the greater the investment the bigger those bumps in the road become.

Instead of trying to create a perfectly complete program try piloting pieces of the program with smaller audiences. Learn from your mistakes, make adjustments and improve. By making many small investments you are gathering valuable innovative real time data that can be used to create the perfect program you were hoping to create in the first place.

Takeaways:

Accelerated Learning is designed to meet the needs of a diverse set of learners. It is designed to be innovative, flexible and adaptive. Maximize these traits by implementing design thinking techniques and explore the feature article written by Danielle Lake, PhD of Grand Valley State University for a specific example of how Design Thinking was used to create an Accelerated Leadership Program.

Sign up TODAY for the September CAP Webinar:

*Understanding and Responding to Regulatory Reactions to Educational Innovation: A Federal Update*

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**Description:**

As educators attempting to identify innovative strategies for addressing the needs of twenty-first century students, it can sometimes feel like pedagogy is overtaken and subsumed by compliance concerns. This webinar will provide an overview of some hot-off-the-press accreditation and regulatory developments to help attendees proactively translate their educational efforts to regulators and respond effectively when they react to new or unfamiliar developments.

**Presenter:**

Naomi Harralson May, Esq., is an Associate in the Higher Education practice group at Cooley LLP. Prior to joining the firm, Naomi worked at and consulted for both public and private colleges and universities on accreditation, institutional effectiveness, student learning assessment, governance, and strategic planning matters, most recently at the College of William & Mary. During law school, she served as a legal intern in the Office of the General Counsel at the U.S. Department of Education, where she assisted with litigation, rulemaking processes, and program services related to federal student aid. Naomi's practice at Cooley integrates her hands-on experience at institutions with legal analysis to help clients navigate complex regulatory waters, particularly in the areas of accreditation and the Title IV regulatory framework.

**When:** Wednesday, September 14, 2016 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

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**Design Thinking Accelerated Leadership:**

**From a Skeptic to an Evangelist**

A long-term online instructor and mentor to faculty new to online teaching, I have -- for close to a decade -- resisted combining the challenges of online courses with
accelerated programming, thinking combining the challenges of both was likely to impede transformational learning. And yet, three years ago, I was asked to help design and teach in a new interdisciplinary, hybrid and accelerated 19-Month Leadership degree completion program (the "ALP") at Grand Valley State University.

I said yes.

And -- after contributing to its design and teaching in the first two cohorts -- I asked to be assigned to GVSU's ALP in perpetuity. The program reimagines accelerated learning for returning adults. It harnesses Design Thinking in order to engage students in community-based learning. As an iterative, project-based, and collaborative problem-solving process, Design Thinking begins with empathetic listening, observation, and immersion. Through primary and secondary research, students wrestle with the real world complexities that surround course content. The process opens space for knowledge construction that honors the lived experience of those involved in the issues being addressed. It also, however, moves students from the creation of knowledge, to its enactment: encouraging ideation and implementation. It, in effect, employs Wlodkowski and Ginsberg's Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching and encourages iterative, real-world engagement, making accelerated community-based learning more likely.

**Accelerated Community-Based Learning: From Impossible to Invaluable**

With careers, young kids, and aging parents the common assumption is that returning adult students cannot take on collaborative, place-based projects in an accelerated program. Despite such persistent concerns, this dimension of GVSU's ALP appears to be the most effective component on at least three measures:

1. It encouraged programmatic scaffolding;
2. Fostered intentional integration between courses;
3. And inspired transformational learning.

These pedagogical strategies empower students to wrestle with the complexity of social issues by not just studying curricular content and skills, but by putting them to use in collaboration with the surrounding community. As one student wrote:

"Community engagement has made a tremendous difference in my learning experience... The tools that I now possess in my educational toolbox have been sharpened... It is real life experience. I have benefited more from community-engaged learning in this cohort than any other educational experience I have ever had."

Engagement opportunities that began with observation and empathetic listening and empowered student-and-community designed projects fostered deep and sustained experiential learning that spanned the 19-month program. It also opened long-term opportunities for leadership development, defined by students as "the ability to transform, empower, and adapt," to work towards becoming a "conceptual integrative thinker that is both reflective and action-oriented."

In order to encourage student-and-community ownership over these projects, broad place-based community engaged "themes" were selected for each cohort. From education and empowerment to issues surrounding local workforce challenges and community, these themes have become the link between accelerated courses and the lever by which students enact course content and skills. Students have, for
instance, created mentoring programs in local schools, bilingual student literacy projects, community gardens, social media campaigns, as well as middle-to-high school transition connections.

Instead of being impossible then, design thinking has made program-wide opportunities to engage the surrounding community integral to the learning process: helping students integrate, ideate, and innovate across the artificial divides created by traditional university structures (like disciplines, semesters, and courses). Echoing this sentiment, one of the alumni wrote that "without my experiences visiting the Literacy Center, Challenge Scholars Schools and the West Grand Neighborhood Organization, I might not have really understood that leadership comes from patience, understanding, dialogue, and walking with others." While many students found the rigor of the ALP to be intense, they also found the real world grounding of their coursework and the opportunity to apply it to be transformational. "For me," one student wrote, "bearing witness to my community encouraged me to ask deeper questions... Our classes have allowed me the freedom to ask questions of myself, my family, my community, my colleagues and especially my boss." In fact, in an anonymous exit survey, all students in the first cohort said the program pushed them to become active learners. They also all said they have positively affected their organization by consistently applying practices learned in the program.

But most critical to the successful implementation of such high impact learning practices was the method by which GVSU's ALP was created: through an intensive curricular mapping process by the faculty teaching in the program.

**Curriculum Mapping: From a hopeless pursuit to a worthwhile endeavor**

No easy feat, the curricular mapping process spanned an entire academic year. Requiring monthly cross-disciplinary faculty meetings with an instructional designer, the process began through a faculty learning community and harnessed half-day workshops and trainings on best practices for teaching returning adults. While long and at times tense, the process was critical for expanding faculty's framework: helping them see the depth and breadth of the overarching program as well as where and how their own course "fit." That is, by explicating the program outcomes and learning goals, faculty were able to visualize where, when, and how their course connected to
the larger framework. The process led to

- the identification and minimization of course overlap and a commitment to foster more seamless course transitions for students,
- the development of program-wide requirements and shared language,
- the creation and modeling of an interdisciplinary learning community for cohort students, and—perhaps most surprising—
- a commitment to fostering opportunities for community engagement throughout the ALP.

Verifying the curricular mapping process was invaluable to the quality of the program, all students in the first cohort said they understood the purpose of each course and the relationship between the courses. One wrote that the process "elevated" their learning, saying "I don't know that an accelerated program without interdisciplinary integrated studies would be a full educational program" and another writing that "...I am now able to solve problems with a greater understanding of engaging all the players. It [the ALP] has taught me that a good leader should be open to holding all views not just their own."

*The ALP's curricular mapping process and the subsequent lessons learned were shared at [CAP's 2016 conference in Austin, Texas](http://example.com) and materials can be found [here](http://example.com).*

**Catalyzing Connection**

While too often dismissed as cumbersome, inessential, or even impossible, curriculum mapping and community-based learning break down the divide between theory and practice, between disciplinary expertise, and between individual courses. The curriculum mapping process created a critical boundary-spanning space for collaborative innovation: a bridge-between. It fostered opportunities for engaged pedagogy that dug deeply into local issues and sustained opportunities for project-based learning over the course of the program. GVSU's ALP provided students with hands-on, real life opportunities to see the value of their educational efforts, thereby encouraging transformational learning and empowering them to make a difference in their own communities.

GVSU ALP students graduating in the first ALP cohort (April 2016).

**About the author:** Danielle Lake, Ph.D. is an assistant professor in the Liberal Studies Department at Grand Valley State University in Michigan. She received her PhD in Public Philosophy at Michigan State University. Her research interests include
feminist pragmatism, wicked problems, and transdisciplinarity. As a public philosopher, her work seeks to engage with, in, and through the public in order to address our collective problems. Recent publications can be found at http://works.bepress.com/danielle_lake/

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1. Use DBs to extract the students knowledge - design questions that allow that knowledge to come out and get out of the way #CAPNetwork2016 from @MirelesTrey

2. "Time is fixed, but learning is variable...why is time so important in #HigherEd regulation? Money." Problem. #CAPNetwork2016 from @munsonsmith

3. Come to CAP conference before you roll out accelerated programs. #CAPNetwork2016 from @marcievannote

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For more information contact [Jeannie McCarron](mailto:jeannie.mccarron@college.edu)

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