

ACTION PLAN for Michigan State University: A 21st-century Chautauqua

1. Context.

What is a chautauqua? Originally, the term referred to a 19th-century program that brought educational speakers and performers together for families vacationing on the shores of Lake Chautauqua in upstate New York.¹ Quickly, it became synonymous with any open public forum for the discussion of cultural and scientific issues of the day.

The 21st-century *Chautauqua* at MSU is beginning with a two-year program of campus dialogues in the three residential colleges (James Madison, Lyman Briggs, and the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities co-sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities to build a culture of individual, social and institutional responsibility.²

Why campus dialogues on responsibility? The great virtue of American colleges and universities is the value that they place on academic freedom: the freedom to explore and discover new knowledge and to debate conventional wisdom. This is not merely an intercollegiate sport; academic freedom is absolutely necessary if we are to address the problems and challenges of our times. As trite as it may sound, there is no disputing the fact that without these spaces for free inquiry and open discussion, we would not have the human resources – the next generation of scientists and poets of every stripe – that we need to meet challenges as different as global warming, malaria, and child abuse and neglect.

We also know, however, that for a college or university to function productively, our commitment to academic freedom must be matched by an equally strong sense of personal, social, and institutional responsibility. Rights and responsibilities are opposite sides of the same coin. One cannot effectively use and enjoy freedom of inquiry in the laboratory, the classroom, the gallery, or the field without a set of agreed-upon community standards. For these standards to be accepted, all the members of the community must feel and take responsibility for them. In the RCAH, for example, who will decide what can and cannot be performed in public? What can and cannot be published on a blog on the College web site? What can and cannot be hung on our gallery walls or installed in an outdoor space?

There is no reason to expect unanimous agreement on issues such as these. There is also no reason to wait until a disagreement escalates into an acrimonious exchange, or worse. The skills we need to discuss these difficult questions can

¹ <http://www.ciweb.org/history.html>).

² <http://www.jmc.msu.edu/core/>

be honed before things come to an irreconcilable head. By organizing campus dialogues among students, faculty, and staff who feel strongly about such issues, we make it more likely that we can hold difficult conversations about them.

2. Activities for 2007-08

a. Goals

1. Content Goals

- Take stock of the current climate of personal, social, and institutional responsibility.
- Hold discussions of important issues in the three residential colleges and student organizations
- Build capacity to reach mutual understanding on important issues through structured dialogues
- Create a culture of sustainable responsibility for resolving pressing issues within the residential colleges and eventually throughout the wider university

2. Process Goals.

- 21st-century Chautauqua student and faculty facilitators will be working with student groups and organizations to move gradually and naturally to this level of dialogue in which the subject of personal and social responsibility can be achieved. In the RCAH this means actually creating the student organization and governance system that we believe will provide the best institutional structure for campus dialogues.
- Another dimension of the 21st-century Chautauqua, building on what we learn from the campus dialogue project, is to create a range of curricular and co-curricular projects that will institutionalize some of the ideas agreed upon in the local dialogues. These projects may include new service-learning, field experience, internship, and civic engagement courses; new study abroad and more local study away programs with a service-learning or civic engagement component; and new trans-college courses on professional and civic responsibility.
- Finally, we will be assessing just what we are gaining from this project. What new structures have we created? How well have they worked? How have they changed our attitudes about responsibility, and how have they affected our ability to act responsibly.

b. Opportunities for support

1. Faculty, students, and staff of the three residential colleges
2. Honors College professorial assistants program
3. Division of Student Affairs and Services
4. Office of Faculty and Organizational Development
5. Office of the Provost

c. Barriers to accomplishment & strategies to accomplish them.

1. Incentives for faculty participation. Strategy is to provide stipends for one or two faculty Chautauqua Fellows through the Office of Faculty and Organizational Development.
2. Training of student and faculty facilitators of on-campus dialogues. Strategy is to coordinate training with the regular training of Resident Mentors in the three residential colleges, utilize local faculty expertise for additional training, and invite in visiting consultants to prepare students and faculty for facilitating dialogues.

d. Communication Strategy.

1. Create and circulate flyer to student and faculty groups who may be interested in Chautauqua Planning Board
2. Create a Chautauqua Planning board with representatives from
 - University-wide student organizations
 - Residential college student body
 - Residential college faculty
3. Create and maintain a web site for the project linked to the three residential college web sites.

e. Team actions and timeline

ACTION	PURPOSE/DETAILS	WHEN
Circulate “A 21 st Century Chautauqua” flyer	To publicize project to students, faculty, and staff in three residential colleges and relevant student organizations	August 15, 2007
Meet with resident mentors for the three residential colleges	To inform them of the project, take questions, and recruit potential Planning Board members	August 21, 2007
Meet with faculty of the three residential colleges	To inform them of project and recruit potential Planning Board members	August 15-24, 2007
Consult with Provost on AAC&U Survey Instrument and	To gain University approval of the Survey instrument, set timeline for IRB approval and distribution of Survey	August 20, 2007
Meet with interested students, including professorial	To plan their participation on the Planning Board	August 24-October 7

assistants		
Team Meeting	To discuss final membership of Planning Board	October 8-14
Dialogue on Survey among Planning Board members	To gain greater clarity about the Survey instrument and build a common understanding of the project among Planning Board members	mid to late October

f. Recommended timeline for campus work

ACTION	WHO	WHEN
Distribute Survey	To students, faculty, and staff of three residential colleges to take stock of current attitudes and beliefs about responsibility	early November, 2007
Identify precise locations participants for spring 2008 campus dialogues	To reserve time and place, avoid scheduling conflicts, and plan logistics	mid to late November, 2007
Identify courses in the three residential colleges	To communicate with academic advisors	spring 2008 and coming academic year 2008-09
Develop wiki and social networking technologies to be used in conjunction with face-to-face dialogues	To explore ways of reaching larger students audiences who are less inclined to participate in ongoing or even periodic face-to-face dialogues	October and November, 2007

g. Evidence of success

1. Recruitment of an effective Planning Board
2. More detailed timeline for campus work, with exact dates, times and places for campus dialogues
3. Expressed desire by student organizations within the three residential colleges to have 21st Century Chautauqua dialogue facilitators work with them to resolve issues of concern

h. Resources

1. Stipends for faculty Fellows
2. Technical support to create and maintain web-based programs to extend face-to-face dialogues
3. Support from three residential colleges in the form of physical space for dialogues and web-based information
4. Secretarial support from the Office of the Provost

3. Reflection.

The suggested questions in the ACTION PLAN OUTLINE are all ones that we will keep in mind during the next three months. The gaps that we identified through the matrix analysis process need to be addressed, especially providing adequate incentives to students and faculty to encourage sustained participation in the dialogue process and the course and curriculum building process. In the long run, we hope to integrate these dialogue skills and individual curricular innovations into the curriculum of the three residential colleges and across these college. This may involve study abroad and study away experiences as well as courses cross-listed in the three colleges.

A more immediate concern that has already surfaced is that as we methodically plan for campus dialogues in spring 2007, old issues are resurfacing and new issues will undoubtedly arise. Requests have come to us already from concerned student organizations. It is not clear how best to respond to these requests while we are still creating a Planning Board and training dialogue facilitators. We may be able to “intervene in the existing culture in helpful ways” on a limited basis during fall 2007, but this is not part of the timeline we have drawn.

4. Appendices.

- A 21st Century Chautauqua flyer.