

# Academic Plan 2009-2014

## Part I

### Naropa University

#### Contents:

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction
3. Scope of the Plan
4. Context
  - a. Founding Vision
  - b. Contemporary Higher Education
  - c. Strategic Plan Data
    - i. Undergraduate Data
    - ii. Graduate Data
  - d. Summary
5. The Curricular (Narrative) Arc
  - a. Educational Vision Statement
  - b. Learning Outcomes and Competencies
  - c. “Short Stories”
6. A Call for Action
  - a. Four Goals and Actions
  - b. Additional Considerations
7. Summary

#### Prepared by:

Stuart J. Sigman, Ph.D.  
Vice President for Academic Affairs, and  
Dean of the Faculty

#### In consultation with:

Academic Council  
Cauldron  
Chairs Council  
Enrollment Management Team  
Office of Academic Affairs  
Office of Student Affairs  
United Naropa

## **Academic Plan 2009-2014**

### **Part I**

#### **Naropa University**

##### **1. Executive Summary**

The Strategic Plan approved by the Board of Trustees at its September 2008 meeting calls for the Office of Academic Affairs to create *inter alia* an Academic Plan. This document represents the first fruition of the faculty and staff efforts since the fall to establish a clear vision for the curriculum and a path for realizing that vision. In particular, after a review of the founding inspiration for Naropa University, contemporary thinking about “best practices” in university curriculum development (primarily at the undergraduate level), and data on student satisfaction with various dimensions of their Naropa education, this Academic Plan proposes a “curricular arc” to describe the goals and essential learning experiences of all degree programs at the university. A set of action steps for implementing this curricular arc is also proposed.

##### **2. Introduction**

The Naropa University Academic Plan 2009-2014 – Part I is designed to address concerns raised in the Strategic Plan about the coherence of the University’s various degree programs, the need for an articulation of the University’s distinct educational focus, and the desirability of a response to student satisfaction and success data collected during the strategic planning process. This document arises from the work of Academic Council (all members of the Ranked and Core Faculty), United Naropa (student government), Cauldron (the faculty’s executive committee), the Chairs Council, and the staff of the Office of Academic Affairs. The Enrollment Management Team (consisting of the Dean of Admissions, Dean of Students, and Assistant Vice President for Student Administrative Services) contributed crucial perspective on student enrollment data.

This Academic Plan provides a framework for careful review and, where appropriate, modification of the curriculum for all degree programs in order to better meet the expressed educational needs of our students. It is also a response to the following aims of the Strategic Plan:

1. strengthen the educational experience for students; and
2. provide students with knowledge, skills, and contemplative training to enhance their effectiveness in the broader world

More specifically, it addresses the following broad strategies to reach these goals:

1. define the university’s distinctiveness and what it delivers;
2. broaden the curriculum by adding courses in areas not currently represented in the university’s offerings;

3. provide enhanced levels of student support through counseling, mentoring and better preparation for careers upon graduation; and
4. strengthen and integrate diversity.

### **3. Scope of the Plan**

The overall aim of the Strategic Plan is to enhance and ensure the institution's, and by extension the faculty and staff's, long-term financial health. In addition to the four strategies noted above to achieve this aim, the Strategic Plan calls for increased revenue generation via enrollment growth, the design and construction of new facilities, and reduction in instructional costs through a recalibration of average class sizes. The means to implement the latter three strategies are not the primary focus of the Academic Plan – Part I, though this document does provide the basis for relevant future action in these areas. For example, the Strategic Plan calls for greater coherence of the curriculum (especially at the undergraduate level), and enhanced branding and marketing efforts that come from a more clearly focused vision for our educational “product.” The Academic Plan – Part I provides answers to the former strategy, while a separate document (Academic Plan – Part II, Enrollment Management Plan) describes the heightened branding, marketing and recruitment efforts needed to increase both on-campus and online enrollment, and the direction for the development of new degree programs.

The strategy to improve and create new facilities, including classrooms and a community and learning center, is not covered by this document at all. Rather, requests coming from individual departments and degree programs for a new and/or enhanced physical plant are contained in Academic Plan – Part III, Facilities Plan. The view of the curriculum contained in the current document should serve as a means to prioritize the facilities requests contained in Part III, and taken together will lay the groundwork for campus master planning.

Finally, the results of the proposed strategy to operate more efficiently and sustainably by simultaneously increasing the average student enrollment in classes by 10% and reducing the total number of sections scheduled each year are included in an Interim Progress Memo filed by Academic Affairs.

### **4. Context**

#### **4.a. Founding Vision\***

Naropa University began in 1974 as a summer program in Boulder, Colorado in two five-week sessions that attracted over 1500 student participants per session and approximately 55 academic, artistic, spiritual and social luminaries who served as faculty. According to the founder, Tibetan Buddhist meditation master Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the then-named Naropa Institute “developed from the idea of working with what exists in [the United States] and also with traditions around the world, predominantly Buddhism,

---

\* The careful reading of this section and suggestions by Dr. Judith Simmer-Brown are greatly appreciated.

Hinduism, and sensory awareness, philosophy, and so forth. The basic point here is that we could work together, we could relate with each other on the basis of trust....”<sup>1</sup>

The founding of this new educational institution was placed in the context of the lineage of Nalanda University, which flourished in India from the fifth to thirteenth centuries C.E. Legendary accounts describe the tenth century abbot and scholar Naropa and his visionary encounter with an old crone. As a result of the woman’s questioning of him, Naropa realized that his study of words and texts had not automatically produced wisdom or the appreciation for the meaning behind the words. For Trungpa Rinpoche, this balance of intellectual and intuitive knowledge was absent from American education (and society more broadly). He wished to reawaken the abbot Naropa’s insight:

The purpose of the Naropa Institute is that we not only understand the words, but that we have to understand the meaning behind them at the same time. Because of this we decided to name this particular institute after Naropa.<sup>2</sup>

Often, in university study, you are told that if you work hard enough you are going to get a degree at a certain given time, disregarding your discovery, your experience. That has become a problem. But at Naropa Institute, we are following the example of Nalanda, the institute where Naropa, the great Indian pundit, studied. We could work, study, think, intellectualize, and experience everything that goes on in our state of being. We could explore and open various fields of understanding, whatever is venerable, whatever has possibilities. But at the same time, we also have to bend ourselves into a discipline, into a particular discipline.<sup>3</sup>

Reed Bye, an early student of the founder and currently Associate Professor of Writing & Poetics at the University, describes the unique pedagogy that allows for this attainment of both knowledge and wisdom: “The founding inspiration of Naropa University as an educational institution, then, involved the weaving of academic study and the practices of mindfulness and awareness. This was to be a school where scholarly disciplines would be pursued along with contemplative practices that uncover the direct experience of nowness.”<sup>4</sup> According to a recent history of the University’s founding, “[Trungpa Rinpoche] believed that all students, including Westerners, could use meditation and other contemplative practices to enhance mindfulness and awareness in order to attain deeper personal understanding in their academic and artistic disciplines.”<sup>5</sup>

In the founder’s own words, this pedagogy did not necessarily imply adherence to a particular religion, but rather the opportunity to employ a rigorous methodology derived from one of the world’s great religious traditions:

Why Buddhism? It’s not Buddha-ism. The religion of the Buddha isn’t necessary, particularly, but the disciplines that we have developed and learned from over 2,500 years are necessary. At Nalanda University ... [scholars] memorized texts and thought about what was in the texts, whether the contents were valid or invalid.

When you follow these principles of education, you begin to use your logical, or critical, intelligence to examine what is presented to you. The critical intelligence is also critical intelligence about yourself.<sup>6</sup>

As Fabrice Midal, a French philosopher who is a scholar of Trungpa Rinpoche's work, writes:

Naropa Institute was not intended as a sectarian organization, nor even a Buddhist university, in the sense that there are Christian universities that teach theology in order to train clergy. Chögyam Trungpa wanted Naropa Institute to be a place where many traditions could all present their own wisdom. By means of provoking such encounters, sparks would certainly fly, which would help all of society.<sup>7</sup>

For Trungpa Rinpoche, this deeply personal educational model has both a social fount and purpose. Given the political and social disruptions in the United States at the time of the University's founding, it is perhaps not surprising for Trungpa Rinpoche to have observed:

Basically, there is a lot of confusion and chaos here. Social problems, psychological problems, and more o[r] less spiritual problems of many kinds have developed on this particular continent, which is much more accentuated than the other continents of the world. Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you agree with me that this particular continent is in search of something or looking for trouble. We know that, although we may not like to acknowledge that. So here at Naropa we are talking about trouble, discussing trouble.<sup>8</sup>

Importantly, from a Buddhist perspective the solution to these social problems is neither immediate nor unbridled intervention. Rather, the starting point for ameliorating the world's suffering is the individual's disciplined practice and cultivation of awareness and compassion. Then it is possible to engage strategically in creating solutions to contemporary problems. To quote Bye: "Universities such as Nalanda ... were international centers of study and learning inspired by the Mahayana Buddhist ethos of cutting through delusions based in dualistic conceptions of self and other. From the clarification of those delusions in oneself, unconditional compassion and skillful methods of working for the benefit of others are said to arise spontaneously."<sup>9</sup>

Contemplative practice became a foundational discipline of a Naropa education, serving an educational rather than a religious purpose. For Midal, "one of the first principles of the institute was to give a central role to meditation. It was one of the key points in Chögyam Trungpa's vision of education."<sup>10</sup> Meditation was one of the disciplines that Naropa would teach and encourage students to practice, as part of an effort to cultivate "mindful awareness" and a "synchronized body, speech, and mind."<sup>11</sup>

In brief, as the Academic Plan unfolds, it is important to recognize the profound inspiration and vision that undergird the University's founding, and to situate this document in the context of the project set out by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. First, a key value to keep in focus is the necessity of a mode of inquiry that allows for the integration of traditional bodies of knowledge and artistry with the faculty's and students' "inner or spiritual understanding."<sup>12</sup> There is deep respect for academic and cultural traditions and knowledge, and a belief that a reflective pedagogy is warranted to extend these "into the world with fresh life."<sup>13</sup>

Further, just as bodies of knowledge are to be held in relationship to the students' personal journey, so too is there an emphasis on the interdependence of the self and the other. This gives rise to a profound recognition of the role education can play in cultivating students' awareness of the world's condition, their compassion for others, and the skills for them to address the world's condition. This is most recently and eloquently expressed in the Mission Statement adopted by the Board of Trustees in 2006: "Naropa students explore the inner resources needed to engage courageously with a complex and challenging world, to help transform that world through skill and compassion, and to attain deeper levels of happiness and meaning in their lives." Further: "A Naropa education—reflecting the interplay of discipline and delight—prepares its graduates both to meet the world as it is and to change it for the better."

#### **4.b. Contemporary Higher Education**

Along with an understanding of the context of the University's founding, this Academic Plan incorporates a perspective on some of the conditions that are currently faced by the institution and, more particularly, by our students as they consider completing a degree at Naropa and preparing for families, citizenship and careers upon graduation. This discussion focuses on the significant body of literature related to undergraduate education that may help contextualize and provide potential solutions to many of the internal and environmental conditions experienced by the University and our students.

Naropa rightly prides itself on its special place in higher education and on the unique pedagogy (within an American liberal arts context) that it champions. Indeed, many of the instructional practices and educational goals of a Naropa education are consonant with the demands that policy makers, the business community, and education thought leaders have for higher education. At the same time, for the Academic Plan to be meaningful and relevant, it must acknowledge and respond to the changing landscape of American society and higher education. This section thus reviews some of the major trends and debates in contemporary higher education, focusing on undergraduate education.

A report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise (LEAP), commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, calls for a radical rethinking of the traditional segregation of "liberal arts" and specialized education, suggesting that across all levels of a four-year undergraduate education students need to be pushed to achieve integrated mastery and skills. This

rethinking was prompted by recognition that universities must prepare students to function as citizens and in careers in an increasingly complex world that demands the integration of liberal arts and career-relevant skills. Towit:

[In] a deliberate break with the academic categories developed in the twentieth century, the LEAP National Leadership Council disputes the idea that liberal education is achieved only through study in the arts and sciences disciplines. It also challenges the conventional view that liberal education is, by definition, “nonvocational.”

The council defines liberal education for the twenty-first century as a comprehensive set of aims and outcomes that are essential for all students because they are important to all fields of endeavor. [...]

The LEAP National Leadership Council recommends, therefore, that the essential aims and outcomes be emphasized across every field of college study.... General education plays a role, but it is not possible to squeeze all these important aims into the general education program alone. The majors must address them as well.<sup>14</sup>

The council articulates a set of four “essential learning outcomes,”<sup>15</sup> resulting from interviews and dialogues with college and university leaders, the business community, and selected professional accreditation agencies. The four learning outcomes that are proposed are:

1. knowledge of human cultures, and the physical and natural world;
2. development of intellectual and practical skills, including critical thinking, communication, quantitative and information literacy, and teamwork;
3. cultivation of a sense of personal and social responsibility, including knowledge of both local and global affairs, intercultural competence, ethics, and a base for learning throughout one’s life; and
4. capacities to integrate learning, apply knowledge, and address new situations.

In order to achieve these outcomes, the council proposes principles to guide institutional planning and capacity building. Interestingly given the high percentage of transfer students at Naropa, the council recognizes the significant number of students in the United States who complete a bachelor’s degree after enrolling in more than one institution, and so it recommends attention to the outcomes as “a common framework that provides a sense of purpose and direction to guide student programs across the many different parts of the academic system.”<sup>16</sup> Transfer policies and articulation agreements between two- and four-year institutions, for example, might consider students’ attainment of a particular learning outcome at previous institutions. Equally, acceptance of the goals should lead to shared responsibility – across general education and the major; across academic and student life programming – on a campus/institution-wide basis.

Another recommendation seeks to treat students as co-creators (with institutional personnel) in the realization of their education: “In today’s academy, many students are not following any comprehensive plan at all. Rather, many are working to cobble together a sufficient number of courses that will enable them to meet the required number of credits...”<sup>17</sup> This observation, along with an emphasis on integrative and applied learning experiences, naturally leads to a reframing of the overall educational journey. It is suggested that, from the beginning, students need opportunities to understand the institution’s view of the educational progression, and be given opportunities to make selections (of courses, of papers or other assignments within courses, etc.) that help build toward their attainment of that vision. The curriculum should emphasize students’ increasing mastery of diverse modes of inquiry, engagement, and their application to complex problems.

Finally, the council urges curricular attention to humanity’s “big questions” and avoidance of curricula that simply provide students with inventories and checklists of the types of courses that need to be fulfilled:

[It] is time to challenge the idea ... that simply taking a prescribed number of courses in the liberal arts and sciences fields is sufficient. Rather, steps must be taken to ensure that study in these core disciplines prepares students to engage with the “big questions,” both contemporary and enduring. Study in the arts and sciences should provide students with opportunities to explore the enduring issues, questions, and problems they confront as human beings – questions of meaning, purpose, and moral integrity.<sup>18</sup>

For the council, this principle leads to the suggestion that the following fields of study be covered by the curriculum: science, mathematics and technology; cultural and humanistic literacy; global knowledge and competence; civic knowledge and engagement; and inquiry- and project-based learning.

A parallel AACU publication concerned with student persistence, educational engagement, and achievement of institutional learning outcomes proposes the adoption of “high-impact educational practices.”<sup>19</sup> The report’s author, George Kuh, examines the research on those practices that seem to improve student performance and proposes the adoption of ten such practices:

1. first-year seminars and experiences
2. common intellectual experiences
3. learning communities
4. writing-intensive courses
5. collaborative assignments and projects
6. undergraduate research
7. diversity and global learning
8. service learning, community-based learning
9. internships
10. capstone courses and projects

Perhaps more important than the specific activities is for Naropa to consider Kuh's hypotheses about why these practices have an impact. "First," Kuh contends, "these practices typically demand that students devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks; most require daily decisions that deepen students' investment in the activity as well as their commitment to their academic program and the college."<sup>20</sup> The various practices above, when well organized across courses and staff, bring students into regular contact with faculty and advisors, increase the expectations for students' in-class and outside engagement in their studies, and provide for synthetic or integrative learning. These practices also ensure that students receive systematic and meaningful feedback on the progress of their work, as well as encouragement to continue and persevere. This is a lesson that may be applicable to both undergraduate and graduate education.

Second, these activities provide for regular interaction between students and staff, and among student peers, and put "substantive matters" at the forefront of students' engagement with their studies. Whether in first-year seminars, faculty-led research projects, or group problem-solving assignments, students are put "in the company of mentors and advisors as well as peers who share intellectual interests and are committed to seeing that students succeed."<sup>21</sup>

Third, the aforementioned high-impact activities provide opportunities for students to question old thinking habits, develop new ones in response to unfamiliar problems and situations presented to them, and learn to co-exist with others whose patterns of behaving and thinking may be different. Further, these activities enable students to make use of their developing knowledge and skills; they provide "opportunities to integrate, synthesize, and apply knowledge [which] are essential to deep, meaningful learning experiences."<sup>22</sup>

To summarize, there are several implications of contemporary thinking about undergraduate education for Naropa's Academic Plan. First is the suggestion that students be treated as co-creators of their education, involved in an intentional and planned selection of courses, degree fields, and extra-curricular learning opportunities. The educational experiences made available to students should include a logic for how different courses can be stitched together and meet the curricular goals of the institution and each student's personal goals. To accomplish these goals, the faculty may need to explore additional pedagogies that require students to be active in their learning.

Second, best practices would recommend that implementation of learning outcomes and the learning experiences to meet these be a shared responsibility across the faculty (not isolated by major or general education), and between faculty, advisors, and student support staff.

Finally, emphasis on learning outcomes can provide a vehicle for students to consider the application of their liberal arts education to various professional pursuits upon graduation. To realize this potential, an institution should provide students with

opportunities to integrate their studies and apply their developing knowledge and skills to real world cases or other problems.

#### **4.c. Strategic Plan Data**

As noted in the Introduction, of the five goals articulated by the Strategic Plan, two are most salient to the Academic Plan:

1. strengthen the educational experience for students; and
2. provide students with knowledge, skills, and contemplative training to enhance their effectiveness in the broader world

The following four action items are relevant to and implicate the work of Academic Affairs:

1. define the university's distinctiveness and what it delivers;
2. broaden the curriculum by adding courses in areas not currently represented in the university's offerings;
3. provide enhanced levels of student support through counseling, mentoring and better preparation for careers upon graduation; and
4. strengthen and integrate diversity.

These goals and actions were informed by data that the University's strategic planning consultants developed from constituent interviews and surveys. During the strategic planning process, interviews were conducted with alumni, then-current students, and students who had taken leave of the University without completing a degree; an online survey with both closed-ended and qualitative questions was administered to enrolled undergraduate and graduate students.

This section of the Academic Plan summarizes the survey data and lays the foundation for the approach to articulating and implementing the University's curricular distinctiveness below.

##### **4.c.1. Undergraduate Student Data**

The data on student satisfaction with a Naropa education produce a picture the University can generally take pride in. For example, 94.6% of undergraduates completing the survey (N = 357) consider Naropa their first choice for college enrollment and 81.6% respond that they probably or definitely would re-enroll at the University based on their experience to date. Although only 66.9% consider tuition to be a worthwhile investment, 84% express overall satisfaction with the university.

Slightly greater than half of the undergraduate respondents, 56%, consider the quality of faculty instruction to be consistent. With regard to faculty preparedness, 94.3% of respondents consider this to be important or very important and 87.5% are satisfied or very satisfied with this aspect of their education. Similarly, 91.9% judge the faculty's

commitment to academic excellence to be high and 79.9% are highly satisfied with this. With regard to tolerance of different spiritual traditions, 88.9% consider this to be essential and 75.2% are satisfied with its handling on campus.

Surprisingly, some areas of university commitment do not receive strong marks from students. For example, 75.7% of respondents consider the diversity of the faculty to be important and only 57.3% are satisfied with current faculty diversity. More students, 90%, consider diversity in the curriculum to be an important aspect of their education, and only 70.3% are satisfied with this.

Other areas of curricular depth are judged to be inadequate by undergraduates. Students seem especially concerned about life after Naropa. For example, 70.9% feel that preparation for graduate school is important, yet only 42.5% consider themselves adequately prepared. Concerning career preparation, 76.1% believe this to be an important part of their education, yet only 32.8% express satisfaction with this aspect of the curriculum. (Of those who consider this an important part of their education, 41.5% express dissatisfaction and 38% express satisfaction with what is currently offered.) Nearly three-fourths of students, 72.8% of respondents, desire career counseling but only 21% are satisfied with present arrangements. Given the university's two-year struggle to establish a mentoring program, it is interesting to note that 83.1% of respondents consider having a mentor to be important and only 48.3% are satisfied with current opportunities. It is clear that models for mentorship, perhaps encouraging students to seek out faculty with research or others interests they themselves want to explore, should be addressed by the faculty.

The undergraduate survey asked about the contemplative dimensions of a Naropa education and attempted to gain student perspective on various potential additions to the curriculum. Overall, students are pleased with the contemplative aspects of their education: 81.8% are satisfied with the contemplative aspects of their overall education and 78.9% with their major; 88% consider the integration of contemplative work with the rest of their education to be effective or very effective, and 77% consider the same levels of effectiveness to be the case for their major.

Although a closed-ended question was not asked about whether students felt they could articulate the meaning and purpose of contemplative education, their responses to the qualitative sections of the survey indicate a range of responses:

It's not clear how classes should integrate contemplative practices. At times too much time is spent with feelings and not enough on subject matter.

Some classes integrate contemplative aspects poorly; I would rather it not be done at all th[a]n have it attempted half heartedly

As far as the contemplative aspect goes, at Naropa, even more than other schools I think, you get what you put into it. My most transformative experiences have

occurred when I really showed up for what I was learning and applied it to my life.

The vision and mission of Naropa are admirable yet it sometimes seems as though curricula are designed to further this view, rather than adopt a broad perspective, both intellectual and contemplative, and then allow this enlightened vision to emerge of its own accord.

“Contemplative.” Before I came here, I thought it meant “thinking.” When I came here, I was told that it absolutely does NOT mean “thinking,” but I was never told (or taught in some other way) what it DOES mean. I have been here four years. I will graduate in May never having learned what it means. Based on context, it seems to be tied to meditating, which (at Naropa, at least) is the exact opposite of thinking. This is very confusing to me.

It would be inappropriate to give undue weight to these few comments, especially in light of the overwhelmingly positive quantitative data on satisfaction with Naropa’s contemplative components. At the same time, the study recently completed by the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, consisting of focus groups on faculty views of contemplative pedagogy,<sup>23</sup> as well as the Strategic Plan’s call for greater clarity of the University’s distinctive curriculum, should influence our thinking here to some extent.

The degree of academic rigor, often incorrectly seen in opposition to the University’s contemplative foundation, receives somewhat checkered ratings. In part, there may not be a consensus about what students expect from the academic portion of the curriculum. To take one cluster of data on this matter, 80.5% of respondents think their peers’ preparedness for class is important, but only 48.7% are satisfied with this. This contrasts with 97.6% and 86.5% of students considering their own preparedness to be, respectively, important and satisfactory. Similarly, 93.5% consider intellectual challenge to be important, though 73.7% are actually satisfied with their courses from this vantage point. Interestingly, 84.7% are satisfied with their own intellectual development through Naropa. A slightly lower number, 74.5%, are satisfied with their artistic development.

The qualitative data demonstrate the range of student views on the education they wish to receive. The following quotes can be interpreted as suggesting that students, while not afraid of rigor, yearn for an education that is distinct from traditional liberal arts fare:

I came to Naropa to expand my horizons beyond western beliefs, and I have accomplished most of that in my classes except the one I withdrew from. I wanted more out of it [than] a western science approach.

I feel that there are vast opportunities at Naropa to create a very academic educational experience, as well as opportunities to focus more on the contemplative aspects. I have heard people complain that Naropa isn’t “academic enough,” and to be honest, I think this is whining; I think that Naropa is designed

for self-motivated people, and that if you want that, you can find it if you look. I have been very deeply challenged at Naropa, and though I have focused more on the contemplative aspects than the academic, I feel fully prepared for graduate school.

Not everyone is a bookworm or has a desire to go to graduate school. I would like to see an alternative to the current INTD program that would allow students to take classes from a few different majors (which is very useful), but not have to be put through all of the difficulty of the INTD program.

With regards to “student preparedness” and participation in classes, I think that it would be a huge mistake to try to make Naropa more “rigorous” by implementing more coercive or external motivators (i.e., harsher grading, stricter requirements, etc). One of the best things about Naropa is its looseness - the room in which people are invited to find their own motivation.

Other students express concern over what they perceive to be anti-intellectualism on campus and a lack of coursework defined by traditional notions of liberal education:

As far as course offerings, they are piss poor. We need curriculum that actual[ly] reflect[s] the liberal arts college that we’re supposed to be or, at the very least, classes that don’t interfere in terms of scheduling with being able to take classes in all the other liberal arts areas at CU through the consortium agreement.

I’ve been lucky enough to find teachers that challenge me intellectually. Overall, though, it seems that Naropa students’ bad experiences with “conventional” education make the faculty less likely to challenge them intellectually. They seem so scared of “mind” that they dwell almost exclusively in the “heart.” The faculty could do more to find creative ways to challenge them intellectually. Science classes could help with this.

When asked to rate various content areas not currently represented in the University’s curricular offerings, students express high interest in Spanish (81.7%) and other world languages (80.8%), study abroad opportunities (90.1%), film (64.4%) and an expansion of visual arts (70.2%). Despite the concern about career or professional preparation, only 46.9% of respondents consider business courses and 61.6% consider leadership development to be important. With regard to some areas of the traditional liberal arts, 59.7% and 39.6%, encourage the university to increase offerings in, respectively, science and math.

This range of views on curricular expansion is exemplified by the following qualitative data:

Where’s the bio? Chem? The hard sciences are just as important, they all go hand in hand! Hello, quant[u]m physics?

Please, please do not ever require math and science. I am fully convinced that my life will not suffer in any way from my lack of college-level math and science, and I am also convinced that my mind has been more fully developed by not forcing it into pathways it is not designed for, and instead focusing on consciousness itself.

Science. Language studies. Further developed media/film studies. An expanded arts program. History of any kind. Science. Philosophy & Critical Theoretical discourse. All of these fields have only been glimpsed for my time at Naropa rather than accessible in any real variety or abundance.

Science classes must be added! Business and foreign language classes would also help students develop a more realistic world view.

On question 15 I would also like to see more social sciences and historical classes.

I want to study abroad. I do not want to go to Prague, been there done that. I am not a writing major. Give me the opportunity to go somewhere else and do something in my major.

IF NAROPA OFFERED SCIENCE, MATH AND BUSINESS AND MOST IMPORTANTLY LANGUAGE ---I wouldn't even be considering leaving. I most certainly would have more trust in the school's ability to prepare me for a job and the "real" world. You TRULY need these skills at a university, because they are needed at the individual level. I mean, come on, how are we supposed to go out into the world without language!! PLEASE offer these classes!!! Sooner rather than later would be great!!!!

I would have LOVED a contemplative business class!

In brief, undergraduate students give high marks to the faculty and the contemplative dimensions of their Naropa education. At the same time, some of the qualitative data indicate student misconceptions or confusion about contemplative pedagogy. Second, while several curricular additions are endorsed, there is a range of responses to the possible inclusion of business courses and liberal arts fields currently not represented in the curriculum. Finally, students yearn for mentorship and preparation for life after receiving a Naropa bachelor's degree.

#### 4.c.2. *Graduate Student Data*

Like the undergraduate view of the faculty, graduate students (N = 421) hold Naropa's professors in positive regard: 68.1% of respondents consider the quality of instruction to be moderately or very consistent, 93.4% are satisfied or very satisfied with faculty preparation, and 89.3% are satisfied or very satisfied with the faculty's teaching skills.

Similarly, the curriculum and the academic environment of graduate programs score strongly among graduate students: 87.5% of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with their intellectual development and, among those who consider artistic development to be important, 78.6% are satisfied with their progress. With regard to the university's contemplative pedagogy, 85% express satisfaction with these aspects of their degree program and 83.8% with their overall Naropa experience.

There are also data that might lead to further thinking about improvements at the graduate level. For example, when asked how important intellectual challenge is, 99% of respondents judge this to be important or very important, but a slightly lower number (81%) express satisfaction with this program characteristic. With regard to diversity of people and thought, 94.6% consider its inclusion in the curriculum to be important or very important, but 77.8% express satisfaction with its actual inclusion.<sup>†</sup>

The qualitative data may provide some insights to help with the interpretation of these quantitative findings around diversity. To wit:

A huge piece Naropa needs to look at is tolerance of spiritual diversity.... I don't like the feeling that I'm being preached at or that somebody is trying to convert me. I think everyone's coming from a good place... but this still needs to get addressed. I hope that in the future [the] department will make more of an effort to bring in diverse perspectives, consult with the world wisdom traditions teachers on curriculum/readings, etc.

There are two competing visions within Naropa: the founders' view of many faiths coming together versus the employees' wish for a Buddhist school. The result is that outwardly, the school tr[ie]s to encourage diversity but the real desire for a Buddhist school creates an environment that is not very good with or interest[ed] in true diversity.

Lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the faculty and guest artists continues to be highly disappointing.

It is important to reiterate the earlier data that graduate students are satisfied with Naropa's contemplative pedagogy. At the same time, they express the importance of curricular diversity, as well as diversity among the personnel. Of course, this is also a value that is highly prized by the institution itself. In this regard, judgments of the

---

<sup>†</sup> Naropa attracts students from a variety of religious and spiritual traditions. Based on a survey question that allowed for multiple responses by undergraduate students, it appears that 14.7% of our undergraduates identify as Buddhist and 31% as having no religion or as being spiritual with no specific religious affiliation. Self-identified Christians, Hindus, Jews and Muslims make up an additional 16.9% of the respondents. At the graduate level, 21.5% of respondents identify as Buddhist, 18.4% are Christian/Hindu/Jewish/Muslim, and 34.1% either express no religion or no affiliation though they consider themselves spiritual.

congruence between Naropa's values, actuality, and marketing messages are important to note. Specifically, 86.7% of graduate student respondents express admissions counselors' portrayal of the university to be (very) important and 85.5% judge admissions print/electronic materials similarly. However, 73.3% and 72.7% express satisfaction with, respectively, the two sources of information.

Another area of curricular concern focuses on career preparation. Comparable to the discrepancy noted above for undergraduate perceptions on this topic, 93.6% of graduate respondents judge career preparation to be important or very important, but 57.5% consider current preparation to be (very) satisfactory. Representing data from several departments, the following statements give flesh to these numbers:

[As] a graduate from my program I am left [leaving] with few concrete skills. I think that an adjustment of the curriculum to focus on concrete skills and experientials and hands on work in class to build these skills would be very beneficial. In this vein I also feel that Naropa must work towards creating a community counseling center where students can learn and be observed by professors. The lack of hands on real experience is very detrimental to the program and had I known that this was not provided or done more research pre-application I may have applied to a different school despite the value I place on contemplative education. I believe that Naropa must start bringing their vision, a vision that focuses on changing the world view, into reality.

My program is very contemplative and challenging, but I wonder sometimes if the type of challenges I'm getting are preparing me for a career. For example, I may write a paper that challenges me, but how much does this help me interact boldly with a client.

The most disappointing aspect of the curriculum is that there are no practical classes offered at all at Naropa. If I am to be a working writer, which I plan on or else I would not pursue this degree, I need to learn some very basic information about steps in publication, agencies and their roles, etc. There is absolutely no one here who can help me navigate the world of publishing.

I feel there was not enough prep[aration] as far as after graduating is concerned.

The human dimension of the curriculum is important to graduate students, as well, and even here there is a slight difference between levels of judged importance and satisfaction. For example, 85.5% consider group process to be of importance and 83.8% consider this important (or very important) to their personal development. Yet, with both dimensions, satisfaction is lower – 72.7% and 74%, respectively. Satisfaction with the actual contribution of group work to professional development hovers at 71.1%.

In sum, graduate students completing the survey view the faculty and the contemplative pedagogy positively. Some concern is expressed over the University's embodiment of its

professed commitment to diversity. Equally of concern for students is their readiness to assume professional careers in their fields of study.

#### **4.d. Summary**

As one might expect of an institution that educates both bachelor's and master's students, and that offers degrees in such disparate fields as creative writing, environmental studies, psychology (both counseling and non-counseling) and religious studies, there is no single or typical picture of a Naropa student. At the same time, several broad views about Naropa students can be discerned, including their interest in diversity, professional preparation, and the integration of contemplative and academic disciplines. At the undergraduate level, there appear to be slightly different cohorts in terms of the desire for a full representation of liberal arts disciplines in the curriculum.

There are sound reasons for this Academic Plan to respond to the challenges and insights summarized above, including the need to continue to manifest the vision articulated at the University's founding, to consider the relevance of current best practices in higher education, and to respond to student satisfaction and success data. First, as noted in the discussion on the University's founding, Naropa's educational aim is not to retreat from contemporary realities, but to enable students to be fully engaged and present with these. The founding vision calls for an education that is both personally and socially transformative, and that integrates contemplative practices and disciplinary knowledge.

The notion that “sparks will fly” through the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western educational practices leads naturally to the second observation: in manifesting its commitment to contemplative pedagogy, Naropa has the opportunity to consider contemporary thinking in (undergraduate) higher education as it moves forward with defining its core curricular vision. The Strategic Plan calls for dramatic and sustained enrollment growth for the next five years (and for another five years afterwards),<sup>‡</sup> which in turn necessitates a careful review and modification of the curriculum. Adopting some of the best practices reviewed above – such as treating students as co-creators of their educational journey, providing opportunities for synthesis and application, and viewing curricular goals as shared across the university and not segregated by department or personnel – may help Naropa achieve some of the targeted enrollment growth.

Finally, the Strategic Plan sees the linkage between enrollment and curriculum. The Plan recognizes the uniqueness of Naropa's educational offerings, at the same time proposing a new commitment to delivering that distinction “with excellence.” In part, responding to the kinds of student data described above may assist the University in meeting that commitment.

---

<sup>‡</sup> The Academic Plan distinguishes between the first and second five years of the Strategic Plan in order to differentiate the work that will be undertaken to broaden and cohere the existing curriculum, which is projected to fuel enrollment growth for the first few years, and the likelihood of new degree programs being developed for the latter half of the Strategic Plan's life.

Naropa University has been at the forefront of contemplative education for over thirty years. At the same time, the Strategic Plan calls upon us to provide a clearer articulation of the scope and purpose of contemplative education. In order to do this, we must consider the range of educational options available to our students in 2009, not to mimic these options but to position ourselves in relationship to them. Organizations like the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, which provides training programs to faculty at mainstream institutions in the adoption of contemplative pedagogy to their disciplines; the Garrison Institute, which provides training for K-12 educators and is emerging as a thought leader in the broader field; and the (now defunct) Leap Year Program at Kripalu Center, which offered a bridge program combining yoga, other contemplative practices, and college preparation to students unsure about their college direction, indicate that Naropa's mission is catching on. This Academic Plan aims to maintain Naropa's leadership of this field.

### **5. The Curricular (Narrative) Arc**

In order to bring greater coherence and clarity to Naropa's curriculum, Academic Council and Cauldron have developed what has come to be called the curricular arc. The arc is intended to encapsulate the faculty's curricular vision and pedagogical commitments. It consists of three components: First, borrowing from the Mission Statement approved by the Board of Trustees and paralleling the effort in Fall 2008 by the Trustees to craft a Statement of Distinctiveness, the faculty authored a two-paragraph summary of the inspiration and goals of Naropa's contemplative education. This statement is seen as a broad sketch of both undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

Second, the faculty deduced a set of six learning outcomes (or competencies) that should be embedded in the curriculum for all degree programs. Recognizing the differences between bachelor's level contemplative liberal arts education and master's level contemplative professional education, the set of learning outcomes is not intended to constrain the faculty responsible for any particular degree. Rather, the outcomes are aspirational, and set reasonable expectations for what students will learn and experience in their time at Naropa.

For each of the outcomes described below, there is an expectation that faculty will examine which courses, other learning modalities, and co- and extra-curricular experiences might support students' attainment. In working to align their curriculum with the six outcomes, departments and programs will be asked during the 2009-2010 academic year to select at least three points along the educational journey in which each outcome is addressed and students may demonstrate beginning, intermediary or advanced mastery. It is the eventual implementation of the six learning outcomes with an explicit model of learning experiences and milestones at (minimally) three points along a student's University career that constitutes the arc-like quality of the curriculum.<sup>§</sup> The

---

<sup>§</sup> In the case of the undergraduate curriculum, there will need to be shared responsibility and coordination across departments, the Core Program and extra-curricular student life in the development of learning experiences that support students' attainment of the six competencies. The curricular arc is not the

curricular arc is thus developmental or diachronic, the purpose of which is to help students see the direction and “point” of their education across time. (See Appendix for an example of a three-stage developmental progression of a learning outcome.)

Third, a number of short narratives were developed by the faculty to serve as pithy encapsulations of the curricular arc. During the exercises that led to the generation of these narratives, faculty were asked to create a story of no more than two sentences that makes use of various clauses extracted from the Mission Statement and that might serve as the equivalent of an “elevator pitch” to describe Naropa’s curriculum. It is not expected that the narratives presented below will actually become the University’s tag lines; however, it is hoped that the curricular arc including the brief narratives will provide future branding efforts with materials to be reworked and improved upon for promotional and external communication purposes.

In brief, an iterative process involving the two main faculty bodies – Academic Council and Cauldron – and the Office of Academic Affairs has produced a statement about Naropa’s curriculum that will help shape future curriculum development and that will serve as the answer to the call emanating from the Strategic Plan to define the University’s “distinctiveness and what it delivers.” This curricular statement is accompanied by a list of six learning outcomes that, when fully operationalized and realized in the curriculum, will provide students with a progression of learning experiences. Finally, the curricular statement is also accompanied by a number of short narratives, designed to summarize and “capture” the essence of the University’s educational commitments and aspirations.

### **5.a. Educational Vision Statement**

The faculty of Naropa University has produced and is committed to realizing the following vision of contemplative education:

Learning at Naropa is an invitation to those who hold curiosity, are passionate scholars, and seek personal transformation and engagement with the world. Our educational heritage includes a range of mindfulness practices that cultivate presence, clarity and integrity. These practices spark the student’s courageous inquiry into self, society and nature. Our learning community values a love of study, artistic training, concern for ecological wisdom, and a commitment to diversity. Because our intent is to prepare students to encounter our changing world as skillful and confident participants, we situate learning in contexts that are cultural, historical, and environmental. Naropa graduates translate their learning into gifts dedicated to a just and living world.

Our educational path focuses on immersion in contemplative theory and practice; exploration of diversity and ecological sustainability; strengthening skills in

---

province of the Core Program, majors, minors, electives or student life programming; it is to be realized in different ways and at different times across these curricular and extra-curricular offerings.

critical thinking, research, and writing, as well as other modes of inquiry, knowing and expression, such as those that derive from the arts; the building of intra- and inter-personal capacities; developing competency in a major area of study; and the application of learning to real world settings.

This educational vision statement implicates a student journey that, at the undergraduate level, interweaves contemplative development with the breadth and depth made possible by the liberal arts; and at the graduate level, interweaves contemplative development with professional training and/or advanced mastery of a discipline. Equally important, the perspective assumed by the statement confirms the University's commitment to our students' preparedness for engagement with community (and community diversity), the ecological systems in which they live, and the world of work.

### **5.b. Learning Outcomes and Competencies**

The statement above sets out a number of goals and outcomes of a Naropa journey, specifically: "cultivate presence, clarity and integrity"; "prepare students to encounter our changing world as skillful and confident participants"; and "Naropa graduates translate their learning into gifts dedicated to a just and living world."

The following six outcomes have also been developed by the faculty and expand upon the last paragraph of the educational vision statement:

- 1) *Competency in Contemplative Theory and Practice*: Graduates are able to engage the world through unbiased awareness and presence of self, insight and clarity of mind, and compassionate practice.
- 2) *Skillfulness in Addressing Diversity and Ecological Sustainability*: Graduates are able to think critically and analytically about social and cultural diversity; they recognize the interconnectedness of the human community to ecological sustainability and cultivate sustainable practices.
- 3) *Ability to Employ Multiple Modes of Inquiry, Knowing and Expression*: Graduates are able to think, read, and write analytically and critically; use academic research methodology; utilize library resources and technical media. Graduates understand and are able to employ the contribution of the arts to human inquiry, knowing and expression.
- 4) *Embody Intra-and Inter-personal Capacities*: Graduates are able to effectively communicate as individuals and in collaboration with others through empathetic listening and inquiry, embodied deep listening and dialogue, and intercultural competency in diverse groups.
- 5) *Demonstrate Knowledge and Skill in a Discipline or Area of Study*: Graduates develop a comprehensive understanding of both foundational and advanced concepts and methods in their area of study; build awareness of contemporary

issues; and demonstrate the ability to apply, synthesize or create knowledge through a capstone project or paper.

- 6) *Apply Learning in Real World Settings*: Graduates are able and inclined to engage real-world challenges and work ethically and effectively across diverse communities drawing on disciplinary competency, civic knowledge, presence and personal values, and creative intelligence.

These six competencies are considered by the faculty to be the hallmark of a Naropa education. While these learning outcomes are not new to the institution and it is likely that all have figured into the curricula of existing degree programs, their articulation here serves two purposes. First, they are the basis for careful review by departments of existing curriculum, with the expectation that the curriculum of particular degree programs may be modified over time to better reflect and realize these outcomes. This is especially true when the competencies are viewed developmentally, as a “through line” that programs reflect and realize throughout the two-, three- or four-year student journey.

Second, the six competencies constitute a unique constellation of educational outcomes and a unique pedagogy for achieving these outcomes. As such, it is expected that their articulation in this document will serve as the basis for any brand messaging work that is commissioned or undertaken by the University.

### **5.c. “Short Stories”**

In an effort to explain the focus and purpose of Naropa’s educational offerings, faculty engaged in an exercise to develop short narratives, an encapsulation of the essence of a Naropa education in as few words as possible. As with most stories, the ones offered below are structured around a narrative arc, that is, they embed a logic of movement or the passage of time, transition or sequential development, and accomplishment or progression. This arc is considered important as it provides a trajectory for students to anticipate before they enter the program and to orient to while working on their particular degree.

Eight narratives were produced by Academic Council:

1. The Naropa journey engages students to discover their inner resources, in conjunction with the intuitive intellect. Compassionate service to the world is a natural outcome of this integrative process.
2. A Naropa education combines academic rigor and contemplative practice. By locating knowledge in its social, historical, and personal context, the Naropa journey prepares students to claim their unique places as engaged and aware participants in the contemporary world.

3. Through developing authentic insight and self understanding, students are empowered to meet the world as it is with openness and acceptance. This lays the ground for students to become skillful and confident agents of change.
4. Engaging with rigorous inquiry and contemplative practice, Naropa students emerge with insight and courage to meet the world as it is and create positive change.
5. Naropa University awakens students to serve as global citizens through the cultivation of intellect, confidence, insight, and creativity.
6. A Naropa education fosters recognition of sentience and appreciation of aliveness to prepare students intellectually and emotionally to participate as a confident, creative and full person in the world.
7. Naropa University is a learning community where students fully engage heart and mind preparing them to cultivate the well being of self and society.
8. Through the cultivation of academic excellence and contemplative insight, a Naropa education offers a student the opportunity for courageous self inquiry and active community engagement and to explore movement between the two.

Again, it is not expected that these statements will serve as the “elevator pitches” or “tag lines” that the University will formally adopt. Rather, they were produced so that the faculty as a body could offer in a preliminary fashion some shorthand ways of explaining the distinctive approach and goals of a Naropa education. It is also hoped that these short narratives may provide perspective for any brand messaging work the University may undertake or commission as part of the implementation of other aspects of the Strategic Plan.

At the same time, the aim of this Plan is not to cede the creation of a University branding strategy wholly to others. Rather, the Plan assumes that the faculty’s implementation of the curricular arc described in Section 6 below will serve to further refine and sharpen the short story that encapsulates a Naropa education and its ultimate purpose. The above stories may be thought of as initial hypotheses, which will be tested during the implementation stage.

## **6. A Plan for Action**

In order to meet the challenges posed by the student data and contemporary best practices in higher education, the Academic Plan draws on the expertise and competence of the faculty to implement the proposed educational vision statement. The action plan below results from conversations on the major implications of the curricular arc. To continue the development of the founder’s vision of an educational institution that bridges and integrates the best of Eastern and Western traditions, and to recognize the potential value

of best practices and thinking in higher education today, four goals and associated actions are established by the Academic Plan.

### **6.a. Four Goals and Actions**

**Goal 1:**<sup>\*\*</sup> Employ the curricular arc as the distinctive framework for Naropa’s educational offerings.

**Rationale:** The Strategic Plan calls for Naropa to “strengthen the educational experience for students” and “define the university’s distinctiveness and what it delivers.” The curricular arc defines the major goals and features of a Naropa education, and can be used to accomplish both internal curricular transformation and external communication with prospective students, funders, and the wider public.<sup>††</sup>

#### **Actions:**

1. Recognizing differences in graduate and undergraduate education, as well as differences across academic disciplines, this Academic Plan nonetheless calls for all degree programs to ensure their alignment with the curricular arc described above. This complements work already underway by departments to ensure curricular alignment with the Mission Statement.
  - a. In the case of undergraduate education, the narrative arc should be seen as a responsibility shared by departments that offer majors as well as the Core Program (general education). The Office of Student Affairs should also be invited into sharing responsibility for the generation of learning experiences consonant with the curricular arc. This view necessitates alignment of the curriculum across undergraduate offerings, and not an isolated approach in which majors and the Core Program separately implement the curricular arc. The goal is for students to see the curricular arc as the framework for their four-year education, and to look for contributions to their fulfillment of the arc to come from Core courses, majors, electives, and co- and extra-curricular programming.
  - b. In the case of graduate education, the unique disciplinary and professional aspirations of each department need to be recognized. Still, departments should adapt the curricular arc to their purpose. At a minimum, departments will be encouraged to clarify the integration of contemplative and disciplinary study, the relationship between scholarship (and artistic expression) and its application

---

<sup>\*\*</sup> Unless reference is made specifically to undergraduate or graduate education, the goals, rationale and actions listed in this section of the Academic Plan should be interpreted to refer to Naropa’s educational offerings broadly, i.e., both bachelor’s and master’s levels.

<sup>††</sup> “Curricular transformation” is a broad term that includes all the modalities and service units that provide educational offerings to students – e.g., formal coursework, co-curricular programming, and extra-curricular programming. Though not always specified in the action steps described in this section, the larger vision for implementing the curricular arc entails close collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs.

beyond the classroom, and students' preparedness for working in a diverse community.

2. Assessment plans will be modified, as necessary, to reflect departments' programmatic alignment with the curricular arc.
3. Students should be provided with opportunities to understand the full scope of the curricular arc, and how particular courses, co- and extra-curricular experiences, and other learning opportunities contribute to their fulfillment of the curricular arc. (See below for a discussion of conferences and journey guides.)
4. The University should employ the curricular arc in future branding and marketing activities. The above articulation of the curricular arc includes a broad statement of the vision of a Naropa education, six learning outcomes, and several options for a two-sentence "pitch" or "tag line." Thus, the curricular arc should form some of the input that is provided to the University's branding consultants, as per the Strategic Plan and Action Plan.

**Goal 2:** Establish a clear through-line or developmental progression in the curriculum that students are aware of and held to.

**Rationale:** Although related to the curricular arc, this goal is also a response to student data around retention, specifically, the expressed need on the part of students to envision themselves staying at the University beyond introductory courses. This goal envisions students participating not merely in a series of course enrollments, but in a journey whose progression is mapped out by the faculty and includes some opportunities for choices based on each student's goal and path. In addition, there is an opportunity to assist students to envision the trajectory of their Naropa education by encouraging their participation in capstone and other signature events led by their seniors, to learn about the academic discipline in which they major and understand the potential culminating activities of their studies.

**Actions:**

1. As degree programs and non-classroom-based programming build alignment with the curricular arc, Academic Affairs and Student Affairs should also take steps to articulate the path from introductory to advanced courses and other learning experiences. The developmental progression will be articulated as a sequence of goals and outcomes in which courses taken in the final year of a degree program are seen as building on and fruitional of courses taken earlier in a degree program. Prerequisites for courses will be clearly determined and stated, and the definition of coursework at each grade level (100-499 for undergraduates, 500-799 for graduate students) will be agreed upon.
2. Programs will establish opportunities for students to reflect upon their education and their progression through the curricular arc at regular times during the academic year.

- a. Undergraduate students should be provided with the curricular arc in some format that regularly invites them to reflect upon the coursework they have completed, are currently taking and/or are planning to register for. For example, the curricular arc might be published as a workbook or CD-ROM, with reflective exercises that ask students to integrate contemplative and academic study, etc.
  - b. The University should explore models for students to check-in at regular intervals with faculty and support staff on their educational progress. The following suggestions have been offered to date: a yearly “conference” with a faculty panel, in which each student discusses and reflects upon his/her educational progress from the perspective of the curricular arc; periodic meetings with a mentor who serves as a “journey guide,” assisting students in retrospective review of the courses and prospective planning of future coursework; and involvement of students and faculty in learning communities that comprise both coursework and non-class encounters.
  - c. No matter the format, students should be encouraged to be intentional about the integration of their coursework and about the direction they wish their education to take. Students should be given an opportunity to reflect upon and integrate the contemplative and academic components of their education, stitch together the different courses they complete, and clarify their goals for life after Naropa.
  - d. The curricular arc provides a framework for planning new coursework and learning experiences. Undergraduate students overwhelmingly request opportunities to study world languages, to experience cultures outside the United States (study abroad), and to prepare for professions and graduate school. A sizable number of students, though certainly not a majority, seek a broadening of the liberal arts curriculum – in such disciplines as history, mathematics and science. The curricular arc should be used by a faculty planning group to examine gaps in the current undergraduate curriculum and prioritize the addition of courses in these liberal arts fields. Simultaneously, an analysis of the cost structure for study abroad and other programming should be undertaken.<sup>‡‡</sup>
3. The implementation of the curricular arc will include opportunities for students to engage in one or more culminating experiences.
    - a. All departments will require a capstone project or comparable fruitional experience so that students can formally connect their several years of learning and demonstrate their completion of the curricular arc. The capstone (or equivalent) will provide students with an opportunity to experience and demonstrate mastery of programmatic objectives.

---

<sup>‡‡</sup> The Academic Affairs Strategic Plan Progress Report suggests that a second round of instructional efficiencies may be needed in order to fund additions to the curriculum. This hypothesis should be tested while the faculty develops new course proposals.

- b. At the undergraduate level, departments will be encouraged to develop multiple options for students to fulfill the capstone requirement, including completion of an internship (accompanied by a seminar and integrative paper), social action project, research or other scholarly thesis, creative portfolio or performance showcase. This should allow for the multiple interests and pathways of Naropa students as described in the data analysis above. In all cases, the options that are offered should align with the curricular arc and the unique disciplinary standards of the program.
  - c. At the undergraduate level, departments may wish to consider collaborative capstone offerings and/or multidisciplinary capstone offerings. For example, all students conducting a social action project, no matter their specific major, might complete this in the context of one course offered by a single faculty member.
  - d. It may be that certain outcomes of the curricular arc will need to be assessed on a university-wide basis, rather than by the majors. Therefore, the undergraduate program should consider fruitional experiences beyond the major.
4. The curricular arc should be treated as a shared and public element of Naropa’s culture. From orientation through to graduation, students should be made aware of, and have opportunities to discuss and reflect upon, the curricular arc.
- a. Students’ fruitional experiences should be sources of community celebration. Academic Affairs should arrange an event (if necessary, spread over several days at the end of the academic year) in which students present their capstone projects. Poster sessions, gallery showings, oral and media presentations, performances, and the like should allow for students from the full range of disciplines to have a venue to share the fruits of their education. Academically more junior students and recently declared majors should be encouraged to attend the community celebration, in part to enhance their membership in the community of contemplative scholar-activists, and in part to learn about the kinds of fruitional projects students typically complete.

**Goal 3:** Implement the curricular arc in ways that provide students with educational opportunities to prepare for careers, professions and vocations.

Rationale: The data collected during the strategic planning process speak to students’ desire for greater institutional programming for graduate school and/or work. The curricular arc proposes two complementary visions for the preparation offered to students: “Our intent is to prepare students to encounter our changing world as skillful and confident participants.” Also, “Naropa graduates translate their learning into gifts dedicated to a just and living world.” These sentiments speak to a unique opportunity that the University has to develop programming that is consonant with a view of right livelihood. Naropa faculty can take pride in our students’ development of such skills and sensibilities as compassion, confidence, and awareness of self and other. The challenge

is to help students translate and apply these skills and sensibilities to settings outside the university.

Actions:

1. At the undergraduate level, students will be offered opportunities to bridge their education with various pathways to careers, professions and further study. The aforementioned capstone experiences are one way in which the University can invite students to tailor the final phase of their education to life after Naropa. Students anticipating applying to graduate school, for example, should develop coursework that supports this goal, including the completion of a research thesis.
2. This goal will be further achieved by the creation of minors that, while grounded in the University's contemplative heritage and commitments, provide a bridge to the world of work, professional fulfillment, and individual financial self-reliance. At the moment, the following minors are being explored by the faculty: Media Studies; Business and Entrepreneurship; Community Development (Social activism, advocacy and change).<sup>§§</sup>
3. A close partnership among academic departments, Alumni Relations and Career Services should be built. This partnership should enable departments to call upon alumni and others as guest speakers, to host visiting professionals for brief residencies, and provide "real world" cases for students to work on in various classes. As these partnerships develop, the University will need to review the staffing that supports the various offices serving as a bridge to alumni and professional fields.
4. The Office of Student Affairs has occasionally promoted the idea of a Co-Curricular Transcript. This idea should be integrated with the curricular arc, and a committee consisting of faculty and student affairs personnel should meet to develop a single document that students can use to record their academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular progress. Student-designed electronic portfolios are one possible means of capturing students' attainment of the curricular arc through course, co-curricular and extra-curricular participation.

**Goal 4:** Implement the curricular arc in ways that provide students with opportunities to engage in contemplative practices, and to understand and reflect upon the relationship between contemplative practices and contemplative pedagogy employed by the faculty.

Rationale: The Strategic Plan calls for a clarifying definition and focused implementation of the University's distinct curriculum. The strategic planning data appear to indicate student satisfaction with the University's contemplative foundation, and uncertainty with how to characterize the contemplative pedagogy employed in the classroom and the relationship between contemplative practice and academic study. This goal continues developments at the undergraduate level that motivated the creation of the Contemplative

---

<sup>§§</sup> Other minors are already in the pipeline, including one in Gender and Women's Studies. The three mentioned above are of special interest because of their professional or career orientation.

Practice Seminar (renamed the Contemplative Learning Seminar), an introduction to the University's foundational contemplative practices and philosophy. In addition, this goal recognizes that contemplative education encompasses both coursework that is primarily focused on contemplative practices (e.g., Tai Chi or meditation) and that embeds contemplative practices within traditional academic disciplines.

Actions:

1. Recognizing the diversity of approaches and practices that are subsumed under the rubric of contemplative education, and that no dogma is either feasible or desirable, departments will undertake the creation of statements about their employment of contemplative pedagogy. In the process, the faculty will, as needed, distinguish between contemplative practice and contemplative pedagogy, and the differing aims of contemplative work for spiritual and educational purposes. The curricular arc described above posits particular outcomes and learning experiences that advance students' contemplative education. Departments will articulate their contribution to their students' developmental through-line with regard to contemplative practice.
2. Departments will ensure that course syllabi provide students with an anchor that addresses such questions as:
  - a. What contemplative pedagogical practices can students expect to experience in the course?
  - b. How does the course contribute to the students' attainment of the curricular arc?
  - c. How is the integration of contemplative practice and academic content handled in the course?
  - d. How does the course enhance students' effectiveness in the broader world?
  - e. How might students and practitioners engage with other traditions in ways that avoid cultural and religious appropriation?
3. The undergraduate faculty will examine the redundancies that exist in the curriculum around contemplative work. There is informal, anecdotal evidence that, since the adoption of the Contemplative Learning Seminar at the undergraduate level, students find some departments' introductory contemplative courses repetitive with this Core Program requirement. Departments should take the opportunity to reconsider the contemplative practices students experience in major courses, building upon rather than repeating the lessons of the Seminar. Similarly, students periodically seek a waiver from Core courses, such as the Civic Engagement Seminar and the Diversity Seminar, because of perceived redundancy.

This action step does not assume that contemplative development occurs in a linear progression; nor does it discount the value of redundancy and multiple encounters with the same practices and texts. At the same time, it asks departments to be more explicit in describing the contemplative experiences offered in their courses, including providing students with opportunities to reflect upon the redundancies and deepening insights.

## **6.b. Additional Considerations**

In order to implement the action steps that support the curricular arc, the University may need to reconsider various aspects of its academic and support operations. The following are just a few of the considerations for enhancing the University's capacity to respond to the Strategic Plan's call for greater clarity and improved delivery of the curriculum.

First, the implementation of the 10% classroom registration efficiency, along with the curricular developmental progression described above, may mean a re-examination of faculty expectations and roles. For example, the implementation of the 10% efficiency might call upon faculty to adapt their teaching to larger enrollments, perhaps with greater use of classroom technology. The curricular arc assumes greater faculty involvement in student advising and mentoring. Both initiatives bring a commensurate need for ongoing and focused faculty development.

Second, the University employs a large cadre of adjunct faculty, those who are hired to teach specific courses but whose primary employment is external to the University. These "occasional" appointments bring a valued dimension to our students' education, but potentially mean that a training program focused on adjunct faculty may be advisable. In January 2009, Academic Affairs scheduled an orientation session for adjuncts, in which some of the strategic planning data around student retention and success were discussed. Adjuncts had not previously been made aware of the issues surrounding student retention, and eagerly sought to understand their role in helping departments meet the expressed needs of students. Adjuncts came to understand the importance of better situating the individual courses they teach in the context of programmatic goals, and requested more training on the University's commitments to contemplative practice, diversity, and the integration of outcomes across courses.

Third, changes in the academic calendar might better enable the University to implement some of the initiatives described above. For example, time between the last day of semester classes and graduation exercises may be needed to accommodate the capstone celebrations. Similarly, Practice Day or an additional day during the semester may be needed to schedule the student meetings with their journey guides. The hypothesis raised in the Strategic Plan of moving to 4-credit courses may now have a context for future planning, given that such a move would have not only the benefits of instructional efficiency (reducing the number of courses the University offers each year for students to carry a full load, thus increasing faculty salaries) but of providing opportunities for more in-depth instruction, especially to meet the objectives about around reflection of contemplative pedagogy and academic disciplines.

Fourth, the Academic Plan is general enough that it should be applicable to the differing needs and disciplines of undergraduate and graduate education. Questions remain, however, about the differentiation of students within the undergraduate cohort. For example, a suggestion that the Core requirements for first-time college students and transfer students be differentiated arose during faculty consultations on the Plan. This

would combine Core courses for students entering with a certain minimum number of credits, and would free up credits to enable them to complete the developmental and fruitional coursework described above. Equally important are finding ways of accommodating the somewhat distinct needs expressed by undergraduate students seeking a degree that emphasizes personal exploration and those seeking a more traditional liberal arts degree within the framework of contemplative pedagogy. In this context, the possible desirability and marketability of an “honors track” should be explored.

Finally, it should be noted that this Academic Plan – Part I focuses exclusively on the articulation and plans for implementing the curricular arc. In addition to the plan for enrollment growth (Part II) and physical infrastructure (Part III), the faculty has been asked to work on other initiatives to improve academic operations. For example, Chairs Council has divided itself into working groups that are examining: the role that interdisciplinary research and applications centers might play in enhancing the University’s national reputation; the technology needed to support the curriculum across departments; and proposals generated by individual faculty and departments for the creation of new degree programs.<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

In addition, several ad hoc task forces are studying: the structure and governance of the undergraduate programs, with an eye toward the creation of an identifiable Naropa Undergraduate College, a faculty to support the College in its efforts to implement the cross-departmental dimensions of the curricular arc, and a revised job description for the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education; the desirability and feasibility of the University offering study abroad programs in ways that appeal to our own students and are not dependent on enrollments from outside students; the desirability of changing the BFA in Performance to a BA, with possible collaboration of acting, dance and music faculty in a new bachelor’s program; and additions to the curriculum in such areas as Business and Entrepreneurship (labeled the “Heart to Work” Initiative), Communication and Media Studies, and Gender and Women’s Studies. Finally, the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Chair of Environmental Studies are heading teams examining ways of better representing the University’s commitments to, respectively, diversity and sustainability in the curriculum. Finally, the crucial role of the Dean of Students and the staff of the Office of Student Affairs should be noted here. A model of greater coordination between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, and of shared responsibility for the unfolding of the curricular arc, is called for.

Thus, there is much work that Academic Affairs is coordinating, and future reports, white papers and installments of the Academic Plan will address the additional topics mentioned above that will ensure Naropa University’s ability to “deliver distinction with excellence.”

## **7. Summary**

---

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> A fourth Chairs Council working group has also been constituted. This group is studying the student satisfaction data; its findings and perspective are included in the current document.

Academic Plan – Part I provides an initial response to the call in the Strategic Plan for the University to articulate the distinctive purpose and outcomes of a Naropa education. This Plan sets out a course for curriculum revision, and is also intended to be used by the Office of Admission and the Office of Marketing and Communication on branding, marketing and recruitment for the University. The Plan aims to continue the thirty-plus years’ unfolding of the founder’s vision for Naropa University, at the same time that it reckons with contemporary thinking in higher education and alumni and student perspective generated during the strategic planning process.

Academic Plan – Part I sets out a curricular arc, a set of outcomes for a Naropa education that is simultaneously held in common by all degree programs and unfolded distinctly by graduate and undergraduate programs. The curricular arc is developmental in nature; it charts the learning experiences and outcomes of a Naropa education at multiple points in a student’s journey.

Finally, it is expected that the Office of Academic Affairs will collaborate with an implementation team established by the faculty governance process to monitor departmental efforts in breathing life into this Academic Plan.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ven. Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche. “Welcoming Remarks.” Presented to the First Naropa Institute Convocation, Boulder, CO, June 10, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Reed Bye. “The Founding Vision of Naropa University.” In F. Midal (Ed.), *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa*. Boston: Shambhala Press, 2005, p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> Ann Hunter. “The Legacy of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche at Naropa University: An Overview and Resource Guide.” Allen Ginsberg Library, Naropa University, n.d., pp. 23-24

<sup>6</sup> Ven. Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche. “Why Buddhism in America?” Public talk to the Naropa Institute, Boulder, CO, Summer 1980.

<sup>7</sup> Fabrice Midal. “Rethinking Education.” Chapter in his: *Chögyam Trungpa: His Life and Vision*. Boston: Shambhala Press, 2004, p. 253.

<sup>8</sup> Trungpa, 1974.

<sup>9</sup> Bye. *Ibid.* pp. 150-151.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>11</sup> Bye. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>14</sup> National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America’s Promise. *College Learning for the New Global Century*. Washington, DC: AACU, 2007, pp. 1-2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> George D. Kuh. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Burggraf. Work in progress.

**“BA UNDERGRADUATE CONTEXT”**

(#   1   ) **Outcome:**

Students will be able to demonstrate key capacities of critical thinking – including holding multiple perspectives, analyzing patterns, and understanding complex systems.

**Through-line experience/activity/major assignment/educational offering**

<b>Introductory</b>	→	<b>Intermediate</b>	→	<b>Capstone</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Intro Core Seminar that overtly emphasizes training in these skills</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Majors identify and select preliminary course to re-emphasize and deepen discipline</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Senior Project/Thesis specifically address these skills among others</li></ul>

**Through-line (progression) of educational outcome**

<b>Introductory</b>		<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Capstone</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Write a paper that demonstrates an ability to analyze a complex argument and offer ones own view</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Write a paper that addresses a complex system drawing on multiple sources to analyze and synthesize</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Coming to Voice” and original thinking in a field of inquiry in which a student demonstrates a depth of understanding of multiple sources and perspectives</li></ul>