

**CURRICULUM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE VISAYAS STATE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE:  
SOME INSIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES <sup>1/</sup>**

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**Introduction**

For over two decades, the Visayas State College of Agriculture, (ViSCA) has done its significant share in curriculum planning and development. The approach to planning and development is highly participative. This paper has drawn insights from the writer's experiences as the chairman of the College Curriculum Committee.

The term curriculum originally comes from a Latin root which means *race-course*, thus, the school curriculum based on this concept is a *race to be run, a series of obstacles or subjects to be passed* (Marsh and Stafford, 1988). But change is very dynamic in that over the years the term curriculum has assumed a number of meanings with corresponding problems. Marsh and Stafford (1988) identified and compiled them, as follows:

Curriculum Definition	Corresponding Problems
1. Disciplined study of permanent subjects, such as grammar, reading, math, etc.	1. Does the state of knowledge change? If so, shouldn't also be reflected in the curriculum?
2. All the experiences the learner has under the guidance of the school.	2. Do all experiences (planned or unplanned) count as curriculum? Which of the experiences are unique to the school?
3. All planned and learning outcomes for which the school is responsible.	3. Is it possible for teachers to separate means from outcomes? Does it exclude unplanned but acted experiences?
4. An event to which the various elements of the environment (physical, social, psychological) make a curriculum?	4. Is it manageable to consider all these elements? Does it create a static image and downplay the processes (in some cases hidden curriculum aspects)?

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It is not our task to dispute all the aforementioned definitions, but rather how these definitions contribute to the developmental processes in curriculum planning. Nevertheless, there are three significant things that we ought to learn about curriculum, according to Marsh and Stafford. First, the term curriculum subsumes "syllabus" which is typically a listing of contents to be examined and analyzed. Second, a curriculum involves some conscious planning. Third, it is unnecessary and undesirable to separate curriculum from instruction: curriculum comprises the structured series of intended learning outcomes, while instruction is the interaction of students with these learning outcomes.

Contextual variations in the approach to curriculum planning and development are highly possible and can be experienced in different school settings. ViSCA, for instance, has its share with this kind of academic exercise.

### Some Insights and Experiences on Curriculum Planning and Development in ViSCA

The curriculum planning activities of the Visayas State College of Agriculture (ViSCA) involves practically all staff, namely: Faculty Members, the Department Curriculum Committee, the College Curriculum Committee, the Executive Committee, the Academic Council, the Board of Trustees, and finally, the Department of Budget and Management. Each of them has its own specific functions and responsibilities in relation to curriculum development activities (Figure 1).

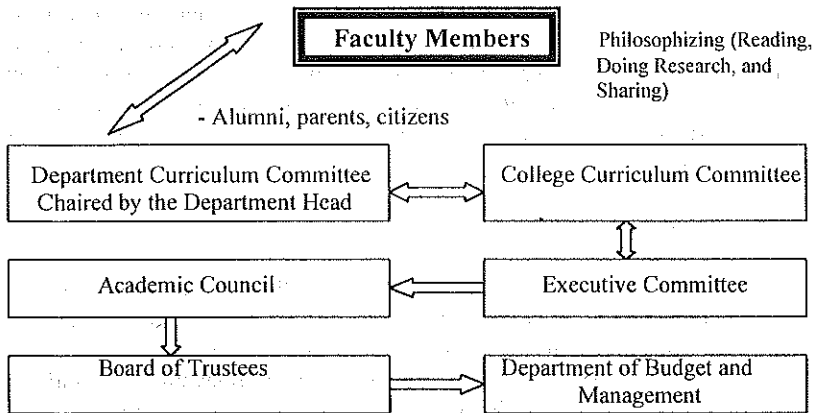


Figure 1. The Curriculum Planning Flow Chart of the Visayas State College of Agriculture

## **The Faculty Members**

There are fourteen academic departments of the college and each has its own faculty line-up. The academic departments, through their faculty members, can propose any new curriculum program, revisions of the college existing curricular offerings, and additional major fields to the existing academic programs.

The faculty members, convening as a group, usually engage in philosophizing the proposed academic curriculum. They do a lot of readings, conduct survey research, and discuss issues related to the proposed curriculum.

It should be noted that any curriculum matter to be proposed does not come out of the blue. It will go through a series of interactions or discussions among the faculty members of a particular department. Thus, the plan to offer a new curriculum program begins with the teaching staff who have in mind the major thrust of the college. Usually, they do a lot of readings related to the proposed curriculum program and conduct surveys before coming up a curriculum proposal. Like other human beings, ViSCA faculty members react to situations not only intellectually but also emotionally. This is perhaps the reason for working hard during the initial stage of curriculum planning activities.

## **The Department Curriculum Committee**

Three or five faculty members comprise the Department Curriculum Committee, chaired by the Department Chairman. They are responsible for coming up a curriculum proposal as a result of their concerted planning and efforts. The curriculum proposal is subjected to thorough discussions by among themselves and it is then revised with the supervision of the department head. Enriched with data gathered and interviews with possible end-users of the curriculum, the proposal is then finalized and forwarded to the College Curriculum Committee for comments and appropriate action.

## **The College Curriculum Committee**

The college-wide committee is composed of the Director of Instruction and selected senior faculty members that take charge of refining further the curriculum proposal. Among its functions are as follows: 1) to assist the Vice-President for Academic Affairs in formulating effective and relevant undergraduate curriculum programs; and 2) to review and recommend proposals for adoption, revisions, or improvement of the different undergraduate curricula offered in the college.

The committee members sometimes meet with the proponents of the curriculum proposal to iron out issues which are either for inclusion or deletion. It is at this time also that the proponents defend their proposal. It is possible that the college curriculum committee, after its series of meetings, returns the proposal to the department curriculum committee for revisions. After all suggestions are taken, the college curriculum committee now makes its final revision of the proposal and then submit it to the next higher body, the Executive Committee.

### **The Executive Committee**

This committee is chaired by the College President. Its membership consists of all academic department heads, center directors and selected administrative division heads. One of its functions is to examine the curriculum proposals submitted to that committee. The members of the committee also make comments and suggestions for improving whatever proposals are tabled for discussion. If there are drastic revisions, said proposals will be returned to the College Curriculum Committee for review and considerations. If none, the proposals will be forwarded to the Academic Council for further comments or deliberations.

### **The Academic Council**

The Academic Council, which is composed of faculty members with at least having an academic rank of assistant professor, is the highest academic body that approves all curriculum proposals and recommends them to the Board of Trustees for approval. It is in the Academic Council that a given proposal is debated upon by its members. In the event that the proposal can not be acted upon favorably, it is returned to the Executive Committee or to the College Curriculum Committee for further refinement. If acted upon favorably, all the comments of the academic council members will be incorporated in the proposal prior to its submission to the Board of Trustees for final action.

### **The Board of Trustees (BOT)**

The Board of Trustees is the highest policy-making body of the college that approves all curriculum proposals before they are to be implemented. Otherwise, any new academic curriculum program operating without approval from the Board of Trustees is considered "*illegal*." However, before any new academic program is implemented by the college, there is still another government body (the DBM) that should be respected in terms of financial support to the program.

The Board comprises the following: a) The Chair of the Commission of Higher Education or his/her representative; b) The ViSCA College President; c) The Regional Director of the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA); d) The Chairman of the Commission on Education of the Lower House, or his permanent representative; e) The Chairman of the Commission on Education of the Upper House, or his permanent representative; f) Two prominent citizens of the region; g) The President of the ViSCA Alumni Association; h) The President of the ViSCA Faculty Association; and j) The President of the ViSCA College Supreme Student Council. The Board convenes once in three months or four times a year. It approves all proposals and other related matters submitted for appropriate action.

### **The Department of Budget and Management**

The Budget and Management Office shall be consulted before a new curriculum program is offered on matters pertaining to the budgetary allocation for new professors and administrative personnel to be hired as well as laboratory supplies and library references to be purchased. If the college insists on offering any curriculum program without the proper clearance from said office, it shall bear the burden of non-financial support and shall be resourceful enough to answer for the needs of the new program. In brief, the DBM does not assure any budgetary allocation for the implementation of the new academic curriculum program if it does not approve it.

### **Inclusion of Local Knowledge and Bio-diversity Conservation Concepts in the Curriculum: An Example**

The curriculum planning flow chart begins with the participation of the teaching staff and also ends with the teaching staff through their membership in the College Academic Council. There are two possible processes on how the concepts of bio-diversity conservation and local knowledge can be included in the curriculum offerings of the college namely: the integration approach and the mandated approach.

#### ***Integration Approach***

The inclusion of local knowledge and bio-diversity concepts begins with the brainstorming of the teaching staff, the idea of which may come from any of the fourteen academic departments. After its discussion among the staff, the matter through a written proposal is elevated to the Office of the Director of

Instruction, which in turn, endorses it to the Executive Committee after that office has made some comments or suggestions. If everything goes well, it reaches the academic council for further discussion and approval. Should it be approved, the concepts are integrated in the curriculum, either in the forestry curriculum or in the agricultural science curriculum. The concepts can be integrated in the following subjects: Farming System, Soil Management, Crop Production, and Ecology.

### ***Mandated Approach***

The indigenous knowledge and bio-diversity concepts are integrated in the curriculum through the mandated approach, that is, the Commission on Higher Education may issue a memorandum to all higher educational institutions ordering the inclusion of the aforementioned concepts in the college curriculum. Although mandated for inclusion and integration in the curriculum, series of discussions still ensue from the department level to the academic council. The inclusion is specified for which subject areas the two concepts can be integrated.

### **Problems Encountered and Their Suggested Solutions**

Any cooperative activity can not escape from experiencing problems which are treated as enhancements rather than obstacles to achieving success in the curriculum-making endeavor. These problems may serve as eye-openers for improving the flow of activities in curriculum planning and development in the college.

The first problem is related to the time and energy of faculty members. Any curriculum work in the college always involves and solicits the expertise and attention of the teachers. The teachers' pressures in the classroom through their teaching loads make them difficult to give adequate attention to the demands of their curriculum involvement. The series of curriculum meetings may steal the time which is supposedly devoted to classroom responsibilities. Sometimes, curriculum meetings will be conducted during evenings. To solve this problem, curriculum sessions are arranged in advance to give time for teachers involved to realign their assignments and to prepare for advanced make-up classes. Although this sometimes meets opposition, it has been solved, nevertheless, through getting the individual class schedules of all involved in the curriculum planning program. In that way, conflicts of schedules for meetings can be properly arranged. Teachers are also allowed to hold night classes, with permission from the office of the Director of Instruction, in order to make-up their classroom absences. Thus, students' classes are not considerably affected if those involved in curriculum meetings will be informed ahead of time.

Then, there is the problem of giving credit points for those involved in the curriculum development committees of the college. There are guidelines in this regard, but they are being considered for review to accommodate some questions regarding the points given to committee assignment.

The third problem pertains to the budgetary allocation of the proposed curriculum program. In the event that it is approved, the financial support for the program is to be resolved. If it does not get any budget at all from the DBM for new faculty members to be hired and the laboratory supplies and equipment to be purchased, the implementation of the new approved curriculum program becomes a burden to the college administration. To overcome this problem, the approved curriculum program is shelved in the meantime, pending assurance of financial support from the DBM.

Finally, one should contend with the problem on the timeliness and relevance of the new approved curricular programs. After they are implemented, societal changes are fast-taking place enough to declare all programs irrelevant and therefore are subject to another round of reviews and revisions. If this happens, there can be another series of curriculum meetings to be done to update existing curriculum programs with newer trends and approaches.

### **Concluding Statement**

Curriculum planning in ViSCA is a cooperative endeavor which uses the participatory approach to accomplish a program goal. Every staff is involved from the initial inception to the implementation stage. Problems crop up in the curriculum development process; nevertheless, they are treated not as barriers but as challenges and enhancers for the effective implementation of any approved curricular proposal.

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