



DESIGNING THE SCHOOL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Jacqueline Murray,

Director First Year Seminar Program

Professor, Department of History

University of Guelph

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WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOU BEFORE WE TALK ABOUT THE SCHOOL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?



I'm so happy to have the position as director of the first-year seminar program because it lets me do administration and lets me teach using enquiry-based learning. I work across the campus with faculty from every college and every program, just as the students are from every college and every program. I've come to specific ideas about what are the most effective ways to educate students or to help them educate themselves. Also I have a belief that disciplines are over, they were the product of the 19th century and we need to be providing students with an opportunity to have a more integrated and multi-disciplinary education. It is only multi-disciplinary perspectives that can deal with the complex situations in today's world: climate change, hunger, and intolerance, human rights are not going to be solved by any one area. Increasingly, just to be a citizen we need to know about science and its implications; even if we are not scientists we have to understand these things.

SCHOOL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

University of Guelph

Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1G 2W1

www.schoolforcivilsociety.ca

519.824.4120 x 56096



[sfcivilsociety](https://twitter.com/sfcivilsociety)

civilsociety@uoguelph.ca

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE SCHOOL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?



I see it as a place where there are no departments whatsoever and it is an integrated school. It's a community that reflects complexities and brings with it almost a think tank feel. It's absolutely possible to bring that kind of think tank feel to introductory levels of education. I see a porousness to this school where there is movement between the students and faculty and civil society – they move back and forth and flow into each other – it's a place where the faculty are working with the communities of the world. So it could be anywhere. And this is true for the students too. The world could be their classroom. Perhaps they all could have internships or volunteer placements related to their degree but giving them that practical component so they can see how theory is applied and they return with lived experience that then informs their academic experience. It becomes a flow between the academic and the practical, between the academy and civil society that is real and meaningful.

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WHAT DO YOU SEE BEING THE BIG TRENDS OVER THE NEXT 10 OR 20 YEARS THAT WILL INFLUENCE THE SCHOOL?



A lot of the trends right now in educational pedagogy are going to be increasingly important. More and more people are going to challenge our traditional organization of five half courses every semester, completed in four years, and every course worth half a credit: it is a straightjacket that hobbles real education. There's going to be increasingly a move away from content delivery. There is absolutely no point to have a professor in a large lecture hall lecturing students from slides that are posted on the web. That's a pedagogy from the 13th century, when the prof alone had the book and since nobody else did they hung on his every word. Well, now everyone's not only got the book, they've got the internet, they've got Wikipedia. They don't need lectures. Lectures are out. They need to learn how to deal with information, how to analyze it.

Increasingly it's going to be active student-centred learning. Some of it might be like we offer now, in the third and fourth year, where a student pursues an independent study project of some description. Maybe that will be all a student does in a semester, for example. Endless busy work that occupies so much of students' time now would be less. Students are perpetually busy doing hundreds of little quizzes and three midterms in a semester and it is bizarre to me. How do you get three midterms? As faculty, we complain that we don't have time to think. This system is going to modify so that students will also have time to think.

We can develop learner-centered courses that give the students the opportunity to become empowered and to become autonomous learners and to take control of their own learning because they actually have a chance to love what they are

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doing. Most of what our students currently do is superficial. Deep education is when they are immersed in what they are doing and they really learn. Instead of skimming over the surface of scads of information they can drill down deeply into complex questions.

If we can promise deep education, along with reading, writing and arithmetic, at the end I think the difficulties of change will be far greater internally than they will be externally. There's been a kind of a seepage across the university of the things that used to worry the administrators. People cling more tightly to what they have. In the changes in the last two decades almost everybody, every area of the university, has been threatened in some way or another, their discipline, their department down sized, their class sizes raised. I think to get universities to move beyond wanting to give degrees that look like degrees from Fribourg in 1890 is going to be a challenge. It will be so important to affirm that change does not mean worse.

IF THIS WAS 20 YEARS FROM NOW AND THE SCHOOL IS SUCCESSFUL, WHAT DO YOU THINK IT WILL HAVE DONE?



It has reinvented undergraduate education and it has graduated people who have gone out and become leaders because of the quality of the education and their ability to move through different contexts and different cultures, to bring an intellectual openness along with critical acumen. The atmosphere has engendered exciting, interesting, crosscutting research that has provided breakthroughs in how different issues of critical global importance are understood: contributions to global change, contributions to hunger, and contributions to human rights and to social tolerance. The faculty who are attached to this school think in these same integrated ways. They bring the same openness and the same critical acumen as they inculcate in their students.

WHAT OBSTACLES MIGHT HAPPEN ALONG THE WAY?



I was thinking the faculty might be frustrated at first by the structural changes and uncomfortable if there were not immediate evidence that these innovations were working. If there didn't seem to be any pay back, or there was external criticism about how the school was new and trendy and what is it really doing. When you try something new one of the first things that happens when there's a blip is you want to go back. There's a kind of failure of heart borne from uncertainty. But the students will believe in it and won't permit it to change because the results for them are far more immediate and perceptible.

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