General Education Review Committee

Report

April 11, 2007

Committee Members:
William Felice, Chair
Anne J Cox
Barney Hartston

Table of Contents

Part One: Eckerd College and the National Debate on General Education

I. The "Ruling Ideas" of General Education at Eckerd College

The Association of American Colleges (AAC) asserts that a strong general education (GE) program reflects the central educational values and commitments of the institution as a whole. Schools with well-built programs are very clear on the "Ruling Idea" or "common aim" which the GE program intends to realize. The AAC also notes that the absence of clarity, the inclusion of too many purposes, or too many compromises in the design makes effective implementation of a GE program very difficult.[1] GE defines the essence of a liberal arts college, providing its overarching intellectual framework, purpose and goals.

Harvard President Derek Bok describes the common aim of GE as the attempt colleges make "to awaken intellectual interests and help undergraduates comprehend the world and their place in it with a greater breadth of understanding than they could achieve by concentrating on a single discipline or special field of study."[2]

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum calls on colleges and universities committed to the liberal arts to focus their GE curriculum on the development of the following three abilities: 1) the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's own traditions—what Socrates called the examined life; 2) the ability to think of oneself as what Stoic philosophers called a "citizen of the world"; and 3) the ability to develop a "narrative imagination," which is the ability to try to understand what it might be like to experience life from a position other than one's own.[3]

Many versions of GE have been taught over the years at Eckerd College with titles ranging from "Western Civilization and Its Christian Heritage," "Inquiry and Human Nature," "Modes of Learning," "Values and the Search for Spirit," "Christian Faith and the Great Issues," "Western Heritage One and Two," and "Western Heritage in a Global Context" (WHGC) combined with "Quest for Meaning" (QFM). However, throughout all of these variations, there has been a consistent "ruling idea" or "common aim" in the GE program at our school. To a large extent, the underlying philosophy of GE at Eckerd attempts to embrace the principles of breadth of understanding and critical examination promoted by Bok and Nussbaum.

We find two central "ruling ideas" guiding the Eckerd College GE program from its founding under the leadership of Dean John Bevan to the current period under the guidance of Dean Lloyd Chapin.[4] The two core "ruling ideas" are: (1) the importance of a common educational experience based on the centrality of the unification of

---

[1] Association of American Colleges, "Strong Foundations: Twelve Principles for Effective General Education Programs," 1994.

[2] Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should be Learning More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 256.

[3] Martha Nussbaum, "Foreword," in *Alive at the Core: Exemplary Approaches to General Education in the Humanities*, ed. Michael Nelson and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), xiv.

[4] See Lloyd W. Chapin, "The Core Curriculum at Eckerd College," in *Alive at the Core*, 96-122.

knowledge; and (2) the importance of a values-based education to build moral character and good citizenship. These two core principles embody our institutional mission.

In 1945, Harvard published *General Education in a Free Society*, known as the "Red Book" because of the color of its binding. In 2007, the Red Book is arguably still the most influential study of the liberal arts in the US. This prominent study argues for both of the goals upon which Eckerd has built its GE program—the unification of knowledge and a values-based education. The Red Book, for example, states: "The heart of the problem of a general education is the continuance of the liberal and humane tradition. Neither the mere acquisition of information nor the development of special skills and talents can give the broad basis of understanding which is essential if our civilization is to be preserved…Unless the educational process includes *at each level of maturity* some continuing contact with those fields in which value judgments are of prime importance, it must fall far short of the ideal."[5]

A. The Unification of Knowledge

> **"Ruling Ideas" of GE at Eckerd College:**
> - *Unification of Knowledge*
> - *Values-Based Education*

The first "ruling idea" is to expose our students to the **"unification of knowledge"** and provide a common educational experience for students regardless of their field of specialization. John Bevan, the founding dean of faculty who played a key role in the development of the curriculum wrote, "Underlying the design of the core program is the conviction that knowledge is unified and that at the heart of the academic experience there should be a unified, rather than departmentalized, approach to understanding."[6] Dean Chapin notes that "the inclusion of subject matter from the humanities, the arts, and the social and natural sciences did recognize that human perspectives of reality are necessarily mediated by different methodologies and that no one perspective can be taken as absolute." Chapin also acknowledges that this commitment to the unification of knowledge found expression not only in the required participation of all students but also in the expectation that every faculty member would also participate and contribute to GE.[7]

The college's commitment to the "unification of knowledge" is clear in the Eckerd College Catalogue, which states: "We are vitally concerned with the development of *whole* persons and therefore encourage the intellectual, spiritual, cultural, social, emotional and physical growth of the student…the Eckerd experience is designed to assist students to go beyond the limitations imposed by ignorance, narrowness, conformity, self-centeredness, and irresponsibility. Our aims are to help individuals achieve excellence in thought and conduct and to spark their imagination about future possibilities."[8]

---

[5] Quoted in Harry R. Lewis, *Excellence Without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* (N.Y.: Public Affairs, 2006), 53.

[6] John Bevan, "Florida Presbyterian College: New Adventure in Education," in *Experimental Colleges*, ed. W.H. Stickler (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1964), 100. Also quoted in Chapin, "The Core Curriculum," 99.

[7] Chapin, "The Core Curriculum," 99, 100.

[8] Eckerd College, *2006-2008 Catalog*, July 2006, 2.

GE is designed to introduce our students to the major approaches to knowledge essential to undergraduate education. Students should be educated in the different kinds of knowledge within the liberal arts and the forms of inquiry and means of analysis in these areas. The GE curriculum seeks to explore different methodologies toward knowledge within the humanities, arts, social sciences, and natural sciences, exploring how analysis in each area is acquired and used and its overall value.

Through a commitment to the "unification of knowledge," the GE program attempts to articulate what is most important to know and to teach students. We attempt to teach a body of common knowledge drawn from the world's major civilizations and provide a common educational experience for all Eckerd students based on humanity's shared values, shared knowledge, and shared aspirations.

Associate Dean Suzan Harrison articulates this goal as follows: "To acquire a broad base of knowledge about one's own culture and its interactions with other civilizations and cultures; that is, to gain at least some acquaintance with many fields of human inquiry: science, literature, religion and philosophy, the arts, social relationships and human behavior."[9] The idea of the "unification of knowledge" can be seen in the current WHGC curriculum which combines a study of some of the classic texts (or "great books")—Plato, Aristotle, Darwin, Marx, Mencius, the Qur'an and so on, with an interdisciplinary approach across the major fields of the liberal arts (humanities, arts, social science, natural science).

B. A Values-Based Education

The second "ruling idea" is to provide a **"values-based education."** Bevan articulated this goal as follows: "to equip the student for the formation and articulation of informed, independent, responsible judgments of value." This values based-education was not to indoctrinate in the Christian faith but, as stated in the original objectives to the core course at Florida Presbyterian College, "to challenge students to think through social, economic, and political issues in the light of their own personal value systems."[10] As Dean Chapin wrote: "The focus on equipping students to make and explain informed value judgments enabled the college to retain the traditional liberal arts goal of strengthening moral character while maintaining the important distinction between education and indoctrination."[11]

Eckerd College grew from a religious tradition that promoted the idea that an educated society was critical for resisting political and religious tyranny. "These Presbyterian founders built the college on the foundational conviction that truth, in its innumerable forms and expressions, holds the power to set humanity free from oppressive ideas and practices. This conviction is the heart and soul of a liberal arts education."[12] The "liberal" in "liberal arts" and "liberal education" means free—freedom.

---

[9] Suzan Harrison, "WHGC Syllabus 2006-07," iii.
[10] Bevan, "Florida Presbyterian College," 100.
[11] Chapin, "The Core Curriculum," 101.
[12] Eckerd College, *2006-2008 Catalog*, July 2006, 2.

Eckerd College is thus a part of the liberal arts tradition in America based on "human freedom, and the capacity of education to free the mind and ennoble the soul."[13]

An Eckerd College values-based education then is not indoctrination of a dogma, but rather an affirmation of the idea that "truth" has "innumerable forms and expressions." The goal is to equip students with the ability to "make and explain informed value judgments." We believe that it is possible to engage in this undertaking without crossing the line into unacceptable indoctrination or proselytization. The goal of GE is to teach ethical and moral reasoning and prepare our students to be enlightened citizens. It is possible to do this without instructors imposing their personal ideologies, religious beliefs, or policy preferences on their students.

Thinking about values cuts across the entire GE curriculum, from the Arts to the Sciences. The "Red Book" notes the importance of including "values" in a natural science program: "[Although in] the natural sciences facts are studied in abstraction from values…this separation, while pragmatically valid, leads to disaster if treated as final. Values are rooted in facts; and human ideals are somehow a part of nature."[14]

President Don Eastman has defined the five core values of Eckerd College as residential, global, spiritual, environmental and personal. These five areas provide the base to the "value-based" education at our school and in our GE program. As President Eastman stated: "These are the values of Eckerd College. They may be, in the intensity of their combination here in this place unique. These are values, we believe that in this 21st Century of the Common Era, engender freedom…Eckerd College's mission, let me say again, is to teach its students to think, to imagine and to believe, in order for them to live as free men and women."[15]

II. A Liberal Arts Education at Eckerd College

A liberal arts education, according to the former President of Brown University Vartan Gregorian, should be "designed overall to enhance student's powers of rational analysis, intellectual precision, independent judgment, and mental adaptability."[16] Carol Schneider, the President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), argues that the many classic descriptions of a liberal education collectively point to the importance of helping students develop the following:

- "Analytical, communication, and integrative capacities;
- Problem-solving, intercultural, and collaborative abilities;
- Scientific, technological, and quantitative competence;
- Cross-cultural, aesthetic, and historical knowledge;
- Ethical and civic engagement and responsibility; and
- Preparation for work in a dynamic and global economy."[17]

---

[13] Lewis, *Excellence Without a Soul*, 60.
[14] Quoted in Lewis, *Excellence Without a Soul*, 55.
[15] Donald R. Eastman III, "42nd Convocation," September 5, 2001.
[16] Vartan Gregorian, "Six Challenges to the American University," in *Declining by Degrees: Higher Education at Risk* (N.Y.: Palgrave, 2005), 80.
[17] Carol G. Schneider, "Liberal Education:Slip-Sliding Away?," in *Declining by Degrees: Higher Education at Risk* (N.Y.: Palgrave, 2005), 65.

Each of these essential areas, defined by Dr. Schneider, are present in the GE program at Eckerd College. Our GE program is made up of the Autumn Term project/course; computation, foreign language, and the College Program Series; the Western Heritage in a Global Context (WHGC) sequence in the first year; one course in each of the four academic areas plus an environmental perspective course and a global perspective course in the second and third years; writing, oral and technology proficiencies; and a Quest for Meaning (QFM) course in the senior year.

As already noted our program is value based and actively promotes social responsibility. As a faculty, we have determined what is important, worthy and valuable for our students to know. We include some texts and courses and not others. We train in certain skills and not others. Students in GE hopefully encounter texts and faculty willing to take a stand and, in fact, go out on a limb on issues central to humanity (justice, truth, power, and so on). Students learn that the GE curriculum is a product of academic discussion and struggle; a living curriculum often passionately achieved.[18]

The educational coherence of our GE program can perhaps be summarized in the following manner. We attempt to cultivate the highest of critical thinking skills, what John Newman (1873) called "the integrative habit of mind,"[19] through a focus on four areas:

- Content/Unification of Knowledge: WHGC and QFM.
- Personal Development/Value-Based Education: WHGC, QFM, and G and E Perspectives
- Skills: Writing Portfolio, Computation (M), Foreign Language, Oral Communication, and Technology Proficiency requirements.
- Ways of Knowing: Academic Area Course Requirements

One question we will explore more below is whether the GE program is successfully focused on the overarching "ruling" ideas and goals. The danger is that by adding too many additional objectives into GE, the entire experience becomes diluted for all involved. In addition, compromises made in the delivery of the program could also water down the focus.

To a significant degree, the current learning objectives are a product of the review of GE by the Eckerd College community from 1993-1995. This review led to important revisions in the curriculum, including (a) a strengthening of the role of the mentor; (b) the "Global Context" was added to the Western Heritage course for first year students, bringing in the views of non-western cultures and thinkers; (c) the "Arts" were given a larger place in the curriculum; (d) new proficiency requirements in oral communications and technology were introduced; and, (e) the universal participation of faculty was affirmed.

Our discussions with the EC faculty in the Fall of 2006 were designed to solicit their input about the implementation of these revisions. Has educational coherence been maintained while striving to achieve all of these objectives? (See "Faculty Feedback on General Education" in Part Three below.)

---

[18] See Association of American Colleges, "Strong Foundations," 1994.

[19] John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (N.Y.: Longman, Green, 1947 [1873]). Quoted in Association of American Colleges, "Strong Foundations," 1994.

III. The National Debate on General Education

It is important to note that for the past century and a half there has not been a common unifying vision of liberal education in America. Following the Civil War, colleges and universities went in a variety of directions. Some advocated total freedom of choice of courses, others a more traditional "great books" approach, while others were more vocationally oriented. "Humanists argued for the primacy of liberal learning and the cultivation of intellect, refinement and judgment. University presidents such as Woodrow Wilson spoke of a commitment to public service. Research-minded faculty were preoccupied with attracting and preparing their successors." These basic divisions remain present in the academy today. [20]

There never was a liberal canon that America's colleges and universities deserted for reasons of political correctness or job training. History does not support such charges. Instead, due to a variety of pressures, schools made different choices about how to pursue a liberal education. Some schools, for example, have abandoned the effort of attempting to articulate what the content of a liberal education should look like at their schools. Instead these schools endorse norms of "breadth" and student "choice," which then often become "goals" in themselves. Unfortunately, this means that the content of the "liberal" education these students receive is often totally unclear. According to Lewis: "When colleges talk about how broadly students will be educated or how much they will enjoy their freedom of choice, they conveniently avoid saying much about what students will learn. And breadth and freedom in academia are like lower taxes in politics—it is hard to be against them, even if they come at the cost of important sacrifices."[21] Eckerd College has consistently rejected this road, and instead since its inception, attempted to define a common general education program for all its students.

Bok summarizes and critiques the four approaches to General Education pursued across the country.[22] These conflicting methodologies are as follows:

- A "Great Books" or "Enduring Texts" approach, which involves a study of original texts from a variety of fields. The idea is that all undergraduates will have studied the same readings and grappled with a set of fundamental questions of human existence and social organization. However, very few colleges elect to go this route. There is no agreement on the list of Great Books and few faculty are trained to teach either the Western classics or non-Western texts. This approach is thus often too vast and can result in intellectual incoherence.

- A "Survey Courses" approach, which involves the creation of sweeping courses in such subjects as the growth of Western Civilization, the evolution of democratic institutions, the development of modern science, the operation of a competitive economy. As Bok notes, the problem here is that "survey

---

[20] Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 22-23.

[21] Lewis, *Excellence Without a Soul*, 24-25.

[22] This summary of the four approaches is from Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 255-280.

courses of this kind can easily become superficial." While covering a vast amount of ground, it is unclear how much learning takes place through these broad overview courses.

- A "Methods of Thought" or "Modes of Inquiry" approach, which involves an exploration of how human beings try to understand the world. Through these courses, students learn the principle methods of inquiry in the liberal arts. While information changes, or becomes outdated, intellectual inquiry remains the same. Critics of this approach argue that it can focus too much on method over content, and that it is too superficial.

- A "Distribution Requirement" approach, which simply requires students to achieve a breadth of study by choosing a number of courses from the arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. This has been called the "smorgasbord approach" to GE. Critics point out that such an approach catering to student "choice" results in a program with no intellectual coherence, no attempt to discuss the "unification of knowledge" or the idea of shared knowledge.

Eckerd College has attempted a "hybrid" approach with elements of all four methodologies present in our GE program. Bok warns of the dangers of such a "hybrid" model to GE. As Bok writes: "[B]orrowing an attractive feature from another model almost always requires giving up something valuable in return…Over time, any system of requirements is likely to erode into incoherence through the gradual accumulation of exceptions and expedient solutions to unanticipated problems. Eventually few members of the faculty remember what the original curriculum was meant to accomplish, and more and more lose interest in the enterprise."[23] At our "listening sessions" with faculty, some felt that our program unfortunately had devolved into intellectual incoherence. Combining aspects of the four approaches into one "hybrid" program has proven difficult. We explore below our understanding of these problems and propose alternative ways forward which can remedy these weaknesses while maintaining our "common aim" and "ruling ideas" of GE at Eckerd College.

---

[23] Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 271.

Four Key Debates

Debates are raging in campuses across America on the purpose and direction of the
liberal arts and general education. We will not attempt to summarize all these issues surrounding the liberal arts. However, there are four key debates that have a direct ramification on our program that we would like to briefly discuss.

- Preparation for Citizenship
- Living with Diversity
- Moral Reasoning
- Living in a More Global Society

A. Preparation for Citizenship

"Preparing citizens" is a distinct program goal of GE at Eckerd College. The goal is stated as follows: "Search for the inner significance, intention, or purpose of his/her own life (personal, professional, and public citizen from the local to the global level)."[24] However, are we adequately engaging our students with the myriad of issues surrounding local and global citizenship?

Harvard University's Task Force on General Education, for example, recently recommended that, in addition to existing requirements, undergraduates at Harvard should also be required to study religious faith and American history. A central motivation for this change was to develop a "unified concept of general education—how to educate our students as responsible human beings and citizens." The report states that GE should not be "a form of pre-professional training," but rather should help students "see how the ideas, facts, and perspectives they are learning in the college come to life in real-world scenarios." The Task Force sees Harvard's role as helping students prepare to be ethical citizens for democracy and a global society.[25]

Beyond Harvard, colleges across the country are debating how to enhance GE toward a more deliberate program of civic education. Bodies of knowledge central to this objective would include introduction to American democracy, political philosophy, basic elements of economics, and knowledge of American engagement in world affairs. College is seen not primarily as a path to a well-paid career, "but as a vital means for achieving better government or stronger communities."[26]

To achieve these types of objectives, the political philosopher Ronald Dworkin recently promoted the idea of a required Contemporary Politics course. The course would take up "issues that are among the most contentious political controversies of the day, including, for example, the case for and against abortion; affirmative action in public education; the role of money in politics; the fairness of the tax system; and the role of civil liberties in shaping and limiting antiterrorist activities." The pedagogical aim is to "instill some sense of the complexity of these issues, some understanding of positions different from those the students are likely to find at home or among friends, and some

---

[24] Eckerd College General Education Program Goals, Fall 2006.

[25] Robin Wilson, "Harvard Panel Proposes Requiring the Study of Religion and American History," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 13, 2006, A49.

[26] Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 184.

idea of what a conscientious and respectful argument over these issues might be like."
The course could include classics of Western political philosophy (from conservative and liberal traditions) and non-Western thinkers on these issues as well. Such a course would be difficult to teach. But think how much it would improve our politics if students had "some understanding of the reasons why a deeply devout person might nevertheless prefer a tolerant secular state to a tolerant religious state, or why an atheist might think that public celebrations of religion were appropriate in a nation where the vast majority of whose members were religious…Or if they had actually read and debated the opinions of Justice Margaret Marshall and Chief Judge Judith Kaye in the Massachusetts and New York gay marriage cases and, if they disagreed with those opinions, had been challenged to say why." [27]

Suggestions like Dworkin's present many political difficulties, including in the selection of texts. It is easier not to attempt such an ambitious project. But, his point is that we "cheat our children inexcusably if education is so remote from political issues that we allow the nation to continue only to masquerade as democratic." John Dewey's link of education and democracy is as relevant today as when he wrote his educational philosophy.[28]

The required service-learning component in our GE program promotes responsible citizenship. But, unfortunately, this community service is too often seen as an alternative to civic education. Too many of our undergraduates who participate in service learning, for example, do not see a connection between homelessness and government policies toward mental health and poverty, or the link between pollution and state environmental programs. This is a failure in our general education program.

To address these concerns, we have proposed in "Model One" a first year common fall syllabus on "Citizenship" (see below starting on page 23) and retaining QFM (see on page 30).

B. Living with Diversity

Colleges across the country attempt to help their students function successfully in a diverse population. Eckerd College is no exception and we face particular challenges. In 1996 race riots exploded in the neighborhoods surrounding our campus. Issues of homophobia and harassment of the gay community have surfaced and women protest against sexual violence at our school. In addition, the lack of ethnic and cultural diversity on the campus limits our students understanding of other ethnicities, cultures and religions. Martin Luther King said it well, when he wrote: "We have inherited a large house, a great world house, in which we have to live together, black and white, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu, a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to

---

[27] Ronald Dworkin, "Three Questions for America," *The New York Review of Books*, September 21, 2006, 26-7.
[28] Dworkin, "Three Questions," 27.

live with each other in peace."[29] For colleges and universities, Bok writes, "The challenge is to determine how to help students learn to live together with understanding and mutual respect while not appearing insensitive to the aggrieved, unfairly accusatory to the majority, or rigidly doctrinaire to the larger society."[30]

Williams College has come up with a new way to study diversity. The old system at Williams required students to take a course about a minority group or a non-Western group. But this requirement became so vague that it lost all meaning. The faculty recently abolished this requirement. In its place are a series of "exploring diversity" courses that aren't just about another culture or group, but must, according to the college's new policy, "include an explicit and critical self-reflection on and immersion in a culture or people." This can be accomplished in a number of ways, including: through a comparative study of cultures and societies; through "cultural immersion," which includes study abroad or through foreign language courses that "explicitly engage in the self-conscious awareness of cultural and societal differences, traditions, and customs;" through "critical theorization" in which students explore the ways scholars analyze cross-cultural interaction and so on.[31]

The point at Williams is to shift "the goal away from learning some facts about another group to learning to understand other people's ideas and approach to life." The idea is not to agree with groups, but to understand them. Prof. Edward Burger, Chair of the Committee on Education Policy at Williams, said, for example, that a course might qualify that explored the antebellum South in which students would learn why white farmers might have backed the Confederate cause. He believes that the "empathy" component is critical today. "When we hear that halfway around the world, people are burning down stores because of cartoons of Muhammad, we need to be able to do more than think that these people are wacky," Burger said. Students can disagree with these views, but they need some basis for understanding.[32]

Diversity, as a central value of GE at Eckerd College, is defined below as: An investigation into society and culture and the ability to place one's own cultural traditions in a broader human context demonstrating knowledge of the range of diversity in traditions, history, and values. Our proposed "citizenship" common syllabus in the Model One first year program (starting on on page 23) attempts to incorporate these approaches to studying diversity in the 21st century, while Model Two (starting on on page 27) allows for more conversations between texts as it retains the "Global Context" of WHGC, but reduces the number of themes covered each semester.

C. Moral Reasoning

"Moral reasoning" is a distinct program goal for GE at Eckerd College. The goal is stated as follows: "Explore issues of purpose, value, and vocation through the lens of various religious and ethical traditions and includes a sustained service learning project in

---

[29] Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 167.
[30] Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 75.
[31] Scott Jaschik, "Next Generation Diversity," *Inside Higher Education*, October 27, 2006.
[32] Jaschik, "Next Generation Diversity."

which in-class ideas are translated into action."[33] As already noted above, a key "ruling idea" of our GE program is to provide a "values-based education" to our students. All of our proposals modifying GE maintain the centrality of moral reasoning to our program.

It is interesting to note how moral reasoning is part of a national debate on GE. The issue is often framed in terms of the degree to which ethics and moral reasoning should be a "required" component to a student's education, or merely an "option" for students who are interested. Is it a goal that demands the attention, resources and effort of the entire college? Or, are courses in moral reasoning and ethics provided by scholars in the Humanities all that is needed? Consistently for fifty years, Eckerd College has made moral reasoning a "required" component and resisted arguments based on student "choice." Princeton, on the other hand, allows for "choice" with interested students able to take a course titled "Ethical Thought and Moral Values." Other schools have dropped the "ethics" option or requirement altogether.

There is also no consensus on the best way to "teach" moral reasoning and no unity on what counts as good character. Some question whether it is it really possible to teach ethical thinking in the classroom. Lewis, for example, believes that small group discussions are often not the best forum for raising difficult moral issues "as the requirement for quick answers encourages rote pieties and snappy argumentation and discourages deep thought." Discussions of moral issues can devolve into routine exercises with students offering safe and reliable answers. The brightest students, picking up that a "moral question" is in the works, will unfortunately often engage in intellectualized gamesmanship. For all of these reasons, an effective "value-based" GE programs demands intellectual leadership, adequate resources, and thoughtful pedagogy to succeed.[34]

Studies have shown that young people, our students, are less influenced by parents, churches and other external sources in developing their moral beliefs. For example, Alan Wolfe, after interviewing hundreds of Americans on attitudes towards morality and ethics, wrote the following:

> Contemporary Americans find answers to the perennial questions asked by theologians and moral philosophers, not by conforming to strictures handed down by God or nature, but by considering who they are, what others require, and what consequences follow from acting one way rather than another…The defining characteristic of the moral philosophy of the Americans can therefore be described as the principle of moral freedom. Moral freedom means that individuals should determine for themselves what it means to lead a good and virtuous life.[35]

A GE program can provide students with classic readings ("enduring texts") and thoughtful discussions on moral reasoning to help them sort through this "moral freedom." Professors do not need to proselytize on what they consider virtuous. Rather,

---

[33] Eckerd College General Education Program Goals, Fall 2006.

[34] Lewis, *Excellence Without a Soul*, 98.

[35] Alan Wolfe, *Moral Freedom: The Impossible Idea That Defines the Way We live Now* (N.Y.: Norton Press, 2001), 195. Quoted in Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 150.

the role of the professor is to help the student to arrive at her or his own thoughtful judgments of value and purpose.

Seneca gave us the concept of a "liberal" education in a famous letter he wrote in A.D. 64. An education is truly "liberal" only if it "liberates" the student's mind and encourages the individual to take charge of his or her own thinking. The idea is to guide students to lead a Socratic "examined life," reflective and critical of traditional ways. Such an education helps an individual become fully human, no matter what their social class, gender or ethnic origin. Moral reasoning is thus central to the success of Seneca's vision of a liberal education.[36] Moral reasoning is included in both first year models, but is a key component of QFM.

D. Living in a More Global Society

The "global" program goal of our current GE program is stated as follows: "An encounter with cultures and/or histories whose bases (philosophical, religious, ethical, aesthetic) or world views differ significantly from those of the Western European or North American tradition."[37] This program goal was adopted by the Eckerd College faculty in 1995. The logic for "globalizing" GE was articulated at that time by the Educational Program Review Committee: "We do not expect our students—or our faculty—to master global history or a variety of cultures. Our belief is that the course sequence should focus on the philosophical and cultural foundations of the Euro-American civilization of which the college is a part while at the same time making both students and faculty more aware of some of the important contributions of other major cultures to the increasingly global civilization that constitutes the modern world. An important part of this increased awareness should be an appreciation for similarities and differences in perspective that characterize Euro-American and other cultures."[38] Implementation of this goal was achieved through the Global Perspective and the change in the first year program from "Western Heritage" to WHGC.

General Education programs across the country also "globalized" their curriculums in the 1990's. Two of the more ambitious global programs include Drury University and Hendrix College. Drury University requires all students to complete a minor in "Global Studies 21" (21st century) through a series of courses housed primarily in the Interdisciplinary Studies Center. Students complete courses in foreign languages, world cultures, and globalization. The program is interdisciplinary, with the faculty teaching (and tenured) in the school's Interdisciplinary Center. Drury students are encouraged to study abroad for an extended period (from a month to a year). The core courses and electives in the "Global Studies" minor are designed to teach students the skills and insights needed to be able to "contribute to life in a global community."(See summary of the Drury program below in Part III. A National Review of General Education Programs.)

---

[36] Seneca quoted in Nussbaum, "Foreword," xii-xiii.
[37] Eckerd College General Education Program Goals, Fall 2006.
[38] "Summer 1994 Educational Program Review Committee Report (approved by the Eckerd College faculty, May 3, 1995) 16.

Hendrix College has developed a "Global Awareness" component to their "Odyssey" experience to help students understand and appreciate cultures or environments other than their own. Students at Hendrix are encouraged to engage in learning outside the classroom that broadens their intellectual horizons and deepens their understanding of issues affecting the world today. Hendrix has the financial resources to help students study abroad. Hendrix requires all students to undertake both an immersion component and a reflection component to meet the "Global Awareness" requirement. Students must be exposed to the target culture for an extended period of time, ideally a semester abroad, but minimally a one to two week period of continuous immersion. The reflection component, which may include such things as guided small- and large-group discussions, papers, journals, and oral presentations, generally increases in importance as the length of immersion decreases. For example, a full academic semester abroad would not generally require any supplemental work to qualify for "Global Awareness" credit, whereas a student spending only a single week in a foreign culture or environment would be expected to prepare substantial supplementary work in order for that activity to be recognized as satisfying this requirement.[39]

While the need for a "global education" has perhaps never been so acute, American students are less informed about world affairs than their fellow citizens from older age groups. Furthermore, studies show that U.S. students have less knowledge of world affairs than their counterparts in most other industrialized nations. In a test to determine students' knowledge of international affairs, first year students at American colleges answered only 42 percent of the questions correctly, and scores improved from the 1st year to the senior year by only 10 percent.[40]

While most schools, including Eckerd College, do not have the financial resources to support immersion opportunities (like those at Hendrix College) for students to study abroad, there are many ways to enhance the "global" dimension of a liberal education. Bok, for example, argues that two courses "seem essential enough at present to be prescribed for all students: a basic course on America's role in the world to help equip undergraduates to be reasonably informed citizens and a course on how to understand another culture that prepares them for lives characterized by increasing contact with other societies."[41] Our proposals below are attentive to enhancing these dimensions of a global education.

---

[39] This information on the Hendrix program is taken directly from their website at: http://www.hendrix.edu/odyssey/odyssey.aspx?id=510 (assessed March 10, 2007).

[40] Robert B. Woyach, *Understanding the Global Arena: A Report on the Ohio State Awareness Survey* (1989). Quoted in Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges,* 225-226.

[41] Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 252.

Short List of Substantive Recommendations

Adoption of the 5 Guiding Principles of an Eckerd College Liberal Education:
1.) The Unification of Knowledge
2.) A Values-Based Education
3.) Critical Thinking
4.) Intellectual and Practical Skills
5.) Intellectual Depth and Breadth

First Year and Capstone Models
- New Models for the First Year
- First Year Skills Lab
- Retain QFM with four significant changes
- Remove Required Service Learning Component from the Senior Year

Breadth Requirements and Perspectives
- Institute a Required Service Learning Course/Project
- Strengthen the Science Component in General Education ('N' requirement)
    - A.) Required Science Course with Lab or Experiential Component
    - B.) Interdisciplinary/Team Taught Science Course
- Reexamine Courses that Meet the G/E Perspective Requirement

Writing Proficiency
- More Systematic Guidelines and Training for Writing in the First Year
- Better Coordination and Assessment of Writing Across the Curriculum
- The Creation of Web Resources for Faculty and Students on Plagiarism

Oral Proficiency
- Greater Collaboration between the Rahall Center and the General Faculty
- Make Guidelines, Evaluation Rubrics, and Assignment Ideas Available at the Rahall Website
- Work to Develop a Campus Culture that Values Excellence in Oral Communication

Information Literacy
- Remove the Current Technology Proficiency Requirement
- Institute Systematic Training in Information Literacy during the First Year
- Assign Librarians to Individual First-Year Sections
- Institute Better Training in Information Literacy within Disciplines

Faculty Development
- General Education Faculty Associates Program
- Allow Junior Faculty a WT Release for Auditing First Year Courses
- May College/Retreat
- Rethink "Monday Meetings" for First Year Course

Student Development
- Consider Adopting Student e-Portfolios

Staffing
- Associate Dean of General Education and Academic Innovation
- Reduce student:faculty ratio in the first year program
- Administration Commitment: Significant increase in tenure-track faculty
- Faculty Commitment: Teach in GE every 3-4 years
- Increase in stipends for teaching in the first year program and QFM

Part Two: New Directions for General Education at Eckerd College

I. Guiding Principles of an Eckerd College Liberal Arts Education

The five principles underlining a liberal arts education at Eckerd College are designed to empower students, liberate their minds, and prepare them for citizenship. These principles are infused across the curriculum, in all academic areas and individual disciplines. The first two principles, the unification of knowledge and a values-based education, are the central core objectives of our General Education (GE) program. While the other principles are introduced in the GE courses, it is primarily through the students' entire experience at our school that they gain the exposure and training in these other areas. We call on all disciplines to identify aspects of this framework of principles which they will explicitly include in their majors and programs. The principles are:

1) The Unification of Knowledge

    A key "ruling idea" of our GE program is the "unification of knowledge." Our students are exposed to a variety of different approaches to knowledge within the liberal arts, and they are educated in the forms of inquiry and means of analysis in each of these areas. Central to this process is an investigation of the different methodologies within the humanities, arts, social sciences, and natural sciences, and an exploration of how each of these approaches is useful and valuable. The unification of knowledge is demonstrated when students articulate and apply concepts or constructs from two or more academic areas to personal, academic, professional, or community activities and apply this knowledge to their own intellectual development and to the goals of society.

2) A Values-Based Education

    A second "ruling idea" of our GE program is a values-based education. Our program fosters the development of a sense of ethical standards to equip students to be able to be able to make informed and responsible judgments of value in their personal, academic, and professional endeavors. The values central to a liberal education at Eckerd College are:

    - Global – An encounter with cultures and/or histories whose bases (philosophical, religious, ethical, aesthetic) or world views differ

significantly from those of the Western European or North American tradition.

- Environmental – An opportunity for students to address issues in the environmental realm in such a manner as to enhance their knowledge of the natural world and to make informed value judgments concerning the environmental consequences of personal and social actions.

- Spiritual/Moral Reasoning – An exploration of issues of value and vocation through the lens of various religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions linked to the search for inner significance, intention, and purpose in one's life.

- Citizenship – An examination of how the ideas, facts, and perspectives taught in college come to life in the real world and the conscious linking of education to the role of the informed citizen to protect freedom and democracy. Service-learning, in particular, promotes responsible citizenship.

- Diversity – An investigation into society and culture and the ability to place one's own cultural traditions in a broader human context demonstrating knowledge of the range of diversity in traditions, history, and values.

3) Critical Thinking
Critical thinking involves the careful examination of ideas from multiple perspectives to improve understanding and develop unique and useful opinions worthy of further development. Critical thinking is demonstrated by the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize complex ideas, solve challenging problems, and use knowledge and understanding to raise new questions.

4) Intellectual and Practical Skills
Core intellectual and practical skills include:

- Writing: The ability to communicate effectively in writing, which includes the expression of ideas, opinions, beliefs, and facts to others effectively in a variety of written formats

- Oral communication: The ability to orally communicate effectively,which includes presentations in one-on-one and in small and large group settings

- Information Literacy: The ability to make use of technology and to retrieve, use and evaluate electronic information effectively in pursuit of scholarly activity.

- Foreign Language: A basic knowledge of four skills in a foreign language: listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing including the essential elements of grammar.

- Math/Numerical Data: The ability to utilize and interpret numerical data, to conceptualize in quantitative or abstract symbolic terms, and/or use the methods of statistics.

5) Intellectual Depth and Breadth
Intellectual depth is demonstrated by substantial knowledge in one area, usually the major, but where applicable, in a minor or other concentration of study. Intellectual breadth is demonstrated by the ability to compare and contrast approaches to knowledge in the different Academic Areas (Arts (A), Humanities (H), Social Sciences (S), and Natural Sciences (N)).

II. First Year and Capstone Models

A. The First Year Program

Introduction: The core of our current GE program is the establishment of a common intellectual experience for all students and all faculty. The common syllabus provides the primary vehicle to pursue both "ruling ideas" of GE: the unification of knowledge and a values-based education. Universal "non-expert" teaching provides our students with role models of teachers as exemplary citizens, struggling with the major issues of our time, mature thinkers, and expert readers, aware of current affairs and conversant with the history of ideas. Central to the first year GE program is also skills training in writing, oral communication, and technology. We recommend maintaining a common syllabus, universal teaching, and skills training as critical components to GE. Both of our proposed new GE models include these three

> The First Year Program
>
> Key elements
> - Unification of Knowledge
> - Values-Based
> - Critical Thinking
> - Begin skills training: writing, oral communication, technology
>
> Pedagogy
> - Common Syllabus
> - Universal "Non-expert" Teaching
> - Skills Lab
> - AT
>
> Two Models
> - Model One: AT; Fall—Citizenship Common Syllabus, Spring—First Year Seminar Clusters
> - Model Two: AT, Fall/Spring—Themes (justice, sacred, freedom, nature) with a 70% common syllabus and 30% individualized instruction.

central elements. Both of our proposed models, however, also provide more room for faculty creativity and independence as well as better training and guidance for those who participate. We have sought models for the first year that are unique, yet still consistent with the spirit and traditions of Eckerd College.

Pedagogy:

Common Syllabus

While almost all faculty who participated in the listening sessions acknowledged the need for some alterations in the current course, there was substantial support for a common intellectual experience for all first year students. A general exposure to some of the "classic texts" was also seen by many faculty as an opportunity to build a universal academic experience for the entire Eckerd community. We also note the investigation done by the American Academy for Liberal Education (AALE) of sixty-six liberal arts programs over twenty-five years. The AALE study concluded that there were substantial

benefits to those schools that incorporated a common syllabus including "world classics" into their general education programs. The students, of course, gain exposure to enduring texts which they otherwise may not encounter in their entire college education. But, in addition, the faculty develops into a "learning community," bound together in a campus-wide dialogue facing common intellectual challenges and excitement. We find these arguments in favor of a common syllabus compelling.[42]

Universal Non-Expert Teaching

In 2004 Eckerd College was recognized as an "Institution of Excellence" in the design and execution of our first year program by the Policy Center on the First Year of College (supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts). The report on our program notes the importance of universal "non-expert" teaching at our school. The authors write: "The benefit of the arrangement and the nature by which faculty teach out of their own discipline, particularly with regard to the WHGC course, is that students get to see the faculty struggle throughout the program much as the students themselves struggle. This humanizes and personalizes the role of the instructor, a phenomenon that strengthens the mentor and student relationship."[43]

For fifty years, Eckerd College has struggled with this model of "non-expert" teaching, requiring all professors to teach outside their narrow disciplines and more fully engage the liberal arts. The ethos of our school is to value two forms of teaching and learning. On the one hand, we value the "expert" professor able to instruct students in a particular body of knowledge and field of study, which empowers students in their career goals. On the other hand, we also value the "non-expert" professor willing to engage materials outside her or his discipline, conversant in the history of ideas, aware of current affairs, and reflective about responsible citizenship in the 21st century. We believe that both modes of teaching and learning are important, complementary, and together encourage the best outcomes for students in the liberal arts.[44] We have intentionally folded both modes into the proposed first year programs to allow for more expert teaching in the first year as well as additional support for universal non-expert teaching.

However, this model will only work if the serious staffing problems plaguing GE are addressed. As noted in our summary from the faculty listening sessions, professors from all over campus raised thoughtful criticisms of the impact of staffing shortages on the academic program overall. Our proposals for improving GE depend upon action being taken to hire the necessary full-time, tenured faculty needed to deliver a quality program. We outline these needs in detail below in Section VI. Staffing.

First Year Skills Lab

Rationale: Although faculty in Autumn Term and WHGC are encouraged to work with students on basic skills such as oral proficiency, writing ability, and

---

[42] Anthony Brunello, Michael Chiariello, and J. Scott Lee, *The Wider World of Core Texts and Courses* (Chelsea, Michigan: Sheridan Books, 2004), x.

[43] Stephen W. Schwartz and Michael J. Siegel, "The First Year at Eckerd College," in Betsy Barefoot, et. al. (eds.), *Achieving and Sustaining Institutional Excellence for the First Year of College* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 108.

[44] Professor Julie Empric and Professor Bruce Foltz separately wrote us very useful memos on the history and importance of universal "non-expert" teaching at Eckerd College. This section draws on their helpful reflections.

information literacy, it is often difficult to train students adequately or systematically during class time while still keeping up with course content and other mentoring issues. The "First Year Skills Lab" would take a concept that is growing in popularity at other liberal arts colleges – peer mentoring – and employ it to help students practice fundamental skills that will prepare them to succeed both during and after their college years.

__Details__: To give freshmen a chance to spend additional time on intellectual and practical skills, each first-year fall semester section will have a lab component led by a "peer mentor". The peer mentors may be selected from a variety of sources, but the most promising would be current Junior or Senior Ford Scholars who are among the best students on campus and have already self-selected for their interest in teaching. Additional peer mentors could be added from the honors program, from student activators, or from academically superior students who apply to Student Affairs. If necessary, these "skills lab" leaders might also be drawn from volunteers in ASPEC. Skills lab sections could be held in Tuesday or Thursday afternoon lab times, with two different sections splitting a normal three-hour time slot.

In the skills lab, peer mentors would work with students on a number of tasks, including supplemental discussions and activities based on course material, practice writing assignments and peer editing, oral presentations and speech skills, information literacy exercises, and activities designed to continue freshmen orientation and socialization in the liberal arts college experience.

After their selection as peer mentors, the student lab leaders would be required to attend a teaching workshop during the Autumn Term. This workshop might be conducted by selected Foundations faculty, by an Associate Dean of General Education, or by a combination of writing and communications faculty along with librarians. They would also be encouraged to link up with AT faculty to discuss common expectations, goals, and methods. Finally, the peer mentors could also start to interact with their future student mentees during the Autumn Term, and they would get course credits and/or a stipend for their participation in this program.

Autumn Term

Eckerd faculty and student feedback suggests that Autumn Term is by far the most popular and successful part of our general education program. It seems to be effective as a recruiting tool for prospective students (and their parents), as an orientation period, as a lead-in to Western Heritage, and as a way to create a bond between a freshman cohort and their professor/mentor. Criticisms of Autumn Term tend to focus on either the uneven level of rigor across courses or the fact that students are far too exhausted after three weeks of intensive coursework and extracurricular activities to make a clean start in the fall semester. The general praise for Autumn Term, however, suggests that this format needs only some minor adjustments and not a major overhaul. We therefore recommend that the Director of General Education and Dean of Students continue their efforts to refine Autumn Term assignments and activities, but we would suggest leaving the structure of this academic component as it currently is.

Two First Year Models

Model One: The "Citizenship Course" and Spring Seminar Clusters

With this model, all first year students will take an autumn term course and continue with the same professor through the fall General Education common course on citizenship. In the spring, however, all first year students would sign up for a first year seminar and no longer meet with their AT/Fall class or professor.

- **Autumn Term** – remain as it is
- **Fall Semester** – A common syllabus on "citizenship," universal teaching, and a skills lab.
- **Spring Semester** – Interdisciplinary "First Year Seminar Clusters"

This model is an attempt to be responsive to concerns raised by faculty about the academic quality of the current first year program. At the listening sessions, many faculty, for example, expressed criticisms and frustrations with the lack of depth and rapid pace of the WHGC course. There was a perceived "rush" through the enduring texts and many themes (power, justice, truth, and so on) resulting in a lack of intellectual depth. With a central focus on one theme, citizenship, we hope to address these issues and improve the academic quality of the course overall.

This model also incorporates both the "expert" and "non-expert" teaching models. While all faculty teaching in the first year program would continue to teach the common fall syllabus on citizenship, in the spring each professor would be able to teach more closely to his or her area of expertise in the delivery of the "first year seminar clusters." Our students will then gain from both models of teaching. In the fall, "non-expert" teachers would encourage students to learn from the classic texts and think about what it means to be a responsible citizen of the 21st century. In the spring, the well-grounded "expert" teacher would engage students in how his or her specific discipline approaches a key issue or area of concern.

This model should make it a bit easier for faculty to teach in the first year program. Some faculty expressed frustrations with a whole year of "non-expert" teaching, with momentum and enthusiasm seriously compromised in the second semester. The spring seminar clusters address this issue by allowing faculty to teach in the areas where they have demonstrated expertise and competence.

Fall Semester: "Citizenship"
**Rationale:** Numerous studies have documented and analyzed the decline in civic understanding and responsibility in America since the 1960's.[45] The unpopular war in Vietnam caused many college students and professors to associate patriotism and citizenship with mindless obedience to the state (my country "right or wrong"). The result has been that campuses have shied away from teaching civic responsibility and according

---

[45] See for example: Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

to Derek Bok, neglected "the task of preparing moral human beings and active, enlightened citizens." Bok continues:

> The failure to mount a deliberate program of civic education not only gives students inadequate preparation to participate effectively in government and community. Together with the precarious state of practical ethics, it also leaves undergraduate education largely bereft of a compelling public purpose. Most people today think of college primarily as a stepping-stone to well-paid careers but not as a vital means for achieving better government or stronger communities.[46]

Conservative and liberal think tanks have pointed to a "crisis in citizenship."[47] For example, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute released a study in September 2006 titled "The Coming Crisis in Citizenship: Higher Education's Failure to Teach America's History and Institutions." This study summarized the results of a 60-question, multiple choice test to 14,000 freshmen and seniors at 50 different institutions. The results were startling as the average score among seniors on the test of American history, politics, and economics was 53.2 percent—an F. In addition, seniors scored only 1.5 percentage points higher than first year students.[48]

The subject of citizenship and civic engagement is certainly controversial. Should such a course emphasize rights or duties? Teach national or world citizenship? Encourage loyalty to the government or mobilize students to struggle against oppression of minorities, women, gays, and the poor? Yet, differences of opinion surround all important educational issues and do not justify the unwillingness to engage these critical issues.[49]

The service-learning component of our GE program gives our students an intense experience of civic engagement. Yet, service-learning alone cannot provide an adequate civic education. A fall semester GE course on citizenship can serve to educate students on the role of government and the importance of civic participation in a democracy.

**Details:** The fall semester first year course could explore the concept of "citizenship" both in the United States and globally. Discussions could focus on democracy's "big questions" including issues of inclusion, equality, cooperation, and civility. Students could be asked to consider the construction of self in relation to ideas of governance and explore the ideas and values that influence social contracts for living together. Readings from philosophers, historians, social scientists, poets, playwrights, essayists, natural scientists, and political leaders could guide the inquiry as students consider concepts such as "individualism," "democracy," "social contract," "human nature," and "equality." Students would be encouraged to consider how the circumstances of our lives—especially family, culture, and place—shape our sense of ourselves as citizens. Students would also be asked to consider the ways individual and group rights and responsibilities are negotiated among families, communities, and governments.

---

[46] Bok, _Our Underachieving Colleges,_ 184.

[47] See William A. Galston, "Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education," 4 _Annual Review of Political Science_, 2001.

[48] John Gravois, "Condemned to Repeat It," _The Chronicle of Higher Education_, November 24, 2006, A21.

[49] Bok, _Our Underachieving Colleges,_ 179.

The fundamental goal of this first year general education class would be to help students develop an ethical sensibility that is foundational to cultivating effective and informed global and national citizenship. Students would be engaged with the intellectual tools required for informed and critical civic engagement. The course could review western and eastern ethics and worldviews on the idea of citizenship and the role of the individual in society. The syllabus could be built around the centrality of the integration of knowledge and the key values of Eckerd College. Enduring classic texts from our global heritage could be integrated throughout the syllabus. The citizenship curriculum should explore the different methodologies toward knowledge within the humanities, arts, social sciences and natural sciences and discuss the value of each approach to knowledge in relation to citizenship. The values of Eckerd College (global, environmental, spiritual, citizenship, and diversity) should also be integrated into the syllabus.

A possible organization of topics may include:

The Liberal Arts:
Citizenship and the Liberal Arts: What is a "liberal" education? How are the
      "liberal arts" connected to citizenship?

Humanities:
Citizenship: Traditional and Contemporary Western Ethics
Citizenship: Traditional and Contemporary Eastern Ethics

Social Sciences:
Citizenship in the U.S.
Global Citizenship

Natural Sciences
Citizenship and Scientific Literacy
Environmental Citizenship

Arts:
Citizenship, Democracy and the Arts

Our Individual Experience:
Diversity: what is the "American" experience?
Religion in America

Spring Semester: First-Year Seminar Clusters
    Rationale: Many students and faculty tend to complain that our current WHGC program weakens in the spring semester, when student (and faculty) enthusiasm for the common syllabus and common class cohort begins to wane. As an alternative, faculty might instead be encouraged to create interdisciplinary first-year seminar clusters that are developed by a small group of two or three faculty around a common idea or theme. Although there would be no common spring syllabus (at least outside individual seminar

clusters), and although first year students would be separated from their Autumn Term cohort, there would still be ample opportunity for students to engage in interdisciplinary learning and basic skill development.

__Details:__ In the spring, first year students would be free to select from a range of interdisciplinary seminars. The seminars would be grouped in clusters, and each cluster would focus on a common topic or theme determined by two or three faculty partners – *at least one of whom must come from a different Collegium*. Individual professors would still teach and grade their own sections, and faculty partners would be free to decide the degree to which they would use common readings or syllabi. However, since the primary goal of this "seminar cluster" is interdisciplinary study, each section would be exposed to multiple methodological or theoretical approaches, perhaps with the aid of plenary lectures given by each participating faculty member. Although participating professors would be free to develop their own seminar topics and faculty partnerships, course clusters should resonate with one or more of the major values of Eckerd College (global, environmental, spiritual, etc.).

To give an example of what a first-year seminar cluster might look like, the authors of this report (IRGA/Political Science, Physics, and History) constructed a seminar cluster of our own entitled "Science and Ethics in the Shadow of Hitler". This cluster would be centered on the play "Copenhagen" by Michael Frayn – currently assigned in QFM – which is loosely based on a meeting between the German scientist Werner Heisenberg and the Dutch scientist Niels Bohr during WWII. The play opens up a myriad of issues and problems that each professor in this cluster can approach from a different perspective, including the science behind the Uncertainty Principle and atomic weaponry, the ethics of using science for potentially destructive ends, the meaning of political/personal resistance and collaboration, the manner in which science was particularly distorted to serve National Socialism, and the extent to which authors of fiction may use their artistic and literary license. This faculty triad would develop course syllabi in common (or at least in parallel), and would each give at least one plenary lecture attended by all students in the cluster to introduce readings that come from his or her academic field.

There are, of course, an almost infinite variety of topics or issues that could be conducive for this kind of "interdisciplinary seminar cluster" approach. Some possible combinations:

- "Death and Dying": Biology, Human Development, Religious Studies
- "Drilling for Oil": Economics, Environmental Studies, Marine Science
- "The Mysteries of Love": Psychology, Anthropology, Creative Writing
- "Space Travel in Fact and Fantasy": Spanish, Math, Physics
- "Discovering the Enlightenment": Visual Arts, Chemistry, Philosophy

Because these seminar clusters are designed to be truly interdisciplinary, they will often rely on a discussion format and on a "non-expert" teaching method. Experts, however, will never be far away, and will be available for consultation by both students and other faculty within the cluster.

In addition to coordinating the content of the course, professors in these first-year seminars will also be responsible for the continued development of student skills in writing, oral proficiency, and information literacy. The main writing assignments in all seminars will be research-oriented, and will require the mastery of appropriate research techniques and the proper use of sources and citations. Coordination with librarians, writing faculty, and communications faculty will be key in helping seminar leaders to develop effective assignments and useful guidelines for evaluation.

In sum, these first-year seminars are designed to provide a number of benefits for students, including exposure to interdisciplinary approaches and an opportunity for additional skills training before entry into the major. This format may also be useful for faculty, who will have the opportunity to design unique and innovative courses, to model both expert and non-expert teaching for students in the same course, and to forge links with faculty across campus that could inspire new approaches to their own teaching or research.

Model Two: Themed 70/30 Courses

In this model, all first year students will take an autumn term course and continue with the same professor through the fall and spring WHGC course.

- **Autumn Term** – remain as it is
- **Fall & Spring Semester**- 70/30 WHGC: 70% common syllabus and 30% professor choice. WHGC format with two themes each semester. Skills lab.

However, this course would have more flexibility than the current WHGC course. There would still be a common syllabus for 70% (or so) of the materials. This would be the time when all sections of the course reading and discussing the same materials at the same time, however, 30% of the course readings could be decided by the individual faculty member to fit his or her particular interest in the course. For faculty who do not want to customize the course, there would still be a set of recommended readings for that 30% of the course.

In order to provide the necessary flexibility for this course, this new version of WHGC would only have two themes per semester, but still follow the model of the current WHGC course that puts texts from different places in conversation with each other. This is also designed to address the issues of covering too much material at one time and the complaints of having to teach "in lock-step" while preserving the things that many faculty cited as strengths of the current WHGC: the global nature of the course and the common experience for faculty and students.

The addition of the skills lab using peer-mentors in the fall semester is designed to further ease the burden on faculty in the current WHGC to do everything: teach content as well as writing, oral communication and research skills. This allows the faculty to focus on the course content, whether it is the common core of the course or the individual materials introduced by the instructor.

This model also explicitly incorporates both the "expert" and "non-expert" teaching models. While teaching the common syllabus, the "70" of the "70/30" model,

27

faculty would be classroom discussion facilitators in a "non-expert" mode. However, during the individual faculty designed portion of the course, the "30" of the "70/30", faculty would have the opportunity to go into further depth in an area of expertise.

Dispensing with the rigid nature of the current system to allow for individual flexibility offers the advantage of making it easier for faculty to move from non-expert to expert teaching in the classroom while retaining much of the valuable common experience for students and faculty alike.

Fall Semester: What is Justice? What is Sacred? Focus on only two themes and allow for instructor flexibility: 70/30 model

Spring Semester: What is Freedom? What is Nature? Focus on only two themes and allow for instructor flexibility: 70/30 model

__Rationale:__ The first year program should embody the first two principles of general education: 1) the unification of knowledge and 2) a values-based education. Although this revision of WHGC focuses on these two principles throughout the year, the choice of the two themes for the fall semester is particularly aimed at addressing the question of values. The question of justice, as addressed in classic and enduring texts in Western and non-Western traditions provides a foundation for addressing crucial questions of ethics. Similarly, the nature of the sacred helps to get students to think critically about spiritual/moral reasoning and values. The question of the sacred became a point of contention in the most recent revision of general education at Harvard University.[50] However, since spiritual/moral reasoning is one of the five central values, the question of the sacred fits naturally with Eckerd's goals and aims.

This means that the fall version of the new WHGC no longer addresses the themes of "Journey" and "Truth." An additional reason for eliminating the "Journey" section is that the readings for the "Journey" section of the current WHGC course were most often cited in the listening section as problematic because students had encountered those readings before. This meant that the beginning of the course was not as challenging to students as it could be and faculty reported that students tended to treat the course as a high school class. As for the discarded theme of "truth," some of the readings for that theme could fit into a revised section on "Justice" which would allow some of the same texts to be used in the new course.

---

[50] Interestingly, the October 2006 version of Harvard's general education requirement was primarily a distribution system with the notable exception of two required courses: 1) American government and 2) faith and reason (Wilson, "Harvard Panel", 49). However, the February 2007 report (Report of the Task Force on General Education, Harvard University, Feb 2007, http://www.fas.harvard.edu/curriculum-review/general_education.pdf) replaces these two specific courses with a distribution model that includes a requirement of courses in 1) "The United States and the World" and 2) "Culture and Belief." This report, while acknowledging that "Religion has historically been, and continues to be a force shaping identity and behavior throughout the world" (p. 18 of above report), stopped short of requiring a course on religion. This, then, raises the question of whether Harvard would have chosen to make this change had there not been such a debate on this particular point (see letters to the editor and articles from November 2006 to January 2007 in The Chronicle of Higher Education).

In the spring semester, the emphasis shifts to a more intentional focus on the unification of knowledge. The thematic questions of freedom and nature lend themselves to multi-disciplinary approaches as they currently include readings from across the curriculum. Current readings in "freedom" focus on humanities and social sciences while the current readings in "nature" cross the spectrum from the natural sciences to the creative arts. Certainly some of the readings from the discarded theme, "power," could be used as part of the "freedom" section. Finally, note that in the most recent version of WHGC (06-07), the spring semester has already been truncated to three themes to allow for additional time on the texts.

Details: This new 70/30 WHGC course is then a modest revision of the current course. This course still focuses on thematic questions, still uses classic and enduring texts, and still reflects global concerns. There would be a common syllabus with a reduced number of lectures in common (including the art lectures that provide coherence to the current course). The number of "section days" would be increased for the "30%" part of the course with individual instructor reading assignments for some of those days. The midterm and final exam would have a common core with additional questions to reflect the assignments for the individual "30%" part of the course.

Common texts would be chosen less out of a desire to maintain historical coverage and more for their usefulness in providing groundbreaking or unique views on each course theme. No text would be included, however, without the provision of substantial class time to discuss the cultural/historical context, the major themes, and the contemporary implications of each reading.

In this 70/30 model, an individual faculty member could choose any number of different approaches to the additional section days ("30%" part of the course). For example, during the "What is Justice?" section, a faculty member might decide to focus more on Plato, bring in modern texts with emphasis on environmental justice, or concentrate on ancient legal codes. This could be more closely related to an area of expertise of the faculty member, readings tied back to the Autumn Term course, or a text that the faculty member thinks should be in the course for any number of reasons. Similarly, in the "What is Nature?" portion of the course a faculty member might bring in articles judged to be the best in science writing of that year, engage in field work or do an experiment in class, consider the debate over intelligent design, or connect to the writings of romantic poets. However, for faculty members who do not want to put in their own texts, there would also be a standard syllabus available. Those teaching in the course for the first time might well use the standard syllabus to avoid increasing their own work load and to get a better sense of the course as a whole.

In the listening sessions with students, however, there was concern about uneven expectations in courses with a common syllabus (both WHGC and QFM). There is a danger that this could be even worse in the 70/30 model. To address the issue of variance across sections, the Associate Dean of General Education would need to establish clear guidelines as to the appropriate amount and nature of individual materials that should be added as part of the individual faculty member's 30% of the course. The standard syllabus, available for those who do not want to put individual materials in the course, would provide a model of the appropriate amount of material and help to keep the course expectations as uniform as possible while allowing flexibility to individual faculty.

B. Capstone Course: Quest For Meaning

The Quest for Meaning (QFM) course required of all seniors is one of the most innovative components of the Eckerd College liberal arts program and fits within the highest priorities and goals of the national studies we reviewed on successful general education programs. This capstone course brings all students (from all disciplines) back together one last time to explore the complexity and value of a liberal arts education. Eckerd College has been a national leader in refining this senior year format and challenging our students to reflect on overall "purpose" and "meaning" before graduation.

However, the QFM course is suffering from a lack of commitment from both the administration and the faculty. QFM is too often seen as secondary to WHGC. While most faculty and students we talked to applauded the latest revisions of the QFM curriculum, especially the more rigorous focus on the liberal arts, many lamented the continual change in leadership and the high number of adjuncts teaching the course. Both faculty and students also expressed a desire to move the service-learning component out of QFM (which we address below). It is time for Eckerd to make a basic decision about QFM. If we think this course is an important "capstone" experience for our seniors, then the faculty and the administration have to give the course the commitment, leadership, and backing to make it succeed. If we are not going to provide this, then the course should be eliminated.

We hope that the school can find a way to keep QFM. We think that the course is a critical component of our GE program and, therefore, strongly recommend keeping QFM with four significant changes:

First, for the reasons outlined below, we suggest that the service-learning component of GE no longer be included in QFM. Instead, students would meet a Service Learning Requirement through either a specific service learning course or completion of a service learning portfolio (Section III. A. Required Service Learning Course / Project).

Second, the staffing crisis in QFM must be remedied. For QFM to succeed, it must be taught by full-time faculty. Teaching in the course should be rewarded at the level of WHGC teaching and required for promotion. Unfortunately, QFM is currently viewed as secondary to, and not as important as, the first year program. Students are well aware of this different attitude and it negatively impacts on their feelings toward the course. While undoubtedly there are curriculum issues to correct, the central underlying problem in QFM is the lack of commitment to the course by the administration and the faculty. If this commitment is not forthcoming, the course should be ended. We hope that the funding will be forthcoming to provide the staffing (outlined in section VI. Staffing below) to save this critical component of the GE program.

Third, the 70/30 model (outlined above in first year Model Two) could be considered for QFM, e.g., 70% common syllabus and 30% professor choice. This model provides for a common syllabus, yet allows individual faculty to tailor the course to his or her particular strengths. For faculty who do not want to customize the course, there would still be a set of recommended readings for that 30% of the course. The advantages of incorporating both the "expert" and "non-expert" teaching models in this way have already been described above (see on page 21). Such an approach also opens up an

opportunity for professors, if they choose, to include the students in the final selections of the texts for their section of QFM. Student involvement in finalizing the syllabus could help to improve their loyalty and commitment to the course.

Fourth, we recommend that as often as possible WHGC students be brought back together in the same section for QFM their senior year. Over the last few years, individual professors have taken the initiative to teach QFM to the group of students he or she taught four years earlier in WHGC. The results overall have been very positive. There is an immediate level of trust between the students and the teacher and a good learning environment is thus quickly established. Students also reported to us that they really looked forward to getting back together with the first year classmates. They hoped to see how their classmates had developed and changed and to reconnect with them before graduation.

To keep all sections at the same size, there will be a few students in these classes who were not in the Professor's WHGC class. To avoid the creation of an "in-group" of former WHGC students, Professors have in the past moved quickly to fully integrate everyone into the class. This seemed to work well and these potential problems did not materialize.

**Rationale:** There are few opportunities for undergraduate students to reflect on their education in the liberal arts overall. Our society and culture push young people to specialize and focus on a rewarding career. Our QFM course is designed to create an opening for students to explore the ways in which the liberal arts overall impact on their understanding of self and society. The central purpose of QFM is to provide a time for students to assess how scholars in all the liberal arts (humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and the arts) struggle to find "meaning" in their work and their lives. We intentionally "force" all students to move outside the safety of their disciplines and (for one last time before graduating) struggle with ethics and meaning through the prisms of the different methods of knowing found within the liberal arts.

The QFM course is built around the two "ruling ideas" of GE: the unification of knowledge and the importance of a values-based education. The course begins with a study of ethical theory and faith-based approaches to "meaning." From this foundation, students are then guided through the various academic areas and perspectives, exploring how each area of knowledge contributes to overall understanding and meaning. This "capstone" in the liberal arts is thus purposely designed to help students understand the centrality of the unification of knowledge. It reinforces the idea that the general liberal arts are not just a foundation for specialized learning, but an essential and integrated part of the educational process.

**Details:** As noted, the course begins with readings on ethics and faith to supply students with ways to look at "meaning" and avenues that have helped others with these difficult questions. The syllabus then explores readings on various complex issues that confront humanity along with a few stories (fiction and nonfiction) showing how others have lived their lives and even found meaning within the context of these issues. We ask students to take the time to examine these issues closely and make connections between different bodies of knowledge and diverse understandings of the world.

For example, the course challenges students to examine some of the most complex moral quandaries confronting our planet, including environmental devastation, torture, and global poverty. How does an individual find personal "meaning" in a world filled with such inexplicable sorrow, pain, and preventable suffering? The GE curriculum is designed to begin a process of self education on our sometimes thorny and perplexing world. The immensity of the challenges facing our small planet and the global human community can overwhelm and lead to a sense of despair. We ask our students how they can overcome such feelings of despair. How do they conceptualize a meaningful life?

Removing service learning from QFM, frees up time for professors and students to slow down and explore texts more fully. Many students expressed to us a desire to spend more time with the current material used in the course. De-linking service-learning from the course creates an opportunity to deepen the academic quality of QFM.

Overall, we think that the basic format of the course is solid. The key components of QFM are: (1) a study of ethical and faith-based approaches to meaning, (2) a review of the key methods of learning within all areas of the liberal arts (natural science, social science, humanities, and the arts), and (3) the application of these ways of knowing to critical issues confronting our world (global poverty, environmental devastation, and so on). The QFM leadership will have to stay attuned to the need for the right "balance" between the different academic areas and perspectives. (For example, some faculty are concerned that there is too much social science and not enough humanities in the class.) But, these types of issues can be easily worked out.

We further recommend maintaining a common syllabus and universal teaching within QFM, with a consideration of the 70/30 model outlined above. We have already reviewed the benefits to these two critical components above in the discussion of the first year program. These advantages remain in the senior year as well. QFM creates a true "learning community" of faculty and students engaged in a challenging exploration of "meaning" in today's world.

We examined other alternative modes of delivering a senior capstone course. For example, the course could be simply "applied ethics" without the review of the liberal arts methodologies. Or, the course could be more problem-oriented and examine one single issue (such as poverty). In the end, however, we support the current structure of QFM as it structurally embraces the two "ruling ideas" of the GE program—a values based education and the unification of knowledge.

III. Breadth Requirements and Perspectives

A. Required Service Learning Course / Project

One way Eckerd manifests "values-based" as a foundational principle of general education is our current requirement that all students engage in service learning in the senior capstone course, Quest for Meaning. The value of service learning in higher education is well-established.[51] It is one of the measures of an engaged student[52] which,

---

[51] College Learning for the New Global Century: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP), AAC&U, 2007, Appendix A (pp. 53-54) and references listed in Note 53 (pp. 61-62).

for under-prepared students, correlates with greater success in higher education.[53] Derek Bok points to the increased emphasis on community service as evidence that higher education has not abdicated its role in helping students to develop "the will to act ethically."[54]

In the student listening sessions, although the seniors generally found service learning to be valuable, most expressed frustration with a service learning requirement in the fall of their senior year. Most students recommended keeping the service learning requirement, but moving it to earlier in the College career so students could continue with the community service throughout their four years and maybe beyond.

Therefore, we recommend de-coupling the service learning component from the senior capstone course. Instead, we propose a Service Learning Requirement that students could meet one of two ways:
1. A course designated as a Service Learning Course, or
2. A Service Learning Portfolio

Components of a course designated as a Service Learning Course:
A course may be designated as a "Service Learning Course" if it includes
1. Minimum of 40 hours of service with a non-profit organization
2. Reflection on the service learning (paper, project, presentation) in the context of the course

Note that some courses may "count" both as Service Learning Courses and for other requirements (in the major, as perspectives and as area courses). Courses that might be designated as Service Learning Courses include (but are not limited to): service learning Winter Term trips, certain internships (unpaid for non-profit organizations), Options for the Future, many Management discipline courses, and new courses developed specifically to meet this requirement. Any courses proposed as Service Learning Courses would go through the usual course approval process.

Components of a Service Learning Portfolio:
1. 40 hours of service with an approved non-profit organization (Director of Service Learning in CALA would maintain the list of approved organizations and sponsored activities); 20 hours must be with the same organization in a time period of no more than one semester
2. Documentation of 40 hours of service
3. Reflection paper on the service learning (guidelines similar to reflection essay in QFM syllabus)

The Director of Service Learning would be responsible for assembling a committee to evaluate the portfolios (on a pass/fail basis) to assess whether a student met this college requirement. Examples of students who might choose to complete a portfolio include those who participate in Spring Break service learning trips, those who do the pick-up and sorting of recycling weekly on campus, those who participate regularly with ECHO

---

[52] Measured by National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) http://nsse.iub.edu/html/sample.cfm accessed 1/30/07.

[53] George Kuh, et al., "Connecting the Dots" http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/Connecting_the_Dots_Report.pdf accessed 1/30/07

[54] Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges,* 167.

(Eckerd College Homeless Outreach), students who take a class with a 20 hour service learning requirement and then complete their hours with "Into the Streets." Students who, for example, participate in a couple of "Into the Streets" experiences could "count" these experiences, but would still have to meet the requirement of 20 hours with the same organization in the timeframe of one semester. This is a non-credit bearing project.

Proposing this new requirement that potentially requires additional classes from a faculty that is already stretched may seem unfeasible. However, many students are already meeting the equivalent of this requirement through classes and/or service learning trips. According to the report of Service Learning hours for AY 05-06, there were 165 students enrolled in courses (not counting QFM and Management courses) where students were required to perform 20 or more hours of service learning[55]. In addition, 105 students participated in Spring Break trips. Currently as requirements for the major, all Management majors would fulfill this new requirement in their course work, and most Environmental Studies and Human Development majors would complete requirement in their required Internship course. This accounts for a significant proportion of our graduating seniors. In addition, there are slots for 120 students per year in Spring Break trips, and perhaps as many as 120 more slots in upper-class AT trips, and the current service learning courses (about 140 slots) provide almost enough slots for all students. However, since many students participate in multiple service trips, this will likely require the modification of existing courses and may also require the addition of a handful of new courses.

Faculty Development: Faculty development funds have proven effective in the past in encouraging faculty to integrate service learning into existing courses or develop new courses. The Director of Service Learning should have a modest budget ($3500) for faculty development and to pay a stipend for portfolio readers.

Spring Break Service Trips: As the best option for co-curricular service learning experiences, spring break service trips provide opportunities for students to travel and engage in service at a modest cost to the student (generally no more than $500/student) and the college (120 students for $20,000 currently supported by grant funding). The college should continue funding these trips at a cost of about $20,000 per year.

Upper-class AT Service Trips: Given the popularity of the Spring Break Service Trips, another option for service trips would be an Autumn Term service trip.[56] Upper-class students could participate in a service learning trip in the week prior to the beginning of the fall semester and returning to Eckerd. These could be developed and funded in much the same way as the Spring Break Service Trips ($20,000/year).

---

[55] Note that there were 349 students in 18 Management courses that were required to perform 20 hours or more of service.

[56] At the initial meeting for the 2007 Spring Break Service Trip, 300 students attended. All the trips were full and if there had been additional space, more students would have participated (79 students who applied were not accepted).

B. Required Science Lab Course

The natural sciences are part of the core of a liberal arts and sciences education and, in particular, a liberally educated individual should be scientifically literate. In a paper given by Chemist Michael P. Doyle, formerly of Research Corporation, he claimed that

> All students, science and non-science majors alike, must be in position to make critical decisions regarding healthcare, the environment, technology, and other prominent issues. In order for them to make informed decisions, they must be scientifically literate, meaning that they must possess a minimal understanding of terms and concepts, scientific processes, and the impact of science on society.... [57]

Doyle's paper grew out of a Project Kaleidoscope symposium on science and the liberal arts. Project Kaleidoscope, a leader in this field, has since worked to identify features of a general education curriculum focused on scientific and quantitative literacy. These features include a curriculum that:

- "reflects a common understanding of what 'literacy' is (scientific/quantitative) and has means in place to measure student progress toward such literacy (literacy: an appreciation of the relevance of math and science to the past, present and future of our global community; an understanding of and comfort with the use of the methods of science and math; the ability to make use of various modes of quantitative and scientific ways of thinking in solving real-world problems)
- reinforces insights into how people learn, leading students to be able to organize and apply knowledge, as well as the value of experiential learning and of giving students responsibility to learn for themselves
- connects students with opportunity to confront and address real-world problems
- brings science at the cutting-edge into programs addressing scientific and quantitative literacy."[58]

Components of an N-Area Course for Non-Science Majors:

Drawing on these descriptions of scientific literacy in the context of the goals for Eckerd's general education, then, science area courses for non-science majors should include the following components:

1. an introduction to the methods of scientific analysis and problem-solving including quantitative analysis in understanding and interpreting data, scientific

---

[57] "Challenges of the Futures of Liberal Arts Colleges: Asking the Right Questions," *Occasional Paper II: What Works, 1994,* http://www.pkal.org/documents/ChallengesOfTheFutureOfLiberalArts.cfm accessed on 1/26/07

[58] *Project Kaleidoscope: What Works Volume IV:* "Shaping General Education Program Focused on Scientific and Quantitative Literacy" http://www.pkal.org/documents/WhatWorksLiteracy.cfm accessed on 1/26/07

methodology, the interplay between theory and experiment and the role of scientific theories.

2. an experiential component (lab exercises and/or field-work)

and ideally, such courses will also

3. be interdisciplinary
4. include a discussion of values around the uses of science

Currently we do not have the staffing or the space to require that all "N" area courses for non-science majors have an associated laboratory class. However, we should move in this direction in the future, particularly as we plan for the new science building and hire additional faculty. Almost all liberal arts institutions require at least one semester of a laboratory science course (and often two semesters) for all of its graduates. In order to move forward in addressing science literacy for our students, we propose that all "N" area courses have an experiential component. This does not mean the course would necessarily have an associated 3-hour lab meeting each week: it could meet in a studio format, have homework assignments that included substantial field work, or require occasional laboratory work. The experiential part would need to be substantial enough for students to understand the link between experiment and theory that is fundamental to the scientific method.

Furthermore, we propose that the "N" area course requirement for non-science majors be met in two ways: 1) the current N-Area courses that either already include an experiential component or are modified to include an experiential component or 2) a new team-taught interdisciplinary course in the Natural Sciences.

Example of a New Interdisciplinary/Team Taught Course: Global Warming

We propose the development of new interdisciplinary team-taught "N" area courses (with experiential components). An interdisciplinary course is consistent with the "unification of knowledge" and as such has the benefit of allowing students see how different disciplines in science address a particular scientific issue. For example, consider a course on "Global Warming" team-taught by 3-4 faculty from across the Natural Sciences.[59] Each faculty member would have his/her own section of the course, lead discussions in that section, and be the laboratory instructor for that section. The multiple sections would meet together as a whole for plenary-style lectures as appropriate for different sections of the course: a chemist explains the chemistry of greenhouse gases, a physicist explains relevant thermodynamics including heat, entropy, absorption/emission spectra, a mathematician/computer scientist explains mathematical modeling, a biologist explains photosynthesis and its role in global gases, etc. These plenary-style lectures would be followed by individual course discussion sections and relevant laboratory exercises/field work (possibly using current laboratory space in the mornings or over WT).

---

[59] This idea originated from a proposal for a Science Forum suggested in a memo to the GE Review Committee from Bill Roess, Professor Emeritus of Biology.

Other potential topics include:
- Genetic engineering and Genomics (health, agriculture, & industrial enzymes)
- Alternative Fuels/ could be part of global warming
- Ecological / Environmental health

Faculty participating in this Interdisciplinary/Team taught course would receive a stipend for their participation and it would be considered part of their contribution to the GE program. A potential staffing model for those participating in this course would then be:

Fall Semester	Spring Semester
AT+ First Year Fall course+ mentoring	*First year spring course*
OR	*OR*
QFM	*Interdisciplinary Lab Science Course*

The resource implications of requiring an experiential component to current "N" area courses would require, at the minimum, limiting the class size of these courses and requiring those teaching the courses to modify them. Since a great many of these courses are taught by adjuncts, this is non-trivial. We already have difficulty staffing "N" area courses since 60% of our N-area courses in the last three years were taught by non-tenure track faculty. Furthermore, if faculty decide to add a full laboratory component to "N" area courses, this requires more of a faculty load (1.5 course instead of 1 course), increasing the GE load on the faculty. The message is clear, we must have additional tenure-track faculty (see Section VI. Staffing). In addition, there are space considerations as well, particularly for the experiential components for a common interdisciplinary, team-taught course. These space concerns ought to be taken into consideration in the design of the new science building. However, the limited exposure to science for our non-science majors is a weakness in our current GE program that we must move to remedy: initially by adding experiential components (minimum of eight hours) to current "N" area courses, but eventually requiring that all "N" area courses have a laboratory and providing a number of interdisciplinary science laboratory/studio courses.

C. Guidelines/Norms for "G" and "E" Perspectives

All Eckerd students must take a course that provides a Global Perspective, designated as a "G" course and an Environmental Perspective course, designated as an "E." According to the Eckerd College Catalog:

> **Global perspective** courses provide an encounter with cultures and/or histories whose bases (philosophical, religious, ethical, aesthetic) or world views differ significantly from those of the Western European or North American tradition. Such a course will encourage students to view their own cultural traditions and assumptions in the larger context of the world's diversity. Given the inherent educational value of having cultural experiences in other parts of the world, which naturally encourage cultural comparisons with the student's own, a semester of

study or winter term abroad, if so designated, may also satisfy the global perspective requirement.[60]

and

Environmental perspective courses provide opportunities for students to address issues in the environmental realm in such a manner as to enhance their knowledge of the natural world and to make informed value judgments concerning the environmental consequences of personal and social actions.[61]

In the faculty listening sessions, there was broad support for these perspective courses although some faculty mentioned a lack of clarity in determining what the specific criteria for a perspective course were. Faculty proposing new courses should certainly justify the perspective designation in the context of the catalog statement and we recommend that College Council pay particular attention to the extent to which the perspective is a core theme of the course (not simply one of many components). Furthermore, we recommend that faculty re-examine courses that are currently designated as perspective courses (particularly a course has been inherited from previous faculty) to assess whether or not these courses in their current form are still consistent with the catalog description above.

At the student listening sessions, although most students were satisfied with perspective courses, there was dissatisfaction with the number and availability of perspective courses: particularly "E" courses. Because these courses are interdisciplinary and not generally "gateway" courses to a major, it is not easy to staff them (or even know from year to year which courses will be offered). We recommend that the Associate Dean of General Education (see page 53) take responsibility for monitoring the number of perspective courses offered and work with collegial chairs to provide balance and consistency.

D. Guidelines/Norms for Breadth Requirements

Currently students must take one course each from the four academic areas: arts, humanities, natural sciences and behavioral sciences. This distribution requirement was the most recent modification to Eckerd's general education program. As a part of the 2000 Self-Study, transcript analysis showed that a majority of students under the previous "perspective system" had limited exposure to the core area of the liberal arts. As a result the 2000 Self-Study recommended that students take two courses from four academic areas (Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities and Fine Arts) to "guarantee that all students have at least a minimum college-level introduction to each of the major broad components of what is universally understood to be a liberal arts education."[62] The faculty decided instead to require one course from each academic area coupled with two perspective courses (Global and Environmental) . Generally, courses designated as area distribution courses are those without pre-requisites that are neither perspective courses nor courses that meet the foreign language or computational competency requirements.

---

[60] Eckerd College *2006-08 Catalog*, July 2006, 61.
[61] Eckerd College *2006-08 Catalog*, July 2006, 55.
[62] Eckerd College, *2000 Self Study*, September, 1999, 241.

A distribution approach to breadth requirements such as this is fairly consistent with all but a few institutions which either have a distribution system alone or a distribution system coupled with a few common core courses (generally in the first year). Even so, it is worth asking if a course that is essentially a gateway course to a major (like "Intro Psychology," for example), provides an adequate understanding of the behavioral sciences for non-social scientists.

However, most faculty and students seem to be generally satisfied with this graduation requirement. During student listening sessions, students particularly commented on the value of being "forced" to take courses outside their own field, particularly in the arts. Faculty commented over and over again that this distribution requirement system is a vast improvement over the old perspective system. In general, there seem to be adequate courses in all areas. The one exception is the science area course where 60% of the science area courses were staffed by non-tenure track faculty in the past three years.[63] Our proposal above to strengthen the "N" requirement will hopefully create more opportunities for tenured/tenure-track faculty to teach these science courses.

Thus, we recommend that Eckerd continue to require 4 area courses as breadth requirements for our students.

E. CPS Requirement

Students are required to attend 16 designated College Program Series Events from a designated list published each semester. These events include attending lectures from a number of lecture series, theatrical performances, and some programs developed by Student Affairs. At the student listening sessions, most of the complaints about the CPS Requirement revolve around the administration of the program (lost cards and inaccurate counts of CPS credits). However, overall, our sense is that this requirement does work. It gives students exposure to the liberal arts and is consistent with the guiding principles of a liberal arts experience as students hear from well-respected intellectuals from across a variety of disciplines or attend arts events they might otherwise not attend. Therefore, we recommend the Eckerd continue the CPS Requirement while exploring ways to address the issue of administering it.

IV. Skill Development Rubrics and Guidelines

A. Writing Proficiency

The Writing Portfolio is the cornerstone for assessing student writing at Eckerd College. First-semester juniors are expected to submit examples of four distinct types of writing: descriptive/expressive, argumentative/persuasive, research /writing from sources, and a timed essay. Students also have the option of submitting an additional assignment of their own choosing to round out the collection. Each student portfolio is evaluated by two faculty volunteers, each of whom has participated in a "norming" session before

---

[63] This comes out of the research done by the Science Curriculum Review committee. S. Weppner, private communication.

starting work. If a student portfolio is failed by these initial inspectors, it is screened again by two additional faculty members and the director of the portfolio project. Thus, no portfolio can fail without having passed through the hands of multiple faculty members. According to the faculty who are most deeply involved in our Writing Excellence Program (including those who first designed it), the portfolio process not only works well, but is also nationally recognized for excellence.

Of course, writing assessment does not begin in the junior year. Freshmen who have difficulty with writing are identified in Autumn Term by their mentors, and they are advised to take one of many available composition courses in the fall semester. Over the next two years, all students are exposed to different kinds of writing within their required GE courses and their own disciplines. As for the portfolio itself, students are given clear expectations, and the roughly 15% who fail in a given semester are required to enroll in a writing course and resubmit a portfolio in the following semester.

Although the portfolio process seems to be working very well, anecdotal evidence from both students and faculty suggests that our preparation of students leading up to the portfolio submission is not as successful as it should be. In theory, students are exposed to "writing across the curriculum" as an alternative to a required composition course. By embedding writing assignments into both WHGC and courses in various disciplines, this approach assures that students will never see writing as a skill separate and distinct from their own course of study, but instead as a vital component to success within their major and in the world after graduation.

This system works, however, only if students are exposed to a variety of writing tasks that feature both formative and summative evaluation; that is, we must make sure that all students take courses which feature a variety of writing modes as well as opportunities for feedback and revision. In our various Listening Sessions, both faculty and students reported that our practice did not always live up to our ideals. Some seniors complained that they (or their peers) had little experience in one or more of the required forms of writing before the portfolio, and they reported panic among significant groups of students in the days and weeks before the portfolio deadline. Students also complained about the variation in writing expectations and evaluation among professors, especially in WHGC. Although many faculty spoke in support of the portfolio process, there were also a number of critical comments about the state of student writing. Many complained that there was little coordination of assignments and expectations for student writing in WHGC, while others suggested that we need to offer a broader range of writing-intensive courses (including science writing) to ensure that all students receive training in their first few years.

In light of this feedback, and because of the centrality of writing competency to the college's educational mission, the General Education Review Committee recommends the following measures:

1.) *More Systematic Guidelines and Training for Writing in the First Year* – The Associate Dean of General Education should work with writing faculty to develop more systematic guidelines for writing assignments in the first-year program, including closer coordination of the kinds of papers that are assigned, better training for faculty in providing useful feedback to students, and additional guidance about appropriate expectations and grading of freshman writing. Several colleges, including Portland State

University, have created detailed rubrics for assessing student writing competence and measuring student progress.[64] Such tools may be superfluous for experienced writing faculty, but could be invaluable in a system that depends on writing instruction by faculty from a wide range of backgrounds. If adopted, the First-Year Skills Lab would provide a good opportunity for additional work on basic writing skills, but it would also require the regular training of seniors as evaluators and facilitators of writing.

2.) *Better Coordination and Assessment of Writing Across the Curriculum* – The already overburdened faculty of the Writing Excellence Program should attempt to reach out to individual disciplines in order to help them assess the nature, variety, and goals of assignments given to underclassmen. Although such an assessment is (and should be) primarily the responsibility of discipline coordinators, closer cooperation across disciplinary lines would help assure that fewer students are allowed to slip through to the junior or senior year without appropriate training. At a time when Eckerd has a significant number of new faculty and is also growing increasingly dependent on part-time and adjunct faculty, the communication of standards and expectations across campus is especially important.

3.) *The Creation of Web Resources for Faculty and Students on Plagiarism* – Students are exposed to the potential punishments for plagiarism on every syllabus they receive at Eckerd. They also have access to many resources that define plagiarism, including A Writer's Reference by Diana Hacker and various handouts from the Writing Center. In addition, most Autumn Term classes attend the Writing Center AT orientation which makes specific reference ways to avoid plagiarism it course assignments. However, activities and exercises that teach strategies to avoid plagiarism could and should be more integrated into the first-year program. These might include web-tutorials or additional links on the Writing Center website. In addition, faculty could surely benefit from a set of resources on the web that aid them in identifying and dealing with cases of academic dishonesty. These resources should include definitions and examples of plagiarism, advice for the designing of "plagiarism-proof" assignments, an explanation of the proper process for pursuing a case of academic dishonesty, templates for notification letters, and a list of useful contacts for advice and guidance. Such resources might be especially valuable for new faculty as well as for part-time and adjunct faculty.

B. Oral Proficiency

Although it has not always been given the attention it deserves, most colleges and universities now consider oral proficiency to be as important as writing proficiency in producing capable graduates and productive citizens. Speaking and presentation skills have long been a significant focus at Eckerd, both within GE courses and across the curriculum. A desire to be more proactive in helping students develop these skills eventually led to the founding of the Rahall Communication Resource Center in 1997.

---

[64] "The Four Goals of University Studies", Portland State University, http://www.pdx.edu/unst/goals.html (accessed March 9, 2007). See also Linda Barnes, "Guide to Writing and Grading Criteria", http://www.uoregon.edu/~lzreis/public/gradingcriteria.htm, (accessed March 9, 2007).

Since then, an ever widening circle of students and faculty have used the Rahall Lab to prepare, practice, and troubleshoot various kinds of oral presentations.

There are certainly ways in which our oral proficiency requirements could be strengthened; however, we believe this process is already underway – especially since the recent expansion of the Communication faculty and the hiring of a new director of the Rahall Center. As of August 2006, faculty in WHGC have been provided a series of evaluation forms which they can use to rate and comment on student presentations in class. These evaluation forms are then passed on within student files to permanent mentors, who can make sure any need for remediation is fulfilled through courses that contain a strong oral presentation component. In addition, all disciplines are now required to have a formal plan to demonstrate how they provide a summative assessment of their students' oral competency. The evaluation of students both at the start and end of their college careers is designed to assure that no senior can graduate without first demonstrating adequate speaking abilities.

Because this oral proficiency process has only recently been implemented, we are hesitant to make specific new recommendations in this area. It is clear, however, that there is still much to be done. One of our major goals should be *greater outreach and collaboration between those involved in the Rahall Center and the general faculty*. As a part of May and August workshops for WHGC, Communications representatives distribute a large packet of oral presentation guidelines, evaluation rubrics, and assignment ideas to instructors. It is important, however, that these kinds of helpful materials be made available to all faculty – preferably on the Rahall Center website. In addition, it may be useful for Communications faculty to meet occasionally with individual disciplines – especially during the assessment cycle – in order to make sure that oral proficiency is being adequately assessed in each major.

As we continue to implement and refine our oral proficiency standards, there is one additional important obstacle that we must all work together to resolve. One of the most common complaints in our Student Listening Sessions was that student-led discussions in WHGC and QFM were usually inferior to professor-led discussions and were often considered "a waste of time." A number of students from several different disciplines suggested that such presentations should be limited or even eliminated in order to protect the academic integrity of the courses. Although faculty comments on this matter were rare in our own listening sessions, anecdotal evidence suggests significant faculty sympathy for this reaction. These complaints, of course, raise a number of issues that are essential to the way we think about oral proficiency. In order to be successful, oral presentation assignments must not be seen by faculty and students as just another hoop to jump through, but as an integral part of their education. Faculty must provide a clear rationale for these assignments and also provide prompt and clear feedback. However, faculty must also work to persuade their students to respect the contributions of their peers and encourage them to set higher expectations both for their own performance and that of their classmates. It is the responsibility of all professors – but especially those in Communications – to help *build a campus culture that values excellence in oral communication*.[65]

---

[65] In order to move toward this goal, Professor James Janack has suggested that it may be worthwhile to include recognition of the fulfillment of the Oral Proficiency Requirement on the student transcript in the

C. Information Literacy

Eckerd students are more technologically savvy than ever before. Just a few years ago we were concerned about how many of our students owned computers and were capable of operating e-mail, word-processing, and spreadsheet programs. Now most of our students have little difficulty learning to use complex Course Management Systems and wikis, viewing video podcasts, and communicating through Facebook or instant messaging. Even those students who struggle academically are usually quite skilled at accessing information over the internet, and in using their computers to both write papers and communicate with others in the campus community. In fact, our current Technology Proficiency Requirement Form for freshmen has become so outdated that it is now all but ignored by mentors.

Proficiency in the use of technology, however, is not the same as information literacy. According to the American Library Association, information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."[66] This includes "competencies in formulating research questions… as well as an understanding of ethical and legal issues surrounding information."[67] In an electronic information age, it is essential that students know not only how to access and use pertinent information, but also how to gauge the appropriateness and credibility of the sources they encounter. Websites such as Wikipedia and search engines such as Google certainly have their uses, but students need to learn how to become more sophisticated "consumers" of information. These kinds of skills are vital to success in college, but they are also essential for good citizenship and lifelong learning.

Although we have done little to formally assess the information literacy levels of our entering and continuing students, anecdotal evidence suggests that student competence varies across disciplines and that training is generally sporadic and unsystematic. Currently, all freshmen must complete a 20-minute on-line library tutorial as part of their Autumn Term requirements. This tutorial serves as a basic background lesson on using the library catalog and electronic databases. A half-hour class session with a reference librarian precedes this tutorial; however, its focus is primarily on introducing students to library services and not on specialized or detailed research techniques. Although there are a number of WHGC professors who assign website evaluations, complex research projects, and/or annotated bibliographies to their freshmen, there is no requirement for such assignments – only a rather vague expectation that each professor will assign 35 hours worth of writing per semester.

Training within the disciplines also seems to be rather sporadic. In 2005-2006, Eckerd librarians engaged in 63 library instruction sessions for individual courses (including a handful in PEL).[68] Because many of these sessions are set up by a cadre of

---

same way we include completion of the Writing Portfolio. Although most institutions do not seem to include notations about skill mastery on their transcripts, this action may be worth considering.
[66] "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education," American Library Association, http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm#f1 (accessed March 3, 2007).
[67] "Information Literacy Glossary," American Library Association, http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues/acrlinfolit/infolitoverview/infolitglossary/infolitglossary.htm (accessed March 7, 2007).
[68] Helene Gold, Electronic Services Librarian and Associate Professor at Eckerd College, Personal Communication, (March 7, 2007).

faculty 'regulars', it is not uncommon to find a group of seniors who have attended multiple library instruction sessions alongside others who have had little or no formal library instruction since their freshman year.

Eckerd College's approach to information literacy was not always so unsystematic. In the 1980s, all freshmen in Western Heritage were required to engage in a major research assignment with several intermediate steps, including: selecting a workable topic, evaluating the usefulness and credibility of sources, and writing a book review. Librarians were key in developing this assignment, and they were actively involved with students as they completed each step. This was, of course, before students had easy access to the internet, with all of its benefits and pitfalls as a research aid. There may be good reasons for not requiring all instructors in the first-year program to use a common research assignment rubric. However, there is certainly no reason that formal library instruction should end after Autumn Term.

In short, as the need for training students in information literacy has increased dramatically, as educational organizations have developed new pedagogies and national standards for information literacy, and as many other colleges and universities have instituted information literacy as one of their primary goals, Eckerd College has instead allowed itself to fall behind. It is time for a change. Information literacy must be considered alongside reading, writing, oral, and quantitative proficiency as a primary goal of both our general education program and training within individual disciplines.

The General Education Review Committee, therefore, recommends the following measures:

1.) *Remove the Technology Proficiency Requirement* – The current requirement includes a form (in triplicate) that is laughably outdated and largely ignored. Faculty are told to fill out these forms after students finish their Autumn Term Library Tutorial, which has little to do with the mastery of technology. One copy of the form is intended for the mentor file, one copy for the student, and one for the Registrar's Office. If any of these forms do reach the Registrar, they are placed in a file cabinet where they gather dust until they are destroyed after graduation. We should instead assume that all incoming students have already mastered the basic tasks listed on the existing form, including using e-mail and accessing the internet. Those students who have not yet done so will be able to set up appointments or attend special workshops run by ITS. Any additional technology skills that we wish to assess can be folded into our new information literacy requirements.

2.) *Institute Systematic Training in Information Literacy during the First Year* – Librarians should consult with faculty (and the Associate Dean of General Education) to develop a list of basic information skills that all freshmen will be expected to master as well as a basic plan for helping students to master them. These skills should include:
- Ability to identify authorship and assess credibility of information on the web
- Ability to distinguish between popular magazines and scholarly journals
- Ability to distinguish between primary and secondary sources
- Ability to access and use library catalogs and electronic databases
- Ability to identify the parts of a bibliographic record
- Ability to use appropriate citation styles for footnotes and bibliography
- Ability to quote and paraphrase without committing plagiarism

A one-time library instruction session is simply not enough to help freshmen master these tasks. Training in these skill sets should be integrated into first-year courses and perhaps also into the first-year skills lab (if adopted). Sample information literacy guidelines and evaluation matrices are available on many college websites.[69]

3.) *Assign Librarians to Individual First-Year Sections* – We currently have only five full-time librarians (including the acting director). This is far too few to have each one regularly attend first-year class sections while still maintaining his or her reference hours and other duties. Instead, each freshman section should be assigned a particular librarian as a contact person, who will meet periodically with those students throughout the year as they work on research and writing assignments.

4.) *Institute Systematic Training in Information Literacy within Disciplines* **–** Librarians and discipline coordinators should work closely to develop (or refine) information literacy components for each major – including exercises within ordinary courses, senior seminars, and/or comprehensive exams. These components will vary according to the skills required for different subject areas; however, they should be both formative and summative. That is, courses or tasks within each discipline should both assist students in developing advanced research skills and also measure their overall competency in accessing and evaluating information.

D. Quantitative Literacy

For quantitative literacy, Eckerd students must complete an "M" designated course. These courses include mathematics discipline courses, Introduction to Computer Science, statistics courses offered in the Behavioral Sciences Collegium and logic. This is the way most institutions try assure some level of quantitative literacy for their students. Some institutions take this a step further by integrating quantitative aspects more broadly across the curriculum.[70]

In addition, during the faculty listening sessions, some faculty, particularly those in the natural sciences, commented on the weak mathematics preparation of students in their courses. These complaints seemed to be directed primarily toward the preparation of students for a science major than for the basic quantitative proficiency of an Eckerd College graduate. Nonetheless, this concern for the general quantitative literacy of all Eckerd students is valid.

Unfortunately, increasing the number of required quantitative courses or instituting "mathematics across the curriculum" (or even adding it as a requirement of a first year course) does not seem feasible at the current time. Ideally, a new 'N'

---

[69] See, for example, the detailed rubrics available at "Information Literacy Resource Guide," Augustana College, http://www.augustana.edu/library/Services/InfoLiteracy/index.htm (accessed March 9, 2007).

[70] For example, all Portland State University Freshman Inquiry courses must include a quantitative component which is explicitly included in its assessment rubric. During their junior year, Drury University students must take a year-long scientific research course that culminates in a campus-wide research symposium ("poster session") where students present their research findings.

perspective course, particularly with its experiential component (and necessary data analysis), will provide further opportunities for our students to develop quantitative skills beyond the single required course. Thus, *we recommend that the current one course requirement (M designation) remain as is and strongly recommend that science area courses include quantitative analysis* (see Section III. B. Required Science Lab Course above).

E. Foreign Language Proficiency

Currently, Eckerd College requires all students to finish two semesters of a foreign language or to demonstrate an equivalent level of competency. This requirement is not out of line with other colleges and universities; however, it may not be ideal for our students. An important problem with this kind of requirement, as Bok notes, is that one year of instruction in Spanish or Italian may provide a small vocabulary and a basic understanding of grammar, but it will not impart a substantial level of proficiency.[71] As a former college president has quipped, students at this level "know enough to read a menu but not enough to compliment the chef."[72] At a school like Eckerd, which prides itself on having students who are attentive to global issues and intercultural understanding, this limitation is an especially serious one. No student or professional can hope to truly understand another culture without the ability to substantially interact with people in their own idiom.

There are, unfortunately, several important obstacles to raising the number of required language courses. Implementing a two-year requirement would put added strain on many science students who are already hard-pressed to finish their major and college-wide requirements in four years. Second, such a requirement would put an even greater burden on the language faculty at Eckerd, who already must devote the great majority of their time and course load to introductory classes. At a minimum, a more ambitious college-wide requirement would need to be accompanied by a substantial increase in faculty positions in the languages.

In our Faculty Listening Sessions, some language professors suggested that we might abolish a college-wide requirement in order to allow instructors to provide more advanced language courses that focus on culture and literature to students who might benefit. In other words, by making all foreign language requirements discipline-specific, those students who could benefit most from advanced language study would be able to do so, while those who would benefit less (and would be less enthusiastic) would no longer clog up the system. There are certainly good reasons to consider discipline-specific language requirements, and there are a number of colleges and universities that currently follow such a policy. However, adopting such an approach might send exactly the wrong message to students: that foreign language skills are only valuable for those working in "global" fields such as International Business or IRGA, and that they are unnecessary for students pursuing general graduate work or entering directly into the job market. In an era where language skills are becoming increasingly important, nothing could be further from the truth.

---

[71] Derek Bok, <u>Our Underachieving Colleges</u>, 235.
[72] Derek Bok, "The New 'U'", <u>Forbes</u> (April 4, 2006),
 http://www.forbes.com/2006/04/15/derek-bok-university_cx_db_06slate_0418bok.html.

Therefore, because raising the number of required language courses is currently impractical, and because making all language requirements discipline-specific is undesirable, the recommendation of the General Education Review Committee is an unhappy compromise: *to allow the current one-year language requirement to continue unchanged.*

V. Faculty and Student Development

A. Faculty Development

1. <u>General Education Faculty Associates.</u> To enhance the effectiveness of universal teaching at Eckerd College, we propose the creation of a General Education Faculty Associates program. There will be a total of five faculty Associates, one from each Collegium. The five faculty associates will work closely with the Associate Dean of General Education to provide intellectual and academic leadership to the first year program. This team of associates will also provide leadership in faculty development, and in particular, the pedagogy of "universal teaching." Faculty associates will make a two to three year commitment in order to provide the necessary continuity to the course. Faculty associates will all teach in the first year program. Faculty associates should receive a significant stipend and a course reduction.

Identifying a core group of faculty to participate regularly in the first year program is not a new idea. The 2000 Self-Study recommended developing such a cadre of faculty with an increase in base salary.[73] The self-study saw this group of faculty as mentors for junior faculty teaching in for the first time in WHGC and as a way to encourage voluntary participation in general education courses. In contrast with the Self-Study, we recommend that Faculty Associates be a temporary position with stipends. The Associate Dean of General Education would work with Collegial Chairs to recruit Faculty Associates for General Education.

2. <u>Junior Faculty.</u> Teaching in the first-year program and/or QFM can be daunting for any faculty member because of the universal teaching requirement. This is especially true for a junior faculty member teaching in the first-year program for the first time. Thus, before teaching the course for the first time, junior faculty should have the opportunity to sit in the course with a senior faculty (ideally a "General Education Faculty Associate"). To have the time to sit in on the course as well as Monday faculty meetings, the junior faculty member would receive a WT course release. This recommendation is also one from the 2000 Self-Study.[74]

---

[73] Eckerd College Self Study 2000: Faculty Roles, Rewards, and Institutional Resources, 210. The self-study recommendation included identifying no more than 10 such faculty who would make a 6-year commitment to the course by teaching WHGC at least 4 out of the 6 years (excluding hexennial leaves). It suggested an honorarium of $4000 (in 1999) per Distinguished Professorship with an estimated cost of $66,000 (or a $1.5 million gift to the endowment for such purposes).

[74] Ibid, 208-9.

3. <u>May College/Retreat.</u> The post-graduation May faculty workshop for faculty in the current WHGC course is valuable in preparing faculty for the coming year. However, there is a potential for making this workshop more useful for the faculty as a whole as well as the first-year faculty by having a 3-day faculty-wide "May College" or "Faculty Retreat" faculty development opportunity. St Lawrence University has a highly successful three-day May College immediately after graduation with a high participation rate from faculty who receive only a modest stipend.[75] Coordinated by the Associate Deans of Faculty Development and General Education, concurrent workshops could address pedagogy, use of technology, skill building, the first-year program and other issues often only touched on during fall Faculty Retreats. Bringing the faculty together around such issues will further build a community of scholars and teachers that is already one of Eckerd's primary strengths.

As an example, the May College might include concurrent morning sessions: 1) first-year faculty; 2) designing WT courses abroad, 3) developing service learning courses and then afternoon sessions on issues around teaching such as 1) student-teacher expectations, 2) use of skill development rubrics, 3) oral communication across the curriculum, 3) technology training, 4) book group discussions or 5) issues of concern to the faculty as a whole (organized by FCC). Since the May College would afford opportunities for discussion of issues relevant to the faculty as a whole, the May College would replace the Fall Faculty Retreat.

Faculty participating in the May College would receive a modest stipend as would those leading concurrent sessions.

4. <u>Monday meetings.</u> Faculty listening sessions highlighted some particular needs for faculty teaching in the first-year program. Faculty generally agreed that the Monday afternoon meetings were useful, but the tension between "expert" and "universal" teaching exists here as well: some faculty wanted to hear from "experts" on the readings to get additional background and comfort with unfamiliar material while others wanted to hear suggestions of strategies for use in "universal" teaching particularly from those who were non-experts themselves. To help ease this tension, the General Education Associates would be responsible for a set of Monday afternoon faculty meetings. These Associates, building on individual collegial affiliations, would identify faculty experts on the material at hand within their affiliated collegia and assemble resources from these faculty as background material and supplemental resources. However, the Associate would need to balance this with the universal teaching inherent in the course to assure that Monday meetings also provide strategies and resources that could go directly into the classroom. This would have the added advantage of easing the burden on junior faculty teaching in the course for the first time who find themselves expected to teach seasoned first-year program veterans how to prepare for class in the upcoming week.

---

[75] St Lawrence University's Center for Teaching and Learning runs a 3-day "May College" after graduation (http://www.stlawu.edu/ctl/mfc.htm).
.

B. Student Development

1. e-Portfolios. e-Portfolios are not a new idea. Colleges and universities have been experimenting with them since the early 1990s as a way both to help students reflect on their own learning and to aid institutions in more effectively assessing student progress. Surprisingly, even after more than a decade in use, e-portfolios are still regarded as being on the cutting-edge of educational pedagogies. At a January 2007 conference of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), a number of schools lauded for their innovative general education programs highlighted e-portfolios as very prominent components of their curriculum. There are certainly potential pitfalls for any college attempting to develop an e-portfolio system, but the benefits such a project could offer makes it worth serious consideration.

A brief look at existing collegiate e-portfolio programs reveals a number of different methods and approaches. Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), for example, uses Open Source Portfolio (OSP) and Sakai to allow students to collect and display information about their interests, achievements, and goals. The core of this approach is the "learning matrix," which is a relatively simple device to assess student mastery of basic skills and core general education goals. Below (Fig. 1) is an example of IUPUI's learning matrix:[76]

Fig. 1 – Learning Matrix from IUPUI

In this example, artifacts of various kinds, including documents and videos, have been uploaded to demonstrate student mastery in different areas at varying levels. The categories listed on the Y axis of the grid are IUPUI's Six Principles of Undergraduate

---

[76] From "About the Project: Overview," http://eport.iupui.edu/overview.htm (Accessed February 13, 2007).

Learning (PULs), which apply not only to general education courses, but to all courses at the university. Files uploaded to this matrix may be direct evidence of learning (papers, oral presentations, etc.) or assignments that show evidence of personal reflection about such learning.[77] The individual learning matrices are then evaluated by a combination of faculty, career counselors, and other trained members of the campus community.

Kalamazoo College, on the other hand, has developed a web-based e-portfolio requirement that allows students to develop their own individual web pages in order to trace their academic development across all four years. As the Kalamazoo website describes it:

> the 'K' Portfolio starts before orientation with a 'Foundations Essay' and culminates with a final 'Senior Connections' response to four years at 'K' College. Along the way, in eight required gateway points, students create their own home pages, link their best work, summarize their academic goals and plans of study, write about the choice of a major, capture their intercultural experience on paper, reflect on their career readiness, and discuss their plans for their Senior Individualized Projects.[78]

Students may design their own web graphics and music, and then create HTML links to "evidence" of their progress in completing the "Five Dimensions" of a Kalamazoo education: lifelong learning, intercultural understanding, social responsibility, career readiness, and leadership.

IUPUI and Kalamazoo College are just two examples of a myriad of approaches to using e-portfolios. As the number of schools using e-portfolios have increased, so have the number of software platforms to support e-portfolio development. Currently there are several commercial and free systems available, and many colleges have formed consortia to discuss, plan, and even develop their own e-portfolio platforms.[79] Recommendations about what software platforms might be appropriate for Eckerd must be made by a team of staff and faculty who will consider such things as the overall goals of our portfolio program, the ease of use (by both faculty and students), and the simplicity and cost of implementation.

Eckerd College could use e-portfolios in a variety of ways. At minimum, they might serve as an opportunity for students to showcase evidence of their own development, including such things as their e-Autumn Term Portfolios, e-Writing Portfolios, and Senior Theses and/or Philosophy of Life Essays. A better use of this technology, however, might include more systematic requirements for contents, more

---

[77] For more information on e-portfolio initiatives at IUPUI, see "Indiana University E-Portfolio," http://eport.iupui.edu (Accessed February 13, 2007).

[78] "The Kalamazoo College Portfolio," http://www.kzoo.edu/pfolio/ (Accessed February 13, 2007).

[79] See, for example, the Electronic Portfolio Consortium, an association of individuals from over 700 institutions across almost 60 countries. Founding members of this organization include IUPUI, Bowling Green State University, University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire, Penn State, Maricopa Community Colleges, and UCLA. See http://eportconsortium.org. A more local example of collaboration in e-Portfolio development can be seen at "The Connecticut College e-Portfolio Development Consortium", which links Connecticut College, Union College, Dartmouth, and Mt. Holyoke. See http://www.union.edu/PUBLIC/ECODEPT/kleind/conncoll/index.html.

frequent forms of student reflection, and more careful assessment by Eckerd faculty and staff.

Clearly, an e-portfolio system may hold significant promise for Eckerd College – in fact, it may open doors that lead a much more sophisticated approach to both how we teach and how students view their own learning. But as mentioned above, such learning portfolios are not without risks. Poor training, weak support, or ineffective assessment methods could easily make such portfolios pedagogically worthless and turn them instead into another "hoop" that students must jump through. Although significant grants for developing e-portfolio programs are available, such an initiative would also undoubtedly put a strain on our budget, bandwidth, and ITS staff. Finally, as leaders of an e-portfolio consortium admitted as recently as 2003:

> Today's electronic portfolio, or ePortfolio, is much like the Course Management System (CMS) of 1997 - there is not yet a coherent understanding of functional requirements, design specifications, or how and to what extent an electronic portfolio might benefit teaching and learning. CMS software did not receive wide acceptance until its usefulness and functionality could be justified and until it became easy-to-use and offered services unavailable from existing systems. Until the ePortfolio software environments can similarly demonstrate their effectiveness, ease-of-use, and transparent integration, they will not reach the level of acceptance that the CMS has received in the past few years.[80]

Considering that there is still such uncertainty about the value and proper use of e-portfolios, it is clear that any decision to proceed in this direction must be made with careful and thorough consideration.

VI. Staffing

There is probably no issue more contentious among the faculty than the staffing of WHGC and QFM (see summary of faculty "listening" sessions below). The viability and effectiveness of our GE program depends upon the college solving the staffing crisis. If we do not have the resources to deliver the full GE program currently in operation, it must be scaled back. QFM, in particular, has suffered over the years from a lack of institutional support, both on the part of the administration and the faculty. In addition, WHGC is being taught more and more by either continuing part time or adjunct teachers. The result has been a decline in the quality of the program overall. We are not recommending a scaling back of GE. Rather, we strongly recommend that the administration and faculty collectively commit themselves to the resources and time to deliver this program which is so central to our liberal arts mission.

The challenges of staffing a general education program are also not unique to Eckerd. The institutions we interviewed (see Section III. A National Review of General Education Programs) are struggling with staffing and are using an increasing number of

---

[80] "Electronic Portfolio White Paper Version 1.0," (November 3, 2003) http://eportconsortium.org (Accessed February 13, 2007)

adjuncts and part-time instructors. Institutions with faculty dedicated to the general education program, such as Drury University with its Interdisciplinary Center, face concerns of a faculty tier system, where those in the general education program are not as widely respected as others. Even with the Interdisciplinary Center and dedicated faculty, it is still a challenge to find faculty within disciplines to participate. Portland State also has staffing problems: many who teach in the University Studies program are on fixed term contracts and are not part of the tenure-track faculty. Lehman-CUNY uses a large percentage of adjuncts in its program as well. No one staffing model seems to adequately address these problems as the use of adjuncts across the curriculum in higher education continues to increase.

The Staffing Problem:
1.) *WHGC and QFM taught more and more by visitors and "continuing part-time" faculty.*
      WHGC: In 2002-2003, we delivered 20 sections of WHGC with 19 taught by tenured/tenure-track faculty and 1 by Student Affairs. In 2007-2008 (next year), we will offer 25 sections of WHGC with 19 taught by tenured/tenure-track faculty and 6 by either visitors or "continuing part-time." There has been NO increase in tenured/tenure-track faculty teaching WHGC in the last five years.
      QFM: In 2002-2003, we delivered 17 sections of QFM with 9 taught by tenured/tenure-track faculty and 8 by ASPEC, coaches or "continuing part-time." In 2007-2008 (next year), we will offer 18 sections of QFM with 10 taught by tenured/tenure-track faculty and 8 by Student Affairs, coaches, and "continuing part-time."
      If the Eckerd College GE program is to reflect the central educational values and commitments of the institution as a whole, the program must be taught as often as possible by the full time faculty. By having too many part-time teachers and visitors teach our core programs, we send a strong message to our students that Eckerd College does not value GE. The tenured/tenure-track faculty are currently stretched too thin and are thus unable to increase their already significant commitment to GE. The fundamental solution to our staffing dilemma lies in the hiring of more tenure-track faculty who are committed to the liberal arts and GE.

2.) *Increasing use of adjuncts and overloads by all collegia to allow for faculty participation in GE.*
      All collegia reported to us that they are hiring an increasing number of adjuncts (or paying overloads) to create space for full time faculty to participate in GE. Yet, numbers alone do not adequately reflect the hidden costs that departments often must absorb when its faculty teach in the GE program. While some departments hire adjuncts to maintain a full range of course options for students when the regular faculty teach in GE, other departments simply offer fewer courses. Other faculty try to do it all and take on GE as an "overload." All of these approaches are problematic. Hiring adjuncts to teach our core discipline courses should also be a last option (rather than a built in necessity) to allow for full time faculty to teach in GE. Majors should not be forced to eliminate key discipline courses to teach GE. And, it is the rare professor who can really do an effective

job teaching four or more classes. Adding GE courses on as "over-loads" should not be seen as the solution to our staffing crisis. Students again get short-changed as professors scramble to stay on top of impossible teaching loads.

3.) *Growth in the study body without a commensurate growth in tenure-track faculty.*
    The staffing issue is really NOT about GE. If we reduce the number of required GE courses, students would still have to go somewhere to take classes. These students would just be redistributed (as noted below in the summary of the faculty listening sessions) into other courses—especially those in majors that are already overburdened.
    Therefore, we want to stress again, that the solution to the staffing crisis is to increase full-time faculty hiring to match our increase in student growth.

Proposals:

1.) *An Associate Dean of General Education and Academic Innovation*
    Strengthening and recasting the Associate Dean's position as the "Associate Dean of General Education and Academic Innovation" could make a strong statement that Eckerd College is fully committed to GE and academic excellence in the liberal arts. The Associate Dean would be responsible for the intellectual and administrative leadership of the program. We envision the Associate Dean providing leadership to not only the first year program and QFM, but to the entire GE program. She would get help in guiding the program from the five faculty associates from each of the collegia. She would work to integrate the College Program Series speakers into the GE curriculum and plan other ways to enliven the course pedagogy. There were, for example, many thoughtful proposals on enriching the curriculum presented by faculty during the Strategic Planning process initiated by President Eastman. The Associate Dean could be charged with working with the faculty to pursue these kinds of initiatives.
    We believe that strengthening the power and resources of the Associate Dean is critical to the success of GE. In fact, at some point in the future, Eckerd College might want to consider the creation of a "Dean" of General Education. Removing the "Associate" from the title would be much more than just a symbolic act, but rather recognition that GE at our school is central to our overall mission.

2.) *Appoint Five General Education Faculty Associates (one from each Collegium)*
    The GE Faculty Associates program is described above on page 47. This core group would receive a course reduction and a stipend to take on these responsibilities. These Associates would work closely with the Associate Dean of General Education and Academic Innovation to maintain a high quality curriculum throughout the GE program.

3.) *Reduce the Student-Faculty Ratio in the First Year Program.*
    We presently highly publicize our student-faculty ratio as 13:1. However, new first year students arrive and find that their WHGC classes are currently each filled with 22 students. We believe that the learning process is significantly improved in a smaller class. Given the importance of GE to Eckerd College, we strongly propose that we work to reduce the class size in the first year program. Immediately, this means keeping each

section next year at or below 22 students. For subsequent years, we should adopt a policy of no more than 20 in each section. Currently, QFM already meets this goal with around 17 to 19 students in each section.

4.) *Administration Commitment: Hire more tenure-track faculty to be able to support the core GE programs.*

The crux of the staffing problem (as we note above) is the growth of the Eckerd College student body without a commensurate growth in the tenure-track faculty. We call on the administration, as part of the strategic plan and vision for the college, to substantially increase the full-time faculty. In the end, all of the improvements in the quality of the GE program recommended in this report hinge on the hiring of full-time, tenure-track faculty to do the job.

5.) *Faculty Commitment: Teach in the first year program and QFM every 3 to 4 years.*

If the faculty believes in the vision of the liberal arts outlined in this report, then we must also step forward. We therefore call on each faculty member to agree to teach in either the first year program or QFM every 3rd or 4th year. There is currently a wide variation between faculty member's participation in GE. This is not healthy for the institution. There needs to be a common standard which we all equally strive to fulfill. To meet the demands of the first year program and QFM, which is 110 courses every school year, actually depends upon all of us teaching in the program every 3-4 years.

6.) *Increase the stipends for both the first year program and QFM.*

The current stipends are:
> WHGC: $3000 total for three semesters
> QFM: $750.

We recommend making the value of the stipend the same per semester for the first year program and QFM. Furthermore, we recommend increasing the stipends to the level proposed by the 2000 Self-Study. The Self-Study recommended stipends in WHGC of $3500 and QFM of $1200. [81] In 2007, adjusting for inflation[82] this would be stipends of (equalizing WHGC and QFM to $1200/semester in 2000 dollars):
> WHGC: $4200 total for three semesters
> QFM: $1400.

---

[81] Eckerd College, *2000 Self-Study*, September 1999, 211
[82] Using the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI inflation calculator at http://www.data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl accessed on March 30, 2007.

VII. Process

The General Education Review Committee, in consultation with the Dean of Faculty, proposes the following general procedures for consideration and implementation of reforms to the General Education Program:

Spring 2007:
- General Education Review Committee submits report to the faculty; first faculty forum is held to discuss the report.

2007-2008:
- E.P.&P. is charged with organizing the faculty review of the report and determining the process for bringing legislation to the faculty for approval.

- The faculty affirm:
  1) the five "Guiding Principles" of an Eckerd College Liberal Arts Education, which are: the unification of knowledge, a value-based education, critical thinking, intellectual and practical skills, and intellectual depth and breadth (outlined on p. 17 above); and
  2) that the "ruling ideas" of GE at Eckerd College are (1) the unification of knowledge and (2) a values-based education.

- The faculty vote on the legislation presented by E.P.& P. to reform the college's GE program.

2008-2009:
- Approved changes to GE could be given to a faculty "Implementation Committee" appointed by the Dean of Faculty. Working with the faculty, this committee could revise the syllabus, set up the necessary training sessions, and so on.

2009-2010:
- New GE Program could be launched…

Part Three: Feedback on General Education

I. Faculty Feedback on General Education

A. General notes

As important as it is for our general education program to meet the needs of our students and the mission of our college, it is absolutely essential that it also be a reflection of the Eckerd faculty. For any general education program to work, it must include a common commitment by faculty members and must be run by the best teachers on campus.

Because our faculty (and our students) change over time, it is necessary that our approach to general education change as well. Faculty input must be an essential part in this process. To this end, the General Education Review Committee solicited faculty feedback through a number of forums, including: eight informal "Faculty Listening Sessions", an open webpage for faculty to post messages and comments, and individual communications. The explicit goal of these forums was to gain a qualitative, not a quantitative sense of faculty opinions. Previous surveys have already shown that our faculty is deeply divided in their opinions about the current general education program – especially WHGC and QFM. While many faculty strongly support the current system, a roughly equal number consider the program deeply flawed. Thus, although the committee was certainly attuned to areas where individual faculty praise and criticism tended to echo or overlap, we were much more interested in particular comments rather than in another numerical survey. This approach seemed especially promising since we have so many new faculty on campus who might benefit from open discussions about our general education priorities.

The feedback we gathered from faculty during the Fall of 2006 was sometimes as broad and complex as fully-developed models for general education, and sometimes as specific and simple as the plea for QFM shirts to match those provided to WHGC faculty. However, in general, the discussions in the Listening Sessions, the postings on the website, and the private communications to the committee were extremely constructive. They demonstrated that beyond the divisions about implementation, there is a common commitment to improving general education at Eckerd. In all our contact with faculty members, the committee noticed two issues above all others that generated the most debate:

1.) *Universal participation*

In our various interactions with faculty, we often heard a sense that the ideal of general education at Eckerd as a common enterprise or partnership has gradually been lost over the past few decades. For some, the main cause of this decline is flagging support by certain members of the faculty for Eckerd's traditional model of "non-expert" teaching of first-year students. For others, the problem is not that particular faculty members have abandoned general education, but that Eckerd's general education model has abandoned them – forcing them to teach in a course with no expertise, little support, and often cynical students.

Those that support our current model of universal participation often point to the benefits that students get from learning alongside their professors. While students are often uncomfortable without an expert or authority figure in the classroom, this approach (if done well) can encourage young students to become active learners and to see learning as a life-long process instead of a limited academic enterprise. Faculty who support this model also tend to extol the virtues of having a common model of socialization for students and a chance for interdisciplinary communication and sharing of pedagogy by faculty who might otherwise remain segregated in their various areas of campus. Finally, there is a real fear that abandoning universal participation would necessarily mean the need to hire even more adjuncts to teach WHGC and QFM, or would require us to hire regular faculty whose sole responsibility was general education courses. Not only is the "ghettoizing" of general education contrary to the spirit of Eckerd, these faculty contend, but such measures would merely confirm the belief of some students that general education is separate from, and less valuable than, courses in their own major.

Critics of universal participation, on the other hand, tend also to be critics of the "non-expert" model of teaching. Faculty often cited their own frustration about teaching topics with which they sometimes have little more experience or understanding than their own students. These faculty also point to student frustrations with WHGC as evidence that the model of "non-expert" teaching is deeply flawed. Some suggested that improving the course is not simply a matter of giving non-expert faculty more confidence in the classroom, it is instead a matter of allowing faculty to teach in areas in which they have a more cultivated competence. Forcing professors to teach so far out of field seemed to these respondents to be both a waste of faculty talents and a waste of students' time.

The good news amidst these great divisions is that while Eckerd faculty may starkly disagree on the best way to implement general education, there still seems to be broad faculty support and enthusiasm for the basic principles of general education. Regardless of whether we decide to keep our current system of universal participation, it is imperative that we seek models of general education that will preserve some of the benefits of the current system (faculty and student socialization/communication, active learning, etc.), while also providing better opportunities for faculty to teach in areas and use methods with which they feel both confident and competent.

2.) *Staffing and Mentoring Loads*

Perhaps the most frequently expressed complaints regarding general education at Eckerd had to do with time. Professors from all over campus complained about the impact that general education courses had on their ability to offer courses within their own major. The greatest impacts seem to be in the sciences; Marine Science, for example, reported needing numerous adjuncts just to staff their current required courses. Commitment to general education also means that faculty have less time for electives or courses of personal interest, and are occasionally required to teach large introductory courses as overloads just to make sure students can take all of their required courses. These kinds of burdens can often lead to bitterness and frustration among professors that can easily (and even unconsciously) be transferred to students.

There was an equal amount of faculty frustration with mentoring loads. Although mentoring burdens within WHGC are split evenly, many faculty already come into the course already overburdened with mentees from their own discipline. With mentor loads

above 50 or even 75 students, it becomes impossible for professors to give either majors or freshman advisees the time they deserve.

Unfortunately, general education reform may not be able to do much to solve these problems. Even if we were to reduce the number of required general education courses (or abolish them), students would have to go somewhere to take classes. In other words, the numbers of students would just be redistributed through other courses – especially those in majors that are already overburdened. The same is true for mentees. An earlier fly-up date or immediate fly-up to a tentative major would not prevent the overloading of mentors; in fact, it may actually increase the burden for those professors in the most popular majors.

These are certainly problems that require solutions. But the best and most obvious solution is to advocate for increases in faculty hiring that match our current rate of student growth. We might also look for ways to support existing faculty, including hiring a professional academic counselor (or groups of upperclassmen) to support faculty in mentoring their freshmen. Certainly, without reducing the burdens on faculty we can hardly hope to continue our current program successfully, much less think about more ambitious or intensive systems of providing general education.

B. Feedback on Particular Parts of the GE Program

1. Autumn Term

The feedback on our current Autumn Term program was overwhelmingly positive. The general perception is that Autumn Term is popular with students and is an effective recruiting tool for prospective students and their parents. Most faculty also suggested that the Autumn Term was effective as an orientation period, as a lead-in to Western Heritage, and as a way to create a bond between the class and the professor. There were three main criticisms of the current Autumn Term format. First, Autumn Term may be a bit too full of activities, leaving students burned out by the start of fall semester. Second, the current AT calendar brings freshman to campus at a time where they are subjected to poor weather and a greater potential for hurricane strikes. And third, the academic rigor of AT courses often varies widely – leading a couple of faculty to suggest that it might be better not to count it for course credit. Overall, however, faculty comments on AT tended to suggest that it was the most popular and successful part of our entire general education program.

2. Western Heritage in a Global Context

No topic in our faculty discussions provoked such animated discussion as WHGC. Although the tone of our discussions was always cordial and collegial, it was clear that there were stark differences of opinion and strong passions hidden just below the surface.

While almost all the faculty who participated in the faculty listening sessions acknowledged the need for some changes or alterations in the current course, many participants expressed praise for WHGC as a whole. There was substantial support for WHGC as a common experience for all freshmen that could serve as a foundation for later campus dialogue both inside an outside the classroom. Additional elements of the course that were praised, included:

- the discussion-oriented pedagogy which helps students become active learners
- the thematic nature of the course, which helps orient discussions and instill basic values
- universal participation, which aids faculty socialization and creates a true "community of scholar-teachers" among participating faculty. This is especially important for new faculty.
- "non-expert" teaching that provides students a role model for life-long interdisciplinary learners
- a critical approach to great books of the world that provides both exposure to "classic texts" of various cultures and an opportunity to learn critical thinking skills

Of course, the strong praise for WHGC was also matched by strong criticism – including criticism of some of the specific elements of the course mentioned above. Displeasure centered around three major issues: the general goals and objectives of the course, student training and preparedness, and faculty training and support.

a.) General goals and objectives of the course:
There were repeated calls for us to avoid simple tinkering with WHGC, and instead to re-think its basic purposes and goals. Even those who praised the course in general suggested that the ideals of WHGC had been lost over the years as it morphed into a "Frankenstein" packed with superficially covered texts ripped from their historical and cultural contexts. This superficiality was a concern for almost all faculty participants in the learning sessions; however, a few faculty pointed out that more in-depth readings of texts would also require more training (and more potential discomfort) for faculty not used to teaching discussion-oriented classes. While there was some praise of the thematic organization, there was also criticism that we only teach students to make superficial connections instead of focusing on deeper and more nuanced readings of the texts. Professors lamented almost unanimously that the course had become so rushed that little real insight or critical reading of the individual texts was possible.
As mentioned above, there were several faculty who defended the use of "classic" texts, but there were also others who suggested that more contemporary sources and issues might seem more discussable and more immediately relevant to students. Such an approach might work better at making freshman more globally aware and better "citizens of the world". Several others commented that there were not enough hands on activities in the course, including lab work, service learning, arts and crafts, or field trips. Finally, while some faculty defended the roughly chronological approach of WHGC (and a few suggested that it might be better framed as a world civilizations course), many others suggested that we would be better served to abandon chronology in favor of a purely thematic organization.
Meanwhile, still other participants in the listening sessions suggested that the content of the course was much less important than the skills that we should be imparting to students in their first college year. Students need to spend much more time developing such abilities as analytical reasoning, critical thinking, use of scientific methods, oral and written competency, information literacy, and the basic ability to understand the importance of interdisciplinary approaches. Such skills, it was suggested could be

developed with a range of different kinds of readings and assignments – and the development of such skills, not exposure to a cannon of core texts, should be the real organizing principle of the course.

There were also complaints that the first year program (Autumn + Fall + Spring) is unnecessarily long, and that by the spring semester the course, along with both faculty and students, loses its energy and focus. Faculty commented that by the end of the spring they have used up their "bag of tricks" and the students are harder to motivate. While some suggested that this could be handled by adding more hands-on experiences in the spring, others claimed that a one-semester WHGC course (or at least one semester of a common syllabus) would keep both faculty and students from becoming jaded.

Finally, some faculty complained that WHGC had devolved into a kind of "Introduction to the Humanities" course. Much of the emphasis on real interdisciplinarity – including a more detailed and thorough introduction to the sciences – had been pared down and reduced to token status. These faculty claimed that the lack of real interdisciplinarity both disappointed some non-humanities students and led to increased frustration among non-humanities faculty who were being required to teach so far outside their field of study.

b.) Student training and preparedness

Another of the major concerns with WHGC is that the course in its current form is not attuned to the needs and desires of freshmen, nor is it an appropriate transition into college life and into a particular major field. The emphasis that many faculty placed on the need for a skill-based instead of a strictly content-based first year course was motivated in part by a sense that many incoming students were woefully prepared by their high schools. Many students do not know how to read difficult texts, so they turn to Sparknotes when overwhelmed or confused. Students do not know how to listen or take notes in long or complex plenary lectures, so they text message or sleep or talk to their neighbors. Students don't understand the model of non-expert teaching, so they express disappointment or even anger when an instructor won't play the role of an expert in class. And finally, students don't always understand the definition of the "liberal arts" or the purpose of general education, so they are embittered by the need to take a required course outside of their field of interest. For some faculty, these problems were a signal that we need to do a better job of both teaching basic skills and also "selling" to students the basic notions and value of general education. For others, the best solution was to start with a skills course and move any abstract discussions of classic texts and values until the second year, when students would have a developed more appropriate theoretical tools.

For many of those concerned with using WHGC to better build student listening, reading, and thinking skills, the rushed format of the current course came in for particular criticism. With so many texts covered so quickly, special "Section Days" often must be used to catch up on material instead of for skill-building exercises. Even exams in the course were criticized as requiring mainly regurgitation and not the kind of deep thought or critical analysis that we should be encouraging our students to utilize.

Finally, some faculty encouraged the replacement of "classic texts" with which students may already be superficially familiar, with less familiar texts that challenge their worldview. Even though second (and more thorough) readings of classic texts can certainly be useful, it is not always easy to convince freshmen that this is true. Using

primarily unfamiliar or "global" texts in WHGC will encourage more students to do the reading and do it with an open mind.

c.) Faculty training and support

Many faculty suggested that WHGC is based on idealized notions of faculty-student interactions that don't work so well in practice – partly because faculty are not given proper training and support. Although May and August workshops can be helpful, many comments suggested that we need better faculty training in how to deal with certain texts, lead a discussion, and mentor effectively. This kind of training would be especially helpful for socializing new faculty into the program, especially if it included visits to WHGC sections and plenary lectures in the year before the first WHGC participation. Such training, however, may require additional faculty development support or a course release.

While well-intentioned, and often helpful, the Monday faculty meetings of WHGC were criticized by many faculty for their inconsistency. The most frequent complaints centered around the suggestion that the meetings were useful for providing ideas for class activities, but much less systematic in providing help for understanding the content and context of individual texts. While the course now encourages presentations in Monday meetings by non-expert faculty, there were calls for more expert help to make sure that faculty members weren't just going through the motions in class. Lack of readiness and confidence with the course material was cited as a prime reason for faculty dissatisfaction. A few faculty even suggested it would be useful to have a cadre of regulars to assist the director in training and preparing faculty on different topics. Online resources were cited as a big improvement over the old faculty guide, but they did not serve as a substitute for informed discussion in the Monday meetings.

Faculty comments painted mentoring load as the one of the most rewarding, but also most exhausting part of faculty responsibilities in WHGC. For faculty in some understaffed majors, the mentor load is so high that they can spend very little time with their own majors – especially in the run-up to registration. Some faculty questioned the need to delay fly-up until spring semester, especially for students who already know their intended major. Other faculty asked for assistance in mentoring freshmen, even citing the PEL model of hiring people to serve as career planning advisers for first year students. Mentoring in WHGC and in the disciplines would remain, they suggested, but these special first year advisers (perhaps centered in CALA) would help students get on track before they come in to talk to their mentors. A few faculty members even suggested that students should be required to submit a degree plan to the Registrar by their sophomore year.

There also seemed to be frustration about the widely varying requirements, expectations, and teaching styles among WHGC faculty. Out of a desire to maintain a degree of autonomy, the particular kinds of written, oral, and critical thinking assignments required in the course have been left up to the instructor. Faculty reported hearing frequent student complaints about some sections that were much more rigorous and demanding than others – a situation that can lead to the demoralization of both students and faculty.

3. Quest For Meaning

Faculty comments on QFM also tended to be fairly divided. Some argued that QFM is a vital part of the general education and provides a valuable bookend to WHGC and a chance for students to return to "big" questions after the completion of the major. Many with recent experience in the program commented that the latest revisions of QFM (especially the more rigorous focus on the liberal arts) have provided greater coherence and intellectual credibility to the course.

There were also substantial criticisms of QFM. The primary and almost universally voiced criticism was that the service component – while valuable in and of itself – did not belong in a senior course. This kind of service work would be much more valuable for underclassmen, especially since it might inspire a sense of real community activism that might be carried over into subsequent college years. The consensus appears to be that the senior year, when students must also worry about comprehensive exams, theses, applications for graduate schools or plans for post-graduate employment, is simply not the best time for this mandatory service requirement.

Other faculty were highly critical of the content of QFM, claiming that student and faculty opinion of the course is extremely low. Although some faculty claimed that part of the problem was tied to a continual change in leadership that pulled the course in different directions each year, others blamed lackluster readings and plenary sessions that students did not find valuable. Of course, the high number of adjunct and non-teaching faculty involved in QFM was also cited as hurting the course's credibility with students. In addition to the reasons stated above, faculty comments suggested this lack of faculty commitment could be attributed to a number of factors, including the course's checkered past and a lack of commensurate faculty support compared to what is given to those who teach in WHGC.

Despite these criticisms, many faculty still spoke positively of keeping a bookend "values" course for Eckerd seniors; others, however, were less sanguine about holding on to a course that cause so much resentment among students and faculty.

4. Other parts of General Education

Because our faculty listening sessions tended to focus primarily on the "bookend" courses of WHGC and QFM, feedback on other general education requirements tended to be less systematic. Nevertheless, there were important issues raised in these discussions about almost every part of the existing program.

Distribution and Perspective Requirements:

Several faculty members commented that perspectives and breath requirements were a good idea, and that the requirements were dramatically improved by the last program revision. But others complained that they were an uninspired grab bag of courses that were not integrated or tied directly to general education goals. In addition, the complaint was raised that students often fulfilled breadth requirements with introductory courses that they didn't necessarily take seriously. However, by far the most frequently voiced concern was that there were no clear criteria for what comprised a global or environmental course, and no common sense of what the overall goals of such courses should be. Many faculty spoke about the need for guidance (or even a standard template or common rubric) for creating such courses.

Writing Proficiency:

Faculty comments were fairly positive about the portfolio process, although a few faculty voiced skepticism at the methodology used. The primary criticism, however, was directed not at the portfolio process itself, but at the lack of rigorous training in writing skills before students complete the portfolio. For some faculty, the clear way to train students in writing during the early years of college is to require a writing course. Others favored the creation of a variety of writing intensive courses (including those for writing in the sciences). Still others argued for the incorporation of more rigorous writing assignments in WHGC, and suggested greater training for faculty and/or greater outreach from the Writing Center to make this easier for non-humanities faculty.

Fewer, but still important comments were made on the following issues:

- College Program Series: CPS events were generally lauded although there was a suggestion that a "CPS distribution requirement" could be helpful

- Oral Proficiency Requirement: Since the implementation (or re-implementation) of this requirement is still underway, many faculty seemed hesitant to call for changes. There were, however, suggestions that more rigor was required in measuring oral proficiency and that we needed to be clear how both measurement and training were occurring in WHGC, in other GE courses, and in the majors.

- Technology Requirement: The consensus is that our requirements here are so outdated that they are all but ignored by faculty and students already. Most students are already quite technologically savvy – with the possible exclusion of a very few international students.

- Information Literacy: Ironically, while students are technologically savvy, some faculty members suggested that they are almost completely unable to use library resources to conduct college level research. Students have particular difficulty in evaluating the credibility of sources (including websites) and accessing articles through electronic databases. Currently, all freshmen get an extremely cursory introduction to the library in Autumn Term; all further instruction comes only if a professor arranges a particular bibliographic instruction class or if an individual student seeks help him or herself.

- Science Lab Course: there was substantial regret expressed that Eckerd students were not exposed to a science course with lab work or fieldwork. However, there was also concern that implementing such a requirement would be impossible given current restraints on staffing and facilities.

- Language Requirement: Some faculty questioned the effectiveness of a one-year language requirement and suggested that we consider requiring a second year. Other faculty suggested that faculty loads in the languages

are already severe and that such an extension would be impossible without doubling the size of the department. Several commenters suggested that the college might be better served by removing a college requirement and instead making language requirements discipline-specific. Doing this would also allow language professors to offer more advanced courses in language, literature, and culture for interested students.

II. Student Feedback on General Education

A. General Notes

As in the case of the Faculty Listening Sessions, our purpose in gathering student feedback was not to compile a statistical sample of student opinion, but instead to actually meet with small groups of students and listen to their comments about our GE program. Our committee originally planned to meet with a selection of QFM sections at the end of the fall semester; however, scheduling proved to be difficult, so we instead made appointments to meet with individual senior seminars. Of course, not all majors hold required senior seminars in the fall semester; so we simply did our best to find a variety of seminars with significant student populations. In the end, we held meetings with nine separate groups of seniors, including seminars in Anthropology, Biology, Economics, Environmental Studies, IRGA, IB, Marine Science, Visual Arts as well as our senior Ford students. Although specific complaints did vary from group to group, there was a surprising amount of unanimity about the major strengths and weaknesses in our general education program.

Each of the meetings featured some praise for general education courses, but this praise was especially prominent among the Senior Ford Scholars. Some in the Ford program suggested that science majors do not get enough exposure to the liberal arts, and they suggested that more emphasis could and should be required. Others insisted that GE courses should flow better throughout the four years instead of working as bookends at the start and the end. Finally, several Ford students also suggested that the success or failure of most GE courses (especially WHGC and QFM sections) depends on the students themselves. Students who take responsibility for their own learning, they argued, can help turn these courses into very valuable experiences.

Most of our other discussions with seniors tended to focus more on what students would want to change about the GE requirements rather than on what they enjoyed or what they would keep. Of all the criticisms leveled at general education courses, three areas seemed to come up most often across student groups:

1.) Variability in Faculty Quality and Expectations – Students in every major we surveyed reported that WHGC sections differed substantially both in quality and in rigor – and that such a difference was both unfair and demoralizing. Some students rejected outright the model of "non-expert teaching", but others insisted that that having a passionate and prepared professor was the most important thing. Ford students were especially critical here, and many suggested the need either for "expert" team-taught courses or better training in how to teach in a "non-expert" general education course. Seniors had the same kinds of complaints about QFM, in which many instructors were

seen as lacking qualifications and credibility, especially those who were not regular faculty members. Professors also ranged widely in the amount of work expected, and students reported that many of their peers were doing little or no reading in the class, or had failed even to purchase the texts.

2.) Selling General Education. Many seniors suggested that we need to do a better job of explaining or "selling" students on the basic idea and purpose of a liberal education. It would be especially helpful, they suggested, to talk to freshmen about the value of reading (or rereading) the "classics", and it might often lessen senior resistance to QFM if we explained how the courses were designed to fit together and how they were valuable. Ironically, students seemed to disagree about how successfully these two "bookends" of general education were linked to one another. Environmental Studies and Economics seniors, for example, complained that QFM and WHGC were substantially the same course, even if the readings differed. Others, however, (especially in Anthropology) said there were few direct connections between the two courses, or even between readings within QFM itself. Several students across different groups also argued that a GE capstone is unnecessary and much less useful or desirable than a capstone in their own major field.

3.) Dissatisfaction with Student-Led Discussions. Students in several sections expressed a loathing of student-led discussions in both WHGC and QFM. Such discussions, according to both Ford and Anthropology seniors, were examples of "the blind leading the blind". When professors ceded control of the class to students, the result was almost always superficiality and mediocrity.

B. Feedback on Particular Parts of the GE Program

1. WHGC
There were many animated discussions of our current first year program, and students both praised and criticized the current system. Complaints about the WHGC sequence tended to fall in three general areas:

a.) The easiness of the course. A substantial proportion of students reported that they had already encountered many of the WHGC texts in high school, and thus felt it was a waste of their time to read them again. Several also reported that it was fairly easy to get through the course without reading the texts (or even buying them) – especially in sections where there were no quizzes and writing assignments were simple.

b.) The course moves too quickly. Many students (although not all) suggested that the course moves far too quickly from topic to topic and reading to reading. This means that when a student finds an area of real interest or inspiration, it is usually gone by the end of one or two class periods. The Ford seniors were especially vocal about the lack of depth, while Anthropology and Art seniors lamented the especially superficial treatment of world religions and cultures.

c.) Two semesters is too long. Although this comment was not voiced in every senior seminar, it was fairly common. Students suggested the course seemed to drag in the second semester and that this impacted student learning. There were many suggested solutions to this problem offered in different student groups, ranging from removing WHGC completely (Mar. Sci.), to limiting it to one semester, to spreading it out over two years, to even delaying it until the sophomore year when students were more intellectually mature.

Two less common objections had some support within individual listening sessions:

d.) Anthropology seniors suggested that the themes of the course are too broad and that there is too much focus on the Humanities.

e.) Art seniors complained that the readings were given little context or historical background, while Biology students added that we would do much better to link "classic" readings more intentionally to contemporary readings and issues.

2. QFM

In our Student Listening Sessions, discussions about QFM were often quite animated – even more animated than our discussions about WHGC. This is undoubtedly due in part to the fact that these students were in the midst of the course at that time. There were four main topics of discussion regarding QFM:

a.) Move the service requirement. Every group of students we spoke to, without exception, argued that the service component did not belong in the senior year, when students were simultaneously preparing for comps, finishing up requirements, applying to graduate schools, and starting to think about life after graduation. Although there were a few general critics of "required volunteerism", most seniors seemed to want to keep the requirement but move it to an earlier year. A number of students also suggested that the service learning requirement should be more like CPS events; that is, students would be encouraged to finish the requirement earlier rather than later, but they would be relatively free to determine when, where, and with whom to perform their service. Several students were even interested in *raising* the minimum number of required service hours – as long as there was more freedom to choose where, when, and how.

b.) Rethink or abolish group service. This concern was voiced less often, but it still seemed to resonate. Several students in different senior groups complained that it was hard to find a good group to join and difficult to resolve scheduling and transportation issues. Some also suggested that many group members had "different priorities", which made the experience less enjoyable.

c.) The course is too structured and narrow-minded. Several Ford and Marine Science students complained that there was too much reading assigned for each week of QFM and too little time for a real "quest for meaning". Some Ford, Art, and Biology seniors suggested that the course was too oriented toward a Judeo-Christian perspective and too focused on the perspective of "dead (or occasionally live) white males." Potential

solutions varied from adding more history/government readings, to focusing on shorter and more contemporary selections, to allowing students to have a greater voice in what books or articles are assigned.

d.) Reunite WHGC cohorts in QFM as often as possible. Several seniors reported that WHGC classes which later joined together in QFM sections have worked very well. Students and faculty start with a common understanding of each other, and they can see how everyone has developed and changed over four years of college. This helps provide more immediate "buy-in" to the course.

There were many other comments made by seniors about QFM (sometimes vociferously); however, these tended to encounter resistance either within the group or across groups. Some examples:

e.) Political Bias. While some students viewed the readings in QFM well-selected and ideologically balanced, others complained of a strong political bias in the readings that was then reflected in the tenor of class discussions. A small proportion suggested that the purpose of such courses was "to cram political views down our throats".

f.) Festival of Hope and Philosophy of Life. Some students praised both of these assignments as valuable and memorable parts of the course. However, at least as many seemed fiercely opposed. Some even suggested the two course components were absurd and a waste of time that only forced seniors to do the minimum possible reflection in order to pass.

3. Perspectives and Breadth Requirements

Although there were some students who voiced opposition to being "forced to take courses they didn't want", the majority of students seemed to recognize and condone the objectives behind the perspective and breadth requirements. The main complaints centered on three areas: a lack of flexibility in the requirement, variations in course difficulty, and problems with scheduling.

Students in various disciplines suggested that the there should be more flexibility in breadth requirements. Both Economics and Biology students, for example, complained that students should be able to opt out of one or more of these requirements if they can demonstrate that they are building "breadth" in other areas. Students might then be able to avoid a dreaded science class, for instance, if they took additional useful courses outside their major. There were also student suggestions that some courses should be allowed to fulfill more than one requirement at a time (e.g.: perspective and breadth), and that internships might also be used for 'G' or 'E' credit.

Several seniors also claimed that some of the offered perspectives were far too difficult and forced students to do upper-division work in disciplines with which they were unfamiliar. This was seen as unfair; especially if peers were able to take other perspectives that required much less work. Some science students, on the other hand, complained bitterly that non-science students were allowed to take special courses for the 'N' requirement, when no one else was provided that luxury. (Ironically, International Business majors seemed to think that 'N' courses were far still too difficult.) Several

Biology majors also reported that their E-perspectives were a waste of time since these courses usually covered much more rudimentary environmental issues than they had been exposed to in their own major courses. Other seniors complained that many 'E' perspective courses had relatively little to do with actual knowledge about the environment.

Finally, there was some student frustration with the range of perspective courses offered every semester. Students in most groups suggested that a greater number and better variety of courses would be helpful, and Biology majors in particular complained that their rigid major requirements meant that it was often impossible to schedule the particular 'E' or 'G' courses that they would enjoy taking.

4. Other Parts of General Education

Fewer discussions, but still important ones, were held on the following topics:

- Writing Proficiency – Many students, especially those in International Business and IRGA, suggested that the writing portfolio works very well as it currently is. Other seniors, however, complained that they did not have experience writing all the different kinds of required papers before their junior year and that professors in their classes often did not take the time to talk about writing or give formative feedback. Some Biology students were adamant about the need for a required writing course, although many others tended to advocate more rigorous writing training in WHGC and in the majors.

- Languages – Comments here were only sporadic and contradictory. Students in IRGA complained about the lack of variety in upper-level language courses. Some Marine Science students, on the other hand tended to view language requirements as superfluous.

- Technology – Some students thought that we should require a computer class where students learned "computer literacy", including how to use Excel, Power Point, Photo Shop, and various software packages for taxes and banking, etc.

- College Program Series – There were both very positive and very negative opinions voiced on this requirement. While there were a few who suggested that the requirement was unnecessary, most of the negative comments focused primarily on procedural issues such as resistance to having student groups bring in their own CPS speakers, interminably long question-and-answer sessions that forced students to stay late, and inaccurate recording of attended CPS events by the Registrar.

III. A National Review of General Education Programs

A review of Eckerd's general education necessarily includes an exploration of how other institutions understand and deliver their general education programs. In higher education, finding institutions that are leading the way in understanding and envisioning general education for current student populations is not simply a matter of identifying the "top schools." Many strong general education programs reside in institutions that are not widely known. In order to consider the diversity of approaches to general education, we explored institutions that are similar to Eckerd as well as ones that are, on the surface, quite different.

Procedure:

General education programs can not be easily understood apart from the particular context of a given institution. They grow out of a given institution's ethos and institutional goals. These vary widely depending on student population, institutional funding sources, and institutional mission. Thus, instead of trying to gather statistical information on numerous schools, we decided in favor of exploring a limited number in some detail. Our initial task was to select a small, but representative and useful sample from all the many institutions.

To gather names of schools to investigate, we conducted interviews with Eckerd's leadership (Dean, Associate Deans: present and former). We reviewed several books on exemplary general education or first year programs[83] and lists of institutions from national organizations that focus on curricular issues.[84] We also briefly reviewed a list of the general education requirements of HEDs list schools complied by an Eckerd work-study student. From this initial list, we identified over twenty schools (see Table I) to explore in more detail. As we reviewed these schools, we categorized them in two ways:

Table I: Initial list of schools considered:
Bard College
Barnard College
Bates College
Beloit College
Boston University-Core
Brown University
Colgate University
Colorado College
Columbia University
Davidson College
Drury University
Duke University
Earlham College
Elon College
Evergreen State University
Hendrix College
Johns Hopkins University
Lehman College-CUNY
Portland State University
Reed College
Rhodes College
St John's College (Baltimore)
SUNY
University of Chicago
University of Puget Sound
Wabash College

---

[83] George D. Kuh, et. al. *Student Success in College* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005); Betsy Barefoot, et. al. (eds.) *Achieving and Sustaining Institutional Excellence for the First Year of College*; Michael Nelson et. al. (eds) *Alive at the Core.*

[84] American Association of Colleges and Universities: www.aacu.org. First Year Programs: www.firstyear.org; www.fyfoundations.org; www.cic.edu/index.asp; www.liberalarts.org. accessed April 2, 2007.

1) from the extent to which students experienced a common syllabus compared with a distribution requirement
2) to a pedagogical approach that ranged from "great books" to "modes of learning" (see Figure 1 below).
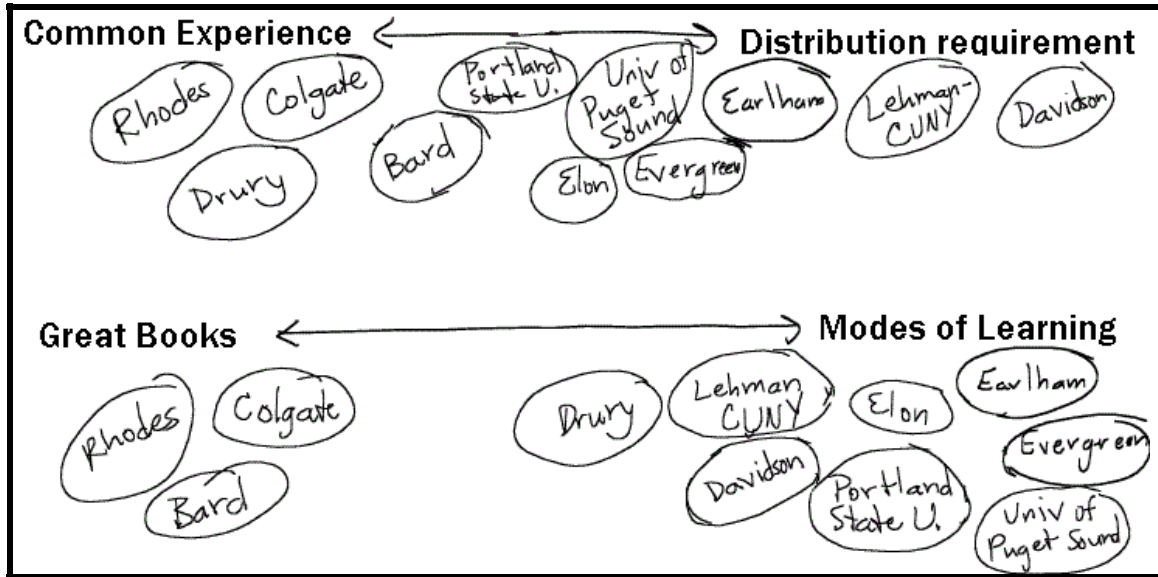

Figure 1: Subjective organization of the general education program of nine institutions across two continuums. The common experience to distribution requirement compared the extent to which students experienced a common course and common readings. The "great books" to "modes of learning" continuum was the extent to which the general education courses valued particular texts or found the texts secondary to introducing methods of learning and analysis.

The goal in this initial survey was to explore as many different approaches to general education as possible and to find representative institutions of high quality for different approaches. We made no systematic attempt to develop a means to evaluate the best approach primarily because the approaches are so heavily dependent on the institutional culture. Some of the case studies we read that pointed us to a number of institutions, however, did identify exemplars in particular approaches according to national surveys (e.g. NSSE survey).[85]

We selected a subset of institutions that had a well-articulated general education program with interesting features with the additional proviso that some aspects of the program might transfer to Eckerd in some form (thus, we eliminated quality programs like St John's). We then re-evaluated this subset (listed below in Table II) according to the criteria listed in Bok's book (See Section III. The National Debate on General Education).[86] We then narrowed the list further to institutions that seemed to best match Bok's criteria in one form or another and arranged phone interviews with the head of the

---

[85] George D. Kuh, et. al. *Student Success in College*; Betsy Barefoot, et. al. (eds.) *Achieving and Sustaining Institutional Excellence for the First Year of College*; Michael Nelson et. al. (eds) *Alive at the Core*.
[86] Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*.

general education or first-year program. The purpose of the phone calls was to discover how the general education program was implemented at the institution (beyond the rhetoric of the website or case study description in a book) and how faculty and students responded to the program.

Types of GE Programs:

What we learned from this process was that general education programs are widely varied and the aims of general education programs are lofty and often difficult to meet. General education programs are under pressure to do everything (teach communication, critical thinking, appreciation for diversity, provide a solid foundation in great books, teach quantitative and technological skills, etc) while in competition with disciplines for scarce resources. Concerned voiced by Eckerd's faculty during the Listening Project (see section "Listening Project") are not limited to Eckerd. Most general education programs are a compromise between a core program of great books (St John's College with the common four-year curriculum as the obvious exception) and a distribution system. This compromise is usually embodied in a first year required course coupled with upper-level distribution requirements. The first year (or first semester) course ranges from a seminar course on various topics (often similar to Autumn Term) to a course with a common syllabus (like WHGC) with variations in between. Upper-level distribution requirements are similar to Eckerd's system with a notable difference that many general education science requirements include a laboratory course. Also, many institutions seem to have more general education requirements (more courses as a percentage of total courses), but we did not do a rigorous study of this.

> **Table II: Bok's Criteria Applied to the Following Institutions:**
> Bard College
> Colgate University
> Davidson College
> Drury University
> Earlham College
> Elon College
> Evergreen State University
> Lehman College-CUNY
> Portland State University
> Rhodes College
> University of Puget Sound

> **Institutions Interviewed:**
> Drury University
> Lehman College-CUNY
> Portland State University
> Rhodes College

Distribution system:

Bok claims that a call to defining a general education program in terms of a cafeteria-style menu of course choices is not new. He argues that while a system of distribution requirements is often the easiest and most popular to implement because it gives the widest latitude to both students and faculty, it tends not to serve the aims of a liberal arts education. We agree with that premise and so did not focus on institutions with a distribution system except for Lehman-CUNY because of its use of learning communities.

Lehman-CUNY: Learning Communities and Retention in an Urban Environment

The hallmark of Lehman-CUNY is the strength of its learning community approach and how it has dramatically improved the success of its student population. The use of "learning communities" in higher education is wide-spread and recognized to

enhance student success and retention in college. Lehman adopted this approach because of its high percentage of first generation students, who are also by and large members of under-represented groups in higher education (minority students, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds). Students entering Lehman are clustered into learning communities by anticipated major. Students with an interest in biology, for example, would take Biology I, Composition, First Year Seminar, Anthropology and Math I. A group of 20 students stay together in a block of courses which constitutes their "learning community." The faculty teaching the different classes in a "block" meet together occasionally to monitor the progress of students as well as to discuss potential connections between the classes. The Composition course, in particular, intentionally creates assignments that support the work in the other courses within the block. In the spring semester, students have a block of three classes and are free to choose their other two courses. A general education requirement of interest is that students must take a set number of courses designated as "writing intensive" which is Lehman's approach to writing across the curriculum.

First-year Core (plus Distribution System):
Because we agreed that a distribution system where students simply choose courses from a "menu" of choices leads to an incoherent and uneven general education program, we focused the rest of our research on institutions that had varying degrees of compromise between common (or "core" courses) and distribution requirements.

Rhodes College: Traditional Core
Most traditional in the group of students with a first-year core is probably Rhodes College, an institution much like Eckerd in size and student population. Rhodes' core course is a two year sequence on Western Culture and Values that a significant fraction of the incoming students participate in. Students are assigned to discussion sections and attend whole class plenary lectures. The course is staffed primarily by the humanities faculty and is supported by an endowment for the program (that requires that Rhodes provide students a series of courses in Judeo-Christian heritage and/or values). Rhodes has just completed a curriculum revision to reduce the number of courses that students take each semester (from 5 down to 4) and thus reduce the number of courses in the core (from 4 semesters to 3) with a drop in required distribution requirements. In the curriculum revision, Rhodes paid particular attention to the goals of its general education program and which courses fulfilled those goals. In the process, Rhodes created a graduation checklist based on general education goals not just a course check-list as a way to explicitly communicate the educational objectives of courses within the distribution system.

Barnard College: Immersion in a Time and Place
Although not included in the interviews, Barnard College's "Reacting to the Past" deserves mention as its first year program immerses Barnard College students in a particular place and time as they compete in a game set at crucial historical moments based on great texts. Within the game, student reading of texts provide a way for students to develop a voice consistent with their side. For example, a student describes her month in Gandhi's India as she and her teammates read Gandhi's works to acquire, in

a sense, Gandhi's voice in order to keep India together and prevent Hindus and Muslims from destroying each other.[87] Playing the game made the texts alive so that she felt that she had lived the experience. In month-long units, students travel through the past, often across cultures in the course of the game and live the texts. These courses engage students and draw them deeply into influential texts in meaningful ways.

General Education Across Four Years:
 While many institutions approach general education in much the same as Eckerd[88], two noteworthy exceptions are Portland State University's University Studies Program and Drury Universities. These programs approach general education as less of a compromise between common courses versus distribution requirements and more as a structured coherent program.

Portland State: University Studies and Assessment across the Curriculum
 The University Studies program at Portland State University intentionally links general education courses across a four-year program, beginning with first-year, team-taught interdisciplinary theme-based courses (Freshman Inquiry or FRINQ courses) to the senior year capstone course that includes service learning in the community (often connected to the major field of study). The team-taught FRINQ consists of a group of linked courses where students meet with their individual professor in a seminar format for discussions as well as a lecture format or panel discussion for the three or four sections of the linked course. Besides the faculty member, each course also has a peer discussion leader: an upper level student who leads the section discussion for some course period.
 Between the first and fourth year courses are general education courses that are linked: a sophomore-level general education course (Sophomore Inquiry or SINQ) is the gateway to a group of junior-senior level general education courses. Picking a particular "track" for upper-level general education coursework avoids the superficial breadth of many distribution course based systems. During their senior year, students engage in a service learning course that they pick by type of service learning project in the Portland area. This means that all of the students in a given senior capstone course will be working together on the same project.
 In addition, Portland State University requires all students to submit a portfolio that reflects on their education, identifying which courses and activities helped them meet four explicit institutional goals. Furthermore, each University Studies course must describe how it will meet the goals (to differing degrees depending on the level of the course) and has well-developed assessment rubrics that are widely referenced in higher education.

Drury University: Global Studies 21
 Drury's general education program is encapsulated in a minor that all students are required to complete: Global Studies 21 (21st century). The aim of the Global Studies 21

---

[87] "Reacting to Reacting" Change, July/August 2006, p. 52-53.
[88] Ursinus College has recently adopted Universal Participation in its common first year course. Burton Bollag, "Where a Geneticist Can Teach 'Gilgamesh'," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 52.11 (Nov 4, 2005).

program is "to prepare students for the 21st century by providing the breadth of understanding and skills needed in our rapidly changing global society."[89] The program begins in the first year with the Alpha Seminar: The American Experience.   This is essentially a common core course with a 70-80% common reading list and 20-30% of the course materials set by the individual faculty member participating in the course. In the sophomore year, students take a common course, "Global Awareness and Cultural Diversity" and a course on values followed by the junior year "Global Futures," a topical course on issues of sustainability. Continuing the progression through the four years, juniors take a 6-credit interdisciplinary science course which is followed by a research methods in science course in the senior year. This senior year course includes a campus-wide research symposium where students present their work to the campus community.

Surprisingly, this ambitious program developed in a University in crisis.[90] In the 1980s, Drury was in financial trouble and facing falling enrollments. Forged in this crisis, the Alpha Seminar together with the Global Studies 21 program became one of the most coherent and clearly focused general education programs we investigated.

Our review of other institutions was reassuring and challenging as well as fodder for many ideas contained in this proposal. We learned that Eckerd's general education program, in its current form, compares favorably with other general education programs in the country. Our aims and methods are consistent with other institutions. Furthermore, the coupling of a first year program with distribution requirements is a common approach to general education. The wide variety of general education programs, methods, and strategies that are successful at different institutions indicates that there is not one correct way of delivering a general education program, but the most successful ones tend to be those tied most directly to well-articulated goals and objectives.

---

[89] http://www.drury.edu/multinl/story.cfm?nlid=53&id=15073 accessed March 30, 2007.

[90] Charles C. Shroeder and Randy L. Swing, "Drury University" in Betsy Barefoot, et. al. (eds.) *Achieving and Sustaining Institutional Excellence for the First Year of College*, 146-7.