



Report of the General Education Committee

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Submitted to Richard Gale, VP Academic and Provost

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction	4
Background and Context.....	5
A Brief History of General Education	6
General Education Models	7
The Core Curriculum Model	7
The Distribution Model.....	7
The Blended Distribution Model–Core Curriculum Model	7
The Thematic Curriculum Model.....	7
The Learning Community Model.....	7
Negotiating the General Education Development Process	8
Bringing People Together.....	8
Considering Place and Culture	9
Finding the Right Words.....	9
Anticipating the Impact of Compounded Change.....	9
Challenges of Interdisciplinarity	10
Recommended Best Practices for General Education	11
Principles	11
Best Practices.....	11
Credit Requirements.....	12
General Education Models.....	12
Conclusion.....	16
Recommendations.....	17
References.....	18
Appendix A.....	20
Appendix B.....	20
Appendix C.....	20
Appendix D.....	20
Appendix E.....	20
Appendix F.....	20

Executive Summary

Although “general education” is not a term commonly used in the Canadian post-secondary context, we are all familiar with elective courses and the requirement that students complete a minimum number of credits outside their core areas of study. Capilano’s Academic and Strategic Plans articulate the university’s commitment to a general education curriculum; this report presents the context within which that curriculum should ideally be developed, including timelines to implementation with target dates of 2016 and 2017.

This document opens with background, context, and history. It presents an overview of the classic models of general education curriculum and identifies potential obstacles and challenges to the development and implementation of a general education curriculum. It offers five examples of existing general education programs as potential starting points for university-wide discussions regarding the planning and development of general education programming.

At the conclusion of this document, the general education committee recommends that:

- The university commit to a collaborative, faculty-led consultation and design process, with a general education launch date of September 2017 (see proposed timeline in Appendix B);
- The university provide budgetary support for a general education committee to guide this consultative process through the 2015-2016 academic year;
- The committee facilitate meaningful and sustained consultation with the university community, especially faculty and students, as outlined in the proposed timeline;
- The university and committee adopt and adhere to the principles and best practices outlined in this document, including identified faculty development opportunities; and
- The general education curriculum at Capilano University contain the program elements outlined in this document and include a minimum of 24-30 credits, with minimums established on a program-by-program basis.

Introduction

Since Capilano University became accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), considerable concern has arisen around the NWCCU requirements for general education and how those requirements will be met at Capilano. While general education has long been a feature of the American post-secondary system, intentional general education programming has not been widely implemented in Canada. Concerns about the NWCCU requirements stem, in part, from our lack of familiarity with the term “general education,” which is typically used in the American educational system to describe “core concepts,” or “university studies.”

More specifically, general education programs are substantial, coherent programs of university study that are designed to provide students with a common experience that enhances their intellectual, practical, integrative and applied learning skills; their sense of personal and social responsibility; and their knowledge of human cultures, histories, and the physical and natural worlds.

In Capilano University’s Academic and Strategic Plans, the university shared its commitment to developing a general education program unique to Capilano – one that will also be unique in Canada. This program will not only meet NWCCU requirements for accreditation but also serve the mission of our institution and support student success at university and beyond. As outlined in the Academic Plan:

Employers do need educated and trained graduates—they also need socially, interpersonally, environmentally aware individuals, with broad-based knowledge and understanding, who are critical and creative thinkers, effective communicators and problem solvers. Our world changes quickly, so we need to be adaptable and equipped, academically, with transferable skills and knowledge. This is the goal of Capilano’s general education: fostering abilities and skills, literacies and understandings, perspectives and positions that cross disciplines and prepare students for meaningful engagement with their world. (Capilano University, 2014a, p. 16-17)

We are committed to these goals; we must also be committed to a development process and a general education curriculum that respects our institutional and Canadian cultures – that truly sets us apart. This report proposes the path forward. It provides an introduction to general education and its history; offers five exemplary general education models to foreground the consultation and development process; identifies potential roadblocks to development; and proposes a collaborative, faculty-led process for the design and implementation of a general education curriculum for launch in Fall 2017.

Background and Context

In response to the recommendations of Capilano University's Academic and Strategic Plans, the Vice President Academic and Provost struck a committee on General Education with a mandate to produce a draft proposal for Capilano University's general education curriculum by March 31, 2015. Committee members include the Vice President Academic and Provost, representatives from all five Faculties and the Library, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, and the Registrar.

Following on work completed by a sub-committee of the Ad Hoc Senate Credential Policy Review Committee, the General Education committee accepted that our current Senate Policy on Credential Requirements (S2009-03) reflects many of the definitions of general education found in the literature, and these are included in many of Capilano's programs. However, the sub-committee's report (Appendix A) identifies several problems or inconsistencies in the way that the so-called "general education" curriculum is implemented at Capilano, including the fact that general education requirements are not specifically defined for many Capilano credentials (baccalaureate concentrations, post-baccalaureate certificates, post baccalaureate diplomas, graduate certificates, and graduate diplomas).

Consequently, the process of implementing a robust and intentional general education curriculum will involve a careful review of all program curricula and may require some programs to "open up" their credentials, accommodating students' need to fulfill general education credits rather than departmental electives, or to review their programming to identify where general education objectives are already being met through existing requirements.

Throughout the process of researching and writing this report, the committee members have been mindful of the need to develop general education curriculum thoughtfully and with extensive collaboration and consultation with and between faculty members, departments, and programs. A common refrain in the literature and at the AAC&U conference on General Education in Kansas City is that if we want our general education initiative to fail, we should design and implement it quickly and with minimal consultation.

A Brief History of General Education

Early university curricula, developed at institutions such as the University of Cambridge and the University of Oxford, were built on a canon of classical studies that would, it was believed, prepare students to enter society as educated individuals, well-versed in the most important texts and thinkers of the Western world (Wehlburg, 2000). In Canada, institutions such as the University of Toronto drew on this approach in designing their undergraduate programs, as did many institutions in the United States (Greenleaf, 2010).

In order to provide more choice for students in their educational planning, universities turned to an elective general education system that gave students the freedom to choose courses based on their interests. The elective system resulted in many changes in higher education; for example, students now had the freedom to build their own programs of study and declare majors and minors, the number of elective course offerings grew substantially, faculty specialization was increasingly valued, and disciplines became influential, particularly as they became housed separately (Gaff, 1983, cited in Wehlburg, 2000).

However, the elective system also had its shortcomings. Without the common canon as the foundation for a higher education, students lacked the opportunity to engage in “a common discourse” and the higher education system was now producing “graduates whose preparation level and overall capabilities varied widely” (Wehlburg, 2000, p. 5). The elective system was criticized for its fragmented approach to higher education, and universities responded by developing new requirements that students take a set of foundational courses in select disciplines alongside their electives. With this change came the emergence of general education programs (Wehlburg, 2000).

Since the 1960s, higher education institutions have grappled with how to offer general education that offers both coherence and choice while best preparing students for their future careers. Universities continue to experiment with approaches to general education that balance a substantial and coherent program of study with student choice. The general *elective* requirements at most Canadian universities average between 25.5-31.4 percent of an undergraduate degree. This difference alone makes the development of a general education program a major undertaking.

In the following section, we outline some of the most common models for contemporary general education programs that should inform the development process at Capilano University.

General Education Models

The purpose of general education is to provide students with an intentional, integrated course of study that provides intellectual breadth and depth in preparation for further studies, future careers, and lifelong learning. Several models of general education attempt to achieve this goal with varying degrees of success. The following are common general education models and their strengths and weaknesses.

The Core Curriculum Model

- Based on a common core of courses
- Typically delivered in years one and two
- Serves as a foundation for upper-level studies
- Often seen as courses to be “gotten out of the way”

The Distribution Model

- Students select courses from a menu (the “smorgasbord” approach)
- This model emphasizes the number and types of discipline-based courses from specific fields of study (e.g., natural sciences)
- Strength is in breadth and flexibility
- Weakness is lack of cohesion and “randomness” of courses

The Blended Distribution Model–Core Curriculum Model

- This blended model attempts to address weaknesses of Core and Distribution Models
- Students choose a defined core curriculum and select from approved additional courses outside of their primary program of study or major

The Thematic Curriculum Model

- Content organized around general themes reflective of university mission and goals (e.g., sustainability, diversity, citizenship)
- Thematically linked courses connect class content with its relevance to work and society
- Significant time and commitment required from involved faculty
- A budget that provides for its development, pilot testing, implementation, and coordination is required.

The Learning Community Model

- Follows cohort model for all or part of the general education curriculum
- Improves student retention, persistence, and transition to further studies

- Groups small numbers of students into learning communities that facilitate discussion and create a sense of belonging
- Requires significant amount of program coordination and lead-time to develop and implement.

Not surprisingly, the various models and innovative approaches to general education programming reflect reformers' attempts to grapple with issues of depth versus breadth of knowledge, unity among elective choices versus fragmentation, the willingness of faculty specialists to collaborate in curriculum design outside their disciplines, and the shift from a Western cultural perspective to one of cultural diversity (Newton, 2000).

Whatever the model of general education, recent changes in approaches to general education are fueled by the recognition that curriculum must shift from "what students need to know" to "what students need to know and be able to do" upon graduation (Weissman & Boning, 2003, cited in Duncan, 2014, p. 15) – or rather, an outcomes-based approach rather than one based solely on content knowledge.

Negotiating the General Education Development Process

We know why Capilano University needs a general education program. We know how general education evolved from its beginnings. In the previous and subsequent sections, we review and summarize some of the most successful models currently implemented in North American institutions. As we prepared those summaries, we were consistently reminded that large curricular changes are rarely accomplished easily.

As we embark on our own general education development process, we acknowledge a clear message in the literature on general education reform: any major curricular change within a higher education institution is disorderly, time-consuming and provokes anxiety. There are lessons to be learned from institutions that have lived through the experience. Most notably, we believe that the university community needs to be clear on why change is necessary, and it needs to feel that it has a role to play in that change. By focusing on this key principle, we can avoid the resentment and anxiety so common at the outset of reform efforts, and we may, in fact, significantly increase excitement over the creation of our general education program.

Bringing People Together

In an institution designed around disciplinary specialties – one experiencing a period of political flux – we can only overcome resistance to change through the harnessing of our "collective courage" (Carrell, 2015). We – the entire university community – need to set aside our individual goals and disciplinary boundaries and harness our "collective genius" to support student success. At the AAC&U General Education conference in Kansas City, Carrell suggested that the overarching goals set out in the University's

mission, academic plan and strategic plan can act as strong unifying forces to help overcome territorial barriers. She expressed hope that faculty can rally around the idea of producing graduates more ready to take on the challenges of the modern world, and described how faculty “think tanks” and learning communities can encourage sharing and understanding.

Several conference speakers cautioned against ignoring resisters and discussed the importance of ensuring everyone feels heard, as part of an “intentionally iterative” process. This is the basis for our recommendation that the development process be faculty-led, collaborative, and consultative. We must not forget that the voices of our students should be front and centre during this process.

Considering Place and Culture

It is equally important that we avoid the urge to “import” another institution’s general education model or curriculum. We must consider the university community’s current and remembered histories and understandings of Capilano University, and that the distinguishing features of our institution, which make unique and innovating opportunities possible, can help us construct a program of general education that is a signature of our place in the world. Given the location of our campuses and the histories of the spaces we occupy, it will be important to acknowledge and be inclusive of Indigenous knowledges and understandings of who is a learner/teacher, and the unique perspectives and opportunities this brings.

Finding the Right Words

Terms such as *general education*, *general studies*, and *liberal studies* have competing definitions and historical associations based on the perceiver’s knowledge and experience. The committee anticipates, and has already experienced, resistance to the idea of a “general education” program based merely on our colleagues’ perceptions of the phrase. Our program should be given a name as distinctive as the program itself; we are innovators for integrative undergraduate education in Canada, and we should avoid calling our creation “the general education program.” Inviting all members of the university community to be a part of the naming of the new program will make a positive contribution to the consultation process.

Anticipating the Impact of Compounded Change

Since becoming a University, Capilano has experienced seismic change, with further change on the horizon, including the current Faculty Restructuring Review. It would be prudent to acknowledge the likely existence of institutional “change fatigue” and the possibility of cynicism toward or distrust of proposed changes, which will need to be heard and overcome. We can help by minimizing the ways in which this process is associated with other institutional changes and by providing examples of how similar

concerns have been successfully overcome in other universities. We want the general education development process to be revitalizing and to provide hope for faculty, which again prompts our recommendation to make the process collaborative, consultative, and faculty-led.

Challenges of Interdisciplinarity

The general education programs that have provided the greatest inspiration to this committee are those that have been designed and delivered by cross-faculty teams. They also take an interdisciplinary focus, creating connections between courses and scaffolding learning from year to year. There are, however, some potential barriers to achieving the interdisciplinary focus we desire for our general education program. For example:

- According to several student participants in a March 2015 focus group, it is difficult to access courses outside of a student's area due to timetabling, time-ticket and permissions issues
- The same students also felt they would benefit greatly from more guidance in the selection of their electives
- "Off the grid" cohort programs will face considerable scheduling challenges in providing and/or participating in a more pan-institutional and interdisciplinary education model
- Surcharges and their role in "balancing the books" for certain resource-heavy specialized programs will have to be considered. There will be financial implications to creating a more interdisciplinary environment
- Education is expensive and time-consuming. Some students view electives as filler and may consider any increase in electives as an unfavorable change
- As general education is not a widely-used term to describe the required elective portion of a Canadian education, any increased quota of elective content, particularly in specialized applied fields, may be perceived as resulting in a less robust or less professionally valid credential in comparison to other Canadian institutions. While students would undoubtedly benefit from more interdisciplinary learning, the specialized training such curriculum would replace may be deemed a bigger loss.

These potential barriers underscore the importance of early consultation with the registrar, student advising, program areas, and marketing to ensure that the program developed can overcome these hurdles. The committee also recommends opportunities for faculty development in cross-disciplinary collaboration skills.

Recommended Best Practices for General Education

The committee's review process, which included assessing the general education models presented at the AAC&U conference in Kansas City, has led us to identify a set of interconnected best practices. The committee recommends that the following principles and best practices inform and guide the general education development process at Capilano University.

Principles

Principle 1 - A university's general education program is the embodiment of the institutional mission, values, and goals at the level of courses shared in common by all students.

Principle 2 – A general education program is a substantial and coherent program of university study that is designed to provide students with a common experience that enhances their intellectual, practical, integrative and applied learning skills; their sense of personal and social responsibility; and their knowledge of human cultures, histories, and the physical and natural worlds.

Principle 3 - General education is the responsibility of the entire university, and all stakeholders shall have the opportunity to contribute to its development.

Principle 4 - General education programs provide opportunities for students to synthesize and integrate the knowledge and skills that they are acquiring throughout the entirety of their degree program.

Best Practices

Best Practice 1 - General education programs should include undergraduate courses at all levels of study with clearly mapped out laddering opportunities and course selection resources and guidelines.

Best Practice 2 - A university's general education program should incorporate opportunities for systematic reflection and curation through the intentional use of digital learning portfolios. Likewise, similar opportunities should be embedded in the students' primary program of study.

Best Practice 3 - In addition to providing a common university-wide learning experience, students should be able to make choices and select their own pathways through the general education program, which ideally also includes the opportunity to acquire transcript citations and/or secondary credentials such as minors in the process of completing general education requirements.

Best Practice 4 - All students should have the opportunity to complete a capstone project within their primary program of study and/or through the general education requirements.

Credit Requirements

In keeping with the university's current elective requirement in S2009-03 and the committee's review of general education programs and elective/breadth requirements at numerous American and Canadian universities, we recommend the development of a general education program with a minimum of 24-30 credits from outside a student's primary program of study.

Sample credit ranges for general degree requirements at select local universities and institutions: BCIT = minimum of 21 credits; Kwantlen = 27-39 credits; SFU = 36 WBQ (Writing, Breadth, Qualitative) credits outside of student's major; and UFV = 30 credits in five or more subject areas outside of major. We recommend a range of credits to accommodate the particular needs of various degree programs at Capilano, recognizing that some programs have professional accreditation or other requirements that may be seen to restrict their ability to incorporate general education curriculum.

General Education Models

As a university, we are committed to helping our students become "engaged, informed, and committed citizens who are well prepared for success through career-related and professional degree pathways" (Capilano University, 2014b, p. 7). For this to happen, our students must be able to engage with complexity both within and beyond the context of their chosen fields of study.

Providing cross-disciplinary opportunities to investigate the inter-connected geo-political, cultural, environmental, and economic concerns central to contemporary society both locally and globally, which can be embedded in an institution's general education program, will enhance our students' ability to reach their personal and professional goals and to participate in public discourse as critical and thoughtful citizens.

Building on the principles and best practices above, the committee recommends Capilano University develop a general education program with the following program elements:

Program Element 1: Integrated multi-level courses across all four years of baccalaureate degrees with well articulated objectives throughout the entirety of the general education program.

Program Element 2: Mix of required foundational courses and interdisciplinary pathway options with required course options distributed evenly across the lower and upper levels.

Program Element 3: Opportunity to complete transcript citations and/or interdisciplinary minors while completing coursework required for general education program.

Program Element 4: Adoption of high impact learning practices within the general education program such as peer mentoring, learning portfolios, first-year seminars, and undergraduate research (Kuh, 2008).

Beyond these program elements, we suggest the following models as inspiration for the program that will be developed at Capilano University. In each of the models, a substantial and coherent general education curriculum is integrated into the undergraduate degree as a whole. It is not something to “get out of the way” or to complete on “the way out the door.” General education is a shared experience. Students from across campus, irrespective of their home faculty and primary program, have the core curriculum in common. Select high impact learning practices have been incorporated into all of the models below.

Institution	General Education Basics for Baccalaureate Degrees
Chico State Chico, CA Public 17,000	<p><u>GE as a percentage of total degree requirements:</u> 37%-40%, or 48 of 120-127 units.</p> <p><u>Program:</u> GE Foundations and Pathways</p> <p><u>Mission:</u> Chico is a comprehensive university principally serving Northern California, our state and nation through excellence in instruction, research, creative activity, and public service. The University is committed to assist students in their search for knowledge and understanding and to prepare them with the attitudes, skills, and habits of lifelong learning in order to assume responsibility in a democratic community and to be useful members of a global society.</p> <p><u>Distinctive elements:</u> Students who complete 18 units in a single <u>pathway</u> (10 options) receive an <u>interdisciplinary minor</u> in the pathway. All Chico students must complete a <u>capstone project</u> in either their GE pathway and/or Major.</p>
College of Idaho	<p><u>GE as a percentage of total degree requirements:</u> 40-50%, or 51+ of 124 units.</p>

<p>Caldwell ID Private 1120</p>	<p><u>Program:</u> PEAK (Professional, Ethical, Articulate, and Knowledgeable) Program</p> <p><u>Mission:</u> PEAK challenges students to study broadly across the “four peaks” of social sciences and history, humanities and fine arts, natural sciences and mathematics, and professional foundations.</p> <p><u>Distinctive elements:</u> Students begin their studies with a first year seminar introducing them to the essential elements of academic inquiry. Seminars are arranged by topic. All students must complete a complete a major and <u>three minors</u> (15-20 units, which in some areas of study may require additional prerequisites) across the four peaks.</p>
<p>Green Mountain College Poultney VT Private 826</p>	<p><u>GE as a percentage of total degree requirements:</u> 30%, or 37 of 120 semester hours.</p> <p><u>Program:</u> Environmental Liberal Arts (ELA) Core Sequence</p> <p><u>Mission:</u> Green Mountain College prepares students for fulfilling lives by taking the goal of just and sustainable societies as the unifying the theme for its interdisciplinary graduate and undergraduate liberal arts education. The college’s “general education” requirements are rooted directly in this mission.</p> <p><u>Distinctive elements:</u> The ELA is rooted in the specific biogeographical region in which the college is located. Students complete four ELA core courses over their four years at GMC and seven additional courses from required distribution areas: Quantitative Analysis, Natural Systems, Human Systems, Aesthetic Appreciation, Moral Reasoning, Historic Context and The Examined Life. All students must complete an Environmental Liberal Arts <u>portfolio</u>, personal sustainability paper and a <u>capstone project</u> with a focus that benefits the College and/or greater community.</p>
<p>Ithaca College Ithaca NY Private 6200</p>	<p><u>GE as a percentage of total degree requirements:</u> 23-38%, or 28-45 of 120 credit hours.</p> <p><u>Program:</u> Integrative Core Curriculum</p> <p><u>Mission:</u> The Integrative Core Curriculum (ICC) envisioned as a set of thought-provoking academic experiences designed to connect students from across the campus, and connect knowledge, thoughts and ideas across the disciplines to help shape students’ understanding of a</p>

	<p>complex world.</p> <p><u>Distinctive elements:</u> All students must complete the Ithaca Seminar - an introduction to liberal arts intellectual experience and academic culture - and ICC digital learning <u>portfolio</u> prior to graduation. Students must complete 16 credits within a single theme. There are six thematic course clusters from which students can select.</p>
<p>Portland State University</p> <p>Portland OR</p> <p>Public</p> <p>28,000</p>	<p><u>GE as a percentage of total degree requirements:</u> 24%, or 11 of 45 courses.</p> <p><u>Program:</u> University Studies</p> <p><u>Mission:</u> University Studies provides students with integrated, four-year, connected learning experiences that lay the foundation for lifelong intellectual development.</p> <p><u>Distinctive elements:</u> Year-long Freshman Inquiry course, Years two through four interdisciplinary clusters (15 options) - students select clusters that complement major or primary program of study, community-based capstone courses, peer mentor program, and dual credit high school Inquiry option.</p>

During the general education development process, we may also want to consider the potential of an “in-house” model in the form of the Liberal Studies (LBST) Minor (currently in concept paper format), which proposes giving all degree students an opportunity to complete a Liberal Studies minor as a supplement to their primary program of study.

The current 24.00 credit proposal invites students to take a mix of LBST core courses and Arts and Sciences courses in order to earn a minor in Liberal Studies. The final credit count for this proposal will be finalized once the proposed revisions to S2009-03 are approved by Senate. Revisiting and revising this proposal, especially in conjunction with the Liberal Studies interdisciplinary pathways initiatives, could offer an internal framework worth considering and further developing to meet the needs of the university community as a whole.

In short, there is an abundance of inspiring models from a wide range of institutions, including our own, for us draw upon as we move into the next phase of the development process. The appendices and resources that follow map out the various challenges and complexities associated with general education reform and development.

Conclusion

The message that has come through loud and clear in our research is that successful reform depends upon a collaborative, inclusive, dialogue-based approach to change. This approach signals a commitment to making general education “ours” as a university community and aligns with the Academic Plan’s assertion that “the process of moving forward will be both collaborative and consultative, leading to the collective transformation of learning, teaching, and academic work at Capilano University” (Capilano University, 2014a, p. 5). The collaborative and inclusive development of a general education program is most often achieved not through the design work of a single committee; the committee’s role is to design and lead the *process* by which all faculty, and the university community at large, may come together to design a distinctive program and curriculum that reflects the institution’s mission and culture (Roach, 2010; Brailow & Whitney, 2010; Burney & Perkins, 2010).

Our proposed timeline (Appendix B) draws on the lessons learned through the successful implementation and reform of general education programs at other institutions. The key feature of our timeline is an open submission process that allows any individual or team on campus to submit a general education proposal for consideration after a period of community education and consultation. These proposals are presented, discussed, and revised before being put to a vote. This practice has been documented at the University of Michigan-Flint, Franklin College in Indiana, and Salve Regina University in Rhode Island to great success and has proved to be revitalizing for faculty and for the programs (Roach, 2010; Brailow & Whitney, 2010).

The Academic Plan proposes that “Capilano will create an integrated general education experience for all degree students that is interdisciplinary and intentional” (Capilano University, 2014a, p. 24). In order for the program to be integrated, interdisciplinary, and intentional, we suggest a timeline featuring a faculty-led design process that culminates in a soft launch of the program in Fall 2017, rather than Fall 2016. We have included a sample timeline for a Fall 2016 launch (Appendix C), but this committee believes that taking the extra year will be crucial to the success of general education at Capilano University, despite the pressures that make a Fall 2016 launch seem desirable. Many institutions have reported the lack of success that accompanies rushed reform efforts that include only minimal consultation (e.g., Smith et al., 2001). We have included one such report from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia (Appendix E). We also include a chart that compares the merits and constraints of the Fall 2016 and Fall 2017 launch timelines (Appendix D).

Recommendations

For the reasons outlined above, in this document we do not propose a general education model or curriculum for adoption at Capilano University. Rather, we recommend a process that will result in the implementation of a community-developed general education curriculum in Fall 2017. To this end, the committee recommends that:

- The university commit to a collaborative, faculty-led consultation and design process, with a general education launch date of September 2017 (see proposed timeline in Appendix B);
- The university provide budgetary support for a general education committee to guide this consultative process through the 2015-2016 academic year;
- The committee facilitate meaningful and sustained consultation with the university community, particularly students, as outlined in the proposed timeline;
- The university and committee adopt and adhere to the principles and best practices outlined in this document, including identified faculty development opportunities; and
- The general education curriculum at Capilano University contain the program elements outlined in this document and include a minimum of 24-30 credits, with minimums established on a program-by-program basis.

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Appendix A

Ad Hoc Senate Credential Policy Review Sub-committee Memo

Appendix B

Process Timeline to Fall 2017 Launch

Appendix C

Process Timeline to Fall 2016 Launch

Appendix D

Comparison of Merits and Constraints of 2016 and 2017 Pilot Launches

Appendix E

Smith, V. R., Brunton, B. G., Kohen, A. I., Gilliatt, C. A., Klippert, J. C., & Marshall, C. T. (2001). General education reform: Thinking critically about substance and process. *The Journal of General Education*, 50(2), 85-101.

Appendix F

General Education at CapU – A Flowchart

Appendix A

Please see next page.

TO: Ad Hoc Senate Credential Policy Review Committee

FROM: Alison McNeil and Nanci Lucas, Ad Hoc Committee members

DATE: January 27, 2015

RE: **GENERAL EDUCATION: DEFINITION, DESCRIPTION AND INCORPORATION IN SENATE POLICY**

Purpose

As part of the Ad Hoc Committee's review of Senate Policy S2009-03 *Requirements for Credentials*, which currently contains the University's general education requirements, we were asked to research this topic in detail and bring our findings back to the entire committee. We have examined four aspects of general education focused on the following questions:

1. *Current Situation at Capilano University* - How is "general education" currently described and used (e.g. in requirements for credentials)?
2. *Practice at Other Institutions* – How is "general education" described and used elsewhere?
3. *Cap U's Academic and Strategic Plans* – What implications do these recently adopted plans have for our current "general education" description and usage?
4. *Conclusions and Recommendations* – What have we concluded from our research and what would we recommend to the Committee regarding description and use of general education?

1. CURRENT SITUATION AT CAPILANO UNIVERSITY

How is General Education Currently Described?

The Senate Policy S2009-03 *Requirements for Credentials* provides a general rationale and specific direction (including minimum credit requirements) on curriculum to program areas with respect to General Education:

Rationale:

- "all Capilano U students are expected to receive instruction that increases their ability to function as independent learners and responsible citizens" (para. 1)

Direction on curriculum to program areas:

General

- "Each Cap U program of 30 credits or more shall include a core of general education or related instruction at the breadth and depth appropriated for the level of the credential." (para 1)

Specific Direction and Minimum Requirements - see table below

Specific Direction and Minimum Requirements in Capilano U's Current Policy:

General Education curriculum required	Certificate	Adv Cert – 45 credits	Diploma- 60 credits	Adv Dip 90 credits	Bac Degree 120 credits
Instruction in language and communication skills – “all programs should include English and/or communications in their curriculum” (para 2)	<i>ALL CERTS</i> - Three credit hours of English or Communications courses	<i>Same as cert</i>	Six credit hours of English and/or Communications courses	<i>Same as Dip</i>	English 100 completed within first 60 credits plus three credit hours of English or Communications courses. plus
Competency in working with numbers and logical structures – “all programs should include quantitative/analytical or related instruction in computation ” (para 2)	<i>CERTS of 30 CREDITS OR MORE</i> – 45 hours of instruction in computation	<i>Same as cert</i>	<i>Same as cert</i>	<i>Same as cert</i>	Three credits in a quantitative/ analytical course approved by SCC (approved course list maintained by Cmtee Clerk) and 24 non-
Preparation for working with others – “all programs should include opportunities for students to increase their competency in working with others and to increase their understanding of the variety of influences on interpersonal interaction ” (para 3)	<i>CERTS of 30 CREDITS OR MORE</i> – 45 hours of instruction in human relations	<i>Same as cert</i>	<i>Same as cert</i>	<i>Same as cert</i>	discipline credits, which may be used to satisfy the quantitative/ analytic and English language requirements

Comments/Observations:

- General Education is defined in terms of 3 areas that directly relate and reflect the 7 institutional goals of the university in our Strategic Plan: **communication skills, quantitative reasoning ability and analytical thinking, and group and social interaction skills.**
- Communications requirements are stated in terms of full courses (e.g. 3 and 6 credit hours) whereas the other two areas are not, and instead are stated in terms of hours of instruction.
- The other credentials listed in the Senate policy (Bacc concentrations, Post-Bac Cert, Post-Bac Diploma, Graduate Cert and Dip) do not have explicitly stated requirements for general education.

How is General Education Currently Implemented?

Capilano's templates for *Non-Degree Credit Program Final Approval* and *Degree Program Final Approval* each have a General Education section in which the Senate policy is quoted and the program area is asked to: "Describe how the program meets the general requirements specified in the Senate's policy on Requirements for Credentials."

2. PRACTICE AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS AND WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

See **Appendix A** - Examples of General Education Definitions.

In terms of recent research on general education requirements, we have attached two research study papers of interest. (Chan, Brown, Ludlow, [2014] *What is the Purpose of Higher Education?* and Warner and Koeppel, [2010], *General Education Requirements: A Comparative Analysis*).

The second paper provides the following definition and observations about general education policy:

- General education is used heavily in higher education and refers to courses within a distribution schema that all students must pass as a **requirement for graduation**.
- The general education curriculum, shared by all students, demonstrates the institution's **mission, philosophy, values and culture**.
- General education may be the most important manifestation of an **institution's educational mission**.

3. CAP U'S ACADEMIC AND STRATEGIC PLANS IMPLICATIONS

Capilano's Academic and Strategic Plans adopted in 2014 are founded on the same 7 institutional goals that are reflected in the current Senate policy.

Strategic Plan on "General Education"

General education is referenced on page 13 of the plan with reference to a required interdisciplinary general education core curriculum, an optional first year experience called "the Cap Year Experience", foundational capacities and transferable skills:

"To prepare well-educated and engaged citizens, Cap U will develop an optional first year experience and a required interdisciplinary general education core. The Cap Year Experience, described in detail in the academic plan, will be piloted in year one. The interdisciplinary general education curriculum will build on Capilano's strategic goal [student success], dedicated to foundational capacities and transferable skills, and constructed to begin operation in year two."

Academic Plan on "General Education"

General Education is referenced on pages 16 and 17 with emphasis on outcomes for Cap graduates as:

"...socially, interpersonally and environmentally aware individuals, with broad based knowledge and understanding, who are critical and creative thinkers, effective communicators and problem solvers. Our world changes quickly, so we need to be adaptable and equipped, academically with transferable skills and knowledge. This is the goal of Capilano's general education: fostering abilities and skills, literacies and understanding, perspectives and positions that cross disciplines and prepare students for meaningful engagement of their world."

Goals and timelines regarding developing general education are provided on pages 27 and 32:

Goal: Before graduating in Spring 2014 and thereafter, all degree students can demonstrate achievement of measured general education outcomes.

Summer 2014:	Begin development of a Cap approach to general education
Fall 2014:	Development of measurable general education learning outcomes
Spring 2015:	Begin measurement of general education learning outcomes Development of Cap general education curriculum
Fall 2015 :	Implementation of Capilano general education curriculum

Comments/Observations:

- Currently the Registrar’s office monitor’s general education “outcomes”, in that it assesses whether students have completed the current general education requirements of the program when they apply for graduation.
- Program areas also assess general education outcomes through program assessments.
- The intentions with respect to general education provided, e.g. “critical and creative thinkers, effective communicators and problem solvers” are consistent with current requirements
- The Cap year is optional, the general education requirements for degree students are not.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Presently Capilano U’s S2009-03 *Requirements for Credentials* does reflect many of the common definitions of General Education and these are included in many of our programs. Our current general education requirements also appear to be consistent with the 7 institutional goals in our Strategic Plan and NWCCU direction.

The questions that remain are:

1. Are there any missing pieces from our current general education requirements?
2. Do they need improved, enhanced, strengthened and/or refined in any way to better reflect our institution’s “educational mission” as articulated in our current Academic and Strategic Plans (e.g. 7 institutional goals)?
3. What more needs to be done (if anything) and by whom, to measure outcomes of general education?

Our understanding is that a campus-wide committee has been formed to examine General Education in more depth. We believe that the information and questions presented here should be sent to this new committee for further debate and work.

APPENDIX A – EXAMPLES OF GENERAL EDUCATION DEFINITIONS FROM USA INSTITUTIONS

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)

General Education Definition

An essential collegiate-level component of associate and baccalaureate degree programs designed to foster effective independent lifelong learning by introducing students to the content and methodology of the major domains of knowledge

Policy 2.1

Programs of study for which applied or specialized associate degrees are granted, or programs of an academic year or more in length for which certificates are granted, must contain a recognizable body of instruction in program-related areas of:

- 1) communication,
- 2) computation, and
- 3) human relations.

Additional topics which should be covered as appropriate include safety, industrial safety, and environmental awareness. Instruction in the related instructional areas may be either embedded within the program curriculum or taught in blocks of specialized instruction. Each approach, however, must have clearly identified content that is pertinent to the general program of study.”

Onondaga College, US.

General Education enables individuals to acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary for responsible participation in society. These include the ability to reason and communicate effectively; a capacity for compassionate inquiry; a framework for intellectual, ethical and aesthetic growth; and a commitment to the well-being of self and the larger community.

Harvard University

Eight Elements of General Education

The Task Force on General Education’s final proposal for that part of undergraduate studies specifies courses in eight subject areas, in addition to the College’s requirement for some foreign-language proficiency and Expository Writing, a first-year mandate (itself subject to revision, to incorporate instruction in writing and speaking throughout a student’s academic experience). The categories are:

- Aesthetic and interpretive understanding;
- Culture and belief
- Empirical reasoning;
- Ethical reasoning;
- Science of living systems;
- Science of the physical universe;
- Societies of the world; and
- The United States in the world.

To that end, the task force recommends general-education courses in eight subjects (see box), broadly covering topics in humanities, social science, science, and quantitative and ethical reasoning, but

explicitly *not* in a departmental or disciplinary way (because that is the work of students' concentrations). Indeed, to fulfill a general-education requirement, the task force would require that a course satisfy one or more of these goals:

- preparing students for civic engagement;
- teaching students to “understand themselves as products of—and participants in—traditions of art, ideas, and values”;
- preparing students to “respond critically and constructively to change”; and
- developing “students’ understanding of the ethical dimensions of what they say and do.”

Boston University

At the most fundamental level, a Boston University General Education should produce graduates who are:

1. Skilled at solving open-ended problems in both quantitative and qualitative environments
2. Globally and culturally aware
3. Ethically and socially responsible

To achieve those capabilities, we agree that undergraduates must demonstrate the ability to:

- think quantitatively and critically
- express themselves through communicating effectively, critically, and with discernment, orally and in writing
- engage in an active ongoing learning process
- produce and create with imaginative spirit
- know a broad body of work in science, literature, and art
- command and employ technology with competence, creativity, and ease

Appendix B

Please see attached Excel spreadsheet, "2017 Pilot" tab.

Appendix C

Please see attached Excel spreadsheet, "2016 Pilot" tab.

Appendix D

Please see next page.

Comparison of Merits and Constraints of 2016 and 2017 Pilot Launches

2016 Pilot Start	2017 Pilot Start
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer resources needed at the onset to get program running (fewer workshops, much lower time commitment by organizing body) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher resources needed at onset. However, case studies have shown that quick, low consultative processes can fail
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet NWCCU requirements sooner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NWCCU requirements met later – risk?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty “get over” change sooner, but fewer support the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty more involved in reform – case studies indicate high faculty involvement leads to higher satisfaction of process outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher risk of failure – case studies have shown that quick processes with minimal faculty input have resulted in failure and the requirement to restart – risk to budgets, institutional morale, marketing, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced chance of GE program failing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rushing results in more mistakes or bad decisions made throughout the process, resulting in back-tracking & fixing up programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Longer timelines allow for the GE program to be developed with less stress, and also allows departments more time to make program changes to allow for GE.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty will have low investment – won’t be “their” program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty take more ownership of the GE program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased risk of push-back from CFA for top-down approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better likelihood of CFA support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty burn-out (GE committee, curriculum developers, Registrar’s office, SCC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less faculty burn-out, but acknowledgement that this will still be an issue, even with the longer time-line
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer chances for meaningful cross-campus dialogues – silos may be reinforced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowing time for meaningful cross-campus dialogues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher creativity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty have basic understanding of GE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty have more in-depth understanding of GE due to heavier involvement throughout entire process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shorter timelines may ensure things get done while there is momentum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Longer timeline could drag out the process – risk of losing steam/something getting in the way
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The team that has done all of the research can guide the decision – efficient, less chance of models that don’t make sense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk that proposals will be too far off based. However, a few people on the existing committee have indicated interest in proposing a model, so there should be at least one very well informed one
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders may view engagement as “token” consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation more likely to be viewed as meaningful, relevant and impactful
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum development has less opportunity for cross-disciplinary collaboration with little time for community-developed learning outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequate time for collaboration across disciplines and to develop agreed upon learning outcomes

Appendix E

Please see next page.

GENERAL EDUCATION REFORM: THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT SUBSTANCE AND PROCESS

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with

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Introduction

Any institution of higher education intending to conduct a major reform of its general education program inevitably will confront the multiple challenges of designing and delivering a curriculum with “understood purposes and proven effectiveness” (Reynolds, 1998, p.150). Successfully meeting those challenges may entail significant alteration of the substance and oversight procedures that typify the program being replaced. The relevant literature available for consultation is substantial, but typically offers case studies that are success stories. We believe, however, that much can be learned from curriculum reform experiences that are unsuccessful. Hence, in this essay we pursue two interrelated goals. First, we examine the substance of a new program of general education at James Madison University (JMU) and identify design weaknesses in the new curriculum. Second, by highlighting problems encountered in the reform process at JMU, we infer a set of strategies for effective general education reform.

Historical Background

JMU began as the State Normal and Industrial School for Women at Harrisonburg, Virginia, in 1908. It became the State Teachers

College at Harrisonburg in 1924. Its tradition was that of an industrial-vocational school with a heavy emphasis on teacher education. The school became coeducational in 1966. In the late 1960s, the faculty voted to transform the college into a liberal arts college. The curriculum was changed so that a new “general studies program” was created and organized around distribution areas in the humanities, arts, sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and history. The name of the school was changed to James Madison University in 1977. In the mid-1980s JMU revised its general education program and created the Liberal Studies Program (LSP).

The design of Liberal Studies reflected what were then new trends in general education curriculum. In addition to the basic liberal arts approach carried through from the previous program, new emphasis was given to lifelong learning, interdisciplinary perspectives, written communication skills, and critical thinking. A set of 16 learning goals was devised that required students to take courses from a prescribed range of areas, typically by choosing from an approved menu of discipline-based courses within each area. Structurally similar to most programs using distribution requirements, the LSP nonetheless had a distinctive feature in the role played by elected faculty in its design, implementation, and oversight. The faculty serving on the oversight committee, chaired by the Dean of Letters and Sciences, were drawn from the traditional “liberal arts” disciplines. These faculty developed and publicized the criteria for course approval, evaluated course proposals, and had administrative approval for periodic review of the LSP. The committee enjoyed widespread faculty support because it was composed of members whose expertise and training qualified them well to represent those entrusted with the responsibility of teaching the courses that comprised the LSP. The Liberal Studies Program was very recently replaced by the new “General Education Program” (GEP) and it is the latter program that is the subject of our essay.

Devising the New General Education Curriculum

There are a variety of possible structures for a general education curriculum. Most schools have chosen one of two structural types:

a core curriculum in which students take the same general education courses or a set of distribution requirements in which students choose their classes from a designated “menu” of courses.¹ The Liberal Studies Program at JMU was essentially a menu approach. The main concerns regarding the operation of this program were the fairly standard ones of quantity-quality conflicts and the need to broaden the adoption of integrative techniques. Encouraging the follow-up of widespread writing across the curriculum, for example, was recognized as an ongoing difficulty. Yet, there was no general concern among JMU’s faculty that the LSP was structurally flawed. Indeed, the extant oversight committee made no recommendations for either serious change in or complete abandonment of Liberal Studies. Thus, the central administration’s initiative to create a new general education program was a surprise to faculty.²

Working through a newly constructed General Education Committee, the design phase of the new program unfolded over roughly a two-year period. Key members of the committee had an article published in this journal describing the new General Education Program (GEP) as a “true reconceptualization of general education (one that) differs markedly from previous programs” (Reynolds, 1998, p.149). It would be grounded in an “objectives-based” approach to developing and delivering a general education program featuring “interdisciplinary” content.

This GEP was presented as a novel twist on the common core approach to structuring a curriculum. Instead of a set of common required courses, the core would be defined by a set of “learning objectives.” The goal was a “shared experience” for all students with every student able to demonstrate accomplishment of the entire range of objectives. Objectives were divided up into five groups, called “clusters.” Each cluster represented, in broad terms, the content and methods of traditional disciplines. For example, instead of a distribution requirement for mathematics and natural science, Cluster Three was called, “The Natural World.” Delivery of the new GEP was to be in the form of a series of what are called “packages.” A package is a set of two or more courses in which students ostensibly master the objectives of one of the five “clusters.” Thus, the essence of the new program was the design of packages, within which a small number of courses would cover a

broad range of cluster objectives. Regardless of which package students chose, as they scheduled courses in the five required clusters, the result purportedly would be a common outcome of accomplishing the same learning objectives.

Some of the themes of JMU's new program will sound familiar to those who have kept abreast of the general education reform movement. The new conventional wisdom seems to be that general education in colleges should focus on integration and cohesion, on learning skills and techniques rather than traditional bodies of knowledge, and on interdisciplinary connections that break down old disciplinary barriers (see Gaff, Ratcliff, and Associates, 1997). Julie Klein (1998, p.6), for example, in summarizing major trends, cites "designing integrated core curricula, providing breadth of knowledge, clustering and linking courses, and infusing integrative skills" as elements of a directional shift toward interdisciplinary general education.

Certainly another trend in higher education in recent years is the growth of assessment efforts. Discipline-based assessment programs had already been developed and implemented at JMU prior to the recent revision of general education. However, assessment of general education had been essentially an unmapped frontier. It seemed reasonable, therefore, to design general education in a way that located specific, assessable educational targets. Early in the design phase, the General Education Committee cited the need to have "more specific objectives" as part of the rationale for general education reform. It is hard to overstate the dominance of this "objectives-based" approach on the development of the new general education program at JMU. Unpacking the content of JMU's new GEP is a bit complicated, but doing so allows us to explain why the actual learning objectives are seen as incoherent and why the program's claim to interdisciplinary content is spurious.

The process began with a draft statement of "sixteen broad goals for general education" written by the General Education Committee (Reynolds, p. 153). A theory of general education that rationalizes this initial set of 16 goals was never identified. The next step was to solicit and collect long lists of "learning objectives" which gave "further definition to the broad goals" (Reynolds, p. 153). An impressive number of objectives (1,352) was gathered

by various means³ and then winnowed to a smaller, more manageable set. The result was a set of approximately 100 learning objectives. Eventually, these remaining objectives were rewritten and arranged into what were called “clusters.” Each set of cluster objectives was then given to a separate committee composed of administratively appointed faculty. These committees revised further the set of objectives contained in their respective clusters. Members of the General Education Committee have claimed that the process of revising objectives was particularly fertile because “many (faculty members) began to have a broader vision of the content of each cluster and began to develop courses... and a sense of ownership of the objectives” (Reynolds, p. 154).

However, many faculty members thought the winnowing process had a decidedly different character, similar to the following metaphor. Suppose that the manager of a regionally renowned restaurant asked each of 200 chefs to submit seven of their favorite recipes. The chefs complied, and the entire set was given to a handpicked committee composed of individuals who had very little experience cooking, much less creating new recipes. The committee took the set of 1,400 recipes and fashioned 100 new recipes by simply mixing ingredients and cooking instructions in a way that seemed sensible to them. This set of 100 new recipes was given to a representative group of chefs. After conducting a careful review, the chefs voted overwhelmingly against adoption. Despite this, the manager ordered adoption of the committee’s recipes by the restaurant. Metaphorically speaking, this is just what occurred at JMU. For many faculty members, neither the five clusters of learning objectives nor their sum add up to a coherent whole.⁴ The General Education Committee confused a framework for organizing a curriculum with a model of student learning.

The imprecision and overly ambitious nature of the clusters of objectives left many traditional liberal arts departments in a very difficult position. To get a course/package approved it was necessary to claim that the entire set of learning objectives in a cluster would be taught. Not surprisingly, every package proposal contained the claim that it would meet this condition. The breadth of each cluster’s objectives coupled with the constraint of, at most, three three-credit courses virtually assured that the objectives

would have to be approached at a most superficial level. Absent approval criteria that would ensure academic quality and faced with strong administrative pressure for rapid implementation, faculty had every incentive to claim to teach all of the objectives in a cluster while doing their best to cover a subset. Once enough packages had been accepted by the GEC and once completion of the new program became a requirement of all entering students, this design flaw became clear to any faculty with a background in the traditional liberal arts. This, in turn, spawned a variety of efforts in pursuit of a more coherent program. In the few years since the program's inception, the objectives in each of the clusters and the constituent packages of courses have been in an almost constant state of flux. Although these adjustments may be seen as a sign of flexibility, their impacts have been marginal and the main structural flaws remain. Moreover, the uncertainty and confusion created by such curriculum churning is an ongoing source of frustration for registration and advising personnel. To assist students they must continually re-chart possible routes through the changing course/package/cluster maze so that the general education requirements can be fulfilled. This dynamic has both expanded the number of possible routes and reduced their comparability, a development that runs counter to the GEP goal of providing a common experience for all students. Indeed, the structural weakness of the "package" approach is clearly revealed in Cluster IV entitled "Social and Cultural Processes," because packages have been abandoned altogether. The cluster now features a distribution approach, which is utterly at odds with the structure that proponents claim distinguishes the new program.

These particular curriculum problems may be somewhat unique to JMU, but another concern is common to all reform efforts seeking to achieve a more interdisciplinary general education program. What is the best curriculum design approach to achieving the interdisciplinary learning outcomes that colleges increasingly seek for their students? Although we do not have a complete answer to this question, we can identify relevant issues related to JMU's experience and its path to what (to date) is an unsuccessful reform.

The exact meaning of the term "interdisciplinary" has never been defined by anyone associated with the new JMU program.

Instead, it is revealed as part of a description of how the program evolved:

The five clusters of our general education [*sic*], because they are broad areas of knowledge, necessarily span multiple academic departments. This is why the interdisciplinary nature of the program arose—the clusters are interdisciplinary by virtue of their breadth. (Reynolds, p. 156)

The idea that subject matter breadth is equivalent to interdisciplinary content might seem appealing at first, but it cannot withstand critical scrutiny. The fact that there are both discipline-bound forms of explanation that have broad focus (e.g., open-economy macroeconomics or sociobiology) and interdisciplinary literatures that are focused upon narrowly defined topics (e.g., law or nuclear weapons proliferation) means that JMU's formulation is inadequate, *prima facie*.

Indeed, we would argue that genuinely interdisciplinary work must meet two necessary conditions. First, far from being “non-disciplined,” it is highly disciplined in that it meets the standards developed within the disciplines that are reflected in its content (Hausman and McPherson, 1985, pp. 1–3). Second, such multidisciplinary content is applied to a particular problem or issue to generate a new, integrated way of understanding the issue—one that is consistent with the complexity of the issue being examined. JMU's new program fails to meet this or any comparable standard.

At a deeper level, placing exclusive emphasis on “connections across disciplines” brings a potential pedagogical dilemma directly into focus. JMU's five clusters of learning objectives must be taught in a total of 41 to 44 semester credit hours. Given this credit hour constraint, it is impossible to develop the disciplinary building blocks necessary for each student to approach this content in a genuinely interdisciplinary way. Either the student already possesses mastery of disciplinary content sufficient to comprehend the connections, or the connections will need to be made for the student by her instructors. The latter result is worrisome to faculty because it tends to result in a lowering of the average level of rigor in general education courses. This “watering down” phe-

nomenon should be a concern at all schools seeking to broaden the interdisciplinary dimension of their general education curricula. Even programs that have received praise for their design, like Portland State's University Studies program, have faculty that are legitimately worried about maintaining rigor (Greene, 2000).

What the desirable balance is between disciplinary content and interdisciplinary connections and how it is best achieved are questions deserving explicit attention at any institution considering general education reform. We propose that the GEP at JMU is a prototype of the difficulties that follow in the wake of implementing a program without first achieving consensus on the answers to such questions.

The Process of General Education Reform

A new general education program is very likely to encounter some problems. However, we believe that most of the serious problems associated with the new program at JMU stem directly from the process by which the new program was created and implemented. It would seem unnecessary to suggest that *serious* attention must be given to process issues. Yet, this did not happen at JMU, and ignoring this obvious point undermined the potential for successful reform. Our goal in this section is to suggest some strategies that draw from our experience.

1. *Promote open discussion.* This process goal is at least twice as important as any other and has two distinct components. First, an open and inclusive process needs to exist at all stages of the general education reform process. This is both common sense and the conclusion of research on general education reform.⁵ We agree with Mastera (1999) that the debate needs to begin with the initial stage of recognizing an impetus for change, whether emanating from internal or external sources. If this stage is skipped without discussion, the reform process will have begun in a closed fashion, and this can have a negative effect on the following reform stages. The haste with which JMU terminated its "old" general education program (LSP) and constructed a new one was rationalized by the assertion that the university had to enact changes quickly or risk change being imposed by state government au-

thorities (Reynolds, 1998, p.152). Unfortunately, there was neither a public discussion of external factors nor a serious review of the Liberal Studies Program. The point here is that having a few open meetings during the overall process is insufficient; every stage of the process must be open. After the impetus for change is openly discussed, a thorough review of the existing program must be conducted. Widespread faculty involvement in this phase is the best way to identify problems, design reforms to resolve them, and also build support for the overall reform process. Such a review did not occur at JMU, and the legitimacy and credibility of the reform process suffered as a result.

The second point is to recognize that openness is not a commodity and cannot be easily increased at any point in time since it flows from the underlying environment within a college community. If there are extant communication problems between faculty and administrators or unresolved governance issues, the potential for an open discussion about general education reform will be inhibited. At JMU, broader “restructuring” turmoil existed at the time the administration announced the decision to develop a new general education program. Creating an environment for open, effective discussion is a prerequisite for any effort to reform general education, and it must be an ongoing concern.

2. *Establish a legitimate revision committee.* One logical way to launch a reform is to use existing curriculum committees or an existing general education committee. As we suggest below, a regular review of the general education program ought to be a task of such a committee. Thus a regular review should be the obvious internal source for an impetus to change since its function will be to identify either minor problems, likely resolvable through changes to the existing program, or the need for a major reform of the existing program. If a review recommends a major reform, it is still critical to have university-wide, open discussions. Without a clearly established need for general education reform, those charged with the responsibility for conducting the reform face an up-hill battle.

At JMU, instead of following standing procedures and allowing for periodic review of the existing Liberal Studies Program, the administration **appointed** an *ad hoc* committee and gave it a few weeks to complete a review. Such a narrow time frame pre-

cluded the kind of open and careful review of the existing general education curriculum we have already suggested is critical to launching a successful reform process. The committee's report recommended the creation of a new General Education Committee (GEC) vested with full authority to develop a new general education program. The initial set of appointments to the GEC was very skewed against traditional liberal studies disciplines. Indeed, the first act of a Task Force on Governance appointed by the university's Board-of-Visitors was crafting an agreement to add *elected* faculty from liberal studies departments as a means of providing greater balance and credibility to the GEC.

It is well established in the literature that successful reform requires that a revision committee have an appropriate level of faculty representation.⁶ This refers both to the compositional balance among faculty, administrators, and support professionals and to the quality of the faculty appointments. For a revision committee to achieve legitimacy it must have faculty appointments that will be viewed as legitimate from the perspective of the faculty as a whole. Legitimacy is most likely if a faculty senate or the entire faculty makes selections. At JMU a very different route was chosen. In what amounts to a weak form of indirect proof, JMU provided a model of what **not** to do when a process was chosen that bypassed existing curriculum review structures and that featured an appointed, *ad hoc* committee with inadequate faculty representation.

3. *Establish a reform agenda and timetables.* A clear plan for the work of committees, a schedule of open meetings, and a set of deadlines for the different reform stages needs to be determined early in the process. All relevant steps that are envisioned, for example, the use and evaluation of pilot courses or the role of faculty development resources, need to be spelled out early and openly. It is also important to structure an agenda so that it starts with broader issues before moving to specific courses because general education reform can change an institution's identity.

Imagine a continuum along which all colleges and universities in the U.S. are arrayed. Two "Great Books" schools, both named "St. John's," probably define one of the extremes. Both schools have only general education requirements and no major-field degree requirements. At the other extreme is Brown University, which

has no general education requirement and only majors. A particular institution's position on this continuum depends mainly upon its tradition, mission, and resources. The "location" chosen is crucial because it not only defines the institution's identity, but also defines the range of programs open to students. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that anyone associated with JMU ever considered the possibility that general education reform would have an impact upon institutional identity. A careful review of where an institution actually fits along this continuum and a clear decision regarding at least the direction of change would be important parts of a well-planned reform process. It is easy to claim that "external forces demand change," but hard to imagine how to devise rational means without first specifying the ends being sought.

4. *Debate and design the new curriculum.* Curriculum substance issues were discussed earlier. JMU's approach signals the need for a genuinely open process. The GEC was aware of the need to get faculty involved in the curriculum reform process. The committee held a series of open forums and often solicited faculty input. Unfortunately, the open sessions proved largely ceremonial because standard GEC practice was either to ignore serious questions or to acknowledge the concern and promise to deal with it during the next stage of the reform process. Stages came and went, but important questions remained unanswered and direct challenges were never met. These sessions probably did more to undermine than to enhance the credibility of the reform process.

Our experience suggests that each of the reform development stages needs to include a meaningful evaluation period in which consensus-building feedback can occur among faculty, staff, administrators, and the reform committee. This is more than a linkage to our earlier suggestion of open discussion at each stage of the process. The importance of timely and thoughtful responses to questions and concerns is hard to overstate. At JMU, the GEC's failure to provide such responses undermined the GEC's credibility and served as a deterrent to faculty participation. There is little incentive for faculty to offer constructive criticism when they perceive that well-founded concerns are consistently ignored or deferred indefinitely by those leading the curriculum development process.

5. *Create clear criteria for course approval.* This involves two dimensions: standards and mechanisms. Content standards become

more difficult to establish if the curriculum goals seem overly ambitious and/or plausible pedagogical concerns are left unaddressed. Ironically, JMU could have avoided these difficulties had it followed the curriculum approval procedures it devised and had it developed criteria for approval of packages of courses.⁷ These procedures, initially announced by the GEC, featured a prominent advise-and-consent role for the Faculty Senate for each component of the new program prior to actual adoption. Furthermore, the GEC acknowledged the need for approval criteria for packages and individual courses before inviting proposals. Regrettably, the announced procedures were not followed (i.e., the Senate was left out of the loop entirely) and the GEC has yet to present approval criteria that are adequate to serve as quality control standards.

Institutions contemplating general education reform can learn two lessons from this example. First, either a credibly established governance committee or a respected (external) mediator needs to be given the pre-assigned role of umpire to resolve situations where agreed upon reform rules are violated. The point is to anticipate disagreement and to plan for resolving it. At JMU, the exclusion of the Faculty Senate from its role and the administration's decision to ignore the rejection of the GEC proposal by the newly formed Undergraduate Curriculum Council were demoralizing for the faculty who were destined to deliver the instruction in the new program.

The second lesson involves another connection between substance and process. If the curriculum goals of the new program lack coherence, it will be difficult to establish clear criteria for approval of new courses. With weak or nonexistent criteria, a mix of courses can be adopted that have substantial variance in the rigor of their claims to meet general education goals. This result, we have found, requires significant attempts to "fix" curriculum flaws after the curriculum is adopted and placed in operation.

6. Establish a role for assessment. The assessment of general education needs to be as well-planned and as well-managed as the new curriculum, and the planning should begin early in the reform process. One obvious assessment goal would be to test whether the new curriculum produces better performance results on some core set of general education outcomes. A logical strat-

egy for accomplishing this is to compare pre- and post-reform test results, which requires that an assessment pretest be developed and used before the new curriculum is implemented. This example is one strategy that might be pursued. No doubt other strategies are conceivable, but the point is that the role of assessment needs be discussed early in the reform process and in the same open fashion we have argued for above. As published case studies have indicated (e.g. Kloss, 1993), designing general education assessment tests is a challenge. The difficulty of the task is likely to increase if assessment work is disconnected from the reform process.

A lesson suggested by the JMU experience is that assessment will be more difficult to undertake if curriculum goals lack coherence and if criteria for new course approval are weak. Since implementation of the new course mix began at JMU, each year has involved more repair and modification of the content and administration of the program. The result is that the new general education program is a moving target, making meaningful assessment virtually impossible to achieve.

7. Anticipate program changes and concerns and set up information channels. It is unrealistic to expect any general education reform effort to be perfect. We think that our case will help other institutions contemplating general education reform to avoid problems of the scope and magnitude we experienced. However, even with a successful reform effort and well-designed curriculum, longer-run success requires some type of post-implementation monitoring. Staffing, other resource allocation issues, admissions and transfer student policies, and a host of other issues should be anticipated concerns during and after implementation of the new curriculum.

8. Schedule periodic review. The monitoring just mentioned should feed into, but be distinct from, a periodic review of the general education curriculum. The purpose of such a review is to judge whether the new curriculum is accomplishing its educational goals. Ideally, assessment results will be available to inform such judgments. However, periodic review should go further. Departments offering general education courses should periodically defend the connection between their courses and general education and demonstrate that the courses being delivered live up to the

form and content in their proposals for inclusion in the program. This is another reason why well-defined criteria for course approval are needed; they can be used again to see if the implemented courses have been able to accomplish what they had proposed. The review committee's judgment must be institutionally significant within the broader general education reform process. Thus, as we suggested earlier, this committee should have the role of being the internal impetus for change since ongoing general education reform should be considered the rule rather than the exception.

9. Vote on the proposal for adopting a new general education curriculum. This step

is the culmination of a genuinely open process. Colleges vary in the degree in which faculty voting is formalized regarding curriculum matters, but a vote on the final reform proposal is an important step. It is, by nature, inclusive and can help build the commitment and support needed for implementation success. At Portland State, for example, although much of the inspiration and energy behind the development of their University Studies program has been attributed to their president and provost, the new program was not adopted until their Faculty Senate voted to approve it.⁸

Such a vote did not occur at JMU. The closest thing to it was the vote of the Undergraduate Curriculum Council recommending against adoption of the new General Education Program. The central administration opted to ignore this vote, implement the new program, and withdraw its participation from the UCC; effectively terminating the latter's existence. Since implementation, the Faculty Senate has surveyed the entire faculty on two separate occasions and found that a majority opposes the new General Education Program.⁹ Further evidence of the weak faculty support is the recent (3/23/2000) unanimous endorsement by the Faculty Senate of a resolution calling for an *external* review of the GEP.¹⁰

Conclusion

Charting a successful reform path is a goal of any institution embarking on curriculum change. Civian et al (1997, p.658) suggest

that success is more likely if the reform agenda is modest. This line of advice suggests making frequent, small changes. We suspect, however, that most colleges infrequently pursue revision of their general education curriculum. Thus, general education reform is likely to be a major event in the history of an institution. Properly done, general education curriculum reform will successfully meet its challenges if it is a thoughtful, open, democratic and deliberative process that culminates in a program whose content has widespread faculty endorsement.

The literature on curriculum reform is clear: openness and inclusiveness are essential. While there is no sure or easy path to either, the experience at JMU allows us to identify a set of necessary conditions for genuinely effective curriculum reform of general education. Although senior members of the administration may well need to take a leadership role, they must ensure that the approach they adopt is open, that the existing program is reviewed in a fair and thoughtful manner, and that the need for reform is well established by the findings of the review. Once a committee with credibility has been formed, its goals and objectives must be clearly stated and justified. All enunciated genuine concerns must be dealt with substantively and in a timely way.

Finding a working consensus is difficult, at best. However, requiring those who are leading the process to argue clearly for what they decide to do is probably the surest path to building trust and a broad sense of ownership within the university community. Prior to seeking faculty endorsement, the committee should also develop, articulate and explain the rationale for (i) the changes that it deems necessary, (ii) the criteria it means to employ to insure academic quality, (iii) the role of outcomes assessment, and (iv) the system and schedule for periodic review of the new program. Clearly, there is much to be learned from failed models of curriculum reform. Regrettably, JMU's new program continues to provide such a model.

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Endnotes

1. On the range of general education curriculum possibilities, a good place to start is with Gaff (1983, 1991) and Gaff, Ratcliff, and Associates (1997).

2. JMU's new program was administratively imposed. Because faculty were not given a clear rationale for the new program, the Reynolds (1998) article may serve that purpose. The article suggests that JMU saw a menu-based approach as inferior, implying the Liberal Studies Program was structurally flawed. There was no such consensus, thus the surprise at the quick push for a new approach. The inferiority claim is not supported in the literature. The research of Jones and Ratcliff (1991) indicates that gains in general education are greater with a distribution requirement than a core curriculum, especially if particular clusters of courses are taken (see also Jones, 1992).

3. This claim is rather misleading. The GEC did solicit the faculty for suggestions for learning "objectives." No doubt many faculty and some departments sent the GEC lists of possible candidates. But the administration also simply ordered every department head to provide a copy of every course syllabus taught by his/her faculty for every course that was part of the LSP. It seems likely that a significant number of the 140 (1/3 of all faculty at JMU) faculty members that Reynolds claims submitted objectives did so without necessarily knowing they had done so.

4. The entire set of learning objectives is available for review as ITEM 5 at the following website we have constructed to support this paper: <http://cob.jmu.edu/kohengened>.

5. Civian et al (1997, p.659) have the same point on their list of suggestions for good practice. Kanter et al (1997, p.127) conclude "that a curriculum change process that is open and collaborative is the only way to insure that faculty will feel committed to the eventual outcome;" with such a commitment being key to success in the schools they studied.

6. On the importance of legitimacy issues in committee design see Kanter et al (1997, ch.6). Jerry Gaff makes a similar point in arguing that "the specific content of curricula is less important than the *process* of conducting a review, agreeing on a program of study and its rationale, and endowing it with the authority of the faculty and the administration" (Gaff, 1991, p.82, emphasis in the original).

7. On the specifics of the advise and consent role for the Faculty Senate at JMU, see ITEMS 13 and 14 at our website; the original plan could be a useful model.

8. The Portland State story was told in a group of articles recently published in this *Journal*. On faculty senate voting at Portland State, see Weikel (1999, p.73).

9. The exact wording of the first referendum was: "The General Education Program proposed for the fall of 1997 is academically superior to the existing Liberal Studies Program." A majority of the faculty in four of the five colleges disagreed with this assertion, often by substantial majorities. In a more detailed follow-up survey, conducted by the Faculty Senate in cooperation with the newly appointed General Education Council, faculty claimed that they were (i) not opposed in principle to objectives-based learning; but (ii) they could not support the particular sets of learning objectives associated with the new program.

10. The specific resolution was "Whereas many faculty and at least some administrators have serious questions about the academic integrity (rigor, coherence, process, and content) of General Education, and whereas there is a body of evidence that in at least some programs General Education is draining significant resources from the major, the JMU Faculty Senate recommends that General Education undergo a comprehensive external review. Furthermore, the Senate strongly urges that the Steering Committee of the Faculty Senate and the VPAA collaborate in the selection of the external reviewers in order to insure the integrity of the review process and procedures."

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Appendix F

Please see next page.

Why are we talking about General Education at Capilano?



2010 – Senate revises Senate Policy 2009-03 requirements for credentials

"All Capilano University students are expected to receive instruction that increases their ability to function as independent learners and responsible citizens. Each Capilano University program of 30 credits or more shall include a core of general education or related instruction at the breadth and depth appropriate for the level of the credential." (See S2009-03 for specific program guidelines.)



2013 – Capilano University officially receives NWCCU accreditation

NWCCU Standard Two Section: "The general education component of undergraduate programs (if offered) demonstrates an integrated course of study that helps students develop the breadth and depth of intellect to become more effective learners and to prepare them for a productive life of work, citizenship, and personal fulfillment. Baccalaureate degree programs and transfer associate degree programs include a recognizable core of general education that represents an integration of basic knowledge and methodology of the humanities and fine arts, mathematical and natural sciences, and social sciences. Applied undergraduate degree and certificate programs of thirty (30) semester credits or forty-five (45) quarter credits in length contain a recognizable core of related instruction or general education with identified outcomes in the areas of communication, computation, and human relations that align with and support program goals or intended outcomes."



2014 – New Academic and Strategic Plans adopted

"Our strategic goal is student success: Capilano University is committed first and foremost to student success. It is our defining feature, the standard by which all things will be measured. During the next three years, Capilano will organize its activities to maximize the opportunity for all students to succeed in their educational objectives. This will happen not only in academic areas, but also across the university as a whole."

"Common experiences: To prepare well-educated and engaged citizens, Capilano University will develop an optional first-year experience and a required interdisciplinary general education core. The Cap Year Experience, described in detail in the academic plan, will be piloted in year one. The interdisciplinary general education curriculum will be built on Capilano's strategic goals, dedicated to foundational capacities and transferable skills, and constructed to begin operation in year two."

"Employers do need educated and trained graduates—they also need socially, interpersonally, environmentally aware individuals, with broad-based knowledge and understanding, who are critical and creative thinkers, effective communicators and problem solvers. Our world changes quickly, so we need to be adaptable and equipped, academically, with transferable skills and knowledge. **This is the goal of Capilano's general education:** fostering abilities and skills, literacies and understandings, perspectives and positions that cross disciplines and prepare students for meaningful engagement with their world. But our commitment to general education is an integral part of, not separate from, the practical education that draws many students to our university."



Fall 2015 – Ad Hoc Senate Credential Policy Review Committee struck

This committee's terms of reference include reviewing general education's definition, description and incorporation in senate policy.



Spring 2015 – General Education Committee and Cap Year Committees struck

Committees tasked with exploring possibilities, looking at best practices and coming back with recommendations for what General Education and a Cap Year should look like.