

Trends in the Liberal Arts Core: A FIPSE Study of Cycles of Change in General Education Curricula of 66 Colleges and Universities in the United States : 1978-1998, preliminary results.

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Purpose of Assessing Trends in the Liberal Arts Core

Assessing Trends is a three-year project funded by grants from the Fund for Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to study the evolution of general education requirements and the liberal arts core curricula in sixty-six colleges and universities in the United States from 1978-1998. The sixty-six colleges and universities are representative of the national proportions of (pre-2000) Carnegie class research, doctoral, masters, and baccalaureate institutions. Drawn from all geographic areas of the country, they include in representative national proportions public, private, secular, and religious institutions. The purpose of the study is to identify typologies of general education structures and requirements and to locate causes of change in these over the last twenty years, thereby making it possible for higher education institutions to develop strategic planning and policy decisions for their liberal arts and general education core curricula.

Methodology of Trends in the Liberal Arts Core

The study has three phases: a catalog study of sixty-six institutions, on site-interviews at twenty-one selected institutions, and, finally, dissemination and demonstration to educators of the best practices and reform results within general education. We have concluded the catalogue study which records the changes in core curricula. That study forms the basis for many of the trends discussed in this paper. On the basis of the catalogue study, we have begun our site visits to institutions which exemplify different trends, particularly changes in trends, in general education, and prior to traveling to a campus, the Principal Investigator has drawn up "Institutional Profiles" which trace that institution's 20 year history of change in general education. Site visits conducted by the Principal Investigator, the Project Director and AALE staff have focused upon small group and individual interviews as well as formal presentations to faculty and administrators. The interviews permit us to identify the interaction of various causes of change in liberal, general education, and the presentations permit faculty and administrators to weigh changes in their general education programs within a national context. A causal narrative of changes in general education centering on the 21 selected schools is projected.¹

Historical Background of Changes in Liberal Arts Curricula

The benefits of explaining general education structures in terms of a causal history of their changes has its ultimate justification in creating reflection upon the nature of liberal education. *Trends in the Liberal Arts Core* signifies in its first phase examines the liberal arts through the lens of general education. There are good reasons for this. We must be careful when we ascribe a liberal arts education to degrees and majors. Until the rise

of the universities, most if not all of the courses of a liberal education, however widely divergent from institution to institution, were taken by all of the students within an institution.² A liberal baccalaureate education, thus, had little to do with the diversities of specialization we see today; the baccalaureate degree is an umbrella, often, which has as its virtue the tendency to specializing, becoming more and more imitative of graduate schools.³ However, the advent of majors within 20th Century universities and colleges, and even the diversification of majors into tracks, still implied a uniformity of curriculum for each given set of students, though, of course, the uniformity was now of a major. Such uniformity may well have led to some curious thinking about liberal education. For example, one 1960 study found that faculty members of liberal arts departments thought that a liberal arts education could be achieved simply by taking a major in their department.⁴ Yet, if we recall that the medieval curriculum was expanded out of seven disciplines and we admit the expansion of liberal arts subjects to all the physical and biological sciences, all the social sciences, and to the vernacular letters and fine arts, it is difficult to see how anything remotely like a liberal arts and sciences education could be achieved by the study of courses in one department.

Nor will it do simply to identify a multidisciplinary "core" of courses as equivalent to a curriculum. Clifford Adelman strays dangerously close to identification of courses with curriculum in the use to which he puts his concept of the "empirical core curriculum".⁵ Adelman is primarily concerned with refuting the notion that "there was no core curriculum, no concentration of matter in the diffusion of knowledge in either four-year or two-year institutions." Adelman's work manufactures an "empirical core" of the 35 top courses in percentage share out of 1038 courses which account for all undergraduate credits.⁶ This empirical core includes a collection of six business courses, but concentrations of knowledge along disciplinary lines decrease rapidly and none have the same degree of post-introductory representation.⁷ While the empirical core does show a concentration relative to all other course credits, excepting business, the "concentration" is one of multidisciplines, of multiple subjects.

Multidisciplinarity may, then, be necessary to a liberal education, but it is no guarantee of a *liberal arts*, general education or core *curriculum*. Adelman, generally, scorns studies based in catalogues on the grounds that the empirical product of transcripts tells us what is actually happening regardless of the promises of catalogues.⁸ But this is to ignore the first line of institutional causality in what the empirical core looks like.

Catalogue rules specify credits out of baccalaureate of arts and science degrees that are reserved for general education. These rules group courses into various categories which very frequently have widely differing specifications which direct course taking behavior of

students and, hence, enhance or diminish the probabilities that particular courses will enroll larger or smaller numbers of students.

We tracked the appearance of Adelman's empirical core courses within general education requirements, with the exception of the business courses, an electrical engineering course, a teacher practicum, and a physical education course. We ranked the incidences of empirical core courses which were stipulated as satisfying general education requirements within our universities' and colleges' catalogues. We, then, correlated the rank of courses used to satisfy general education requirements with the rank of empirical core courses in the College Course Map; the correlation is relatively strong – around, $r = .644$. That is, the courses which have the highest frequency of satisfying general education requirements in bachelor of arts and science degrees are also the courses most likely to occupy the greatest share of the course taking in national transcripts.⁹

A curriculum moves through time and, thus, a longitudinal study of many curricula in one institution produces a kind of cinema of curriculum — a good imitation of what the curriculum was doing in its institutional life. Bring together sixty six curricula, each moving over 20 years, and you not only have 66 “shorts” but a grand movie of an intricate ballet with highly divergent patterns and rhythms. It is in the rhythms of these patterns that one begins to appreciate what a liberal, general education curriculum may really be.

Since our primary interest was in liberal education, especially as it was changing within university-wide or college of arts and sciences general education settings, our initial research efforts traced the rules in catalogs that directed students to take more or less general education credits. It is by means of catalog rules that we locate the first types of general education programs and shifts in their patterns. Course taking rules which make up general education curricula return us to the notion of a degree since general education is, really, only found for students who have matriculated.¹⁰ Our study indicates that general education requirements are found in several differing extensions. There are universities which have one set of general education requirements for all students. Such institutions' requirements typically partially fulfill undergraduate bachelor of arts and sciences degrees, as well as bachelor of education, bachelor of science in business, bachelor of architecture, music, and fine arts degrees. In 1998, Temple University, for example, required a surprisingly uniform general education curriculum for *all* of its undergraduate students (others following this pattern include, Northern Arizona and Assumption).

Second, another extension of baccalaureate requirements, especially in business and education, allows the professional schools, or sometimes departments, to follow the categories and credit requirements prescribed by general education, but to stipulate which of the “service courses” provided by the colleges of arts and sciences will fulfill those categories (e.g., Fordham and Samford).

Third, there are institutions which have so-called general education requirements, but allow schools to exempt portions of the general education requirements; that is, there is limited or no credit fulfillment in certain categories of general education. (e.g., Grambling, Hood). Typically, nursing programs and B.F.A.'s

frequently fall into this group. We found that 49% of records from all Carnegie classes show these kinds of alternative degree programs for general education.¹¹ Finally, some institutions have no university-wide, no truly general education requirements, leaving general education to the policy of each school (Boston University, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis).

In research and doctoral institutions, our FIPSE study shows that these last two, non-universal extensions occupy about 40% of our curricular records. Conversely, in university-wide general education we repeatedly find general education requirements for a whole university extended for College of Arts and Sciences, or CAS, students. Such is the case at the University of Miami where all students must occupy 25% of their curriculum with general education requirements, but college of arts and science students must fulfill requirements which occupy 49% of their curriculum. These four patterns are always negotiated at large institutions some time in the institution's life and they are not fixed for all time. Our study shows, at least, eight Masters, Doctoral, and Research universities which have shifted these large scale requirement patterns.¹²

What is common to the vast majority of these arrangements is that the provision of general education rests in part and, usually, in whole upon the college(s) of arts and sciences or a “university college” which is staffed largely by college of arts and sciences faculty.¹³ Indeed, if a liberal education cannot be located through a curriculum, it probably cannot be found for those seeking institutional education. Therefore, our data in *Trends* in general and core curriculum education are focused upon universal requirements and, when these are not extant, requirements for the college(s) of arts and sciences.

Trends preliminary data indicate that the average percentage of credits in all institutions devoted to general education programs in 1978 was 36.3. The average in 1998 was 41.1.¹⁴ The period between 1978 and 1982 saw the largest jump in average percentage of baccalaureate credits devoted to general education, from 36.3 to 39.5 %, while 1994/95 seems to have been the highwater mark, with the average reaching 41.7%. If frequent, large credit increases in general education marks reform, then for many schools, 1980-1982 marked the years when reform in general education first began. 1990 was a time of significant, though not quite as extensive change, as well. Between 1994 and 1998 the total baccalaureate credits devoted to general education dropped by .5%¹⁵ The overall increase in 20 years would, therefore, represent a 6.2 credit rise in a 124 credit baccalaureate – a considerable increase equivalent to two courses.

These trends are also confirmed by noting that in our whole database the number of increases in credits devoted to general education out of a baccalaureate degree exceeds the number of decreases by nearly a 2 to 1 margin. This trend is also confirmed when Carnegie categories of schools are examined, three of the four Carnegie class showing similar rises.¹⁶

In 1978 the median percentage of credits devoted to general education was 37. That is, half of the schools in our database anchored 37% or more of their curriculum in general education; half devoted 37% or less to the general education curriculum. By 1998 the median had risen to 40% of credits. This is considerably larger than the “1/3 of curriculum” rule which administrators often use to

roughly determine general education allocation. The figures are largely consistent with figures on the "percentage of [bachelor's] programs consisting in general education" which Levine published in 1978. At that time he found the plurality of Research Universities and Comprehensive, Masters' Universities, and Liberal Arts Colleges used 31-40%, while the plurality of Doctoral Universities, the Carnegie class with the fewest data points in our study, used 41-50% of their program's credits for undergraduate education.¹⁷

We have already noted how Carnegie class Research institutions diverged from the rest of the institutions in *Trends* in the growth of general education. A sense of the national complexity of general education can be had by examining current percentages of baccalaureate degree credits devoted to general education when stratified by affiliation. In 1998, these figures were, respectively, secular (that is, public and private combined) 35.4%; publics 38.4%, privates 35.1%, and religious 43.1%.¹⁸

Without reference to electives, our FIPSE survey concurs with the idea in general education literature that American higher, liberal, general education structures generally fall on a continuum of categories which shapes student selection of courses between the extremes of prescribed courses and free electives. The literature does not tend to treat the categories and subcategories statistically.¹⁹ This is understandable, since courses seem to matter the most and subjects, perhaps, next. Further, what may be a set of separate categories in one general education program may reappear, four years later in the same school, as a set of subcategories under one, broad general distribution rule. But there is an important reason to watch trends, here. Categories are like the pillars of a pier; on each one some section of the structure rests. Subcategories, to extend the analogy a bit far, are extension of docks off the main pier. Go down one and you are not likely to be able to go down another.

This means that if categories and subcategories extend, an institution is increasingly differentiating its general education curriculum and its course directing structures -- whether it be through a series of selections or mandated paths.

Such has been the case with the curricula of *Trends*' schools. When we add the number of categories and subcategories and compare trends, we find that differentiation measured in terms of total numbers of these increases with every year of our study, amounting to a 21% increase over 20 years.

In 1998 we find 14 institutions, 21% of our database, adding subcategories to their general education or core programs. Of these 14, nine had no change in credits, so this proportion represents more efficient tracking of students into new requirements. This suggests that it really does matter if a school adds a new category or subcategory. Sometimes these additions were architectonic shifts in the distribution requirements. For example, William and Mary went from a disciplinary based general education program to an interdisciplinary/methods based program. Other times, types of requirements changed; Eckerd exchanged a senior seminar a new interdisciplinary distribution subcategory. Other times, tracks were increased; the University of Dallas began to offer Latin as one of four language tracks; Brooklyn College allowed ESL courses to satisfy the English requirement; Georgetown and Wofford created new general education for non-

majors science tracks. Still other times, categories were created that allowed double dipping so that, now, courses needed to evince new particular qualities; Temple created a "studies in race" category which could be satisfied by courses in other categories that met the criteria of the "race" category. Earlier years show similar examples for Writing Intensive courses.

There are other structural features which are not captured by the counts and examples above. For example, Boston University had had two categories to its general education program, one named Languages and Mathematics -- the skills component, the other Divisional Studies, a distribution structure, since 1978. In 1994, BU fundamentally changed the structure of its College of Liberal Arts' general education program though it added no new categories, no new credits, left in tact its Divisional Studies program, and, ultimately, added only eight new courses to a base of 200 general education courses -- an increase of 4% or less. BU renamed the old second category of its program "General Education Program," transferred under GEP the old Divisional Studies, and created an alternative curricula of eight courses, the Core Curriculum, which students may elect to take instead of the Divisional Program. Of course, an institution which offers either a core curriculum or a distributive system tends to collapse the distinction that Levine and Bloom agreed on as primary institutional characterizations and that Rudolph repeated in characterizing general education as the option either "to take certain core courses or else to select unspecified courses in various subject areas."²⁰

Typical of programs above is equivalency; what is taken in the core program counts in the distribution program. But aside from the old practice of allowing general education courses to double dip for majors, as we will see in several different instances, *institutions are starting to make use of incentives between two general education programs or features.* The University of the South has adopted a more limited core curriculum alternative than BU's. This one, four courses long, substitutes for four general education courses in English, Philosophy, History, and Fine Arts. But it also has an incentive program built into it where if students take just two of the courses, they also receive credit for taking one of two required, writing intensive courses. If they take all four, they receive credit for two writing intensive courses.

To what subjects, then, did the expanded and differentiated credits devoted to general education go? Preliminary tallies indicate that number of schools that required foreign language of at least one year increased from 28% of our schools in 1978 to 41% by 1998. School requiring one or more lab requirements in the physical sciences have increased from 22% to 44%. An increase in interdisciplinary, Western Civilization or History of Ideas required core courses also seems apparent, rising from 8% of all institutions in 1978 requiring students to take these courses to 24% by 1998. Diversity courses increased as a requirement from in 3% of our institutions to 21%. In 1978 10% of our institutions had Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) or Writing Intensive requirements; by 1998, 33% had them.²¹

Increases in subjects do not always come together and requirements for subjects which we might believe are mutually exclusive turn out to be mutually complementary. For example, foreign language enjoyed its greatest jump between 1978 and 1982, a jump of 33%, while lab requirements enjoyed their greatest

increase between 1982 and 1986. Whereas foreign language and lab requirements have continued to rise over time, some central subjects rise and fall over time, ending where they began. In 1978, 47% of our schools show at least one required English course, composition. After a rise to 57% in 1986, in 1998 the number had fallen to 50%, while during the same period WAC and Writing Intensive rose fairly steadily. Finally, we might think of the canon debate as one of rather mutually exclusive positions – Western Civilization, Great Books, and History of Ideas (that is, Western Culture) on one side, non-Western Civilization, Diversity, Multiculturalism, Minority and Gender Studies on the other. In books, maybe, but in the curriculum the “canon wars” probably have actually helped *both* camps, bringing increased requirements for courses in both categories in the differing curricula of institutions and, thereby, helping to put more structure into them. Indeed, by 1998 37% of our institutions had *both* a Western Culture and Non-Western/Minority requirement, and 23% required specific courses (usually but not always) in some version of Western Culture.

These relative shifts within an expanding pool of general education credits imply curricular rearrangements and trade-offs which affect the course taking by students and, hence, the course delivery by faculty.

Curricula are, then, a relation of courses, not just simply an empirical collection, negotiated and formed by individual faculties bound by “catalogue” rules that stipulate requirements and, hence, provisioning of courses for students.

But if we think that we have begun to adequately describe general education by listing the courses that are being added to it, we are likely to miss a great deal of the fascinating innovations and history of general and liberal education at the end of the 20th Century. The rise of innovations – particularly in Western Culture courses – seems to bring with it or parallel many important curricular developments. Typically, these programs involve more than two courses and are sequenced. In the mid 60's the University of North Carolina at Asheville (UNCA) developed a four-course Humanities sequence which it made into one of four categories in its general education program. By 1982, the first course in the sequence was made the last and the entire sequence was extended into the senior year. The success of the program encouraged a unique feature at UNCA, a single core art course for every student. Rather than adopt a one- course sequence, Colorado College developed an “Option A” sequence of about 30 different two-course sequences, nearly the only such sequences in its curriculum. In addition, the presence of Option B, the non-Western, minority requirement of two courses (unsequenced) led to the development of Option C -- a blend of Western and non-Western. Wabash's Tradition and Culture course evolved out of a straight Western Civilization sequence into a modular sequence, which intersperses and contrasts varying non-Western cultures to the still predominant Western Culture modules.

Intriguingly, the rise of Western Culture courses may have replaced, somewhat, structure in two liberal arts majors. Recent publications and press articles have detailed the removal of structure, the loss of “foundational courses emphasizing broad

periods.” from English and history disciplinary majors.²² I have no wish to dispute the figures which show the losses within these majors, but English and History departments are, probably, the two major contributors of faculty to Western Culture programs (Political Science, Classics, Philosophy, and, sometimes, Religion being the others) and interdisciplinary these programs, in turn, are most often sequenced chronologically as broad surveys. This deserves further analysis, but the broad historical survey of various major periods, figures and types of literature may well have moved out of the disciplines into general education over the last 20 years.

Very generally, we might speak of “curricular support” as the topic which captures much of the history and innovation in general education in the last 20 years. And that support may be divided into four categories: political support and decision making processes for general education; fiscal support for general education; supplemental instructional support for general education; and, finally, assessment and program review support. It is equally clear that these supports may be external or internal to institutions and may affect both public and private institutions. For example, political support from the Board of Regents of Louisiana prescribed minimum requirements for a bachelors degree which show up in our 1994 cohort, raising the credits required for general education by 22%. City University Board of Trustees stipulated, in 1999, that every college should have a core curriculum, but the details of this are not yet worked out. Though Ellen Belton, Dean of Brooklyn College, believes that minimum standards will be involved here, she reports concern by the faculty and administration that any final determination not draw up categories which will disturb the highly structured and nationally known core curriculum which Brooklyn developed in 1980.²³ Our catalog records show that in 1993 Arizona mandated state core curricula to make transfers possible. It appears that structural changes in Northern Arizona's core took place as a consequence. So, while it is clear that external political pressures are helping to construct the narrative of core changes, it is not clear that these are always beneficial or particularly good for general education.

Below we narrate some of the stories concerning supplemental instruction and program assessment which our catalog study led us into during site interviews. These developments are partly market driven in the sense that (1) many institutions are seeking to improve general education, (2) these improvements, particularly in supplemental education, help with improvement, and (3) the kinds and models of improvements are often spreading throughout all classes of institutions, so that we find colleges and universities competing in ways heretofore, usually, unrealized.

One baccalaureate college, Colorado College, recently instituted a “freshman experience” seminar. Colorado invented the block system, a one-month/one-course system of instruction which offers advantages such as concentrated study, flexible scheduling – so that field and longer trips become possible, and concentrated time with a professor. Surveys at the college indicate high satisfaction among both faculty and students with the system, but one problem has repeatedly occurred. A student takes one intensive course with students for more than three weeks and, then, these students are all dispersed to a whole set of different courses next month. In order to counter this disruptive effect and to extend the effects of academic life beyond the class, Colorado began this last year to develop the

Freshman Experience and to coordinate it with a new Continuing Conversation. The former involves learning teams of one or two faculty members and student mentors. As with many first year course initiatives across the nation, the numbers in class are small, the topics are picked by faculty to illustrate less their expertise than an educated mind's work upon a topic of interest, and the courses are designed to introduce critical skills, not remediation, needed for college work. The student mentors act to both inform professors of problems the students are having and as advisors to students on how to adjust to academic life – e.g., creating study sessions and informally examining papers. The Continuing Conversation is a co-curricular program, designed to extend past the life of the course, into the rest of the year, under the aegis of the freshman experience professors but at the initiative and direction of the students. Funds for student projects – e.g., asking a speaker to come to campus to address a theme found in one of the first year seminars – are to be delegated to worthy proposals.²⁴

Programs like Colorado's are designed to maximize the effectiveness of social liberal learning often by making sure that students remain in school. Such efforts begin early. Ball State has a June two-day, required advising session where both students and parents come to learn of the transition to college and to make out the schedule for the first year. Both Ball State University and Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) have also constructed learning teams which pick up the moment a student enters the institution. Ball State, a residential university, under the administration of the University College created in 1990, puts together a team of four – two faculty members, a residence head or advisor, student mentors (who have taken the course before) and professional advisors. There are two faculty members because Ball State has constructed a system of learning communities based in paired courses for about 80% of its incoming freshmen. In addition, supplemental instruction in the form of group sessions and individual peer tutoring is offered at the learning center, which concentrates on high risk core courses.²⁵

IUPUI is not a residential institution, but its University College, formed in 1994, has been just as active in leading a highly decentralized university to build liberal learning habits. With retention data and a huge financial shortfall pointing to a need for significant action, in 1995 IUPUI began a pilot learning community program. UC110 First Year Seminars emerged, with learning teams of a professor, advisor, student mentor, and librarian. The First Year Seminars are largely about teaching students how to navigate the university's curricula and support services, and this effort has apparently had great success, raising retention rates four percentage points and bringing the bottom of the middle performing SAT scored students into the university. But IUPUI has also developed UC112 Critical Inquiry, a supplemental instruction, companion, linked course to a variety of first year courses in general education, including African American Studies, Anthropology, Biology, History, Psychology, and Women's Studies, which were among the 25 most frequently taken courses at IUPUI. The two basic goals of the course are to support success in the main, general education course and to develop more generic skills within the broad area of the linked course.²⁶

Whether we are looking at Colorado or these two, large Doctoral universities of Indiana, clearly the model for successful

general education emerges is, indeed, the time-tested one of close professor, instructional, peer, and advising contact with students – a model which baccalaureate institutions have traditionally claimed as their own. Such trends, then, seem to portend renewed and, probably, beneficial competition between universities and colleges as each seeks to improve its general, liberal education.

Retention rates are, of course, student performance rates in relation to a school's program; they are a measure of success in attracting and keeping students. On websites, we notice that while all institutions detail their schools and majors, some actively direct web users to their core and general education programs. This is clearly a marketing strategy which when coupled to the advising and supplemental instruction detailed above points to a trend in liberal arts. Since only a few majors, capturing a relatively small number of students for an institution, *distinguish* one institution from another, but general education is widely variant, we strongly suspect that institutions seeking to compete with peer institutions are crafting better and more extensive general education programs to provide the grounds for marketing the distinctive character of their institutions. More specific measures than retention rates of program and student performance in liberal education are changing the notion and make-up of general education.

Since about 1994 Ball State has been developing a general education/core assessment procedure, the distinguishing feature of which is that it is now a regular, annual process which generates enormous data on inputs and outcomes. Ball State has gone through three cycles. The first began with a review of every course in the core. This review lasted more than three years and was subdivided into science, fine arts and humanities courses, and social science and honors courses. Master syllabi, data collection of each department's devising, national instruments on subject matter accomplishments, attitudinal questionnaires and focus groups with students from each course all played a part. In this sense, the goal of the first cycle was departmental self-awareness in regard to its core courses. The second cycle reviewed these collected materials in light of the mission and goals of the core/general education program. This review was conducted by the University Core Curriculum Subcommittee of the Undergraduate Education Committee. The committee made recommendations on courses that were binding and either courses were revised or they were dropped. The third cycle which focuses on strategic planning has recently begun as a result of two different impetuses. Parallel to the two review cycles, voluntary summer workshops, originally involving only 20 concerned faculty, began to talk about program goals – e.g., what did it mean to be "an educated person." These workshops began to merge with the work of the departments and Core subcommittee to produce recent summer workshops which have focused on university mission statements, separate goals, and matching learning outcomes on a matrix with core structure and courses. The idea is that students will not be able to move through the core without encountering courses matched to outcomes. In the meantime, faculty participation in the workshops has more than doubled precisely because the faculty have come to see that their courses and the excellence of their institution are at stake in these.²⁷

Tusculum College, a Masters University, has a core program extending into the junior year. Recently, as part of its core reform it instituted portfolio assessment on six foundational

competencies -- writing, analytic reading, public speaking, critical analysis, math, and computer literacy --and three practices of virtues -- self knowledge, civility, and ethics of social responsibility. Students must pass all nine assessments at two different levels -- minimum skill level for college work and minimum standard for citizenship -- in order to graduate. A third level of recognition represents honors. Students are responsible for arranging submission of evidence, usually in the form of papers, to the Competency Program. Professors submit evaluations which argue the merits of the student submissions, not on the basis of meeting course requirements, but on the basis of meeting standards in each of the nine areas of competency. The Tusculum faculty has developed a handbook containing detailed standards which student work must meet.²⁸ Though almost all Tusculum courses provide work eligible to satisfy the competencies, the college has provided an incentive to use the Commons, or core, courses: "the number of competencies listed in the catalog for each course is limited to one for a non-Commons course and two for a Commons course".²⁹ In 1978, Levine had discussed competency-based education as a way to "emphasize student attainment rather than time-serving." While, undoubtedly, these efforts are directed toward attainment, they are clearly attempting to emphasize and enhance the connection between the means of a curriculum and the end achieved -- competency.

All regional accreditors have been demanding the collection of evidence of student learning, but institutions have repeatedly reported to us that they have not had any instruction in how to use this evidence. Some institutions have undertaken to measure performance of programs, e.g., IUPUI. Tusculum's experience has been highly instrumental in AALE's work to develop the Pew Knight initiative focusing accreditation on learning outcomes by providing objective, systematic, yet varied evidence of student performance.

In a study of general education trends, we seek, among other things, to locate trends in structural change -- that is, a change in the *relations of courses* for both faculty and students. Behind such data analysis, of course, are concerns with curricular qualities -- both their nature and their excellence. Given the distinctions and cases above that we have elaborated as ways to judge whether there has been structural change in curricula in our database, trends in curricular developments have begun to emerge.³⁰

(1) *We see structural change in about 75 % of our schools' general education curricula.* For all institutions (66), 21.5% of our records (396) show structural changes. Of these, 73% show a rise or fall in credits in general education; 27% show a structural change without any rise or fall in credits. In other words, about 1 in 4 of our institutions which accomplish structural change do so through efficient use of existing general education credits.

(2) In the early 1980's 1 in 3 of our institutions experienced a structural change. Since then, the pace has slackened somewhat with only 1 in 4 of our institutions experiencing a structural change every four years.

(3) Of the schools that change the structure of their general education curricula, 60% change it twice and 14% three times within our twenty year study. In some cases the rate of change is so fast that institutions are not waiting four years to make new changes.

(4) This turbulent curricular reform does not seem to be "tier-dependent;" that is, while many of the prestigious colleges and universities have moved toward general education and elective systems with less structure and fewer required courses over a 25 year difference in survey years,³¹ our representative survey of general education development *within* those years indicates that in all Carnegie classes colleges and universities the elite tier³² are *behaving identically with the rest of the database in terms of statistical trends.* That is, all institutions are changing their general education programs with the same frequency. All are adding general education credits 2 times more often than they are subtracting them. All are adding one year of required language or laboratory science at the same rate. The difference between the elite and the entire database is that the elite schools only have an average of 35.54 % credits versus 40.91% of their baccalaureate credits devoted to gen ed, and the elites do not differentiate their general education categories and subcategories as much as the entire database does.³³

We may say, with real probability then, that the non-elites are using the trends within general education to craft diverse, highly articulated programs of general education. This finding accords with Clifford Adelman's suggestion that the so-called "empirical core" curriculum varies with the selectivity of institutions, yet it points out that the reforms of structures and rules for satisfying general education programs of the 1980's would have had empirical effects on actual course-taking.

The Future of the Project

The database of *Assessing Trends* provides both the statistical analysis above and a detailed description of the university wide or college of arts and sciences curricula of universities and baccalaureate institutions. Subsequent to data analysis have come the site visits to twenty or more institutions which we are now undertaking. The aim is to be able to characterize liberal education's state and future. Institutionally, this can only be done through the site visits, where faculty and courses can be examined in some detail so that flesh can be put on the bones. This "flesh" is not only the credits, categories, and support of general education we have discussed above, but the explanation of how particular goals in liberal education have come to be realized -- down to the course, professor and, even, textual level. The materials of the site visits have begun to reveal that story, one which we look forward to telling as the project develops.

Endnotes

1. This publication should locate itself midway between the models of Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636*, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1977 and Michael Nelson, ed. *Celebrating the Humanities: A Half-Century of the Search Course at Rhodes College*, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 1996.

2. Philo Hutcheson argues that "the prescribed curriculum faded away, [but] it did not die. Aspects of its nature--including in some instances the conception of unitary knowledge argued by Newman and Hutcheson --persist...in the form of general education." in

“Structures and Practices” in Gaff, *Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum*, 109.

3. Rudolph 246, 253.

4. Francis Oakley, *The Community of Learning*, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992, 62.

5. Clifford Adelman, *The New College Course Map and Transcript Files*. National Institute on Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Life-Long Learning, U.S. Department of Education, 1995, 229-232.

6. These are really course categories since they aggregate instances of course taking with similar subjects and titles across many different institutions.

7. The resulting concentration shows, as Adelman says, “business now rules.” Six of the top 35 courses are business courses; four of them are above the introductory level. Math has four courses, two below calculus and the other, statistics. Concentration rapidly declines to three English courses -- one of which is English Composition, two courses each of history -- one of which is Western Civilization, psychology -- one of which is General Psychology, and chemistry -- one of which is General Chemistry. The rest of the courses, 14, are based in single disciplines; e.g., introductory economics, computer programming, and intro to communications. This empirical core looks, then, suspiciously like the entire baccalaureate curriculum for, perhaps, the most popular major in the country -- business.

8. Adelman 229.

9. We suspect, on the basis of documented patterns but not statistically complete data, that general education requirements in professional schools would tend to show similar correlations for three reasons. First, professional schools of the largest non-science majors -- business and education -- tend to follow the credit and category patterns of requirements of arts and science general education programs; they simply specify particular courses which must be taken, e.g., introduction to economics as the “social science” course. Second, professional schools based in the physical sciences -- particularly nursing and health science programs -- necessarily demand many of the science courses found in the empirical core, but, following the pattern of the B.S. in a college of arts and sciences, they do not demand foreign languages found in the core. Why? Not because of accreditation requirements but because graduate schools do not demand foreign language of their incoming students. (This last point was derived from an interview with the Director of Health Science at Miami University.) Third, professional schools which tend to limit general education credits -- particularly arts schools and social work programs -- still tend to demand some of the courses found in the empirical core, e.g., composition, introductory sociology, or statistics. And this demand, though of fewer credits, still tends to imitate the categories of subjects found in the arts and sciences general education programs.

10. Our decision to focus the first phase of our study upon

catalogues which contain descriptions of general education was predicated, in part, on the possibility that accreditors of professional programs might curtail general education and, thus, liberal learning by demanding that certain degrees require less general and, therefore, liberal education course taking. In the end, we found no statistical correlation between the addition or deletion of accreditation and the rise or fall in general education credits within an institution -- notwithstanding anecdotal evidence suggesting that general education credits were a function of accreditation policies of accreditors of professional programs. Indeed, our site visits have given us evidence that university administrators have successfully challenged claims by professional schools that accreditation policy will not permit compliance with institutional, general education policy.

11. The number is somewhat larger when departments are allowed to constrain the credits. Figures based on a subset of 57% of our total institutions, the subset containing representatives of all four Carnegie classes.

12. Howard, Temple, University of South Carolina, University of Miami; Middle Tennessee State; University of Northern Arizona, Hood, and Samford.

13. Conversely, professional schools rarely offer courses for general education that can be taken by all students in the institution and many institutions exclude professional schools from offering courses for general education.

14. Rudolph noted that Levine and Weingart in their *Reform of Undergraduate Education* had found that “a survey of curricular developments from the period from 1967 to 1974 confirmed persistent trends -- increased specialization, choice of electives in the field of concentration, the increase of electives at the expense of general education but not at the expense of majors” (248). Our data indicates, then, a gain by general education at the expense of electives.

15. 78/79, 36.3; 82/83, 39.5; 86/87 40.3; 90/91, 40.6; 94/95, 41.7; and 98/99, 41.2.

16. Baccalaureate schools saw an increase from 37.2 to 42.6 percent of credits. Masters universities rose from an average of 30.5 undergraduate, baccalaureate percent of credits devoted to general education to a 39.2 average. Doctoral universities, on average, required 40.9% of their undergraduate curricula to be devoted to general education in 1978 and 43.7% in 1998. Research universities rose marginally from requiring students to use 37.6% of their undergraduate curriculum for general education in 1978 to 38% in 1998. Research universities, unlike all other institutions, seem to have risen and fallen noticeably, cresting at 41.6% in 1986.

17. Levine, *Handbook*, Table 2, 16.

18. Here an outlier, having a 100% general education curriculum, has been stricken; otherwise the percentage of credits devoted to general education in religious institutions would rise to 45.8.

19. The number of course taking categories in the general education programs of baccalaureate institutions varies from 1 to 12. Half of the records are at 01-03 categories; half of the records are at 04-12. The mode is two categories with 33 records; the next highest is 3 with three categories, and 23 records have 5 categories. If we look at those institutions with one or two categories, then we find the same pattern repeated in their subcategories. That is, the subcategories of distribution requirements range from 2 to 13. The mode is higher in subcategories, 4, and three-quarters of these distribution categories have four or more subcategories. Within these categories, anywhere from one to over 100 courses may be found, depending on institution, and the rules specify the number of courses and how to select from them. Further, our FIPSE study indicates that 49% of our records show schools with three or more courses escapable by exam only, that is, required, mandated courses. Thirty percent require four or more mandated courses. So, the basic truth, here, is that general education runs along a continuum of categories in which 49% of the time we find three or more mandated courses and a highly varied pattern of categorical rules for taking other courses. These figures do not include the first 9 schools in the database, which include two schools without subdivisions.
20. In 1996, Baylor created a more entry-restricted, similar program as an alternative to its longstanding core curriculum; we have, then, competing cores within one institutions. The new core is not for honors students but for students who demonstrate a willingness to participate in the demands of a very structured curriculum.
21. Mathematics requirements are more difficult to sort out, because of coding for multiple courses fulfilling requirements, but there appears to be little or no change in requirements.
22. Stephen Balch, *Losing the Big Picture: The Fragmentation of the English Major since 1964*, National Association of Scholars, 2000; Ronald R. Thomas, "English Majors Are Studying Shakespeare as Well as Toni Morrison," *CHE*, 623/00; Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, "Cultural Literacy Depends on Survey Courses," *CHE*, 11/24/00.
23. Telephone interview prior to site visit scheduled for 1/5/01.
24. Summary of interviews with a number of faculty members at site interview, 9/27-9/29/00.
25. Summary of notes from site interviews with faculty from Ball State University, 11/8-9/00.
26. Summary of notes from site interviews with faculty from IUPUI, 11/6-7/00.
27. Summary of notes with Tom Lowe, Dean of University College at Ball State University, from a meeting with him and his team at the Asheville Institute on General Education, 6/6/00, and from the November site interview.
28. *The Competency Program at Tusculum College, 1998-1999 Edition*, 2.
29. *Ibid.*, 3.
30. *CHE* reports that success at Duke in core reform rested in large part on analyzing core curricula at other institutions so that objections and alternatives to initial proposals could be answered or accommodated. It further reports that the processes of faculty and administration decision making had direct affects on adoption of the reforms. Further, at Duke and Rice names, categories of the core, and courses were all subject of intense faculty discussions. And, it reports that reforms failed at Rice, in part because the science faculty objected partly on content and partly on ideological grounds, "When Revising a Curriculum, Strategy May Trump Pedagogy." 2/19/99.
31. Stephen Balch, *The Dissolution of General Education*. Princeton, National Association of Scholars, 1996.
32. Bard, Bryn Mawr, Carleton, Connecticut, Dickinson, Grinnell, Williams, Reed; College of William and Mary; Georgetown and Rice.
33. The entire database has a range in categories between 1 and 12, median between 3 & 4 categories. The elites range from 1-7, have a median at 3, and include two schools which have no subcategories – a feature not found in any other part of the database.