

University Studies: Learning How to Improve Undergraduate Education

Judy Patton
Portland State University
<http://www.unst.pdx.edu>

PSU - Context for Change

- New President, Judith Ramaley - connected PSU to national conversation
- Carnegie Report on Undergraduate Education (Boyer, 1987)
- PSU's desire to improve General Education
- Question of what a liberal education should be now in an urban institution

What was going on in the national conversation...

Impetus for Undergraduate Curricular Change: 1993 Wingspread Group

Stated a mismatch between what higher education is putting out and what society needs...

Needs expressed as:

- stronger, more vital forms of community;
- informed, involved citizenry;
- graduates who can assume leadership roles;
- a commitment to the idea that all students have an opportunity to develop their talents to the fullest

(see also Boyer, 1987; Astin, 1993; Coles, 1993)

Former Requirements - The Distribution Model

18 credits from two departments, from each of the three academic distribution areas	54
Two courses (6 credits) of diversity coursework from the approved list	6
Writing 121	3
Writing 323	3
HPE 295	3
Total credit hours	69

The Process

The Provost created and the Faculty Senate appointed a task force to look at different forms of General Education

Faculty members took a “research” approach to looking at the literature and consulting experts in higher education to develop the model

The task force began its work in winter term, 1992; the first year courses were implemented beginning fall 1994. In less than 18 months, an entirely new way of thinking about and delivering gen ed was designed and initiated.

The Initial Question

“Can you state with conviction that these requirements are meaningful?”

(Michael Reardon, Provost of PSU, 1993)

FACTORS WITH NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES

Living at Home

Watching Television

Large Institutional Size

Lack of Community Among Students

Frequent Use of Teaching Assistants

Full-Time Employment; Off-Campus Employment

(Alexander Astin, 1992)

FACTORS WITH POSITIVE EFFECTS ON GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES

Student - Student Interaction

Student - Faculty Interaction

A Faculty That is Very Student Oriented

Tutoring Other Students

A Faculty that is Positive about the General Education
Program

An Institutional Emphasis on Diversity

Hours Devoted to Studying

(Alexander Astin, 1992)

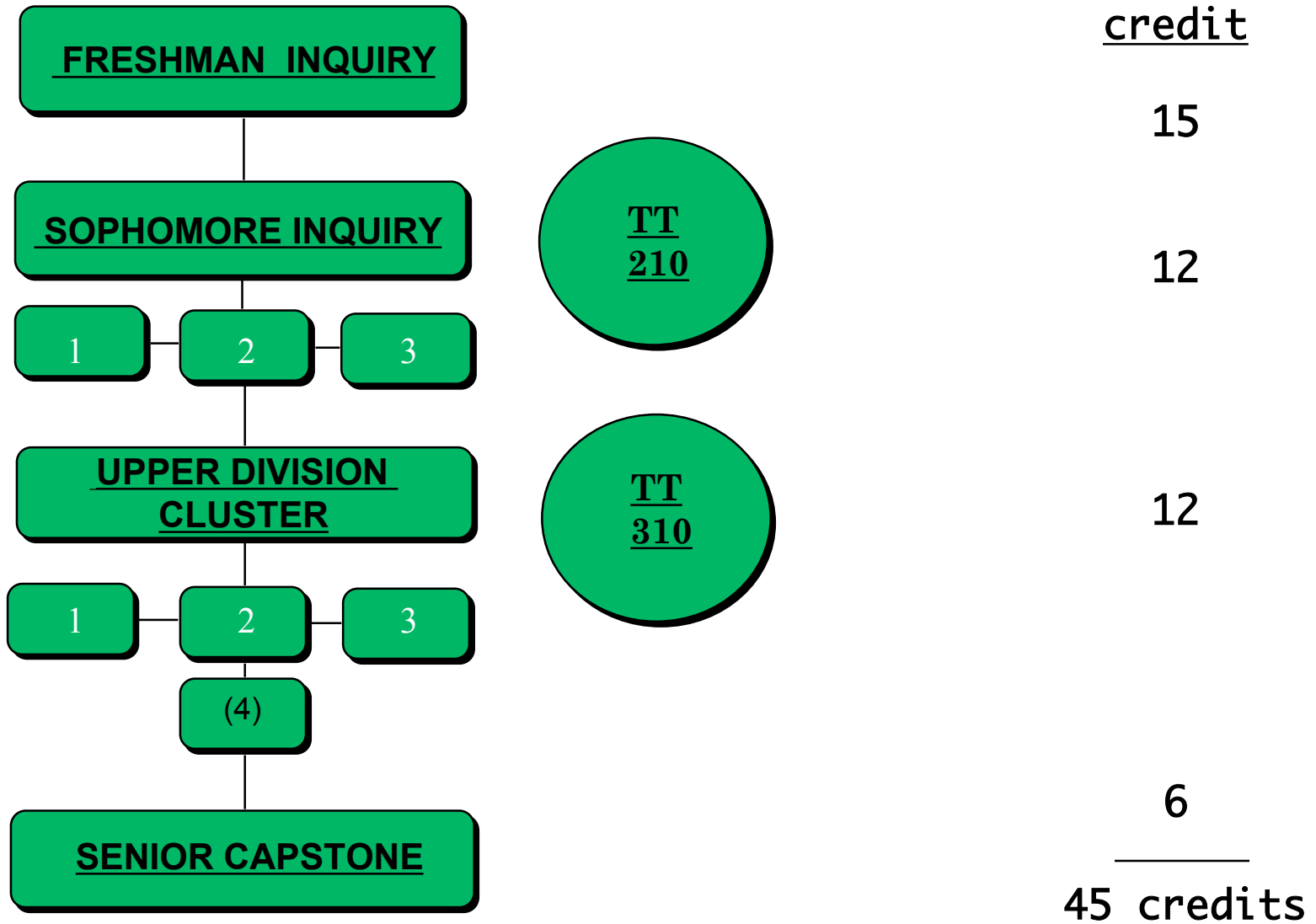
A Mission Statement for General Education

The purpose of the general education program at Portland State University is to facilitate the acquisition of the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes which will form a foundation for life-long learning among its students. This foundation includes the capacity and the propensity to engage in inquiry and critical thinking, to use various forms of communication for learning and expression, to gain an awareness of the broader human experience and its environment, and appreciate the responsibilities of persons to themselves, to each other, and to community.

University Studies Goals

- Inquiry and Critical Thinking
- Communication
 - written, oral, quantitative, visual, technological, group
- The Diversity of Human Experience
- Ethical Issues and Social Responsibility

A Map of the Program



University Studies Requirements*

Credits Transferred	Class	
0 - 29	Freshman	Freshman Inquiry - UNST 1X1, 1X2, 1X3
30 - 44	Freshman	Transfer Transition ** - UNST 201-210
45 - 59	Sophomore	Three Sophomore Inquiry courses - UNST 211-299
60 - 74	Sophomore	Two Sophomore Inquiry courses - UNST 211-299
75 - 89	Sophomore	One Sophomore Inquiry course - UNST 211-299
90+	Junior	(Transfer Transition UNST 310 is recommended.) Three Upper-Division Cluster courses (12 credits) and a Senior Capstone (6 credits)

*You must begin with indicated course(s) and complete the remainder of the UNST program.

**Transfer Transition courses may be used to complete a Sophomore Inquiry requirement if you are not required to complete it as a third-term freshman (30-44 credits).

The Portland State Model - serial integrated LC

Freshman Inquiry (Fring)

Students in Class of about 35 for entire year

Two hours per week students are in small groups (12) led by a student peer mentor

Sophomore Inquiry (Sinq)

Students take 3 different courses out of 27 standing UD clusters in classes of about 35

One hour of small group (12) mentor sessions led by a graduate student mentor

The Portland State Model (cont.)

Transfer Transition Courses

Include 2 mentor sessions per week; a condensed Friday

Junior Clusters

Students choose one Sophomore Inquiry area to focus on

Interdisciplinary look at area in more depth

Three courses required from a single cluster

Senior Capstone Courses

Interdisciplinary teams of students

Address problems in the community over one, two or three terms

Courses facilitated by faculty with community partners

The Changed View

Acknowledgement that student development issues are important to success

A commuter campus—necessity to reach students in the classroom

Idea that student development can and should be tied to the curriculum

Four level program vs. one or two level program

Key Elements of the Program

Faculty creating curriculum in teams across disciplines; they cannot come in and teach the same course

The Mentor Program

Assessment of student learning

- Electronic portfolios

- Key assignments

- Reflective practice

Faculty development to support learning about learning and reflecting that understanding in their teaching

Faculty and mentor research and work groups to continue program development and improvement

How'd We Do It?

- Research-based – helped achieve faculty buy-in
- Shifted internal resources from upper division to entering students
- Invested in faculty development
- Did not pilot
 - is the required curriculum - difficult to ignore
 - affected most areas of the university - scheduling, classroom design, advising, teaching/learning, P&T

- Invited critics into the development group
 - Inclusive - learned as developed and continued to bring people into the work
- Crossed boundaries – academics, student affairs, library, all schools & colleges - grad and undergrad
- Used assessment for continuous improvement
- Changed the culture of the institution

Policies Created to Support the New Program

For Unst courses, SCH follows faculty

To teach Frinq, faculty agreed to a 2 to 3 year commitment - .75 FTE for tenured related faculty - in the early years, departments received funding to hire replacement faculty

Courses at other levels of the program are part of faculty teaching loads

Shared tenure lines

Support for Faculty

Summer stipends

Fall and Spring Retreats and “Just in Time”
support

Created the Center for Academic Excellence

The Mentor Program

Hired in winter

Take 4 credit course in spring

Begin mentoring in fall

MDTs during year

Paid a stipend and receive tuition remission

Concrete evidence of the value of the student voice
in the program

Understand and can communicate the student
experience to the faculty

Mistakes/Challenges

- Did not bring the Deans into the discussion early enough or with intention
- Ongoing difficulty getting program information out to the campus community
- Oversight committee was not a formal Faculty Senate committee

Mistakes/Challenges

- Change in upper administration = change in institutional priorities
- Faculty/Departmental Resistance
 - Created lasting enemies
 - The emotional effect of the changes was underestimated

Why it's still in place...

- Most Faculty/Departments/Deans supported the program and felt this was the teaching experience they thought they would have when they began in higher ed
- Parents love the program, and it has attracted new students
- Assessment data bears out that the program works AND...

A few of our awards and recognitions

- W.K. Kellogg Foundation - For Advancing Institutional Transformation
- The Pew Leadership Award -For Renewal of Undergraduate Education
- Templeton Guide to Colleges that Encourage Character Development—Exemplary program for First and Senior year programs
- Hesburg Certificate of Excellence for Undergraduate Curricular Reform
- A Princeton review book, Colleges with a Conscience: 81 Great Schools with Outstanding Community Involvement, listed Portland State for its excellent service-learning programs and blending academics with community work.
- President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. The University is one of only 141 colleges, universities, and professional schools from across the nation recognized for distinguished community service.

More Awards - Upper Admin Values the National Reputation

- Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Partnership Award for Campus Community Collaboration - PSU Watershed Stewardship Program
- AAC&U, “College Learning for the New Global Century,” for fostering civic, intercultural, and ethical learning.
- 7 years, US News & World Report, top ten colleges
 - First Year Experiences, Learning Communities, Service Learning, Senior Capstones, Cooperative Education and Internships
- 2008 US News & World Report - Up & Coming Schools

What we know from research

Most of the impact of the first year can be attributed to what students do during college.

What campuses do determines how engaged students are during college.

(Swing, 2003)

What we know from experience

What we have learned from working with faculty at a number of institutions is that while learning communities (LCs) create a space for learning, the substance of what happens within that space is what matters most for students, regardless of how that space is configured. What students learn is shaped by the assignments or assessments they are invited to do.

(Malnarich & Lardner)

Leading Predictor Variable Engaging Pedagogy

To what degree did this course include. . .

- a variety of teaching methods?
- meaningful class discussions?
- challenging assignments?
- productive use of classroom time?
- encouragement to speak in class?
- encouragement for students to work together?
- meaningful homework?

"Evidence has been accumulating for over a decade that a series of approaches, including collaborative and active learning, have the potential for creating real increases in student learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Smith, 1996; Sorcinelli, 1991). Yet on many campuses these ideas are having little impact on what is actually happening in classes and in the formation of institutional practices (Angelo, 2001)."

Middendorf and Pace, 2002

Other Models

IUPUI: The PULs (Principles of Undergraduate Learning)

<http://iport.iupui.edu/selfstudy/tl/PULs>

Core Communication and Quantitative Skills

Critical Thinking

Integration and Application of Knowledge

Intellectual Depth, Breadth and Adaptiveness

Understanding Society and Culture

Value and Ethics

IUPUI Model

University College - for undeclared students

First-Year Seminar UCOL U110

- special course
- required of entering students,
- offered by University College (UCOL) and all undergraduate schools
- facilitates student transition to college by introducing key information and skills needed to succeed
- opportunities to connect with faculty, staff, and other students
- taught by an instructional team, including a faculty member who sets academic goals and is the team leader; a student mentor who serves as a role model and peer guide to the college experience; a librarian who introduces library resources and literacy information; and an academic advisor who provides information on academic policies and procedures and works with students to begin academic planning, major and career decision-making.

Learning Communities -- FYEs linked with other entry-level courses to form learning communities, where faculty may collaborate in creating class assignments.

All FYE's integrate the PULs

Alverno's Eight Abilities

Communication

Analysis

Problem Solving

Valuing

Social Interaction

Developing a Global Perspective

Effective Citizenship

Aesthetic Engagement

Alverno Model

Every course is labeled with the ability it addresses and at what level.

Digital Diagnostic Portfolio (DDP)

The ability is demonstrated by a key assignment in the course that students put in the DDP

Each student writes a reflective self-assessment for each key assignment that is accompanied by a faculty assessment

There are college wide entry, mid and exit assessment performances.

These are evaluated by community assessors trained by Alverno.

San Jose State: General Education Program Objectives

- a broad understanding of the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and the arts;
- an ability to communicate ideas effectively both in speaking and in writing;
- the capacity for critical and creative thinking;
- an understanding of ethical choices inherent in human development;
- an ability to assess information (information literacy);
- an ability to address complex issues and problems using disciplined analytic skills and creative techniques;
- multi-cultural and global perspectives gained through intellectual and social exchange with people of diverse backgrounds and experiences;
- the characteristics of “intentional learners” who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources, and continue learning throughout their lifetimes; and
- the capacity to participate as a socially responsible member of civic, professional, cultural, and other communities.

San Jose Gen Ed

Gen Ed learning outcomes are mandated by the state in California. It is a fairly complex system.

See - <http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbggen/narr/soc-fall/rec-240.html>

MUSE: Metropolitan University's Scholar's Experience

MUSE refers to university-wide First-Year Experience activities, programs and workshops that exist to help first-year students succeed at San José State University. This includes the special MUSE seminar courses that are offered each fall, the Peer Mentor Program, and a series of workshops and activities to provide assistance with various aspects of one's university experience.

The Goals of the MUSE Program are to help students to:

- ~Establish a strong foundation for becoming a university level student and scholar.
- ~Become acclimated to both the intellectual and social activities of university life.

Evergreen State College Model: Coordinated Studies

The learning community is engaged “full-time” (15-18 credits) in interdisciplinary, active learning around themes. Faculty development occurs through co-planning and team-teaching across disciplinary boundaries.

Faculty teams of 3-4 co-plan the coordinated study around an overarching theme, or around related content/skills subjects

Generally, faculty members teach only in the coordinated study, and students register for it as their entire “course load”

Therefore, scheduling of class time becomes quite flexible:
opportunities for BLOCKS of time for lectures, discussions, field trips, workshops

Frequent use of “book seminars,” collaborative learning, and student projects

The importance of context: Coordinated Studies Themes

“Ways of Knowing: How We Choose What to Believe”
History, Philosophy, Literature, Drama

“The Televised Mind”
Mass Media, Sociology, Freshman Writing

“Problems Without Solutions?”
Sociology, Economics, History, Politics, Religion

“Looking at the Renaissance: Power and the Person”
Music, History of Art, Drawing, Freshman Writing

“The Science of Mind”
Neurobiology, Cognitive Psychology, Philosophy of Mind and
Language

The Evergreen State College: Five Foci of Learning

We Believe...The main purpose of a college is to promote student learning through:

- Interdisciplinary Study
 - Students learn to pull together ideas and concepts from many subject areas, which enables them to tackle real-world issues in all their complexity.
- Collaborative Learning
 - Students develop knowledge and skills through shared learning, rather than learning in isolation and in competition with others.

- Learning Across Significant Differences
 - Students learn to recognize, respect and bridge differences - critical skills in an increasingly diverse world.
- Personal Engagement
 - Students develop their capacities to judge, speak and act on the basis of their own reasoned beliefs.
- Linking Theory with Practical Applications
 - Students understand abstract theories by applying them to projects and activities and by putting them into practice in real-world situations.

Resources

<http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu> – many resources

Bransford, John D., Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking, Editors. How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School. Available to read online for free:

<http://www.nap.edu/catalog/6160.html>.

More Resources

Huba, M. E. & Freed, J. (2000). Learner-centered assessment on college campuses: Shifting the focus from teaching to learning. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Tagg, John. The Learning Paradigm College.
<http://www.ankerpub.com/books/tagg.html>

Zull, James E. The Art of Changing the Brain: Enriching Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning. Available at Amazon.com