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Vardaman R. Smith, Bruce G. Brunton, Andrew I. Kohen, Cynthia A. Gilliatt, John C. Klippert, Caroline T. Marshall



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GENERAL EDUCATION REFORM: THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT SUBSTANCE AND PROCESS

Vardaman R. Smith
Bruce G. Brunton
Andrew I. Kohen

with

Cynthia A. Gilliatt
John C. Klippert
Caroline T. Marshall

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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