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INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AS SCHOLARLY WORK: GENERAL EDUCATION REFORM AT PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Mary Kathryn Tetreault and Terrel Rhodes

In spring 2004, Portland State University (PSU) celebrated the tenth anniversary of University Studies, the general education reform that brought national attention to the institution. This anniversary is noteworthy because the program has endured and thrived beyond the “seven-year shelf life” such programs often have (N. Hoffman, personal communication, October 2000; Carnochan, 1993; Stanford revisits, 1997). A sensational headline, “An Emulated General Education Program Finds Itself under Attack at Home” (2000), suggested that Portland State’s program might be following a similar pattern.¹ As on other campuses, disagreements among faculty members about general education signaled deeper contentions in the academy that warrant analysis. This analysis is consistent with the culture of reflective practice that has been present at Portland State since the beginning of this present reform. Throughout it has been informed by the research emerging in the 1990s on student learning, retention, and the evolving recognition of the complex interplay between learning and teaching.

Neither of this article’s authors was at Portland State University when the reforms were devised and adopted. Tetreault arrived as Provost in fall 1999 and Rhodes one year later as Vice Provost for Curriculum and Undergraduate Studies. Both were drawn to the institution in part by the national reputation of University Studies. It captured their interest, as it had that of foundations and national scholars, because of its focus on students as learners and knowers, the blurring of the boundaries between the curriculum, the campus, and the city, and the substantial changes in the methods and approaches used to educate students.² In addition, Tetreault’s research on teaching and learning in college and university

classrooms around the country predisposed her to this student-centered approach to general education (Maher & Tetreault, 2001).

Once on campus, there were immediate challenges that suggested trouble in paradise. Tetreault learned upon her arrival that the Faculty Senate had directed the incoming provost to make a decision about the administrative location of University Studies before January 2000. The Senate signaled concerns about the administration of University Studies while reaffirming its value to students and the need for full engagement of faculty (Farr, 1998). Weeks before Rhodes assumed his position as Vice Provost for Curriculum and Undergraduate Studies in July 2000, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* called him, requesting his comments for inclusion in the article cited above. The reporter indicated that a group of faculty who were dissatisfied with University Studies had conducted a survey of students and had found substantial opposition to the program. The opposition seemed to revolve around a dissatisfaction with the level of skills such as writing and numeracy that students obtained under the new program, insufficient inclusion of the knowledge that had been contained in the traditional distribution model, and faculty dissatisfaction with being asked to teach out of their disciplinary expertise.³ As the person to whom University Studies would report, what did he think about the criticisms? While still on the east coast, he was quoted in the *Chronicle* about a program and a group of people he might have briefly met, but didn't really know.

Since its introduction in the early twentieth century as a replacement for teaching the classical languages, general education has prompted debates about its purposes and content that have raged in various forms. The question of what the first year of the college course should be led to the rise of Western Civilization courses. This rise grew out of the War Department's mandated creation of "War Issues" courses at all colleges with a Students Army Training Corps. The purpose of these courses emerged as part of the struggle surrounding World War I to make the world safe for democracy and provide some rationale for why young American men might risk their lives fighting in World War I. This approach worked until the 1960s when there was a loosening of requirements throughout the higher education system as well as a rise in consciousness among

women and various ethnic groups. Controversies over what to teach continued through the cultural wars of the 1980s as multicultural and multidisciplinary “studies” became departments and programs in universities (Allardyce, 1982; Lougee, 1982; Searle, 1990; McNew, 1992; Carnochan, 1993). By its very design and structure, University Studies embraced the multifaceted layers and dimensions of the educational culture wars.

We contend that disagreements about general education represent larger issues in the academy, about its purposes, its form, its assumptions about human nature, and its beliefs about what constitutes learning. A schema we find useful for getting at this complexity comes from Catharine Stimpson, former head of the fellows program at the MacArthur Foundation and currently Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at New York University. In her review of books on the place of women’s studies in the academy, Stimpson remarked that “the disagreement about women’s studies is but the first layer in a multilayered disagreement about American higher education.” Stimpson goes on to point out that these disagreements are institutional, epistemological, and relational. For her, key questions are:

- *Institutional*: How much change do we need in higher education?
- *Epistemological*: How socially constructed is knowledge? In the dynamic alliance of knower and known, do we stress the knower or the known?
- *Personal and Relational*: How much do we recognize similarities between the self and the other? How much do we recognize differences? How much has power corrupted these relations? (Stimpson, 1995, p. 748–749)

In this article Stimpson’s multidimensional schema provides an analytic framework that contributes to a new layer of understanding about the process of transformation in American higher education. About the time University Studies was being developed at PSU, Judith Ramaley (then president) and Michael Reardon (then provost) “invented” the notion that institutional change is scholarly work. The story is told on campus that Ramaley urged the community to

take an approach to change that was informed by an established body of knowledge and a willingness to act in a scholarly and collaborative manner. Ramaley challenged the campus to establish a culture of inquiry driven by questions, particularly the messy, confusing questions for which there is little agreement on what the most pressing issues are or which remedies are most viable (Yee, 2000). This scholarly approach also called for a different research paradigm: a shift from an empiricist research-based methodology to one more qualitative and reflective that was focused on creative problem solving.

The PSU faculty committee formed to address general education reform was inspired by the idea of institutional change as scholarly work and members agreed to hold themselves to the high standard expected of the best research. This included learning what authorities in the field know—more than 20 faculty members traveled to a joint meeting of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and discovered whole bodies of knowledge about student learning and institutional reform. Participation in the first national Pew Higher Educational Roundtable also expanded faculty members' thinking on the transformation process. It was agreed that every plan for change at PSU would be integrated with national discussions.⁴

But there were other scholarly behaviors that informed the faculty members' views of how much change is needed, which took the form of questioning their perspectives and paradigms and turning from an emphasis on problems to possibilities. Their answers to how much change is needed informed a fundamental change in the mission, ways of constructing student success, responses to external partners, presentation of the curriculum, design of faculty development, and rewards and uses of resources. For example, there also was attention paid to new areas of knowledge and skills that the faculty needed to know and thus a new focus on faculty development efforts formalized through the creation of a Center for Academic Excellence.⁵ The movement to interdisciplinary teams, the use of new technologies, and the increased commitment to community service and service learning were changing the basic ideas of faculty roles and responsibilities.

University Studies: Key Design Components: An Overview

Portland State is primarily a commuter school. Less than one-third of the students live on campus, two-thirds are transfer students, and the vast majority of students are Oregon residents from the Portland metropolitan region. Part of PSU's historic mission is to provide access to the students in the region who are place-bound because of family and job responsibilities.

The University Studies general education program spans the entire four years of a traditional undergraduate's career beginning with freshman inquiry and culminating with a senior capstone. All aspects of University Studies are organized around four primary goals: communication (written, oral, and graphical), critical thinking, the variety of human experience, and ethics and social responsibility.

University Studies was designed in part to enhance student retention at PSU; therefore the first-year course, Freshman Inquiry, is organized as learning communities that connect the same set of students in a year-long seminar with a common set of faculty and a peer student mentor. The first year of University Studies provides students a choice among thematic seminars conceived and taught by teams of faculty from several disciplines. For example, the Columbia River Basin is taught by a biologist, an anthropologist, a geographer, and a historian, and focuses on the importance of the Columbia River to the entire Northwest region of the country. Each faculty member has responsibility for one section of students and remains with them throughout the freshman year. Each faculty member participates in every other section of the same theme during the year. An integral component of Freshman Inquiry involves small-group sessions lead by upper class peer mentors. These mentors act as "co-cultural translators": they assist in interpreting the course materials, take the lead in instruction on use of technology in the classroom, and translate student understandings and positions to the teaching faculty. In a way, the students in this context become authorities to one another (the experts) and the faculty becomes the learners. The Writing Center, the Advising Center, and other academic support services are integrated into the work of the courses.

In the second year of the program, students take three separate Sophomore Inquiry classes. The Sophomore Inquiry courses have interdisciplinary content but are taught by a single faculty member who is associated with one of many departments across the campus. Each class has a graduate student mentor who conducts a mentor lab each week that supports the course assignments through sessions on the use of technology and the research process. The Sophomore Inquiries begin to narrow the students' disciplinary focus as they progress toward a major, e.g., Natural Science Inquiry, Latin American Studies, and Leadership for Change.

The third year of the program has students taking three upper division cluster courses offered by the various departments. Students select one of the Sophomore Inquiries they took in year two as the doorway to a set of three upper division courses from different departments that have been approved as meeting University Studies goals and that move more deeply into the subjects introduced in the Sophomore Inquiry course. If a student chose the Sophomore Inquiry titled Environmental Sustainability, a selection of courses in this cluster might contain classes such as Toward Sustainable Architecture, Nature into Art, Literature and the Environment, Environmental Chemistry, or Environmental Ethics.

In the fourth year, every student enrolls in a Senior Capstone course. The Senior Capstones are not capstones in a major; rather they enroll a set of students from various majors. A PSU faculty member teams with a community partner from an industry, government, nonprofit, or community organization to team teach the course. Each course is community-based in that it addresses some real issue or problem in the community and results in a product that attempts to ameliorate the issue. Typically, the class has meetings in the community more than on campus.

Organizationally, University Studies has a director and an office support staff, including faculty members who coordinate each level of the program. University Studies has its own core faculty of tenure related and annual contract faculty. Faculty members from across the campus teach courses in all levels of the program in addition to the University Studies core faculty. In general, University Studies functions much like a department. Initially, University Studies reported

to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, but in response to faculty dissatisfaction about the program being the general education program for the entire campus, University Studies was moved to the provost's office shortly after Tetreault arrived at PSU.

Stimpson's key questions are now examined in relation to the institutional changes introduced above.

Institutional Concerns: How much change do we need in higher education? Substantial change; in fact, a new stance on institutional change.

Stimpson's first question, how much change is needed, was confronted by Portland State in the early 1990s. The impetus had multiple but common sources: low student retention, a fragmented curriculum, and a declining budget. Instead of framing questions around why retention was low, the faculty committee turned to an emphasis on student success. By making their objective the promotion of student success rather than increasing retention, they identified positive and constructive objectives for review and study. The evidence since the change supports the notion that curricular change has resulted in improved retention and stronger revenues. Agreement that the core curriculum was fragmented led to the development of an entirely new approach to general education—the University Studies program. When partners in the urban community asked the faculty to evaluate both the relevance of the general education requirements to student and community needs and the technological awareness and competence of faculty and students alike, the response was to incorporate these concerns into the goals of the University Studies program. These goals could be characterized as a new set of basic skills, including critical thinking, effective communication, computer aided writing and oral presentations, and the ability to work in teams.

The Faculty Senate adopted the four-year University Studies general education program in 1994 to replace a disciplinary-based, distribution set of requirements, choosing to implement the entire program over the next four years rather than to pilot the new program.⁶

The Larger Institutional Context

University Studies was developed at a time when PSU was also constructing itself as an urban institution. There was general consensus that the time was right to address not only Portland State University's identity within the University of Oregon system, but its marginalized position in comparison to the state's two other research universities. Ramaley encouraged colleagues to carve out a different institutional mission. It was at that time that our motto—"Let Knowledge Serve the City"—was adopted. Ramaley and Mayor Vera Katz went a step beyond the rhetoric of emphasizing the urban location of the University and wrote the Metropolitan Compact, which pledged collaboration between the city and the university and established the University District. The Compact took physical form in the construction of the Urban Center, which houses the University's College of Urban and Public Affairs and a distance-learning center. These facilities rest in a plaza built by the city; a European-style streetcar traverses the plaza, connecting PSU to the inter-city light rail system. These physical connections with the city symbolize the conscious blurring of the boundaries between the university and the city, most directly evident through the Senior Capstone courses and other community-based curricula.

How Much Change Occurred?

As Tetreault and Rhodes came to know the institution better, they wondered if there were distinctions of purpose at work that tied back to institutional identity. A few faculty members expressed deep reservations about our motto, "Let Knowledge Serve the City," and saw it in conflict with their disciplinary values and research agendas. A series of faculty focus groups (2002) in which tenure related faculty were asked to give feedback on drafts of new institutional vision and values documents revealed, however, that connection with the community is the one aspect of their work that draws nearly our whole faculty together (Balshem, Collier, McBride, & O'Brien, 2002). Some define it as the city, some as the Northwest, and still others as the world. What ties faculty together is the value of community engagement, however defined.

This emphasis on responsiveness to the community traces back to the origins of Portland State University, which began in 1946 as an extension of the University of Oregon and the Oregon System of Higher Education to educate returning veterans.⁷ However, it was not until the founding of University Studies that community engagement became a part of the university's general education curriculum. This institutional value is now embedded in a vision statement that places community engagement at the center:

Portland State University aspires to be an internationally recognized urban university known for student learning, innovative research, and community engagement that contributes to economic vitality, environmental sustainability, and the quality of life in Portland and beyond.

While it is difficult to establish a causal link between the influences of such a value in the curriculum to institutional vision, it is noteworthy how community engagement is a broadly held value of faculty members manifested not only in the vision statement but throughout many of the majors.

One weakness in the change process was the missed opportunity to measure student learning and other indicators related to general education prior to the implementation of University Studies. In the decade since Portland State University took up Stimpson's first question about the amount of change needed, there is some evidence that the course of change selected has been useful. The decision of our colleagues to make substantive rather than incremental change improved the retention rate from freshman to sophomore year from 33% in 1994 to 69% in 2002. As noted earlier, the institution achieved national prominence in undergraduate education that it had not had before. This prominence was recently reconfirmed when *U.S. News and World Reports* introduced a new category with outstanding examples of academic programs that lead to student success. Labeled one of the "programs that really work," PSU was ranked in the top ten in three categories: senior capstone, learning communities, and service learning. Over 300 faculty per quarter from all of the seven PSU colleges and schools, including the Graduate Schools of Education and Social Work, teach in the

University Studies program. Annual review and analysis, conducted by faculty from both inside and outside the University Studies program, of student work samples contained in student portfolios reveal consistent findings that students not only master their specific content materials, but also demonstrate appropriate levels of ability in the four goal areas of general education based on standard rubrics for measuring student performance levels.

Epistemological Concerns: How socially constructed is knowledge? In the dynamic alliance of knower and known, do we stress the knower or the known?

The epistemological disagreements about University Studies have centered primarily on Freshman Inquiry. This may be due in part to the challenging work of educating freshmen of traditional age. However, it is also tied to faculty members' beliefs about the social construction of knowledge. Then President Ramaley observed that debates at Portland State over the past decade are similar to curriculum debates elsewhere, often clustering around two poles: educational classicists and educational progressives (Loveless, 2001). The first tend to emphasize explicit learning goals and the role of the instructor as transmitter of knowledge and arbiter of what should be learned, while the latter revere natural learning without traditional standards, hierarchies of skill, and bodies of knowledge to be mastered. Ramaley concluded: "University Studies is clearly built upon 'constructivist' logic and an educational progressive mode while the critics are solidly in the classic tradition" (J. Ramaley, personal communication, August 17, 2002).

Even though University Studies emphasized the "constructivist" philosophy, the curriculum that was developed was "fusion" pedagogy—combining basic skill development through traditional content materials. A substantial number of the faculty, and particularly those who have taught in Freshman Inquiry, agree that major goals of communication and critical thinking are presented and pursued through content, reading articles and books identified and taught by the disciplinary faculty teaching in the program. Yet some critics of University Studies bemoan what they view as "watered down" content and the inadequate expertise of faculty in teaching students to

improve communication skills. Both sets of faculty are truly concerned with enhancing student learning.

One of the limitations of these debates is that they frequently are posed as the long-standing dichotomies between content and pedagogy; between mastery of bodies of knowledge and learning how to learn; and between developing minds and educating students for civic engagement. We have come to see these dichotomies as “straw” distinctions. Stimpson’s question about the dynamic alliance of knower and known sheds light on the debate because the knower, the student, comes more sharply into focus. The disagreement is primarily about whether one stresses the known or the knower: content taught primarily for the purpose of mastering a body of knowledge or a discipline or content seen also as a means of learning to write and to think critically and to work with diverse groups who may see and interpret the content differently. Faculty sentiments generally correlate to disciplinary and methodological commitments among the faculty, as has been noted by Stimpson and others (Lindenberger, 1990). Relations between the knower and the known are interactive and exist on a spectrum, and at one end of the spectrum is science. There are things we must simply know, where the knower must work to learn what is there, e.g., $e = mc^2$. At the other end are the more interpretive disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (C. Stimpson, personal correspondence, October 2002).

The issue seems also to be partially a developmental and sequencing issue rather than a philosophical disagreement. (As students enter the university, should we develop the knowers’ abilities to gather, understand and analyze information so that they can better understand and use the known, or should we impart the known to the students and then teach them the roles of knowers? At a fundamental level, University Studies chose to take on Perry’s and Kohlberg’s developmental theories and invite faculty and students to engage in the challenge and questioning of the known and the knower throughout the undergraduate career rather than building neatly on what the developmental psychologists described as the progressive fashion of student collegiate development from *dichotomous* right and wrong “facts” to the *autonomous commitment* in the major and the senior year.) In a study of development of student self-perception as learners, Collier found that students who completed the University

Studies curriculum compared to those who transferred into the university, and thus missed portions of it, viewed themselves much more as autonomous life-long learners capable of continuing to discover and to use what they had acquired through their formal undergraduate education (Collier, 2000).

This dynamic relationship relates not only to individual students but to knowers in a learning community. Because the curriculum is directly linked to the Portland community, there is a stronger basis for speaking with confidence about how individuals and communities create and receive knowledge through interaction. Some who have taught in Freshman Inquiry from the beginning note that it is the only place in the university where students become connected to each other and the professor over the course of an academic year. As one observed, “local knowledge by the faculty member of students as well as students for each other affects strategies for both knower and known.”⁸

Faculty members’ traditional emphasis on the known may account for the challenge in assessing how University Studies shapes our students as knowers. Sandy Astin hinted at the need to emphasize the knower rather than the known when he observed: “You have a wonderful program focused on student learning, but you must find ways to demonstrate what it is achieving.”⁹ The demonstration of accomplishment of the known and the abilities of the knower has been embedded in our assessment efforts. Not realizing the tension has constricted early understanding of what was being achieved on both levels or what needed to improve. Those who emphasize the known supported an approach wherein all freshmen students would take the ACT-COMP and all graduating seniors would retake the exam to measure gains in student learning. However, difficulties in administration of the tests, the cost, and the validity of results obtained from students who did not recognize the value of the test results led to its discontinuance.

The University Studies Office then instituted a program of assessment that was formative, while not being described as such, and focused on students as knowers and active inquirers. Using mainly student questionnaires and focus groups, these efforts provided evidence of the new basic abilities mentioned earlier—enhanced community building, improved writing ability, improved

communication, enhanced technological skills, and enhanced confidence in working with diverse groups of people. But these findings had limited credibility among some faculty because they were done by the University Studies Office and did not measure changes in basic skills and knowledge, particularly science concepts and applications. More recent assessment has focused on student work and the achievement of learning outcomes related to content as well as mastery of the goals for general education. Results of these assessments demonstrate expected performance gains such as improved writing (see Balslem, 2000; Wollner et al., 2001).

Personal and Relational: How much do we recognize similarities between the self and other? How much do we recognize differences? How much has power corrupted these relations?

This set of questions opens up inquiry about similarities and differences of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, tenure status, and discipline among faculty members and students. As a theoretical frame for understanding these similarities and differences we have found the idea of positionality, an idea promulgated by feminist and post-modern scholars, to be illuminating. These scholars hold that no group is in and of itself oppressed or marginal. It is always in relation to something else. For example, women are marginal compared to men, black women are marginal compared to white common middle-class women. People are defined not in terms of fixed identities, but by their location within shifting networks of relationship, which can be analyzed and changed.

From its inception, University Studies addressed the issue of similarities and differences by having the goal of exploring the diversity of human experience. This exploration takes place among a student body and faculty who are predominately white.¹⁰ Considering previous assessments of University Studies, this may be the least developed of the program's goals and helps explain the following incident. During a campus visit in fall 2002, Richard Light, author of *Making the Most of College* and a statistics professor at Harvard, asked a student panel, which represented gender, racial, and international diversity, how they experienced diversity on campus.¹¹ Somewhat to our surprise, these traditional-age students all

spoke of age as the most important position—the value to them of having someone older and more experienced in their classes (Light, 2001). Their characterization of age as the primary “difference” at Portland State suggests a number of things. It may reflect a culture in which similarities predominate over racial and ethnic differences. Or students may have felt that a panel moderated by a Harvard professor was not a safe place to take up this difficult dialogue.

In 2000, based on student feedback, the faculty determined that they needed to do more to make the students in Freshman Inquiry courses aware that they were in fact studying the diversity of human experience. There was an abundance of diversity issues and “content” in the courses but it was a goal the students didn’t understand very well. The 2001 assessment results demonstrated a significant increase in student responses on diversity questions. PSU data regarding students’ experience with diversity from the National Survey of Student Engagement suggest a finding of relevance to University Studies. PSU students, especially freshmen, reported having frequent discussion with students who hold diverse religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values; or who are from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds. However, PSU seniors, many of whom did not start at PSU and thus did not take Freshman Inquiry, were less likely than seniors at peer institutions to converse with other students who hold diverse opinions. Given that so many of our students are commuters and encounter other students primarily in the classroom, this finding may support the value of intentional inclusion of diverse students confronting diversity issues within the classroom as Freshman Inquiry purposely does.

Applying this category of questions to faculty members reveals that the most striking differences in terms of the University Studies’ debate are the positionalities that grow out of gender, discipline, and tenure status. Those calling for an alternative to University Studies are predominately tenured white male scientists who have not taught in Freshman Inquiry. In contrast, among the Freshman Inquiry faculty, there is a higher percentage of nontenured yearly contract faculty members. There tend to be more women and men of color.¹² In our observations, the fixed-term faculty describe themselves in more multidisciplinary and diffuse ways, while the tenure track faculty most often uses a single disciplinary reference—biologist or historian or

anthropologist. This may be because the former have been hired to teach in an interdisciplinary program and are not associated with one of the disciplinary departments. Or could it be that they have a different perspective on the academy because of their temporary status and employment histories? Their positionalities of gender or race may also make them more skeptical about academic hierarchies.

Throughout there has been a concern that not enough tenure track faculty have been teaching in University Studies. One of the ways of addressing this has been to allocate a tenure track position to departments in exchange for assigning a tenured faculty member to teach in Freshman Inquiry. For some, this is a burdensome assignment—teaching in areas where they feel inadequate and learning pedagogies and content of little interest or perceived value to them. One senior faculty member from mathematics, who taught in Freshman Inquiry, related her reluctance to teaching it again; not because it lacked rigor or was an unpleasant experience, but because it was too much work; too much of a stretch from what was typically taught in the department. There is likewise a group of faculty members, both senior and junior, who are revitalized by it. For example, a senior anthropologist talked about how this teaching experience was coming at a good time in his career—he has just published a book and is thinking about his next project. He also talked about all the time it took to teach freshmen but how that work was informing his teaching in a broad sense (T. Biolsi, personal communication, winter 2001). Another faculty member who was on the original faculty team in 1993 and who taught in University Studies until he retired, said:

From my point of view, working on an interdisciplinary team is exciting because another member on the team can compensate for my lack of knowledge and can school me enough that I can provide a basic view for a freshman. After 25 years of schooling, a liberal college education, and 30 years of teaching, I feel mildly offended that someone tells me I don't know enough to teach a freshman some basic concepts of science, or, what's worse, that I don't know how to find out how to do so. From my point of view, that's where the excitement of interdisciplinary teaching comes, from the opportunity to learn

from colleagues and teach them. That's what I'd call a new kind of collegiality at Portland State, a kind that makes both of the teams I worked on very dear to me. (S. Reese, personal communication, March 29, 2002)

As a community, we need to know more about why tenured faculty members have such various experiences.

The interdisciplinary nature of Freshman Inquiry, which requires that faculty teach in areas outside their disciplines, is an issue for some tenured faculty. These faculty find it far more comfortable to teach in their area of expertise and in a classroom of their own rather than in a team. They believe the traditional model is much better for the students than someone from the humanities, for example, teaching materials from the sciences from the perspective of a humanist. In an effort to address these criticisms and also provide greater latitude in the teaching of Freshman Inquiry, a new, rotational model is being tried, which continues an interdisciplinary theme, the Power of Place. While freshmen and their peer mentor remain together as a cohort during the year, three faculty members from history, geology, and art history rotate among the sections each of three quarters, focusing primarily on their content areas' contribution to the theme. In addition to these perceived advantages, faculty are not required to devote considerable time to teaching new content that takes them away from their research and other departmental responsibilities. This approach is in part about managing the competing demands of faculty members. The enormous pressures on faculty time are certainly a factor.

The expressed discomfort with the Freshman Inquiry model may also be about faculty members as knowers and their relationship to the known. It may be a reflection of the anxiety the expert knower experiences in areas where he or she is a novice knower and learner. A faculty member teaching in this new rotational model format for the first time remarked that he had had a wonderful experience with his students the first quarter but less so with the new group during the second. In passing he said: "I'm not getting my first year experience," meaning the connection and intellectual development between a professor and his students over the course of an entire academic year (D. Johnson, personal communication, March 2003).

A President's Advisory Council report suggests that these issues relate not only to individual faculty but to PSU's institutional processes and relationships as well, including the relationships between faculty and administrators and among departments (Moving the conversation, 2001). For example, members of the Advisory Council cited "the disconnect" between the rhetoric of institutional leadership, which places a high value on participation in University Studies, and the realities of the "ground-level" workings of faculty and departments. They noted that faculty who have participated heavily in University Studies and attended less to their scholarship may be at risk at the time of tenure and promotion. They also believe there is a lack of consequences for nonparticipating departments. When both the president and the provost who presided over the general education transformation left their administrative positions and Daniel Bernstine assumed the presidency, he along with Tetreault voiced continued support for University Studies. The movement in 2000 of University Studies from a single college to the provost's office and the hiring of new leadership for the program removed barriers experienced by some faculty who felt excluded from the continuing design and direction of the general education program.

Personal and Relational: Constructions of what it means to be a professor and issues of authority in an imagined community.

Contemplating the question of how power has corrupted relationships brings us to the question of faculty authority. Our discussions about University Studies lead eventually to faculty members' conceptions of the ideal academic. Martha Balshem, a tenured professor in University Studies, characterized it this way after interviewing some of the faculty doubters:

The issues that anger the people I've talked to so far revolve around the authority to define what the ideal professor looks like, the authority to define what good teaching is, to define what is taught, and the authority to decide who should be valued and respected and who should not. (Balsham, 1998)

From her perspective, the divide is “in some way connected to the difficulties of trying to get it right as the ideal academic.” In part, some faculty members’ conceptions of the ideal academic are about the balance between scholarship and teaching and the perception that disciplinary based research and teaching have been devalued with the institutional emphasis on educational reform, skills development, and community-based learning. Some faculty, particularly in the sciences, see the extensive commitment to Freshman Inquiry as taking them away from their departments and their research and out of their subfields, while simultaneously taking students away from the sciences and mathematics. An analysis of student course-taking patterns, however, reveals that since the introduction of University Studies, students are taking more science-related courses than previously was the case.

But this question of relationships in an institutional context may be about more than ideal academic identity or good teaching. After reading an earlier draft of this paper, Ramaley observed:

What I failed to understand at the time is that beneath the surface of scholarly identity are deeper and less coherent elements of core human identity itself—who am I, where do I belong, what does change mean to my deeper sense of self? The arguments at PSU are not just about what ought to be taught, what the relationship between students and faculty ought to be and what a well-educated person ought to know and be able to do as a result of an undergraduate education. It is also about deep issues of identity. The perceived arrogance and favored status of the new order evoked resistance. In the very rush to create the new order, the failure to maintain connections, to focus on local knowledge, and to re-establish consensus laid the groundwork for opposition. (J. Ramaley, personal communication, August 17, 2002)

Personal and relational issues also extend to notions of an ideal community. Ramaley’s challenge to the faculty to act in a scholarly and collaborative manner embodies not only notions of the ideal academic but also the ideal imagined community. Author Benedict Anderson’s idea of “imagined communities” provides a useful

theoretical frame for understanding why general education debates become a symbol of divisions. Anderson, referring to modern nations, observed that human communities exist as imagined entities in which people:

will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion. Communities are distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined. (Benedict, 1991, p. 15)

The common idea of the imagined community at Portland State University, as in most universities, is that of a community of scholars who can debate important issues but in the end reach consensus. Undergraduate studies have often been envisioned as the place where students are initiated into this community. In this idealized construction, faculty and students engage in a common dialogue about life's most important issues most often generated by a common set of readings.

Portland State University has moved well beyond debates about a common set of readings to focusing on student learning, but the themes of consensus and the authority to decide what is taught continue. In the President's Advisory Council Report, one of the strongest statements centers on the role of the traditional departments in matters of general education. The committee pointed to "departments' relative loss of autonomy in deciding what their contribution to general education will be ... and ownership and responsibility for general education." The issue of faculty authority over the curriculum is also tied to faculty authority over the use of resources, the authority to determine how resources are spent: resources for teaching, travel, laboratories, but also the resource of faculty time. It is common for science faculty to recall the loss of faculty positions during budget cuts in the early 1990s and to assert that resources that were rightly theirs were used to fund University Studies.¹³ The loss of positions was real; however, it is also the case that the University Studies program was begun with new money from state appropriations and has brought over 4 million dollars to the university from external sources since its inception. New faculty

positions were also available to departments in conjunction with the formal commitment of full-time faculty participation in the University Studies program. Many departments that took advantage of the new faculty positions are among the largest departments on campus. In addition, the University Studies budget that in the early years consistently showed a deficit each year is now balanced and producing more dollars through tuition and state allocations than it costs to provide the program.

Looking Backward and Looking Forward

Returning to Stimpson's three clusters of questions and looking at the institution a decade after University Studies was implemented, our colleagues' response in the 1990s to how much change is needed transformed the institution in positive ways. We have a nationally recognized program that the majority of faculty members agree is the chosen model for the delivery of general education. The enrollment of freshmen has increased 77% since 1994 and, as noted earlier, retention from freshman to sophomore year has improved. One of the central marks of the PSU general education program—connection with the community—is also a value that ties the faculty together and is now a part of our institutional vision. One condition that persists is a declining budget nearly as severe as that of the early 1990s and the erosion of public support for higher education. While University Studies will have budget reductions similar to other academic units, it has not been targeted for elimination or singled out for special reductions.

The success in transforming the university in the 1990s continues to contribute to the institution's confidence even in difficult financial times. One feature that has characterized Portland State since its beginnings in the 1940s is its responsiveness to the community. This responsiveness in part explains the approach to general education reform. In the 1990s the need to focus on undergraduate education was recognized; in this decade PSU's partners in the urban community are calling for a university that provides the research and creative capacity needed for a knowledge-based economy. Because of this need, PSU is focusing on graduate education, particularly

through the addition of Ph.D. programs in engineering, computer science, and mathematics. President Bernstine and Mayor Katz have broadened the notion of the metropolitan compact to encompass the idea of a great university in a great city. For example, in her remarks at the dedication of the PSU Urban Center Plaza, Mayor Katz noted: "For Portland to be an even greater city it needs a great university. And Portland State is that university." Putting meat on the bones of this idea has taken the form of faculty roundtables and public forums focused on community partnerships in science and engineering, particularly with the Oregon Health Sciences University; K-12 education; creative industries; economic, environment, and social sustainability; and the humanities.

In the most recent years the conversations among faculty have actually begun to question the administration's commitment to teaching as the expectations of research and scholarly activity have risen. In response to continuing state budget reductions and increasing demands from the community for research partnerships with the university faculty, more emphasis has been placed in the tenure and review process on faculty success in obtaining external grants and contracts and on scholarly activities. Perhaps what is now emerging is a greater balance between the competing traditions among the faculty and a greater opportunity for faculty, however they identify themselves, to create a space for themselves and to feel valued in the university.

We continue to address the dynamic alliance of knower and known and the social construction of knowledge. More than anything else, the foundation of the dissent regarding University Studies appears to grow out of a fundamental conflict between the importance of and balance between the knower and the known. The notion that liberal learning needs to be at the center of our work continues to arise from the faculty. At the same time we are witnessing an explosion of new and broader knowledge—the known—that a decade ago we did not foresee or imagine. If we cannot even predict where we will need this new, deeper, broader knowledge, then what we can do is prepare our undergraduate students to be able to engage in finding out "knowers". In a very real sense we need to concern ourselves with what we do not know. We need to know much more about how the faculty thinks about the known and the unknown. Why is it that some faculty experience innovation in general education as invigorating

while others either have no interest or perceive participation as a burden? We also need to know more about how our students experience the dynamic alliance between the known and the knower.

Like other institutions PSU is experiencing major transformations in the student body, faculty, and administration. The process of engaging in reflection leads us to conclude that our most pressing, messy, confusing questions center on addressing Stimpson's personal and relational questions.

Many business and government leaders in our external community call for a university in the city that provides the research and creative capacity needed for the knowledge economy. This call raises further reflections about the relationship between the known and the knower. For instance, is the high-tech revolution changing the cultural capital students need? How is the science faculty's assertion that the students should learn more science tied to changing notions of cultural capital? John Guillory's book, *Cultural Capital*, offers some clues. He argues that an important function of the university is the formation, identification, and distribution of cultural capital that is the preferred knowledge by which the elites who possess it can be distinguished from others who lack it. Should we be concerned that literature and other humanities disciplines, the cultural capital of the old bourgeoisie, are becoming increasingly marginal for students who will become the new professional class (Guillory, 1993)? What cultural capital do PSU students perceive themselves needing to require?

Applying Stimpson's relational questions to the faculty led inevitably to this question: How much were our disagreements about general education tied to positions of privilege and power? Part of the resentment around University Studies, as Ramaley remarked, was related to "the perceived arrogance and favored status of the new order . . ." As noted earlier, it is also tied to notions of the ideal faculty member and the core identity of some. We need to know more about how faculty members think of the various positionalities that faculty occupy, positions based on gender, ethnicity, discipline, and tenure status that are relational and contextual. How, for example, do their various positionalities relate to their beliefs about how socially constructed knowledge is? What are the dynamics of privilege at play? How do the characteristics of the "ideal" faculty

member against whom some are relegated as “other” come to be defined at an institution? Answers to these questions are important not only in relation to University Studies but to the campus as a whole as the faculty becomes more diverse.¹⁴

At a crucial juncture when critics were questioning the value of the program, the university was able to change leadership from the original advocates for reform; to move beyond the early champions; and to empower a new set of listeners and bridge-builders to again link with those who felt disenfranchised to strengthen the program across the campus. The ability to shift assessment of the program to the demonstration of student learning through formal processes and standards based on student work in their general education courses began to provide evidence that students were learning what faculty said they wanted students to learn. The acknowledgment that University Studies could generate substantial external funds, be the source of data for scholarly publications, and balance its budget to the point of a surplus for the university removed the foundation for some objections to the program. The explicit valuing of research and scholarly activities, especially those that generated external support and brought recognition to the university, helped rebalance the perception that only one group of faculty on the campus were privileged.

Tying the inquiry process and the answers to the question of how much change is needed to “scholarly work” accounts for the boldness and the endurance of this institution’s transformation. University Studies has endured in part because they held themselves to high standards of scholarship and behaved like scholars. If the institution can hold itself to the same standards it too will achieve its scholarly aspirations and answer its questions locally for itself within the broader framework of higher education and our institutional vision, and then we stand to continue to make a contribution to higher education.¹⁵

Notes

1. The *Chronicle* was responding to information provided by a small group of Portland State University faculty on the disagreements they have surrounding University Studies. The core of this group numbered from 8 to 10 although nearly 50 faculty signed a request for faculty to complete a survey on University Studies. The faculty at PSU numbered 652 in 2004.

2. Awards include the Pew Leadership Award for the Renewal of Undergraduate Education, 1996; the Corporation for National Service Award for Commitment to National Service, 2001; and the Theodore M. Hesburgh Award for Enhancing Undergraduate Teaching and Learning, 2002. University Studies received funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to advance institutional transformation efforts, 1996; The Pew Charitable Trust to Restructure for Urban Student Success, 1996; The American Council on Education / W. K. Kellogg Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation to assess institutional transformation, 1997; and the New England Research Center for Higher Education (NERCHE) at University of Massachusetts Boston to support initiatives at each institution to promote civic learning, 2000. Scholars such as Tom Ehrlich, Pat Hutchins, and Lee Shulman from the Carnegie Foundation and Alexander Astin, Director of UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute, are frequent visitors to the campus. Since University Studies began in 1994 nearly 300 colleagues from around the country and the world have visited campus to see the program up close.

3. This survey was constructed by a small group of faculty and mailed to all faculty on the Faculty Senate list. Ninety-nine faculty responded but a mean of 48% of items were not completed by respondents.

4. The then Provost, Michael Reardon, was a significant part of the story. He initiated two committees, one on interdisciplinary coursework and one on reform of general education. See White (1994); Rennie-Hill & Toth (1999).

5. The Center's design was influenced by the work of a scholarly faculty reading group sponsored by ACE and Kellogg and led by Michael Reardon.

6. When a state property tax abatement measure severely reduced resources, Michael Reardon and Vice President for Finance and Administration, Lindsay Desrochers, made administrative cuts and devised a strategy for funding. Committed to ensuring the success of University Studies, they requested that the Chancellor's Office underwrite the program in the amount of \$1,000,000 for each of two years. Their argument was that if enrollment increased in the program and retention improved, they would have the needed resources to make the program self-supporting.

7. The expectation was that once the veterans were educated, students in the metropolitan Portland area would seek their degrees at the University of Oregon or Oregon State University, both located outside the population center. See Dodds (2000).

8. We are grateful to Shelley Reese, Chair of the English Department from 1992–98, for this insight.

9. Astin was on campus as part of the ACE/Kellogg grant and made this observation at a meeting in winter 2000.

10. Freshman class: White (67.4%), Asian (13%), African American (3.6%), Hispanic (3.5%), Native American (1.9%), Multi-ethnic (1.5%), declined (6.8%), international (2.2%); Total PSU students: White (65.9%), Asian (10.3%), African American (3.1%), Hispanic (4.1%), Native American (1.3%), Multi-ethnic (1.3%), declined (10.4%), International (3.7%); Faculty as a whole: White (76.1%), Asian (6.1%), African American (3.5%), Hispanic (2.0%), Native American (.8%), Multi-ethnic (.5%), declined (11.3%).

11. This discussion occurred during Focus on Faculty, September 2002.

12. For example, the Freshman Inquiry faculty for academic year 2002–03 were 49% female versus 42% for the campus; and 20% percent minority versus 12.6% for the campus.

13. This loss of faculty positions occurred throughout the institution. For instance, the English faculty went from 45 in 1979 to 25 in 1995.

14. The President's Diversity Initiative is having an impact on faculty hiring. The percentage of tenure track faculty who self-identified themselves as being an ethnic minority increased from 4.6 in 1991 to 14.5 in 2004.

15. We wish to especially thank Judith Ramaley and Michael Reardon, the president and the provost at the time University Studies was created, and faculty members Nancy Porter, Shelley Reese, and Martha Balshem for their comments on earlier drafts of this article. We also thank Donna Bergh, Executive Assistant to the Provost, and Cathy Knight, Assistant to the Provost, for their editorial assistance.

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