

Ten Highlights from the Scholarly Literature
about the
Process of General Education Reform
(Arranged by Date)

1. *A key fiduciary responsibility of college and university boards is not only to financially support liberal education at their institutions, but also to oversee the success of liberal learning and its integration with students' majors...It is not just the funding but the quality of liberal education about which board members should have a vested interest...The time has come for college and university leaders, including board members, to ask if their campus' liberal or general education, along with disciplinary depth, provides their students with a multidisciplinary and holistic problem-solving approach to the complex local and global challenges we all face.*
-Trusteeship Magazine, "Liberal Education vs. Professional Education" (2014)
2. *...the Faculty dominated steering committee...planned steps that would enable continued movement toward reform, including deciding whom to invite onto a task force, what kind of power and autonomy the task force would have, and what the group's charge would be. That core set of leaders chose task force members deliberately, not only incorporating a wide range of campus representatives from various positions and disciplines and a balance of gender and experience but also selecting members with a strong track record of collegiality and campus citizenship...Selecting task force members who were generally respected and widely recognized as judicious, fair thinkers would position the group well for educative and persuasive efforts central to their mission...The General Education Reform Steering Committee adopted a very intentional approach to leadership. The committee was populated by individuals who both had shown a proclivity to university-wide thinking and were believed to have a good deal of respect among their peers within their respective units...Committee members saw themselves as responsible for the engagement of the rest of the campus in the reform process. We developed a committee mantra that transcended our disciplinary and school/college silos, which we modeled throughout the process: "We are stewards of the university, not representatives of our respective units."*
-Journal of General Education, "The Role of Leadership in Gen Ed Reform" (2011)
3. *...successful reform in academe requires an understanding of the following: the informal value systems at work; the various groups within the university and the norms of those groups...the pockets of power and the amount of influence to be expected from each; the various perspectives that exist regarding general education and the need for reform; and the extent to which trust between various players is available in sufficient quantities to bring about reform...A [key] factor that contributed to the success...of the curricular reform was related to the membership of the [reform] committee itself. Too often curriculum committees are no more than a reflection of the values and norms of the departments they represent. Faculty members on such committees are generally expected to represent their particular interest group and "protect their disciplinary turf." Although the members of the [reform] committee were faculty members drawn from departments, each of the committee members had a strong commitment to general education and curricular reform...Individuals were able to transcend [disciplinary]*

boundaries and work together for the good of the whole. The members of the committee became champions for general education reform and retained their commitment through the years from development to passage to implementation.

-Journal of General Education, "Advice for Avoiding Pitfalls" (2011)

4. *...a program for strengthening general education must be designed to embody each institution's character, the needs of its students, and the strengths and interests of its faculty...those charged with curricular reform should meet the task head-on, avoiding any "quick fixes" or ready-made solutions...the process requires careful organization. An effective leader must be appointed. Respected faculty leaders must be recruited. There must be a clear charge and definitive parameters...members of the leadership group must prepare themselves by reading the professional literature, studying trends and innovations, and building their credibility as leaders among their colleagues...Efforts to improve general education require that a [committee]...draw on those most knowledgeable, most interested, and most committed.*

-AAC&U, Avoiding the Potholes (2009)

5. *An astounding 95% of general education reform failures are directly linked to failures in process. Heeding advice that we carefully consider matters of process as a part of our larger reform effort, we gave control of the process to the committee; decisions about the content of the project were left to the rest of the university. In other words, we empowered the campus community as a whole to make decisions about the curriculum, rather than relying on an appointed committee to make those decisions on their behalf...The [Gen Ed Reform] committee used existing faculty governance structures to define the process...We inundated the campus with national news about general education reform, we invited participation from campus members who had felt silenced or "silo-ed", and we refused to accept the status quo as an option. We placed the needs of our students squarely at the center of the discussion and unrelentingly communicated with all constituents to help them see roles for themselves in the initiative. Silos were dismantled, barriers were crossed, and the culture of secrecy and suspicion that pervaded the campus was transformed into one of openness, inclusiveness, collaboration, and engagement...In the end, this process-oriented approach enabled us to achieve much more than the reform of a single program; we changed the culture of the campus.*

-Liberal Education, "Transforming Institutional Culture" (2008)

6. *...the task of reform is often assigned to a faculty committee or task force made up of individuals from a variety of disciplines who have little experience in examining institutional-level issues or in examining such issues from an organization-wide perspective...Faculty are often not aware that general education reform thrusts them into the unfamiliar role of agents of cultural change...General education change is not just a task of curricular change: it is also cultural change...The educational program of the institution reflects the norms, values, and behavior of the organizational culture...What is or is not thought to be quality curriculum is largely the result of our educational philosophies, beliefs, values, and normative positions. Although campus-wide general education efforts may focus on what is best for students, recognizing why faculty hold the beliefs they do about what is best is a much deeper task that involves systematic examination of the cultural context in which the change is taking*

place...Engaging the organization's culture and attempting to understand it can help to steer the process of general education reform around [the] potholes...

-Journal of General Education, "Gen Ed Reform as Organizational Change" (2005)

7. *The process of general education reform [is] an issue of institutional culture. The culture of the institution dictates how effectively those who hold various perspectives will be able to work together...Faculty agreed at a [faculty] assembly meeting that a review and overhaul was in order and elected a committee to do the work. These assembly meetings are identified as the linchpin of faculty governance at [the university]. The members of the restructuring group were selected by and from the faculty.*

-Journal of General Education, "Collegiality and Culture in Gen Ed Reform" (2004)

8. *Curricular reforms, like ground wars, are won by the infantry fighting under leaders who are colleagues—senior faculty, young faculty with new ideas, and previously embattled faculty who see a chance to achieve their goals in a new way.*

-Futures Forum, "Reinventing a Core Curriculum at a Small College" (2003)

9. *Most of the serious problems associated with the new program at [the university] 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...Ignoring this obvious point undermined the potential for successful reform...The initial set of appointments to the [reform committee] was very skewed against traditional liberal studies disciplines...It is well established in the literature that successful reform requires that a revision committee have an appropriate level of faculty representation...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. The [university] 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...There is no evidence that anyone associated with [the university] 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.*

-Journal of General Education, "Substance and Process in Gen Ed Reform" (2001)

10. *...frequently, only a few members of blue ribbon general education reform committees are well prepared for the task. More often than not they have little background in the history of general education, insufficient understanding of the underlying pedagogical issues, or minimal acquaintance with competing models of general education...A familiarity with these models can provide a context against which the institution's current general education program can be analyzed and evaluated and can allow general education reformers to identify more sharply and quickly both their own presuppositions and the assumptions of their colleagues.*

-Journal of General Education, "Tensions and Models in Gen Ed Planning" (2000)