

GENERAL EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY:

A QUEST FOR COMMON PRINCIPLES

by

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ABSTRACT

In the early years of the 21st century, general education programs in U.S. postsecondary institutions stand at the center of multiple competing pressures, from demands for accountability to calls for increasing assurances of articulation across institutions. Complicating potential responses to these normative pressures is the challenge inherent in adapting any curricular component to fit the institution in which it is implemented. A curricular component that must be both stable and harmonious within the academy yet responsive to the broader sociopolitical context, general education must encompass courses that reflect the institution's mission and its faculty strengths while simultaneously responding to the need for articulation across institutions as well as the needs of the community.

In approaching general education reform, administrators and faculty typically follow one of two strategies: select from the de facto general education models of the 20th century, or emulate general education programs at institutions perceived to be at the forefront of general education praxis. In neither case is there clear evidence that those involved in general education design have consulted the body of scholarship dedicated to general education ideology. Nor has there been an analysis of such scholarship to determine current dominant trends in the national discourse on general education.

Since 1990, numerous U.S. colleges and universities have undertaken costly and time-consuming reforms of their general education programs. To inform future general education reforms and to contribute to the understanding of priorities in general education in the early 21st century, this qualitative study reports on a documentary analysis of general education scholarship in *The Journal of General Education* from 1990 to 2011. The study reports dominant thematic

trends in general education scholarship, considers the relevance of those trends in light of their resonance with a 20th-century general education paradigm, and makes recommendations regarding praxis as administrators and faculty approach the task of general education reform across the range of institutional contexts represented on the current stage of U.S. higher education. Recommendations include the use of scholarship as a source of organizing principles to guide efficient and effective general education reform.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughters, Stella and Kate. They embody all that is needed in the world: compassion, curiosity, determination, and best of all, hope.

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For their support and invaluable guidance in the production of this document, I thank the members of my committee: Michael Harris, Vistasp Karbhari, Claire Howell Major, and Stephen Tomlinson. Most of all, I thank my chair, Wayne J. Urban, whose advice and insights rendered this endeavor incredibly rewarding. Dr. Urban's breadth of knowledge on higher education coupled with his comprehensive understanding of its history and philosophy challenged my own reasoning as I wrestled with interpretation of trends in the field. His commitment to scholarly excellence was inspirational. My hope is that I have succeeded in producing a document that reflects the superlative quality of his guidance.

As with any educational experience, I benefitted from learning in both curricular and extracurricular contexts, within the classroom and beyond. The Executive Ed.D. program in Higher Ed Administration at the University of Alabama functions is a cohort model. I was most fortunate to enter the program with Ed.D. Cohort Three. Each member of that cohort influenced not only how I understood the inner workings of higher education but also the ways in which I thought about the purpose of higher education within the larger social context. As one who had spent most of her professional career in the "faculty side of the house," I had much to learn about the complexities and challenges of administration—from enrollment management and student affairs to finance, advancement, and research. In debates over the organizational cultures of higher education, its philosophy, history, and future, Cohort Three and the faculty of the Ed.D. program challenged my thinking and guided the development of my understanding of the

complexities of the world in which they had long worked, researched, and taught. Much affection and appreciation to the members of Cohort Three—for their intelligence, their persistence, and their humor.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE GENERAL EDUCATION CONUNDRUM

The general education component of the undergraduate curriculum has been identified as the core of the undergraduate academic experience—characterized on the one hand as an essential part of any institution’s strategic planning and on the other hand as a “spare room” into which contents may be shoved to serve any number of disparate purposes.¹ Although framed in much of the literature as the curricular component that stands in service to the philosophy of liberal education, general education programs throughout history and across the U.S. have demonstrated breadth of structure, content, and purpose.² As the most common element within the undergraduate curriculum, the component with which the vast majority of institutions serving undergraduate populations must grapple, general education is a curricular construct that can be neither discarded nor neatly contained within a one-size-fits-all model. Nonetheless, pressures across U.S. higher education in the past two decades have worked to encourage institutions and

¹ For discussions of general education as central to the undergraduate experience, see Daniel Bell, *The Reforming of General Education: The Columbia College Experience in its National Setting* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966); Ernest Boyer, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987); Jerry Gaff, *General Education Today: A Critical Analysis of Controversies, Practices, and Reforms* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983); Jerry Gaff, *General Education: The Changing Agenda* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1999); see Task Force on Higher Education and Society, *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2000), Chapter 6, http://www.accesstosuccess-africa.eu/web/images/literature/peril_and_promise.pdf; California Commission on General Education, *General Education in the 21st Century: A Report of the University of California Commission on General Education in the 21st Century* (Berkeley: Center for Studies in Higher Education, 2007). For more detail regarding general education as the “spare room” of the curriculum, see Ernest Boyer and Arthur Levine, *A Quest for Common Learning: The Aims of General Education* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1981). For a view of the strategic selling of a general education core that was not an accurate portrayal of the undergraduate experience in the 1980s and 1990s, see Ernest Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 1990), xi-xii.

² Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010). Similarly, see the definition provided by the Association of American Colleges and Universities in their attempt to distinguish among liberal education, liberal arts, and general education, available online at http://www.aacu.org/leap/what_is_liberal_education.cfm. Consider the AACU notion that general education is “part of the liberal education curriculum” in the diverse institutional contexts represented by varied missions across multiple colleges and universities in the current U.S. higher education system.

systems to establish general education programs to ensure ease of transfer for highly mobile student populations.

Given the increasing state and national attention paid to learning outcomes at the undergraduate level, the strength of an institution's general education program, upon or around which all other undergraduate learning is constructed, may determine an institution's competitive edge as it seeks to establish the value added by its undergraduate curriculum.³ However, at a time when general education could offer institutions such a competitive edge, trends in U.S. higher education have increasingly focused attention on standardization of curricula through articulation agreements and on developing responsiveness to the demands represented by student consumerism.⁴ Indeed, higher education stakeholders, from institutional administrators and faculty to legislative policymakers and leaders of professional organizations, have faced multiple pressures as they have attempted reforms to position their general education programs and policies to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Combined with competing pressures to demonstrate value added at the institutional level, these normative pressures have contributed to the development of a clear challenge: designing general education programs that can meet the demands for transfer articulation while simultaneously allowing institutions to demonstrate the value added by rigorous general education programming in keeping with their unique missions and academic strengths.

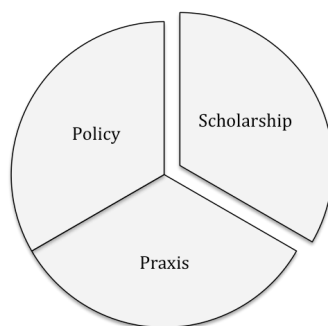
A related challenge lies in demonstrating to stakeholders that clear principles of design and reform of general education can be identified—principles that guide design but also allow

³ Michael Harris, "Out, Out, Damned Spot: General Education in a Market-Driven Institution," *The Journal of General Education* 55, nos. 3 & 4 (2006): 186-200.

⁴ Detailed discussions of the pressures of articulation, accountability, and responsiveness to student consumerism comprise the next section of this chapter.

individual institutions to accommodate the myriad constraints on their general education curricula and to incorporate the unique features that characterize their own cultures and contexts. The ability to meet this challenge lies in the extent to which general education reform is informed by a variety of perspectives. Among those perspectives, as in any discipline or field, are those drawn from the realms of praxis, policy, and scholarship.⁵ General education reform within U.S. institutions of higher education has shown responsiveness in two of those realms: praxis (e.g. emulation, adoption, and adaptation of extant programs and models) and policy (e.g. responsiveness to external mandates regarding articulation, accountability, and assessment). However, it has not demonstrated coherent, principled consideration of the national scholarly discourse emerging from the critical analysis of trends in general education research and practice. The gap represented by lack of attention to such scholarship is illustrated below.

Figure 1. Relevant spheres of influence on general education design and reform.



In investigating the ways in which scholarship may inform and contribute to praxis and policy in education, analysts have suggested that praxis-oriented professionals should “dramatically

⁵ For a discussion of relationships among scholarship, policy, and praxis, see Mark B. Ginsburg and Jorge M. Gorostiaga, “Relationships Between Theorists/Researchers and Policy Makers/Practitioners,” *Comparative Education Review* 45, no. 2 (May 2001): 173-196, citing, among others: Maureen Hallinan, “Bridging the Gap between Research and Practice,” *Sociology of Education*, ed. Peter Cookson, Joseph Contay, and Harold Himmerfarb 69 (1996): 131-34; and, Bruce Biddle and Don Anderson, “Social Research and Educational Change,” in *Knowledge for Policy: Improving Education through Research*, ed. Don Anderson and Bruce Biddle (London: Falmer, 1991): 1-20.

increase utilization of research [findings] in education [praxis].”⁶ At the heart of this argument is the belief that “vital decisions within educational systems ‘are taken without sufficient knowledge and information.’”⁷

Several studies within the past two decades have demonstrated convincingly that scholarly communications within a field inform decision-making at the level of praxis.⁸ Furthermore, scholarship has been identified as a locus of informed perspectives that must be considered in the development of shared disciplinary knowledge and in progress towards the establishment of disciplinary paradigms.⁹ Two primary approaches, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods, have been used in the analysis of scholarship as a core of informed perspectives in various fields. On the one hand, studies have presented the results of analyses of multiple scholarly sources in a given field, drawing conclusions regarding trends in prioritized themes and possible de facto paradigms.¹⁰ Other studies have presented the results of analyses of scholarship in a single source considered to be of primary influence within a given

⁶ Fernando Reimers and Noel McGinn, *Informed Dialogue: Using Research to Shape Educational Policy around the World* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), p. 5.

⁷ Wanda Rokicka, “Introduction,” in *Educational Documentation, Research and Decision-Making: National Case Studies*, ed. Wanda Rokicka (Paris: International Bureau of Education, 1999)

⁸ Maria Gonzalez, ““Crises” in Scholarly Communications: Insights from Forty years of the *Journal of Library History*, 1966-2005,” PhD diss. University of Texas at Austin, 2008. ProQuest (AAT 3324836).

⁹ Kathy Brock Enger, “Analysis of Articles Published in Eight Selected Higher Education Journals on Selected Variables to Reveal Scholarly Development of the Discipline,” PhD diss., University of North Dakota, 2004. ProQuest (UMI 3127739).

¹⁰ Robert Smith, Stephen Southern, and James Devlin, “Themes in Counseling Journals: A Decade of Changes Affecting 21st Century Counselor Education,” ERIC, 2007. (ED506175); Jeni Hart, “Women and Feminism in Higher Education Scholarship: An Analysis of Three Core Journals.” *The Journal of Higher Education* 77, no. 1 (2006): 40-61; Enger, “Analysis of Articles”; Richard A. V. Diener, *A Longitudinal Study of the Informational Dynamics of Journal Article Titles: A Treatise in the Science of Information*. PhD diss., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1980); David Braun y Harycki, “A Historical Analysis of the Content of Three Professional Journals that Contain Middle-Level Education Articles Between 1982 – 1995 and Their Relationship to the “Ten Essential Elements of a “True” Middle School”,” EdD diss. University of Nebraska – Lincoln, 2002. ProQuest (AAT 3022620).

discipline or subdiscipline.¹¹ Together, these studies make a compelling case in support of research-based grounding of praxis and evidence-based policymaking.

The current study contributes to the body of general education scholarship through the documentary review of scholarly research on general education within U.S. higher education. The addition of the perspectives gained through such a review benefits the field of general education in two ways: first, through presentation of informed scholarly perspectives that are simultaneously national and institutional in scope; second, through the identification of current thematic trends that can and should inform general education design and reform within any institution, regardless of its unique character and mission. In the remainder of this chapter, the pressures on and costs of general education design and reform are considered. The chapter closes with a review of the central problem that drove the research reported herein, the questions that guided the study, and a brief outline of the remaining chapters.

Pressures: Policies and Costs

Relevant pressures impacting general education reform in the first decade of the 21st century can be placed into two primary categories: policies and costs. In the following section, pressures on general education at the federal, regional, and state levels are presented along with relevant concerns expressed by national higher education organizations. Following, financial pressures on general education are reviewed, in light of the demands of consumerism and of the burdens curriculum reform places on institutional resources.

¹¹ Brandon Aylward, M. C. Roberts, J. Colombo, and R. G. Steele, "Identifying the Classics: An Examination of Articles Published in the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* from 1976 – 2006," *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* 33, no. 6 (2008): 576-589; Donovan Wright, "Citation and Content Analysis of the *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 2000 to 2006," EdD diss., Nova Southeastern University, 2008. ProQuest (AAT 3347423); Gonzalez, "Crises"; Elizabeth Ann Shumaker, "A Quantified Content Analysis of the *Journal of the National Art Education Association*: Art Education, from 1948 through 1984," M.A. thesis, Ohio State University. (Ohio State University: OhioLink's ETD Center, 1986); Symen Brouwers, Dianne A. van Hemert, Seger M. Breugelmans, and Fons J. R. van de Vijver, "A Historical Analysis of Empirical Studies Published in the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 1970-2004," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 35, no. 3 (2001): 251-262.

Policies

The 1946 publication of Harvard's "Red Book" and the simultaneous publication of the inaugural issue of *The Journal of General Education* (hereafter *JGE*) marked the advent of a national conversation on the topic of general education, a conversation that has often centered on challenges of access and accountability in the context of debates over purpose, substance, and structure.¹² As noted in general education literature of the late 20th century, pressures outside the academy often drive responsiveness inside, leading to modifications through (a) revisions to general education and/or (b) changes in programs or majors being offered.¹³ Multiple pressures have been exerted on general education in the form of policy statements and positions from the federal to the regional and state levels as well as from within professional organizations. In this section, pressures represented by policy statements and positions, playing out through calls for accountability and through articulation and accreditation plans, are reviewed.

National

Since the midcentury and the passage of legislation from the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 and the National Defense Education Act of 1958 to the Higher Education Act of 1965 and its reauthorizations over the past 45 years, national policy pressures have increasingly been brought to bear on higher education. This policy attention has often focused on skills and content traditionally associated with general education – even going so far as to term that area of the curriculum a "disaster area."¹⁴ Most recently, the Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education (Spellings Commission) produced a report calling for reforms

¹² Harvard Faculty of Arts and Science, *General Education in a Free Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946).

¹³ Gary Miller, *The Meaning of General Education: The Emergence of a Curriculum Paradigm* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988).

¹⁴ Carnegie Council, *Mission of the College Curriculum* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), 5.

across a breadth of areas within higher education.¹⁵ Specifically, this report identified four primary areas of concern for U.S. higher education in the 21st century: access, accountability, affordability, and quality.

Recommendations within the report were comprehensive in coverage of issues related to the undergraduate curriculum. However, only one section included direct reference to the notion of “general education” in the undergraduate curriculum. Located in a subsection on accountability within the larger “Recommendations” section, a single statement discussed the design of assessment materials such as the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress, intended to “assess general education outcomes for undergraduates in order to improve the quality of instruction and learning.”¹⁶ The absence of explicit references to general education throughout the majority of the report, however, did not reflect an absence of attention and concern regarding general education, its associated content or skills.

Although the report never referred specifically to the general education component of the undergraduate curriculum, skills and goals often associated with general education were in fact woven throughout the report’s text and subtext. For example, the Spellings Commission noted that employers bemoaned the absence of skills specifically associated with general education, “... report[ing] repeatedly that many new graduates they hire are not prepared to work, lacking the critical thinking, writing and problem-solving skills needed in today’s workplaces.”¹⁷ Similarly, discussions of accountability focused on assessment of skills typically located in general education: critical thinking, written, and oral communication skills, and analytic reasoning, with exams like the Collegiate Learning Assessment identified as useful tools for

¹⁵ The Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of Higher Education* (Maryland: U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

¹⁶ Commission, *A Test of Leadership*, 24.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3. (emphasis added)

“comparability to national norms ... measurement of value added between the freshman and senior years ... [and] inter-institutional comparisons that show how each institution contributes to learning.”¹⁸ Further, the Spellings Commission noted that “there are also disturbing signs that many students who do earn degrees have not actually mastered the reading, writing, and thinking skills we expect of college graduates. Over the past decade, literacy among college students has actually declined... [as] graduates enter the workforce without the skills employers say they need in an economy in which, as the truism holds correctly, knowledge matters more than ever.”¹⁹ Framed as a weakness relative to preparation for the workforce, the failure of HEIs to prepare students in critical skills has the potential to drive curricular reform in general education as well as the disciplines and professions.

The Spellings Commission also noted that recent research identified shortcomings across postsecondary institutions in core literacy skills, citing evidence from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy that “the percentage of college graduates deemed proficient in prose literacy has actually declined from 40 to 31 percent in the past decade.”²⁰ Concerns regarding literacy across a broad spectrum were similarly raised, as the Spellings Commission noted that “[t]he need to produce a globally literate citizenry is critical to the nation’s continued success in the global economy” to the extent that “[t]he federal government has recently embarked on an initiative to dramatically increase the number of Americans learning critically needed foreign languages from K-16 and into the workforce.”²¹ Referencing a skill set and content area that has appeared frequently in the core literature associated with the general education curriculum, the Spellings Commission commented that “[h]igher education, too, must put greater emphasis on

¹⁸ Ibid., x.

¹⁹ Commission, *A Test of Leadership*, x. (emphasis added)

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹ Ibid., 24.

international education, including foreign language instruction and study abroad....”²² Finally, moving out of those domains often associated with the humanities, arts, and social sciences areas of the general education curriculum, the Spellings Commission, citing research by the National Center for Education Statistics, noted the need for strengthening in core skills not only in prose and document literacy but also in quantitative literacy. The Spellings Commission went even further in recommending “that America’s colleges and universities embrace a culture of continuous innovation and quality improvement by developing new pedagogies, curricula, and technologies to improve learning, particularly in the area of science and mathematical literacy.”²³ Overall, the Spellings Commission’s recommendations focused on encouraging development of key skills that have traditionally been associated with the private good of higher education, i.e. preparation as a productive member of the workforce and a successful individual from a professional perspective. On the other hand, the skills targeted increasingly resonate with discussions of the public good of higher education, i.e. the preparation of an educated citizenry capable of meaningful participation in the sociopolitical contexts of its time.

Rarely do the concerns raised in discussions of accountability, access, and efficiency focus on the preparedness of college graduates in terms of specialized professions. Rather, these dialogs most often reference concerns regarding the acquisition of skills termed “general” and “foundational,” including: literacies (e.g. verbal, visual, scientific, mathematical), communication skills, cultural awareness, and general preparedness as a global citizen – all of which are often lumped together under the designation, “21st century skills.” As the report by the Spellings Commission noted, “[t]he future of our country’s colleges and universities is threatened by global competitive pressures, powerful technological developments, restraints on public

²² Ibid., 24.

²³ Commission, *A Test of Leadership*, 25.

finance, and serious structural limitations that cry out for reform.”²⁴ In the years since the Spellings Commission released its report, three of the four threats identified have grown as global competitive pressures and public finance have responded to worldwide economic downturns and major shifts in the balance of the world’s economic powers.²⁵ Additionally, concerns regarding the abilities of institutions of higher education to respond to perceived weaknesses in their academic and research structures abound. Given these developments coupled with the fact that the Commission presented no specific framework for addressing the challenges they identified, the need for organizational principles upon which to base curricular reforms that will rise to the challenges is compelling.

The following assumptions are clearly supported in the literature: undergraduate education is present across all basic Carnegie institutional types;²⁶ general education is present within the vast majority of undergraduate education curricula; and, general education in the postsecondary context must accomplish an increasingly challenging task: to reflect unique institutional missions and structures and to respond to articulation pressures. In light of these assumptions, a review of the Spellings Commission Report reveals that key skills within general education include critical literacies (as a conflation of the foundational 21st century skills including critical and creative thinking; technological, visual, and quantitative literacies), integrative and adaptive perspectives (as a conflation of academic skills necessary in a rapidly

²⁴ Ibid., 29.

²⁵ John Aubrey Douglass, “Higher Education Budgets and the Global Recession: Tracking Varied National Responses and their Consequences,” *Research and Occasional Papers Series: CSHE.4.10* (Berkeley, CA: Center for Studies in Higher Education, 2010).

²⁶ Basic Carnegie classification types include two-year institutions through four-year institutions, under private and public control, in for-profit or non-profit status. The majority of institutions within the system of postsecondary education as classified by Carnegie will have a general education component in their undergraduate curriculum. Notable exceptions to this generalization would include institutions designed for graduate programs only (e.g. Adler School, Keck Graduate Institute, School for International Training, The Wright Institute). For a listing of Carnegie institutional types across all basic categories and a discussion of the role of undergraduate education across institutions in the U.S. system of higher education, see http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/ugrad_program.php.

evolving knowledge economy), and pluralistic sensibilities (as a construct of perspective necessary for functioning in an increasingly globalized sociocultural, political, and economic context). The challenges of addressing those key skills within disparate institutional contexts are clear.

With calls for reform at the national level, institutions face the questions of whether they can reasonably respond to the calls while maintaining sound general education programs and whether they, as individual institutions, can find a way to accommodate change within the constraints of their own institutional realities, both in terms of their institutional cultures and in terms of the practical issues of their internal disciplinary makeup. While institutions wrestle with the challenges presented at the national level, they must also contend with those emerging at the regional level. In the following section, pressures of regional accreditation are added to those bearing down on institutional reform in general education at the national level.

Regional

Divided among six federally-approved, regional accrediting agencies, as well as the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, the vast majority of postsecondary institutions operating in the U.S. are subject to periodic review of their operations: academic, extracurricular, and financial.²⁷ Accrediting agencies serve as a method for overseeing public investment in higher education as well as for maintaining some measure of comparability in quality of delivered content across the broad range of institutions represented in the U.S. higher education landscape. Framed as intermediaries between a non-accrediting U.S. Department of Education and the institutions themselves, and as supportive of the role of state boards of

²⁷ For a list of all federally-sanctioned accrediting agencies, their scope of recognition and their functional areas, see http://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation_pg6.html. The discussion in this section focuses on the six regional accrediting agencies responsible for oversight of public institutions of higher education in addition to the single accrediting agency responsible for oversight of private postsecondary institutions.

education, the six regional agencies, along with several mission-specific agencies functioning at the national level, work to review institutional operations and to serve both formative and normative roles in the postsecondary landscape.

Although breadth and variation are present across the accrediting agencies in terms of the forms and functions they allow for general education, there are also striking similarities. In addition, research has suggested that the formative assessment and quality control functions performed by these agencies in the realm of general education, in a context of decentralized control over postsecondary education, is highly consistent.²⁸ For example, all of the regional accrediting agencies, including the agency responsible for oversight of independent colleges and universities, foreground skills necessary for the critical assessment of information and for clarity in its communication. In addition, the agencies highlight expectations that general education will facilitate development in student awareness of areas of knowledge (and their attendant frameworks for interpreting meaning and for structuring inquiry), leading to the goal of student as educated person with a passion for learning. Finally, the agencies are consistent in requiring that general education programs foster skills and awareness associated with understanding of the benefits and challenges of a pluralistic democracy, from diversity to civic responsibility and the ability to work with individuals from a breadth of backgrounds.²⁹ In the next section, state level

²⁸ Celia Lopez, "General Education: Regional Accreditation Standards and Expectations," *Liberal Education* 85, no. 3 (Summer, 1999): 46-51.

²⁹ Middle States Commission on Higher Education, *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Requirements of Affiliation and Standards for Accreditation*, (2011), 47-50; New England Association of Schools and Colleges: Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, "Standards for Accreditation: General Education," (2011), 4.16-4.19, retrieved from http://cihe.neasc.org/standards_policies/standards/standards_html_version#standard_four; Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, "The New Criteria for Accreditation," (2012), retrieved from <http://www.ncahlc.org/Information-for-Institutions/criteria-for-accreditation.html>; Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, "Standards for Accreditation," (2010), retrieved from <http://www.nwccu.org/Pubs%20Forms%20and%20Updates/Publications/Standards%20for%20Accreditation.pdf>; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, (2012), retrieved from <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2012PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf>; Western Association of Colleges and Schools

policies are added to the increasingly complex mix of external pressures being brought to bear on general education design and reform within postsecondary institutions across the country. These state policies can be seen both as an extension of national and regional conversations as well as a more discrete realization of the rather more broad descriptions that do take place at the higher levels of organization.

State

In recent years, challenges have been noted in retention and persistence of an increasingly mobile student population, as well as in ensuring rigorous program design in the face of pressures to accommodate transfer efficiency.³⁰ It has been estimated that approximately 60% of all college students attend more than one institution during their undergraduate careers; transfers can lead to an average loss of one semester of coursework for these students.³¹ It should, therefore, come as no surprise that [Secretary of Education] Spellings, in regional higher education summits held in 2007, enjoined state legislators and higher education administrators to look closely at issues of transferability of courses across two-year and four-year institutions within their states. Spellings further emphasized the problem when she noted the low success rates of the community college students who pursue transfer to four-year colleges, seeing “[t]heir inability to transfer credits [as] too high a hurdle for most.”³² Given these conditions, coupled with current pressures for accountability, trends in performance-based funding for state-assisted colleges and universities show an inclination among legislatures to require institutions to

Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Schools, *Handbook of Accreditation 2008, (With revisions [sic] to Commission Decisions, ratified Feb. 24, 2012)*, retrieved from http://www.wascenior.org/findit/files/forms/Handbook_of_Accreditation.pdf.

³⁰ *General Education in an Age of Student Mobility, The Academy in Transition* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2001).

³¹ U.S. Department of Education, *Completion Time for Bachelor's Degrees* (Washington, DC: Center for Education Statistics, Office of Research and Improvement, 1986); C. Adelman, *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School through College* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

³² Matthew Dembicki, “Spellings: Congress Should Look at Credit Transfer, Accreditation,” *Community College Times* (June 5, 2007). <http://aacc.modernsignal.net/article.cfm?ArticleId=328> (accessed June 25, 2011).

consider transfer and articulation readiness across the P-20 spectrum. When combined with mounting legislative inroads into the specifics of articulation as far down as the course level, accountability pressures create a stage on which innovative general education reform may face off against significant external policy constraints.

In recent years, state boards of higher education have wrestled with questions of whether and how to quantify and qualify the general education component of undergraduate postsecondary education. With growing percentages of students transferring among institutions as the diversity of the university-bound population has grown, states appear to be flexing their legislative muscles in an effort to address public pressures in this area. Numerous professional organizations have been tracking policy trends in this area across states ranging from Massachusetts to Pennsylvania, South Carolina to Kentucky, Oklahoma to Texas, and Florida—known for its strides in solidifying articulation among its two- and four-year institutions.³³ The results demonstrate that since 2000 multiple states have implemented policies forcing institutions to consider state articulation agreements or transfer policies when making curricular revisions.³⁴ Given that the courses usually available for transfer from the two-year to four-year institutions

³³ Consider, for example, the Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count initiative focused on insuring the success progress of students entering the pipeline in the two-year systems, <http://www.achievingthedream.org/default.html>. Similarly, consider the Southern Regional Education Board's "Clearing Paths to College Degrees: Transfer Policies in SREB States. A Focus Report in the Challenge To Lead series," (Southern Regional Education Board, 2007), http://www.sreb.org/main/goals/Publications/07E06_Clear_Paths.pdf. At the national level, consider reports funded by the Lumina Foundation, including: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, "Following the Mobile Student: Can We Develop the Capacity for a Comprehensive Database to Assess Student Progression?" *Lumina Research Report* (Indianapolis: Lumina Foundation, 2003), <http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/researchreports/NCHEMS.pdf>; American Association of Community Colleges and American Association of State Colleges and Universities, "Improving Access to the Baccalaureate," *Lumina Foundation Report* (Indianapolis: Lumina Foundation, 2004), http://www.pathtocollege.org/pdf/Lumina_Rpt_AACC.pdf.

³⁴ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, *Designing Texas Undergraduate Education in the 21st Century: A Report with Recommendations from the Undergraduate Education Advisory Committee* (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2009), <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/1699.PDF>.

are within the general education curricula, these policies inevitably represent constraints on general education reform and innovation.

The relevance of these types of policy constraints will only continue to grow as community colleges bear the brunt of surges in student enrollment or re-enrollment in college in times of economic downturn. As students enroll in community colleges with an eye towards transferring to four-year institutions, concerns for articulation of transfer credits continue to impact decision-making at the level of general education. For example, as Dicroce points out in a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, “[t]he associate transfer degree makes sense only if it comes with ironclad assurances that it has value within the context of the general-education core curriculum at four-year institutions and meets the requirements of the first two years of baccalaureate study—two criteria not embraced in the transfer policies of most states.”³⁵ In the years since Dicroce’s report, of course, these criteria have been put on the table in policy discussions and initiatives across the nation.

A review of representative state initiatives illuminates the potential trends in state control relevant to the general education component itself. In 2001, Robert Shoenberg of the AAC&U indicated that twenty-two states had implemented articulation agreements intended to establish statewide core curricula and facilitate transfer across institutions.³⁶ Such efforts intensified during the first decade of the 21st century. In 2007, following a decade-long effort in response to its Course Equivalency Project, Oklahoma instituted policies aimed at increasing transferability of the general education core from two-year to four-year institutions. Similarly, in a report on undergraduate education in the state, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board discussed

³⁵ Deborah Dicroce, “How to Make Community Colleges the First Leg of a Journey,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 28, 2005): B22.

³⁶ Robert Shoenberg, “Why Do I Have to Take This Course? Or Credit Hours, Transfer, and Curricular Coherence,” in *General Education in an Age of Student Mobility* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2001).

the importance of the general education curriculum and its role in transfer and articulation issues from the perspective of interest in standardization of 21st century skills.³⁷ In April 2010, Kentucky followed suit by passing a bill designed to ensure transferability of general education courses from two-year to four-year institutions in the state.³⁸ Transfer and articulation, specific to the courses in general education, are at issue not only between two-year and four-year institutions. These concerns extend to the question of transferability of credit among four-year institutions as well, with implications for the freedom with which institutions can design and deliver their general education curricula.³⁹

With enhanced levels of state control over aspects of their higher education systems, impacts on institutions' abilities to innovate must increasingly be measured with an eye cast towards relevant state articulation agreements. In fact, research demonstrates that centralized control of higher education at the state level has increased since the early 1970s, in terms of the number of states with centralized governing boards as well as the levels of control those boards exercise over institutional activities.⁴⁰ Additionally, research suggests that the need to consider state regulations, particularly among public institutions of higher education, will often impact curricular design in identifiable ways, leading to less innovation and risk-taking in that area.⁴¹ Finally, review of state legislative policies such as those of Texas, Kentucky, and Oklahoma confirms that increasing levels of control and pressure are being exerted relative to transfer and articulation in postsecondary institutions.

³⁷ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, *Designing Texas Undergrad Education*.

³⁸ Nancy Rodriguez and Deborah Yetter, "Community College Transfers Eased by New Bill," *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Kentucky, 2010), http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/courier_journal/access/2009824161.html?FMT=ABS&date=Apr+15%2C+2010 (accessed December 12, 2011).

³⁹ Consider, for example, that while the California system allowed articulation between the two-year colleges and the University of California system, similar articulation was not guaranteed between the University of California and California State University systems.

⁴⁰ Morphew, "Conceptualizing Change."

⁴¹ Christopher Morphew, "Conceptualizing Change in the Institutional Diversity of U.S. Colleges and Universities," *The Journal of Higher Education* 80, no. 3 (May/June 2009): 243-269.

As constraints associated with articulation, accountability, and affordability increase, institutions of higher education must be prepared to consider issues of transferability and articulation in any curricular innovations they undertake, particularly in those areas in which state articulation and transfer policies have shown most interest and activity. As Morphew notes, following Grant and Riesman, and El-Khawas, public institutions tend to be less innovative, constrained as they are by pressures “to conform with state regulators and coordinating agencies.”⁴² By analogy, any and all institutions facing mounting normative pressures may respond similarly, with potential damage to curricular innovation at a time when higher education may prove key to success on the global stage.

As an example of the challenges institutions face relative to external pressures on their curriculum, consider the recent case of Northern Kentucky University. In an unusual turn of events that succinctly illustrates the potential complexities faced by higher education administrators and academics alike, the U.S. Education Department recently stepped in to question not only an accrediting agency’s review of a general education reform at Northern Kentucky University but also to question the institution’s own commitment to that reform. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education required the Southern Association on Colleges and Schools to review its determination that reforms at NKU met with the Association’s own standards regarding the general education component of the curriculum.⁴³ In addition, as events unfolded at Northern Kentucky in Fall 2011, the implications of pressures from national to institutional became increasingly clear as not only the Association’s regulations but also state

⁴² Morphew, “Conceptualizing Change,” citing Gerald Grant and David Riesman, *The Perpetual Dream: Reform and Experiment in the American College* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978): 249; Elaine El-Khawas, “Clarifying Roles and Purposes,” *New Directions for Higher Education*, 1976, no. 13 (Spring 1976): 35-47.

⁴³ Eric Kelderman, “Education Department Asks Accreditor to Better Explain a Curriculum Review,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Sept. 19, 2011).

legislation and institutional policies were scrutinized. Although admittedly a single case, the Northern Kentucky case regarding a portion of the general education curriculum at a public university highlight the necessity for negotiating extremely complicated considerations as scholars and practitioners consider curricular design and reform.

In sum, evidence clearly suggests that (a) state coordination has increased in both presence and control, and (b) there is a recent trend across state agencies to ensure transferability of general education requirements among two-year and four-year institutions. Inevitably, external pressures on institutions to innovate in the general education component while simultaneously meeting the demands for 21st century skills delivered in an efficient manner, combined with pressures to insure that the innovations fit within the general outline of constraints set by state articulation and transfer policies, including comprehensiveness and a reflection of the democratic context within which all U.S. higher education occurs, create an interesting challenge in terms of programmatic reform of the general education curricula. At the same time, professional organizations with various perspectives and agenda in terms of higher education and general education also add to the complex of pressures seeking to influence institutions and their curricular planning.

Professional Organizations

Numerous professional organizations representing stakeholders across higher education, from the American Association of Colleges and Universities to the Association of American Universities to the Association of American Community Colleges, have released policy documents, implemented innovative initiatives, and established conferences dedicated to the form, content, and structure of general education curricula. As the largest organization, and the one now representing the broadest range of institutional types in U.S. higher education, the

American Association of Colleges and Universities has a long history of interest in the design and revision of the general education curricula. In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the American Association of Colleges and Universities commissioned three surveys reviewing the current state of the general education curriculum across its member institutions. In all three cases, extensive reports were the result, dedicated to a discussion of the form, content, and structure of the American Association of Colleges and Universities' member general education programs, with some additional attention paid to processes of reform and revision.⁴⁴

Similarly, the Association of American Universities, an organization usually equated with the super-elite of research universities in the U.S., undertook reviews of undergraduate education among its member institutions as recently as 1990, and again in 1994.⁴⁵ A response, perhaps, to criticisms in the 1990s regarding the sparse attention that undergraduate education had received among the elite research institutions during the recent boom years of federal funding of basic and applied research, the surveys enjoyed an extraordinarily strong response rate (e.g. fifty-three of fifty-eight institutions responded in 1994). Described as an informal survey, member universities were simply asked to "provide [the Association of American Universities with] information on

⁴⁴ For perspectives based on national surveys and interviews across a breadth of institutions nationally, the American Association of Colleges and Universities series is highly instructive, including: Jerry Gaff, "Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," in *Society for Values in Higher Education, Project on General Education Models, General Education, Issues and Resources*, eds. Jerry Gaff and Jerry Chance (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges, 1980), 17-30; Jerry Gaff, *General Education Today*; Jerry Gaff, *New Life for the College Curriculum: Assessing Achievements and Furthering Progress in the Reform of General Education* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1991); Jerry Gaff, *Strong Foundations: Twelve Principles for Effective General Education Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1994); Jerry Gaff, "The Changing Agenda;" James Ratcliff, D. Kent Johnson, Steven M. La Nasa, and Jerry G. Gaff, *The Status of General Education in the Year 2000: Summary of a National Survey* (Washington: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2001); James Ratcliff, Kent Johnson, and Jerry Gaff, *Changing General Education Curriculum: New Directions for Higher Education*, 125 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

⁴⁵ Surveys and reports funded by the Carnegie Foundation and the Association of American Universities represent a meaningful contribution to the national perspectives on general education, particularly among U.S. research universities. Such reports include: Association of American Universities, *Survey of Undergraduate Education Activities* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Universities, 1995); Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities* (Stony Brook: State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1998).

programs and activities that enhance undergraduate education, including any new initiatives to focus additional resources and attention on this area."⁴⁶ In the final report, a clear focus on general education programs as well as skills, content, and activities associated with the goals of general education emerged. Within 132 pages of text, the phrase "general education" appeared no less than forty times, usually in contexts where extensive discussion of the goals, content, and structure of the programs occurred. Terms often associated with such skills and content include, for example, critical thinking, communication, citizenship, as well as public ethics, also appear with regular frequency.

Attention to general education within higher education continued into the first decade of the 21st century. In September 2006, many of the most prominent professional organizations in higher education collaborated in the production of an open letter directed to their members. The title of this document, timed for release soon after that of the Spellings Commission report in the same year, was "Addressing the Challenges Facing American Undergraduate Education, A Letter to Our Members: Next Steps."⁴⁷ The organizations involved included the American Association of Colleges and Universities, Association of American Universities, Association of American Community Colleges, American Council on Education, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and National Association of State Universities and Land-grant Colleges (currently the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities). Collectively, these groups represent the vast majority of institutions and institutional types in the U.S. and share broadly defined concerns that resonated with those expressed in the report from the Spellings Commission.

⁴⁶ Association of American Universities, *Survey of Undergraduate Education*, 2.

⁴⁷ "Addressing the Challenges Facing American Undergraduate Education, A Letter to Our Members: Next Steps," was disseminated widely; see online at <http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=18309&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm>.

As with the report from the Spellings Commission, this letter contained no direct reference to the general education component of the undergraduate curriculum. However, on the first page of the letter, the following list appeared. Presence on this list reflected an issue's status as a "challenge facing American undergraduate education." A swift glance at the list raises a number of interesting points relative to general education.

- Expanding college access to low-income and minority students
- Keeping college affordable
- Improving learning by utilizing new knowledge and instructional techniques
- Preparing secondary students for higher education
- Increasing accountability for educational outcomes
- Internationalizing the student experience
- Increasing opportunities for lifelong education and workforce training

Of the seven challenges listed, three (internationalizing the experience; improving learning through new knowledge and instructional techniques; and, increasing opportunities for lifelong education and workforce training) have direct implications for the goals of the general education component of the undergraduate curriculum. Additionally, recent research makes clear that the reform of general education programs is typically time consuming, expensive in both accounting costs and economic costs, and potentially divisive across stakeholder groups.⁴⁸ Therefore, any efforts that may result in a coherent vision of general education's goals, activities, and boundaries will benefit institutions searching for ways in which to increase efficiency and

⁴⁸ Association of American Colleges and Universities, *A New Vision For Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (Washington D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002); Ann Ferren and Ashby Kinch, "The Dollars and Sense behind General Education Reform," AACU *peerReview* (Summer 2003): 8-11; Ann Ferren and Rick Slavings, *Investing in Quality: Tools for Improving Curricular Efficiency* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2000).

effectiveness of this omnipresent aspect of their operations. Indeed, this key challenge directly contributes to the framing of the objectives for the current study.

In sum, the policy pressures and conversations, both internal and external to the institutions themselves, create a context that presents opportunity and challenge. Therefore, institutions individually, and the system of higher education as a whole, must find a principled way both to approach general education within their own contexts as well as to explain and expand upon the benefits that general education can provide to the individual and the society. Through such principled approaches general education may be effectively and efficiently pursued across the U.S. postsecondary landscape. In turn, general education may finally inform the national consciousness in a way that has not yet been accomplished. However, additional obstacles may impede the pursuit of principled general education reform. Among these obstacles can be included both market trends in the form of student consumerism and challenges inherent in institutional activities during a period of economic downturn.

Costs

While Robert Zemsky and Derek Bok have attended to the impact various marketization trends are having across higher education, David Riesman has focused in on a strand of market forces that is playing out in student consumerism. In his seminal work, *On Higher Education*, Riesman points out that the rise in student power, a.k.a. student consumerism, has directly impacted course offerings and programming at institutions of higher education, echoing concerns driving curricular reforms as far back as the late 1800s, in the debates between Charles Eliot and James McCosh over the desirability of allowing students freedom to construct their own programs of study.⁴⁹ Riesman argues that although competition to attract students should have

⁴⁹ For texts containing relevant perspectives, see James McCosh, “Academic Teaching in Europe,” in *Inauguration of James McCosh as President of The College of New Jersey, Princeton* (New York: Robert Carter and

led to development of stronger educational choices, the opposite appears to have occurred. As McCosh foretold in his debates with Eliot in the 1880s, the outcome Riesman identifies as unpredicted—a watered-down general education curriculum—lies in the differences between what students need and what they want. Although Riesman suggests that the curricula (including general education) should have strengthened as faculty and administrators pulled out all the stops to attract students with the best they had to offer, the fact that “best” came to be measured in terms of student wants rather than student (or societal) needs has proven to be the downfall of the strengthening of the core in any but the most progressive and/or secure institutions.⁵⁰

The challenge inherent in catering to student wants rather than needs was complicated, of course, by a feature of the higher education system that was not in place during the Eliot-McCosh years, but that was foreshadowed by Veblen in his concerns at the early tendencies among institutions of higher education to follow the forces of the emerging market.⁵¹ The potential for problems came to fruition in the 1970s, when student populations that were ill informed in the multiple ways in which higher education could serve them were also increasingly subjected to the pressures of credentialization.⁵² The combination of inexperienced student populations in pursuit of increasingly expensive credentials, in concert with state and regional intervention in curricular matters as well as national attention toward homogenization in the

Brothers, 1868), 35-96; James McCosh, *The New Departure in College Education: Being a Reply to President Eliot's Defence of It in New York, Feb. 24, 1885* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885); Charles Eliot, *Educational Reform, Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Company, 1901).

⁵⁰ David Riesman, *On Higher Education: The Academic Enterprise in an Era of Rising Student Consumerism* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

⁵¹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1918), particularly comments in “Introduction” and “Summary and Trial Balance.”

⁵² Cf. Ivar Berg, *Education for Jobs: The Great Training Robbery* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970); Randall Collins, *The Credential Society* (New York: Academic Press, 1979). For more recent discussions of the tension between public good and private benefit in higher education, see David Labaree, “Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle over Educational Goals,” *American Educational Research Journal* 34, no. 1 (Spring, 1997): 39-81, and Simon Marginson, “Higher Education and Public Good,” *Higher Education Quarterly* 64, no. 4, (Oct. 2011): 411-433.

service of accountability, quality, and affordability, set extremely complex objectives for reformers of general education to attain, especially in a context of competing understandings of what general education encompasses in purpose and in form.

The literature on espoused undergraduate mission demonstrates that, across institutional types, a common institutional priority is that of attention to undergraduate education.⁵³ In a majority of mission statements, this attention to undergraduate education focuses on the skills most often associated with the varying objectives of general education as they have been established over the 20th century. As a result, the general education curriculum is closely tied to the institutional mission—the locus of what are considered common foundational skills and knowledge for all undergraduates. In fact, arguably, no other effort to define the quality and character of the education to be offered at a given institution is more important than this one.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, determining an appropriate general education program to fit a given institution’s unique characteristics remains a meaningful challenge.

In the relatively diverse world of U.S. higher education, institutions struggle to differentiate themselves from one another while simultaneously maintaining sufficient similarity to compete for specific student populations.⁵⁵ As a public reflection of that process, institutional image is increasingly communicated to the public through mission statements, visions, and strategic plans, placed on institutional websites and communicated through marketing materials such as college view books.⁵⁶ The vast majority of these documents, across community colleges, liberal arts colleges, comprehensive universities, and even research powerhouses, inevitably

⁵³ Christopher Morphew and Mathew Hartley, “Mission Statements: A Thematic Analysis of Rhetoric Across Institutional Type,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 77, no. 2 (2006): 456-471.

⁵⁴ Carnegie Foundation, *Mission of the College Curriculum*.

⁵⁵ Riesman, *On Higher Education*.

⁵⁶ Morphew and Hartley, “Mission Statements”; Mathew Hartley and Christopher Morphew, “What’s Being Sold and To What End? A Content Analysis of College Viewbooks,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 79, no. 6 (November/December 2008): 671-691.

highlight some reference to the public and private purposes of higher education within the first few sentences of a mission. For example, in the list of the top three topics mentioned across baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral mission statements, Morphey and Hartley report the presence of references to the instillation of “values,” enhancement of “diversity,” attention to development of “leadership” as well as “civic duty,” and “preparation for the world,” each of which has at one or more times in the history of higher education been associated with the goals of general education.

General education’s presence across the landscape of U.S. higher education coupled with its resistance to containment within a single model means that the reform of general education, as a lived experience of the undergraduate mission, is a high-stakes endeavor. Clearly, multiple forces at work in higher education, from calls for accountability to requirements for articulation to demands of student consumerism, have had and will continue to have both positive and negative effects on the direction of curricular reform, including that associated with general education.⁵⁷ In the current context of calls for efficiency, responsiveness, and accountability, the luxury of mistakes in reform efforts is one that neither individual institutions nor higher education systems can afford. In the section that follows, the urgent need for principles to guide general education design and reform is made even stronger through consideration of the costs of reform of general education, whether it is done well or poorly.

In an atmosphere in which commissions and committees are interested in heightening efficiency and the quality of the undergraduate educational experience, the amount of time, energy, and funding that institutions spend on their various activities assumes an increasing significance and potential for opening the institution up to criticism. In addition, among the

⁵⁷ Derek Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003); Robert Zemsky, *Making Reform Work: The Case for Transforming American Higher Education* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009); David Riesman, *On Higher Education*.

plethora of options on which institutions might choose to deploy their resources, the choice to reform general education, occurring over and over again across all institutional types, not only speaks to the relative weight the institutions are placing on the importance of this curricular area or activity system but also illustrates the significant loss failure to reform could represent if institutions are forced to make other strategic choices.⁵⁸ Although the resources dedicated to reform general education across the institutional types may vary in real terms, the great promise and relative drain that such reform represents at all institutions, whether private or public – elite or open access – is clearly a significant pressure facing higher education institutions.

Privates

Private universities populate the history of general education revision and reform. From Columbia to Stanford, Chicago to Harvard, the battles that raged over form, function and structure of general education are well documented in books, articles and institutional archives.⁵⁹ One particular institutional record in reform of general education, however, is often held up as both a model to emulate and an example of the excess of time and energy spent in the pursuit of an effective general education curriculum – the reform efforts of Harvard University.

Over the course of the past sixty years, the senior administration and faculty at Harvard University have reviewed and revised the general education curriculum no fewer than three times, involving a total of no fewer than fifteen of those sixty years. The initial review, begun in 1944, was the most comprehensive in scope (addressing the questions of form, function, and content of education across the entire educational spectrum, from K-16 and beyond). Ironically, it was also the shortest of the three revisions. This review, culminating with the publication of

⁵⁸ For a discussion of potential impacts of the 2008 economic downturn, see Christine M. Keller, *Coping Strategies of Public Universities during the Economic Recession of 2009: Results of a Survey on the Impact of the Financial Crisis on University Campuses* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2009).

⁵⁹ Cf. Harvard, *General Education*; Bell, *The Reforming of General Education*.

the widely read *General Education in a Free Society*, encompassed from the time of the charge to implementation in the university catalog approximately seven years (with the charge being issued by President Conant in 1944 and the implementation for incoming undergraduates occurring with the Class of 1952).⁶⁰

In the 1970s, then-president Derek Bok charged the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Henry Rosovsky, with assembling a task force to review and revise Harvard's general education curriculum. Beginning with the charge in 1972, the Task Force on the Core Curriculum met across most of the decade before producing the *1978 Report on the Core Curriculum*. Implementation of the recommended reforms began with the Class of 1982, ten years after the initial charge had been made. In the most recent review undertaken at Harvard, rumblings suggesting the need for such a reform can be traced to the late 1990s, with a formal charge issued in 2002 and the results reported initially in 2006, rebuffed by interim president Derek Bok, revisited and resubmitted in final form, *Report of the Task Force on General Education*, in 2007. Again, implementation of the new curriculum did not occur until two years later, with the incoming Class of 2009.

Harvard is not the only private institution whose general education reform efforts have attracted attention in the first decade of the 21st century. Having not revisited the general education established as part of the institutional Master Plan of 1963, the administration at Southern Methodist University charged a General Education Review Committee with the responsibility of reviewing the general education curriculum over the course of AY 2008-2009, generating a proposal to be submitted to the provost by April 2009. The timeline for implementation included a period for review and approval by the "appropriate governing bodies" in Fall 2009, with additional revision and finalization of policies (accomplished through

⁶⁰ Harvard, *General Education*.

meetings by newly established committees) with the assumption of catalog publication and full implementation in Fall 2011. At Southern Methodist, the discussions, meetings, and debates spanned three years, from charge (Fall 2008) to implementation (Fall 2011). In addition, the committee membership numbered twenty, including faculty, staff, students, and administrators, who met no fewer than eighteen times over the course of the two-year timeframe. On average, the meetings lasted for no less than an hour, with a minimum of 360 man-hours committed to the meetings portion of the first-stage planning process in AY 2009-2010.⁶¹ Considering the commitment of time and energy to meetings and the work of designing and implementing a new curricular program, costs both direct and indirect inevitably mount.

Indirect costs, including opportunity costs, measured through time commitment to reform are not limited to formal meetings and the actual work involved in outlining and establishing a new general education curriculum, nor assessed only in time spent dedicated to visible work on the review. For example, Harvard produced a formidable site dedicated to archiving the materials associated with their latest review of general education, ranging from committee reports to vodcasts of invited guest speakers to a compilation of invited articles by Harvard faculty reflecting on the challenges and benefits of the process and of the core curriculum itself.⁶² This website serves not only to provide insight into the staggering resources dedicated to the reform of general education but also as a model towards which many institutional committees may cast their eyes but few, if any, can replicate.

⁶¹ For access to numerous documents, including blog entries, recording the general education revision at SMU, see <http://smu.edu/gec/index.asp>.

⁶² For the current Harvard core curriculum, see <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=core>. For an overview of the latest reforms at Harvard, see <http://www.generaleducation.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k37826&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup116510>.

Publics

Private institutions like Harvard and Southern Methodist University are not the only universities to spend extraordinary levels of time and energy in reform of general education curricula. Within the past five years, numerous public universities have responded to the challenge, many indicating an interest in solidifying their institutional mission and ensuring that they are providing a solid foundation for undergraduate education at their colleges and universities. One of the most widely lauded, and emulated, general education reforms by a public university in recent memory occurred at Portland State University in the 1990s. Renowned for its breadth and innovativeness, the Portland State University reform inspired dedication of a special issue of *JGE* to its efforts.

While not documented quite as thoroughly online as are the most recent Harvard reforms, a review of the Portland State reform reveals the comprehensive nature of the effort, representing a four-year time span from charge to implementation and including a recurring program evaluation component that is becoming increasingly common among recently reformed general education models. A cursory review of the general education reform procedures at a variety of other institutions, from Appalachian State University to Northern Illinois University to Kansas State University and the University of Nevada—Las Vegas, reveals that the four-year time commitment at Portland State is not unusual among the publics.⁶³ Indeed, the Kansas State initiative, called the K-State 8 General Education Program, encompassed several working groups (involving over 75 students, staff, and faculty) across five years of planning.⁶⁴ In the case of the

⁶³ For examples of recent efforts in general education design and reform, see Appalachian State University, http://www1.appstate.edu/orgs/gen_ed/; Kansas State University, <http://www.k-state.edu/cat1/GenEd/>; Portland State University, <http://www.pdx.edu/unst/>; University of Maryland, <http://www.senate.umd.edu/taskforces/gened/index.cfm>; University of Milwaukee, http://www4.uwm.edu/acad_aff/gened_taskforce/index.cfm; University of Nevada – Las Vegas, <http://generaled.unlv.edu/>.

⁶⁴ <http://www.k-state.edu/kstate8/>

University of Maryland task force, although the entire reform process involved only a single calendar year, the 19-member task force itself met weekly during that period.⁶⁵ Representing a breadth of timeframes, these examples nonetheless illustrate the significant time and effort committed to reform among the publics.

Taken together, the examples of Portland State, a public regional university facing the constraints in curriculum that accompany that institutional type, and Harvard, a private elite that can afford to address the challenges of time, interest, and energy, illustrate both the potential of the reform of general education and its costs.⁶⁶ For the vast majority of institutions undertaking the task of reforming a curricular component that may have no clear purpose, structure, or even content but that may well represent the key to many institutional dreams, successful reform will force a re-visioning of what and how general education can exist within its specific context. While static models of general education as templates would clearly be inappropriate, operationalized principles that are sufficiently robust, clearly flexible, and supported in current scholarship and research would contribute greatly towards the increase of efficiency and effectiveness in general education reform.⁶⁷ In the end, the challenge of achieving appropriate, robust design and implementation in the face of insufficient resources and buy-in may prove overwhelming for institutions facing the necessity of general education reform.

The Challenge

As demonstrated in this chapter, pressures motivating institutions to consider reform of their general education programs have originated in national, regional, and state education bodies

⁶⁵ See <http://www.gened.umd.edu/>

⁶⁶ For a general discussion of the opportunity costs associated with general education design and reform, see also Ferren and Kinch, "Dollars and Sense."

⁶⁷ Consider consistent reference to the need for unique institutional mission in general education design expressed everywhere from the regional accreditation agencies to state commissions on higher education to scholarship reviewing differentiation of general education models and missions across institutional types. See also Jerry Gaff, "Avoiding the Potholes: Strategies for Revising General Education," *Educational Record* 61, no 4 (1980): 50-59.

as well as professional organizations concerned with issues of articulation, accountability, and efficiency. In addition, trends in student consumerism have added an element of pressure as institutions must strive to convince students and their families of the relevance and value of a postsecondary education. These external pressures alone create a challenging context for innovative reform. Coupled with the inherent costs of major reform to a curriculum that is intimately entwined with multiple if not all departments on a college campus and that necessarily involves significant commitments of time and energy from administration, staff, and faculty, the pressures create a context in which reform becomes a high-stakes endeavor. Unfortunately, this endeavor often plays out in institutions where general education may have languished untended for decades, or worse—where it has been a battleground for departments seeking to repulse what they have perceived as forays into the sanctity of their disciplinary domains.

Research investigating ways in which to address the challenges of reform in general education has ranged from case studies of successful and unsuccessful reforms to large-scale surveys regarding the desirability and character of general education reform.⁶⁸ The plethora of scholarship evaluating general education design and reform efforts speaks to the challenges and diversity inherent in the process.⁶⁹ Research reveals that constraints adhere within the unique cultures and internal character of each institution as well as in the associated challenges in

⁶⁸ Cf. Gaff, *General Education Today, Strong Foundations, General Education: The Changing Agenda, New Life*; Bell, *Reforming of General Education*; William Toombs, Marilyn Amey, and Alexander Chen, "General Education: An Analysis of Contemporary Practice," *The Journal of General Education* 40 (1991): 102-118; Vardaman Smith, Bruce Brunton, Andrew Kohen, Cynthia Gilliatt, John Klippert, and Caroline Marshall, "General Education Reform: Thinking Critically about Substance and Process," *The Journal of General Education* 50, no. 2 (2001): 85-101.

⁶⁹ Cf. Eugene Arden, "A Hard New Look at the Old Core Curriculum," *The Journal of General Education* 31, no. 3 (1979): 143-150. Sandra Kanter, Zelda Gamson, and Howard London, "The Implementation of General Education: Some Early Findings," *The Journal of General Education* 40 (1991): 119-132. Robert R. Newton, "Tensions and Models in General Education Planning," *The Journal of General Education* 49, no. 3 (2000): 165-181. Mary Kathryn Tetreault and Terrel Rhodes, "Institutional Changes as Scholarly Work: General Education Reform at Portland State University," *The Journal of General Education* 53, no. 2 (2004): 81-106.

attempting a one-size-fits-all approach to curriculum reform across institutions.⁷⁰ Rather than leading to clarity in terms of best practices in general education reform, research often highlights the complexities of curriculum reform within individual institutions when considering their varied cultures and missions.

The importance of institutional culture and mission when considering curriculum reform has been highlighted by numerous scholars from the latter half of the 20th century into the first decade of the 21st. As early as 1980, Gaff commented on the inadvisability of what would today be considered a “benchmarking for best practices” approach to general education reform efforts.⁷¹ As awareness of the relevance on institutional culture and the uniqueness of each institutional context on curricular design and change has increased, it has become clear that even modification of the “one-size” model to a “one-size-fits-all-institutions-of-this-type” model encounters inevitable obstacles, as what may work for one research university or liberal arts college may not work for another.⁷² The challenge remains regarding how to approach reform of general education in the 21st century as institutions contend with the challenges of policies and costs while simultaneously facing the tensions arising from their own idiosyncratic internal structures and constraints.

To gain insights from a group of scholars best situated to speak to useful trends in general education design as well as to ameliorate the challenges inherent in attempting general education design and reform through best practices or benchmarking, the current study focused on an

⁷⁰ Brian Bourke, Nathaniel Bray, and C. C. Horton, “Approaches to the Core Curriculum: An Exploratory Analysis of Top Liberal Arts and Doctoral-Granting Institutions,” *The Journal of General Education* 58, no. 4 (2009): 219-240. Darrell Warner and Katie Koeppel, “General Education Requirements: A Comparative Analysis,” *The Journal of General Education* 58, no. 4 (2009): 241-258. Willis Jones, “General Education Assessment at Private Historically Black Colleges and Universities: An Exploratory Study,” *The Journal of General Education* 59, no. 1 (2010): 1-16.

⁷¹ Gaff, “Avoiding the Potholes,” 50.

⁷² Cf. Kenneth Boning, “Coherence in General Education: A Historical Look,” *The Journal of General Education* 56, no. 1 (2007): 1-16. Also, Bourke, Bray and Horton, “Approaches to the Core Curriculum” as well as Warner and Koeppel, “General Education Requirements,” and Jones, “General Education Assessment.”

under-utilized method in qualitative research: the documentary study. Specifically, the current study analyzes scholarship during the modern period of general education reform, 1990-2011. The analysis resulted in the identification of dominant thematic trends reflecting priorities within general education itself. The study then reviews potential uses of the thematic trends as organizational principles to guide general education design and reform across all institutional contexts. The identification of such organizational principles clearly stands to benefit administrators and faculty as well as the students and societies they serve. The following research questions motivated the design and implementation of the study itself.

The Questions

The questions guiding the current study investigating the general education problem in U.S. higher education at the transition from the 20th to the 21st century included the following. What does the national scholarly discourse reveal regarding dominant thematic trends in general education within U.S. higher education between 1991-2011? To what extent do these thematic trends resonate with the 20th century paradigm of general education? What practical implications might such dominant thematic trends and the 20th century paradigm have relative to general education design and reform for the 21st century?

The Plan

The current study proceeded along the following path in order to answer the key research questions presented above. In Chapter 1, the challenges motivating the current study were presented. Following a discussion of the policy and market pressures, the potential costs of the reform of general education in the current period were reviewed. The challenges inherent in benchmarking and best practices as methods for approaching such reform were presented,

followed by a description of an alternative approach in the form of documentary study. Finally, the key questions and plan motivating the design of the current study were presented.

Chapter 2 begins with a brief overview of general education literature with a focus on the contemporary period to set the stage both for the selection of the primary data source for the study and to illustrate major threads that characterized general education and its design across the 20th century. Next, the selection of a 20th century paradigmatic framework for general education is discussed relative to general education as a field.⁷³ The result of a critical and historical review of dominant trends in general education across the 20th century, Miller's general education paradigm comprised three principles as core to general education as it moved into the 21st century: self-consciousness, comprehensiveness, and democratization.⁷⁴ The framework serves as a construct for interpreting thematic trends identified and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Finally, a review of the literature on the potential of both documentary study as a qualitative method and scholarly literature as a source of insight into organizational principles within disciplines and fields of study is presented.

Chapter 3 discusses the selection of *JGE* as the sole scholarly source used in the current study. The chapter then reviews the challenges inherent in documentary study, with specific attention paid to the potential biases represented by the researcher herself. Finally, given the interpretive nature of the work, the chapter ends with a discussion of the benefits this type of qualitative analysis offers for the current study.

⁷³ Miller, *The Meaning of General Education*.

⁷⁴ Note that Miller's terms were *self-consciousness* (or purposefulness), *comprehensiveness*, and the *democratic context within which general education exists*. For reasons of symmetry in expression, I have chosen to use *democratization* as the term to reference the more complex noun phrase. Although *democratization* is an evolving term, I use it here in Giroux' sense of a pedagogy of democratization as it plays out in the multicultural movement. For a discussion of Giroux' notion, see Henry Giroux, "Critical Pedagogy and the Postmodern/Modern Divide: Towards a Pedagogy of Democratization," *Teacher Education Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 37-47.

In Chapter 4, the complexities of the coding processes and their results are presented. Discussion of the analysis includes a breakdown of descriptors, themes, and patterns across the two-stage coding process. Results are considered in light of Miller's paradigmatic framework for 20th century general education.

In Chapter 5, discussion of findings focuses on explication of three dominant thematic trends in *JGE* scholarship, consideration of the resonance of those trends with Miller's paradigmatic principles, and the potential uses of the dominant thematic trends as organizational principles in general education reform efforts in the 21st century.

In Chapter 6, a review of the implications of the findings reported in Chapter 5 is discussed, along with the limitations of the study itself. Recommendations are made for praxis, policy, and future research. Finally, ways in which the study may contribute to the resolution of tensions between stability and responsiveness in general education design are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW ON GENERAL EDUCATION, PARADIGM SETTING, AND DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH

As noted in Chapter 1, Boyer and Levine described general education as the “spare room” of the undergraduate curriculum, a metaphorical space to be filled with whatever the tenants chose in a season—to be used in whatever fashion seemed appropriate at a given moment: a guest bedroom for visiting courses, or a sewing room in which to stitch together a ragbag of course remnants from earlier curricular reforms.¹ Add to these concerns Schneider’s recent description of general education as “... an orphan curriculum, fragmented and incoherent.”² Not only, then, is general education a complex construct to be considered from multiple angles relative to the target institutional context in which it will be incorporated, but also it is a complex construct impacted by multiple constraints that require an enormous amount of time, energy, and funding, to handle successfully.

Scholars over the past century have presented competing perspectives on the mission, content, and structure of general education. In the earlier half of the century, scholars debated the purpose and content of general education from both philosophical and practical perspectives.³ In the latter quarter of the 20th century, those debates continued apace.⁴ Most recently, even though

¹ Boyer and Levine, *A Quest for Common Learning*, 3.

² Carol Schneider, “Liberal Education: Slip-Sliding Away?” in *Declining by Degrees: Higher Education at Risk*, eds. Richard Hersh and John Merrow (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 69.

³ Cf. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916); Robert Maynard Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936); Jose Ortega y Gasset, *Mission of the University* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1944); Harvard, “Red Book”; Bell, *Reforming General Education*; Task Force on the Core Curriculum, *Report on the Core Curriculum* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1977); Russell Thomas, *The Search for a Common Learning: General Education, 1800-1960* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1962).

⁴ Boyer and Levine, *A Quest for Common Learning*; Dinesh D’Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: The Free Press, 1991); Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New

consensus appears to be that the reform of general education is desirable, even essential, notable challenges face faculty and administrators who are attempting to undertake revision and reform to meet the needs of higher education in the global context in the 21st century.⁵ As Case noted in his discussion of the challenges inherent in any curricular reform “an educational reform will not remedy an identified problem if it succeeds in only a relatively small sector of the community. Our efforts will continue to meet with limited success until we improve our collective ability to conceptualize and operationalize educational initiatives.”⁶ In his discussion, Case highlights not only operational but also conceptual challenges faced by curricular reform. He also makes the case that such reforms are meaningless unless they have the potential to be implemented beyond the individual institution. Therefore, the requisite first step is to conceptualize potential educational initiatives beyond the level of the individual institution while maintaining adaptability to meet the needs at the level of the individual institution. By reviewing the tensions that have played out in general education across the 20th century, this literature review will contextualize emergent thematic trends that may be observed as general education entered the 21st century.

As various pressures on higher education at large intensify, the demands on general education increase; functions assigned to general education multiply. Effectiveness in meeting these functional demands, coupled with efficiency in structure and delivery, are guiding constraints on successful implementation, creating a challenging environment for administrators

York: Simon & Schuster, 1987); Lawrence Levine, *The Opening of the American Mind: Canons and Culture and History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); Boyer, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education*; Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas*.

⁵ See for example the discussion in Terrel Rhodes, “Since We Agree: Why are the Outcomes so Difficult to Achieve?” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 121, no. 3 (2010): 13-21; Larry Cuban, “Curriculum Stability and Change,” in *Handbook for Research on Curriculum: A Project of the American Educational Research Association*, ed. Philip Jackson (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 216-247.

⁶ Roland Case, “Our Crude Handling of Educational Reforms: The Case of Curricular Integration,” *Canadian Journal of Education* 19, no. 1 (1994): 81.

and faculty who are attempting revision or reform. They know it needs to be done; however, logistical planning and implementation in a context in which multiple constituencies are pressuring for increased efficiency and accountability represent what could be termed Extreme Curriculum Planning. Therefore, in assessing resonance among potential organizational principles and dominant conceptual themes in general education, it is hoped that a robust framework can be identified that will allow for design and reform in general education to overcome these types of inherent challenges, on a large scale—to identify resonance that reflects the potential resolution of the often competing worlds of the theory and praxis in a way that will be both stable on the large scale and remain flexible at the institutional levels.⁷ Towards this end, the current chapter considers major tensions in general education, reviews approaches to identifying organizational principles, and presents a paradigmatic framework from which to expand potential organizational principles to guide the design and reform of general education programs in the 21st century.

General Education: The Periods

One objective in the current study is to determine whether dominant thematic trends in general education are identifiable in the core scholarship, with an eye towards considering such trends as potential organizing principles for the guidance of general education reform. Such trends can be presumed to reflect ongoing tensions as the field prioritizes issues and concerns with which scholars wrestle in an attempt to move the field forward. To inform interpretation of tensions that may drive the emergence of such thematic trends in the current literature, it is helpful to review such tensions across the modern history of general education within the U.S. higher education system. Given the current study's focus on the transition from the 20th to 21st

⁷ Larry Cuban, "Managing Dilemmas While Building Professional Communities," *Educational Researcher* 21, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1992): 4-11.

century, this review of the literature covers two earlier periods but prioritizes discussion of general education in the past 30 years.

By convention, since the early 1900s, cycles of general education design and reform have been broken into 20-25 year timeframes.⁸ Therefore, the following overview of tensions in general education will be broken into three commonly identified eras in the modern general education movement: 1945-1969, 1970-1989, 1990-present. Those periods roughly correspond to the three timeframes in which it is agreed that curricular reform in general education was particularly active—marked by increasing activity in the early years of each period and by calls for renewed efforts at reform in the latter years of each period.

Early Period: 1945-1969

The early period of literature relevant to the current study marks a time that included the initial publication of *JGE*, a memorable revision of Harvard’s general education curriculum—accompanied by the publication of *General Education in a Free Society* (the “Red Book”) and the publication of several treatises, monographs, and books on the role of higher education, generally, and general education, specifically.⁹ Key tensions of the time can be readily seen in the debates over the purpose and organization of general education as they played out in seminal

⁸ Bell, *The Reforming of General Education*; Thomas, *The Search for a Common Learning*; Boning, “Coherence in General Education.” Note Thomas’ divisions in the 19th and into the 20th century follow a similar pattern of slightly longer 35-year time spans. Timeframes are typically associated with the periods from 1915-1945 (the initial period), 1946-1969 (the first reform period), 1970-1989 (the second reform period), and 1990-2011 (the latest reform period).

⁹ Cf. National Society for the Study of Education, *The Fifty-First Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education: General Education*, ed. Nelson Henry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); Chapter VIII in Richard Hofstadter and C. DeWitt Hardy, *The Development and Scope of Higher Education in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 206-226. For a discussion of higher education in the larger sociopolitical context, see Educational Policies Commission, *Higher Education in a Decade of Decision* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association of the United States, 1957); U.S. President's Commission on Higher Education, *Higher Education for American Democracy, A Report, Vols. 1-6* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947); W. Todd Furniss, ed., *Higher Education for Everybody? Issues and Implications* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1971). For discussions of the role of higher education in relation to its research mission as well as an overview of relevant sociopolitical issues, see James Forest and Kevin Kinser, *Higher Education in the United States: An Encyclopedia*. (California: ABC-CLIO, 2002) and Cuban, “Curriculum Stability and Change.”

works from the late 1940s through the 1960s. Of those tensions, two are most commonly found throughout the literature: general education versus specialized education; and, liberal education versus general education.

First, scholarship reflected the need to distinguish between what was termed “general education” and “specialized education” in the postsecondary context. For example, on the one hand in the 1945 Harvard “Red Book,” general education was described as “that part of a student’s whole education which looks first of all to his life as a citizen and a responsible human being” while specialized education was characterized as “that part [of an education] which looks to the student’s competence in some occupation.”¹⁰ Clearly, the distinction being drawn between general education and specialized education in this period speaks to the tension between what has often been termed the public good (service to society as a member of the educated citizenry) and the private good (benefit accruing to the individual through his/her development of career-oriented skills), with the former associated with general education and the latter with specialized education (the disciplines or professions). As later scholarship will reveal, this alignment of general education with the public good as against specialized education for the private good becomes increasingly fuzzy as the 20th century comes to a close. Further, the demands of preparation for each arena become increasingly fuzzy as the skills required for an educated citizenry and those required for productive roles in a knowledge economy appear to merge.

A second tension in this early period existed in the space between the definition of general education and that of liberal education. This tension played out in the early period in debates among scholars arguing that general education is “to preserve the ancient ideals of liberal education and to extend it as far as possible for the masses” juxtaposed against those who argued in favor of general education in insuring that the individual be “knowledgeable about the culture

¹⁰ Harvard, *General Education*, 51.

of which he is a part [but] never merely ‘well-informed,’” suggesting instead that the individual also remain “tolerant around the beliefs of others because he respects sincerity and is not afraid of ideas.”¹¹ The tensions are approached from another perspective in a classic debate between Bode and Demos, grounded in their respective interpretations of the claims of the “Red Book.” Bode, in his initial response to the publication of the “Red Book” finds within the text a tendency to value the past as ideal and to prioritize reason and faith over empiricism. Both are claims that Demos rejects—characterizing the “Red Book” view of the past as perspective, not as absolute good against which to assess contemporary thought or action, and its view of reason and faith as complementary to empiricism in a call for balance among ways of knowing.¹² As later scholarship reveals, the interpretation of general education as a bastion of classical liberal education comes under increasing scrutiny in light of the growth of the multiculturalism ideology of the late 20th century.

In the later years of this early period, e.g. 1960-1969, scholars revisited the challenges of general education reform in light of the multiple social and political changes of the 1950s and the emerging interest in universities as centers of developing sociopolitical thought and activism. Debates reflecting the earlier tensions between general and specialized education as well as between liberal and general education are often couched in essays highlighting the lack of clarity regarding both higher education as well as general education. Walker, for example, connects the advent of the increasingly varied general education models to a failure in defining general

¹¹ *General Education in School and College: A Committee Report by Members of the Faculties of Andover, Exeter, Lawrenceville, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 20.

¹² Boyd Bode, “Review: The Harvard Report,” *The Journal of General Education* 17, no. 1 (1946): 1-8; Boyd Bode, “The Harvard Report Once More,” *The Journal of Higher Education*, 17, no. 4 (1946): 201-204+206; Raphael Demos, “Mr. Bode and the Harvard Report on Education,” *The Journal of General Education* 17, no. 2 (1946): 57-62+114.

education itself.¹³ Similarly, Weisinger criticized general education, as a movement, for pursuit of epistemological synthesis with neither sufficient attention to requisite intellectual rigor nor appropriate modifications to adapt an education for the relatively homogenous elite to fit the preparedness and goals of the heterogeneous masses.¹⁴ Characterizing higher education of the time as a conglomerate of remedial courses, job-training courses, and ad hoc courses responding to the whims of faculty interests, Weisinger calls for a revision of higher education itself, with general education to be included only insofar as it contributes to the development of the intellect. Complementing Weisinger's criticism and in line with Walker's assertion of the need for a definition of general education, Bell characterized general education as "education in the conduct and strategy of inquiry itself."¹⁵ A treatment of general education through the case of Columbia University, Bell's reflections on general education reform stand as a reminder of the emerging interest in learning to know in the dynamic sense rather than learning knowledge in a more static sense, as he noted the relevance of the knowledge revolution that would place increasing demands on innovative thinking and creativity.¹⁶ The dichotomy represented by static, absolutist knowledge (whether in terms of inculcation to the disciplines or the professions) versus dynamic, contextualized knowing (reflecting a subordinate but omnipresent theme in general education) becomes increasingly compelling as the 20th century draws to a close and the demands of a knowledge economy within a global context intensify. In the intervening period, accommodating heterogeneous student populations amid escalating credentialization and growing social complexity provides further challenges for the general education movement.

¹³ K. Walker, "Problems in General Education in State-Supported Colleges," *The Journal of General Education* 13 (1961): 128-144.

¹⁴ Herbert Weisinger, "In Criticism of General Education," *The Journal of General Education* 15, no. 3 (1963): 161-174.

¹⁵ Bell, *The Reforming of General Education*, 157.

¹⁶ Bell, *The Reforming of General Education*.

Middle Period: 1970-1989

Despite clearly identifiable concerns regarding the structure and purpose of general education during the early period, actual general education reform saw a decline in the later years of the 1960s. As a result, the middle period in the current study is so defined to correlate with increasing dialog on general education that occurred in the early 1970s. Confirming scholarly concerns expressed in the 1960s, deBary characterized the current state of the field as “[a] creeping crisis from the neglect and erosion of general education in the last decade or so.”¹⁷ As general education reforms found new life, tensions remained from the earlier period and new issues, reflecting pressures external to the institutions, were confronted.

Again, sociopolitical context cannot be separated from growing concerns regarding the roles of higher education as well as those of general education. Some concerns remain in common with those of the earlier period, as the role of the universities in the broad sociopolitical discourse was debated. Concerns regarding the need for responsiveness to contemporary concerns, often framed relative to the state of the liberal arts at the time, could equally well be applied to the state of general education caught between the industrial age and the post-industrial revolution.¹⁸ Additionally, universities’ accessibility for diverse student populations was challenged, and they came under scrutiny for the eagerness of their response to a period of generous research funding in light of what was perceived as a lack of similar eagerness in their attention to the undergraduate educational mission.¹⁹

¹⁷ William Theodore deBary, “General Education and the University Crisis,” in *The Philosophy of the Curriculum: The Need for General Education*, eds. Sidney Hook, Paul Kurtz, and Milo Todorovich (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1975), 3.

¹⁸ E. Shoben, Jr., “The Liberal Arts and Contemporary Society: The 1970s,” *Liberal Education* 56 (1970): 28-38.

¹⁹ Forest and Kinser, *Encyclopedia*, 467-470. For a discussion of the exponential growth in federal research funding during this period, and potential implications for undergraduate education and general education, see Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, 51, and Chris Roe, “Research Funding,” in *Higher Education in the United States: An Encyclopedia*, eds. J. F. Forest and Kevin Kinser (California: ABC-CLIO, 2002), 527-531.

In the middle period, tensions foreshadowed in the earlier period continued apace. A wave of credentialization heightened prioritization of the professions to the detriment of concerns for general education other than as it could serve the preparation of the individual for a quality of life framed in terms of the private good.²⁰ On the other hand, highly respected scholars such as Ernest Boyer and Arthur Levine called for a core curriculum focused the public good, on addressing issues critical for society's progress and stability.²¹ In addition, as disciplinary specialization in the academy intensified, interest in diversity of perspective in a post-structuralist sociocultural context raised challenges to the usefulness of a core curriculum identified as parochial and out of touch with the concerns of a postmodern world, and one that failed to take advantage of the opportunities that the burgeoning research mission should have represented for the core undergraduate mission of the institutions.²²

As the relatively more straightforward and definitive industrial, mechanistic, modernist, structuralist frameworks began to give way to complex, information-based, post-modernist, critical frameworks, so the skill sets and knowledge needed by and expected of students exiting postsecondary institutions continued to expand in complexity.²³ The once clearly drawn lines between the roles of general education and specialized education blurred as did the distinctions among skill sets for the public and private purposes the two curriculum components represented. In the transition from the 20th century to the 21st—the late period of general education—the impact of the tensions of the previous periods would be clearly felt: diverse student populations

²⁰ See discussions in Berg, *Education for Jobs*, and Collins, *The Credential Society*.

²¹ Boyer and Levine, *A Quest for Common Learning*.

²² For a discussion of the emerging interest in relevant concerns regarding the role of general education, see Zelda Gamson, *Liberating Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984). Regarding the responsibility for general education in research universities, see reflections in Harry Boyte and Elizabeth Hollander, *Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University* (Michigan: University of Michigan Center for Community Service and Learning, 1999), available online at http://www.compact.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/wingspread_declaration.pdf.

²³ Bruce Dearing, "General Education and Radical Social Change," *The Journal of General Education* 24, no. 3 (1972): 139-143.

required responsive curricula both to understand the complexity of their perspectives and to prepare them for the academy; the rapidity of knowledge evolution required comprehensive awareness and engagement in service to both society and the professions; and the sheer growth of information and technology necessitated the development of active skills of comprehension, production, and problem-solving.

Late Period: 1990-2011

In its earliest instantiations, general education was often identified with three fundamental purposes: providing common foundational skills among diverse student populations (often associated with humanist and pragmatic ideologies); training students in the epistemologies and modes of inquiry of the disciplines and professions they were to enter (diversely associated with scholar-academic and utilitarian ideologies); and acculturating the individuals to the expectations and demands of the sociocultural and political environment in which they were to participate as educated members upon graduation (associated with traditional liberal education and citizenship ideologies). Although there is no one-to-one mapping of purpose to ideology, these three purposes have been, variously, expressed in the four curricular ideologies of instrumentalism, humanism, pragmatism, and progressivism. Further, given the complexity of general education as movement versus program, the four primary ideologies themselves are realized in one of three common general education models: Great Books, Scholarly Inquiry, and Effective Citizenship.²⁴ The curricular structures through which the

²⁴ For a review of curricular ideologies of the 20th century, see Michael Schiro, *Curriculum Theory: Conflicting Visions and Enduring Concerns* (California: Sage Publications, 2007); Herbert Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893 - 1958*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004); Elizabeth Vallance, "A Second Look at Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum," *Theory into Practice* 25, no. 1 (1986): 24-30; Craig Howard, *Theories of General Education: A Critical Approach* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992); Hook, Kurtz, and Todorovich, *The Philosophy of the Curriculum*; Joseph Katz, *New Vitality in General Education* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1987); Jerry Gaff, *General Education Today: A Critical Analysis of Controversies, Practices, and Reforms* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

ideological purposes were approached included the core, the distributive, and the hybrid.²⁵ The complexities in relation of purpose to ideology to model to structure have been seen alternately as reflecting changes inherent in the sociocultural contexts within which general education functioned as well as to the pressures of which general education responded.²⁶ From a tension between the public and private good across general and specialized education, challenges have moved to addressing the conflation of the associated skills within both curricular areas. Where tensions initially focused between acculturation to a core grounded in classical liberal arts versus exposure to a breadth of issues aligned with contemporary concerns, challenges have moved to addressing the roles of both breadth and depth, acknowledging the benefits of exposure to both classic liberal arts and the benefits of situating any such exposure within the contemporary context defined by current social, political, and economic challenges. A review of recent studies evaluating general education design and reform efforts provides additional insights into the current state of the field in this late period.

The most recent timeframe, 1990-2011, existed in concert with a renewed period of general education reform, this time marked by the efforts at a public research university on the west coast: Portland State University, and in close association with increasing scrutiny of the role

²⁵ Consider Elizabeth Jones and James Ratcliff, "Which General Education Curriculum is Better: Core Curriculum or Distributional Requirement?" *The Journal of General Education* 40 (1991): 69-101; Jerry Gaff and Anna Wasescha, "Assessing the Reform of General Education," *The Journal of General Education* 40 (1991): 51-68; Sylvia Hurtado, Alexander Astin, and Eric Dey, "Varieties of General Education Programs: An Empirically-Based Taxonomy," *The Journal of General Education* 40 (1991): 133-162; Steven Brint, Robert Hanneman, Scott Patrick Murphy, Kristopher Proctor and Lori Turk-Bicakci, "General Education Models: Continuity and Change in the U.S. Undergraduate Curriculum, 1975-2000," *Journal of Higher Education* 80, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 2009): 605-642, (models include diverse, personalized/individual, integrative, interdisciplinary core/major-dominated); Richard Clewett, "A General Education Focus for the Coming Years" *The Journal of General Education* 47, no. 4 (1998): 265-281, (purposes include imparting tacit knowledge, tapping into critical thinking and impart disciplines/theories/cognitive skills, and tapping into comprehensiveness/interdisciplinary at the level of the particular program); for more in-depth discussion of models across specific institutions, see Bourke, Bray, and Horton, "Approaches to the Core Curriculum," (models include "Great Books, Scholarly Discourse, Effective Citizen").

²⁶ Boning, "Coherence."

of general education at research universities across the nation.²⁷ In this period, interest in areas of general education continued from the middle period, including: multicultural education, literacies, technology, even engineering. In addition, consideration of potential ties between research and core functions of general education was increasingly apparent in the literature.²⁸ Finally, the complexity of each aspect of general education became clear: from the skills required for communication and thought, to content as reflection of assumed epistemological and cognitive frameworks, to the very sociocultural contexts within which the universities functioned.

Recent studies reviewing reform in individual institutions present a number of interesting findings regarding trends in general education. For example, Newton, in his review of general education planning, posited that the revision committees are often underprepared for the complexity of their tasks, identifying four key areas with which committees should be prepared to wrestle: knowledge, learning, faculty competence, and content.²⁹ In addition, Newton identified three key models of general education that he posited as templates for committees considering the design or reform of general education: Great Books, Scholarly Disciplines, and Effective Citizen. As a review of the general education models of the 20th century, Newton's categories work well and reflect many of the tensions that played out across the latter half of the 1900s. However, whether these models suffice to meet the complexity of demands on general education in the 21st century remains questionable.

²⁷ Charles R. White, *A Model for Comprehensive Reform in General Education: Portland State University* (Portland: Portland State University, 1995), <http://pdx.edu/unst/program-documents> (accessed January 15, 2011); AAU, *Survey of Undergraduate Education Activities*.

²⁸ Consider the issuance of the Wingspread Declaration relative to the relationship among research mission, undergraduate education and service to the community. The urban-grant movement can be seen as another comprehensive attempt to resolve the research, service and education missions of institutions of higher education in specific geographic and demographic contexts.

²⁹ Newton, "Tension and Models."

In another article dedicated to the challenges of general education design, Szostak taps into the core concern with where integration occurs in general education. Traditionally, scholars have been concerned with general education models to the extent that they (a) integrate knowledge for students, (b) leave it to the students to integrate the knowledge, or (c) provide some hybrid plan for integration to fall to both curricular design and student efforts.³⁰ This explicit interest in the locus of integration through the general education experience reflects an implicit acknowledgement of the complexities inherent in the curriculum itself. As the demands on general education increase, the necessity for attention to integration of content to sense-making increases. The interest in locus of integration and challenges of form and function is central to another article in the first decade of the 21st century.

In their article reviewing dominant patterns in general education design, Brint, et al. present a review of general education ideologies, focused on origin, form, and function of dominant patterns in the transitional years from the 20th to the 21st century.³¹ While there is overlap with the models identified in other articles, there are also some interesting and potentially telling differences. As noted above, the four models identified by Brint et al. include the “Core Distribution,” the “Traditional Liberal Arts,” “Cultures and Ethics,” and “Civic-Utilitarian.” The “Core Distribution” model is one that Brint et al. associated with exposure to a breadth of areas, with integration of the knowledge gained dependent on the actual constraints placed through courses included in the core. The “Traditional Liberal Arts” model is one that Brint et al. associate with a focus on scholarly inquiry and acculturation into the disciplines, a model that leaves students potentially vulnerable with inherent gaps in breadth of perspective both across the disciplines and relative to contemporary sociocultural contexts. The third model,

³⁰ Rick Szostak, “Comprehensive Curricular Reform: Providing Students with a Map of the Scholarly Enterprise,” *The Journal of General Education* 52, no. 1 (2003): 27-49.

³¹ Brint et al., “General Education Models.”

“Culture and Ethics,” can include both great books programs and those focused on the non-western canon. However, the potential weaknesses in these models arise from foregrounding culture and ethics at the expense of academic content. These challenges do not necessarily inhere in the models; however, the foregrounding of discrete and core needs in general education may lead to gaps in other core areas. Finally, Brint et al. discuss the “Civic-Utilitarian” model as an extension of concerns with educating individuals to meet their responsibilities as members of the socioeconomic and political contexts into which they graduate. In sum, the four models reflect the complexities inherent in both the demands placed on general education and the practical challenges in curriculum planning to address those demands.

Compellingly, the research reviewing dominant models and themes based on reviews of institutional practice reveals potential trends in general education during the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st. However, there remains a lack of consensus regarding organizational principles to guide design and reform in general education—perhaps unsurprisingly, as the domain of praxis cannot be the sole informant in addressing curricular principles. The next section presents a review of a late 20th century general education paradigm, one that both crystallizes the dominant concerns of general education and contextualizes identification and interpretation of dominant trends in 21st century general education. In this paradigm, the approach for identifying dominant trends in 20th century general education expanded beyond a review of praxis and included consideration of the recommendations of scholars in the field. The current study replicates that approach in terms of a focus on the recommendations within the general education scholarship of the 21st century, recommendations that are understood to both reflect and complement work such as that of Newton, Brint et al., Szostak, Boning, Ratcliff and Jones, and Gaff and Wasescha.

Paradigms and Organizing Principles

In order for goal setting (and subsequent program planning and implementation) to progress efficiently, the underpinning paradigm(s) within which one is working must be thoroughly understood.³² In the 20th century framework chosen to contextualize and inform the findings in the current study, the term *paradigm* is used. Because the use of the term is controversial outside the natural sciences, it is important to acknowledge that paradigm in Kuhn's strict sense of a shared set of assumptions within a scientific field would inevitably prove problematic.³³ On the other hand, adopting the oft-used term *meta-narrative* in the sense of unquestioned universality of perspective offers no resolution.³⁴ Therefore, for the purposes of this discussion, the term *paradigm* is used to reference those prioritized concerns that emerge when scholars engage in discourse about the purpose, structure, and content of curricular ideology. The existence of a paradigm is determined through the identification of such prioritized concerns. The relative dominance of the concerns, similarly, is measurable—as will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four. However, whether the concerns are somehow objectively the right or best priorities for the field is not a goal of the current study.

In the late 1980s, Gary Miller proposed a general education paradigm comprising just such a set of organizing principles.³⁵ It is important to note here that in recognition of the complex implications of the use of the term *paradigm*, in the discussion of analysis of the current study, the term *dominant thematic trend* is used in conjunction with the term *organizing*

³² There is a history of understanding organizational structure as analogous to paradigm setting and change as impacted by paradigm shift. Cf. Allen Imershein, "Organizational Change as Paradigm Shift," *Sociological Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (January 1977): 33-43; Hans Simsek and Karen Seashore Louis, "Organizational Change as Paradigm Shift: Analysis of the Change Process in a Large, Public University," *The Journal of Higher Education* 65, no. 6 (November/December 1994): 670-681.

³³ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

³⁴ See Jean-Francois Lyotard's discussion of the challenges of the meta-narrative in the postmodern context. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

³⁵ Miller, *The Meaning of General Education*.

principle, used in the 20th century general education paradigm. In the following section, Miller's organizing principles are outlined. In the chapters that follow, current dominant thematic trends in general education are reviewed in light of Miller's original principles. It is posited that resonance among the organizing principles of the earlier paradigm and current thematic trends highlights the importance of those trends for usefully informing the reform of general education in the contemporary period.

Framework: Miller's Paradigm

One of the primary challenges, as one approaches a review of literature on educational programs, lies in identifying a framework through which to approach any given program. In the case of general education, which has been defined both as an educational movement as well as in terms of individual institutional programs, the framework must be useful both at these macro and micro levels. In a review of themes, trends and ideologies associated with general education across the majority of the 20th century, Gary Miller's text, *The Meaning of General Education: The Emergence of a Curriculum Paradigm*, emerged as a model both of documentary research and reasoned distillation of dominant themes in general education. As noted above, Miller's goal was to review themes or threads in general education scholarship in order to review where general education had been in the 20th century and where it was headed in the 21st.

In his construction of a general education paradigm for the 21st century, Miller asserted three principles to guide the design and reform of general education in the U.S. postsecondary context at the close of the 20th century: the principle of self-consciousness or purposefulness; the principle of comprehensiveness; and, the principle of democratization. Taken as a whole, the three principles had the potential to guide organization of general education design and reform. Within the context of the current study, the principles are considered relative to the dominant

themes evidenced in the scholarly research investigating general education over the intervening decades between their initial publication and the work since 1990.

Self-consciousness

Miller's first paradigmatic principle, self-consciousness, asserted that general education must be pursued as a self-conscious endeavor, allowing it to move beyond existence as "a 'paper curriculum' that states objectives but provides no means for achieving those objectives."³⁶

Grounding this self-consciousness and self-evaluation in the educational philosophy of Dewey along with the developmental psychology movement of the mid-20th century, Miller asserted that the very quality of purposeful self-reflection is key in assuring the continued relevance and essential contributions of general education. In this principle, Miller consolidated a century of tensions among various general education ideologies and their associated structural models by simply noting that programs should periodically assess their purposes and structures in light of contemporary developments in both society and the academy. Ongoing concern with self-consciousness in general education would be evidenced in scholarship reviewing programmatic purpose, design, and content and prioritized relative to interest in programmatic reforms.

Comprehensiveness

In his second and third principles, Miller shifted attention from the level of program evaluation procedures to reflection on the goals and content of general education itself. In his discussion of general education as comprehensive, Miller focused attention on the need for general education to provide both depth and breadth of exposure to the multiple perspectives represented by the fields and disciplines of the academy. Attending to issues of content related to academic and professional preparation, Miller clarified the ways in which general education should attempt comprehensive coverage of material, both in terms of content as well as delivery.

³⁶ Miller, *The Meaning of General Education*, 187.

First, a comprehensive general education program dealt with “... basic contexts, methods, attitudes, values, and skills that can be arrived at from many different experiences and areas of study and are valuable to all individuals regardless of their academic or professional interests.” Second, Miller asserted that general education must be “... concerned with ... total learning environments,” not restricted to environments bound to given majors or professions. Third, Miller noted that general education “... applies to all levels of education” and should not be thought of as simply the first 40-64 hours of an undergraduate curriculum.³⁷ In this principle, Miller honed in on the emergence of the traditional scholar-academic ideology, with the potential for clarity and resolution of the potential challenges inherent in constraining knowledge through its organization within de facto disciplinary and professional boundaries and the limited epistemological frameworks, cognitive structures, and modes of inquiry those entailed. Ongoing concern for comprehensiveness in general education would be evidenced in the scholarship of concerns with the organization of knowledge, associated epistemological frameworks, cognitive structures, and modes of inquiry as well as interest in insuring that the work of general education be done across the breadth of undergraduate education.

Democratization

Finally, in his concern with the democratic nature of general education, Miller focused on the relationship of the individual to society “as its [general education’s] organizing goal.”³⁸ In this principle of democratic pluralism, knowledge is selected for inclusion in general education specifically because of its value “in helping the student deal with current and future problems.”³⁹ In this arena, Miller captured the traditional liberal education ideology as it informs general education from within the constraints of a single Western worldview. Ongoing concern for

³⁷ Miller, *The Meaning of General Education*, 188.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

democratization in general education would be evidenced through presence in the scholarship of concerns with multiple perspectives at the level of individual, text, and society, but particularly in prioritization of discussions on the importance of multiple perspectives relative to what would in recent years be associated with multiculturalism.

For Miller, constructs of self-consciousness, comprehensiveness, and democratization represented principles through and around which the general education curriculum had been and should continue to be organized. In other words, the design and review of general education curricula should encompass stages at which self-evaluation of purpose, content, and structure could occur. In addition, it must include stages at which the breadth of its goals, substance, and procedures could be assessed in relation to the context within which it was being implemented. Finally, general education design and reform should allow for discussions regarding the extent to which its intent and realizations aligned with its foundational democratic contexts.

Throughout his text, and indeed in its very organization and delivery, Miller pointed out that pressures outside the academy often drive the decision making inside, with the ultimate modifications playing out in (a) revisions to general education and/or (b) changes in programs/majors being offered. This perspective was mirrored by the Spellings Commission (2006) when the report noted that “[t]he future of our country’s colleges and universities is threatened by global competitive pressures, powerful technological developments, restraints on public finance, and serious structural limitations that cry out for reform.”⁴⁰ In order to respond appropriately, from within what most outside the academy would consider an unlikely area, general education may find itself at the center of a maelstrom, called upon to serve as the proving ground for the development of foundational, essential skills needed for success across the breadth of the individual’s lifetime. The extent to which general education can rise to the

⁴⁰ Spellings Commission, *A Test of Leadership*, 29.

occasion may depend largely upon whether or not a principled response to the challenges can be identified.

Consideration of the resonance among Miller's principles of engagement and dominant thematic trends evidenced in the core general education scholarship of the past two decades may go far in determining whether such a principled approach is at hand. A key question for the current study is the extent to which Miller's original framework has stood the test of time as measured by the resonance among his paradigmatic principles and the dominant thematic trends that emerge from the scholarship analyzed in the current study. The answer to this question will determine the extent to which such trends continue to be relevant in organizing the design and reform of general education programs. If the dominant trends in the scholarship resonate with Miller's principles for organizing general education, it is fair to assume that they represent a next generation of organizing principles for the 21st century. Although such resonance among dominant thematic trends and Miller's paradigmatic organizing principles could be established through a number of approaches, the current study follows precedents set by researchers who have used documentary analysis of scholarly literature to identify such principles and trends across a variety of fields.

Documentary Study of Scholarly Literature

As noted in Chapter 1, approaches that attempt to generate best practices through quantitative analysis and identification of most common practices and approaches that attempt to perpetuate general education models through practices associated with benchmarking have proven common in research evaluating and making recommendations in general education reform and design. Another promising approach, one that has not been used often in the general education arena and one that had fallen out of favor for decades in other arenas as well, is that of

document study. If used as a qualitative method to identify dominant thematic trends in a given area of study, documentary research reviewing a national discourse in a delineated arena of knowledge can make inroads into the development of a fully operationalized model for reviewing and classifying curricular elements. An understanding of the exact potential of document analysis of scholarly literature can best be gained through a review of articles incorporating this approach in search of similar insights across other fields.

Historically, scholarly literature, whether books, journals, monographs, conference proceedings or numerous other types of oral and written media, represents a body of knowledge through which experts in a field, established or emerging, can share their insights, concerns, and findings. Through this sharing of relevant information, honed in the peer review process intended to establish baselines for expectations of rigor, reliability, and validity of claims, scholars in a field or discipline work together to disseminate the knowledge created in their individual or collective research efforts.

Increasingly, understanding the dynamics of the processes of knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination, through, for example, the publication of information in related scholarly journals, is essential not only for understanding the trends and themes emerging in the work of the experts but also for ensuring continued clarity of perspective relative to the recommendations and insights of those that have come before. This contribution may be of particular interest given the challenges that journals, particularly those associated with university presses, have faced in recent years, as well as the remarkable contributions they have made during the explosive growth of digital formatting they have enjoyed since the advent of the online scholarly journal repositories such as Project Muse and JSTOR in the mid-1990s.⁴¹ In

⁴¹ See Albert Greco, Robert M. Wharton, Hooman Estelami, and Robert Francis Jones, "The State of Scholarly Journal Publishing: 1981-2000," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 37, no. 3 (2006): 155-214 for a discussion of the

sum, given the explosion in access to scholarly literature across almost every conceivable field and discipline, it seems appropriate to reflect upon the potential insights such access might provide in terms of informed praxis.

The use of disciplinary journals as sources of insights into the emergent paradigms and concerns of a given field is increasingly common across education as well as the social sciences. For example, in 1980, Richard Diener conducted a longitudinal study of journal article titles in an attempt to demonstrate the usefulness of such an approach in understanding the dynamics of the emerging discipline of information science.⁴² Similarly, in 1986, Elizabeth Shumaker conducted a quantitative content analysis of the Journal of the National Art Education Association, to gain insights into themes and trends in art education between 1948 and 1984.⁴³ In the realm of middle school education, Braun y Harycki investigated the fit between ten national standards in middle schools and the relative levels of presence of those standards in scholarly articles advocating reform between 1982 and 1995, finding that journal articles most frequently contained reference to the first of the ten standards.⁴⁴ Similarly, in 2004, Brouwers, et al. presented a historical analysis of empirical research articles in cross-cultural psychology, in an effort to identify trends in both methodologies and conceptual frameworks in the field over a period of approximately 35 years.⁴⁵ Across these studies, compelling insights were gained as researchers framed contemporary developments in fields through the lenses of relevant scholarly contributions in the literature.

challenges faced in scholarly journal publishing. For insights into the growth of the university press itself, see Cecile M. Jagodzinski, "The University Press in North America: A Brief History." *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 40, no. 1 (2008): 1-20.

⁴² Diener, *Informational Dynamics*.

⁴³ Shumaker, "A Quantified Content Analysis."

⁴⁴ Braun y Harycki, "Historical Analysis."

⁴⁵ Brouwers, et al., "Historical Analysis."

In a content analysis of almost 1800 articles across four journals in counseling, Smith, Southern, and Devlin identified both established and emerging themes in the area of counselor education.⁴⁶ More recently, Brandon Aylward, et al., undertook a review of the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, from 1976 through 2006, in an effort to identify both the most influential works in that journal as well as to identify their connections to advances in that specific sub-discipline in psychology.⁴⁷ Similarly, in 2008, Donovan Wright conducted a study of *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education* from 2000 – 2006, using both citation analysis and content analysis, in an attempt to demonstrate the journal’s impact on the emergent field of distance education.⁴⁸ Jeni Hart, in her review of three core journals in higher education, demonstrated the extremely low levels of feminist discourse present in these scholarly outlets.⁴⁹ Like much recent work in the literature of higher education, all of these studies focus on the use of quantitative, bibliometric methods of analysis to trace the emergence of trends in their areas of interest.

Not all studies considering scholarly literature as the source of data are quantitative in nature. A notable exception to the trends in quantitative content analyses of scholarly literature is Gonzalez’ 2008 investigation of “crises” in the realm of library history.⁵⁰ Utilizing Bourdieu’s heuristic of cultural capital and the implications for communication within a given discipline, Gonzalez reviews the first forty years of *The Journal of Library History*. Based on her comprehensive review, Gonzalez demonstrates the ways in which “scholarly communications” can be understood as “value negotiations” among stakeholders in a given field or discipline. Such value negotiations can, in turn, meaningfully inform decision making on a practical level.

⁴⁶ Smith, et al., “Themes in Counseling Journals.”

⁴⁷ Aylward, et al., “Identifying the Classics.”

⁴⁸ Wright, “Citation and Content Analysis.”

⁴⁹ Hart, “Women and Feminism.”

⁵⁰ Gonzalez, “Crises.”

In investigating trends in higher education research through a review of scholarly journals, Kathy Brock Enger presents a clear and comprehensive overview of the role of scholarly literature in the development not only of shared disciplinary knowledge but also in the progress of a discipline towards the establishment of relevant paradigms.⁵¹ Enger demonstrates the role of the scholarly journal as a unique and key contributor in emergent disciplinary dialogs. Further, Enger argues convincingly that the systematic review of scholarly literature, dedicated to the investigation of specific themes or trends in the field, is a relatively underutilized trend in higher education scholarship.

Citing examples from areas as diverse as physics to student affairs, Enger contends that as a field, higher education has failed to utilize similar methods consistently and thoroughly in assessing the lessons available in its past.⁵² Although she bases her discussion upon Kuhn's notion of the creation of a paradigm, as a shared framework on which members of a discipline agree to build their understanding of their work, she extends the argument to note that the paradigm may be more or less meaningful depending on the extent to which the members of the discipline take time to reflect upon it.⁵³ In the end, the foundational argument of her dissertation is that members of the higher education community have failed to do just that—and so she is motivated to review the journals in higher education in order to determine the state of scholarly development in the discipline itself.

The conclusions of each of the studies referenced above lead to four relevant conclusions. First, content analysis and citation analysis provide interesting insights into the trends and themes that have emerged longitudinally within a field or discipline. Second, without the perspective these methodological approaches provide, the differentials of influence represented

⁵¹ Enger, "Analysis of Articles."

⁵² Enger, "Analysis of Articles," 40-42.

⁵³ For a more in-depth discussion, see Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

among the various journals in a discipline would be difficult to understand and the implications of those differentials in terms of contribution to the national discourse would remain hidden. Third, content analyses and citation analyses are insufficient for presenting a comprehensive picture of the themes that emerge in a field or discipline, particularly when they are undertaken based on preconceived notions of the themes the researcher expects to find. Finally, reliance on scholarly literature as a key source in evolving understandings of trends in fields and professions is essential. As Braun y Harycki notes in the conclusion to his work in middle-school education, “greater emphasis should be placed on the historical understanding of the development of ... concepts in professional education programs and in the writings of authors.”⁵⁴ In sum, longitudinal content analyses across a range of disciplines have yielded extremely productive insights into the major themes and trends of those disciplines. However, as with most large-scale quantitative analyses, the minor chords or competing voices in the discourse may have been diminished. Therefore, incorporating a qualitative approach similar to Gonzalez’ use of Bordieu’s framework in her own work on library history, the current study pursues a qualitative rather than quantitative investigation of themes and trends in the scholarship of general education.

Although this choice presents obvious limits in terms of generalizability of the findings, the use of documentary research allows the complexity of the discourse to emerge from the scholarship itself, in ways not possible among studies dependent upon quantitative methods. In addition, a qualitative approach allows the current descriptive study to organize and present themes and trends that may be subjected to a variety of analytical perspectives in the future, from feminist to Marxist interpretations regarding the underlying motivations for the emergence of particular themes or trends in general education programs.

⁵⁴ Braun y Harycki, “Historical Analysis,” 168-69.

Triangulation is, of course, a key concept in contemporary methods from the social sciences through the sciences. The desirability of multiple perspectives gained from distinct data sources is undeniable. Often referenced as methodological pluralism, this notion of combining such approaches as documentary research with survey or interview research and observation has gained increasing respect in a context in which the diversity of perspectives and meaning are recognized.⁵⁵ However, depending on the specific topic a researcher is investigating, the timeline in question, and the specific nature of the research question, the usefulness or need for methodological pluralism may be more or less limited.

For example, in the case of a discipline in which the scholarship has, on balance, focused on one particular methodological approach to the exclusion of others, research incorporating a single method and data source can be seen as complementing the already existing body of knowledge in the area. In the case of scholarship in general education, numerous studies have incorporated data from large-scale surveys or reviews of primary sources such as institutional curricula.⁵⁶ The proposed documentary research of the current study will complement that earlier work by providing insights gleaned from a longitudinal review of a meaningful segment of scholarship in the field. In addition, scholarship in a discipline may demonstrate imbalance in research relative to the complexity of the construct under investigation. For example, in general education research, where reviews of the historical record have been completed, the majority of investigation has been limited to primary sources drawn from a relatively small group of

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the role of documentary research within the larger scope of qualitative research methods, see Kenneth Bailey, *Methods of Social Research*, 4th ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1994); for a discussion of the advantages of documentary research, see also Gary McCulloch, *Documentary Research in Education, History, and the Social Sciences* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004).

⁵⁶ Cp. Paul Dressel and Frances DeLisle, *Undergraduate Curriculum Trends* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1969); William Toombs, James Steven Fairweather, Alexander Chen, and Marilyn J. Amey, *Open to View: Practice and Purpose in General Education*. (University Park, PA: Center for the Study of Higher Education, University of Pennsylvania, 1988); Jerry Gaff, *General Education Today and A New Life for the College Curriculum*.

institutions and/or perspectives presented through secondary sources in the form of oft-cited books on the topic.

In other texts, the most common approaches to identifying trends in general education have included interviews, or focused on in-depth discussions of single case studies, often from a practitioner's perspective.⁵⁷ Extrapolating from these findings, in consideration of Enger's claim of need for increased reflection on the implications of prior scholarship in higher education combined with Gonzalez' argument that scholarly literature represents value negotiations among the experts in a field, the current study provides a review of literature on general education that is both timely and essential. Both Enger and Gonzalez tap into the notion of paradigm setting through their discussions of disciplinary value systems that emerge from study of the scholarly literature of a field. As noted earlier in this section, a key challenge associated with the concept of paradigms outside the natural sciences is that paradigms are considered to be the central or core proven assumptions shared by the members of a given discipline, field or profession.⁵⁸ Outside the hard sciences, a paradigm may become a more or less explicit worldview, as defined by a set of priorities reflecting dominant issues or concerns with which a discipline or field wrestles. As a descriptive rather than prescriptive or predictive work, the current study traces the emergence of such dominant issues in general education scholarship over the period of transition from the 20th to 21st century.

⁵⁷ Obvious examples include the plethora of references to Harvard's *General Education*, Bell's *Reforming the Curriculum*, and the series of texts produced for and as a result of the Carnegie Foundation's and the AACU's work between the 1970s and 2010, often associated with scholar Jerry Gaff. Although the scope of those texts moves outside Harvard and Columbia (note that Bell includes discussion of Chicago and Stanford as key institutions in addition to Harvard and Columbia whereas Gaff's texts, as products of national surveys and projects, include reference to myriad of institutional types), nonetheless, on balance, the majority of literature, particularly that involving in-depth analysis in a case study format, outside the journals has been dedicated to an narrow set of institutions.

⁵⁸ For a full discussion of paradigms, paradigm setting, and paradigm shifts and their relation to scholarly arenas in and out of the hard sciences, see Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and Thomas Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977). See particularly, Chapter 9, "The Essential Tension: Tradition and Innovation in Scientific Research?" (225-239) and Chapter 12, "Second Thoughts on Paradigms" (293 -319).

Conclusion

In Chapter 2, literature reviews of three areas were presented. To contextualize the complex, emergent, and responsive challenges of general education, tensions of three major periods were reviewed, with an emphasis placed on the late period (1990-2011). To demonstrate both the potential for a general education paradigm and to contextualize interpretation of emergent dominant thematic trends in current scholarship, Gary Miller's general education framework was presented. Finally, the potential of scholarship as a viable source for establishing trends that can inform praxis was illuminated through a review of documentary studies involving scholarly literature across a variety of fields. In Chapter 3, the methodology for the current study is presented in detail. In Chapter 4, the coding and analysis of the data are presented. In Chapter 5, findings are discussed. Chapter 6 concludes the study with a summary of key findings, a discussion of the limitations of the study, and recommendations for general education praxis, policy, and future research.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Documentary Research

Scholars researching general education have undertaken documentary research in the past. In earlier studies, the documents reviewed typically included seminal works in the field in combination with reviews of extant institutional records such as course catalogs, curricula, and committee records.¹ For many contemporary researchers, such documentary research represents a myriad of constraints, from limitations on the breadth of voices represented to concerns regarding the validity and reliability of the voices included. Given the methodological rigor incorporated into the design and implementation of documentary analysis over the past fifteen to twenty years, however, many of the limitations perceived as inherent in working with public texts can be alleviated if not eliminated.

Documentary research refers to the analysis of sources of data, often written but also including sources in visual and auditory media that convey information, insights or perspectives on phenomena, events or entities that we are interested in understanding.² Following Bailey, documentary analysis can be limited “to two main types: the relatively unstructured and non-quantitative approach and the structured content-analysis approach that yields quantitative data

¹ For a perspective on the general education curricular paradigm through the late 20th century, see Miller, *The Meaning of General Education*. For insights into a lack of coherence in general education writ broadly, see Kent Johnson and James Ratcliff, “Creating Coherence: The Unfinished Agenda,” *New Directions in Higher Education: Special Issue, Changing Directions in General Education Curriculum* 2004, no. 125 (Spring 2004): 85-95. Similarly, for a discussion of possible coherence in terms of the overall general education movement, see Boning, “Coherence in General Education.”

² Bailey, *Methods*.

from verbal documents.”³ The current study follows the relatively unstructured and non-quantitative approach in that the purpose of the analysis itself is the search for emergent themes and patterns among the descriptive codes assigned during the initial stages of coding.

Documents are often divided into two categories: formal and functional. Formal divisions occur among primary, secondary, and even tertiary sources, based on the relationship in time and space between the document and the events or phenomena it references. For example, a document may be considered a primary source if the writing occurred either within the same time period as the phenomenon being described or analyzed or if the writing is done by one who has an intimate, eyewitness perspective on the described events. A document may be considered a secondary source if the writing occurred after the time period in which the phenomenon being analyzed or described took place, or if the writing is done by one who has the benefit of hindsight on the events themselves or on primary sources already produced. Consider, for example, the differences among an individual’s diary (primary), his/her autobiography (secondary), and a posthumous biography (secondary), or among a firsthand news report of a natural disaster (primary), a follow-up analysis describing the causes of the same disaster (secondary), and a report synthesizing information about similar disasters and their causes (tertiary). For the purposes of the current study, the bulk of data analyzed will fall within the category of secondary sources. However, functional divisions play a role in distinguishing among those secondary sources

Functional divisions occur across the breadth of purposes for which the piece of writing was crafted: ranging from the expected informative and persuasive goals to perhaps less expected and less detectable goals such as political and professional maneuvering, prestige

³ Bailey, *Methods*, 300-301.

enhancement and career advancement.⁴ McCulloch notes “[a] scholarly work may be read as a contribution to its field or an approach to a specific problem, and thus as a secondary source, but also as a reflection of attitudes to issue in a particular context or period, or in other words as a primary document.”⁵ In his discussion of the various contributions documentary research can make to the understanding of concepts and practices within a field, McCulloch concludes with a call for renewed attention to documents, “often neglected and taken for granted, estranged and alienated even in their familiarity, propinquity and abundance.” In these documents, indeed, he finds “... a basis for a renewed understanding of our social and historical world.”⁶

Assuming the richness of potential insights represented by documents, the next step is always to determine whether it is possible to review all relevant documents within a content area or whether and how to select the most appropriate documents from within the larger data pool. Although the concerns and benefits of documentary research were actually considered prior to the selection of an appropriate data source for the current study, and revisited during the culling process in identifying the final source, the data source itself will be discussed prior to the sections on the challenges and benefits of documentary research. Understanding the role of the data source itself relative to the universe of scholarship on general education is key in understanding how the challenges of documentary research were interpreted and alleviated if not eliminated in the current study.

In the following sections, the selection of the data source is presented, followed by a review of the challenges and benefits of documentary research as well as an overview of the

⁴ The reason for mentioning secondary functions of scholarship lies in preparing for discussion of a primary constraint that must be considered in documentary research—the original purpose for which the document was crafted and the extent to which, if any, underlying purposes may have impacted the reliability and validity of the voice and content within the text itself.

⁵ McCulloch, *Documentary Research*, 28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

researcher's credibility. The discussion of these challenges and benefits includes references to features of the primary data source as ameliorating factors. Finally, as in all qualitative research methodology, the credibility of the research must be established. As the observer, analyst, and interpreter of the data, the researcher filters information in such a way that the reader is at the mercy of his or her insights. To allow the reader the opportunity to assess the believability of the insights and any associated conclusions, the researcher's potential biases must be presented as a matter of record.

Source

In identifying the data source for the current study, it was essential to hone in on the appropriate source for the task. Although numerous potential sources were available for consideration, from institutional materials including course catalogs and syllabi to popular media sources including news articles to academic sources including policy statements, conference proceedings, and journal articles, careful consideration of both the goals of the study and the characteristics of each potential data source led to the conclusion that the best fit for this research lay in academic sources, preferably one that represented a sufficiently comprehensive presentation of concerns and issues in general education over the targeted timeframe.

In order to balance the need for representativeness against realistic concerns associated with the size of the universe of scholarship on general education, the current study conducted purposive sampling from within the entirety of general education scholarship publicly available across the target period: 1990-2011. Purposive sampling is most appropriately used in qualitative studies not intended to generalize results to a given population.⁷ Because this study seeks an understanding of dominant trends in general education scholarship in U.S. postsecondary

⁷ Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlies, *A Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research* (London: Sage, 2003).

institutions, as a source of insight into potential organizing principles at work in the field, it was essential to select a source that would provide “information-rich cases” meriting more comprehensive study.⁸ As noted in Chapter 2, the data source selected for the study was *The Journal of General Education*, as the major source for peer-reviewed scholarship on general education in the postsecondary context. The current section delineates the process through which the reasoned selection of *JGE* was made, including discussion of alternative scholarly sources.

The decision to constrain the data source to those articles published in *JGE* between 1990 and 2011 was made in a conscious effort to eliminate a major concern associated with documentary research: representativeness of the data analyzed. If the goal of a study is to undertake a review of dominant trends in a field or discipline across a specified timeframe, it is essential that the study either access all available documents pertaining to the field or discipline or that the study access documents that can be fairly considered representative of the scholarship in the field or discipline. Depending on the relative narrowness or breadth of the target area, an attempt to access all available documents may prove more or less practical. For example, attempting to access all available peer-reviewed scholarship on the phenomenon of cyber-bullying in a postsecondary context from 2000-2011 might prove a reasonable undertaking, a cursory search in Google Scholar yielding no more than 300 or so results. On the other hand, attempting to review the entirety of peer-reviewed scholarship on social media in a postsecondary context from 2000-2011 would prove unreasonable, as a cursory search in Google Scholar yields over 17,000 results. Searches in academic databases, such as ERIC, in the case of education-related scholarship, yield similar results differentials depending on specificity of topic or area of interest. For example, a search for data sources on general education in a postsecondary context could return over 50,000 results whereas a search for data sources on

⁸ Tashakkori and Teddlies, *Handbook*, 339.

foreign language instruction within general education would return fewer than 1,000 results over the same timeframe.

Because the current study focuses on dominant themes across general education, the vast number of potential sources returned rendered review of the universe of sources impossible. Therefore, purposive sampling to focus the sample size was indicated.⁹ In the current study, purposive sampling was done through consideration of the quality and function of sources from an academic perspective. The value of potential sources lay not in whether they had gained wide exposure in the domain of higher education at large, but in their positioning within the larger, national discourse on general education. Ensuring selection of a representative sampling necessitated review of potential sources through consideration of their role within the larger body of scholarly work on general education. In addition, purposive sampling allowed for the distinction among scholarly genres to hone in on those articles and research reports whose purposes fit the research questions.

When selecting sources of data from which to glean trends in any academic field or discipline, reputation and influence of journals included in the academic searches must be considered. In order to ensure comparability of standards in rigor of review, non-peer-reviewed work on general education was eliminated from consideration. In addition, to constrain relative standards of quality through the convention of journal rankings in the field, only journals falling into Tier 1 or Tier 2 categories were considered.¹⁰

⁹ Tashakkori and Teddlies, *Handbook*, 279.

¹⁰ For the purposes of distinguishing among tiers in higher education journals, the current study relied on Nathaniel J. Bray and Claire H. Major “Status of Journals in the Field of Higher Education,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 82, no. 4 (July/August 2011): 479-503.

Between 1991 and 2011, a search in ERIC (ProQuest) revealed that five Tier 1 journals in higher education¹¹ published approximately 30 articles tagged as substantially related to a discussion of general education or the core curriculum in a postsecondary context, with no single journal responsible for more than 20 articles.¹² Across the same timeframe, fourteen Tier 2 journals, including *JGE*,¹³ published approximately 361 articles prioritizing general education. The much larger number of articles across the Tier 2 journals results from the presence of 292 relevant articles (including book reviews and editorials) in *JGE* itself. The contrast in numbers of articles within the two tiers suggested that the majority of conversation regarding general education fit solidly within Tier 2 relative to its prioritization across the higher education landscape as a whole. In addition, where Tier 1 journals include articles on general education, the scope of the articles and the relevance within the larger universe of competing concerns in postsecondary education are quite different.

At the Tier 2 level, it is possible to gather a breadth of discussion that is unachievable in Tier 1. This is not to say that general education is not a priority for the field. However, the amount of Tier 1 journal space that can be dedicated to articles on general education, and the degree of specificity of topic appropriate at that tier, is quite different than at the Tier 2 level.¹⁴

¹¹ Bray and Major, "Status of Journals." Of the five journals and one handbook included in their identification of top journals in higher education, five included articles on general education distributed as follows: *The Journal of Higher Education* (7), *Research in Higher Education* (20), *Review of Higher Education* (2), *Journal of College Student Development* (1), and *Higher Education* (3).

¹² Substantial discussion of general education or core curricula was informally assessed based on whether either term was included in the list of keywords or subject headings or descriptors for the articles.

¹³ Bray and Major, "Status of Journals." Of the fourteen Tier 2 journals, articles in each numbered as follows: *New Directions for Higher Education* (31; note, 11 of the 31 were on the question of "liberal education," specifically), *New Directions for Institutional Research* (7), *Community College Review* (9), *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* (4), *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (3), *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* (3), *College and University* (4), *Journal of College Student Retention* (2), *Journal on Excellence in College Student Teaching* (4), *Studies in Higher Education* (2), *Higher Education Policy* (5), *The Journal of General Education* (292), and *Journal of College Counseling* (5).

¹⁴ Bray and Major, "Status of Journals." Bray and Major note that Tier 2 is the appropriate level at which to expect specialization of journal focus (with the exception of *Journal of College Student Development*, although that

Tier 2 may reflect less prestige within the universe of generalist journals in a field. However, looking at journals within Tier 2 provided more in-depth reflection on a breadth of topics within a subdiscipline or specialization that simply was not reflected in the generalist journals responsible for covering trends across the entirety of the higher education landscape. *JGE*, as the Tier 2 journal containing the vast majority of peer-reviewed scholarly work in the area of general education in the U.S. postsecondary context, clearly stood out as the locus of the national academic conversation on general education.

From the front matter of the inaugural issue of *JGE*, the journal at its inception was clearly self-described as a journal focused on everything general education-related.¹⁵

The Journal of General Education, published quarterly by the State University of Iowa, is intended to serve instructors and administrative officers in liberal arts colleges, professional schools, teachers colleges, junior colleges, and the secondary schools. More specifically, it is designed to provide an outlet for thoughtful discussions of the issues and experiments of general education.¹⁶

As of 2010, the journal's self-description has changed somewhat, but perhaps not as much as one might have expected over the course of six decades.

For faculty, administrators, and policymakers, *JGE* is the professional forum for discussing issues in general education today. *JGE* addresses the general education concerns of community colleges, four-year colleges, universities, and state systems. *JGE* features articles on: innovative methods in teaching and assessment, profiles of exemplary general education programs, case studies of successful curriculum development efforts, reviews of books and monographs related to general education, special quarterly issues...¹⁷

may simply suggest a burst of publications in the area and the growth of student affairs as a major area within higher education itself).

¹⁵ Note the inclusion of secondary schools and the absence of research universities in the populations to be served by the Journal. Compare that population with: (a) the populations included in the description of the Journal taken from the current JSTOR online database and (b) the populations included in the description of *The Journal of General Education* from its homepage on the Penn State University Press website. Consider also the populations targeted in the JSTOR version, which replicates the front matter included in the *Journal* itself in the 1990s.

¹⁶ Front matter, *The Journal of General Education* 1, no. 1 (October 1946): ii.

¹⁷ Front matter, *The Journal of General Education* 59, no. 2 (2010): ii.

In fact, when compared with an intermediate mission (evidenced in the 1990s version of the journal's self-description and also currently available in the JSTOR online description), there is clear overlap between both the inaugural and the most recent versions of the journal.

How can today's college students be better prepared for tomorrow's world? Do they have the prerequisite abilities to analyze and interpret complex social events, to find and fulfill rewarding personal lives, and to contribute to the social commonwealth? What constitutes general learning today? Is it basic skills development, critical thinking and problem solving, the understanding of our cultures and traditions, or the exploration of new worlds, peoples, and languages? JGE: The Journal of General Education is the professional forum for discussing these issues, adding the results of new research to our store of knowledge about the collegiate level of education. Published quarterly, JGE provides stimulating reading for college and university faculty, academic leaders, administrators, and policymakers. Through critical essays and analyses, contemporary research, profiles of exemplary practices, and reviews of new books and monographs, JGE tackles the current thinking and significant issues under debate in the field of general education.¹⁸

The Journal of General Education espouses a focus on issues related to general education in its purpose, structure and content, as will become apparent as the analysis is outlined below. From questions about the role of general education in the preparation of students for tomorrow's world to their ability to find and fulfill rewarding personal lives to their potential to contribute to the "social commonwealth" in a forum designed for "faculty, academic leaders, administrators and policymakers," the journal taps into questions and issues across the general education as curricular ideology, program, and coursework.

In the words of James Ratcliff, its editor from 1991-1998, *JGE* serves a "mobile and disunified [sic] constituency." He uses this phrase to describe the crew of faculty and administrators who have typically been placed on curriculum committees marked "by constant turnover" and chosen "not according to member commitment to general and liberal learning, but

¹⁸ Front matter, *The Journal of General Education* 48, no. 4 (1999): ii.

according to representation of disciplines and departments across campus.”¹⁹ This single description illustrates why *JGE* is the perfect source for insights and perspectives on a national conversation. The journal itself has reflected that emerging conversation, led by a succession of editors whose job Ratcliff describes, aptly, as that of “steward[s] of a conversation in print” in a unique context that is unlike those of the professional and disciplinary organizations. In the section that follows, the journal as source will be considered in light of the primary concerns that have been raised regarding documentary research.

Documentary Analysis: Challenges

A number of concerns have been established in regards to the use of document study, or documentary analysis. These general concerns will be considered in light of the selection of *JGE* as the data source for the current study. McCulloch, relying heavily on Tosh, presents three related issues that are of concern when approaching the analysis of documentary data, including questions of authenticity of a source, reliability of the perspectives within the source, and representativeness of the source.²⁰ In a related review of the disadvantages or challenges that document study represents, Bailey discusses seven key issues, including: authorial bias, selectivity of survival, completeness of the record, document availability, sampling bias, limitations of medium, and formatting standards.²¹ Although all of these issues are of paramount concern in characterizing the totality of the discourse surrounding general education, for example, in higher education in the United States, given the current focus on the segment of the discourse contained within an identifiable galaxy (that of all articles published in *JGE* from 1991-2011), many of the concerns associated with these constructs are irrelevant. To

¹⁹ James Ratcliff, “Editor’s Note: The Seven-Year Itch,” *The Journal of General Education* 47, no. 4 (1998): vi-x.

²⁰ McCulloch, *Documentary Research*; John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 2002).

²¹ Bailey, *Methods of Social Research*.

demonstrate consistent consideration of the primary challenges represented by document analysis, the use of *JGE* as a data source for the current study is reviewed in light of concerns raised by both McCulloch and Bailey.

Authenticity

Authenticity addresses the concern that authorial attribution for given pieces is accurate. In the historical record, there are situations in which the authenticity of a document's attribution may be questioned. For example, anonymous handwritten documents discovered in a box of artifacts in the basement of a university's central administration building may be clearly impossible to attribute. On the other hand, there may be cases in which documents written by one author are published under a pseudonym or are published as the work of another author altogether. In those instances, where the identity of the author is intentionally obscured, authenticity may never be recoverable.

Given that there is increasing awareness that one's background, attitudes and knowledge (as reflections of one's lived experiences) may inform and bias one's presentation of information, a need to insure that the attributed author is indeed the actual author is clear. Because *JGE* is a scholarly journal publishing peer-reviewed articles and essays, the documents in the journal are assumed to be authentic, that is, a basic assumption is made that the writing was done by those to whom it is attributed. In a related area, concerns have been raised regarding authenticity and completeness of the digital record, as increasing numbers of resources have been digitized and made available via online databases. For this study, the data was drawn from online versions of the articles in *JGE* (through JSTOR's digitized collection of the full journal, from 1991-2006 and Project MUSE's digitized collection from 2007-2011). As a result, concern about authenticity of the articles themselves and the comprehensive inclusion of all articles in the

original publication is limited if not nonexistent, given that (a) *JGE* is a well-respected scholarly, peer-reviewed journal with no apparent inclination towards deception in attribution of scholarship to authors, and (b) the digitization of the presumably authentic articles was undertaken in a cooperative effort between the publication source of *JGE* (Penn State University Press) and JSTOR and Project MUSE, both globally-respected online databases and document repositories.

Reliability

Reliability of information contained in a source is of concern to experts in documentary research because of the potential variation between the insights and abilities of the authors of the original texts. For example, Tosh reminds documentary researchers to question whether authors are presenting accounts that can be clearly relied upon.²² McCulloch further explains the relevance of this concern in terms of issues often associated with questions of truthfulness and bias.²³ On the one hand, a documentary researcher must often consider whether a given source can be trusted as a truthful account. On the other hand, the researcher must also be aware of the potential biases that are inherent in any document.

Taking the content of *JGE* as examples to assess truthfulness, one could look, for example, at the issues on the general education reforms at Portland State University (PSU) in the 1990s. Reported on from various perspectives in two separate issues of *JGE*, the reforms at PSU may be seen in both positive and negative lights. Presumably, however, the authors in each article, even in those cases where the conclusions appear at odds, were striving to present truthful accounts of the events and phenomena as they occurred. Obviously, where there are different accounts of the same event or phenomenon from varied sources, the truthfulness of each can be

²² Tosh, *Pursuit of History*, 65.

²³ McCulloch, *Documentary Research*, 36.

questioned. However, in absence of contrary accounts, and for the purposes of this study, the totality of articles in *JGE* will be assumed to be truthful accounts.

Representativeness

The concerns associated with representativeness or typicality of sources often focus on the presence or absence of specific voices. For example, for a plethora of possible reasons, ranging from failure to record in written form to failure to join the public record to destruction by natural disaster, vast quantities of potential or real documents never make their way into the permanent historical record.²⁴ As a result, perspectives and voices go unheard, and we are left with a conversation that must always be seen as incomplete – one in which whispers may be heard in the background or silent thoughts may be presumed to have existed. Nonetheless, with the understanding that the voices that do remain have their own tale to tell, it is worthwhile to reflect upon the insights that they can provide.

Selectivity of survival among documents is a concern that speaks to the question of representativeness of a given sample of texts. Any body of documents will be incomplete as a record of all potential voices and perspectives. In the case of a scholarly journal, by default, many submissions for publication were rejected. However, because a primary focus is on dominant trends relative to Miller's paradigmatic principles, and because published articles can be assumed to represent priorities in a scholarly area, the articles in *JGE* serve the specific purpose of this study.

Incompleteness of the record is a concern when there is uncertainty or lack of clarity regarding whether documents represent the full body of work as it originally existed. In the current study, this concern is not relevant. Clearly, the choice to focus exclusively on the articles in *JGE* eliminated perspectives available in the universe of information associated with general

²⁴ McCulloch, *Documentary Research*, 36-37.

education programs. However, as a galaxy within that universe, *JGE* represents a complete picture of perspectives of researchers and experts who self-selected into the group of scholars publishing on the topic between 1991 and 2011. In addition, as discussed above, the breadth and depth of scholarship possible in a specialized journal of this nature can be assumed to present a range of topics representative of the foci of the field over the given period.

Lack of availability of documents would, until recently, have posed a potential challenge. Until 2010, the availability of the articles in *JGE* was diverse, ranging from online versions between 1999 and 2010, to earlier hard copies on library shelves to even earlier dusty bound volumes in library archives. However, given the efforts of the Penn State Press and JSTOR²⁵, the entire record of articles in *JGE* from its inaugural issue of 1946 are now available in digitized format. Given the research focus on the latter period in *JGE* publication (1991-2011), access to the documents themselves has been complete and consistent in that all volumes of the period were available through two primary online databases: JSTOR (1991-2006) and Project MUSE (2007-2011).

Bias

Sampling bias is a concern in most research, given the recognition that even if one attempts to gain access to every bit of information available on a topic or issue, inevitably there will be information that is not available for a plethora of reasons. In the case of the current study, sampling bias is relevant in the choice of *JGE* as the source of all articles. Voices of scholars who did not submit articles for publication in *JGE*, or those of scholars whose submissions were rejected, will not be heard in the results of this study. Nonetheless, the multitude of articles from *JGE* and the voices they do represent can be understood as one view of an incredibly complex conversation—and a view that has not yet been presented in the literature. The choice of *JGE*,

²⁵ Journal STORage, a trusted digital repository of scholarly journals since 1995.

given the low citation rate it appears to enjoy in the seminal books on general education, is an attempt to provide an inclusive rather than exclusive presentation of perspectives on the topic. A cursory review of peer-reviewed journals in higher education revealed that a clear majority of the scholarly articles tagged as related to general education in postsecondary contexts in Tier 1 or 2 higher education journals from 1991-2011 were published in *JGE*. As a sample of the total universe of scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on general education in postsecondary contexts in the U.S., the scholarship of *JGE* can be considered representative.

In a related area, the issue of authorial bias, although of clear concern in many documentary research studies, is not problematic given the research focus of the current study. As an example of the relevance of bias in the current study, consider two articles from the Journal addressing the relevance of liberal education for the military forces. On the one hand, consider the perspective expressed by Dwight D. Eisenhower (then Chief of Staff of the United States Army) in his contribution to the inaugural issue of *JGE*.²⁶ In his article, Eisenhower (1946) reflects upon the relevance of liberal education for the military forces. Eisenhower's perspective, if analyzed in the context of his other works, e.g. his later reflections on the potential impact of the military-industrial complex on the future of higher education, would most probably reveal easily identifiable biases that would differentiate it noticeably from, say, the perspective of Roland Garrett, as a professor of philosophy at Baldwin-Wallace College, who reflected upon the relationship between liberal education and the military forces in a larger context of the question of vocationalism in the late 1970s.²⁷ Nonetheless, as sources of perspectives on the

²⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Liberal Education in the Military Forces (A Symposium)," *The Journal of General Education* 1, no. 1 (October 1946): 34-36. Indeed, while Eisenhower asserted the fundamental value of a liberal education in the context of the military forces, his perspective remained that of a pragmatist in his reliance on references to the benefits that the liberal arts could provide relative to national security. Compare this with the much more humanist interpretations of Garrett in the late 1970s.

²⁷ Roland Garrett, "Liberal Education on the Western Front," *The Journal of General Education* 31, no. 3 (Fall 1979): 151-57. Although, like Eisenhower, Garrett considers the uses of liberal education within war as well as

valuing of aspects of general education in their respective time periods, both articles can be seen as equally reliable sources. In sum, this study considers the question of perspectives as guiding both data collection and analyses. It would be for a later and substantially distinct study to investigate the implications of the biases specific researchers brought to the conversation about general education.

Clearly, when looking at sources that were written for inclusion in the public record, in this case a scholarly journal, the researcher must remain ever vigilant regarding the potential, and inevitable, biases of the author(s) of a given piece. However, because of the nature of the current study, it must remain clear that the articles themselves reflect espoused rather than lived values of their authors. It is those espoused values, and the range they represent, that are the focus of discovery in the current study, a search for the presence or absence of discernible dominant thematic trends in general education itself.

The fundamental assumption underlying the choice of scholarship is that faculty and scholars will write about issues and concerns in which they are interested, that they will pursue such concerns as are immediately of interest and are compelling in their lives as researchers and as teachers, and that the level of interest in the scholarship is in what scholars are debating and discussing rather than the whether or how of those debates and discussions. In other words, fifty articles published on interdisciplinary concerns over a ten-year timespan can be taken as an indication that concerns and interests in interdisciplinary programs are high. Assuming that the fifty articles are not arguing against interdisciplinary programs in general education, the prevalence of scholarship dedicated to the desirability of these types of programs, their character

afterwards, Garrett argues from a clearly humanist perspective, focusing on the benefits of liberal education to the individual soldier's post-war quality of life.

and their implementation can be fairly taken as an indicator of prioritization of interdisciplinarity in general education.

Finally, Bailey notes the concern that document analysis results in complete reliance on verbal behavior, to the exclusion of other types of behavior that might prove useful in understanding the perspectives of the individual(s) involved. This particular concern is not relevant in the current study. If the study were focused on ascertaining the differences between the espoused values of a scholar relative to his/her position on general education, nonverbal behavior in an interview context would be absolutely crucial. Given that the focus of the current study is on analysis of the espoused values of the researchers, as representative of dominant issues and concerns in the field, a view into the contrast between those espoused and lived values is not essential. In the following section, concerns shift from the documents themselves to the credibility of the researcher undertaking the study.

Researcher Credibility

Qualitative research, by its nature focused on creative analysis of a collection of data, should be held to rigorous standards in terms of assessing the validity and reliability of the researcher's data collection, analysis and findings.²⁸ As a result, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide information detailing preparedness for the task at hand: creative analysis of the body of work contained in *JGE* from 1991-2011. This section speaks to the credibility, and in a sense the voice, of the researcher. As a result, the first-person perspective is adopted as appropriate to the goal of this section.

²⁸ Michael Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (California: Sage Publications, 2002).

Discourse Communities

The discourse communities to which a researcher has been a participant can constrain the perspectives from which he/she can access and interpret a given body of information. From a scholarly perspective, my training spans a variety of fields including literature, linguistics, language education and higher education administration. I have been exposed to and trained in methodology from the humanities to the social sciences and education.

In addition to a brief overview of my preparation for the analytical task at hand, my connections to the content and people associated with the object of study must be revealed. In the case of the content of *JGE*, I had, to my memory, never read articles in *JGE* or used *JGE* as a source in papers written prior to identification of the journal's contents as a potential core data source for this study. I had formed no prior assessments of the *JGE* in terms of its value for the higher education community, for the larger community of scholars, or for the general population of potential readers. Furthermore, although a member of my dissertation committee is the editor of *JGE*, we had no discussions regarding *JGE* prior to the defense of the proposal for this study. As a result, my perspective on *JGE* in the months prior to the proposal defense was limited to the reading I did in order to ascertain whether its content might prove both relevant and sufficient to merit its inclusion as the sole documentary focus of the study.

Lived Experiences

The lived experiences of a researcher will inevitably color her interpretations of data in a qualitative study such as the current one. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge any experiences that may influence interpretation. Although passionately interested in general education and its role in higher education writ broadly, I came to this project with no conscious preconceptions or preferences in terms of the purpose of general education programs, their

design, or their content. However, as a graduate of Davidson College, a private liberal arts college, I am, on some level, a product of that institution's approach to general education. Considering the liberal arts focus at Davidson, the rigor of its core curriculum, and my overall respect for the institution, I assume that I have, at least subconsciously, been influenced by a humanist's view of the role of general education in developing what the Yale faculty of 1828 described as the furniture and discipline of the mind. In addition, I remember, specifically, reading John Newman's *Idea of a University* while at Davidson and being greatly impressed with his discussion of the importance of knowledge for its own sake (to the point of remembering it years later, when I would have been hard pressed to list with confidence other texts that I had read at Davidson).²⁹ In the intervening years, I have had no reason to reflect upon the meaning and purpose of general education; however, during the two-year period of coursework while pursuing my doctorate in higher education, I had ample cause to reflect upon the question of general education.

Content Exposure

In related acknowledgement of preconceptions I may bring to my analysis of the data in *JGE*, I have spent a great deal of time over the preceding year in reading through books and primary sources related to general education in the United States, from the 17th to the 21st centuries. In doing a review of scholarly texts over the timeframe represented by the articles that I analyzed for this study, I have encountered arguments for and against general education, heated debates over best practices in general education programs, and impassioned pleas for both more and less focus on general education at postsecondary institutions in the U.S. Inevitably, these arguments have impacted the way in which I come to the question of general education.

²⁹ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated, New Impression*. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1899).

However, as I approached the analysis of the articles in *JGE*, I believe that rather than firming a vision of general education in my mind, these texts served to reinforce for me the vastly complex construct that general education programs occupy, from both formal and functional perspectives. As a result, I began data collection in *JGE* with a pre-existing belief in the fundamental importance of the research question in the current study but with no definitive assumptions about the answers to those questions.

Trustworthiness

My trustworthiness as a researcher depended not only on my vigilant awareness of my own biases as I wrestled with the content of *JGE*, but also on my ability to apply the conceptual framework I had chosen to guide my analysis. One approach that researchers often take, in an effort to validate their own impressions, is to rely upon the assistance of colleagues and/or research assistants in the coding and analysis of themes in documents. However, I undertook the analysis and classification of the articles in *JGE* as an individual researcher, with no recourse to consultation with colleagues or research assistants to refine my assessments of dominant themes.

I chose this approach for two reasons. First, I did not have access to colleagues or research assistants who were well versed in the literature on general education over the past 150 years or in the specific literature of *JGE* over the past twenty years. As a result, any perspective they could bring to the analysis would have been informed by my own processes in classifying and interpreting articles in *JGE*. Arguably, additional perspectives filtered through my own interpretations and presentation of any themes and patterns could simply be seen as, de facto, overlaying my own impressions and thoughts onto the voices of individuals ostensibly tasked with providing the insights of the “other.” Furthermore, the use of self as the sole researcher reflecting upon the emergent themes and trends in *JGE* over a 20-year timeframe replicated the

realities most researchers and scholars undertake on a daily basis: identifying and wrestling with concepts or issues that they themselves have a personal interest in understanding further. In the end, the challenge was not to remove biases from the research done, it was to recognize, document, and consider the biases while attempting clear and reasoned explanation of interpretations.

Overall, the greatest potential challenge to my credibility in this study probably lay in my fundamental belief and commitment to the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. The greatest potential benefit to my credibility in this study was that I am keenly aware of that particular bias. As I approached the data source for the current study, I attempted to find balance between my instinctive hope for trends that would reflect increasing emphasis on humanist goals and structure for general education and my commitment to the recognition of goals and structures that might not fall within that humanist domain. In the section that follows, the benefits of documentary analysis are presented, with a final reflection on the challenges inherent in the methodology and its overall potential in the current study.

Documentary Analysis: Benefits

Given the previous review of challenges inherent in documentary research, this section will consider the advantages of this research method. Following Bailey, the applicability of the nine identified advantages to documentary research were considered in light of the goals of the current study, including: availability of record, unselfconsciousness, breadth of timeframe, resource scope, perspective, cost efficiency, and quality.³⁰ Where concerns have been raised and answered relative to the study, the benefits of the selected method are now reviewed in light of the goals of the study.

³⁰ Bailey, *Methods of Social Research*.

Availability

When a researcher wants to study a phenomenon or event in the past, one major obstacle in gaining insights and perspectives lies in the passage of time between the occurrence and the moment of research interest. When the intervening timeframe is sufficiently long, gaining information via methods including surveys, interviews or observation is simply not possible. In those contexts, documentary sources may be the best, and only, avenues into past perspectives. As such, the historical record can provide information that literally cannot be gained through any other source. In the case of the national conversation on general education spanning the years from 1991 through 2011, the majority of the relevant years extend over a timeframe that is clearly in the past. Although the more recent articles contain information that could, in principle, be investigated through interviews of their authors, such an approach is not feasible in the case of those scholars writing on the topic 20 years ago. Among other concerns would be that their recall of arguments made two decades ago would be suspect, assuming that any intervening timeframe and experience or reflection on the topics discussed would have altered their perspective. Given that the purpose of the current study is to see whether there is an emergence of dominant themes in general education over time, interpretation of a static contribution to the conversation in real time is more appropriate, via documentary analysis. Even in the case of more recent articles, perspective shifts in the mere act of writing about a topic, much less in the relevant subsequent experiences and conversations. Tracing the emergence of the conversation on general education could be done via interviews, but they would have to have begun twenty years ago. Although the text can yield only what it can yield to interpretation, as a source the scholarship of *JGE* represents a clearly defined and apparently comprehensive record of the issues of concern to researchers and practitioners in general education over the past twenty years.

Unselfconsciousness

A second benefit to using documents in lieu of real-time data collection through surveys and interviews, for example, is that documents are presumed to have been written unselfconsciously relative to future research interest and critique. In other words, researchers who are looking at primary and secondary documents in the historical record can work from the assumption that the authors of those sources would not have been crafting their message in anticipation of how it would stand up to analyses by future experts.³¹ Although this assumption may undoubtedly be true of the majority of documentary sources in the record, there is some concern regarding the crafting of the message relative to the reception by the contemporaries of the author(s). As a result, though it could be assumed that few, if any, of the authors were looking to the future researchers and crafting their message appropriately, the authors' positions, as with all scholarly literature, were assumed to represent attempts to normalize to the discipline while simultaneously contributing meaningful new insights.

Timeframe

A third benefit of documentary research is its usefulness in gaining a longitudinal perspective of an issue or topic. *JGE* itself records over 65 years of discourse regarding general education, conveniently beginning in the years immediately surrounding the preparation and publication of arguably the most influential single document on general education in the 20th century: Harvard's "Red Book." Even for the shorter period covered by the current study (1990-2011), a longitudinal perspective is possible given that the scholarship reviewed covered twenty uninterrupted years of publication of *JGE*.

³¹ Bailey, *Methods of Social Research*, 295.

Resource Scope

Sample size is often touted as a benefit in documentary research. Although it is often considered helpful for quantitative analyses, specifically, the availability of a breadth of documents and the perspectives they represent can be meaningful for qualitative research as well. For example, the articles of *JGE* represent not only the voice of a journal over two decades, but also the voices of the contributors and the institutional, departmental and collegial perspectives within which the authors worked and conducted their research. Attempting to gain meaningful insights into so many perspectives via other media or methods, even assuming the individuals could be reached and interviewed or surveyed, would have been prohibitive in cost and time. Another notable benefit to working with documents rather than human subjects lay in the researcher's ability to move in and out of the texts at will, taking time to record reactions as they occurred, making notes on perceived connections at the moment – rather than having had to wait until the end of an observation or interview to do so.

Perspective

When the documents studied are primary sources, Bailey notes that they have the benefit of providing the perspectives of confessionals, of a sort. In the case of the current study, the perspectives in the articles to be reviewed could not be considered unguarded in any way. However, as records of the public positions that individuals were willing to take in the context of their professional roles, the articles have the benefit of providing insights into the espoused values those positions represented.

Cost

Similar to the practical benefits listed above, the low level of cost associated with documentary analysis makes it an attractive option for investigating a national discourse on a

given topic. Given the accessibility of *JGE* and its contents in digital form via the online JSTOR and Project MUSE databases, no travel to archives or costs associated with data collection and storage were incurred in working with the articles targeted for analysis.

Quality

The final benefit that Bailey reviews in her discussion of documentary research is that of the high quality of the source itself. In the case of the current study, the data represented by the peer-reviewed articles of *JGE* was of very high quality. Indeed, given that the entirety of the Journal was digitized and readily available as part of the JSTOR journal collection online, the content of the articles themselves was of the highest quality currently available.

Conclusion

In sum, Chapter 3 has presented both the challenges and benefits of documentary study. The reasoned selection of the data source for the study coupled with the comprehensive treatment of the researcher's credibility has mitigated many of the challenges of documentary research in the current study. On balance, the amelioration of the challenges inherent in documentary study coupled with its benefits should inspire confidence in the rigor of the coding, results, and analyses that follow.

In Chapter 4, coding and analysis are presented. Due to the iterative nature of coding cycles in documentary research, the process of coding, the analysis of the results, and the creation of categories and descriptors are intertwined. Following the description of the process, the analysis, and the determination of descriptors and categories, results are presented. In Chapter 5, results and the dominant thematic trends are discussed in detail. Further, resonance is proposed among those trends and Miller's paradigmatic principles. In Chapter 6, the findings are

summarized, followed by a review of the limitations of the study as well as a presentation of recommendations for praxis, policy, and future research.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the gathering and analysis of data are presented. The requisite first step in approaching the analysis of qualitative data is the review of the source itself to establish a unit of analysis that fits the study's goals. In the current study, the overarching goal is to determine whether there are trends in general education scholarship that could usefully inform both praxis and policy in the field. Therefore, in the current study, the unit of analysis—what the researcher is looking for evidence of within the data—is dominant thematic trends reflecting prioritized issues within general education scholarship. To establish such thematic trends and their dominance within the scholarship, an appropriate unit of observation had to be identified. In the case of the current study, that unit of observation was identified as the article abstract.

The choice of the article abstract as the unit of observation was motivated by two primary considerations. First, article abstracts are recognized as a specific genre of discourse, typically following de facto rules in terms of form, function, and content.¹ This is especially true where abstracts reviewed are within a given field and even more so when located within a single publication.² Second, abstracts typically convey the core information or essence of argument within a given article. Therefore, article abstracts can be seen as minimizing genre differences

¹ Douglas Biber and Susan Conrad, *Register, Genre, and Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); John Swales and Christine Feak, *Abstracts and the Writing of Abstracts* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009).

² Betty Samraj, "An Exploration of a Genre Set: Research Article Abstracts and Introductions in Two Disciplines," *English for Specific Purposes* 24, no. 2 (2005): pp. 141-156.

inherent across such varied scholarly writing as the evaluative report, the case study, the research review, the theoretical article, and the praxis-oriented short article.³

In addition to establishing a unit of observation from which the unit of analysis might be usefully derived, the potential data set must also be cleaned in the sense that any sections that might prove inconsistent with the goals of the study must be eliminated.⁴ After the units of analysis and observation have been generated and the data has been cleaned through removal of content that does not fit the goals of a given study, engagement with the data begins.

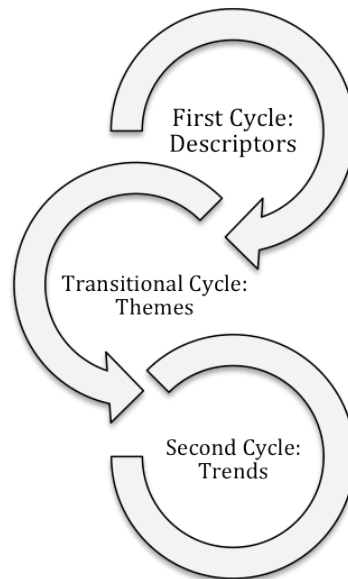
Pre-coding, or the initial foray into the data itself, involves manual highlighting, electronic archiving and sorting, and responsive journaling. Coding itself can comprise single or two-cycle coding. Following Saldana, the analysis for the current study involved a modified two-cycle coding, of particular relevance when approaching a large set of data in search of emergent patterns or trends.⁵ In two-cycle coding, the first cycle encompasses the work of identifying descriptors within each data unit. In the second cycle, emergent patterns or trends are discerned from among the descriptive codes assigned in the first cycle. Occasionally, a transitional cycle of theming the data is merited between the first and second cycles—particularly when descriptors from first-cycle coding remain sufficiently diverse and resistant to pattern identification at the level appropriate for the given project. In the current study, such was the case. Figure 1 reflects the coding stages, which are explained in greater detail below.

³ Michela Montesi and John Mackenzie Owen, “Research Journal Articles as Document Genres: Exploring Their Role in Knowledge Organization,” *Journal of Documentation* 64, no.1 (2008): 143-167.

⁴ Johnny M. Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (London: Sage Publications, 2009), 14-15.

⁵ Saldana, *Coding Manual*, 41-48.

Figure 2. Coding Cycles



Following a pre-coding stage of preliminary jotting, dedicated to researcher familiarization with the data set as a whole, first-cycle coding centered on descriptive coding of the selected units of observation.⁶ Associated with qualitative methodology, descriptive coding “summarizes in a word or short phrase—most often as a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data.”⁷ Descriptive coding is particularly appropriate for the current study as it generates codes that “are identifications of the topic, not abbreviations of the content” where “[t]he topic is what is talked or written about” as against the content, which is “the substance of the message.”⁸ In the current study, first-cycle descriptive coding accomplished the gross categorization of articles by topic focus.

Because of the large quantity of disparate descriptors generated in the descriptive coding of the data, a transitional step between descriptive coding and second-cycle coding—theming the data—was employed. As defined by Saldana, a “theme is an outcome of coding, categorization,

⁶ Saldana, *Coding Manual*, 70.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 70 citing Renata Tesch, *Qualitative Research: Analysis Types and Software Tools* (New York: Falmer Press, 1990), 119.

and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded.”⁹ Formally, a theme is a statement (phrase or sentence) that identifies “what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” and reflects “conceptual topics developed by the research during a review of the data.”¹⁰ The function of a theme, for the purposes of the current study, is “as a way to categorize a set of data into ‘an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas’ [sic] ... lead[ing] to the development of higher-level theoretical constructs when similar themes are clustered together.”¹¹ In the current study, theming the data resulted in the grouping of descriptors into three thematic areas reflecting topical areas that exhibited both breadth and depth in terms of prioritization in the scholarship: interdisciplinarity, multiculturalism, and critical skills.

In two-cycle coding, the second cycle is reserved for the identification of patterns among the content descriptors or identified themes, allowing for further organization of the data into meaningful categories through iterative review and refinement. In the current study, second-cycle pattern coding is distinguished from transitional theming of the data in order to allow the analysis to consider two potentially productive organizational groupings of the data. Specifically, second-cycle pattern coding allowed the analysis to speak not only to the emerging thematic trends but also the breadth and depth of those thematic trends as they were represented across categories often associated with curricular ideological frameworks. The detailed processes of the coding cycles and their results are presented below.

⁹ Saldana, *Coding Manual*, 139.

¹⁰ Saldana, *Coding Manual*, 139; see also H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995).

¹¹ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*; Saldana, *Coding Manual*, 139, citing C. E. Auerbach and L. B. Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 38.

Data Analysis: Source and Unit of Observation

Before the unit of observation could be selected and coding could begin, it was necessary to refine the data source by reviewing the genres represented within *JGE* from 1991-2011. Specifically, texts within *JGE* were separated into categories based on their genre within the larger general education scholarship. A first cut was then made between primary and secondary sources as a way of framing relevant genre distinctions.

Source

For the purposes of this study, primary sources included those articles reporting on original scholarship, whether in the form of a scholarly essay, a research report, a position paper, or an empirical study. Secondary sources included those pieces reporting on the scholarship of others, including book reviews and editorial pieces. Secondary sources were subsequently eliminated from the data pool based on the differentiation between primary and secondary perspectives and the implications of each for assessing thematic trends. This differentiation and its relevance are clarified through a discussion of book reviews and editorials. In addition, within primary sources, the challenges presented by the class of evaluative articles were considered and those texts were also removed from the source.

Book Reviews

The elimination of book reviews was made on the basis of the distinction between primary and secondary perspectives on a given topic. Although their inclusion admittedly reflected a prioritization of the content of the books under review, the reviews themselves did not reflect original scholarship produced for inclusion in *JGE*. In other words, if the scholarship of *JGE* is understood as a national conversation on topics of interest to scholars and practitioners committing their energy and effort to the discussion, in a conversational context, book reviews

could be compared to reported speech—that is, someone else’s ideas reported on by another. If we take the content of *JGE* to represent a de facto conversation organized around a common scholarly purpose, content such as editorials and book reviews must be seen as conversational contributions that are essentially “transposition[s] that necessarily [take] into account two different cognitive perspectives: the point of view of the person whose utterance is being reported, and that of a speaker who is actually reporting that utterance.”¹² Although both book reviews and editorials are combinations of original argument and reported argument, the complexity of the intertwining of the two perspectives make both genres challenging to include in a study intended to trace dominant themes in the original scholarship of *JGE*.

The challenges posed by book reviews, compared with scholarly articles and studies, are illustrated in the following statements.

- a. “Interdisciplinarity will be a key facet of general education programs in the 21st century.”
- b. “In his recently released study, Smith argues convincingly that interdisciplinarity will be a key facet of general education programs in the 21st century.”

The first statement can clearly serve as the thesis for an original article; the second is an (admittedly oversimplified) assessment regarding the validity of another scholar’s work. To include the ideas and impressions in the second would be to alter the voices in the conversation to include, as primary, those from sources outside the Journal. Because one element of this study’s design is discovery of what a core journal in general education such as *JGE* contributes in terms of its status as a bounded conversation, eliminating external utterances (in the form of content produced as books on relevant topics) allows the review to avoid overemphasizing

¹² Teresa Dobrzyńska, "Rendering Metaphor in Reported Speech," in *Relative Points of View: Linguistic Representation of Culture*, ed. Magda Stroińska (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 39.

content dedicated to a given theme, beyond that which it deservedly receives through the articles that prioritize it in original scholarship.

Editorials

Like book reviews, editorials represent a fundamentally different genre relative to the contributions by authors of original scholarship and to the original conversation represented by the scholarship in *JGE*. In addition to the challenge represented by secondary perspectives embedded within the article summaries for a given volume and issue an editorial includes, two key challenges exist if editorials are included in the coding and analyses of *JGE* content. First, editorials often serve as both expressions of editorial opinion and as framing for the articles included in a given issue. Because of the intertwined nature of the opinion and summary, particularly in special issues like those on distance learning and the Portland State University general education reforms of the 1990s, and considering the fundamentally different rules of engagement in an editorial (requiring much less, if any, reliance on scholarly citation or sources), the content of editorials proves problematic when considered in identifying dominant themes in the literature of *JGE*. In addition to including opinions more freely expressed than possible within the conventions of scholarly articles and research studies, editorials also contain a great deal of summary of the articles actually included in given issues. To count editorials in assessing dominance of topics would, in that sense, simply be doubling the value of the topics covered in the original articles themselves. Furthermore, editorials in *JGE* vary widely in the amount of commentary included beyond summaries of the articles themselves. This variation is not consistent by editor or by topic. Given these considerations, along with acknowledgement that editorial control was exercised through their approval of the articles themselves for publication, editorials were eliminated from consideration in identifying major themes in general education.

It was assumed that the inclusion of the articles themselves reflected the prioritization of topics by the editor(s) involved in the selection process and so represented those priorities in themselves. Following the reasoned establishment of an appropriate unit of analysis and culling of content to focus on primary sources, pre-coding was undertaken.

Evaluative Articles

A third genre presented a challenge in the establishment of a coherent data set with which to work in the current study. Evaluative articles—those dedicated to reflection and critique of trends in general education ideologies, models, and content based on surveys, case studies and large-scale longitudinal research—represented a body of work that could be considered a foil or a complement for the findings of the current study. Unlike book reviews and editorials, the guiding concern with the use of this genre was not the extent to which it represented original research and a primary source. Instead, this particular genre, the evaluative article, presented a different type of challenge. Specifically, the evaluative article represented a genre in which scholars wrestled with questions that mirrored the questions guiding the current study. In a very real sense, then, the articles that evaluated general education design and reform by looking at the variables impacting those design and reform efforts actually replicated much of the work being done in this study.

Where the current study was to review scholarship to identify dominant thematic trends in general education at the postsecondary level, the evaluative articles within the scholarship did similar work. For example, in their 1991 article, Gaff and Wasescha considered trends in general education by reporting on administrator impressions of general education reform outcomes across the 1980s.¹³ Similarly, articles from the early 1990s through the first decade of the 21st century revealed analyses and recommendations for general education reforms at the course and

¹³ Gaff and Wasescha, “Assessing the Reform.”

program levels.¹⁴ Where the various evaluative articles in *JGE* provided insights, themselves, into trends across the general education landscape through evaluation of successes and failures in the design and reform of general education, they represented a body of work the current study seeks to complement. Therefore, evaluative articles were eliminated from consideration for the current study. They are, however, revisited below in the discussion of resonance among the organizational principles of Miller's general education paradigm and the dominant thematic trends discovered in the current study.

Unit of Observation

The purpose of the current study is to identify dominant thematic trends in general education curricula and programs through an analysis of topics prioritized in core scholarship across a two-decade span. The first step in approaching coding of the scholarship was to determine the unit that would serve as the appropriate data source given the study's specific focus. For example, in a conventional meta-analysis, the focus would be on the reliability or validity of the claims being argued within each article, necessitating in-depth review of the methodology as well as the analysis and results of each article. Given that the current study is not a meta-analysis of a single focal area within general education but a search for thematic trends in the literature, review of titles and abstracts, rather than in-depth analysis of the complete articles themselves, was appropriate. Consider, for example, the difference in goals in the following scenario involving hypothetical analyses of scholarship on the question of liberal education.

¹⁴ See for example, Toombs, Amey and Chen's "General Education," a review tracing trends across 700 programs; case studies reviewing general education reform such as that by John T. Goldthwait, Marshall A. Asher, Jr., Keith A. Lane, and John Meacham, Jr., "A General Education Program Seen Fifty Years Later," *The Journal of General Education* 43, no. 1 (1994): 44-58; Clewett's article, "A General Education Focus," presenting a considered argument characterizing general education for the 21st century; as well as later articles, such as Boning's "Coherence in General Education," presenting general education as a search for curricular coherence; Warner and Koeppel's "General Education Requirements" comparing general education curricula across rankings and institutional type; and, consideration of general education reform as an opportunity for institutional alignment as in Scott M. Fuess and Nancy L. Mitchell, "General Education Reform: Opportunities for Institutional Alignment," *The Journal of General Education* 60, no. 1 (2011): 1-15.

General education scholarship has focused much attention in recent years on the question of liberal education. Specifically, research has suggested that traditional liberal education, associated with a prioritization of perspective based on careful study of the canon of Western civilization, represents a constraining force when contrasted with the development of a breadth of perspective gained from study of a variety of sociocultural traditions, a process associated with the multiculturalism movement.¹⁵ If the current research focus were on assessing the validity and reliability of claims made by the two camps, liberal education proponents versus multiculturalism proponents, study would require in-depth analysis and comparison of claims, methods, and conclusions drawn across a wide body of scholarship in the two areas. However, as in the current study, if the research seeks to identify topical priorities across liberal education scholarship and/or that of multiculturalism, attention would be more properly paid not to the reliability and validity of argumentation within the scholarship but to the questions being asked and investigated, most often retrievable from a review of the titles of articles and their abstracts. In other words, trends in scholarship on liberal education and multiculturalism could be gleaned from a review of the types of questions being asked about each, whether in terms of their theoretical frameworks or their realizations within education programs. On the other hand, a meta-analysis would seek to determine, for example, whether sufficient evidence was present in the body of work on theoretical frameworks to merit claiming one approach or ideology as preferable above all others, a task that would necessitate a very different analysis of the content of the articles themselves.

In the current study, the focus is placed neither on establishing a claim for the best general education model nor on identifying the most valid general education goals or most

¹⁵ Ana M. Martinez-Aleman and Katya Salkever, "Multiculturalism and the Mission of Liberal Education," *The Journal of General Education* 50, no. 2 (2001): 102-139.

appropriate general education courses. Given the contextual variables that exist in the unique diversity of the U.S. postsecondary context, identifying superlatives of that sort would ultimately constrain valuable dialog regarding fit of model and purpose to institutional contexts. Therefore, the focus is on identifying thematic trends in the scholarship that may inform principles by which any and all general education programs could be usefully organized.

Within this study, review of the scholarship is centered on understanding the emergence of generally accepted fundamental assumptions related to the purposes, structures and content of general education at the onset of the 21st century. Once the unit of observation was limited to article abstracts to insure fit with the study's questions and goals, it was necessary to organize the data in a way that would prove accessible during the coding process. In order to facilitate the review of the titles and abstracts (units of analysis), all were culled from the appropriate online databases (e.g. JSTOR and Project MUSE) and entered into a single Excel spreadsheet. Within the spreadsheet, the unit of observation for each article was placed on separate worksheets by the volume number and year of *JGE*. For all of the coding, including preliminary jottings, this spreadsheet served as the reference for units of observation.

Pre-coding

To approach the identification of dominant thematic trends in *JGE* between 1991 and 2011, the titles and abstracts of all articles in each issue were reviewed.¹⁶ Pre-coding can provide the researcher a way to record initial impressions that are formed as the data is approached for the first time. The impressions are inevitable. Keeping a record, however loosely and informally it is made, can inevitably assist the researcher in understanding where and how codes, themes,

¹⁶ Abstracts are not available for all content in *The Journal of General Education* from 1991-2011. Where abstracts were not available, texts themselves were scanned for identification of the main argument and conclusion(s). Scanning for this information was limited to the initial pages and final pages of the article, as well as the methods section, where relevant. A similar approach was taken in the scanning of book reviews and editorials, adjusted to accommodate the differences in organization and content of those genres.

and trends may have begun to coalesce in the early stages of a lengthy period of engagement with the data.

Preliminary Jottings

Although preliminary jotting is usually associated with the review of field notes in an attempt to both set the content and begin the arduous task of making sense of the data, it can prove extremely helpful when working with a large set of written data as in the current study. As data is approached, the sheer volume can be quite overwhelming and it can prove helpful to begin to jot down impressions and responses as a precursor to assigning codes and beginning the task of searching for trends that further organize the data and crystallize key trends.

As the units of observation for each article were reviewed, the researcher maintained a notebook in which initial thoughts and responses were recorded. These thoughts were not always associated solely with a specific unit of observation but were, instead, generated in response to information from a breadth of content, including article titles and authorial attributions. Two representative thoughts emerged in this preliminary stage: tensions between stability and dynamism as well as complexities of the components of curriculum ideology, including purpose, structure, substance, pedagogy and assessment.

Stability and Dynamism

The tensions between stability, loosely interpreted as adherence to relatively static world views, and dynamism, reflecting interests in complexity and emergent conditions, coalesced as titles and abstracts revealed scholars' interests in, for example, emergent perspectives across relatively less constrained cultural and academic domains (e.g., prioritizing world cultures over Western culture, and cross- or interdisciplinary constructs over those within disciplinary boundaries) and breadth of skills (e.g. the so-called 21st century skills, as critical and creative

ways of knowing beyond memorization of core knowledge). Dynamism could be felt in discussions of models of general education as well. Reflecting a push for increased complexity and dynamism, authors prioritized moves away from the traditional core and distributive models focused around discipline-oriented content to hybrid models organized around thematic constructs and/or interdisciplinary content, with a corresponding emphasis on interplay among epistemologies, cognitive structures and modes of inquiry. Finally, several abstracts prioritized inclusion of content associated with specific disciplines, the justifications for that inclusion being made on the basis of contribution to a breadth of perspective, or movement beyond preparation for the majors.

Discussions of content at the course level typically focused on new, dynamic ways of approaching substance from a variety of pedagogical perspectives, including inquiry-based and problem-based learning as well as experiential learning—all centered around expanding the notion of the classroom beyond the content of the academy and tying it to both the individually-determined and socially-determined experiences and challenges of the contemporary world. It is worth noting here that these initial impressions of tensions between stability and dynamism in terms of the goals, structures, and content of general education proved meaningful and inevitably informed subsequent interpretations through the coding stages. Indeed, in this preliminary period, a second key awareness that emerged would inform researcher assessment of the dominance of emergent thematic trends themselves.

Curriculum Ideology

During this period of preliminary jottings, abstracts began to sort themselves across not only loosely defined notions of stability and dynamism but also what became recognizable as the various components often associated with curricular frameworks, including: purpose, structure

and content as well as pedagogy and assessment.¹⁷ In the section that follows, the constructs associated with general education ideologies and models are clarified through explanation of their placement within what are typically referred to as the domains of purpose, structure, and content of curricular studies.¹⁸ Following the clarification of those categories, a brief overview of characteristics motivating association with the categories of assessment and pedagogy is presented.

Purpose. In multiple ideological frameworks, the conceptual domain of an educational program has been presented as encompassing those theories and rationales that serve as the foundation for decision making in the other domains. Taking the example of programs of general education, in the broad historical context of U.S. higher education, this domain would encompass discussions of the purposes and philosophies underpinning general education both as a movement and in its programmatic instantiations at institutions across the country. Because general education is simultaneously a movement and individual programs within institutional contexts, subdivisions between the two may be appropriate. However, as the first run through the data progressed, a tendency of many abstracts to demonstrate a focus on the following questions became apparent.

- For what purpose does the program exist?
- What are the goals of the program?

¹⁷ The four categories of purpose, structure, content, and assessment reflect organization of previous reviews and bibliographies in the general education literature, e.g. Paul Dressel and L. Mayhew, "A Selected Bibliography on General Education," *The Journal of General Education* 8, no. 4 (1955): 261-86; Helen Warren, "Recent Themes in General Education: A Bibliographic Essay," *The Journal of General Education* 34, no. 3 (1982): 271-291. Similar categories appear in classic curricular reviews such as Schiro's *Curriculum Theory*, George Posner, *Analyzing the Curriculum* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), and, Kliebard's *Struggle for the American Curriculum*. Although pedagogy is sometimes conflated within the content or substantive domain, the direction of the current study is more clearly served by a division between pedagogy and content.

¹⁸ In addition to the seminal works by Schiro, Posner, and Kliebard, consider also Harry Hutson, "Inservice Best Practices: The Learnings of General Education," ERIC (Feb. 1979) ED215990 <http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED215990.pdf> (accessed January 25, 2009). In his work, Hutson uses the terms conceptual, procedural, and substantive in lieu of purpose, structure, and content, respectively. Within the current study, the sets of terms are used interchangeably.

- What are the expected outcomes of the program?

Again, these questions could be asked at the micro or macro levels, conceiving of individual programs, programs across a system, programs defined at a state level, or even programs understood in the discussion of the general education movement at large.”

Structure. In ideological frameworks, the procedural domain, or structure, may be the least easily identified. Including issues of control, support and delivery of information, the questions that relevant abstracts answered included the following.

- How is the program to be structured?
- Who is to be in charge of decision-making at the program level and within the program structure?

The answers to those questions relative to general education programs could be presented in articles that, for example, reflect upon the benefits and disadvantages of centralized administrative or academic units responsible for general education curricula and management. Similarly, debates over the location of the program’s offering within, across or among departments could easily be classified within this domain. Finally, discussions of the delivery of the program itself, associated with the logistics of listings in course catalogs or positions taken on the locus of control of the course content would fit within the procedural domain.

Content. Finally, the content, or the substantive domain, includes discussion of content at both the course and curricular levels. The questions answered by abstracts that fell naturally into this domain included the following.

- Which knowledge, information or skills are to be included in the program?
- What skills and information do students need to meet the overall goals of the program?

Articles that argued for the incorporation of specific courses in the general education curricula situated themselves comfortably within this substantive domain. From interests in inclusion of Asian studies in the core curriculum to arguments in favor of teaching the Holocaust to articles touting the benefits of learning a foreign language or those of including economics, articles ranged across a breadth of seemingly disparate topics sharing, at least apparently, a concern that these topics not be lost in the shuffle as decisions were made regarding content for general education programs.

Pedagogy. Articles wrestling with pedagogical concerns were increasingly prevalent in the literature in the first decade of the 21st century. For example, multiple articles engaged in meaningful discussions of problem-based learning, active learning, and collaborative learning. In addition, a plethora of articles revealed burgeoning interest in the potential benefits and concerns related to alternative delivery options, from distance learning to hybrid models. Finally, numerous articles considered co-curricular or extra-curricular approaches, including living-learning communities, field experiences, service learning, and community engagement. Although articles that prioritized pedagogy were grouped separately from those prioritizing multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills from perspectives of purpose, structure and content, these articles are included in the three thematic categories in the discussion below. It is worth recognizing here, however, that articles prioritizing pedagogy inevitably de-emphasize the content serving as the sample through which the method is demonstrated. Nonetheless, articles focused on pedagogical principles also reflect prioritization of the content areas chosen as the stage on which to demonstrate the benefits of a given method or approach. For example, an article extolling the virtues of problem-based learning relative to interdisciplinary courses or goals can be recognized as prioritizing problem-based learning methodology but also as

implicitly asserting an interest in interdisciplinarity, given its selection among all possible content areas as the staging ground for the discussion.

Assessment. In addition to scholarship wrestling with questions of classroom methods, techniques and activities, a multitude of articles considered the complexities of assessment at the program level as well as across both skills and course content. Among other issues, questions regarding potential for assessing general education outcomes were raised both at the institutional and state levels. Within assessment articles, relevant factors impacting assessment results included disposition, motivation, engagement and perception as well as fit of assessment tasks to outcomes. As with articles prioritizing pedagogy, assessment articles were recognized as contributing to the overall conversation in ways markedly different from those represented by the articles coalesced under the three major thematic categories. Nonetheless, like the articles focusing on pedagogy, assessment articles are also considered in the discussion of the major thematic trends that emerged in the second coding cycle.

Both pedagogical and assessment articles are considered as primary contributors to the core content reflecting prioritization of issues in the scholarship, whether the contribution is through explicit or implicit reference to general education topics. For example, Stage and Kinzie's article calling for reform in STEM education prioritized pedagogical issues rather than considering the question of the role of STEM education itself within general education.¹⁹ Similarly, Dietrich and Olson's research regarding the potential for using e-portfolios in the assessment of international learning assumes the importance of international learning within general education, focusing instead on the question of whether e-portfolios contribute

¹⁹ Frances K. Stage and Jillian Kinzie, "Reform in Undergraduate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics: The Classroom Context," *The Journal of General Education* 58, no. 2 (2009): 85-105.

meaningfully to evaluation of that learning.²⁰ The first is considered implicit evidence of prioritization of interdisciplinary STEM education and the second is considered implicit evidence of prioritization of multiculturalism.

In sum, a review of preliminary jottings made during initial skimming of the data for the current study reveals that abstracts were tagged as foregrounding tensions between stability and dynamism as well as domains across curricular ideology, including: purpose or philosophy, structure or procedure, content or substance, pedagogy or approach, and assessment or evaluation. Abstracts that foregrounded tensions of stability and dynamism were spread across all five of the domains. In other words, issues of stability and dynamism were detected in discussions of purpose, structure, and content as well as pedagogy and assessment. Within those domains, abstracts that foregrounded debates regarding the role of general education, whether as a national movement or institutional program, were tagged in the purpose domain. Those pieces that argued for or reviewed models of general education were assigned to the structure domain. Abstracts presenting arguments for inclusion of specific content within general education were tagged in the content domain. Those abstracts foregrounding recommendations or suggestions relative to pedagogical choices were included in the pedagogical domain. Finally, those abstracts that reported on assessment or argued the pros and cons of assessment, whether at the skill, course, or programmatic level were placed in the assessment domain.

At this stage, as at all stages in coding of this type, the preliminary jottings were reviewed. Although multiple abstracts were tagged as reflective of tensions among stability and dynamism, the more compelling finding lay in the fact that the vast majority of the abstracts could be tagged within one of the five core areas of curricular ideology. This result came as no

²⁰ Jill Wisniewski Dietrich and Christa Olson, "In Quest of Meaningful Assessment of International Learning: The Development of a Student Survey and ePortfolio Approach," *The Journal of General Education* 59, no. 3 (2010): 143-158.

surprise, given that the focus of *JGE* is on questions pertaining to general education curricula, from the classroom to the institutional program to the national movement. However, it was noteworthy that at this preliminary stage the potential for these curricular domains to serve as a framework for assessing the depth and breadth of thematic trends became clear. Specifically, during this preliminary review, it became apparent that to be considered dominant, any thematic trends that emerged during coding would have to exhibit breadth and depth in representation across abstracts focusing on the various curricular constructs.

In the following section, the processes followed during and between first-cycle, transitional, and second-cycle coding are presented. Following the preliminary jottings and reflections, the coding cycles presented the opportunity to look more closely at the content of each observation unit, to consider the primary arguments being made and the themes being prioritized.

First-Cycle Coding: Descriptors

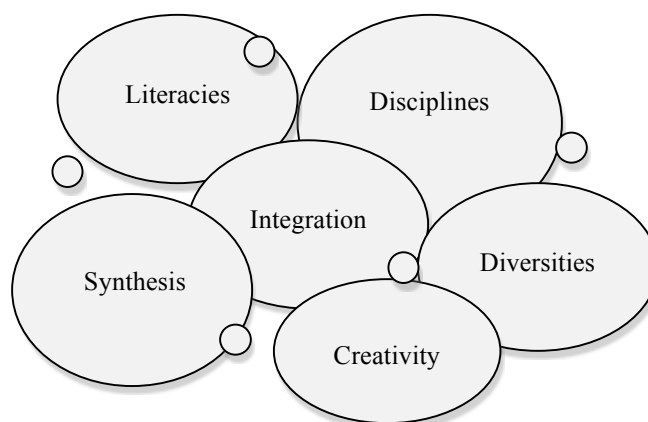
The purpose of first-cycle coding is to identify the topics that appear in each unit of analysis. First-cycle coding itself does not involve organization of the topics into categories of meaning. Rather the focus is on the identification of key ideas and the reflection needed to develop meaningful descriptors that will both fairly characterize the content of the units of observation themselves as well as provide a consistent body of codes that can be reviewed in the transitional theming stage as well as in the second-cycle coding search for trends.

Descriptive Codes

In the first-cycle coding for this study, descriptive codes, or descriptors, were assigned to each unit of observation. Care was exercised both to insure that the codes fairly reflected the priorities of topics within each unit and to maintain an accurate record of the codes themselves.

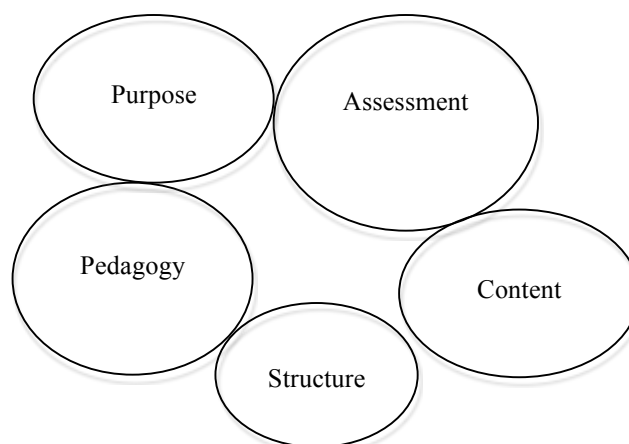
The coding process was iterative in that engagement with the data inevitably led to refinement of the descriptors themselves in light of later discoveries within the data. A record of the initial codes was kept in a notebook as well as noted on the spreadsheets that held the observation units themselves. As the data was reviewed over a few weeks, descriptors began to organize themselves loosely into clumps of nouns and noun phrases. Among representative descriptors were: *liberal education, multiculturalism, critical thinking, literacies, problem-solving, problem-based learning, foreign language, disposition, transferability, borders, canon, cultural diversity, interdisciplinarity, writing, Great Books, synthesis, integrative thinking, creativity, achievement, disposition, transferability, inquiry, technology, mathematical literacy, and engagement*. By no means do these descriptors cover the range of codes initially assigned to the array of observation units. However, their breadth is representative in that they include many of the descriptors that began to coalesce into emergent patterns in the next stage of coding. Figure 2 presents a visual reflection of the complexity of representative content descriptors that emerged during this initial coding. The larger circles contain topics that were frequently represented in the data. Smaller circles represent additional, less frequently mentioned topic.

Figure 3. Content descriptors.



As abstracts were reviewed, descriptor codes were assigned to reflect the content topic(s) highlighted in each. The number of descriptor codes that emerged in the first approach to the abstracts almost equaled the number of abstracts themselves. In addition, after descriptor codes were assigned across these observation units, the results of preliminary jottings were referenced, and observation units were also tagged as foregrounding one or more of the domains of purpose, structure, content, pedagogy, and assessment. Abstracts that foregrounded debates regarding the role of general education, whether as a national movement or institutional program, were tagged in the purpose domain. Those pieces that argued for or reviewed models of general education were assigned to the structure domain. Abstracts presenting arguments for inclusion of specific content within general education were tagged in the content domain. Those abstracts foregrounding recommendations or suggestions relative to pedagogical choices were included in the pedagogical domain. Finally, those abstracts that reported on assessment or argued the pros and cons of assessment, whether at the skill, course, or programmatic level were placed in the assessment domain.

Figure 4. Domain descriptors.



During the coding process, it is important to pause and assess descriptors before attempting identification of emergent trends. At the end of the assignment of content and domain descriptors, it became obvious that although the codes were beginning to come into focus across some loosely defined groupings, there was not yet sufficient apparent order to merit moving directly into the establishment of complex trends in second-cycle coding. Therefore, theming the data, an oft-used transitional stage in coding cycles, was begun.

Transitional Coding: Themes

As noted above, the descriptor codes assigned during the first sweep through the data were both numerous and disparate in reference. On the one hand, the breadth of topics can be interpreted as a clear reflection of the comprehensiveness of coverage within *JGE* in terms of potential topics of relevance in general education as a field. On the other hand, the sheer number of disparate descriptors necessitated the use of a transitional stage in the coding process known as theming the data. The function of a theme, as noted above, is to organize descriptors into higher order categories representing shared features. In the current study, theming the data involved grouping descriptors into categories that reflected shared concerns related to general education. These themes, in turn, revealed priorities that harmonized across three areas of general education: multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills. In this section, each of the three emergent themes is briefly summarized.

Multiculturalism

One theme that emerged from a review of first-cycle coding descriptors was that of *multiculturalism*. Abstracts classified within this category shared in concerns for designing programs that actively prioritized differential perspectives, organizing program structures to ensure that components include opportunities for students to gain exposure to multiplicity of

sociocultural perspectives, and reframing of content to reflect diversity of perspective both in the course texts and in the ways in which the texts were approached. The resulting theme reflected a burgeoning concern with ensuring that students moving through general education are exposed to a breadth of sociocultural perspectives and encouraged in the development of awareness of and respect for the multiple perspectives represented by individuals from various experiential backgrounds, tying into not only notions of diversity but also notions of civic awareness and engagement, extending naturally from general education ideologies that had foregrounded the preparation of an engaged and educated citizenry. The common thread binding these abstracts together was an interest in commitment to democratic principles within a pluralistic context as expressed through discussions of the purpose, structure, and content of general education programs.

Interdisciplinarity

A second theme that emerged through review of first-cycle descriptors was *interdisciplinarity*. The notions of integration and recognition of complexity entailed by this focus spread across two different areas of the curriculum and reflected two disparate though connected trends in the history of general education. Specifically, abstracts foregrounding interdisciplinarity raised questions and issues that hearkened back to interests in both scholar-academic and pragmatic ideologies, conflating the role of general education in contributing to student inculcation into the discourse of the academy and its pursuit of knowledge with its role in preparing students for engagement with the challenges of the professional communities they would enter upon graduation. The common thread binding these abstracts together was their focus on questions of purpose, structure, and substance relative to the role of interdisciplinarity in the academy.

Critical Skills

The third of the thematic trends that emerged among the codes of the first cycle was that of *critical skills*, a category often overlapping with the commonly referenced *21st century skills*.²¹ Where authors called for focus on integrative thought, they often referenced needs for reflection as well as clarity and accuracy of communication of ideas. Terms like *innovative* and *creative* were prevalent in abstracts discussing the contemplative goals of general education for student populations within the target period. These skills were contrasted with illiteracies (textual, graphic, information, technical, scientific), the inability to communicate effectively (whether in writing or through other symbol systems), and the inability to move beyond synthesis and analysis to think in critical, integrative, and creative ways. Together, abstracts whose descriptors comprised the critical skills theme shared an interest in the development of literacies and problem-solving abilities, broadly writ, through general education offerings.

Coherence and Comprehensiveness

Given the iterative nature of the coding undertaken in the current study, it was essential to pause and reflect on whether the groupings generated so far met two key criteria: coherence and comprehensiveness. Before moving into the second coding cycle, the data were reviewed to ascertain whether they allowed for inclusion of the bulk of the scholarship in the source and to determine whether the emergent themes had achieved a stage of coherence that would render them accessible and productive as second cycle coding for increasingly robust and complex patterns was undertaken.

From a qualitative perspective, the three themes discussed above represent coherent and cohesive groupings among the descriptive codes assigned in first cycle coding. The three themes

²¹ Although 21st century skills are referenced in the general education scholarship, the choice of thematic designation of “critical skills” was made to avoid assumptions regarding the skills to be included in the category based on potential familiarity with other “21st century skills” designations.

of multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills met the coherence criteria in the sense that they represent scholarship dedicated to trends across the conceptual, procedural, and content domains of curricular studies, as well as across pedagogy and assessment. In fact, jottings across the curricular domains suggested in the pre-coding stage subsequently provided a reasoned method for determining whether topical thematic trends were emerging in isolated areas of curricular concern or across a breadth of curricular domains. It was assumed that themes evidenced in abstracts across multiple domains (e.g. inclusion of technology in articles discussing purposes, models, and content for general education) could be considered reflective of stronger trends than might themes evidenced in abstracts across a single domain (e.g. inclusion of technology only in abstracts proposing additions to general education content areas or arguing for its relevance in pedagogy and delivery of content).

From a quantitative perspective, review of the abstracts falling within one or more of the three thematic categories confirmed coverage of a clear majority of the articles themselves in *JGE* over the targeted timeframe. Indeed, among just over 150 articles, given elimination of book reviews, editorials, and evaluative articles, the three themes were present in approximately 80% of the texts. Taken as a group, the abstracts coded and placed within the three thematic groupings accounted for well over three-fourths of the total scholarship in *JGE* from 1991-2011.

Following multiple iterative reviews of the data in assigning descriptors and theming the data, the coding process entered its second cycle. In that stage, coding was pursued to determine whether there were additional complexities within the thematic groupings that merited further investigation. Such complexities are at the heart of the identification of patterns in second-cycle coding practices.

Second-Cycle Coding: Trends

Utilizing pattern coding, in the tradition of Miles and Huberman, the second cycle involved identifying patterns among the descriptor codes and themes assigned during the first cycle and transitional coding.²² Where first-cycle coding is dedicated to the identification of elements and topics as well as the generation of appropriate descriptor tags, followed by the transitional theming of the data, second-cycle coding involves sorting through those descriptors and themes in an attempt to recognize potential, emergent trends that exist at more complex organizational and conceptual levels. In the current study, such patterns were sought to crystallize further the analysis of *JGE* scholarship as a whole, leading to the identification of dominant thematic trends that may inform praxis in general education design and reform.

Patterns: Thematic Trends

Upon completion of the first-cycle and transitional coding, the emergent themes of multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity and critical skills were identified. The patterns that emerged within and across each of these three themes are captured in three trends: (1) the role of the individual relative to the contexts in which the he/she functions, (2) movement within each thematic area from the receptive to the productive or from the passive to the active, and (3) resonance with Miller's original paradigmatic principles. Within each dominant theme, the complex patterns comprising the role of the individual, the movement from receptive to the active skills or focus, and the resonance with Miller's principles are discussed. The complex patterns, including sub-themes within the thematic categories, are presented in Table 1.

²² Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994).

Table 1. Miller’s principles relative to current thematic trends and sub-themes.

Current Thematic Trends	Sub-themes	Miller’s Organizing Principles
		Self-Consciousness
Multiculturalism	Cultural Awareness	Democratization
	Globalization	
	Ethnorelativity	
Interdisciplinarity	Epistemological Awareness	Comprehensiveness
	Border Crossing	
	Contingency	
Critical Skills	Literacy	
	Problem-Solving	

In Table 1, two of Miller’s original organizing principles—democratization and comprehensiveness—find resonance in current dominant thematic trends of multiculturalism and interdisciplinarity, respectively. However, two discrepancies exist in the resonance among Miller’s principles and current thematic trends. On the one hand, Miller’s principle of self-consciousness has no apparent equivalent in the current thematic trends. On the other hand, a thematic trend is posited for which there is no apparent equivalent in Miller’s paradigm. These two discrepancies will be addressed prior to the in-depth discussion, in Chapter 5, of the patterns created by the thematic trends and sub-themes.

The first gap, the lack of a current thematic trend emerging from Miller’s principle of self-consciousness, can be explained as a by-product of the selection of genres for inclusion in the current analysis. Specifically, Miller’s organizing principle of self-consciousness reflected a focus on the need for consistent and constant evaluation of general education programs in terms of their design and outcomes. Because evaluative articles were eliminated from the data pool for the current study, as discussed earlier in the chapter, program evaluation itself was not listed as a

current thematic trend. However, given the numerous articles that comprised the set of evaluative articles, it is safe to say that a study undertaking analysis of those articles would find clear confirmation that Miller's principle of self-consciousness has been fully realized in the years transitioning from the 20th to the 21st century.

The second gap, the lack of a principle in Miller's paradigm from which the critical skills theme might have emerged, presents a greater challenge. Because resonance among Miller's principles and current thematic trends has been identified as meaningful in establishing credibility of the dominant trends as potential organizing principles, the apparent lack of a precursor to the trend of critical skills could lead to reasonable challenge of Miller's framework as relevant to the interpretation of thematic trends and their potential. However, an explanation exists for this gap—one that lies in the interpretations made by the researcher herself. Specifically, it must be acknowledged that the majority of articles that will be presented as foregrounding critical skills below could have found a home in either of the themes of multiculturalism or interdisciplinarity. In wrestling with the data, the researcher was compelled to decide between presenting the data as reflective of two dominant thematic trends (multiculturalism and interdisciplinarity) or of three (multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills). For reasons that will become clear in the discussion that follows, the researcher chose to follow the latter path and report on three patterns. One of the primary reasons is apparent in the subtitles of the sections in Chapter 5, as the thematic trends are characterized as reflecting the various roles of the individual: in society, in the academy, and as individual.

Conclusion

In this chapter, coding and analysis of the data were approached in an iterative fashion. Incorporating multiple passes through the data, the coding process involved preliminary jottings

to capture initial impressions in the early stages of working with the data. Following the pre-coding reflections, first-cycle coding allowed for the emergence of descriptor codes assigned to each unit of analysis. Theming the data then provided an opportunity for the codes to begin to coalesce, revealing potential dominant thematic trends of multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills. Reviewed further in the second-cycle coding, these thematic trends proved both quantitatively dominant, appearing in well over three quarters of the abstracts within the data pool, and qualitatively rewarding, demonstrating strong resonance with Miller's paradigmatic principles of general education. In Chapter 5, a discussion of the findings is presented, highlighting the complexity of the emergent patterns derived in the second-cycle coding described in the current chapter. In Chapter 6, conclusions are drawn, limitations are acknowledged, recommendations are made, and future research directions are suggested.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

In this chapter, the relationships among the dominant thematic trends and their sub-themes are considered in light of the implications of resonance with Miller's earlier paradigmatic principles for general education in the 20th century. The resonance among the thematic trends and Miller's paradigmatic principles reinforces both the contribution of scholarship to understanding core priorities in a field and the interpretation of the thematic trends as those core priorities in 21st century general education curricula.

Democratization and Multiculturalism: The Individual in Society

In his discussion of the democratic context and goals of general education, Miller focuses on the role of general education in enhancing student perspectives regarding the increasingly pluralistic character of the U.S. across the 20th century. Here, Miller situates the individual's relationship to society at the core of general education decision making, even suggesting that prioritization of knowledge follows context, so that the character of a society and its members becomes paramount.

In the scholarship of *JGE*, numerous articles focused on multiplicity of perspective as a goal, a guiding factor or an outcome in both program and course design. Among the first-cycle descriptors coalescing loosely around notions of pluralism and democratization were the following:

- cultural diversity
- cultural pluralism
- multiculturalism

- cross-cultural(ism)
- inter-cultural(ism)
- ethnorelativity

A review of the abstracts from which these descriptors and the overall theme of multiculturalism had derived suggested that democratization, as an extension of democratic pluralism through exposure to breadth of perspective in general education programs, was prioritized relative both to the context in which general education functions and within general education curricula itself. Specifically, abstracts focused on multiculturalism as representing the emergence of awareness of the critical importance of diversity of perspectives. Tempered in Deweyan fashion with a particular interest in non-assimilationist and non-acculturationist pluralism, this multiculturalism is neither reductionist nor nihilist. The notions of multiculturalism extended from discussions of the students in the classroom to the cultures represented in the courses themselves. Together, democratization and multiculturalism played out in scholarship of *JGE* in patterns revolving around cultural awareness, globalization or internationalization, and ethnorelativity.

Cultural Awareness

The sub-theme of *cultural awareness* was populated by abstracts tagged with descriptors reflecting their focus on cultural diversity as a variable motivating numerous arguments regarding how and what to study within general education. For example, a framework based on experiential categories was posited by Becker as subject matter for the investigation of the study of contemporary world cultures.¹ In addition, multiple authors wrestled with the challenges of implementation of multiculturally-oriented curricula, whether in debates over the addition of

¹ Robert Becker, "Categories of Experience: A Paradigm for the Study of Contemporary World Cultures at Western State College of Colorado," *The Journal of General Education* 41 (1992): 32-39.

content on cultures previously ignored or the movement of previously marginalized culture content to the core.²

Numerous articles justified the inclusion in general education of specific subject matter and courses through reference to their contribution to the development of student awareness of the perspective of the *other*. For Henderson, cultural dialogues were one of two key aspects to be valued in teacher education programs, as he encouraged the promotion of cultural and reciprocal dialogues to expand perspectives teachers themselves brought to the educational context.³ Tigue presented the teaching of mythology as a way to enhance student abilities to cope with diverse perspectives and to encourage them to explore the experiences of others.⁴ In his discussion of the teaching of the Holocaust, Farnham framed courses as enhancing student sensitivity to the suffering of others and their awareness of cultural diversity.⁵ In addition, Avery's article reframes the canon (specifically Plato's *Republic*) in terms of its potential for encouraging student reflection on such works as the thoughts and experiences of others rather than as ideas of Western Culture to be emulated without reflection.⁶ Finally, Sudermann as well as Wolff cited foreign language instruction as central to general education in its contribution to student awareness of and appreciation for cultural diversity.⁷

² For a representative discussion, see Lynn Goodstein, "Achieving Multicultural Curriculum: Conceptual, Pedagogical, and Structural Issues," *The Journal of General Education* 43, no. 2 (1994): 102-116

³ James Henderson, "The Question of Culture and Dialogue in Reflective Teacher Education Programs," *The Journal of General Education* 41 (1992): 40-50.

⁴ John Tigue, "Teaching Mythology as a Subtext of the Humanities," *The Journal of General Education* 41 (1992): 23-31.

⁵ James Farnham, "What is the Value of Teaching the Holocaust?" *The Journal of General Education* 41 (1992): 18-22.

⁶ Jon Avery, "Plato's Republic in the Core Curriculum: Multiculturalism and the Canon Debate," *The Journal of General Education* 44, no. 4 (1995): 234-255.

⁷ Sudermann, David P., "Out of the Labyrinth: The Role of Foreign Language in General Education," *The Journal of General Education* 42, no. 3 (1993): 149-163; Donna Rogers Wolff, "El Espanol a Distancia! Developing a Technology-based Distance Education Course for Intermediate Spanish," *The Journal of General Education* 49, no. 1 (2000): 44-52.

Still other authors reviewed procedural issues associated with inclusion of diversity awareness within general education. Falcone, et al. discussed introduction of cultural diversity (across ethnic, gender and geography parameters) through assignments embedded within multiple introductory college courses.⁸ On the other hand, Lieberman and Goucher argued for the introduction of multicultural education through a diversity requirement in a distribution general education program.⁹ In another approach to reflecting on the need for encouragement of cultural awareness through general education, Grahn reminded readers of the need to introduce Latin-American culture in global history while Fong argued for movement of Asian-American studies into the core general education curriculum, from what she characterized as its earlier framing in model minority terms as an example that remained at the periphery of the core.¹⁰ Finally, Goodstein presented methods for achieving multiculturalism in the core in spite of the multiple constraints she noted.¹¹ As a sub-theme within multiculturalism in general education, this first thread of cultural awareness reflects scholarly concern with the need to utilize course content and programming to raise student awareness of difference at the level of the individual as well as of the group. In the next section, a second thread demonstrates scholarly prioritization of multiculturalism not only encouraging development of sensitivity and respect for the other but also in coordinating such sensitivity relative to the larger institutional and community context through organized commitment to internationalization of the curriculum.

⁸ Janice Brandon-Falcone, Joel Benson, James Eiswert, and Esther Winter, "Teaching Cultural Diversity in the Core Curriculum," *The Journal of General Education* 43, no. 3 (1994): 230-240.

⁹ Deborah Lieberman and Candice Goucher, "Shaping the Curriculum: Multicultural Education and University Studies," *The Journal of General Education* 48, no. 2 (1999): 118-125.

¹⁰ Colleen Fong, "From Margin to Center (?): Teaching Introduction to Asian American Studies as a General Education Requirement," *The Journal of General Education* 44, no. 2 (1995): 108-129; Lance Grahn, "Integrating Latin America and the Caribbean into Global History," *The Journal of General Education* 46, no. 2 (1997): 107-128.

¹¹ Goodstein, "Achieving Multicultural Curriculum."

Globalization

The sub-theme of *globalization* recognizes a common thread running through the abstracts coded for their various contributions to the promotion of multiculturalism as an integral element of general education in the 21st century.¹² Where some articles focused specifically on cultural diversity as a feature meriting consideration as a core component at both the course and program levels, other articles shared a common interest in internationalizing the curriculum to prepare students for engagement in the global community. For example, Mauch and Spaulding encouraged internationalization of the curriculum through student exchanges.¹³ Brooks reframed the humanities as a locus for the increase of cultural maturity (measured as the “willingness of individuals to explore the way other cultures live, value, and behave”), imploring humanities to encompass a program of cultural perspectives based on global perspectivism.¹⁴ Similarly, Freysinger, focusing on questions of procedure in internationalizing the curriculum, proposed global studies as a structural locus for achieving the goals associated with internationalization of the undergraduate curriculum.¹⁵ These articles serve as representative of numerous others that drew attention to the need for development not only of awareness of sociocultural difference but also of an organized approach to an appreciation of that difference and its impact on various systems on the world stage.

¹² The terms *globalization* and *internationalization* are used interchangeably in the scholarship of the period. *Globalization* was chosen as the core term for this sub-theme to reflect a movement away from defining the world community across national boundaries and towards a more holistic characterization of that community.

¹³ James Mauch and Seth Spaulding, “The Internationalization of Higher Education: Who Should be Taught and Why?” *The Journal of General Education* 41 (1992): 111-129.

¹⁴ Daniel Brooks, “Evacuating the Center: Global Perspectivism and the Study of Culture,” *The Journal of General Education* 44, no. 2 (1995): 87-107.

¹⁵ Robert Freysinger, “Toward Total Internationalization: Comprehensive Institutional Reform and Global Studies. The Case of Bradford College,” *The Journal of General Education* 42, no. 3 (1993): 178-190.

Ethnorelativity

Finally, a third sub-theme of *ethnorelativity* emerged from abstracts encouraging not only the development of sensitivity and empathy towards the other but also the development of fully contextualized perspective both at the levels of the individual student and faculty member as well as at the broader institutional level. For example, Wiley reviewed constraints on multiculturalism and models for diversifying the curriculum in the context of those constraints represented by the “historical and contemporary roles educational institutions play in perpetuating inequity” while Brooks focused at the classroom level, arguing for a “postmodern textbook” considering multiple cultural perspectives and inquiry-based methodology.¹⁶ Martinez-Aleman and Salkever championed multiculturalism as a response to the challenges inherent in traditional liberal learning, arguing for the valuing of multiple perspectives and the identification of multiculturalism itself in the Deweyan non-assimilationist, pluralist tradition as a goal of general education.¹⁷ Finally, in two articles spanning a ten-year period, Meacham as well as Schamber and Mahoney considered the logistics of incorporation of multiculturalism and diversity in models within general education. In the mid-1990s, Meacham, assuming the importance of multicultural core courses, recommended 10 principles for their development: broad course content, faculty expertise, proper teaching methodology, faculty development, modest goals, acknowledging concerns over the courses, piloting and evaluating the courses, open course development, and publicity.¹⁸ A decade later, Schamber and Mahoney expanded beyond these

¹⁶ Daniel Brooks, “Envisioning Interdisciplinary Culture Studies for the 21st Century: A Modest Proposal,” *The Journal of General Education* 46, no. 4 (1997): 245-263; Terrence Wiley, “Back from the Past: Prospects and Possibilities for Multicultural Education,” *The Journal of General Education* 42, no. 4 (1993): 280-300; for a more in-depth treatment of the epistemological frameworks associated with the potential perpetuation of inequity, see also, Landon Beyer, “The Curriculum, Social Context, and ‘Political Correctness,’” *The Journal of General Education* 43, no. 1 (1994): 1-31.

¹⁷ Martinez-Aleman and Salkever, “Multiculturalism.”

¹⁸ John Meacham, “Guiding Principles for Development and Implementation of Multicultural Courses,” *The Journal of General Education* 42, no. 4 (1993): 301-315.

logistics to propose a model of intercultural sensitivity in a general education curriculum as moving from an *ethnocentric* to an *ethnorelative* worldview.¹⁹ In sum, these articles and others coded for multiculturalism contributed to the prioritization of concerns with the ways in which students came to understand their roles within society writ broadly.

Comprehensiveness and Interdisciplinarity: The Individual in the Academy

The overall theme of interdisciplinarity resonates with Miller's principle of comprehensiveness, which sums up and extends the traditional general education purpose concerned with the furniture of the mind and the socialization of the student to the disciplines and the academy. In his discussion of comprehensiveness relative to general education programs, Miller spoke to the need for general education to provide a breadth of epistemological awareness that is inherent across the range of disciplines and academic divisions within the modern university.

Similarly, the thematic trend described here as interdisciplinarity reflects scholarly prioritization of development in students not only of awareness of disciplinary boundaries and the benefits and constraints they represent in approaching challenges in contemporary context but also of the variables that determine the relevance of various ways of thinking as well as the potential skills needed to cross disciplinary boundaries in order to resolve conflicts within, among, and outside the disciplines, in the larger community.²⁰ Abstracts evidencing prioritization of interdisciplinary issues included terminology such as the following.

- interdisciplinary

¹⁹ Sandra Mahoney and Jon Schamber, "Exploring the Application of a Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity to a General Education Curriculum on Diversity," *The Journal of General Education* 53, no. 3/4 (2004): 311-334.

²⁰ For background in the emerging interest in disciplines and their impact on general education, see Phillip Phenix, *Realms of Meaning: A Philosophy of the Curriculum for General Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

- multidisciplinary
- cross-disciplinary
- integrative thinking
- creative thinking
- narrow/wide interdisciplinarity
- intrinsic/extrinsic interdisciplinarity

Together the abstracts prioritizing aspects of interdisciplinarity can be most usefully understood across three sub-themes: epistemological awareness, border crossing, and contingency of knowledge and knowing. A review of abstracts from which these descriptors and the overall theme derived suggested that interdisciplinarity, whether narrow or wide, was prioritized both in terms of the academy itself as well as in terms of the community at large.

As an example of articles foregrounding assumptions of the importance of interdisciplinarity, Swaffar examines the challenges of assessing professorial contributions in light of interdisciplinary work, reflecting an assumption of the importance of interdisciplinary work, its increasing prevalence in faculty work, and the necessity for developing models to assess faculty contribution to the academy through such work.²¹ However, unlike the focus in articles gathered under the multiculturalism thread, the interest in interdisciplinarity extended from challenges originating in the structures of the academy itself: the rise of disciplines across the 20th century and the inevitable impact the resultant siloization had on both knowledge and ways of knowing.

²¹ Janet Swaffar, "Institutional Mission and Academic Disciplines: Rethinking Accountability," *The Journal of General Education* 45, no. 1 (1996): 18-38.

Epistemological awareness

The sub-theme of *epistemological awareness* derives from articles that focus on the development of student awareness of the differences possible in the ways in which knowledge is understood and recognized in the disciplines. For example, Salmon asserts benefit of interdisciplinarity across liberal arts and technical courses, specifically the use of liberal arts in professional arts programs, allowing students to come to understand alternate ways of knowing and the potential for seeing the world through such different lenses.²² Fidler Moloney explores cluster programs as an alternative general education model as against the core and distribution models. In her discussion, she focuses on planning for cross-disciplinary clusters with an eye towards highlighting the epistemological differences inherent within the disciplines themselves.²³ Richards focuses on “synthesis” and its relevance within the interdisciplinary studies context. Specifically, he argues that synthesis, as a core goal, is inadequate and must be supplanted by more meaningful goals such as “broadening students’ perspectives and showing limitations of strictly disciplinary approaches.”²⁴ Hammer’s article contributes to the understanding of interdisciplinarity in general education through his discussion of pedagogical approaches to resolve “fear and disinterest among science students” in a two-year interdisciplinary core program at BU.²⁵ Brooks focuses on pedagogical implications as well, in his assertion of the need for a new type of textbook to serve students in interdisciplinary courses and programs. Foregrounding the need for epistemological openness and flexibility, Brooks characterizes the desirable text model as postmodern in its focus not on canonical knowledge but on ways of

²² Glenn Gritzer and Mark Salmon, “Interdisciplinary Use of the Liberal Arts in Professional Arts Programs,” *The Journal of General Education* 41 (1992): 200-216.

²³ Jacqueline Fidler Moloney, “Elements and Issues in Planning Cross-Disciplinary Clusters from a Faculty Perspective,” *The Journal of General Education* 43, no. 2 (1994): 73-89.

²⁴ Donald Richards, “The Meaning and Relevance of “Synthesis” in Interdisciplinary Studies,” *The Journal of General Education* 45, no. 2 (1996): 114-128.

²⁵ Samuel Hammer, “Open the Book but Don’t Read It: Some Approaches to Success in Science,” *The Journal of General Education* 46, no. 3 (1997): 184-191.

knowing and problems to be solved.²⁶ Similarly, Pharr et al. focus in on the justification of a cross-disciplinary program within a business school context. Although their description of the Integrated Business Common Core (IBC) suggests that IBC functions only as a narrowly defined example of interdisciplinarity, the interest in incorporating notions of cross-disciplinarity within the business school context merits notice.²⁷ Across the articles included in this subcategory the prioritization in interdisciplinary concerns is the establishment of awareness of potential difference in ways of knowing. In the next sub-theme, articles coalesced around the foregrounding of the importance of crossing the epistemological boundaries in the pursuit of innovation and creation.

Border crossing

Among the articles within the sub-theme of *border crossing* is a common perspective on disciplines as bounded spaces within which relatively constrained potentialities exist for accessing knowledge, for its interpretation, and for its use. The articles included herein reflect a prioritization for the need to move out of predefined disciplinary spaces and cross over into new conceptual spaces that represent at times the marriage of those disciplinary domains and at times their absence. For example, Benson and Griffith prioritize the movement from a static, absolutist epistemological orientation towards a focus on the process of knowing across the disciplines.²⁸ Moseley notes the necessity of training faculty to teach in interdisciplinary general education sequences, recognizing both the importance of ID and the fundamental importance of training

²⁶ Brooks, "Envisioning Interdisciplinary Culture Studies." See also, Rose M. Marra and Betsy Palmer, "Epistemologies of the Sciences, Humanities, and Social Sciences: Liberal Arts Students' Perceptions," *The Journal of General Education* 57, no. 2 (2008): 100-118; Deborah Olsen, Barbara M. Bekken, Kathryn Drezek McConnell, and Charles T. Walter, "Teaching for Change: Learning Partnerships and Epistemological Growth," *The Journal of General Education* 60, no. 3 (2011): 139-171.

²⁷ Steven Pharr, John Morris, Dana Stover, C. Randall Byers, and Mario Reyes, "The Execution of an Integrated Business Common Core Curriculum," *The Journal of General Education* 47, no. 2 (1998): 166-182.

²⁸ Garth Benson and Bryant Griffin, "The Process of Knowing in Curriculum," *The Journal of General Education* 40 (1991): 24-33.

faculty (implicitly acknowledging their under-preparedness not only pedagogically but also relative to handling the complexities inherent in the border-crossing of disciplines and their epistemologies, cognitive structures and modes of inquiry).²⁹ Kleinsasser, Decker and Nelson do not speak directly to interdisciplinarity, but tap into associated notions in their discussion of teachers as both gatekeepers (disciplinary) and border crossers (incorporating new modes of inquiry and engagement) as they incorporate writing across the curriculum into their content classes.³⁰ Silverman considers the multidisciplinary program as a vehicle for border crossing within the classroom, shifting the “aesthetic sensibility” of the classroom itself. His article marks an interest in the how of interdisciplinarity at the level of the course itself, not through content per se but through the pedagogy that harmonizes with the values of interdisciplinarity itself.³¹

Other articles reframe the discussion relative to preparedness of the stakeholders themselves. Flower focuses on not only the *how* but also the *when* of interdisciplinary courses through his discussion of ID studies in general education through the middle years as well as in the first and last years of undergraduate education. Flower notes a key benefit for faculty and for students as they are forced to “grapple with the intersections and the overlays among the traditional disciplines.”³² Paxson focuses in on the modes of interaction that emerge through the disciplines and situates them within the prioritized domain of interdisciplinary education. He further distinguishes among internal and external imperatives and describes four levels of interaction characterizing interdisciplinary study, from the relatively discrete borrowing of

²⁹ Merritt Moseley, “Educating Faculty for Teaching in an Interdisciplinary General Education Sequence,” *The Journal of General Education* 41 (1992): 8-17.

³⁰ Audrey Kleinsasser, Norma Decker Collins, and Jane Nelson, “Writing in the Disciplines: Teacher as Gatekeeper and as Border Crosser,” *The Journal of General Education* 43, no. 2 (1994): 117-133.

³¹ Jonathan Silverman, “The Aesthetic Experience of Learning: Sketching New Boundaries,” *The Journal of General Education* 46, no. 2 (1997): 73-95.

³² Michael J. Flower, “Centering the Program: Clusters of Inquiry,” *The Journal of General Education* 48, no. 2 (1999): 90-96.

modes across disciplines to the more holistic connection of disciplines at the conceptual level.³³ In their discussion of effectiveness of core general education courses, Weissman and Boning argued for inclusion of integrative structures within courses, illuminating connections among ideas, the disciplines and the real world, as well as for inclusion of learning objectives that allowed “students to share the experience of the discipline,” calling attention both to the existence of disciplinary frames and the importance of crossing them and connecting them to other frameworks.³⁴ Nowacek takes a discourse-based approach to the analysis of interdisciplinarity, asserting that individuals make interdisciplinary connections across “four discursive resources,” including “content, propositions, ways of knowing, and classroom genres.” In her article, Nowacek draws attention to disciplinary discourse genres as a source for identifying and realizing interdisciplinary connections.³⁵ Overall, the articles included here reflect the movement from epistemological awareness to encouragement of students in moving across and amongst the associated disciplinary spaces. In the final subcategory, contingency, articles encourage students and faculty to engage with the notion of contingency

Contingency

The sub-theme *contingency* here references the notion that epistemological frameworks and modes of inquiry are emergent, even within the disciplines themselves. The articles included in this section shared a commonality in their reflection on the challenges and benefits of exposure to the range of approaches to knowing represented within the disciplines as well as in the spaces that exist among those disciplines. For example, Becker, in discussing benefits of

³³ Thomas Paxson, “Modes of Interaction Between Disciplines,” *The Journal of General Education* 45, no. 2 (1996): 79-94.

³⁴ Julie Weissman and Kenneth Boning, “Five Features of Effective Core Courses,” *The Journal of General Education* 52, no. 3 (2003): 151-175.

³⁵ Rebecca S. Nowacek, “A Discourse-based Theory of Interdisciplinary Connections,” *The Journal of General Education* 54, no. 3 (2005): 171-195.

multicultural perspectives, prioritizes the use of interdisciplinary general education courses for the study of world cultures.³⁶ Reynolds et al. describe a new general education program at James Madison University organized around interdisciplinary clusters addressing five broad areas of knowledge. This article is particularly interesting as it speaks to the prioritization of interdisciplinary studies at the programmatic level, coordinating the organization of the educational experiences to highlight the contingency of knowledge and ways of knowing.³⁷ Sill's article reviews the construct of interdisciplinary studies as well as related models of creativity and synthesis and proposes a model that situates integrative thinking at the core of interdisciplinary studies, a way of thinking that implicitly involves assumptions of contingency and the need for heightened awareness of contextual variables in identifying and addressing challenges.³⁸

Kelly, in distinguishing between narrow interdisciplinarity (associated with multiple disciplinary perspectives used for the purpose of solving problems within the disciplines) and wide interdisciplinarity (focused on solving broadly writ problems through sharing of epistemological and metaphysical assumptions across disciplines), reminds the reader of the multiple levels of organization at which contingency may be relevant.³⁹ It is also interesting to note that he advocates wide interdisciplinarity, representing an article type that suggests that not only is interdisciplinarity increasingly prioritized within general education but that it has been the subject of sufficient reflection that the type of interdisciplinarity desirable for the given context has been considered. In their comprehensive review of interdisciplinary studies, Newell

³⁶ Becker, "Categories of Experience."

³⁷ Charles Reynolds, Violet Allain, T. Dary Erwin, Linda Cabe Halpern, Robin McNallie, and Martha Ross, "Looking Backward: James Madison University's General Education Program," *The Journal of General Education* 47, no. 2 (1998): 149-165.

³⁸ David Sill, "Integrative Thinking, Synthesis, and Creativity in Interdisciplinary Studies," *The Journal of General Education* 45, no. 2 (1996): 129-151.

³⁹ James Kelly, "Wide and Narrow Interdisciplinarity," *The Journal of General Education* 45, no. 2 (1996): 95-113.

and Klein contextualize interdisciplinary approaches and models from the 1960s through the 1990s. They discuss both the implications of interdisciplinarity in light of general education and discuss challenges facing interdisciplinarity in the future, with a focus on the need to highlight contingency of perspective in the pursuit of understanding.⁴⁰ Similarly, Beyler et al. note the innovative framing of interdisciplinary studies as a locus for the development of young faculty in their teaching within University Studies at Portland State University, incorporating awareness of contingency across disciplinary boundaries into the socialization of faculty themselves.⁴¹

Chanock, in her discussion of lectures as models of disciplinary engagement and availability for student acquisition of learning strategies, acknowledges both the benefits of disciplines and the challenges they represent. Specifically, her discussion of the predictable nature of disciplinary lectures is an indirect acknowledgement of constraints they represent in terms of student access to multiple perspectives and ways of knowing if students are not cognizant that those constraints represent contingency of understanding rather than absolutist perspectives on reality.⁴² MacDougall investigates the ways in which faculty create coherence in undergraduate education through the use of thematically-related interdisciplinary clusters in general education for the junior and senior years, creating an understanding of the breadth of perspectives possible.⁴³ Ghnassia and Seabury assume the benefits of an emphasis on interdisciplinarity (with which they assume corollaries of integrative thinking and collaborative teaching/learning) and demonstrate the benefits through a discussion of a course focusing on

⁴⁰ William Newell and Julie Thompson Klein, "Interdisciplinary Studies into the 21st Century," *The Journal of General Education* 45, no. 2 (1996): 152-169.

⁴¹ Richard Beyler, Monica Halka, Yves Labissiere, Lisbeth Lipari, Shawn C. Smallman, and Julie M. Smith, "The Teaching Fellows Program: Transformations in Identity, Pedagogy, and Academe," *The Journal of General Education* 48, no. 3 (1999): 176-187.

⁴² Kate Chanock, "One Good Thing About Lectures: They Model the Approach of the Discipline," *The Journal of General Education* 48, no. 1 (1999): 38-55.

⁴³ John MacDougall, "Creating Coherence in General Education Curricula: Lessons from Interdisciplinary Junior/Senior Clusters," *The Journal of General Education* 49, no. 4 (2000): 239-255.

Epidemics and AIDS.⁴⁴ Keller looks at interdisciplinary studies as a desirable approach for making science accessible to non-majors. Also, through problem-based learning, Keller asserts the value of creative thinking within the context of scientific inquiry.⁴⁵ Szostak calls attention to comprehensive reform of general education through a focus on interdisciplinarity in preparing students for both lifelong learning and responsible citizenship. He further calls for integration into the curricula of an explicit overview of the epistemologies of the disciplines as well as of their cognitive structures and modes of inquiry.⁴⁶ Drake, et al. consider the constraints inherent in insuring longevity for interdisciplinary courses, in their case in the humanities, including the need to bridge gaps by establishing clear goals that remain responsive to the cutting-edge character of interdisciplinarity and that can be communicated across a range of faculty and students.⁴⁷

At times, articles crossed boundaries among the themes, as in the discussion of interdisciplinary courses as proving grounds for the development of more sophisticated communication skills and increased engagement with text.⁴⁸ Similarly, articles investigated outcomes through ethnographic study of interdisciplinary course participation among students at a research university.⁴⁹ Yet another article overlapped with critical awareness in its investigation of innovations in STEM instruction, including the incorporation of interdisciplinary

⁴⁴ Jill Dix Ghnassia and Marcia Bundy Seabury, "Interdisciplinarity and the Public Sphere," *The Journal of General Education* 51, no. 3 (2002): 153-172.

⁴⁵ George E. Keller, "Using Problem-Based and Active Learning in an Interdisciplinary Science Course for Non-Science Majors," *The Journal of General Education* 51, no. 4 (2002): 272-281.

⁴⁶ Szostak, "Comprehensive Curricular Reform."

⁴⁷ Tom Drake, Michael O'Rourke, Dean Panttaja, and Ivan Peterson, "It's Alive! The Life Span of an Interdisciplinary Course in the Humanities," *The Journal of General Education* 57, no. 4 (2008): 223-243.

⁴⁸ Kristine Bruss, "Improving Classroom Discussion: A Rhetorical Approach," *The Journal of General Education* 58, no. 1 (2009): 28-46.

⁴⁹ Marie-France Orillion, "Interdisciplinary Curriculum and Student Outcomes: The Case of a General Education Course at a Research University," *The Journal of General Education* 58, no. 1 (2009): 1-18.

connections.⁵⁰ Yet another article prioritized lifestyles issues approached from an interdisciplinary perspective.⁵¹ From establishing the need for awareness of differences in epistemological frameworks across disciplines to encouraging movement across and beyond the borders represented by those disciplines, the articles in *JGE* work as a whole to recommend exposure of students to interdisciplinary perspectives in order to prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century knowledge economy.

Self-Consciousness and Critical Skills: The Individual as Individual

For Miller, self-consciousness as a paradigmatic principle spoke to the need for general education personnel to remain consciously aware of the contexts, both internal and external, in which they were operating. In that context, his principle was applicable at a meta-level, as a principle of program evaluation and revision and would be directly evidenced in evaluative articles considering programmatic outcomes. This principle, at the programmatic level, was clearly evidenced in *JGE* scholarship through articles espousing the need for evaluative self-reflection in considering general education reform and the design of programs.

In dominant themes of *JGE* scholarship wrestling with the demands of current curricular ideology, the awareness of why and how processes are undertaken and accomplished was also discussed at the level of the individual student, as a set of skills that are increasingly prioritized in the curricular ideology and structure of general education. In the abstracts, critical skills are most often associated with realms of communication and problem solving. Among the key terms identified in the coding cycles are the following.

- critical thinking, communication and problem solving

⁵⁰ Frances K. Stage and Jillian Kinzie, "Reform in Undergraduate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics: The Classroom Context," *The Journal of General Education* 58, no. 2 (2009): 85-105.

⁵¹ Jodi Brookins-Fisher, Irene O'Boyle, and Lana Ivanitskaya, "Institutionalization of a Multidisciplinary Healthy Lifestyles Course," *The Journal of General Education* 59, no. 1 (2010): 63-81.

- critical thinking skills (construct)
- critical linguistic and cultural learning
- critical ability
- critical reading and thinking

Scholarship attending to this theme and the associated descriptors ties critical thinking to two primary areas: literacies and problem solving. Further, the discussions in the associated articles hearkened back to the 19th century interest in liberal education as the disciplining and furnishing of the mind for the benefit to self through increased capacity to engage with the world at large. As with the other themes that revealed themselves during the coding process, critical skills is most usefully considered across sub-categories. In this theme, the two sub-categories serve to illuminate the overall thematic trend most clearly: literacies, which conflate skills in both comprehension and production of symbol systems and epistemological frameworks, broadly writ, as well as problem solving, which encompasses a breadth of approaches to the identification and resolution of challenges. As with earlier categories, sample articles will be referenced to demonstrate typical discussions evidenced in the overall scholarship.

Literacy

In general education scholarship, it becomes apparent that the sub-theme of *literacy* is quite broad, ranging from traditional associations with the foundational skills of reading and writing to, more recently, contemporary associations with the productive and interpretive skills needed to engage with a plethora of symbol systems and modes of communication. Literacies discussed in *JGE* articles included interest in written and oral literacy as well as concern with content literacies (e.g. art, history, science, and technology). In the varied discussions of literacies, the common thread was commitment to the development of awareness complexity of

communication across various symbol systems (e.g. visual, verbal, linguistic). Such discussions ranged across prioritization of realms more traditionally associated with literacy, e.g. media literacy, communications literacy, information literacy, and knowledge literacy.⁵² Newer areas associated with literacies were targeted as well, from tech literacy to computer literacy.⁵³ As a whole, the literature on literacies represented scholarly prioritization of the development of the ability to access information and to communicate it clearly, an extension of goals in general education across the 20th century focused on the development of a student's ability to both engage with issues and express clear, coherent opinions and ideas. As within the other themes of multiculturalism and interdisciplinarity, critical skills took preparation a step further as articles discussed not only literacies but also application of those abilities to solving current and relevant problems both within and outside the academy.

Problem solving

Subsumed under the larger umbrella of critical skills, the sub-theme of *problem solving* in *JGE* scholarship was framed in a variety of ways, including application of analytical, integrative,

⁵² For a representative discussion of media literacy, see Francis Shor, "The Adult Learner, the News Media, and the Third World: Suppressing and Facilitating Critical Thinking," *The Journal of General Education* 42, no. 4 (1993): 225-237; for representative discussions of communications literacy writ broadly, see Joseph Mazer, Stephen Hunt, and Jeffrey Kuznekoff, "Revising General Education: Assessing a Critical Thinking Instructional Model in the Basic Communication Course," *The Journal of General Education* 56, no. 3/4 (2008): 173-199, and Nancy Westphal-Johnson and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, "The Role of Communication and Writing Intensive Courses in General Education: A Five Year Case Study of the University of Wisconsin," *The Journal of General Education* 51, no. 2 (2002): 73-102; for discussions of information and knowledge literacies, see Jane Elizabeth Pizzolato, "Meaning Making Inside and Outside the Academic Arena: Investigating the Contextuality of Epistemological Development in College Students," *The Journal of General Education* 56, no. 3/4 (2008): 228-251; Mary Sellen, "Information Literacy in the General Education: A New Requirement for the 21st Century," *The Journal of General Education* 51, no. 2 (2002): 115-126; Christine Demars, Lynn Cameron and T. Dary Erwin, "Information Literacy as Foundational: Determining Competence," *The Journal of General Education* 52, no. 4 (2003): 253-265; Carol A. Wright, "Information Literacy within the General Education Program: Implications for Distance Education," *The Journal of General Education* 49, no. 1 (2000): 23-33; Trudi E. Jacobson and Beth L. Mark, "Separating Wheat from Chaff: Helping First-Year Students Become Information Savvy," *The Journal of General Education* 49, no. 4 (2000): 256-278; Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson, "Integrating Information Literacy in Lower and Upper-Level Courses: Developing Scalable Models for Higher Education," *The Journal of General Education* 53, no. 3/4 (2004): 201-224.

⁵³ For a discussion of tech and computer literacy, see Theodore Lewis, "Technology as General Education," *The Journal of General Education* 40 (1991): 34-48, and Ann S. Ferren, "General Education Reform and the Computer Revolution," *The Journal of General Education* 42, no. 3 (1993): 164-177.

critical and creative thinking to a variety of problems within, among, and beyond the disciplinary boundaries themselves. In essence, the shared focus in problem solving as a sub-theme under critical skills is the application of a disciplined mind to problems presented across a plethora of contexts, both within and outside the academy. For example, Pittendrigh argued for the connection between critical thinking and the ability to see multiple perspectives, while Tsui foregrounded skills often termed *thinking outside the box* with the development of student self-efficacy and self-directed learning.⁵⁴ Even in reference to the canon, that bastion of traditional liberal learning, Avery positions Plato's Republic in the role of encouraging "learning of critical inquiry rather than absorbing the views of the ancients."⁵⁵ Additional representative articles outlined connections between problem-based learning and critical thinking skills, argued for the roles of critical thinking and problem-solving skills as tools of the future, established the relationship among problem solving, interdisciplinary studies, and active student learning, argued for the enhancement of critical thinking through engagement with science courses and scientific practices, and characterized the development of critical thinking itself as a means for crossing boundaries.⁵⁶ As becomes apparent in this cataloguing of critical thinking, problem solving and content areas, these skills were often conflated with areas of interdisciplinarity and multiculturalism to create a complex web of prioritized skills, knowledge, and perspectives

⁵⁴ Adele Pittendrigh, "Reinventing the Core: Community, Dialogue, and Change," *The Journal of General Education* 56, no. 1 (2007): 34-56; Lisa Tsui, "Cultivating Critical Thinking: Insights from an Elite Liberal Arts College," *The Journal of General Education* 56, no. 3/4 (2008): 200-227.

⁵⁵ Avery, "Plato's Republic."

⁵⁶ Eric Fournier, "World Regional Geography and Problem-Based Learning: Using Collaborative Learning Groups in an Introductory-Level World Geography Course," *The Journal of General Education* 51, no. 4 (2002): 293-305; Michael Parker, "General Education in Fin de Siecle America: Toward a Postmodern Approach," *The Journal of General Education*, 47, no. 1 (1998): 87-116; Michael D. Everett and Otto Zinsser, "Interdisciplinary Social Science Courses: Using a Critical Thinking Approach," *The Journal of General Education*, 47, no. 3 (1998): 225-241; Joseph Chinnici and David Hiley, "Rethinking the Role of the Sciences in General Education Reform," *The Journal of General Education* 47, no. 3 (1998): 242-252; Linda George and Jack Straton, "Shaping the Curriculum: Approaching Critical Thinking through Science," *The Journal of General Education* 48, no. 2 (1999): 111-117; William Hare, "Teaching and Barricades to Inquiry," *The Journal of General Education* 49, no. 2 (2000): 88-109.

coalescing into thematic trends that hold the potential to become organizational principles for general education reform and design.

Across each subcategory of critical skills in *JGE*, articles investigated and reported on both student disposition for and the transferability of the skills themselves. In other words, the scholarship not only prioritized literacies and problem solving, for example, but also delved into those associated skill sets to consider the extent to which students were more or less prepared for engagement prior to their arrival in general education courses. In addition, the scholarship considered preparation relative to the extent to which students would be able to transfer acquired skills both across areas within general education and to their major areas upon their departure from general education into their chosen disciplines or fields. Representative articles in this vein included investigation of the impact of faculty attitudes on students' development of critical thinking skills, considerations of critical thinking as predictive of course performance, interest in relationships between high-performing students and low critical thinking skills, distinctions between specialized critical thinking and generic critical thinking, and concerns with critical thinking and the *pedagogy of force* (which discussed definitions of critical thinking and discussed implications of a pedagogical focus on such skills).⁵⁷ The articles mentioned herein, though not exhaustive, illustrate the depth of interest not only in characterizing critical skills themselves but also in investigating variables impacting both the development (or expansion) of those skills and their relevance and transferability across domains of knowledge and ways of

⁵⁷ Linda Tsui, "Faculty Attitudes and the Development of Students' Critical Thinking Skills," *The Journal of General Education* 50, no. 1 (2001): 1-28; Robert L. Williams and Stephen L. Worth, "Thinking Skills and Work Habits: Contributors to Course Performance," *The Journal of General Education* 51, no. 3 (2002): 200-227; Robert L. Williams and Susan L. Stockdale, "High-performing Students with Low Critical Thinking Skills," *The Journal of General Education* 52, no. 3 (2003): 200-226; Robert L. Williams, Renee Oliver and Susan Stockdale, "Psychological versus Generic Critical Thinking as Predictors and Outcome Measures in a Large Undergraduate Human Development Course," *The Journal of General Education* 53, no. 1 (2004): 37-58; Nancy Lampert, "Critical Thinking Dispositions as an Outcome of Undergraduate Education," *The Journal of General Education* 56, no. 1 (2007): 17-33; Mark Halx and Earle Reybold, "A Pedagogy of Force: Faculty Perspectives of Critical Thinking Capacity in Undergraduate Students," *The Journal of General Education* 54, no. 4 (2005): 293-315.

knowing. Finally, patterns within and among the thematic trends suggested sub-themes of movement from passive to active engagement with both knowledge and knowing as well as implicit interest in the role of the individual in the contexts within which s/he function.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 presented the findings regarding emergent thematic trends in general education scholarship between 1990 and 2010. In Chapter 6, a review of the research questions guiding the current study is presented, in light of the findings from the documentary research discussed. Following a review of questions and findings, principles are derived to inform recommendations for praxis and policy. Finally, limitations of the study are acknowledged and future research paths are suggested.

CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study was motivated by the following events and concomitant concerns. First, conditions across higher education in the United States at the beginning of the 21st century have seen the emergence of policies and legislation encouraging postsecondary institutions to reform their curricula to meet goals of increased efficiency and effectiveness. Further, these demands have been couched in rhetoric focused on the production of members of a workforce to drive the economic engines of the nation. In the past, the preparation of the individual for the workforce has been the responsibility of the specializations—the upper divisions, whether the professions or the disciplines. However, in the rhetoric of current policy, calls for increased effectiveness have moved the focus onto general education, as they have included references to the need for highly developed skills from communication and cultural awareness to critical and innovative thinking. At the same time, calls for increased efficiency have focused on articulation across institutions, to accommodate the needs of an increasingly mobile student population.

Given the focus on skills to serve economic outcomes, along with policy changes that impact articulation and accountability, general education is facing increasing external pressures that represent multiple potential constraints on general education design and implementation. In addition, skyrocketing costs in a context of decreasing public support of higher education and burgeoning private debt in support of rising tuition have exacerbated the price exacted within institutions themselves in terms of expenditures on general education reforms (often in either direct or indirect response to external policies and legislation). These external pressures impact

institutional decision making regarding general education in a number of ways. The challenge of situating general education within the greater institutional context, fitting general education within the institutional mission, increases when institutions face pressure to insure (a) that their curriculum remain receptive to incoming transfer students and/or transient students and (b) that their curriculum prepare students who may plan to transfer out after completing their general education requirements. Compelling arguments have been made for the reframing of general education as a core within an institution's identity, whether as a research institution, a liberal arts college, or another of the myriad of institutional types scattered across the U.S. higher education landscape. The rationale for branding an institution's general education program in the face of mounting pressure to norm it to state and regional articulation mandates proves challenging, however.

In addition to the challenges of fitting general education to institutional mission while simultaneously considering articulation requirements, a second problem inheres in general education reform. Specifically, the common faculty view of general education as a spare room of the curriculum, noted by Boyer and Levine over four decades ago, may persist. Commitment to informed reform of general education programs is essential. Such commitment may result from clarification of the forms and functions general education will take within the larger institutional context. Similarly, establishment of centralized administrative units assigned responsibility for oversight and guidance in development of general education curricula is merited.

A major obstacle to organized curricular reform in any educational context is the extent to which clearly established parameters are identifiable in both theory and praxis. In attempting identification of best practices and models within general education, researchers and practitioners alike have tended to prioritize praxis-oriented observations and analyses rather than considering

general education scholarship itself as representative of the larger national discourse on general education and as a potential source of insights that could usefully inform the review and reform of programs across the country. Of utmost concern in the reliance on observation of common practices across institutions, even where institutional types and cultures may have been considered and accommodated, is the loss of insights that inevitably emerge from a national discourse of the sort represented in the scholarship of a field. The loss of these insights, the compelling benefits of which have been demonstrated in documentary analyses of scholarship in other fields, could result in less effective and efficient reform as well as less effective and efficient implementations of new general education models themselves.

Given the potential for identification of compelling insights through the review of scholarship, it seems ill advised to ignore the contextualization and perspective a documentary analysis of general education research could provide. Therefore, following in the tradition of document analysis of scholarship in general education undertaken by Miller in the late 20th century, the current study identified dominant thematic trends through the analysis of the works published in the core general education journal, *The Journal of General Education*.¹ Like Miller's document study, which led to his establishment of paradigmatic principles for the organization of general education writ large, the current study undertook documentary analysis to identify thematic trends that could usefully inform both praxis and policy in general education. Miller identified three paradigmatic principles for the organization of general education programs: democratization, comprehensiveness, and self-consciousness. Similarly, the current study resulted in identification of three complementary thematic trends: multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills. Compellingly, the three trends identified in the current study exhibited features that resonated with Miller's original principles. In addition, the three

¹ Miller, 1988.

trends, as well as sub-themes within each, exhibited features that hold promise as themes around which general education can be usefully organized in response to emerging challenges in 21st century education and society.

The three dominant trends identified in the current study included multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills—each of which organized around sub-themes that could usefully serve as guiding principles in general education design and reform. For example, sub-themes including the initiation of cultural awareness, the globalization of the curriculum, and the development of ethnorelative perspective emerged in the review of scholarship within the theme of multiculturalism. Similarly, sub-themes including the development of epistemological awareness, the encouragement of border crossing, and the increased awareness of contingency were revealed in the sorting of the scholarship within the theme of interdisciplinarity. Finally, sub-themes highlighting the development of literacies as well as problem-solving abilities became clear during the review of scholarship within the theme of critical skills. In all, the thematic trends and their sub-themes provide promising potential as organizational principles around which general education could be both designed and/or reformed. This potential will be further explored in the discussion of results included in this chapter.

In the sections that follow, the research questions of the current study are restated to contextualize the interpretations of the findings and the assertions of implications for praxis and policy-making regarding general education in the U.S. postsecondary context. Recommendations for both praxis and research are made. Limitations of the current study are acknowledged as recommendations for both praxis and research are made. Finally, the conclusion situates the study is situated within the larger body of current general education scholarship.

Research Questions

To review, the research questions guiding this study included the following. What does the national scholarly discourse reveal regarding dominant thematic trends in general education within U.S. higher education between 1991-2011? To what extent do these thematic trends resonate with the 20th century paradigm of general education? What practical implications do such dominant thematic trends and the 20th century paradigm have relative to general education design and reform for the 21st century? After a review of the dominant trends and their resonance with 20th century paradigmatic principles, the practical implications are discussed in light of the study's findings.

Discussion of Results

What does the national scholarly discourse reveal regarding dominant thematic trends in general education within U.S. higher education between 1991-2011?

The current study's qualitative review and analysis of scholarship in the *The Journal of General Education* from 1990-2011 revealed clearly dominant thematic trends in general education within the U.S. postsecondary context. Specifically, the review demonstrated that scholars prioritized research into the arenas of multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills. Although the study focused on qualitative analysis of the scholarship itself, dominance of scholarly priorities was first established through the gross quantitative measure of topic focus. Specifically, articles wrestling with the key thematic issues accounted for well over 75% of the content analyzed in *JGE* between 1990 and 2011. Dominance was suggested from a qualitative perspective in that abstracts within the three trend areas were not restricted to a focus on limited areas of curricular ideology. In contrast, abstracts within the trend areas reflected concerns across curricular components from purpose, structure, and substance to pedagogy and assessment. In

sum, *JGE* scholarship demonstrated an interest in not only why multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills should be focal areas of general education but also how such elements should be structured within the curriculum, what related courses might cover, how they could be taught, and how they might be assessed. This breadth of coverage as well as the resonance among the thematic trends and Miller's earlier paradigmatic principles prove compelling when the potential of the thematic trends as organizational principles is considered in the 21st century context.

To what extent do these thematic trends resonate with the 20th century paradigm of general education?

In addition to dominance assessed through majority representation in the scholarship coupled with discussions involving the breadth of curricular ideology, the thematic trends of multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills also demonstrated clear resonance with Miller's 20th century paradigmatic principles for general education. Where Miller asserted that tensions in 20th century general education justified a clear commitment to democratization within general education programs, *JGE* scholarship from 1991 through 2011 prioritized multiculturalism and related issues. Further, in its prioritization of multiculturalism and related discussions, the scholarship in *JGE* could be viewed as extending Miller's original construct of democratization across three sub-themes: cultural awareness, globalization, and ethno-relativity. In other words, the breadth of the discussion in the past two decades has moved Miller's original characterization of democratization in directions clearly responsive to the diversity of perspectives and experiences students both represent and encounter.

Similarly, the scholarship prioritized interests in interdisciplinarity, resonating with Miller's identification of comprehensiveness as a key element in general education programs of

the late 20th century and extending Miller's original construct of comprehensiveness across three sub-themes: epistemological awareness, border crossing, and contingency of knowledge and knowing. Expanding on Miller's original characterization of comprehensiveness, the scholarship succeeded in imparting a broader and deeper appreciation for the complexities that inhere not only in the epistemologies and methods of inquiry within and among the disciplines and the professions but also in any attempts to move across the borders those frameworks represent.

Finally, critical skills, as a concentration representing concerns with the individual's ability both to access and engage with meaning, represented an emphasis in the scholarship that indirectly reflected Miller's assertion of self-consciousness as core to the core. Although Miller's original construct focused on the need for design of general education itself to be a self-conscious pursuit at the broad programmatic level, the highlighting of critical skills within the individual was seen as an analogous endeavor. Indeed, the discussion of critical skills coalesced in *JGE* around two sub-themes: literacies and problem solving, interpreted respectively as the ability to access and communicate clearly through various symbol systems and the ability to apply that facility to the solution of current and relevant problems both within and outside the academy. Where Miller asserted the need for self-consciousness in general education reform, entailing heightened awareness of both the content within general education and the problems inherent in its design and reform, the current study reveals prioritization of similar awareness and problem solving at the level of the individual student in his/her engagement with the academy and the larger social context in which it functions.

In sum, dominant thematic trends have been identified in general education through documentary research of representative scholarship between 1991 and 2011. Additionally, the trends clearly resonate with Miller's principles of general education design from the late 20th

century. Therefore, the question of the extent to which the identified trends can meaningfully inform decision making in general education the context of the early decades of the 21st century can now be addressed.

What practical implications might such dominant thematic trends and the 20th century paradigm have relative to general education design and reform for the 21st century?

Scholarship in the years since the publication of Miller's paradigm, which derived principles of design and reform from a review of 20th century trends in general education, reveals similar sustained trends. With the publication of volume 40 in 1991, scholarship in *JGE* followed a path reviewing trends of the past, analyzing general education of the present, and making recommendations for design and reform for the future. Significant bouts of general education reform have occurred over the twenty years considered. The mid-1990s reforms at Portland State University, the California state review of general education in the early 2000s, and the Harvard reforms spanning a seven-year period in the first decade of the 21st century are representative of nationwide reforms in general education. The period from 1990-2011 has been marked by general education reform efforts across the nation's higher education landscape. In sum, the scholarship and the trends reported across the twenty-year span reflect a robust period in general education reforms and can be considered representative of ongoing developments in the field rather than reflections during a period of relative stasis.

Approaching scholarship as representative of a national discourse is not a new phenomenon. Given that curricular trends and shifts in curricular ideologies often span two or three decades, from theory to application to evaluation, scholarship that can be easily accessed and reviewed over long stretches of time serves a key role in identifying and understanding such macro-level trends. As Smith, et al. noted, expanding on Miller's principle of self-consciousness

at the program level, critical evaluation of processes is essential in approaching reform of general education curricula.² Through the current documentary study, in itself an evaluation of scholarly prioritization of directions for general education, the dominant themes of multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills emerged clearly at the forefront of research. The implications of those themes relative to the design and reform of general education are numerous. In the following paragraphs, these implications are reviewed and recommendations for design and reform of general education are made.

Recommendations

In this section three overarching recommendations are presented. First, scholarship wrestling with the challenges of general education must be considered when decision-making occurs in the arenas of praxis and policy-making. Second, the goals of efficiency and effectiveness in general education design and implementation must be clearly defined and met through reference to and understanding of lessons derived from the scholarship of general education. Third, general education can no longer serve at the pleasure of the myriad stakeholders that comprise the university or college—its days as a spare room are over, and the organizational principles guiding its design in the current context should be those of multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills. Table 2 presents a summary of the major findings and associated recommendations. Following a discussion of these recommendations, areas rife with potential for future research are reviewed. The chapter concludes with a summative overview of findings and suggestions for future practice.

² Smith, et al., “General Education Reform.”

Table 2. Major findings and recommendations.

Major Finding	Recommendation
Scholarship reveals three dominant thematic trends in general education between 1991 - 2010.	Policy makers and practitioners should approach general education scholarship as a national discourse among experts that can inform both praxis and policy
	University personnel should attend to general education scholarship when approaching the design and evaluation of general education programs
	University personnel should consider operationalization of the thematic trends revealed in general education scholarship for the 21st century
One dominant thematic trend in general education between 1991 and 2010 is multiculturalism, within which three sub-themes emerge.	Universities should include consideration of the complex construct of multiculturalism in their design and evaluation of general education programs.
	Universities should consider three sub-themes of cultural awareness, globalization, and ethnorelativity when identifying the role of multiculturalism in general education design.
One dominant thematic trend in general education between 1991 and 2010 is interdisciplinarity, within which three sub-themes emerge.	Universities should include consideration of the complex construct of interdisciplinarity in their design and evaluation of general education programs.
	Universities should consider three sub-themes of epistemological awareness, border crossing, and contingency when identifying the role of interdisciplinarity in general education design.
One dominant thematic trend in general education between 1991 and 2010 is critical skills, within which two sub-themes emerge.	Universities should include consideration of the complex construct of critical skills in their design and evaluation of general education programs.
	Universities should consider two sub-themes of literacies and problem solving when identifying the role of critical skills in general education design.

Scholarship, Praxis and Policy

Just as scholars and practitioners across disciplines and professions would never evaluate constructs in their own fields of expertise without reviewing current scholarship on relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, so administrators and faculty should never approach the task of general education evaluation and reform having not first reviewed relevant and current scholarship. In terms of praxis, the scholarship of *JGE* has revealed itself as a locus of comprehensive discussion of trends and priorities at both the national and the institutional levels. The scholarship can inform decision making in general education evaluation across all domains as institutions reconsider their framing of general education purpose, their selection of courses through which to accomplish that purpose, and their structuring of models to facilitate appropriate delivery.

Scholarship and Effective Design

Effective implementation of the thematic trends clearly requires that attention be paid to the design and delivery of courses within the general education curriculum. Time and energy will inevitably be expended in general education reform. General education is the key to much of the work that must be done in higher education, work that cannot fit within the majors and may at first glance seem impossible to squeeze into general education—especially in light of movements to reduce the number of credit hours dedicated to the undergraduate degree program. That said, given the complexity clearly revealed in general education scholarship, and the directions suggested by scholars who have been working on the question of general education over the past two decades, there may be principles of design that will allow reforms to create more effective and efficient general education.

Efficiency and effectiveness are directly related to the dual challenges of policy pressures and costs reviewed in Chapter 1. From the national to the state levels, calls for increasing effectiveness in preparing students for contemporary life emit a sense of urgency that cannot be ignored. Across institutions both public and private the challenges inhering in general education reform in terms of both direct costs and opportunity costs are clear. The downside of the findings in the current study, for some, will lie in the fact that institutions are no longer afforded the luxury of choosing one focus for their general education curricula. The 21st century is not a period in which an institution can decide to frame its general education program solely as preparation for the disciplines or the professions. It is not a period in which institutions can afford traditional prioritization of the canon. It is not a time for a laissez-faire approach to general education—allowing distributive models of general education to emerge from the interests and strengths unique to each institution’s faculty.

At the same time, the 21st century is most clearly not a period in which to allow external policymakers, across state, regional, and federal domains, to reach into the inner workings of general education and unduly influence the framing of the purposes of general education. Where state agencies mandate general education curricula for the sake of expedient transfer of credits, an undeniably important goal to facilitate student progress and ensure responsiveness to life events that inevitably motivate students to change institutions, there must be consideration not of course-specific content or of broad disciplinary areas. Rather than mandating a set number of courses from the traditional categories across humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and math, state agencies’ mandates could be interpreted as prioritizing categories that can be accommodated based on informed knowledge of trends and priorities in the general education scholarship.

This approach to determining and evaluating desirable categories at the state (and even regional and federal levels) does not have to be an earth-shattering shift in the current status quo at the state level. Rather, it can be a natural change following clearly defined trends that reflect considered scholarly work establishing essential purposes for general education in the U.S. As the area-driven distribution approach has responded to state trends across the past two or three decades, current research suggests that reformers should now look not only at the areas of content to be covered but should also consider the implications of the epistemological frameworks and methods students are socialized into through those areas. The preparation of students for entry into academic disciplines and on into professions with increasingly constrained epistemological frameworks and methods of inquiry has the potential to limit severely students' abilities to achieve breadth of perspective that will serve them well in both those academic and professional careers. In other words, simply requiring that students select courses from four areas, e.g. humanities, fine arts, social sciences and sciences, with no attention to the composition of the courses themselves nor to the epistemologies nor methods they represent is to do a disservice to the students and to shirk responsibility for providing them with access to the breadth of perspective and its implications that they must have as they prepare for the disciplines and the professions. Sometimes defended as remaining responsive to the interests and passions of faculty, such loosely defined area requirements—the realization of which leads to the spare room mentality limiting general education programs—are no longer sufficient to meet the needs of students nor the larger community.

This is not to say that the interests and passions of the faculty are to be subsumed by external pressures. Rather it is to assert that the interests and passions of the faculty can remain unavoidably core to the educational endeavor at each given institution while simultaneously

accommodating current pressures. Institutions must commit to models that harmonize with their institutional cultures and with the strengths of their faculty and departments while simultaneously following clear organizational principles. One of the key challenges in the current context, with its emphasis on articulation and accountability, is the extent to which proposed elements of general education curricula can be implemented across diverse institutional contexts. Fortunately, multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills can be incorporated within any institutional context, from two-year institutions to research powerhouses.

Scholarship and Thematic Trends

JGE scholarship demonstrated the emerging prioritization implicitly as the articles within each theme emerged from research and analysis by scholars across the myriad of disciplines and institutional types that populate the higher education landscape in the U.S. No longer relegated to spare room status, general education at both the program and movement levels evidences emergent change when considered from the broad perspective of the national scholarly discourse on the field. Programs organized around the three thematic trends are free to reflect the idiosyncrasy of their institutional contexts while simultaneously remaining responsive to both internal and external stakeholder groups.

In the case of multiculturalism as an organizational principle, the challenges inherent in the diversity of university-going student populations in higher education for much of the 20th century may be reframed. Indeed, the 21st century may be a period in which institutions finally reframe diversity as not only desirable but also essential in facilitating higher education's overall contribution to the larger community. Regardless of institutional type, awareness of diversity and ethnorelativity can be incorporated within the curriculum within courses or across program-level requirements. Given the recognition of the wealth of diversity inherent in every individual's

beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge, each institution of higher education in the U.S., from technical institutes to liberal arts colleges, from private religious institutions to public regional universities, from two-year community colleges to research powerhouses, has within it the populations around which to construct meaningful multicultural experiences, courses, and programs.

Disciplinary boundaries have plagued institutions as knowledge specialization increased over the latter years of the 20th century, creating silos of perspective, method, and discourse that threatened to stifle the creativity, integration, and innovation that are the promise of interdisciplinary programs of the 21st century. Interdisciplinarity can address these constraints on perspective inherent in the disciplines while simultaneously reflecting the unique institutional contexts of the scholars who produced studies and reports collected in *JGE*. Where one institution might explore interdisciplinarity across colleges (e.g. humanities and sciences), another might explore the construct through changes to cores within a single college. Research universities might more often bring undergraduate research expectations to the table in the exploration of interdisciplinary connections, where community colleges might focus on service learning and community engagement to contextualize interdisciplinary connections. Nonetheless, whether at STEM-focused institutions or Liberal Arts Colleges, students can gain interdisciplinary perspective through lower division courses focused on combinations of perspectives across humanities, social sciences, and hard sciences.

Finally, commitment associated with the nurturing of critical skills reveals prioritization of the individual as learner, citizen, and self. Although still framed in the national discourse in uncomfortably utilitarian rhetoric, the focus on the development of critical skills can be interpreted as an inevitable awakening to the inescapable intertwining of the individual in his/her tripartite self: in society, in the professions, and in private. Additionally, development of critical

skills requires no specific institutional course structure or faculty specialization. Critical skills in literacies and problem solving are amenable to any institutional context. Whether an institution chooses to embed critical skills across a core of courses targeted for inclusion in the general education program or across selected courses within a distributive model of general education, the skills themselves can be approached from a variety of content areas. For example, every university or college can include requirements in literacies and problem solving across any number of courses taught by generalists, from foundational courses in the sciences to those in the social sciences, humanities, and fine arts. What attention to critical skills brings to the experience for undergraduate students, however, is insurance that literacies themselves are more broadly understood and appreciated, and that problem solving itself is consciously included within the general education requirements at a given institution. That it is possible in contemporary general education to take numerous courses without a guarantee of exposure to literacies broadly writ or problem solving itself is clear. How to resolve the demand for students who are nimble in thought and action with general education design that appears not to be preparing students to meet that demand is key.

In summary, based on a review of the abstracts in *JGE* (1991-2011), dealing with arguments regarding the appropriate purpose of general education within the contemporary era, scholarship can be fairly summarized as indicating that the purpose of general education as we enter the 21st century must be to develop within the individual student the ability to interrogate the realities in which s/he finds her/himself at any given moment. Whether delving into issues surrounding the individual's role in society, the individual's role in the academy, or the individual's role as an individual, the dominant thematic trends that emerged in *JGE* scholarship present a clear picture of an emergent, complex context within which each student must gain

awareness of variability as well as develop the tools necessary to navigate across boundaries in a way that will meet both the public and private goals of education. In the following section, limitations of the study are acknowledged alongside relevant suggestions for future research.

Limitations and Future Research

The primary limitations of the current study are three-fold. First, the documentary analysis and interpretation are the work of a single researcher. Although qualitative documentary study of this type is often accomplished through the efforts of a lone researcher, the potential for myopia in the identification of trends and their implications is inevitable. One obvious line of future research would entail additional documentary analyses of the same material, either through a similarly designed qualitative approach or through a quantitative content analysis to ascertain whether such studies produced similar results and conclusions. Unquestionably, given the unique experiences of each individual researcher and his/her biases, results in any qualitative approach should vary at least slightly. However, if additional studies resulted in marked similarities of interpretation in terms of the dominant thematic trends in general education in the current period, that would go far in both supporting the findings of the current study and confirming the usefulness of the method for understanding perspectives in the field that can meaningfully inform praxis and policy.

A second limitation of the research is the reliance on content from a single scholarly journal for the data considered and analyzed over a specific timeframe. Although *JGE* was clearly established as a core source for scholarly writing on general education in U.S. higher education, other works, from scholarly journal articles to books, could be included in a similar study. Given the practical constraints on the current study, consideration of the totality of the literature of general education was not possible. However, a future study involving a team of

scholars and greater resources could very well replicate the documentary analysis across the breadth of general education literature. The choice to focus on scholarship from a single journal was motivated not only by pragmatic concerns but also by an interest in limiting variability inherent in works produced across publications and across genres. However, it is not unreasonable to assume that such variability could be embraced. Future documentary analyses could involve identification of dominant thematic trends across the entire body of scholarly writing on general education, including not only journal articles but also books and monographs.

Finally, a related limitation of the current study is the focus on analysis of scholarship to the exclusion of review of praxis-oriented materials, whether in the form of syllabi or curricula or in the form of scholarly articles evaluating general education programs themselves. Additional research would do well to consider the extent to which the findings of the current study, based on the analysis of *JGE* scholarship, resonates with the findings of evaluative articles reporting on general education priorities through case studies, longitudinal reviews, and other praxis-based research reports. In addition, research could be conducted to ascertain the extent to which praxis-oriented materials themselves, e.g. syllabi, curricula, and course catalogs from a variety of institutions, evidenced trends in general education reform. Such research would contribute meaningfully in determining the extent to which praxis currently resonates with the dominant trends identified in the current study as well as the various ways in which those trends may already be realized across institutional contexts.

Conclusion

The current study suggests that design and reform of general education within U.S. postsecondary education can be accomplished in the contemporary period if practitioners and policy-makers attend to the national scholarly discourse. In the current period, this discourse

reveals three primary thematic trends around which praxis and policy should be formed: multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills. This recommendation has implications for stakeholders from administrators to faculty. Both administrators and faculty have to be socialized to these themes and to the notion that general education itself is an area that has become increasingly professionalized. Fortunately for general education practitioners who need to get up to speed in these areas, the three trends are neither new nor unique to the discussions reviewed in *JGE*. A cursory search of related terms in Amazon returns numerous texts dedicated to each of the three arenas, both relative to issues of concern in general education as well as to issues in higher education writ broadly. For example, texts tagged for prioritization of multiculturalism and higher education range from those dedicated to the development of intercultural competence and global citizenship to those wrestling with the logistics of engagement with the global curriculum and experiences. Similarly, a search on interdisciplinarity returned multiple research studies and scholarly texts dedicated to both the construct of interdisciplinarity and to its realization from the classroom context to the campus culture. Finally, a search on critical skills returns so many texts that it is almost impossible to capture the scope and range of their coverage. Whether in the form of scholarly guides preparing students for engagement with contemporary culture and its challenges or in the form of scholarly texts wrestling with the complexities inherent in identifying, understanding, and teaching students the necessary skills, books prioritizing the identification of and instruction in critical skills abound.

Scholarship in *JGE* over the past two decades demonstrates clear trends in prioritized issues, trends that may be amenable to adoption as principles by which to organize general education programs over the next few decades in U.S. higher education. The stability of the three trends in multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and critical skills, coupled with their inherent

flexibility in potential realization across institutional types, makes them ideal candidates as organizational principles for a core around which any and all general education programs could be built. In addition, attention paid to scholarship in general education over the coming decades should allow for continuing insights that can usefully inform future reforms and designs. It should come as no surprise that scholarship produced by individuals who are involved in the day-to-day research and practice of general education could reveal major thematic trends capable of informing praxis and policy to this extent. It would be a shame were practitioners and policymakers to fail to attend to the revelations and their implications as general education reform efforts continue into the 21st century.

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