2002

General education and enrollment trends at private baccalaureate colleges, 1975--2000

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GENERAL EDUCATION AND ENROLLMENT TRENDS AT
PRIVATE BACCALAUREATE COLLEGES
1975 - 2000

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Ellen Levy Vinson
March 2002
GENERAL EDUCATION AND ENROLLMENT TRENDS AT
PRIVATE BACCALAUREATE COLLEGES
1975 - 2000

by

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ABSTRACT

Between 1975 and 2000, general education at private baccalaureate colleges changed considerably. Among 60 sample colleges, five notable trends emerged: an increase in general education quantity; a decline in student choice of general education courses; content shifts toward math, history, the arts and interdisciplinary study; an increasing number of colleges that include study of diverse perspectives in the general education curriculum; and greater attention to skills development, including overall academic skills, as well as written and oral communication.

General education change during the 1990's was due largely to forces external to the colleges including competition, and expectations of accrediting bodies. Additional reasons for curriculum change included internal academic interests and concerns, college logistical considerations, and college mission.

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GENERAL EDUCATION AND ENROLLMENT TRENDS AT
PRIVATE BACCALAUREATE COLLEGES
1975 - 2000
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What is general education? This question, more than any other, prompted the research that follows. “General education is the breadth component of the undergraduate curriculum” (Levine, 1978, p. 3). It is the “cultivation of knowledge, skills and attitudes that all of us use and live by during most of our lives...” (Association, 1988, p.3). It is “those courses that the college regards as so important that they are required of all students, regardless of academic major or intended career” (Gaff, 1991, p.13). What general education is, is not clear.

The literature suggests that general education consumes somewhere between 30% and 40% of the undergraduate curriculum (Blackburn, Armstrong, Conrad, Didham, and McKune, 1974; Gaff, 1990; Toombs, Amey and Chen, 1990). The literature also suggests that general education typically consists of required courses, or of courses selected by students from among a number of approved courses, or of a combination of required and selected courses. There have been criticisms and there have been reforms. Colleges and universities change their general education curriculum for a number of varied reasons (Arnold and Civian, 1997). Still, what general education is, is not clear.

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The literature tells us that curriculum change is typically incremental (Carnegie, 1978) and most often occurs in response to environmental forces (Toombs and Tierney, 1991). Some such environmental forces in recent years have included changing student demographics, (Gerald and Hussar, 1997; Humphreys, 1997), declining state funding (Callen, 1993), technological advances, vocationalism (Gordon, 1993), and increasing consumerism (Levine and Cureton, 1998), resulting in a highly competitive market for higher education (Kanter, Gamson and London, 1997).

Of all the colleges and universities in the United States, private undergraduate colleges have been most vulnerable to the effects of competition (Breneman, 1994). In a competitive market, product differentiation is one means of attracting more consumers (Gibbs and Knapp, 2002), and it has been observed that general education is sometimes used to create distinctive academic programs (Arnold and Civian, 1997).

The Problem

General education is broadly defined in the literature. Its characteristics and varying purposes are discussed, and its failures to meet any number of assorted goals are documented. In spite of the conversation swirling around the idea of general education, there is a lack of clarity when it comes to understanding what general education is, in
practice. It is uncertain as to whether those few general education trends that have been documented across the higher education spectrum hold true in a given segment of higher education, specifically the private baccalaureate college. The literature identifies types of curriculum change, and addresses reasons for such change. While it might be assumed that colleges adapt the general education portion of the curriculum in the same ways and for the same reasons as they adapt the curriculum overall, the literature is not clear about this. Why colleges revise and modify general education is not certain. Finally, it is unclear what, if any, role general education plays in enrollment. This is particularly pertinent in private undergraduate colleges, as this type of college has faced a number of challenges in recent years (Breneman, 1994).

The Purpose

Given the lack of clarity regarding general education, particularly general education at private four-year colleges, this research begins to address the question “what is general education at private baccalaureate colleges?” It attempts to identify ways in which colleges have changed their general education curriculum over time, particularly in light of environmental changes. Because general education criticisms and reforms began in the mid 1970s and continued until the end of the century, the question of general education change was limited to changes occurring between 1975 and 2000. This research also begins to explore whether
or not private baccalaureate colleges use general education as a tool to attract students, and whether or not these colleges perceive a relationship between their general education curriculum and enrollment.

This study focuses on private baccalaureate colleges, also referred to as liberal arts colleges, because this type of institution has tended to emphasize a broad liberal education across its curriculum. Liberal arts colleges have traditionally stressed general education, and have been leaders in curricular experimentation. Because of their vulnerability to competition, it is reasonable to postulate that private baccalaureate colleges, in particular, may have attempted to differentiate themselves with a unique general education curriculum, in order to attract students.

The Research Questions

The research questions specifically addressed in this study are:

1) In the years 1975, 1988 and 2000, how much general education was required at private undergraduate colleges, in terms of credit hours and as a proportion of graduation requirements.

2) In the years 1975, 1988 and 2000, what were the content and structure (i.e. degree of student choice and timing) of general education at these institutions?

3) What elements of general education are consistent across private undergraduate colleges, and how are general education programs unique or distinctive from one another?
4) What factors play a role in decisions to revise general education at private undergraduate colleges, and do competition and changing environmental conditions contribute to general education change?

5) Is there a perceived relationship between distinctive or unique general education programs at private undergraduate colleges and enrollment at those colleges?

College catalogs were used as the primary source to address the first two questions. Selected administrators and faculty were interviewed over the telephone to gather information regarding reasons for general education change and to address questions of the relationship between enrollment and general education.

The results of this study may be of value to those engaged in curriculum design and planning, and also to those involved with enrollment management at private colleges. The findings of this research may also join the conversation regarding the role of general education in American higher education.

Limitations

College catalogs provide only brief descriptions of general education requirements. This study was limited, therefore, by the use of catalogs as the primary information source. A more comprehensive study of general education courses and syllabi might provide a fuller understanding and description of general education. The study was also
limited by the availability of prior year catalogs. Institutions were eliminated from the study if either their 1975 or 1988 catalogs were unavailable. Further, the study was subject to researcher bias, particularly with respect to the interviews and ensuing analysis. While researcher bias is an expected and accepted element of some types of research, such bias may also limit reliability. Faculty and staff perceptions of the reasons for general education revision, and the relationship between general education and enrollment are discussed and analyzed. However, in a study of this sort, it is not possible to definitively establish specific cause and effect. Finally, while telephone interviews are an acceptable methodology, use of the telephone limits the ability to note or follow up on nonverbal responses of the participant, which may provide cues for additional follow up questions.

Ethical Considerations

Approval of the Human Subjects Review Committee of the College of William and Mary was sought and granted prior to the collection of any data. The purpose of the research was fully disclosed to persons selected for interviewing, and to the small number who asked for additional information regarding the request for prior year catalogs.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As American higher education has evolved to reflect changes in American society, so has its curriculum. So closely interwoven are American society and the college curriculum that a time line of the curriculum also serves as "an index ... to the nation's social and intellectual history" (Carnochan, 1993, p.114). Slowly, the classical college curriculum of Colonial times gave way to a curriculum of science and modern languages. By the end of the 19th century, colleges and universities had become centers of practical learning as higher education adapted to "fit into the world of new technology" (Rudolph, 1977, p. 102). Curriculum does not always change in an even progression. When society experiences rapid social and technological changes, as in the latter years of the 20th century, the pace of curriculum change may accelerate and change may become more dramatic. In times of rapid social transformation, a given curriculum may become outdated within only a decade or two (Toombs and Tierney, 1991).

Curriculum change begins with an institution's recognition of need for adaptation, and is often influenced by an institution's environment. (Toombs and Tierney, 1991). Throughout the history of higher education,
the most significant curricular changes have nearly always been precipitated by environmental circumstances beyond the institution's control (Kerr, 1995).

Historically, colleges and universities have approached curricular change in five ways (Levine, 1976, as cited in Carnegie, 1978). Most frequent, most effective, and easiest to implement is incremental change. (Carnegie, 1978). Incremental change is change a little bit at a time. This type of change may incorporate new knowledge and methods. It results in curriculum modification, and commonly is accomplished through the redesign of individual courses or the addition of new courses, disciplines (e.g. subject areas like biology, mathematics, political science, etc.) or divisions (i.e. collections of disciplines, typically labeled as natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities)(Toombs and Tierney, 1991).

Colleges may introduce curriculum change that is broader than incremental change, but that is still limited to designated portions of the curriculum. Some colleges have created innovative enclaves, or specific places (e.g. locations at an off-campus site, portions of the calendar, times of day) in which to introduce a new curriculum. Others have adopted change on the periphery, in affiliated settings or programs (Carnegie, 1978). Examples might include an adult degree completion program conducted at a local high school or business, or a new program offered jointly by the college and a technology research group whose
employees are also faculty of record at the college. Such curriculum change may result in integration, which seeks to make connections across components of the curriculum, or between the academic and the practical. Integration most often is confined to specific programs or portions of the curriculum. Interdisciplinary or upper level capstone courses are examples (Toombs and Tierney, 1991). Institutions may reach beyond this sort of isolated curriculum change and introduce holistic change, “characterized by a unifying and coherent philosophy of education” (Carnegie, 1978 p.256). Of the five historical types of change, the most efficient, but least common and most difficult to adopt is holistic change. This type of change may reach toward transformation, which encompasses a far broader change in the curriculum than either modification or integration (Toombs and Tierney, 1991). Institutions embark on transformational change when there are questions or issues that cannot be addressed by a single discipline or program, when the number of those concerned reaches beyond a division or institution, and when the questions being addressed are laced with value judgments and political overtones. Although some have initiated such change, Toombs and Tierney (1991) note that few institutions have fully accomplished a curriculum transformation.

Far less frequently, curriculum change may also be implemented through the establishment of new types of colleges, with novel missions
and novel curricula to match. (Carnegie, 1978). It is difficult, however, to identify recent examples of this type of curriculum change.

Undergraduate Curriculum

Following several influential publications in the late 1970s, the undergraduate college curriculum became the center of widespread attention and controversy. Arguments centered around content, coherence, common experience or understanding, and comprehensiveness (Gaff, 1991). Some argued for specific content to ensure students were schooled in the knowledge essential for a college graduate (Cheney, 1989; Petry, 1987). Others argued for content designed to develop specific skills, most notably writing, communication, and critical thinking (Hursch, Haas and Moore, 1983; National Institute of Education, 1984). Still others argued for a curriculum that would develop those qualities that might be derived from courses in philosophy or ethics (Association of American Colleges, 1988).

Complaints spoke to a lack of cohesion in the curriculum. Critics cited an inappropriate piecemeal approach through which students could select courses that neither built on, nor bore any relation to any other course. There were calls for enrollment in a mandatory core of courses to develop community and shared understanding among students. The curriculum was criticized as unresponsive, too slow to change, and too much a product of compromise (Gaff, 1991). A flurry of curriculum
reform followed.

Today’s undergraduate college curriculum evolved to its current structure in the first half of the 20th century. Typically the curriculum includes electives, a major, and general education, and is measured by semester, quarter or other hours of credit. Electives are those courses freely chosen by students. The major provides an opportunity for in-depth study within a particular discipline or profession (Stark and Latucca, 1997). It comprises anywhere from one third to more than one half of the overall course of study. Major requirements normally are determined by the department or division of the institution in which it resides. General education provides breadth of instruction, skill development, general or common understanding (Carnegie, 1978), integrating course work or experiences (Gaff, 1999) and in some cases, what the institution deems essential learning. Typically, all students in a given institution or school are subject to the same general education requirements, determined by an interdisciplinary body. General education may be structured in a variety of ways, and over time it has been called on to fulfill a number of purposes.

General Education

General education began in the early days of the 20th century, in part to curtail a system of elective education that allowed students to freely select nearly all of their courses from across a wide range of
disciplines (Scroggs, 1939). General education proponents at the time were concerned that the elective system had traveled too far in the direction of student choice. They seized upon a course of general education to lend coherence and common experience to a fragmented curriculum (Rudolph, 1977). The general education movement gained force in the wake of two World Wars, as a means to instruct students in American heritage and responsibilities of citizenship. It waned in the 1960s and 1970s amid cries for relevance and centrality of the individual, but appears to once more be gaining prominence (Stark and Lattuca, 1997).

As the general education curriculum has shifted over time, observers of higher education have expressed dismay with the changes they have witnessed. General education has been a focus of the wave of criticisms aimed toward higher education which began in the 1970s. In 1978, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching spoke of general education as “an idea in distress” (Carnegie 1977, p. 164). There was a sense that higher education had abandoned its tradition of providing a broad, liberal education and had become simply a training ground on which to prepare students for their vocations (Rudolph, 1977).

General education is sometimes spoken of as liberal education, or the liberal arts and sciences. It has been called on to facilitate the integration and synthesis of learning, awareness of other cultures,
examination of values, a common educational experience, development of analytic skills, and promotion of qualities such as tolerance and empathy (Gaff, 1983). General education is a collection of “those courses that the college regards as so important that they are required of all students, regardless of academic major or intended career” (Gaff, 1991, p.13). Because it is defined by the institution, general education can reflect institutional values and set one institution apart from another. Today, general education typically is structured as either a system of distribution where students select courses from specific areas of study, or as a prescribed core of courses which all students must take, or as a combination of prescription and distribution (Stark and Lattuca, 1997). General education is sometimes taught only during a student’s first year or two of college. In other instances, it may be extended throughout a student’s college career (Carnegie, 1978).

Measurement of General Education

During the last several decades, studies of the curriculum have documented broad patterns and shifts in general education. The first to find considerable change was a study of 271 colleges and universities conducted in the mid 1970s (Blackburn, et al, 1976). An evaluation of catalogs and student transcripts demonstrated that between 1967 and 1974 general education had “diminished considerably” (p.11). During the time span studied, the proportion of the undergraduate curriculum
devoted to general education at four-year colleges dropped from 43% to 34%. Of the 15 categories of four-year colleges included in the study, the greatest mean declines in general education as a proportion of the curriculum occurred at private universities (former Carnegie Classification Comprehensive I), and at public and private liberal arts colleges (former Carnegie Classification Liberal Arts I Private and Liberal Arts II, Public and Private). During the same time period, overall credit hours required for graduation and for the major stayed essentially the same. Credit hour requirements simply shifted from general education to electives.

Changes in the structure and content of general education accompanied the shift in required credit hours. Students were granted more choice in their general education as the proportion of institutionally mandated courses declined. In 1967, 50% of general education courses were prescribed; in 1974, fewer than 30% of courses were prescribed (Blackburn et al., 1976). With regard to content, the proportion of institutions requiring study in the traditional general education content areas of English composition, physical education, foreign language, and math declined as well.

Three additional studies of general education were conducted during the 1980s. An unpublished study by the Carnegie Foundation found general education requirements had increased 5% overall between 1974 and 1980 (Gaff, 1983). A 1981 survey of 272 four-year colleges
and universities found an average general education requirement of 44 semester credit hours (Gaff, 1983). By the end of the decade, the mean requirement had increased to somewhere between 47 hours (Toombs, et al., 1991) and 49 hours (Gaff, 1991), or 38% to 40% of the undergraduate curriculum.

By 1988, a larger proportion of institutions, as compared with 1974, required general education courses in writing, math, computer use and other ‘skills’ areas (Toombs, et al., 1991). On average, general education included four courses in the humanities, three in social sciences, two in writing and in natural science, and one course each in math and fine arts (Gaff, 1991). In addition, 69% of schools included some sort of interdisciplinary or integrating course work in their general education curriculum (Toombs, et al., 1991). It appeared to researchers of the time as though general education was becoming oriented toward “the skills of career and life, formal knowledge of culture and tradition, and the person/society component” (Toombs, et al., 1991, pp. 117-118).

A 1995 study of college transcripts compared course taking patterns of students who had graduated from high school between 1972 and 1984 with those graduating between 1982 and 1993. The study revealed some changes over time in the “empirical core curriculum”, those 35 courses accounting for the greatest proportion of course credit
accumulated by college students nationwide (Adelman, 1995). Most notable were an increase in the number of business courses included in the empirical core, an increase in math, and a decline in enrollment in general biology. This study also revealed changes in the proportion of college students earning credit in selected course categories. For both samples, the greatest proportion of students completed courses in English composition, physical education and general psychology. The proportion of students earning credit in composition increased from 69% in the earlier, to 74% in the later sample, while the proportion earning credit in physical education and psychology decreased. Comparing the two samples, more students in the later sample earned credit in oral communication, college math, economics and business courses. Fewer students earned credit in history or government, sociology, foreign languages, philosophy or religion, biology and chemistry.

**Recent Trends in Higher Education**

American higher education is "embedded in the wider society and subject to society's constraining forces" (Berdahl, Altbach, and Gumport, 1999). As the broader society confronts change and challenges, so does higher education. Curriculum change is often precipitated by change in an institution's environment. Of particular interest in this research are five broad cultural, or environmental, changes which have had an observable impact on higher education and its curriculum.
Changing Student Demographics

As the American population has become increasingly diverse, so have college students. Between 1980 and 1992 the proportion of Asian, African American, Hispanic and Native American students increased from 18% to 25%, and the proportion of white, non-Hispanic students declined by a comparable degree. (Horn, 1995). As women have more and more entered the mainstream of professional life, they have come to predominate higher education. In 1983, the proportion of men and women enrolled in four-year institutions was virtually the same (49.5% men, 50.5% women). By 1996 that proportion had shifted, to produce a predominantly female student body (Gerald and Hussar, 1998). As the baby boom has aged, so have students. Between 1988 and 1996, the number of students 25 and older increased 20%; those 35 and older increased 35%. (Gerald and Hussar, 1998).

Initially the infusion of new students lead to programs in Women’s studies, African American studies, and other special interdisciplinary area studies. These specialized programs of studies have lead to broader recognition and acceptance of the perspectives and scholarship of previously disregarded groups of persons (Humphreys, 1997).

In recent years, as many institutions revised their general education curricula, more and more colleges and universities have begun to require study of diverse perspectives (Gaff, 1999). Although multicultural and
diverse perspectives may be incorporated at any point in the curriculum, "general education programs are ideal locations for addressing issues of diversity" (Humphreys, 1997, p.15).

Financial Stress

As the student population was evolving, colleges and universities confronted a changing financial situation. During the 1980s Federal policy regarding higher education financial aid shifted dramatically, away from need based grants, in favor of student loans (Callen, 1993). Students turned to colleges to make up the financial aid difference. Between 1987 and 1996, the proportion of students receiving at least $1500 in institutionally based aid increased from 5% to 17%. Availability of financial aid can impact college enrollment. In 1996, nearly a third of new college freshmen based their college selection at least in part on tuition or institutional financial aid considerations (Astin, 1998).

Accompanying the shift in Federal student aid policy, states were confronted with budget shortfalls due to a weakening economy. As a result, per student state funding of higher education declined, as did the proportion of states' budgets allocated to higher education. Colleges and universities became more reliant on tuition income to compensate for the declining state appropriations. Tuition increased (Callen, 1993). Competition for philanthropic dollars intensified (Breneman, 1994) and more than ever before, colleges and universities were "expected to stand..."
Institutions may adopt a number of different strategies to adapt to financial stress. Three strategies found to be the most effective are "distinctiveness from other institutions, effectiveness in achieving a particular mission, and quality" (Leslie and Fretwell, 1996, p. 245). Institutions that best survive financial stress are those that build on their strengths and identify a specific niche to fill. One means of developing a niche is "cutting, adding, and reshaping" academic programs, by (p. 61).

At the same time that institutions struggled to redefine themselves in the midst of financial difficulty, they also found themselves accountable to an increasingly wide range of stakeholders. As state budgets became more burdened in the 1980s and competition for tax money became more intense, legislators and taxpayers began to question the value of the dollars spent on higher education. The public began to voice expectations regarding the skills and knowledge of new college graduates (McGuinness, 1999). States made it increasingly clear that they wanted a return on their investment in higher education. They began to attend to issues of quality in undergraduate education, to establish standards, and to hold institutions accountable for student learning (Callen, 1993). In some instances, states have established specific requirements regarding the quantity and content of general education in public institutions. Institutions also have begun to address issues of
quality, specifically in their general education programs. They have introduced or raised standards, focused more attention on communication and reasoning skills, and extended general education to the later years of college (Gaff, 1999).

Vocationalism

Over the years, curricular emphasis has shifted back and forth, pendulum-like, between the liberal arts and a more vocational or practical course of study (Stark and Latucca, 1997). The most recent pendulum swing, beginning about 1980, has been toward the vocational. Given the increasing complexity of society, there is a growing “conviction that the university curriculum must provide relevant [job] training” (Altbach, 1999, p. 26) for students. Students concur. In 1991, three quarters of freshmen entering college (compared with half of new college freshmen in 1971) enrolled, at least in part, to command a larger salary upon graduation (Astin, 1998). Students’ course selections have “become increasingly sensitive to the state of the economy and the job market” (Gordon, 1993, p. 6). Between 1972 and 1988 professionally oriented bachelors degrees (e.g. business, engineering, nursing, computer science) increased dramatically, rising from 33% to 54% of all bachelor’s degrees at all colleges (Breneman, 1994).

Students are not alone in their desire for a vocationally oriented curriculum. Employers also have expectations with regard to
undergraduate education. They are increasingly demanding that the undergraduate curriculum address the career needs of students (Wallhaus, 1996) and they have expressed a desire for greater emphasis on cooperative learning or internship experiences (Van Horn, 1995). Although student preparation is generally thought by business leaders to be at least equal that of the past, economic concerns and technological advances have increased the demands of the workplace (Van Horn, 1995), requiring more highly prepared college graduates.

Countering the trend toward vocationalism, a secondary trend of increasing emphasis on the liberal arts and sciences emerged in the 1990s (Gaff, 1999). The primary focus of this counter trend appears to be the development of communication, reasoning, quantitative and technological skills, and an appreciation for diversity. By and large, this emphasis has been incorporated into the general education portion of the curriculum. Interestingly, the emphasis on skills responds to the needs of business for a more skilled work force.

**Technology**

Perhaps one of the leading factors contributing to the need for a more skilled work force is the meteoric rise in the importance of technology. No longer is the American economy based on an industrial, or even on a service model. It is "information based [and] technologically intensive" (Connick, 1997). Personal computers and the World Wide Web
have dramatically altered the way people do business (Katz, 1999).

Emerging technologies have the potential to transform higher education. Computers are used to supplement communication in traditional colleges and universities. Course assignments, multimedia presentations, chat group discussions, and electronic mail all complement the typical classroom experience (Farrington, 1999). A number of higher education institutions have adopted computer literacy requirements and have instituted either competency testing or general education course requirements to ensure computer literacy (Davis, 1999). In some instances, technology instruction piggybacks required information literacy programs geared to hone research skills (Varner and Schwartz, 1996).

Beyond the traditional classroom, colleges and universities use the World Wide Web to expand access, to overcome geographic boundaries, to offer education asynchronously at times convenient for people with a variety of other commitments, and to engage new types of students (Hanna, 2000b). In addition, a wide variety of new providers are taking advantage of new technologies to enter the higher education marketplace. Many of these new providers are proprietary organizations, and as such are able to move quickly to meet student needs and interests. They include existing educational publishers, commercial education enterprises and new internet based companies (Blumenstyk, 1999, 2000). These providers are drawn by the demand for work related
education (Hanna, 2000a), the opportunity to serve populations outside of the United States, and the potential for profits.

With a wider range of opportunities, students are becoming consumers of education, with choices as to where, when, and from whom they will purchase education (Connick, 1997). Given the growing numbers of new providers of higher education, existing colleges and universities will likely have to "undergo fundamental changes in order to compete - or in some cases to survive" (Hanna, 2000b, p. 28).

**Consumerism**

A college education is a commodity bought and sold on the marketplace. Students evaluate their colleges and universities on the basis of "convenience, quality, service and cost" (Levine and Cureton, 1998). They expect efficiency and they seek a product that matches their definition of a quality education (Zemsky and Massy, 1993). Students shop for the best bargain and often are not willing to pay fees for services they do not use (Levine and Cureton, 1998). While consumerism is not new, the narrow focus and close consumer scrutiny directed specifically toward higher education is new (Levine and Cureton, 1998). Colleges and universities are providers of educational experiences (Zemsky and Massy, 1993). As such, their ability to tell consumer students what they need or what they want has diminished.

While students have increasingly played the role of consumer,
colleges have increasingly courted students as customers (Levine and Cureton, 1998). Institutions engage in elaborate recruiting efforts and offer financial aid or tuition discounts to those who enroll. Colleges and universities incorporate new services and academic programs that will appeal to potential students (Rudolph, 1993). Such programs may be developed to meet needs unique to a particular location or set of circumstances (Leslie and Fretwell, 1996). New programs to increase the interest of prospective students may take the shape of new majors, or new elements in a general education program. Institutions most responsive to the demands of consumer students include comprehensive colleges and less selective liberal arts colleges (Carnegie, 1978). In a consumer oriented system, consumer demand shapes the product (Zemsky, 1993).

**Competition**

Individually and together, each of the trends discussed above have lead to changes in the curriculum and intensified competition for funding and for students. Because “the college experience is, among other things, a product bought and sold on the marketplace” (Kanter, et al., 1997, p.19), colleges compete with one another for money, and for students, and for prestige. They compete with the new providers, who in some instances offer convenience and a career oriented education matching consumer demand, at costs lower than other private institutions. In their
contest for students, colleges and universities attempt to differentiate themselves from one another through the courses, programs, services and faculty they offer students (Kanter et al., 1997). In a competitive environment, differentiation is one means of attracting more consumers (Gibbs and Knapp, 2002).

As colleges compete to address demands for additional services and facilities they also struggle to provide services at a competitive price (Breneman, 1994). They compete to attract well qualified, but financially needy, students by offering attractive packages of financial aid. Those institutions not able to attract a sufficient number of students with program and pricing may turn to other strategies. Some adjust their mission and educate new types of students. Others lower admissions standards (Kanter et al., 1997). Regardless of strategy, success in a competitive market hinges on the “extent to which [institutions] have an education product...provided conveniently for the consumer at a competitive cost” (Connick, 1997, p. 9).

While all of higher education has been affected to some degree by financial struggles and increasing competition, private undergraduate colleges have been particularly vulnerable.

Private Undergraduate Colleges under Stress

Four-year private undergraduate colleges form one segment of the higher education marketplace. These schools are known as liberal arts and
baccalaureate colleges. Their principal mission is the education of undergraduate students. They are primarily residential and attract traditionally aged students. They tend to value breadth or a liberal arts curriculum over a more narrow professional focus (Hawkins, 1999) and their classes typically are taught by regular faculty as opposed to graduate students (McPherson and Shapiro, 1999). While liberal arts colleges bestow only 4% of bachelors degrees awarded nationally each year, the liberal arts college is still considered by some to be one of the best models of undergraduate education in this country (Koblick, 1999).

Liberal arts colleges face a number of challenges. Beginning in the 1970s, students turned increasingly toward vocationally oriented degrees and away from the primary offering of liberal arts colleges. Between 1968 and 1986, bachelors degrees in the liberal arts and sciences shrank from nearly half of all degrees granted, to just over one fourth. Many liberal arts colleges made curriculum changes to accommodate student demand for a more vocationally beneficial education (Breneman, 1994).

Undergraduate colleges, particularly those in the private sector, are heavily dependent on tuition for revenue. Unlike larger institutions, these schools do not have access to financial support from research grants, and while a few of the more selective and prestigious of these schools have a sizable endowment, the majority of schools do not. (McPherson and Shapiro, 1999). Undergraduate colleges are particularly vulnerable in
difficult financial times and are more likely to fail than are other segments of the higher education market place (Breneman, 1994). Between 1988 and 2001, at least 100 public and private four-year undergraduate colleges closed (Meister, 2001). Between 1967 and 1990, 167 four-year colleges in the private sector closed or merged with another institution (Hawkins, 1999).

For private undergraduate colleges, recent trends have resulted in two primary outcomes: too little money, and too few students. By and large, public perception is that small private colleges are a poor value. They appear to be too expensive, they seemingly offer little opportunity to learn business skills, and the prevailing sense is that critical elements of a college education (i.e. problem solving, critical thinking, communication skills) can be incorporated into any curriculum at any institution (Hersh, 1997).

Among the private colleges, those in the middle tier prestige-wise may be facing the greatest challenges (Breneman, 1994; Neely, 1999). Many of these schools have only local name recognition and no large endowment to underwrite student aid. Without a particularly strong academic program, these schools have a great deal of difficulty attracting students (Van der Werf, 1999, July). In the eyes of consumers, these colleges may not compare well to less expensive public institutions. They may struggle to offer a curriculum that "suitably reflects the range of
modern learning" (McPherson and Shapiro, 1999, p.71) and they are not necessarily in a position to meet student expectations for career preparation (Lang, 1999).

Middle tier schools may face greater difficulty recruiting students than those schools with prestige and tuition at the high or even the low end of the spectrum. Students (and their parents) are willing to spend more to attend a school with greater prestige. mid-range schools face the challenge of tuition charges that exceed the margin students are willing to pay for a mid-range reputation. Additionally, they face more price resistance from those able to pay full price, and face more pressure to offer tuition discounts to maintain a degree of selectivity in admissions (Koshal and Koshal, 1999).

Colleges respond to the pressures they face in essentially three ways. They raise more money, they spend less money, and they try to attract more students (Breneman, 1994). To recruit students, colleges may offer financial incentives. This approach has the potential to add to financial difficulties, however (Breneman, 1994). Colleges may market to a new type of student (Breneman, 1994), augment their student support services, or add new facilities (Van der Werf, 1999, December). Colleges may also adapt their curriculum to attract more students. "A curriculum that is attractive to students could be an institution's first line of defense" (Gaff, 1983, p. 52) against declining enrollment. Curricula "that
fail to attract and retain students could bankrupt institutions dependent on tuition income" (p. 52).

Elite or top tier liberal arts colleges with sufficient endowments and name recognition have maintained a liberal arts focus. These colleges offer students a prestigious education along with financial incentives, and continue to attract students (Neely, 1999). These are the colleges that, due to their prestige, attract a sufficient number of students to be able to "resist the economic pressure to offer course work that provides skills needed in the immediate labor market" (Breneman, 1994, p.10). Lowest tier schools typically have only limited regional or religious appeal, and may lack sufficient resources to begin new programs (Neely, 1999). It is the many schools in the middle that are most likely to adapt their curriculum (Carnegie, 1978) in the face of financial stress.

To attract more students, middle tier undergraduate colleges have added business or professional majors. Some have built on their strengths or in other ways attempted to create a niche or a unique place for themselves in the marketplace. Some have created 'applied liberal arts' programs, such as museum management (Hawkins, 1999), or management of nonprofit organizations (Van der Werf, 1999, December). Others have broadened their appeal by adding an international focus (Breneman, 1994). Because general education revision is often used as a tool to create a niche that may be marketed by enrollment specialists...
(Arnold and Civian, 1997), it is reasonable to expect that some have revised their general education programs in unique ways.

Liberal arts colleges followed the country's overall general education trends in the early 1970s. Between 1967 and 1974 the number of required general education credit hours in liberal arts colleges declined as a percentage of the overall curriculum (Carnegie, 1978). Although the general education studies conducted in the 1980s did include liberal arts colleges in their samples, only aggregated results were reported. Beyond commenting that less selective private liberal arts colleges were more likely to develop experimental curricula (Carnegie, 1977), there was no suggestion that general education trends in liberal arts colleges differed significantly from other segments of higher education. Nevertheless it is not entirely clear either, that general education trends in liberal arts colleges have mirrored those across higher education.

Justification for this Study

In recent years, private undergraduate colleges have confronted the challenges of new students' demands, financial uncertainty and growing competition. Of all types of institutions, mid-tier private four-year colleges have been the most vulnerable to the changing higher education environment.

To make their educational product more attractive or valued in the
market, a number of colleges have made adjustments to their curriculum. New programs appealing to new students and their vocational interests have been added to the curriculum. There have been reports of revisions to the general education component of the curriculum (Gaff, 1999). While previous studies have shown that general education does change over time, how general education has changed in private undergraduate colleges is uncertain.

Private undergraduate colleges are slowly disappearing from the higher education landscape. Many have merged with other similar or larger institutions, and many, unable to bear the financial burden of small enrollments, have closed. At the same time, the small private colleges are being emulated in honors colleges at large universities.

A number of baccalaureate colleges have shifted their focus away from the liberal arts. Their missions changed as they adopted professional and vocationally oriented majors. Those colleges formerly classified as Liberal Arts I or Liberal Arts II by the Carnegie Foundation granted more than half of their undergraduate degrees in professional fields in 1988 (Breneman, 1994). The Carnegie Foundation has since changed its classification listings from Liberal Arts I and II to Baccalaureate College-Liberal Arts and Baccalaureate College-General, to better reflect the focus of these institutions.

This study addressed general education change over time, in
those private colleges that have survived. It sought to determine whether shifts in general education were consistent across schools, and to identify distinctive features in the colleges’ general education curricula. This study also explored the relationship between undergraduate enrollment and general education, and attempted to develop understanding of the factors contributing to general education change.

This study identifies trends in general education, which can be valuable to those engaged in curriculum planning. It offers specific recommendations for practice, and points to a need for clear communication and clarity of purpose with regard to academic planning. Further, this research raises a question of whether general education revision is undertaken primarily with the intent of engaging and challenging students, or is simply a response to external competitive forces and internal logistical concerns.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Changes in higher education's environment in recent years have challenged the viability of private undergraduate colleges. A competitive market for higher education has threatened the survival of many small private colleges, resulting in closure of a number of these schools. The colleges that have survived are those that, in a changing higher education market, continued to appeal to potential students. This study sought to discover how private undergraduate colleges have adapted their general education curriculum during the last 25 years. It also explored the role of general education in attracting and recruiting students.

Research Questions

This study examined general education in 1975, 1988 and 2000 at 60 four-year private colleges. It analyzed changes in general education, as well as enrollment trends during this time period, and explored the relationship between general education and student recruiting and enrollment. Research questions were:

1) In the years 1975, 1988 and 2000, 'how much' general education was required at private undergraduate colleges, in terms of
credit hours and as a proportion of graduation requirements?

2) In the years 1975, 1988 and 2000, what were the content and structure (i.e. prescribed, distribution, taken over two, three or four years) of general education at these institutions?

3) What elements of general education are consistent across private undergraduate colleges, and how are general education programs unique or distinctive from one another?

4) What factors play a role in decisions to revise general education at private undergraduate colleges, and do competition and changing environmental conditions contribute to general education change?

5) Is there a perceived relationship between distinctive or unique general education programs at private undergraduate colleges and enrollment at those colleges?

Subjects

Higher education institutions may be categorized in a number of different ways. Two organizations that have developed classification systems are the nonprofit Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the news magazine, U.S. News and World Report. The Carnegie Foundation in 1970 instituted a classification system for institutions of higher education for purposes of policy research. (Carnegie, 2000b). The most recent Carnegie Classification, released in November 2000, categorizes institutions as Doctoral-granting, Masters
(Comprehensive) Colleges and Universities, Baccalaureate Colleges, and Associate's Colleges. Baccalaureate colleges focus primarily on undergraduate education and grant fewer than 20 master's degrees annually. Within the Baccalaureate classification, colleges are further classified as Baccalaureate-Associate's Colleges, Baccalaureate-General, and Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts. Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts institutions emphasize bachelor's degree programs, and grant at least 50% of their undergraduate degrees in the liberal arts. Baccalaureate-General colleges also emphasize the bachelor's degree but grant fewer than 50% of their undergraduate degrees in the liberal arts (Carnegie, 2000a). The Carnegie Foundation (2000a) defines degrees in the liberal arts as degrees in: English language and literature/letters; foreign languages and literatures; biological sciences/life sciences; mathematics; philosophy and religion; physical sciences; psychology; social sciences and history; visual and performing arts; area, ethnic, and cultural studies; liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities; and multi/interdisciplinary studies.

U.S. News (2000) classifies and ranks institutions to provide consumers with descriptive information to assist in their educational decision making. U.S. News designates liberal arts colleges as either regional or national, and as first, second, third or fourth tier, or unranked. Regional liberal arts colleges are those that in the 1994 Carnegie
Classification were designated as Baccalaureate Colleges II (institutions granting fewer than 40% of degrees in the liberal arts and institutions with less selective admissions policies). National liberal arts colleges are those that were categorized as Baccalaureate (Liberal Arts) Colleges I (institutions with restrictive admissions policies, granting more than 40% of degrees in the liberal arts) (Carnegie, Frequently, 2000). U.S. News (2000) develops its rankings from weighted scores on 16 selected indicators. Top tier schools, comprising approximately the top 25% of schools in each of the U.S. News categories are given a specific numerical ranking. The remainder of the schools are assigned to the second, third or fourth tier, and are given no specific rank.

This study investigated general education curricula in those private institutions classified by the Carnegie Foundation as Baccalaureate-General or Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts, that were also ranked in 2000 by U.S. News as second or third tier national or regional liberal arts institutions. Typically, nationally ranked institutions were designated as Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts in the Carnegie Classification, and regionally ranked colleges were considered Baccalaureate-General by the Carnegie Foundation. First tier colleges are generally those with greater name recognition. These are the most prestigious colleges. They do not have difficulty meeting their enrollment goals (Breneman, 1994) and they are growing stronger (Van der Werf, 1999, December). The weakest of the
private colleges are struggling to survive. Those colleges in the middle range are the ones that are surviving in spite of recruiting challenges and financial adversity. These second and third tier colleges are the colleges of interest in this study.

A total of 60 colleges, 30 Baccalaureate-General and 30 Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts were included in this study. Initially, 40 Baccalaureate-General and 40 Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts colleges were randomly selected from among all the institutions within their categories (113 Baccalaureate-General and 82 Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts). Two factors required elimination of a number of the colleges prior to determination of the final sample selection. Several of the colleges had been two-year institutions in 1975 and therefore did not meet the criteria for selection. For a number of other colleges, it was not possible to obtain historical information in a timely manner. These colleges were also eliminated from the study. Additional institutions were randomly selected from each category until there were 30 Baccalaureate-General and 30 Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts colleges that had been four-year colleges since at least 1975, and for which historical information was available. (Appendix A)

Procedures

Each college in the sample was contacted by phone to request photocopies of descriptions of general education and graduation
requirements from the colleges' 1975 and 1988 catalogs. At least two follow up phone calls were made to each of the schools from whom materials had not been received by mail or fax within three weeks after the initial phone call. Those that still did not provide 1975 and 1988 catalogs were eliminated from the sample. Year 2000 catalogs were downloaded from the college's web site or from College Source (Career, 2001).

Catalog studies are particularly appropriate for curriculum research as catalogs are the "primary formal statements of an institution's academic program" (Amey, 1992, p. 25). Prior curriculum studies have relied on college catalogs (Blackburn et al., 1976; Toombs et al., 1991) to investigate general education trends. When used at several different points in time, catalogs can "reveal trends in and the rate of curriculum innovation" (Amey, 1992, p. 25).

Content and structure of general education were recorded according to catalog descriptions. In several instances it was not clear whether a college required a specific course to fulfill a requirement, or whether simply a course in the given discipline was required. When unclear, the requirement was recorded as a distribution rather than a prescribed course. The number of semester hours required for graduation were recorded as stated in the catalogs. For those colleges that used a credit system other than semester hours, credits for graduation were
converted using the equivalency stated in the catalog. If an equivalency was not stated, a conversion factor of 1.5 quarter hours per semester hour was used to calculate semester hours.

The required number of semester hours of general education was recorded in a similar fashion. In those instances where a range of general education hours was possible (i.e. either a three-credit or four-credit course might satisfy a requirement) the number of general education hours was recorded as a mean of the highest and lowest possible number of hours. Although the majority of schools had provisions for students to be exempted from English composition, math, foreign language and/or other courses, the total number of required general education hours was recorded to include all of these classes. Where provision was made for students to complete remedial or developmental courses prior to enrolling in college level general education courses, the hours for remedial courses were not included in the general education calculation, as these hours typically did not earn credit toward graduation.

Six institutions were selected for interview case studies based upon three criteria: the college revised its general education curriculum between 1988 and 2000, the college’s 2000 general education program included elements that were unique, distinctive, or atypical among the institutions studied, and the college’s enrollment in 1997 equaled or exceeded that of 1988. Total undergraduate enrollment for each of the
60 colleges was obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics' web site. (Appendix B)

Extreme or deviant case sampling, focusing on unusual cases, and criterion sampling, selecting a sample based on specific criteria, are both recognized as valuable sampling methodologies for case studies (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996). The total fall 1997 undergraduate enrollment at the six colleges selected for interviews ranged from just under 600, to nearly 1450. Changes in enrollment between 1988 and 1997 ranged from a negative 2% to an increase of 87%. One school had experienced an enrollment decline. By fall 2000, its enrollment returned to the 1988 level, allowing its inclusion in the sample of schools for interviews. All six colleges selected had unique elements in their general education curricula, and all had made revisions in their general education programs since 1988. Unique elements included interdisciplinary courses that were integrated with other general education requirements, an unusually large number of required religion courses, an unusual system of distribution, a more extensive diversity requirement than was typical, and a more extensive career exploration component than found in most colleges.

Standardized open-ended telephone interviews were conducted with key administrators and persons knowledgeable regarding general education at each of the six institutions. Interview questions were geared toward understanding the distinctive elements of the institution, the
reasons for general education revision, and the role of general education with respect to student recruiting and enrollment (Appendix C).

Telephone interviews have an advantage over face to face interviews, by providing access to a more widely dispersed sample without the costs of travel. Telephone interviews have been used at least as effectively as face to face interviews, particularly to gather sensitive information (Gall, et al., 1996). Interview candidates were identified from published lists of administrative staff, and by referral from those individuals. Interview candidates were contacted by phone to request participation and to fully disclose the purpose of this study. To add rigor, interview questions were reviewed by a researcher skilled in interview methodology. Typed interview notes were sent to each participant by electronic mail, giving them an opportunity to correct or make additions to the notes. All corrections and additions were incorporated into the interview data.

Analysis

Several different types of data analysis were used. Quantity of general education (number of credit hours and proportion of the total curriculum) was summarized using descriptive statistics including means and ranges. Analysis of change over time considered direction of change and the number/proportion of schools making changes in quantity. Analysis of structure considered the number and proportion of colleges exercising each of the various student choice options (distribution,
prescription, or a mixture), and timing (general education in first 2 years, first 3 years, etc.) options, and changes in structure over time.

Subject matter analysis built on the content areas identified by Toombs, et al. (1991): interdisciplinary, humanities, fine arts, math-quantitative, social sciences, natural sciences, speech, writing, foreign language, physical education, values, computer and other. These initial content areas were merged, subdivided and appended to provide a full description of general education.

Content analysis was used to address questions regarding consistent and unique, or distinctive elements in general education. Content analysis is a method of data analysis used to categorize written documents. Typically the researcher codes the document and makes a frequency count of instances of each code (Gall et al., 1996). This analysis considered both structure and content of general education.

To analyze the relationship between general education and student recruiting and enrollment, interview responses for each question were first summarized, and then categorized as distinctive characteristics, reasons for general education change, and relationship between general education and enrollment. Responses were then further categorized as themes began to emerge from the interview data. Matrices provided a visual framework for this analysis.

Limitations
This study was limited by the use of college catalogs as they present only brief descriptions of general education rather than more in depth course syllabi or other information which might provide fuller understanding of general education. It was also limited to those schools from which prior year catalogs were available within a given timeframe. Further, the study was subject to researcher bias, particularly in the interviews and interview analysis. While researcher bias is an expected and accepted element of some types of research, such bias may also be limiting. While conclusions may be drawn regarding faculty and staff perceptions regarding general education change, the nature of the research precluded definitively establishing specific cause and effect. Finally, while telephone interviews are an acceptable methodology, use of the telephone limits the ability to note nonverbal responses of the participant which may provide cues for followup questioning.

Ethical Considerations

Approval of the Human Subjects Review Committee of the College of William and Mary was obtained prior to data collection. The purpose of the research was fully disclosed to all persons selected for interviewing, and to those who asked for information regarding the request for current or prior year catalogs.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

Both general education and enrollment at the 60 private
baccalaureate colleges included in this study changed in notable ways
between 1975 and 1988. General education grew in importance in
relation to the rest of the undergraduate curriculum. Its structure became
more similar across colleges. Its content shifted somewhat, increasing
emphasis in specific disciplines and skills areas. Overall, enrollment at the
colleges increased. Like general education, however, this was not true at
all colleges, and at many of the colleges the enrollment fluctuated
considerably. Reasons for general education change varied, but typically
involved either academic concerns or external pressure for change.
Perceptions as to the relationship between enrollment and general
education varied as well.

Changes in General Education 1975-2000

General education at private baccalaureate arts colleges changed in
a number of ways between 1975 and 2000. Quantity increased and it
became more structured as student choice diminished and the proportion
of prescribed courses increased. Content shifted, with an increasing
emphasis on written and verbal communication and mathematics.
Interdisciplinary and integrating course work became more common as did attention to diversity or multiculturalism.

**General Education Quantity**

General education quantity, measured in semester hours, changed considerably between 1975 and 1988, but only marginally between 1988 and 2000 (Table 1). Similar to Blackburn's 1974 finding, colleges in this study allocated an average of 33% of the undergraduate curriculum to general education in 1975. This represents 42 semester hours out of the average 126 semester hours required for a bachelor's degree. In 1988,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institutions Included in the Research</th>
<th>Semester Hours of General Education</th>
<th>Percent of Undergraduate Curriculum</th>
<th>Semester Hours to Graduate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>271 public &amp; private institutions</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Blackburn, et al., 1976)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>60 private</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>60 private</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Toombs, et al., 1991)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Gaff, 1991)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>60 private</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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the percentage had increased to 42%. Between 1988 and 2000 the
average hours of general education remained virtually unchanged.
Interestingly, both hours and percentages are somewhat higher than the

Means are informative, but they tell only part of the story. While
mean measures of general education remained constant from 1988 to
2000, the variability increased considerably. In 1975, six (10%) of the
sample schools had no general education requirements, seven (12%)
required more than 60 hours, and one (2%) required more than 90
semester hours of general education (Table 2). Between 1975 and 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Required Semester Hours of General Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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the range of required hours narrowed. In 1988, all schools required at least 33 semester hours of general education, and none required more than 75 hours. By 2000, the span of general education hours had again increased, but remained smaller than it had been in 1975.

Table 3
Direction of Change in General Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction of Change</th>
<th>1975-1988</th>
<th>1988-2000</th>
<th># of Schools</th>
<th>% of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall increase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1988</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>no change</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no change</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall decrease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1988</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no change</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Net Change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the variation in the required number of general
education hours, the direction of change varied across schools. In spite of a mean increase, not all schools increased general education quantity between 1975 and 1988, nor did all schools hold quantity constant between 1988 and 2000 (Table 3).

Structure of General Education

General education structure was assessed using two factors: when, during their academic careers, students were required to enroll in general education, and how much choice students had in selecting general education courses.

It was difficult to determine timing of general education from catalogs. In most instances the more current catalogs specified that students were expected to enroll in English composition during their freshman year. Ten (17%) of the year 2000 catalogs specifically stated that students were to enroll in general education courses at least during their freshman and sophomore year. Nine (15%) schools required students to enroll in general education (actual number of courses varied by school) during each of the four years of their undergraduate education. Overall, year 2000 catalogs were more specific with regard to timing of general education than were those of earlier years. Whether this reflects a changed expectation regarding the timing of general education or simply a less specific use of language in the earlier catalogs, is not clear.
It was far easier to evaluate degree of student choice. In general across the 60 baccalaureate schools studied, student choice in general education declined from 1975 to 2000. In 1975, six schools (10%) required no general education and had a completely elective curriculum outside of the major. The same year, 20 of the colleges (33%) had only distribution requirements, 32 (53%) had both distribution and core requirements, and 2 schools (3%) prescribed all general education requirements. By 2000, 11 (18%) schools had only distribution requirements and the remaining 49 (82%) had both distribution and core requirements. All schools required some quantity of general education and no school had a completely prescribed general education curriculum.

Although all 60 of the sample colleges used some sort of distribution requirement for general education, the type of distribution varied considerably. For purposes of discussion, this study identified five different types of distribution: multi-division, division, segmented division, multi-department, and department.

- Multi-division distribution, more common in 1975 and 1988 than in 2000, allows students to select courses from among several divisions. Most commonly this type of distribution allows students to select a given number of courses from two or three of a larger number of divisions.

- Division distribution requires students to select a given number of courses from one or more specific divisions (i.e. natural sciences, social
sciences, humanities)

  o Segmented Division distribution segments a traditional division into two or more parts and requires students to select courses from each part (e.g. courses from biological sciences and from physical sciences; or within the social sciences, from psychology/sociology/anthropology; and from economics/political science).

  o Multi-department distribution requires students to select a course or courses from a collection of departments from within a single division, and is most often accompanied by a requirement to take additional courses in the division from a specific department (e.g. a course selected from among psychology/sociology/anthropology; and an economics course)

  o Department distribution requires students to select courses from a specific department.

  Across colleges, the degree of choice within a given distribution varies. Most commonly, institutions designate specific courses that may satisfy a distribution requirement. The number of courses available to meet a given requirement may range from only two or three at one college to nearly all courses in a department or division at another school.

  Table 4 shows the shift in student choice and distribution requirements over time. In general, student choice has diminished since 1975. Distribution requirements have moved gradually from division
distributions to segmented division or multi-department distributions along side department distributions. While still allowing student choice, this effectively narrows the range of choice and ensures students engage in more specific areas of study.
Table 4
Student Choice in General Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Education Structure</th>
<th>Number and Percent of Colleges</th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No General Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution Only</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-division</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segmented Div. or Multi-dept.</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution &amp; Prescribed</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi Division</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segmented Div. or Multi-dept.</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely prescribed*</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*in 1975 one school required)

Note: All sample schools in 1988 and 2000, and the majority in 1975 included more than one type of distribution in their general education requirements.

In addition, the number of schools prescribing at least a portion of their general education curriculum increased from 57% in 1975, to 82%
in 2000. Across the 60 schools studied, an average 22% of general education hours in 2000 was prescribed, an increase over the 18% in both 1975 and 1988 (Table 5).

Table 5
Prescribed General Education Hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Colleges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Hours Prescribed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Percent of General Education prescribed</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of Colleges with at least one course prescribed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of hours prescribed</td>
<td>2 - 92</td>
<td>3 - 41</td>
<td>1 - 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Hours Prescribed</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Percent of General Education prescribed</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General Education Content

There have been striking changes in general education content since 1975. First, with regard to prescribed courses, a far greater proportion of schools prescribed a specific English composition course(s) in 2000 as compared with 1975 (Table 6). After English composition, the most frequently prescribed courses in 1975 were religion and speech. This was also the case in 1988 and 2000, with growing numbers of schools prescribing courses in each of these disciplines.
Table 6

Subject of Prescribed Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline of Prescribed Courses</th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools with Prescribed Courses</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English composition</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (fewer than 3 schools)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools with 1 prescribed course</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Math and Science

In 1975, 18 of the sample colleges, or 30% (including the six with no general education requirement), did not require math or science (Table 7). That number had dropped to two (3%) by 1988, and to zero by 2000. In contrast, nine schools (15%) in 1975 required all students to take both math and science as part of their general education curriculum. By 1988, 26 schools (43%) required math and science, and by 2000, 43 or 72% of the sample required both math and science in their general education curriculum. Interestingly, the 'empirical core curriculum' (Adelman, 1995), also showed an increase in the proportion of college students completing math courses, but a decline in the proportion enrolling in general biology, chemistry and other biological sciences.

While requiring math and science for all students, not all schools require the same sorts of introductory math and science courses that might be required of math or science majors. At least 20% of the schools in 2000 required a quantitative reasoning or an applied quantitative course from one of several disciplines (e.g. psychology, economics, or appropriate to the major), as opposed to college algebra, calculus or other more traditional college math class.
Table 7

**General Education Content - Colleges Requiring Study of Science and/or Math**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Science/Math Content</th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No math or science</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science/no math</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math/no science</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math and/or science</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math and science</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and math/science</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math and math/science</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math may be &quot;other&quot;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological &amp; physical science</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving (nat. sci.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Humanities**

General education requirements in the humanities (Table 8) have changed over time, but not so dramatically as those in math and science.
In 2000, half of the sample schools required students enroll in one or more courses selected from a humanities distribution. About half of the sample schools had requirements for courses in foreign language, in literature, and/or in religion. In general, the number of schools with requirements in humanities departments increased moderately between 1975 and 1988, and then declined by smaller numbers between 1988 and 2000. The only exception is with regard to fine arts, including music, art and theater appreciation and performance. In 1975, 15 colleges, or 25% of the sample schools, required one or more courses in the fine arts. That number had more than doubled by 1988, and by 2000, 39 schools, or 65% of the sample, required students to take at least one fine arts course.

**Social Sciences**

Social sciences have also laid claim to a portion of the increasing requirements in general education (Table 9). While 37 schools (62%) had a social sciences distribution requirement in 1975, 50 (83%) did in 2000. Interestingly, the 'empirical core' (Adelman, 1995) showed declines in all social science areas except economics. This shift accompanied a decline in the number of schools with requirements within specific social sciences departments (e.g. psychology, political science) excepting history. In 1975, fewer than 25% of the sample colleges required at least one course in history. By 2000, more than 50% did. Some colleges specified
that students take courses in U.S. or World History. Others allowed
students to select from a much wider range.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humanities Content</th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities Distribution</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion or Philosophy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Skills

A greater proportion of colleges in 1988, as compared with 1975,
required courses in the skills areas of writing and oral communication
(Table 10). Between 1988 and 2000, numbers changed only marginally.
What did change between 1988 and 2000 was the number of colleges
requiring ‘writing intensive’ courses in addition to the English composition courses. As expected, no college had any sort of computer requirement in 1975, 7 (12%) did in 1988, and 11 (18%) did in 2000. While this number may seem lower than expected, it reflects only those schools that specifically require some sort of computer science or computer

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Education Content - Colleges Requiring Study of the Social Sciences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of and Percent of Colleges</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences Content          #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science Distribution      37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics                       2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology                       4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology                      6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology or Psychology         2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History                         13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography                       0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History or Government           0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government                      0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science               2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archaeology                     1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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literacy course. It does not reflect expected or actual use of computers by students in the course of their studies.

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Education Content - Colleges Requiring Study of Specified Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number and Percent of Colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(with writing intensive requirement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing intensive only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer science or literacy class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech/oral communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education/health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other General Education Content

In the last quarter of the 20th century, general education content changed in several ways beyond the growing requirements in the traditional academic divisions and skills areas (Table 11). The number of
schools including a freshman seminar of some sort in their general education jumped dramatically. In particular, schools indicating that the primary intent of the freshman seminar was 'college success' (i.e. social

Table 11
General Education Content - Colleges Requiring Study in 'Other' Disciplines or Skills Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Other' Content</th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'College Success' i.e. adjustment, study skills, advising</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Freshman Seminar</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Planning, resume, etc.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Seminar (ethics, problem, solving, integration of learning)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Seminar (historical issues)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/Lecture Series</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity or Foreign Language</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter/Multi Disciplinary Course(s)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American/Western Culture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and/or academic adjustment, study skills, academic advising) grew from 3, or 5%, in 1975 to 17, or 28% in 2000. Also of note was the large increase in the number of schools with some sort of diversity requirement, increasing from 5% of the sample schools in 1975 to just over 50% in 2000. Five additional schools, in 2000, required students enroll in either an approved diversity course or a foreign language. A few colleges required that students complete a prescribed diversity course. The more common approach, however, was to require students to enroll in a course, selected from any number of departments, that had been designated as meeting the diversity requirement. Most often, the credit hours for the diversity course could also be counted toward other general education, major or elective credit hour requirements.

**Common and Unique Characteristics of General Education**

Study of general education in the year 2000 at the 60 sample colleges revealed a number of common features, and a handful of unique general education elements.

**Common Features**

Across the colleges studied, common features of general education were evident in both structure and content. Most frequently, colleges structured general education as a combination of prescribed courses and department, or broader, distributions. Eighty-one percent of colleges in 2000 employed such a structure. Typically, colleges expected students
to begin general education course work during their freshman year. While
the number of general education credit hours did vary, at 88% of the
colleges general education comprised between one-third and one-half of
the undergraduate curriculum.

With regard to content, the most common course was English
composition, required by 85% of the colleges, in a prescribed course at
75%. Eighty-three percent of schools had a social sciences distribution
requirement. Seventy percent of the colleges required math and science.
Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the schools included fine arts in their general
education curriculum and 62% included physical education.

A bit less common, but still present in more than half of the
colleges studied, were requirements to take courses in religion (55%),
history (53%) a foreign language (52%) and/or a course with a diversity
focus (52%).

Returning to structure, those colleges that have diversity or writing
intensive requirements typically allow ‘double counting’ of such credits.
This enables students to satisfy both the diversity or writing requirement,
and another general education, major or graduation requirement at the
same time. This serves to effectively increase the quantity of general
education without adding credit hour requirements.

Unique Features

Unique or unusual elements of general education were generally
content oriented or involved out of class requirements. A small number of the colleges (7%) required study of ethics. A small number also required courses in specific social science disciplines: psychology (5%), economics (3%), sociology (2%), government (2%), political science (2%). Three colleges (5%) required no English composition class, but instead emphasized development of writing skills through writing intensive classes. Three colleges (5%) included career oriented or resume writing requirements in their general education curriculum.

Several schools were unique not in content, but in the quantity of general education within a given content area. While more than half of the colleges required diversity related course(s), one school’s requirement was more extensive than was typical. This particular school (selected for further study) required that students complete courses focusing on women’s issues, as well as courses addressing traditions of Europe; of countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and/ or Latin America; and of one or more populations in the United States. Similarly, one religiously affiliated school required 20 hours of religion courses, and noted in its catalog that “one distinctive of the academic program” is that all students earn a Bible minor. One other college had a similar religion requirement.

A small number of colleges required students to complete some sort of experiential learning. Several colleges in the sample required
students to engage in some sort of 'ministry' or 'Christian service' in addition to academic course work, and one required five hours of community service. Five colleges (8%) required students to attend on-campus cultural enrichment programs (lectures and performing arts events) each year of enrollment. One school specified that students also report on the events attended. One college required students attend a campus-wide 'issues dinner' where, following a presentation by a nationally known figure, students and faculty discuss an important social issue.

Just over 25% of the colleges required some sort of Interdisciplinary course. While an interdisciplinary requirement is not entirely unique, three colleges (5%) did have a unique approach to their interdisciplinary requirement. Two (3%) prescribed specific interdisciplinary courses for all students. At one of the colleges, a two course sequence taken by first-year students addressed questions of human nature and ways of knowing. This same college had specifically designated its four credit hour writing and four credit hour oral communication classes to complement the interdisciplinary sequence. The interdisciplinary program at a second college was far more extensive. Thirty-three of the college's 60 credit hours of general education consisted of prescribed interdisciplinary courses. Students enrolled in specified interdisciplinary courses during each of their first three years of
college. Courses addressed problem solving, theories of culture and symbolic classification, global awareness, arts, ecological systems, ethics, classical literature and the impact of science on social and political processes.

With a somewhat different approach to interdisciplinary study, one school gathered all students and faculty around a common set of readings, based on a changing theme. Students and faculty read and discuss "important texts" selected each year from a variety of disciplines. Students are granted one hour of academic credit for each semester of participation. Students are assigned to interdisciplinary groups, and faculty move from group to group each week. The program is intended to improve written and oral communication skills, to develop an appreciation of the liberal arts, and to build a sense of community.

Unique general education features fell largely into two categories. First, certain of the colleges ensured, by requirements in given academic disciplines, that students had exposure to specific content. Second, among those with unique features, there appeared to be a desire to integrate learning, either across disciplines, across academic learning and practical experience, or across academic learning and the arts. In spite of the number of colleges with unique general education features, colleges were far more similar with regard to their general education curriculum, than they were different.
Enrollment

Fall undergraduate enrollment figures for each of the 60 colleges were considered in the selection of colleges for further study. Total undergraduate enrollment at the 60 colleges varied considerably in 1997 (the latest year for which NCES data are available), ranging from 312 to 7384 (Appendix B). Between 1975 and 1997, enrollment at these colleges increased by an average of 21%. Across the sample, changes in enrollment ranged from a 43% loss (representing 215 students) to a 546% increase (representing 2772 students). By far the most common pattern of enrollment change was a moderate fluctuation up and down over the years for which enrollment figures were collected. Only two of the 60 schools experienced an enrollment increase for each year data were collected. Two schools had decided patterns of increase (one peaking in 1979 and the other in 1990), with gradual and persistent declines following. Seventeen colleges (28%) enrolled fewer students in 1997 than in 1975, with a mean loss of 15.5%. Forty-two schools (70%) enrolled more students, with a mean gain of 57.4%.

Interview Case Studies

Six of the 60 sample colleges were selected for further study, based on three factors: 1997 enrollment that was greater than or similar to that in 1988, unique element(s) in the general education curriculum,
and revisions in general education between 1988 and 2000. Two to three administrators or faculty members at each of the six colleges were interviewed. Interviews were designed to explore the reasons colleges had revised their general education curriculum, and the relationship between general education and enrollment. Among the six colleges selected, four were Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts and two were Baccalaureate-General. Fall 1997 enrollment at the six colleges ranged from just under 600 to more than 1400. Change in enrollment between 1988 and 2000 ranged from virtually no change to an increase of 87%. A summary of enrollment and general education characteristics at the six colleges is found in Table 12. A summary of interviews at each of the individual schools is found in Appendix D.

Distinctive General Education Features

As suggested by the selection criteria, each of the colleges’ general education curriculum had one or more distinctive or unique elements. These distinctive features included: a 42 hour interdisciplinary core curriculum, an interdisciplinary sequence integrated with English composition and oral communication courses, a college-wide reading and discussion program, a four-part career preparation program, a four-part diversity requirement, an unusually large (24 credit hours) religion requirement, a 45 hour per semester ‘student ministry’ requirement, a math competency test in lieu of a math course, five writing intensive
courses with no English composition required, and a distribution requirement with course options grouped by areas of ‘human inquiry’ rather than by discipline or division.

**General Education Change 1988 - 2000**

Also suggested by the selection criteria, all of the six colleges made changes to their general education curriculum between 1988 and 2000. Consistent with the literature, by far the most common type of curriculum change among the six colleges was incremental. Five of the six schools made adjustments to the quantity, or number of required credit hours, of general education. Three schools added courses in specific areas including computer science, ethics, career exploration, quantitative analysis, literature, women's studies, and United States culture and traditions. One college added an interdisciplinary requirement. One added an experiential component. Three colleges adjusted the number of hours required in specific divisions or disciplines. Two dropped one or more requirements all together. One college reorganized its system of distribution, moving from a system that grouped disciplines along more traditional divisional lines, to groupings into the areas of human organization and development, human scientific inquiry, human aesthetic experience and human culture.

Several colleges introduced elements designed to integrate learning either across disciplines, or with post graduation plans. Two of these
colleges shifted from a more common distribution system to a general education curriculum with a strongly integrated interdisciplinary component. One college adopted a first year general education curriculum comprised of two interdisciplinary courses linked closely with required oral and written communication classes. The other replaced its distribution system with a general education curriculum in which students completed a total of 42 prescribed credit hours in three interdisciplinary cluster areas: critical thinking, problem solving and rational judgment. Approaching curriculum change that might be considered holistic or transforming, this particular general education revision was short lived. The college eliminated most of its interdisciplinary core and returned to a largely distributional system during the 2000-2001 academic year.
Table 12
Enrollment and General Education at Colleges Selected for Interviewing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College A</td>
<td>550-600</td>
<td>+21%</td>
<td>Distribution/Prescribed</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College B</td>
<td>1100-1150</td>
<td>+87%</td>
<td>Distribution/Prescribed</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>+3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College C</td>
<td>1250-1300</td>
<td>+1%</td>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College D</td>
<td>700-750</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>Distribution/Prescribed</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College E</td>
<td>600-650</td>
<td>+55%</td>
<td>Distribution/Prescribed</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>+42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College F</td>
<td>1400-1450</td>
<td>+4%</td>
<td>Distribution/Prescribed</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Colleges are identified as College A, College B, etc. in order to maintain a degree of anonymity.
Table 12

Enrollment and General Education at Colleges Selected for Interviewing (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Name</th>
<th>General Education Distinctive Features</th>
<th>Type of General Education Change</th>
<th>Reasons for General Education Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College A</td>
<td>college reading/discussion program; math competency; no math required distribution requirements in areas of 'human inquiry'</td>
<td>restructured distribution; dropped math requirement; decreased hours in several areas</td>
<td>to compensate for increased hours in majors required by accreditation; changing faculty interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College B</td>
<td>42 hour interdisciplinary core, linked by a common theme</td>
<td>change from distribution to mostly core (returned to distribution system mid-year 2000-2001)</td>
<td>desire to innovate; (demands of transfer student market, mid-year 2000-2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College C</td>
<td>5 writing intensive courses; no English composition; 4 part career preparation program</td>
<td>added career preparation program; added quantitative class; decreased required hours in several areas</td>
<td>marketing - to attract students; to provide transition from college to career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College D</td>
<td>4 part diversity requirement: women's studies; US, European, and Asian, African, Middle Eastern Latin American traditions and</td>
<td>broadened and increased diversity hours requirement; (in late 1980s shifted from guidelines to requirements)</td>
<td>to be more true to college's mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College E</td>
<td>24 hours of required religion 45 hour/semester student ministry requirement</td>
<td>added computer, philosophy and literature requirements; changed some prescribed courses to distribution</td>
<td>to allow more choice; address accreditor concerns; broaden world view; to provide career preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College F</td>
<td>freshman interdisciplinary sequence, integrated with English composition and oral communication classes</td>
<td>added interdisciplinary components; added quantitative reasoning; dropped several requirements</td>
<td>to raise academic standards; to improve academic reputation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Colleges are identified as College A, College B, etc. in order to maintain a degree of anonymity.
Summary of Interview Findings

The six colleges were selected for further study, in part, because their fall 2000 enrollment was greater than, or similar to, what it had been in 1988. Faculty and administrators were asked to comment on the differences between their college and those with declining enrollment, and on the reasons students select their college over other options. In response, college officials most often pointed to academic quality or overall reputation. They also suggested that students select their college over other options primarily for the college's friendly or comfortable atmosphere. Additional reasons students choose to attend the six schools included attractive tuition or financial aid packages, specific academic majors, college location or size, and athletic programs. At two of the colleges, faculty or staff also commented that elements of the general education program were drawing cards.

Relationship between General Education and Enrollment

Although there were exceptions, overall those interviewed indicated that general education plays a minimal role in recruiting students. Persons at four colleges commented that prospective students do not look at general education prior to enrollment, or are not astute enough to understand or ask questions about it. One person commented, "I doubt
nowadays that students go anywhere based on any part of general education. ... I think the decisions are affective or emotional." Another noted, "I don’t think prospective students look too closely at general education when selecting an institution." A third said, "I’m not sure it [general education] plays much of a role. Most of the students are mostly focused on their major. A lot view general education as an encumbrance."

Two officials suggested that general education may play a small role in enrollment, but only a small role. One faculty member commented, "To some degree it has played a role. It is always hard to tell. On the incoming student survey that asks why they choose a particular institution a number of students marked interest in the [experiential component]."

In opposition to the prevailing view, one academic administrator at each of two schools believed there was a strong link between their college’s general education program, and enrollment. One of these two asserted, "It plays a key role. Four years ago we created the [experiential component] as part of our general education. We have marketed it pretty aggressively." Interestingly, none of the links on this college’s web page lead to information about this particular feature of general education. At the second college, an administrator enthusiastically declared, "It [general education] plays an extraordinarily important role [in recruiting]. ... We think the new [general education] curriculum has been very important in
the making of this institution." Curiously, at the same two colleges, admissions or enrollment officials contended that general education played no role in attracting students. In both instances, it was unclear whether the college had data to support either opinion.

Transfer Students

At two colleges, administrators maintained that the general education curriculum had had a negative impact on their college's ability to recruit transfer students. At one of the colleges, an administrator commented, "Curriculum impacts greatly where you are considering transfer students. ...We have gotten a smaller and smaller number of transfer students each year. ...Transfers are getting lower because parents are becoming aware that whenever you transfer it costs money and credits." Both colleges had amended general education to accommodate the needs of transfer students. The issue of relationship between transfer student enrollment and general education is an interesting one, and was not anticipated. Clearly this is a factor only to the extent that the college chooses to rely on transfer admissions to satisfy enrollment goals.

Retention

Recruiting first time and transfer students is not the only factor to be considered in a discussion of enrollment. Although the issue of retention was not considered in the research questions posed, nor
addressed with a specific interview question, retention of students can also be a key element in maintaining enrollment. At the six schools selected for interviews, freshman retention (the proportion of entering freshmen who return for their sophomore year) ranged from 73% to 87% (U.S. News, 2002). Graduation rates, while not a direct measure of retention, can also give a clue as to the proportion of students who remain enrolled in a given school. Among the six colleges, the six-year graduation rate ranged from 30% to 77% (U.S. News, 2002). At two of the schools where interviews were conducted, faculty and administrators indicated a sense that general education plays a role in retention at their college, thus impacting overall enrollment. At one of the colleges, a faculty member commented that some students enroll at her college intending to stay only one year. After enrolling, they find specific general education courses as well as the religious orientation in their general education and other courses to be attractive, so they stay for all four years. At the second college, one person noted “the [reading and discussion] program brings lots of different faculty and different students together. It is healthy for the community. ...This has been an important piece in maintaining enrollment.”

**Reasons for General Education Change**

Typically, colleges revised their general education curriculum for an assortment of overlapping reasons that were consistent with the
literature on curriculum change. In broad terms, colleges had modified their general education curriculum in response to external forces, including competition, accreditation, and vocationalism, and to address internal academic and mission related issues. Availability of resources also played a role in defining the shape of general education.

**Competition**

As anticipated, competition and marketing concerns figured prominently into general education change at four of the colleges. One college made sweeping changes in its general education curriculum in the middle of the academic year, due to what one official termed as “demands of the market.” This college’s prior general education curriculum had presented an obstacle in efforts to recruit transfer students. It had been comprised of a series of interdisciplinary courses which made it difficult for transfer students to receive credit because they had not taken equivalent courses. An administrator explained, “It was a big problem with transfer students coming in. Their courses didn’t transfer in and they didn’t want to repeat courses. ...Now we are down to six courses, and they have rearranged the content. It’s easier for transfer students to receive credit.” A second college also cited the needs of transfer students as one of the reasons it had made certain of its revisions in general education. This college had relaxed some of its strictly prescribed curriculum and waived one of its general education
requirements for transfer students. One person shared the reason for some of her college's general education changes, "We need to maximize the ability to count the general education units they [transfer students] took elsewhere. Also ... we made an adjustment for transfer students. Now they have to take one special [religion] course each semester [they are in residence], because to take all the special courses would take another year. It became a financial aid issue and an issue with parents."

Reiterating, this administrator added, "The adjustment for transfer students was a recruitment thing. It was a detriment when they had to take an additional 12 hours when they already were losing some credits in transferring." At a third college, a faculty member commented, "The experiential learning was added for a number of reasons. One reason was a marketing reason. We were looking for something as a device to attract students to [the college]. We already had students traveling abroad or doing internships. ...We were trying to zero in on this and use it to bring others to the college. [The experiential component's name] came from the admissions and marketing people. It was a catchy phrase." A fourth college changed its general education curriculum to create what it viewed as an innovative program due, in part, to the heavy competition it faced. One person at the college explained, "We must be on the cutting edge and do as many innovative things as we can. It is a challenge with so many schools in [the state]."
Accreditation

Accreditation had both a direct and an indirect effect on colleges' decisions to change their general education curriculum. In one instance, a college amended its science requirement to remedy a weakness identified by a regional accreditation team. Another college had increased the number of hours required in specific majors due to professional accreditation requirements. To compensate, the college had reduced the required number of general education hours. A faculty member remarked, "Also there are outside agencies which are able to dictate, NCATE and the social work and business accreditation groups. We are a member, which is good, but sometimes our discussions are initiated due to external requirements." She continued, "There were outside pressures and the need to reduce the credit hours in general education." Another person noted, "There are more and more requirements from accrediting agencies, requirements for more hours in the major. You can't just keep adding things on when you have a four-year program."

Vocationalism

Student vocational interests produced several different types of change in the colleges' general education curriculum. One college revised its general education requirements to counter the vocationalism of its students. Concerned that students were focusing on career preparation and therefore not receiving the broad, liberal education central to its
mission, the college added distribution requirements in several divisions. Moving in a different direction, two other colleges supported their students' career concerns by adopting measures to assist them. One revised its freshman seminar to include assessment instruments to assist students with career choice. The same college also added a required computer course to ensure students were prepared to enter the job market. The other school had added a required four-part career preparation program, with an experiential component, to its general education curriculum. A faculty member explained that the intent had been to ease "transition for students from the college setting to post college careers." Recognizing the shift toward vocationalism discussed in the literature, the faculty member continued, "Students are more career and job oriented than they were 20 years ago. They are taking things that are beneficial to them instead of just for the love of learning."

Internal Academic Issues

Internal academic issues factored into general education revision in various ways at all six colleges. Reflecting a changing student population, retention concerns, or both, one college added a component designed specifically to enhance student academic success. Another college introduced a literature requirement to provide a breadth of perspective, because "our students aren't readers." This same school had begun to address issues of diversity within the existing general education
One school trimmed some areas of its general education curriculum to ensure students were able to meet all requirements and graduate in four years. At this particular college a large proportion of students study abroad their junior year. It had been common for students to enroll in 18 credit hours each semester so that they could complete all requirements, study abroad, and still graduate in four years. Faculty were concerned that the work load was excessive. Another college reduced general education hours due to scheduling difficulties. Students had been required to fulfill certain of their general education requirements from one of several possible themes. Because of schedule conflicts, a number of students had been unable to enroll in a sufficient number of courses of one theme, so would have to begin over again with a different theme. To remedy the situation, the college simply reduced the number of required courses.

One college revised general education to improve quality and enhance academic rigor. An administrator at the college commented, “We lost our way [academically] and about 15 years later made a serious attempt at curriculum revision.” Another college broadened its writing requirement because faculty believed writing was important not only in one or two, but in all disciplines. Expressing vague concern, an administrator at a third college attributed a portion of his college’s curriculum to “help students address these issues in a balanced way.”
general education change to changing faculty interests. "As people on the committee change, ideas of general education change. It is good to have the influx of new ideas, yet bad if you're looking for consistency." A faculty member at the same college said general education changes, "because we are alive and engaged in education. We have passions, sometimes changing passions, and interaction among the faculty."

**Mission**

At three of the colleges, administrators or faculty noted the role of mission in defining general education. One faculty member commented that the broad diversity requirements at her college, including the study of women, had been introduced as a way of living out the college's mission as a college for women with an international focus. At the same school, an earlier shift to a more structured general education had resulted from the school's effort to reaffirm its mission as a liberal arts college. A second college commented that the school's general education curriculum derives from its religiously oriented mission. A third college had intentionally engaged in general education reform. It the midst of their discussions, faculty and administrators, "looked at [the college] - what are our strengths and mission, and how can we carry those out." General education changes were built upon the resulting conversations.

**Resources**

Individuals at three of the colleges commented on the limiting
effect that resources have on general education. Speaking about a prior general education change, a faculty member from one of the colleges said, “It came to its demise due to a number of issues, mostly staffing and financial resources. We couldn’t hire additional faculty to staff it and the existing faculty were stretched to the max.” At another college a faculty member commented, “Financial constraints probably make us less open to change. We cannot afford to offer a wide variety of general education courses.” At the third college an administrator explained the difficulty in moving from a distribution system to a prescribed general education curriculum. “Adding new courses where they don’t fit into the curriculum becomes a real staffing problem. ... If you add a requirement that all students must take specific courses, it causes major problems. I’m not against doing that, but you would have to have a lot of sections of the same course, and you create a situation where you don’t have people to staff it.” These comments suggest that, depending on the college, limited resources may either contribute to, or inhibit, general education change.

**Ongoing General Education Change**

General education is always in flux. As discussed above, one of the six colleges made considerable change in its general education curriculum during the 2000-2001 academic year. Three of the other colleges are considering additional change to their general education curricula, as well.
Consistent with reasons for prior general education change, considerations in the current discussions include academic concerns and resource availability.

An administrator at the first college considering additional change commented, “Within the next year we will look at general education again and may revise it.” Another person added, “They are looking to do some revision. From time to time it gets a little complicated. They may try to simplify it or refine it so the road map is easier to follow.” The third person provided a bit more explanation, “Right now we are looking at a potential change in teaching load for faculty. The teaching load right now is seven courses per year, which is high. ... As we work on the [strategic] plan, depending on how faculty positions are distributed, we may need to make changes in general education, because of student demands and meeting student needs. We may allow additional classes to meet some of the requirements, and so on, but not major changes.”

At the second college, faculty had just voted to “redo general education.” One person indicated that this college had been considering adoption of some sort of core or common set of prescribed courses for all students, but resource availability was a concern. No specific details regarding either the faculty vote or the potential changes were available, however.

A faculty member at a third college provided a little more insight
into the discussions regarding general education change at her college. At this college, the struggle to revise general education revolves around philosophical issues important to the college. Recent general education changes at this college have resulted in more student choice. A faculty member explained that, in spite of this, the college wants to, “avoid the make your own degree program where students are allowed to randomly pick their general education courses.” She explained by asking, “Are we going to say just take six units, or are we going to be specific? We probably have a more traditional perspective on general education.” The same college is also considering adding a general education honors option. This raises philosophical concerns. “The discussion is complicated because we have a strong feeling we don’t honor one faculty member over another. ... That carries over in to our perspective on student achievement to some extent. ... We will proceed experimentally.”

This seems to be an apt comment. General education change, over time, has perhaps been nothing more than a well considered experiment in how best to meet the educational needs of college students.

Summary

In summary, general education changed considerably between 1975 and 2000, in quantity, structure and content. Overall, the move was toward more required hours of general education, and a more structured general education with less student choice. Content change reflected
greater attention to math and science, an increased emphasis on writing skills, and a growing focus on issues of diversity and student academic success. Although there were variations from college to college, overall general education at the turn of the century was quite similar from one college to the next.

Perceptions of college officials as to the relationship between enrollment and general education varied across and within schools. For the most part, however, those interviewed indicated that general education plays a minimal role in recruiting students. Reasons that colleges revised their general education curricula most commonly included issues relating to competition, accreditation, and academic concerns.

The above findings help to more clearly define general education at private baccalaureate colleges at the close of the twentieth century. They also help to answer the questions of how and why colleges revised their general education curriculum during the preceding 25 years.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSIONS

This research began with the question, "What is general education?", or more specifically, "What is general education at private baccalaureate colleges?" The study considered characteristics of general education at the beginning of the 21st century, and how those characteristics had changed during the preceding 25 years. This research also sought to explore the reasons that colleges had revised their general education curriculum, and the relationship between general education and undergraduate enrollment.

Sixty second- and third-tier private baccalaureate colleges (30 baccalaureate-general and 30 baccalaureate-liberal arts) were randomly selected for inclusion in this study. Descriptions of general education, including quantity (number of semester hours), structure (distribution, prescribed or a combination) and content, were gathered using the colleges' 1975, 1988 and 2000 catalogs. Six of the colleges were selected for further study, based upon three criteria: the college revised its general education curriculum between 1988 and 2000, the college's 2000 general education program included elements that were unique, distinctive, or atypical among the institutions studied, and the college's
enrollment in 1997 equaled or exceeded that of 1988.

Standardized open-ended telephone interviews were conducted with key administrators and persons knowledgeable regarding general education at each of the six institutions. Interview questions were geared toward understanding the distinctive elements of the institution, the reasons for general education revision, and the role of general education with respect to student recruiting and enrollment.

From this research, it is clear that general education is by no means uniform across colleges. There are enough similarities, however, that a composite picture of general education at private undergraduate colleges in the year 2000 can be created. This composite picture first considers the structure of general education. Typically, general education is structured as a combination of prescribed courses and distribution which allows students to choose courses from among selected offerings in specific academic disciplines or divisions. General education normally comprises between one-third and one-half of the total undergraduate curriculum, typically 40 to 60 semester credit hours. This structure contrasts a bit with the literature which suggested that general education may also be structured as a completely prescribed core of courses. While 2 of the 60 colleges studied did have such a structure in 1975, none did in either 1988 or 2000.

A composite picture of general education content would include at
least one required course in English composition, at least one math class (normally determined by skill level), one or more courses in the natural and social sciences (selected by distribution), a performance or appreciation course in the fine arts (also selected by distribution) and at least one physical education activity course.

The composite falls a bit short in providing a picture of general education content, however. About half of the time general education also includes one or more courses in history, religion, literature, foreign language and/or a humanities distribution. About half the time it also includes a ‘diversity’ course, although most often that course may fulfill other requirements as well.

There were additional variations across colleges in both structure and content of general education. Eleven of the colleges (18%) had a distribution only system, with no prescribed courses. A small number of colleges also required general education content other than already noted. For instance, nine schools (15%) required psychology or sociology, seven (12%) required philosophy, seven (12%) required course work in American or Western culture and traditions, four (7%) required a course in ethics, and two (3%) required economics. In spite of these variations in structure and content, and a handful of unique features at several of the colleges, overall, the general education curriculum at one school looked very much like that at another.
General Education Trends

Analysis of college catalogs from the years 1975, 1988, and 2000, revealed five distinct trends in general education. First, general education quantity is increasing. Second, student choice is diminishing. Third, there is a growing emphasis in four specific content areas: math, history, fine arts (music, theater and art), and in interdisciplinary study. Fourth, multiculturalism or diversity in the curriculum is increasing. Fifth, there is a growing emphasis within general education on the development of specific skills.

General Education Quantity

The mean quantity of general education at private baccalaureate colleges increased during the time period under investigation. Consistent with prior studies, general education grew from 33% to 42% of the total undergraduate curriculum, between the mid-1970s and the end of the 1980s. This growth nearly returned general education at private baccalaureate colleges to the 43% of the curriculum that Blackburn and his colleagues (1976) had found in 1967, across a wider universe of higher education.

The mean number of required semester hours of general education also increased during the last quarter of the 20th century, from 42 in 1975, to 53 in 1988 and in 2000. The 53 hours in 1988 and 2000 is somewhat more than the 47 general education hours in 1990 found by
Toombs and his colleagues (1991) and the 49 hours in 1990 reported by Gaff (1991). This discrepancy may be due to a difference between private baccalaureate colleges and the wider universe in both of these studies. It may also be due to differences in methodology.

This study employed semester hours of credit as the measure of general education quantity. Using this definition, the quantity of general education did not change between 1988 and 2000. However, general education quantity did continue to increase beyond 1988. The growing prevalence of diversity and writing intensive courses, both discussed below, contributed to the growth of general education between 1988 and 2000. For many of the schools, these hours also earned credit toward electives or the major. For this reason, diversity and writing intensive credit hours were not included in the count of general education hours for those particular colleges, and therefore are not reflected in the required number of general education hours.

Double counting of academic credit appears to be a growing trend. This method of designating general education courses to be taken within the larger curriculum has allowed colleges to continue to increase the quantity of general education, while leaving the total number of hours dedicated to major, electives and graduation untouched.

Student Choice

The second general education trend observed is a continuing
decline in the degree of choice students have in selecting their courses. This declining choice is occurring on several fronts. First, the number of colleges including at least one prescribed course in the general education curriculum increased from 34 colleges (57%) in 1975, to 48 (80%) in 1988, and 49 (82%) in 2000. Considering only the proportion of colleges with prescribed courses, it appears as though the decline in student choice leveled off after 1988. However, there were other indications of a decline in student choice.

During the 25 year period under consideration, colleges have continued to more precisely define the areas of distribution from which students may select their general education courses. For instance, the number of colleges with a distribution requirement in a specific department, ensuring study in a given discipline, increased from 20 (33%) in 1975, to 26 (43%) in 1988, to 32 (53%) in 2000. The number of colleges defining a distribution requirement in terms smaller than a division (i.e. segmented division or multi department) also increased, from 28 (47%) to 46 (77%). During the same time period, the number of colleges with a distribution requirement at the broader division level decreased from 43 (72%) to 32 (53%) between 1988 and 2000. Using this strategy of narrowing the distribution definition, colleges have been able to ensure students study in more specific ways, while still allowing them some degree of choice.
This narrowing of student choice forms an interesting contrast to the literature, which suggests that the curriculum is driven by consumer demand and therefore, by student choice. It is important to remember that students are not the only ones with an interest in higher education. These changes may well be a reflection of the widespread criticisms of general education that began in the 1970s, and of the reforms that followed.

**Math, History, the Arts and Interdisciplinary Requirements**

As expected, there were some shifts in general education content at private baccalaureate colleges between 1975 and 2000. Consistent with Toombs' research was an increase between 1975 and 1988 in the proportion of schools requiring courses in math (Toombs, et al, 1991). This trend continued, so that the 9 (15%) colleges that had required math in 1975 had grown to 44 (73%) by 2000. This finding is consistent also with Adelman's (1995) examination of college transcripts which, during a similar time period, found an increase in the proportion of college students earning academic credit in mathematics.

Along side the growth in the importance of mathematics in the general education curriculum is an emerging trend that replaces a required course in the mathematics department with a required quantitative course selected from one of a number of disciplines. Only one (2%) college out of the 60 studied allowed such an option in 1988,
while in 2000, 12 colleges (20%) required a quantitative, as opposed to a mathematics, course as part of the general education curriculum.

Balancing the growth in math requirements were increases in the proportion of colleges requiring history (22% in 1975, 50% in 1988, 53% in 2000) and fine arts (25% in 1975, 53% in 1988, 65% in 2000). Interestingly, neither history or the arts had been identified as a growth area in prior general education research. Of particular interest is the large increase in the proportion of colleges requiring some study of fine arts (music, theater and art). This increasing emphasis, along with the growing importance of math and history, may be an effort by colleges to ensure students receive the broad liberal education that liberal arts colleges had been known for in an earlier era.

Finally, the number of colleges including some sort of interdisciplinary or integrating course work increased from 5 (8%) in 1975, to 10 (17%) in 1988, to 16 (27%) in 2000. This is considerably less than the 69% of institutions with an interdisciplinary requirement found by Toombs in 1988 (Toombs, et al, 1991). Why there would be such a discrepancy is not apparent. It may be due simply to a difference between the private baccalaureate college and the wider sample of colleges used in Toombs' study. It may reflect a difference in methodology. Less likely, the discrepancy may indicate that the current research understates the proportion of colleges with such a requirement.
This could have occurred if college catalogs were unclear regarding the interdisciplinary nature of specific course requirements.

**Diversity**

Consistent with the literature on general education, and expected because of the changing student population, an increasing number of colleges include issues of diversity in the general education curriculum. With a more dramatic increase in the latter part of the period studied, 5% of colleges required study of diverse perspectives in 1975, 18% did in 1988 and in 2000, 52% of the colleges had such a requirement. Even with this dramatic increase, it is somewhat surprising that only half of the private baccalaureate colleges studied specifically included diversity in the general education curriculum. As suggested in the literature, multicultural and diverse perspectives may be incorporated at any point in the curriculum (Humphreys, 1997). The proportion of colleges actually including study of diversity may be understated if colleges embed discussion of such issues either within general education courses not specifically designated as diversity, or at other points within the curriculum.

**Development of Skills**

Consistent with the literature, a greater proportion of colleges appears to be giving attention to the development of skills. For instance, between 1975 and 1988 the proportion of the colleges requiring at least
one course in English composition increased from 63% to 90%. This trend reversed somewhat between 1988 and 2000, with a small decline in the number of colleges requiring a course in English composition. However, among those that did require English composition, a larger proportion also required one or more writing intensive courses (10% of all colleges in 1988, 23% in 2000).

An increasing proportion of the colleges require courses in oral communication. The increases, however, have been small. Fifteen (25%) colleges required an oral communication or speech class in 1975, 22 (37%) had such a requirement in 1988 and 24 (40%) did in 2000.

Between 1975 and 2000 there was an increase from zero to 18% of the colleges requiring a computer class. This finding is consistent with Toombs' 1988 finding of an increasing number of institutions with a computer requirement (Toombs, et al, 1991). The actual number of colleges with a computer requirement (11, or 18%) was surprisingly small, given the prevalence of technology. The small number may be explained, perhaps, by the fact that computer use is so prevalent, that students arrive at college with at least a basic level of computer skills that is sufficient for the academic work expected by the college. It may be also that the use of technology is embedded in the curriculum, rather than divided out into a separate class. The issue of computer instruction was raised at two of the colleges where interviews were conducted. One
administrator commented that his school had eliminated its computer requirement in favor of technology use across the curriculum. Another administrator wondered aloud whether a computer literacy testing requirement might just as well serve the intent of the existing computer class.

Finally, colleges are demonstrating a greater attention to the development of academic skills. In 1988, only one college (2%) required a credit bearing student success oriented class. By 2000, 17 (28%) of the colleges did. The attention to the academic readiness of entering students, and their transition to college, may be related to two separate trends in higher education. First, higher education is attracting an increasingly diverse student population that has been criticized as being less academically prepared than previous generations of students. This, coupled with the increasing competition for students, calls for colleges to focus some of their energies on student retention. The increasing proportion of colleges requiring academic skills classes may therefore be a function of concerns regarding academic preparedness, retention, or both. One of the persons interviewed stated that the student success oriented requirement at her college had been instituted specifically for retention purposes. It is likely that the 28% figure actually understates the proportion of colleges focusing on improving academic skills, as that figure reflects only those colleges that address academic skills in a credit
bearing general education class. Not included were those that address academic skills development in non-credit bearing orientations, or other forums.

**Observations**

In addition to the five trends discussed above, three other observations are worthy of note. First, there appears in some instances to be a disconnect between academic affairs and admissions personnel, at least with regard to general education. Although this was noted only in two of the six schools selected for interviews, the observation was startling enough to comment on it here. On the one hand, academic affairs administrators were confident that features of their general education curriculum formed a centerpiece of the college's recruiting efforts. On the other hand, admissions administrators held that general education played no role in attracting students to the college.

At the very least, these instances raise a question as to whether key offices in these particular colleges are operating with a common set of assumptions, and toward a common purpose when it comes to general education. This points to a more serious issue of clear communication within and across all colleges.

General education has become quite similar from one college to the next, and it appears as though the prevailing forces contributing to general education change are external to the college. It is not at all clear
that general education change has been undertaken by institutions with clarity or agreement of purpose. nor is it clear that, except in occasional instances, general education change has been undertaken with serious consideration of academic issues, except with regard to related logistical considerations.

Second, it appears as though transfer students can be powerful consumers when it comes to general education, at least at colleges that rely on transfer students to meet their enrollment goals. That the needs of transfer students would play any more than a minor role in defining the general education curriculum had not been anticipated. As suggested by the literature, colleges do, at least under some circumstances, adapt their general education curriculum to match consumer needs and wishes.

Third, it does appear as though for first time college students, general education impacts enrollment more through its role in retention than in recruiting. One college faculty member did comment that a particular general education component had been introduced for recruiting purposes. However, the prevailing sense was that general education played little to no role in the enrollment of first time students. At the same time, two colleges commented on the role of general education in maintaining enrollment, and a third suggested that it was time to bring back a previous first year seminar that had been geared toward retention.
Implications for Practice

Findings from this research suggest several implications for curriculum committees or others involved with the administration or oversight of general education. First, the negative impact that general education may have on the recruiting of transfer students illustrates the need to look beyond the academic sphere, and to consider the impact of curriculum change on other college functions. Second, curriculum committees may want to consider the mechanics of any general education change, particularly change which involves deviation from the existing structure. One of the colleges included in the interview sample, for example, had introduced a thematically oriented requirement that had created difficulty for students in scheduling their classes. Given these two examples of conflict between curriculum and other college operations, it is recommended that colleges be alert to potential conflicts and that representatives from a variety of campus offices to be included in the deliberations regarding general education revision.

Going a step further, colleges not only need to include others in discussion of general education, they are advised to ensure all college offices are working from the same set of assumptions and with the same goals in mind. Using a specific example from this research, if recruitment is one goal in the revision of a general education curriculum, then those involved with recruiting must support and value the use of general
education as a recruiting tool. Further, curriculum committees must heed the expertise of those involved with admissions to ensure that the proposed general education revisions will be attractive enough to potential students to serve as a recruiting tool. It is important that colleges guard against the kind of disconnect illustrated by this research. Lack of clarity in purpose, and failure to recognize the needs and interests of students or potential students are illustrations of a serious failure in communication within the institution and with those that the institution serves. Such a failure to communicate is a disservice to all those who have an interest in the institution.

Curriculum committees are urged to consider the general education trends highlighted by this research and assess the relevance of these trends for their institution. In particular, colleges are urged to evaluate their position regarding issues of diversity, and to ensure that the perspectives of culturally diverse populations are made available to students.

Curriculum committees, academic leadership, and faculty are further urged to maintain an ongoing awareness of happenings, internal and external to the institution, that may have implications for general education. It is recommended that those most directly involved with establishing the general education curriculum routinely monitor the environment to identify trends that may suggest a need for general
education revision. It is also recommended that colleges regularly evaluate their program of general education, and that colleges be intentional with regard to curriculum change rather than making change in response to educational fashion or institutional crisis.

Finally, because colleges revise general education in a variety of ways and for a host of reasons, colleges are urged to assess the impacts of curriculum change to ensure the goals of the curriculum change are actually met. Although beyond the scope of this study, after a curriculum revision, assessment is the next logical step. There is a whole body of literature available to guide assessment efforts.

Remaining Questions and Directions for Future Research

The findings from this research raise several additional questions, and suggest directions for future research:

1) Discrepancies between prior studies and the current research, with regard to general education quantity and the prevalence of interdisciplinary or integrating requirements, suggest that general education at private baccalaureate colleges may differ from that at other types of institutions. Additional research, employing the same methodology as this study, but with a sample of upper or lower tier private baccalaureate colleges, or institutions with a different Carnegie classification, may offer insight as to the relationship between general education and type of institution.
2) This research noted the practice of embedding general education within the broader curriculum. Such a practice provides an additional option for structuring general education, beyond the distribution and core options discussed in the literature. This raises questions of the prevalence of this model and its effectiveness in meeting general education goals and further, suggests an alternative method of measuring the quantity of general education. Future research might be designed to address these questions. In particular, it may be instructive to evaluate the extent to which additional content or skills development are incorporated across the curriculum. Examples of such may include ethics instruction in all upper level classes for all majors, development of communication or presentation skills in all courses in given disciplines, or incorporation of job skills development in the final weeks of each term, in each class.

3) This research raised the issue of the impact of accreditation on general education. Further research might examine accreditation standards, accreditation reports, and ensuing general education change to more fully understand the impact of accreditation on general education.

4) A surprising finding of this research was the small number of colleges incorporating a computer related class into the general education curriculum. Research geared to determine who else at the college may be providing such instruction (e.g., libraries, informal study groups, etc.), and how colleges and college students use computers for academic purposes,
may provide some explanation, and may also be instructive for faculty or anyone else involved in curriculum design.

5) This research included a preliminary exploration into the question of the relationship between enrollment and general education. The overall sense was that as prospective students consider their college options, they are largely unaware of general education curricula. Survey and focus group research among high school seniors, or other prospective college students may provide more definitive information regarding the importance of general education to prospective students. Findings of such a study could be valuable to both curriculum committees and offices of enrollment management.

6) Although this study has identified specific changes in general education, it is not at all clear what the outcomes of these changes have been. Additional research designed to investigate the impacts of these changes in general education, both on students and on the institutions themselves, would provide some answers regarding outcomes. It would further provide guidance to curriculum committees and others struggling to define the most appropriate general education for a given institution.

7) While this research considered enrollment patterns in identifying colleges to include in the second phase of research, it did not consider demographic changes in the colleges' student population. Research which considers both the changing composition of specific institutions'
enrollment, alongside general education patterns may reveal the impact of changing demographics and may further provide insight into the responsiveness of colleges to the needs of different types of students.
## APPENDIX A
### SAMPLE COLLEGES

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## APPENDIX B: FALL ENROLLMENT

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In 1975, Barton College was named Atlantic Christian College.
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Set A - Admissions Directors

1. Your college has maintained or increased its enrollment at a time when many baccalaureate colleges are struggling. What do you see as the difference between your college and the colleges that have declining enrollment? Is there anything else?

2. What do you think are the most important reasons students select your college over other colleges? What about that do you think is attractive to students?

3. What role does your college’s curriculum play in recruiting or enrolling students? Does the college collect any information about this in a systematic way? How might I have access to the information? Does the college collect it informally? How is it used?

4. I’d like ask a few questions about the general education portion of your curriculum. Just to ensure we are both talking about the same thing, what I mean by general education are those requirements, such as English composition, for example, that are common to all students, regardless of their major. Some schools call this general education, others may refer to it as the core curriculum or distribution requirements and some have other names for it. Is it clear to you what I am talking about? What role, then, does the general education portion of the curriculum play in recruiting or enrolling students? How do students find out about general education prior to acceptance? Is general education addressed in any of your recruiting materials? How about in your conversations with prospective students?

5. ________________ in your general education curriculum is fairly unique. What effect does this element have on attracting or enrolling students? Why do you think this is the case?
6. In the last 10 years or so, general education at your college has changed in several ways, for example, ________________. Could you describe from your perspective the relationship between enrollment and changes in the general education curriculum at (college name). Why do you think that is true?

7. Do you have any other comments that might help me understand general education or enrollment trends at your college?

**Set B - Academic Deans or Chief Academic Affairs Officer**

1. Your college has maintained/increased its enrollment at a time when many baccalaureate colleges are struggling. What do you see as the difference between your college and the colleges that have declining enrollment?

2. What role does your college’s curriculum play in recruiting or enrolling students? Does the college collect this information in any systematic way? How might I have access to the information? Does the college collect it informally? How is it used?

3. I’d like ask a few questions about the general education portion of your curriculum. Just to ensure we are both talking about the same thing, what I mean by general education are those requirements, such as English composition, for example, that are common to all students, regardless of their major. Some schools call this general education, others may refer to it as the core curriculum or distribution requirements and some have other names for it. Is it clear to you what I am talking about? What role, then, does the general education portion of the curriculum play in recruiting or enrolling students? How do students find out about general education prior to acceptance?

4. ____________ in your general education curriculum is fairly unique. What effect does this element have on attracting or enrolling students? Why do you think this is the case?

5. General Education at your college has changed since the late 1980’s in at least several ways, for example, ________________. Were you
working at (college) when those changes were made? Were you part of the changes or influenced or impacted by them OR Even though you weren’t there at the time, are you knowledgeable about any of those changes? (If not — Who might be knowledgeable? How could I contact them? Skip to Question 7)

6. Can you tell me why the general education curriculum was revised? According to the literature, colleges may change their curriculum in response to external changes, such as changing student demographics, a changing job market, or financial stress. Did any of these factors play a role in the general education revision? Why/how?

7. Your general education curriculum is somewhat unique in that _________. Why were these/this particular element(s) was introduced?

8. Do you think this (unique element) plays any role in attracting students to your institution? Why/Why Not?

9. Do you have any other comments that might help me understand general education or enrollment trends at your college?

Set C - Interview Person Involved in or Knowledgeable regarding General Education Revisions

I’d like ask a few questions about the general education portion of your curriculum. Just to ensure we are both talking about the same thing, what I mean by general education are those requirements, such as English composition, for example, that are common to all students, regardless of their major. Some schools call this general education, others may refer to it as the core curriculum or distribution requirements and some have other names for it. Is it clear to you what I am talking about? What role, then, does the general education portion of the curriculum play in recruiting or enrolling students? How do students find out about general education prior to acceptance?

1. I understand you were involved in (or are knowledgeable about) some of the revisions in the general education curriculum in the last 10 years or so, at your college. What was your involvement? Who else
was involved? How might I get in touch with any of those individuals?

2. Why was the general education curriculum revised? According to the literature, colleges may change their curriculum in response to external changes, such as changing student demographics, a changing job market, or financial stress. Did any of these factors play a role in the general education revision? Why/how? Was there anything else that contributed to decisions to make changes to the general education curriculum?

3. Your general education curriculum is somewhat unique in that __________. Do you know why these/this particular element was introduced? Who might know?

4. Do you think this element plays any role in attracting students to your institution? Why/Why Not?

5. Do you have any other comments that might help me understand changes to general education your college?
APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Descriptions and interview findings from each six colleges selected for further study follow. To maintain some degree of anonymity, colleges are identified in the discussion as ‘College A’, ‘College B’, and so on.

College A

College A is one of the four colleges founded in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It is located in a rural area in a Midwestern state, and is affiliated with the Lutheran Church. Of the six schools selected for interviews, its enrollment is the smallest. It is the least selective of the six, offering admission to more than 95% of applicants, based on acceptance rates published by U.S. News (2002). Its freshman retention rate, at just under 75%, is the lowest of the six colleges. (U.S. News, 2002). Similar to the other five colleges, College A’s student population is predominantly female. The majority of students live in college housing, and 95% are younger than 25 years old. Only 35% of students graduate in six years.

Between 1975 and 1997, College A’s enrollment fluctuated considerably, ranging from fewer than 500 students at two different

College A’s general education is similar to most other schools in the sample, in that it is a combination of prescribed courses and distribution. Like many other colleges, it requires English composition, physical education, an oral communications course, foreign language and a religion course. Its distribution system (except for the one religion course) is built not strictly around academic departments or disciplines, but around areas of ‘human inquiry’. Distribution areas include Human Organization and Development, Scientific Inquiry, Aesthetic Experience, and Culture. Students must select courses from each of the distribution areas, except that in which their selected major is located. College A is somewhat distinctive also in that it requires students pass a math competency test, but requires no math courses. Finally, what College A considers the centerpiece of its general education program, is a reading and discussion program in which all students and faculty participate. Student groups are intentionally comprised of students from various majors, ranging from
Freshmen to Seniors. Faculty meet with a different group each class period.

College A's general education in 1988 was a bit more traditional. Its distribution system was organized strictly according to department and divisional areas (i.e. social science, natural science, humanities). It also required 60 hours of general education, rather than the 49 hours required in 2000. The reduction in hours was accomplished by dropping the math requirement, and decreasing the required hours in religion, foreign language, and distribution areas.

Three people at College A were interviewed: the Provost/Dean of the College, the Assistant Dean who also serves as a faculty member, and the college's first permanent Director of Admissions who had been on staff for about a month. Two of the three interviewed commented that enrollment at College A was not as high as the college would like it to be. One commented on the difficulties of being a small college and the importance of maintaining enrollment, "As a small college it is hard to survive. The majority of my time is spent on that. It influences everything you do. With smaller endowments you have one foot in the grave all the time. ... Tuition is a factor with everything. If you lose one student it affects your budget and programs."

There was uncertainty as to the role of curriculum, and specifically general education, with regard to enrollment. One person
commented, "We debate this weekly. Curriculum plays a role, not a major role. It could play a bigger role if it were marketed. Any more, it is a matter of marketing." Some one else commented, "I doubt nowadays that students go anywhere based on any part of general education. ... I think the decisions are affective or emotional." Another commented, "That can be debated. The faculty would say they are proudest of the [reading and discussion] program. Students might say they are not so big on that. They come here and it's something you have to do." Still, there was a sense that general education played a role in retention. "The [reading and discussion] program brings lots of different faculty and different students together. It is healthy for the community. ... This has been an important piece in maintaining enrollment."

Expectations of accreditors appears to play the largest role in general education change at College A. One person commented, "Also there are outside agencies which are able to dictate, NCATE and the social work and business accreditation groups. We are a member, which is good, but sometimes our discussions are initiated due to external requirements." The same person also commented "There were outside pressures and the need to reduce the credit hours in general education." Another noted, "There are more and more requirements from accrediting agencies, requirements for more hours
Faculty interest, student success issues, and finances also appear to play a role in general education change at College A. One person suggested, "... so as people change, people on the committee change, ideas of general education change. It is good to have the influx of new ideas, yet bad if you're looking for consistency." Another person expressed that general education changes, "Because we are alive and engaged in education. We have passions, sometimes changing passions, and interaction among the faculty."

Speaking to the issues of student success, one individual stated, "The freshman experience grew out of the first year students' need for a common experience. It was an introduction to college and academic issues. ... We feel strongly now that we need another first semester common experience, so we are working on one. It will be in place in the next year or so." The original first year program had been dropped from the general education curriculum, "due to a number of issues, mostly staffing and financial resources. We couldn't hire additional faculty to staff it and the existing faculty were stretched to the max."

College B
College B was a bit different than the other five colleges selected for interviews. Like only one other of the six colleges, it was founded after 1960. Forty percent of its student population is 25 or older. Only twenty-two percent of students live in college housing. Of the six colleges, it is the most selective, admitting fewer than 70% of those who apply. It is also the most diverse, with 13% of its students African American and 16% Hispanic. Its freshman retention rate, at just over 75%, is in line with the other schools. Its six year graduation rate, however, is the lowest of the six schools, at 30%. College B is a Roman Catholic college located in a suburban area on the East Coast.

Enrollment at College B declined by about 13% (90 students) between 1975 and 1977. Since 1977, College B's enrollment has steadily increased, from just under 600 students in 1977 to more than 1200 in 1997. This represents an overall increase of 67% between 1975 and 1997, and an astounding 87% increase between 1988 and 1997.

College B's general education program was perhaps the most distinctive of all 60 colleges included in the larger sample. It was comprised of English composition, religious studies, and a 42 credit prescribed interdisciplinary core curriculum. This core curriculum was divided into three groupings, designed to address critical thinking skills, problem solving skills and rational judgment. Across groupings, all
courses were bound together with a common theme. The three groupings were designed to build upon one another, and students were required to complete all Group 1 courses before moving on to Group 2, and then to Group 3. Interestingly, after the year 2000 catalog was printed, and in the midst of the 2000-2001 academic year, the general education curriculum was modified considerably.

Although the total number of general education hours were similar in 1988 and 2000, College B's general education program in 2000 was a dramatic departure from its 1988 general education curriculum. In 1988 College B had a departmentally based distribution system in which students were required to select one to two courses from each of eight different departments.

Two persons were interviewed at College B: the Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Vice President of Enrollment Services. Both persons interviewed thought the curriculum, specifically the available majors, played an important role in attracting students to College B. One commented "I think the fact that we offer programs in health sciences and in teacher education, two of the career choices that are way up in the list [attracts students]. We prepare people to be professionals." The other stated, "The Sisters are always active in the community in health care and education, so these are two of our strong programs, medical arts and education." The same person also
noted, "We try to keep up with the trends, ... You have to pay attention to marketing trends. For example, students are always interested in business. ... The curriculum always pays attention to new trends and getting our market share of students."

In spite of the important role of academic majors, neither of the persons interviewed thought general education was important in attracting freshman to College B. One noted, "It plays some role. I don't think it plays a large role." The other commented, "Well, its not that Freshmen ever think about general education and what it means, but students understand that there is a core they have to take across the curriculum." When it came to transfer students, the story was quite different, however. One of the persons commented, "It becomes important to students, or they have an awareness of it, if they want to transfer." The other said, "We had a good one [general education curriculum] that was interdisciplinary, but was hard to transfer into. The students who came here as transfer students had to take all of that because they didn't have anything that fit into the general education program here."

The difficulty of transfer students was the primary reason for the most recent change in College B’s general education curriculum. The former interdisciplinary core had been developed by faculty initiative. "People were looking toward developing an innovative core. It
had administration support and was written up in the newspapers. It made a big impression." Slowly, however the interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum faded. “As new faculty came in who weren’t part of the process of implementing the general education program they didn’t approach it from the same interdisciplinary point of view. ... Students were taking the same course, but depending on the instructor the content would be different. It lost what it was intended to do.” So, in the midst of the academic year, the general education curriculum was changed because, “It was a big problem with transfer students coming in. Their courses didn’t transfer it and they didn’t want to repeat courses. ... Now we are down to six courses, and they have rearranged the content. It’s easier for transfer students to receive credit.”

In this instance, the general education curriculum was changed specifically because of, “Demands of the market. It was a very rigorous core. It required too many credits...” Both persons interviewed at College B agreed that “Curriculum impacts greatly where you are considering transfer students. ... We have gotten a smaller and smaller number of transfer students each year. ... Transfers are getting lower because parents are becoming aware that whenever you transfer it costs money and credits.”

**College C**
College C, located in a Midwestern city, was founded by the Presbyterian church in the mid nineteenth century. Like three of the other schools selected for interviews, College C offers admission to approximately 80% of those who apply. Ninety-seven percent of its students are younger than 25, and nearly 85% live in college housing. College C’s freshman retention rate, at 82%, is among the best of the six colleges. Its six year graduation rate of 59% ranks fourth (from best to worst) among the six schools.

College C’s enrollment grew 18% (approximately 200 students) between 1975 and 1988. Enrollment figures in 1988, 1990, 1997 and unofficially in 2000, were similar, hovering around 1250. There were fluctuations in 1995 and 1996, however, dropping to about 1200, then increasing to about 1300, before settling back at the 1250 mark in 1997. Overall, College C’s enrollment increased 18 percent between 1975 and 1988, but less than one percent between 1988 and 1997.

College C’s General Education in 2000 had several somewhat distinctive features. It required no course in English composition, but required 5 writing intensive courses, far more than the one or two such courses required at a number of other schools. It required two courses each, selected from a variety of disciplines, exploring Western Perspectives and Non-Western Perspectives. College C did not require math specifically, but rather courses in quantitative and behavioral
analysis, also selected from among a variety of disciplines. In addition, College C required courses in Creative Expression and in Science. In selecting courses, students had to ensure they completed at least one course in each of the college's academic divisions. Finally, College C was most distinctive in the way it included career preparation in its general education.

Four separate elements are included in College C's career preparation program. Students must all participate in three career service workshops: resume writing, interview skills and one additional workshop. All students volunteer for five hours of community service, far fewer than the 20 to 45 hours required at some of the other colleges in the 60 school sample. Students must attend a dinner where a nationally recognized figure speaks regarding a social issue. The speech is followed by discussion and debate with other students and with faculty members. Finally, in their junior or senior year, students are required to complete a practicum experience which may be satisfied by an internship, study abroad, independent research or an honors project. This series of 4 requirements (workshops, community service, dinner and practicum) is intended to help students make connections between their liberal arts education and their career or graduate school plans.

College C's 2000 general education was really quite similar to
what it had been in 1988. The only changes were the addition of the Quantitative and Behavioral Analysis requirement, a change from three to five writing intensive courses, the addition of the career planning requirements, and a decrease in the number of hours required in several other areas.

Three people at College C were interviewed: the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty, the Director of Admissions, and the Secretary to the Faculty, a faculty member who had been involved in general education revisions over the years.

Two of the three people interviewed believed that the experiential component of general education (and the workshops, volunteer service and dinner linked with it) plays a role in attracting students to College C. One person commented, “To some degree it has played a role. It is always hard to tell. On the incoming student survey that asks why they choose a particular institution a number of students marked interest in the [experiential component].” A second person was firmer in their assertion of the importance of this particular element. “It plays a key role. Four years ago we created the [experiential component] as part of our general education. We have marketed it pretty aggressively.” Interestingly, none of the links on College C’s web page lead to information about this particular part of general education. It is only by using the web page’s search feature...
that an interested student might find a description of this element of general education. The third person didn't believe any portion of general education attracted students to the college. This person held that the academic calendar with a January term allowing for internships or travel abroad, combined with an option to double major, was most attractive to prospective students.

According to one of the people interviewed, the experiential component of general education was introduced to give “a better perspective about how to apply a liberal arts education. This gives [students] an idea about how they can do that, in a safe protected environment at the college.” A different person was more direct as to why this particular element was added to the general education curriculum. He stated, “The experiential learning was added for a number of reasons. One reason was a marketing reason. We were looking for something as a device to attract students to [College C]. We already had students traveling abroad or doing internships. ... We were trying to zero in on this and use it to bring others to the college. [The experiential component’s name] came from the admissions and marketing people - it was a catchy phrase.” He also affirmed the program intent noted by the first person saying, “We were trying to look at making a transition for students from the college setting to post college careers.” This individual also commented on the shift
toward vocationalism noted in the literature, “Students are more career and job oriented that they were 20 years ago. They are taking things that are beneficial to them instead of just for the love of learning.”

Academic concerns and retention were also named as reasons for recent changes in general education. First, College C’s distribution system was reorganized a bit to enable students to more easily schedule their classes. Students had been required to select their Western and non-Western emphasis from a common theme, but had difficulty meeting all requirements because of scheduling conflicts. The required number of courses in these areas was reduced and the thematic approach was dropped. Second, additional writing intensive courses were added, “to enhance the idea that writing is important across the entire curriculum, not just in literature or rhetoric, but for example in the sciences as well.” Finally, “The first year seminar... was somewhat driven by retention.”

College C is currently considering additional changes to its general education curriculum. One person noted, “Within the next year we will look at general education again and may revise it.” This individual wasn’t willing to explain why or what type of additional changes may be considered. Another person commented, “They are looking to do some revision. From time to time it gets a little
complicated. They may try to simplify it or refine it so the road map is
easier to follow." The third person explained, "Right now we are looking
at a potential change in teaching load for faculty. The teaching load
right now is seven courses per year, which is high. ... As we work on
the [strategic] plan, depending on how faculty positions are
distributed, we may need to make changes in general education,
because of student demands and meeting student needs. We may allow
additional classes to meet some of the requirements, and so on, but
not major changes."

**College D**

College D was the only women's college among the six colleges
selected for interviews. College D, located in an East Coast city, was
founded by the Methodist church in the late nineteenth century. Of the
six schools, it draws the largest number of students from out of state
(58%, compared with the next highest 45%), and the largest number of
international students (10%). Ten percent of College D's students are
25 or older, and typical of liberal arts colleges the vast majority (84%)
live in campus housing. College D's freshman retention rate is 77%,
similar to most of the other five schools. Its six year graduation rate
is 64%, second best of the group. Of the six schools, College D is the
only one of the six that does not offer a degree in business
management. For students interested in a professional degree, College
D does offer a degree in education, and offers a nursing program in cooperation with another college. Nursing students must complete their fourth and fifth year of education at the cooperating college. Of all the schools, College D's curriculum most resembles the traditional liberal arts curriculum.

College D's enrollment increased steadily between 1975 and 1988, resulting in a seven percent (50 student) growth in enrollment. Enrollment began to fluctuate a bit after 1988, moving back and forth between about 750 to just under 700. Although enrollment at College D was 14 students fewer (two percent) in 1997 than in 1988, an unofficial figure placed enrollment in 2000 at two students more than that in 1988. Overall, College D's enrollment grew five percent between 1975 and 1997, declined two percent between 1988 and 1997, and was essentially the same in 2000 as it had been in 1988.

College D's general education is, for the most part, a fairly typical system of department and division distribution. College D is a bit different in that it has four separate diversity requirements that must be met by all students: women's studies, and traditions and cultures of the United States, of Europe, and of Asia, Africa, the Middle East or Latin America.

The predominant change in College D's general education between 1988 and 2000 was a decline in the number of general education hours,
accomplished by eliminating a freshman colloquium and decreasing the number of required hours in nearly all distribution areas. This was accompanied by an expansion in the diversity requirements.

College D faces challenges to maintain its enrollment. One of the people interviewed commented, “It’s not easy to get our class. These are not good times. Our discount rate is high. We get students, but it costs. The picture is not all rosy.” She continued, noting the all female student population, “Only four percent of high school girls are willing to consider a women’s college. A much lower percentage actually attends one. ... Our financial aid is generous. Sometimes I feel like we buy them, but they’re not sold.”

Three people at College D were interviewed: the Dean of the College, the Director of Admissions and the Assistant Dean/faculty member.

There were mixed feelings with regard to the role of curriculum in attracting students to College D. One person noted, “Sometimes curriculum plays a very negative role, as in you don’t have a [specific] degree, while we do have a program although not a degree in these areas. When asked if general education plays a role in recruiting or enrolling students, the same person commented, speaking fairly generally, “Yes, I think so. ... If it is done right, general education should be able to embody the mission statement. If it is done well it
becomes a marketing tool.” Another person at College D noted, “Students aren’t savvy enough. It can be a deterrent, but not an attraction. ... A student may go somewhere because there are no requirements. That may be attractive. ...Parents may look at general education and point it out to students. It takes a lot to help students understand.” The third person commented, “I don’t think prospective students look too closely at general education when selecting an institution.” Rather, students choose to attend College D for the small class size, community atmosphere and personalized attention they receive.

General education at College D changed dramatically in the late 1980’s (prior to 1988), moving from a system of few requirements accompanied by distributional guidelines (adhered to by 60% of students) to a much more structured system. Echoing comments made earlier regarding college mission, this change was driven in part by a desire to be more true to the college mission statement. According to one of the people interviewed, “We had difficulty making the case that we were ensuring breadth of knowledge and learning. Careerism was screaming. The faculty voted to strengthen general education... We were not providing the breadth that was in our mission statement.” The more recent adoption of the broad diversity requirement “came with the mission statement. The diversity grows
out of the mission statement, it actually came because of it. First, we are a women’s college. we felt the students should have a course dealing with women’s issues. ... The diversity issue is a major portion of the mission, a global perspective was in the mission statement in 1973, long before it was popularized."

Like College C, College D is discussing changes to its general education curriculum. No details of potential changes were available.

College E

College E, a Protestant non-denominational college was founded in the second half of the twentieth century. Located in a West Coast suburb, College E shares a campus with both a lower and secondary school, and a non-denominational community church. College E has just under 700 students enrolled, all of whom are expected to be active members of a local church. Similar to three of the other six schools, College E accepts approximately 80% of applications. Nearly two-thirds of its students are women and, according to one person interviewed, 30% are adults. Ethnicity and the proportion of students living in college housing was not available, although all unmarried students under age 25 who do not live with their families are required to live in college housing. Similar to most of the other schools, College E has a freshman retention rate of 78%. Ranking fourth (from highest to lowest), its six year graduation rate is 40%.
College E more than doubled its student population between 1975 and 1977, growing fairly steadily from just under 300 students in 1975 to more than 600 in 1997. There were two periods of decline, between 1977 and 1979 and between 1988 and 1990. In both cases, by the next year for which enrollment figures were available, the college again showed an enrollment increase.

College E, with 84 hours of general education, (68% of the hours for graduation), requires more general education than any other of the 60 schools studied. General education at College E is largely prescribed, although there is also a distribution system through which students select history, science, literature, social science and humanities courses. Additional required courses are the fairly typical English composition, oral communication, and math, as well as computer science and a college success and career oriented freshman class. What sets College E apart from other colleges, aside from the quantity of general education, is the heavy concentration of religion classes. Students enroll in 24 hours of religiously oriented course work: 12 hours of Biblical Studies, three each of world religions and scientific models of origins, and six hours of philosophy from a religious perspective. In addition, all students are required to complete a 45 hour student ministry requirement each semester except their first and last.
College E's general education in 2000 closely resembled that of 1988. There was just more of it in 2000. Between 1988 and 2000 College E added computer science, career planning and literature, and restructured its religion requirements. College E also introduced a bit more student choice between 1988 and 2000. The required biological science and physical science courses of 1988 were replaced with a distribution requirement of two science courses, and instead of the prescribed history course, students in 2000 were given a choice between U. S. history and world history.

Three people at College E were interviewed: the Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Director of Admissions and the Assessment Coordinator who also serves as a faculty member.

College E draws a very specific type of student who is attracted by the Biblical focus of the college. As one administrator commented, "We have a pretty specific mission statement that draws on a more selective student population. Students come to us because of who we are. We teach creationism, and that, and who we are, doesn't change." Another noted, "We also appeal quite a bit to the home school community because of our [small] size and dedication to creation science and integrated faith/learning."

Opinions were rather mixed as to the role general education plays in attracting students to College E. Any role general education does
play derives from the strong religious orientation of the college. As one person stated, “The one thing that does set us apart with our general education is the fact that students do take a Bible class every semester. ... It is a selling point that along with their general education they will be exposed to the normal classes as elsewhere and they will almost get a minor in Bible.” Another said, “I’m not sure it [general education] plays much of a role. Most of the students are mostly focused on their major. A lot view general education as an encumbrance.” The same person later added, “A lot of students come here for the Biblical integration. They tend not to think of courses like Scientific Creationism or World Religions as general education.” That College E is a liberal arts college is appealing as well. “We do find students like the liberal arts education with the Bible component rather than just attending a Bible College.”

General Education change at College E has been driven in part by a desire to offer more student choice. One person noted, “The overall thrust has been to give students some choices in the general education courses they take.” Another clarified, “We have tried to create more options. There were two history classes and you took those two history classes. Now there are four, so students can take American or World history.” Accreditation figured into some of the additional offerings. “We have also broadened our science elective, added a lab
and an additional science requirement. That was one of our weaknesses on accreditation."

College E has also attempted to address career needs of students in general education. The college added computer classes, "with an understanding of what was happening in the [employment] marketplace." The former college orientation class was revised to include various assessment tools because faculty, "wanted it to be something that helps students develop a clear sense of how college relates to their goals beyond college."

Finally College E has amended general education to broaden its students' world view. A literature requirement was added because, "Literature broadens their perspective and ensures they are exposed to the world at large and various cultures and aesthetic issues." Along the same lines, "Some of incorporating cultural elements had to do with demographic changes. In [this state] we have a diverse population and it is changing more and more. We have this to help students address these issues in a balanced way."

Finally, like College B, College E revised its general education curriculum with transfer students in mind. Specifically it broadened its social science distribution because, "we need to maximize the ability to count the general education units they [transfer students] took elsewhere. Also ... we made an adjustment for transfer students. Now
they have to take one special [religion] course each semester [they are in residence], because to take all the special courses would take another year. It became a financial aid issue and an issue with parents."

College E, like College C and College D, is engaged in conversation regarding potential changes in general education. Their struggle revolves not around content but around philosophical issues important to the college. While recent changes in general education have resulted in more student choice, College E also wants to, "avoid the make your own degree program where students are allowed to randomly pick their general education courses." Acknowledging the shape of general education at the majority of colleges, one person commented, "The trend is toward a smorgasbord general education at may institutions." She explained College E's struggle in defining its own general education. "Are we going to say just take six units, or are we going to be specific? We probably have a more traditional perspective on general education." The college is also considering adding an honors general education option. This raises philosophical concerns as well. "The discussion is complicated because we have a strong feeling we don't honor one faculty member over another. ... That carries over in to our perspective on student achievement to some extent. ... We will proceed experimentally."
College F

College F, founded by the Presbyterian church in the mid-nineteenth century, is located in a rural area on the East Coast. Of the six schools selected for interviews, College F is the largest with more than 1450 students. College F has the highest freshman retention rate of the six schools (87%), and the highest six year graduation rate (77%). It is also the least diverse with a student population that is 98% Caucasian. Ninety-nine percent of College F's students are of younger than 25, and along with College C and College D, more than 80% of College F's students live in college housing.

College F is the only one of the six colleges that showed an overall decline (two percent) in student enrollment between 1975 and 1997. Enrollment fluctuated back and forth at around 1500, until reaching a low of just under 1400 in 1988. Since 1988, enrollment at College F has fluctuated between about 1450 and 1550, declining seven percent in 1996 and two percent in 1997. Unofficial enrollment figures in 2000 are similar to those of 1996, perhaps signaling a reverse in declining enrollment. Overall, College F's enrollment increased four percent between 1988 and 1997.

Like many of the colleges in the larger sample, College F combines prescribed courses with distribution requirements for its general education curriculum. The distribution courses are fairly
typical, with requirements in religion/philosophy, the sciences, social sciences, humanities and fine arts, and a quantitative reasoning requirement similar to College C’s. What makes College F’s general education curriculum somewhat distinctive is its first year general education requirements. Entering students complete a year long interdisciplinary sequence structured around questions regarding the nature of knowledge of humanity and the determination of human values. Uniquely, the required English composition and oral communication courses complement the interdisciplinary sequence, with assignments in one corresponding with assignments in the other.

To continue the interdisciplinary nature of the first year, students are also required to select one set of two linked courses that are taught by faculty from at least two disciplines.

Between 1988 and 2000, College F introduced the first year and linked course interdisciplinary components, as well as the quantitative reasoning requirement. It also eliminated a number of courses, paring its general education curriculum from 68 hours in 1988 to 48 hours in 2000. College F dropped its literature, foreign language, computer literacy and religion requirements. It also restructured its distribution requirements a bit, but for the most part this was simply cosmetic and involved name changes (i.e. the social science distribution became ‘social thought and traditions’).
Two persons at College F were interviewed: the Dean of the College and the Dean of Admissions. Neither was able to suggest any other person to interview.

What was most striking about College F was the difference of opinion regarding general education's role in recruiting and enrollment. One person commented, "It plays an extraordinarily important role. ... We think the new [general education] curriculum has been very important in the making of this institution." The other person, acknowledging a likely disagreement, commented, "[the role general education plays is] probably very very little. I would be hard pressed to cite how it would play any kind of a key role. It is not distinctive." Both individuals credited College F's overall reputation with attracting students, and one commented that the college also seems to attract an unusually large proportion of alumni children.

Academic reputation is the primary reason College F revised its general education curriculum. One person commented, "We lost our way academically and about 15 years later made a serious attempt at curriculum revision." Speaking about the former academic calendar that had included a winter or January term, this individual commented, "J-term had become play term. ... As a concept it just lost its way academically." College F looked to national general education reform to revise its own general education curriculum. "We studied every national
study. ... We looked at all the reforms and went to conferences.”

College F’s web site notes that general education reform arose from a
desire to create an improved and more rigorous education. The better
and more rigorous education may be lost on College F’s students,
however. One of the administrators commented, “Over the last two or
three years the curriculum has improved. [The freshman
interdisciplinary sequence] is over the head of a lot of freshmen. A lot
of freshmen just don’t see it.” This person asserted that the primary
drawing card for College F is “that they [students] got a warm and
friendly welcome. They also like the cost and the distance from home,
or the majors.”
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