

AN ESSENTIAL ACADEMIC PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY OF THE
GENERAL STUDIES PROGRAM AT LOUISIANA STATE
UNIVERSITY IN SHREVEPORT
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The purpose of this study was to provide a historical overview of the development of the General Studies (GS) program at LSU Shreveport from its inception in 1967 until 2007. Sources of data were primary, secondary, and archival documents, student information accessed through the university mainframe, alumni information obtained from a university-sponsored directory, and an interview with the former vice-chancellor of academic affairs. All data were analyzed and placed in a chronological framework. The resulting framework consisted of dividing the 40 years of program existence into four ten-year periods. The study was limited in scope to the GS program at LSU Shreveport and did not seek to compare this program with other programs offered at the university or other GS programs in the state.

The study results identified several key social, economic, and political factors that influenced the program's development. Political factors included the change from a two-year to a four-year institution, the Statewide Review Committee recommendations of 1983, the dissolving of the College of General Studies in 1984, and the accountability movement of the 1990s. Key social factors discovered were the Civil Rights and Women's Movements of the 1960s, and progressive, life adjustment, and humanistic educational philosophies. Economic factors revealed were the economic recessions of the 1970s and 2007, the technology burst of the 90s, and the current War on Terror. The study also revealed that the GS program has fulfilled the directives of the 1983 Statewide Review Committee Recommendations. Recommendations for future development of the program include adding an online option and implementing an exit survey.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Through many adaptations, American institutions have attempted to make the curriculum of higher learning both flexible and functional in order to meet the needs of the citizenry.
(Whittenberg)

Frederick Rudolph (1962) in *The American College and University: A History* connects educational history with social history, examining higher education in the context of social, economic, and political forces. The history of higher education in the United States begins with the founding of Harvard University in 1636 where, just as in England, only the religious elite were allowed to receive an education. It was a system of balance and control, a way for the church and for men to build a power base in the “new world.” It was not until after World War II that this elitist philosophy began to dissipate as the federal government passed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, which provided college or vocational education for returning World War II veterans, or GIs. The GI Bill, as it is commonly known, was an important effort in assisting these servicemen in returning to a country that had changed from sweatshops to manufacturing powerhouses that needed educated citizens to lead their workers and companies. The philosophy of “education for the masses” became the status quo for colleges and universities. According to Whittenberg (1989), the effort to accommodate the needs of these adult learners, who perhaps were not attending full-time because they were working or because they had families at home, gave rise to the establishment of alternative or nontraditional degree programs. An interest in nontraditional programs began in the late 1960s, stemming from the civil rights movement and the elimination of the separate but equal legal doctrine that allowed for the separation of educational institutions by race. Students searched for nontraditional offerings that coincided with their varied backgrounds and expectations.

Historical Background of the Bachelor's Degree

Nontraditional offerings are, by nature of the term, alternative methods of instruction, which include night or weekend classes, correspondence courses, and degree plans that do not belong to traditional disciplines. To understand the development of the nontraditional general studies degree, one must first review the growth of traditional baccalaureate degrees. According to Levine (1978) Bolognese students of the early thirteenth century had to study six to eight years in order to earn a "baccalaureus," which meant an individual was then authorized to tutor or offer informal lectures. Harriman (1936) reports that the baccalaureate also has its origins at the University of Paris. There, individuals became apprentice teachers, privileged to gain experience through lectures, then continued for another three years to obtain the real university degree. In the fifteenth century at Oxford, students would study for four years to obtain a bachelor of arts degree and most likely end their academic careers. The Oxford system, earning a bachelor of arts or a master of arts, was then adopted by Cambridge University and was eventually imported to America (Levine, 1978). Harriman (1936) states,

From 1642 until 1851 no other degree than the bachelor of arts was given in a recognized liberal-arts college in America. Traditionally, and in fact, the *primum gradum in artibus* was the badge of an educated man, and there was no multiplication of witnesses....In the middle of the nineteenth century the traditional program of studies leading to the degree was called into question by the rise of science. The arts faculty bitterly resented the attempts to add scientific studies to the time-honored curriculum emphasizing Latin and Greek. (p. 302)

During the late 1700s, though, there emerged several new baccalaureate degrees such as the bachelor of science and the bachelor of philosophy. It was not until the 1800s that these degrees

beyond the bachelor of arts were awarded. During the nineteenth century, we witnessed the birth of the associate's degree (Levine, 1978). Because of the longevity of the BA degree, institutions resisted change. Harriman (1936) notes,

For several hundred years the standardized degree in the arts had been the *baccalaureus atrium*; hence it is not surprising to read of the tremendous resentment aroused by the innovators in American colleges....Time had given the baccalaureate degree a well-understood connotation, and the way to win the distinction was through study of the ancient languages. Any other course was held to be, of necessity, "soft pedagogy"....

(p. 303)

Charles Eliot, president of Harvard University from 1869-1909, was a pioneer in the philosophy that new studies in the college curriculum would be an asset to the degree system:

The natural bent and peculiar quality of every boy's mind should be sacredly regarded in his education; the division of mental labor, which is essential in civilized communities in order that knowledge may grow and society improve, demands this regard to the peculiar constitution of each mind, as much as does the happiness of the individual most nearly concerned. (as cited in Harriman, 1936, p. 304)

From his statements, it can be discerned that Eliot believed that when students' individual talents are realized then those abilities are enhanced and benefit the community in which they live. Therefore, individuals should be able to pursue degrees that reflect their own talents or even their own life situations. However, this philosophy did not gain acceptance during President Eliot's tenure, nor did its importance resurface until after World War II. Based on Levine's (1978) research, by the end of the 1970s, there were approximately 650 types of bachelor degrees, ranging from music to welding, being awarded in the United States. In addition, by the time of

Levine's work, 10% of four-year arts and science colleges were offering a bachelor in general studies, also called the bachelor of liberal arts or bachelor of liberal studies. This degree is characterized by students taking courses in an area of concentration instead of a traditional major. Institutions such as the University of Denver, the University of Michigan, and the University of Minnesota were among the universities offering the general studies degree (Levine, 1978). American universities were attempting to respond to social demands of applying knowledge, recognizing that this change in curriculum was a social and not a pedagogical issue (as cited in Robles, 1998). This is the role the general studies degree has taken, satisfying the need for an alternative method to the traditional major.

Context of Bachelor of General Studies

Therefore, just as many traditional degrees came into existence to fulfill a societal need, so did the general studies degree. The degree has grown in importance over the years while still being viewed by many, in and outside of higher education, as an inferior degree. But, scores of people understand the value of receiving a liberal education, and understand the need for a flexible degree plan that allows a student to have an individualized educational experience. With the influx of the nontraditional student comes the necessity to reinvent the curriculum. According to Schneider (2005), over “[forty]-three percent of all college students are age twenty-four or older, and these older students have become the new majority on many college campuses. Higher learning has ceased to be simply an elite or elective option...it is now becoming the baseline preparation for full participation in every sphere of life” (p. 62). The general studies degree can be an avenue to link those social concerns to educational achievement.

Statement of the Problem

LSU Shreveport data profiles revealed that the university has been educating approximately 4200 undergraduates every year for at least the past ten years. Of these students, the average age is 25 or over, accounting for 38% of the student population. After examining the entire student body, undergraduates and graduates, of about 4600, the percentage of part-time students over the past ten years has been at least 38%. Students enrolled in the general studies program have accounted for 5.5% of the total undergraduate population on an annual basis. Even though the GS degree has been a part of the university curriculum since the inception of the campus, there is still reluctance to embrace the general studies degree as a viable alternative to traditional degrees. In fact, currently, there is no record of the historical development of the general studies program at LSU Shreveport. Such a record would not only highlight the adaptations made to the program over the course of 40 years, but it could also illuminate the importance of the degree program to the students who choose general studies as a degree plan, and to the university as a vital alternative to the traditional degree plan.

Purposes of the Study

The purpose of this study was to research the inception and the historical development of the general studies program at Louisiana State University in Shreveport (LSU Shreveport) from 1967 to 2007. This was accomplished through: 1) chronicling the development of the general studies (GS) program at LSU Shreveport, 2) identifying major curricular changes of the program, 3) ascertaining and identifying characteristics of the educational clientele of the GS program, and 4) providing an accurate account of the GS curriculum to diminish a lack of understanding. A historical account of the program aided in revealing the value of the nontraditional degree.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study focused on exploring the origins of the general studies degree at LSU Shreveport and documenting the growth and development of the program.

More specifically:

- 1) What were the major events in the development of the general studies program at LSU Shreveport?
- 2) What were the social, economic, and political factors that contributed to the development of the GS program and curriculum?
- 3) Who have been the educational clientele of the GS program?
- 4) What career paths have graduates of the GS program chosen?
- 5) What are the plans for future development of the GS program?

Significance of the Study

LSU Shreveport is a four-year, comprehensive, public university that offers a broad range of baccalaureate and master's degrees, serving the northwest Louisiana area. The academic structure consists of the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Education, Human Development and Business. The institution is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The university first opened its doors in 1967 as a two-year institution, and in 1974, the first senior level classes were added with 1975 being the first year the university awarded a four-year degree.

The university is a part of the Louisiana State University System, but with a separate administrative and governance structure from its flagship. LSU Shreveport offers smaller class sizes with exceptional technological support. Although LSU Shreveport is not a research university, it serves the community in its own unique ways by offering specialty programs such

as human services administration, bioinformatics, specialist in school psychology, and computer information systems. The general studies degree program contributes to the options students have to choose from at the university.

Although information about the general studies program was available from the university catalog, brochures, and Website, a study of the program itself had not been conducted. This case study developed a framework for the historical development of the program and documented the growth of the program. Moreover, this case study produced a historical account of the development of the program and contributed to the understanding of the processes, changes implemented, and importance of the degree to the university curriculum.

Finally, this study drew attention to the current curriculum of the general studies program at LSU Shreveport and examined its administrative, pedagogical, and societal functions while also describing some planned curricular changes.

Definition of Terms

Concentration (or major) – usually consists of a number of courses in one field or in two or more related fields, is the depth component of the undergraduate curriculum (Levine, 1978).

Disciplinary major – The most common form of major is a concentration in an area having a unique body of knowledge and method of inquiry. Biology, English, and sociology are examples of disciplinary majors (Levine, 1978).

General studies – a collegiate program of undergraduate or graduate work leading to the associate of art certificate, the collegiate degree bachelor of arts or master of arts in which the total program of studies is composed of integrated courses with little regard for disciplinary perimeters including, however, work in the social sciences, the natural sciences and the humanities (Erickson & Winburne, 1972).

Interdisciplinary – the most integrated of the approaches, involving two or more disciplines which are combined in such a way as to produce a new product or synthesis.

Neuropsychology and biochemistry are two examples (Robles, 1998).

Liberal education – the most commonly used synonym for *general education*. The Carnegie Council defines it very specifically as “education rooted in the concerns of civilization and our common heritage,” but others use the term more generally to refer to any education that liberates the learner in spirit and mind (Levine, 1978).

Multidisciplinary – clusters of courses with little or no mingling of disciplines.

Multidisciplinarity characterizes most American undergraduate education, for example, general education (Robles, 1998).

Nontraditional – describes students (such as minorities, women, adults) and curricula (such as external degree program, credit for prior experience) which were not integral parts of the American college in the past (Levine, 1978).

Subject field – refers to an aggregation of disciplines such as humanities, social science, or natural science (Levine, 1978).

Limitations

Much of the historical data connected to the general studies program at LSU Shreveport have been lost over time because of administrative changes and no document saving requirements. The only remaining documents belonging to the former College of General Studies were retrieved from LSU Shreveport archives in order to create a historical development of the program leading up to its current status. Only the data accessible to the researcher were used to create the framework of the case study. As the researcher is the current director of the GS program, recent data related to the program or its students were readily available; however,

any prior documents left from previous directors was limited. Because of this connection to the GS program, the researcher attempted to diminish bias by only presenting data contained in the documents found in archives, in the GS office, and in the interview.

The university's alumni association sponsored the creation of an Alumni Directory Database in 2007, which the researcher accessed. However, this database was not an exhaustive list of alumni as it required self-reported information and participation in the reporting was not required of alumni.

Delimitations

Although there was mention of other degrees, this study did not address the development or success of other programs at LSU Shreveport. The intent was to focus on the nontraditional GS program and its development as an interdisciplinary degree. Furthermore, this research did not seek to compare, point for point, the general studies programs at other universities. GS programs are distinctive to the institution that offers the degree. In Louisiana, the Board of Regents does have guidelines that all GS programs must adhere to, but the institution can deliver the curriculum in the most efficient way, as determined by the institution. The researcher did not seek to survey current or past GS students as the alumni association had already taken on this massive task for the entire university, which yielded a usable sample.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Even though other sectors of society share the mandates – political policy makers, leaders in the justice system, and managers in corporate practice, for example - - it is in the undergraduate curriculum that many of the issues come together for academics. It is important to recognize that the collegiate experience has its own dimensions and its own functions. In the fullest sense, the curriculum is intended to serve all students by means of an experience that has enough unity to sustain a common discourse among the best trained and educated. If students are to be in tune with a world few of their mentors have known, the course of study will have to be changed in fundamental ways still to be determined, discovered, or made. *(Toombs & Tierney)*

Over time, earning a bachelor's degree has become the rule instead of the exception in order to gain access to higher paying careers, and with this has come the growing criticism that with the influx of so many degrees they hold little meaning. In fact, Levine (1978) reported that 18% of students who responded to the 1976 Carnegie Council undergraduate survey stated that receiving the degree was more important to them than the content of the courses. This was a common thread found among students in comprehensive colleges and universities. In a 2005 study conducted by the University of Utah, researchers interviewed eight focus groups composed of high school and college students. The participants in all the groups identified professional success as the primary reason for obtaining a bachelor's degree with a degree being the basic requirement for success in the job market. The findings of the study also state "...that college is important not only for obtaining a first job, but also for career advancement and success down the line" (p. 38). Many may consider this an extreme shift in the purpose of earning a degree. In colonial America at the beginnings of our higher education development, education was for the few who had wealth so that they could create "...a learned clergy, and a lettered people" to serve the church (Rudolph, 1962, p. 6), specifically serving the Puritan religion. So, how could we have moved from serving the church to serving the labor market? In essence, our educational

system has been evolving over the past 300 years, but the reality is that higher education has always served the labor market in some way, including being able to consider the church as a “marketplace.” According to Clark Kerr (1994), higher education “has always served the labor market in one way or another and to one degree or another. In fact, universities began in Europe in early modern times precisely for that purpose” (p.54). Universities supplied lawyers, accountants, administrators, and mathematicians. Therefore, two options arise for colleges and universities. They can either lower their standards, not expecting much effort from their students, or they can adapt their curricula to fit the needs of their students. Many would argue that this could be achieved through a stronger emphasis on liberal education.

Liberal Education

Liberal education has been a traditional element of American higher education since the late 1700s as it became the standard to which educational success was measured. However, as specialization of degrees began to emerge, liberal education lost some of its vigor. There has been a renewed interest in liberal education as several scholars argue that it is the best practice for preparing our students for the 21st century (Schneider, 2005; Blumenstyk, 2010). Blumenstyk (2010) suggests that what is needed is a national dialogue in which the value of a broader education is distinguished between a narrow one. Students should not be satisfied with learning how to install a solar panel. In addition, they should want to learn about solar energy, itself. Schneider (2005) states that “liberal education fosters the qualities of mind and heart that prepare graduates to live productive lives in a complex and changing world” (p. 64). She follows by asserting that liberal education develops:

- Analytical, communication, and integrative capacities
- problem-solving, intercultural, and collaborative abilities
- scientific, technological, and quantitative competence
- cross-cultural, aesthetic, and historical knowledge

- ethical and civic engagement and responsibility
- preparation for work in a dynamic and global economy (p. 65)

These are qualities that every graduate should possess once he or she has earned a bachelor's degree, and they are important for two reasons.

First, Schneider (2005) reports that employers tell educators that, for example, they need engineers who not only know science and technology, but also hold strong communication and collaborative skills along with knowledge of social and global issues. Second, and most importantly to this researcher, liberal education provides the basis for what John Dewey referred to as the underlying value of an undergraduate degree. Dewey stated that “education was a process of growth that had no end beyond itself, a process in which individuals were constantly extending their knowledge, informing their judgments, refining their sensibilities and illuminating their moral choices” (as cited in Ehrlich, 1995, p. 233). An undergraduate degree should perform both functions, provide the individual with the opportunity for self-development and prepare the individual for the social and work commitments that lie ahead.

Blumenstyk (2010) reveals that a liberal arts group, consisting of 1200 colleges as members, embraces the belief that students should have “both a broad grounding in the arts and sciences and a set of intellectual and practical skills, such as information literacy and proficiency in oral and written communication” (p. 1). As with all other bachelor degrees, the general studies degree also encompasses this concept while expanding on the philosophy. Generally, most assert that liberal studies are synonymous with general education, the core group of courses that all students must complete to become “well-rounded” individuals. These core courses liberate the student's mind and reveal societal concerns that affect us all. The general studies degree incorporates general education, and then infuses the philosophy of liberal education into the core curriculum of the program. The GS program allows students to integrate different

disciplines to form a cohesive concentration of study. This allows the student to build upon skills related to several (multi) disciplines instead of concentrating on only one. This multi and interdisciplinary approach to education is an expansion of liberal education, which is why it becomes vital to understand the purpose and philosophical beliefs behind liberal education as they help to explain the philosophy of interdisciplinary studies.

Interdisciplinary Studies

In American higher education, the classical colonial curriculum began to give way to one in which intellectual skills were valued more than possession of a prescribed body of knowledge. It is interesting to note that some 200 years later, current debate about college curriculum involves the same issue. For example, the need for students to be able to locate, retrieve and make use of information, as well as the need to develop the on-going capacity for learning, has led to an emphasis on and integration of those workplace skills into the academic curriculum.

(Robles)

Although the need to reinvent the curriculum to adapt to societal needs is recognized by many academics, the debate still remains whether or not nontraditional curricula uphold the standards of a traditional degree program. For example, when the discussion of changing the curriculum at Brooklyn College arose, to increase the number of interdepartmental programs as a means of adding new majors and minors, stakeholders became infuriated believing that the proposal would “water down” and “kill” the core curriculum (as cited in Robles, 1998). The curriculum, which is guided by specific disciplines, is more than just the content of what is being taught, as it is embedded into the system of higher education. Colleges and universities organize their departments around separate disciplines whereby faculty are trained and promote their specific areas. The faculty teaches students who specialize in that area before they are allowed to graduate. Some faculty suggest that interdisciplinary studies attempts to tear down the barriers that work against “intellectual purposes” in the disciplinary approach (Gaff, 1989; Robles, 1998).

However, the need for new curricula has increased over the years as the dynamics of academics have changed. Robles (1998) mentions events such as World War II and the Vietnam War causing priorities to shift. As a result, more diverse groups of students entered the university and college system over the decades. There would be economic problems such as decreased federal and state funding along with declining resources available to possible students. Students would become consumers, looking for disciplines (degree programs) that would make them marketable in the workforce. Interdisciplinary studies developed as a possible solution to answer those needs. As Gaff (1989) stated, “problems of the world are not organized according to the categories of scholars; solutions to problems are as diverse as pollution, defense, communications, and health require knowledge and perspectives from several disciplines” (p. 57). Moreover, Gaff states that broadening the content engages the interests of a variety of individuals, emphasizing the common intellectual, social, and cultural issues we all face. Universities described and developed these non-traditional programs in different ways. According to Erickson and Winburne’s (1972) national assessment of general studies programs, institutions varied in what they named the liberal or general studies programs on their campuses: “Interdisciplinary was explained as having such synonyms as special, divisional, field, special option, interdepartmental, special scholars, general science, comprehensive area, tutorial, individualized, university studies, related fields of concentration, integrated studies, independent and creative studies” (p. 2). Because institutions define these programs differently, yet they all share common characteristics, the terms used to refer to them have become interchangeable.

Interdisciplinary studies are normally defined as “any deliberate crossing of disciplinary boundaries” (as cited in Peterson, 2008, p. 43). This would include programs such as women’s studies, cultural studies, ethnic studies, gender studies, African American studies, and general

studies. These programs emerged as scholars would assert that traditional disciplines did not satisfy the needs of a growing diversity of not only college students, but the world outside of academia. According to Lyon (1992), this is a natural progression because cross-discipline discourse was occurring on its own. Intertwining of the disciplines occurred because it allowed for broader inquiries. However, Lyon (1992) also reveals that there is much opposition to this type of study as many see interdisciplinary studies

...as a way of assailing the “edifice of hierarchy and power,” a metaphor for the specialized, isolated disciplinary structures; they see interdisciplinary studies as a means of both identifying and attacking the inside/outside distinction incorporated in disciplinary practice and of loosening “the bonds of discourse.” (p. 682)

Instead of valuing the diversity that interdisciplinary studies brings, many argue that one cannot have interdisciplinary studies because individuals can only “inhabit” one discipline at a time (Lyons, 1992, p. 682). Without being well-versed in a single discipline, one cannot excel in the study of several disciplines. These views contrast with those who purport that being able to combine different aspects from multiple disciplines actually expands the intellectual discourse about a given subject.

Moreover, Peterson (2008) remarks that interdisciplinarity does the exact opposite of what it is supposed to accomplish. Instead of bringing disciplines together in a cohesive nature, she argues that interdisciplinary studies maintains and reinforces a separation of the disciplines. She employs the five arguments of Thomas Benson to validate her argument against the establishment of interdisciplinary programs:

First, interdisciplinary studies suffer from conceptual confusion and no principles or values have been developed to serve as their foundation. Second, it makes no sense for

students to attempt interdisciplinary projects without first having a strong basis in the contributing disciplines. Third, because of the explosion of knowledge in disciplines, time spent in interdisciplinary courses makes it harder for students to, at the same time, gain disciplinary competence, which may make it harder for them to get into graduate schools or secure good jobs. Fourth, integrative studies courses are characteristically shallow, trading intellectual rigor for topical excitement. And fifth, interdisciplinarity is costly. (as cited in Peterson, 2008, p. 43)

However, even Peterson (2008) notes that most of these arguments can be refuted. All disciplines have some confusion over principles; all have students who must prepare for graduate school and work; intellectual rigor has not been researched; and the cost of these programs is not a philosophical idea. The argument Peterson believes holds the most weight is that students can only benefit from interdisciplinary studies once they are educated in singular disciplines, which is the argument mentioned earlier by Lyons (1992). Although these five arguments were developed in 1998, they explain past, current, and future complaints against interdisciplinary programs. This list of arguments is used, especially, against general studies programs. General Studies is a special type of interdisciplinary program; in fact, in most cases it is truly a multidisciplinary degree. Students do not focus on a single discipline; instead, they choose from areas of concentration thereby selecting several different disciplines to create a cohesive plan of study.

Multidisciplinary

Before exploring the general studies degree, we must also address the disparity between interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies. Some scholars suggest that the two terms are interchangeable; however, several assert that interdisciplinary is used to describe a range of

programs, varying from “inter” to “multi,” while not providing an accurate description of multidisciplinary programs:

We use “interdisciplinary” to refer to programs that range from the multidisciplinary to the truly interdisciplinary. Multidisciplinary programs are those in which faculty members bring to bear a discrete set of disciplinary skills and perspectives on common problems. A women’s studies program, for instance, typically includes faculty at least from history, literature, and sociology, all of whom study women’s position in society and their contributions to it. A genuinely interdisciplinary enterprise would be one in which faculty have developed a common approach to common problems that is distinct from those of traditional disciplines. (Miller & McCartan, 1990, p. 2)

Therefore, according to Miller and McCartan’s definition above, the terms are not synonymous. Multidisciplinary is not an integrative process of combining common approaches; instead, it is taking approaches from multiple disciplines to solve common problems. For example, when working with a troubled student, one may need an educator to help plan school activities, a counselor to provide psychological guidance, and a social worker to help with problems at home. Each one of these individuals in separate disciplines would work to solve a common problem, the student, from different perspectives.

Katz (2001) also states that there must be a distinction between the two terms as it causes a misrepresentation of what is being done:

As many, including the present authors, have remarked, there are few enterprises that are truly interdisciplinary. Although some programs succeed in teaching interdisciplinary, that is, integrating across existing disciplines to define appropriate objects of inquiry, methodologies, and modes of interpretation and analysis, few of us in the social sciences

and humanities conduct research that is truly interdisciplinary, and the tension between what we teach—and its promises—and what we do is palpable. (p.4)

Consequently, Katz's (2001), Miller and McCartan's (1990) remarks lead us to conclude that most programs we label as interdisciplinary are actually multidisciplinary. Also according to Miller (1990), truly interdisciplinary programs would be more expensive to the university because the institution would need to employ faculty, provide resources, develop new courses, and establish an administrative department. Multidisciplinary programs use existing resources and require less support to sustain their viability. Although the general studies degree at LSU Shreveport is a multidisciplinary program, the institution has historically defined and recognized the degree program as interdisciplinary; therefore, this study uses the term applied and acknowledged by the university.

General Studies Degree

The general studies degree is a degree completion program that finds its roots in interdisciplinary studies. This degree is a combination of the tenets of liberal and interdisciplinary education. Students pursuing the degree must complete the general education requirements that all students complete to earn a bachelor's degree; however, instead of a major, students choose from areas of concentration. Research shows that these types of degree completion programs are a very effective way for institutions to assist with nontraditional students in completing their degrees (Green, Ballard, & Kern, 2007; Hoyt & Allred, 2008). Palola and Lehmann's (1979) work identified three central themes:

First, there is the need for a more individualized curriculum, responsive to adult needs and reorganizing prior academic and non-college educational experiences related to a student's program of study. Second, there is a need for greater diversity in delivery of

educational services including establishing more convenient learning locations, greater flexibility in scheduling, greater emphasis on independent study, and less reliance on campus residency. Third, student learning should be evaluated in terms of competencies gained rather than credit hours accumulated as the basis for awarding degrees. (p. 174)

The general studies degree would be a flexible alternative for the nontraditional student who would perhaps be working full-time or have family commitments (Green, Ballard, & Kern, 2007; Hoyt & Allred, 2008; Zelan & Gardner, 1975). By the end of the 20th century, over 2200 institutions were offering some form of alternative programming that featured flexible scheduling, distance learning, and accreditation of military training (as cited in Green, Ballard, & Kern, 2008). Clark Kerr (1994) notes that larger numbers of traditionally underrepresented groups had been entering the university system over the decades, causing universities to develop new programs or make accommodations for students in existing programs. Colleges and universities began creating programs specifically for adults, labor union members, convicts, women, Latinos, Native Americans, African Americans, providing an opportunity to many who may not have been afforded the opportunity previously. LSU Shreveport followed with this belief in offering a GS program, initially to adult students who needed to attend school at night. In fact, the university created a separate “night division” to cater to the nontraditional students in the program.

However, there are arguments that the GS degree undermines the philosophical belief of the discipline approach even more than other interdisciplinary degrees; therein lies the negative criticism of the program. Those in specific disciplines may believe that “the heart of the undergraduate student engagement with the curricula is the major. This is where the accepted knowledge of the field is packaged for student consumption” (Slaughter, 2002, p. 261).

Choosing an area of concentration instead of a major allows students to complete courses from several different disciplines. As stated earlier, the argument continues to be that the students do not receive enough knowledge in one discipline to be able to effectively study several different disciplines. Further, some would argue that GS degrees actually diminish the quality of all other university degrees because of the flexibility in the curriculum (Fuentes, 2002). In addition, internal and external constituents often ask the question: What can a person do with this [nontraditional] degree (Green, Ballard, & Kern, 2007)? Green, Ballard, and Kern (2007) also state that even though there is continued increasing enrollment into nontraditional programs, few studies exist on the results and value of these programs. Because of this lack of research, the negative perception of the GS program continues to circulate not only within the university system but within the community as well.

Nonetheless, nontraditional students view nontraditional programs as a viable option because of the multidisciplinary nature of the program. They do not have to wait on certain classes to become available and can develop a curriculum that suits their own needs. Additionally, “Empirical data and theoretical models reveal that adults are not concerned with disciplinary boundaries, because they do not view the world as a series of discrete subjects” (as cited in Green, Ballard, & Kern, 2007, p. 17). Students within these nontraditional programs bring work and life experiences with them, so they are able to identify with the melding of various disciplines. The GS degree gives these students a choice. They are able to re-start what they may have begun years before or pursue interests that are not included in traditional degree programs.

Summary

A review of the literature reveals that the general studies degree is rooted in liberal and interdisciplinary studies; however, the degree has its own distinct characteristics. The one characteristic that attracts most students is flexibility. Students have the flexibility to make their own choices as to what type of coursework they wish to complete thereby combining various disciplines to integrate their own life and career interests. This also supports the flexibility of scheduling courses as students are not restricted to a prescribed set of courses except for those needed to complete the requirements for the area of concentration. They can schedule day, evening, weekend, and online courses from various departments to satisfy their needed requirements. The program is ideal for the transfer student who may bring in numerous hours from previous coursework that will not transfer into a traditional program. Most often the general studies curriculum requirements offer enough flexibility to allow different credits to be applied. Moreover, students who began school some time in the past and are now returning view the degree as a faster option to career advancement. They can basically begin their program exactly where they ended a different program years before. All of these are reasons why offering a general studies degree is important to the university and the community. The main argument against offering the degree is that students may not receive a thorough knowledge in one specific discipline. However, there is no evidence that students with an interdisciplinary degree perform worse in the job market or as scholars than those with traditional degrees or vice versa.

Curriculum development and changes occur for different reasons. Most scholars in higher education state that curricular changes occur due to "...new types of students, ranging from minority students to 'nontraditional' or older students or [to changing] in response to new economic conditions" (as cited in Slaughter, 2002, p. 260). Slaughter (2002) further states that

market forces and social movements continue to be influential factors in curriculum change. These are all factors that, over time, have influenced the development of the general studies degree. The degree satisfies a need within the community. If colleges and universities are going to cater to the rising diversity within the communities that they serve, then they will have to continue to provide alternative methods of obtaining a bachelor's degree.

Finally, even though LSU Shreveport defines the program as interdisciplinary, by definition the program is multidisciplinary. It appears to be a popular decision to group all alternative programs under the term interdisciplinary, even though there are other, more reflective terms to use. Academia should recognize the importance of multidisciplinary programs and identify them as such: "As the professional world becomes more and more specialized, it's time for today's-and tomorrow's-leaders to embrace a multidisciplinary approach to problem solving" (Tow & Gilliam, 2009, p. 43). Identifying the GS program as multidisciplinary bridges the gap between what the program promises to do and what is taught.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to research the inception and the historical development of the general studies degree program at Louisiana State University in Shreveport (LSU Shreveport) from 1967 to 2007. This was accomplished through: 1) chronicling the development of the general studies (GS) program at Louisiana State University in Shreveport, 2) identifying major curricular changes of the program, 3) ascertaining and identifying characteristics of the educational clientele of the GS program, and 4) providing an accurate account of the GS curriculum to diminish a lack of understanding. A historical account of the program aided in revealing the value of the non-traditional degree.

Research Design

The center for a case study is shaped by an analytical focus on a chosen individual event or phenomenon. It is a choice of what is going to be studied instead of what method will be used to study the event. Further, an intrinsic case study holds the idea that the case itself is what is of interest, and as the researcher, one should reveal what can be learned from studying the chosen case (Schram, 2003). Moreover, qualitative research allows the researcher to explain "...how and why things happen as they do – and even *assess causality* as it actually plays out in a particular setting" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Qualitative data lead to meaning and that meaning can be connected to the social world (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This becomes especially important to this study as we look for meanings behind the changes that occurred over the years within LSU Shreveport's GS program. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) data should be analyzed early during the collection process, making it a continuing experience and allowing the researcher to think and re-think about existing or even better data. Therefore, as

data were being collected, the researcher placed the information into a chronological sequence of events to provide the needed framework for the study.

This dissertation employed qualitative case study research in order to reveal the development of the general studies degree program at LSU Shreveport in relationship to the expansion of interdisciplinary studies. Documenting the progress of the program and revealing its vital importance to the curriculum of LSU Shreveport is essential in establishing the relationship between general studies and the interdisciplinary movement. Archival documents, electronic media, and university data profiles were used as the primary sources of information for the study.

Sources of Data

Data were collected from the following sources:

1. Archival documents of the former College of General Studies belonging to the LSU Shreveport Archives and Special Collections
2. LSU Shreveport Data Profiles published on the university Website
3. LSU Shreveport Data Profiles which document student demographics obtained from the College of Arts and Sciences dean's office
4. An interview with the past Provost and Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs
5. University catalogs (1973, 1980, 1987) located in archives of the general studies office
6. Documents recording curriculum changes, course adoptions/additions, and graduation lists
7. Louisiana Board of Regents 1983 guidelines for general studies programs
8. 40 Years of Excellence Alumni Directory 2007

9. Internal access to university mainframe and student records.

Data Collection Procedures

An overview of the general studies program at LSU Shreveport was based on the use of historical document compilation and analysis, compilation and analysis of remaining documents from previous directors, and available current and past data profile information. Reviewing the past and current archival documents provided the chronological framework for the study.

Initial data collection efforts began with a call to the LSU Shreveport Archives and Special Collections area of the Noel Memorial Library. The archivist responded to my request to retrieve any documents pertaining to the GS program. Any documents that had been preserved from the former College of General Studies were reviewed for any substantive information that could lend credibility to the establishment of a timeline regarding the development of the program. Because these documents were in archives, copies were made of any information that had value to the study. These documents were placed in chronological order to begin building the framework for further research.

Because of the limited amount of data from archives, it was necessary to limit the range of information collected on student profiles. Past documents contained information on spring graduates only based on a ten year period. Therefore, the researcher made the decision to limit student profile data to the same parameters. Graduation lists for general studies' students were located in the GS office, and the same categories utilized by the archival documents such as age, years to completion, and overall GPA were applied to the years of 1987, 1997, and 2007. Internal access to the LSU Shreveport mainframe was necessary to retrieve this information. An Excel spreadsheet was created to document the data.

To further complement those documents, the researcher reviewed the LSU Shreveport Data Profiles publications on the Website and in the dean's office of the College of Arts and Sciences. Again, using the ten year period, data were collected to determine the percentage of general studies graduates to the overall number of students graduating in those years. A line graph was created to show the progression of graduates over the span of 40 years.

The 40 years of Excellence 2007 Alumni Directory was purchased from the LSU Shreveport Alumni Affairs office as a result of reading the aforementioned works. The directory allows the user to sort using several different parameters. The researcher selected GS majors, other degrees earned, and occupation for the years of 1987, 1997, and 2007. A very limited, yet descriptive, sample of information was obtained; therefore, all years were considered and the information was imported into an Excel spreadsheet.

An interview was conducted with the former provost and vice-chancellor of academic affairs. As provost during the 1980s, the interviewee served as an excellent resource to aide in revealing the rationale behind the sweeping changes made to the general studies program during this time. As the individual instituting the changes, the former vice-chancellor provided an important piece of the chronological framework.

During the data collection process, data were partially analyzed to provide a historical framework to the study. Minimal descriptive statistics were used to coincide with the archival documents retrieved and to provide support for the assertions found within the literature review.

Conceptual Framework

The study was based upon a historical framework examining the origins of the general studies program at LSU Shreveport. The works of Harriet Robles (1998), and Menges, Svinicki, Klein, & Doty's (1994), outline specific "best practices" for the creation and administration of

interdisciplinary studies programs. Most importantly, the use of existing theoretical frameworks, such as curriculum change, leadership, and social change was used to aid in the explanation of decisions or positions employed by individuals or governing committees in the development of the general studies program.

Data Analysis

Because this study was historical and descriptive, one of the main concerns was to create a chronological framework for the development of the nontraditional general studies program while also revealing its relationship to interdisciplinary studies. One of the main challenges was distinguishing between an interdisciplinary program and interdisciplinary courses, while also recognizing that they all fall under the umbrella of liberal education. The general studies degree is considered a “degree completion program,” whereby students are afforded flexibility in their curricula to expedite their graduation process.

Along with the historical analysis of the archival documents and electronic media, a more apparent understanding of the changes to the general studies program at LSU Shreveport was achieved through the discussion with the former provost. The data gathered in the interview were instrumental to explaining key decisions during a period of change at the university and at the state level.

After the key events in the development of the program were identified, the analysis of those events was combined with the events occurring in the development of interdisciplinary studies to provide an analysis and overall chronological framework for the program.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Early Period (1967-1977)

Foundations

LSU Shreveport opened its doors in 1967 offering freshman courses, expanding course offerings in 1968 with sophomore courses. The school, a part of the LSU System with LSU A & M in Baton Rouge being the flagship, came into existence to fulfill a need in northwest Louisiana. It provided an avenue for residents in the area to earn credits that prepared them for a four-year degree. According to the 1968-1969 catalog, the university touted an evening program, which allowed students to take afternoon and night courses instead of the more traditional class times. The purpose or what today we would term the mission of the university was also included:

The university is established and maintained to serve the people of the state. It shall seek to expand the areas of knowledge and understanding through scientific and speculative inquiry and in various ways shall encourage and assist the people of the state to a fuller development of their resources. With these ends in view, an adequate program of studies shall be provided in the liberal arts and sciences, in the important vocational and professional subjects including agriculture, business and commerce, education, engineering, law, medicine, and military science and tactics; and additional courses may be provided in such other subjects as shall appear to be worthy of inclusion in the program of the University. Libraries and laboratories adequate for important and effective research and investigation shall be provided and maintained. (p. 10)

The areas of study available to students reflected this purpose. The administration of the areas of study was simplified at this time because of the two-year nature of the institution. One dean supervised the curricula for all areas, which included Liberal Arts, Business Administration, Teacher Education, Agriculture and Home Economics, and Pre-Professional Sciences.

In 1972, the Coordinating Council for Higher Education and the Louisiana Legislature granted LSU Shreveport baccalaureate degree granting status. Once approval was received from the LSU Board of Supervisors, junior and senior level classes were offered by the end of 1974. This brought about a significant internal administrative change as the university created a College of Business Administration, College of Education, College of Science, College of Liberal Arts, and a College of General Studies. This change also added new objectives:

...[I]t is the objective of Louisiana State University in Shreveport to offer both an opportunity to all who seek advanced education and a challenge to its students to serve society through the acquisition of mental discipline and intellectual leadership. A traditional role of a university and further objective of Louisiana State University in Shreveport is to actively encourage the expansion of knowledge through research....Evening courses are offered to serve the adult, business, and military communities of the area. (p. 9)

The dean of the newly formed College of General Studies administered the continuing education programs, law enforcement, military science, engineering management, the evening division, and the general studies program.

External Factors

Although there were internal processes that brought about the changes to the university, it is also important to examine the external factors that contributed to the development of programs

that did not conform to the rules of the traditional academic discipline. As previously noted, the passage of the GI Bill was an external force that caused colleges and universities to change from a philosophy of elitism to one of open access. During the period, curricula had to change in order to meet the needs of this new type of nontraditional student. Then, with the launching of Russia's spacecraft *Sputnik* in 1957, there was another move toward specialization as the federal government wanted to improve our science and math education, but the Vietnam War in the 1970s brought about tension as colleges and universities became centers of protest (Robles, 1998).

Education for life and personal development described the 1960s while social justice and universal access described the dominant philosophy of the 1970s (as cited in Robles, 1998). Robles (1998) also reports that the 1970s saw a decline in the resources available to higher education, and this economic situation aided in moving the focus to concerns about work: "Students became consumers, looking for curriculum that was relevant to the marketplace" (as cited in Robles, 1998). Therefore, higher education needed to respond to all of these external factors.

In reviewing the 1973-74 LSU Shreveport catalog, the College of General Studies was the answer to those external issues:

The College of General Studies recognizes knowledge acquired and demonstrated by nontraditional ways. Credits can be granted for (1) examinations, (2) military service experience, and (3) correspondence and extension courses. (p. 88)

In particular, the bachelor of general studies degree, administered by the college, sought to address the external issues facing higher education:

The purpose of the bachelor of general studies degree is to permit a student to assume the responsibility for developing a program of study designed to meet his individual needs. This program permits both intercollege and interdepartmental combinations of courses that are difficult or impossible to obtain within traditional programs. The student selecting the curriculum of general studies may structure a program providing a sequence and combination of courses reflecting either specialized or broad patterns of educational experience, depending upon his preference. (p. 88)

With the assistance of the dean, students would develop a plan of study that allowed them to choose two or more subject areas. They would, first, complete all of the general education requirements in their first two years; during the last two years of study, students would focus on the areas that they had chosen. They would need 128 credit hours total to complete the general studies degree.

Demographics

The external factors affected the student demographics of colleges and universities, which is a reason why alternative degree programs were created so quickly during this time period. For one, the eighteen year old, full-time traditional student numbers began to decline. In fact, “[i]n the early 1970’s, nontraditional programs were developed for adults who wanted to complete a college education but had difficulty fitting the schedule of the traditional college programs....The development of alternative types of academic programs on campuses of all sizes and types has encouraged the adult part-time student to return to complete a college degree” (Spanard, 1990, p. 310). Richardson & King (1998) state that since the mid-1970s, universities actively recruited the non-traditional student; however, institutions did not provide the necessary resources for them to succeed. Solomon (1991) also noted that it was not until 1987 that students

whose ages were over 35 were reported. The data had been collected but not “deemed important enough to publish” (p. 4). Solomon (1991) further reports that in the fall of 1970, the total number of older students enrolled in institutions of higher education was 8581 with 1074 between the ages of 25-29, 487 between the ages of 30-34, and 823 aged 35 and older. In the fall of 1975, there were 11,185 students enrolled with 1774 between the ages of 25-29, 967 between the ages of 30-34, and 823 aged 35 and older. The data were retrieved from the *Digest of Educational Statistics* (p. 4).

Another important demographic to consider is the time to degree completion. During the last century, the one relatively constant statistic was that 55% of entering students either did not complete their degree in four years or they completed their degree later after some absence (as cited in Spanard, 1990). The diversity of the student population during the 1960s and 1970s was unprecedented, and most likely half of those students changed from their original degree plans (Spanard, 1990).

The demographics of the student population of the LSU Shreveport general studies program reflected this rising change in the make-up of student bodies across the country. The four-year bachelor’s degree was not offered until 1973; therefore, the first data collected on these students were not submitted until 1977, with the first graduating class. The dean of the college submitted a table to the vice-chancellor/provost of the university detailing the following student demographics: age, hours earned at LSU Shreveport, hours transferred to LSU Shreveport, curricula changes, universities attended, years to complete degree, LSU Shreveport grade point average, and overall grade point average.

Table 1

General Studies Graduates May 1977

| Age | Hrs at LSUS | Hrs Transferred | Curricula Changes | Universities Attended | Yrs to Complete Degree | LSUS GPA | Overall GPA |
|-----|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| 41 | 44 | 118 | 4 | 3 | 23 | 3.25 | 3.20 |
| 38 | 36 | 113 | 2 | 4 | 20 | 3.66 | 2.89 |
| 28 | 30 | 112 | 3 | 5 | 10 | 3.60 | 3.00 |
| 45 | 104 | 32 | 3 | 4 | 17 | 3.32 | 3.15 |
| 52 | 66 | 70 | 2 | 7 | 35 | 3.27 | 3.04 |
| 40 | 71 | 57 | 2 | 4 | 22 | 3.70 | 3.08 |
| 54 | 35 | 94 | 2 | 5 | 26 | 3.08 | 3.42 |
| 22 | 116 | 15 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3.24 | 3.31 |
| 38 | 68 | 74 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 2.80 | 3.13 |
| 49 | 48 | 68 | 4 | 3 | 30 | 2.33 | 2.26 |
| 24 | 128 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 3.01 | 3.01 |
| 26 | 132 | 9 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 3.00 | 2.94 |
| 28 | 50 | 81 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 2.05 | 2.08 |
| 21 | 128 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 2.28 | 2.28 |
| 47 | 45 | 84 | 3 | 3 | 29 | 3.64 | 3.38 |
| 23 | 59 | 72 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 2.62 | 2.58 |
| 22 | 128 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 8 | 3.75 | 3.75 |
| 24 | 65 | 69 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 3.14 | 2.38 |
| 23 | 131 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 2.72 | 2.72 |
| 30 | 33 | 111 | 4 | 2 | 12 | 3.36 | 2.47 |

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued).

| Age | Hrs at LSUS | Hrs Transferred | Curricula Changes | Universities Attended | Yrs to Complete Degree | LSUS GPA | Overall GPA |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|
| 44 | 90 | 41 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 2.32 | 2.39 |
| 24 | 30 | 143 | 2 | 2 | 2 nd degree | 2.32 | 2.34 |
| 22 | 67 | 61 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3.80 | 3.57 |
| 37 | 45 | 84 | 2 | 3 | 19 | 2.43 | 2.00 |
| 23 | 129 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 2.98 | 2.98 |
| 61 | 48 | 90 | 2 | 3 | 42 | 2.50 | 2.22 |
| 22 | 128 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3.71 | 3.71 |
| 19 | 103 | 27 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2.13 | 2.28 |
| 24 | 130 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 2.26 | 2.29 |
| 42 | 89 | 40 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 2.11 | 2.13 |
| 42 | 114 | 15 | 2 | 2 | 11 | 2.17 | 2.21 |
| 48 | 36 | 92 | 2 | 4 | 31 | 2.91 | 2.82 |
| 24 | 96 | 32 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 2.97 | 3.00 |
| 29 | 107 | 21 | 2 | 3 | 11 | 2.60 | 2.52 |
| 22 | 123 | 10 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2.52 | 2.60 |
| 22 | 122 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2.59 | 2.63 |
| 29 | 30 | 117 | 3 | 4 | 11 | 3.30 | 2.08 |
| <u>AVERAGES</u> | | | | | | | |
| 33 | 81 | 53 | 2.73 | 2.78 | 12.86 | 2.90 | 2.75 |

Table 1 indicates that the average age of 37 graduates from May 1977 of the general studies program was 33, 12 years above the traditional graduation age of 21. It is also interesting to note that 22 of the graduates are above the age of 25, which is 60% of the total number being non-traditional. The average number of curricula changes was 2.73 and universities attended at 2.78, with some students attending up to five different universities. In his seminal work, Levine (1978) reported that “[t]hirty-four percent of undergraduates had changed colleges at least once, and 29 percent plan[ned] to change before receiving their bachelor’s degree. Among students who ha[d] already changed or transferred, 70 percent ha[d] attended two colleges, 22 percent ha[d] attended three, and 7 percent ha[d] attended four or more (p. 228). The “years to complete degree” category provided some revealing information. The average number of years was 12.86, and when reviewing individual numbers, it is clear that research correctly reports that adult students left college at some point for “personal reasons” or more specifically family, finances, and work obligations that were too enormous to keep up with the demands of schoolwork (Spanard, 1990). For example, student 5 began college at the age of 17 but did not graduate until 35 years later. In fact, 46% of the 37 graduates took 10 years or more to complete their degrees. The demographics of the initial graduating class of the general studies program at LSU Shreveport exemplified the characteristics of the trends across America’s colleges and university degree completion programs.

Period of Change (1977-1987)

First Transformation

It was not until 1980 that any changes were made to the general studies’ degree requirements. Initially, students completed the 39 hours of general education requirements

established by the state, and then they were allowed to structure their electives with a combination of courses that reflected their preferences. The degree requirements in the 1973-1974 academic catalog state that a person enrolled in general studies will graduate if:

1. He meets the general degree requirements of the university
2. He chooses, with the approval of the Dean of the College, and completes, in addition to the core requirement, an area or areas of specialization distributed among two or more subject areas
3. He earns credit for a minimum of 18 of the total 128 semester hours required in courses numbered 300 and above
4. He is registered in the College of General Studies during the entire semester in which he expects to graduate
5. He earns a minimum grade average of 2.0 on all work attempted whether in the LSU system or elsewhere (p. 88)

Therefore, the student and the dean had the control to select what areas best fit each person.

Course combinations were decided as the student developed interests in certain subjects or if the student had a specialized need to fulfill that would not be suitable for a traditional discipline.

According to Levine (1978), the term “major” was first used at Johns Hopkins University in the 1877-78 university catalog. The major is the depth component to the undergraduate curriculum in which students take several courses in one, or two or more related fields. The term concentration began at Harvard in 1909 and was used as a synonym to the term major (p. 28-35). In contrast, the terms interdisciplinary, field, and joint majors developed as colleges and universities began to see the need to accommodate the diversity within the student population. Field majors, also referred to as subject-field majors, are concentrations based upon several

different disciplines such as natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and applied sciences (Levine, 1978). Based upon these subject areas, the LSU Shreveport College of General Studies made changes to the curriculum requirements for the general studies degree, perhaps believing that the change would provide more focus and stability to the degree plan.

Instead of students choosing from any areas on campus without any true concentration, the students would have to select at least 18 hours of courses from four groups. According to the 1980-81 LSU Shreveport catalog, these groups were humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and applied sciences. Group I Humanities included: communication, fine arts, languages, literature, philosophy, and music. Group II Social Sciences included: anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. Group III Natural Sciences included: agriculture, astronomy, biological sciences, chemistry, mathematics, and physical sciences. Group IV Applied Sciences included: accounting, business administration, computer science, criminal justice, economics, finance, and education. One other noteworthy change to requirements was that students would need to earn a minimum of 24 hours in courses numbered 300 (junior level) or above (p. 102-103). These were minor changes because of variations in terminology, not necessarily because of a need for program revision. In 1983, however, the Louisiana Board of Regents began a statewide review of general studies' curriculums. The Statewide Review Committee and the Northern Region Review Team assessed the curricula and requirements at all colleges and universities in Louisiana in an effort to provide some commonality among the various program and stabilize administrative requirements. Figure 1 details the suggested requirements for all general studies programs in the state.

REQUIREMENTS FOR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS IN GENERAL STUDIES

1. All four-year programs in General Studies shall be titled Bachelor of General Studies; all two-year programs shall be titled Associate of General Studies.
2. Only the student who has been formally admitted to a General Studies program shall be classified as a General Studies student.
3. Admission to General Studies programs shall be based on clearly articulated academic criteria.
4. The general education requirements for General Studies students shall consist of the core requirements of each respective institution.
5. The curriculum for each General Studies program shall be truly multidisciplinary. Each bachelor's program shall require 36 credit-hours of enrichment electives, consisting of 12 credit-hours from each of 3 broad Enrichment Blocks (such as Arts, Humanities, Natural Sciences, Applied Sciences, Behavioral Sciences, Business, etc.) Each associate program shall require 18 credit-hours of enrichment electives, consisting of 6 credit-hours from each of 3 Enrichment Blocks.
6. Each bachelor's program shall require at least 24 credit-hours in an interdisciplinary area of concentration which is organized as a thematic entity. We strongly recommend that each institution require a G.P.A. of 2.5 for coursework taken in the area of concentration. The Board of Regents notes with approval that 3 universities have already established the 2.5 G.P.A., while 2 other universities are considering the establishment of this requirement.
7. Each bachelor's program in General Studies shall require at least 45 credit-hours at the junior-senior levels. At least 15 of these credit-hours shall be required at the senior level.
8. The Board of Regents strongly recommends that each institution consider the requirement of a 2.25 G.P.A. for the upper division credit-hours of 45 and above. The Committee notes with approval that 3 institutions do not anticipate any difficulty with this requirement. Two other universities are considering the establishment of this requirement.
9. The residence requirement for students in General Studies shall be the same as for other students at the university.
10. General Studies students shall have a distinctive administrative base.

*These Requirements shall be implemented no later than the fall of 1984.

Requirements for Undergraduate Programs
in General Studies
Page Two

11. Each General Studies program shall have a stable financial base.
12. Each General Studies program shall have a faculty advisory committee. Off campus units, such as those at military bases, shall have a separate faculty advisory committee.
13. Each General Studies program shall place a high priority on the quality of advisement. Diverse and competent faculty, from a wide variety of disciplines, shall assist in advisement. Each program shall ensure proper preparation and meaningful interaction for faculty involved in advisement.
14. Each affected institution shall prepare a brochure describing its General Studies program. Each institution shall transmit a copy of this brochure and other relevant descriptive materials to the Board of Regents by December, 1984.
15. A statewide forum in General Studies to promote the interchange of ideas and materials shall be organized. The Board of Regents shall serve as a catalyst by arranging the initial meeting of General Studies educators in the Board of Regents' Conference Room on January 30, 1984, starting at 10:00 a.m. Each institution is expected to send one or two representatives to this meeting. Names of the representatives from each institution who will attend this meeting shall be submitted to the Commissioner of Higher Education by January 16, 1984.

Figure 1. 1983 Louisianan Statewide Review Committee report on general studies.

After reviewing all of the recommendations of the Statewide Review Committee, the Dean of the College of General Studies, along with the General Studies Faculty Council, provided a written response shown in Figure 2.

LSU IN SHREVEPORT
RESPONSES TO THE REPORT OF THE
STATEWIDE REVIEW COMMITTEE IN GENERAL STUDIES
SEPTEMBER 15, 1983
Dr. Vincent J. Marsala, Dean

LSUS is pleased to respond to the Report of the Statewide Review Committee in General Studies. We at the University feel that the report is a much deserved "pat on the back" for faculty members who have worked diligently to provide a viable degree program that meets the needs of many of our citizens who otherwise would not have the opportunity to pursue a baccalaureate degree program.

LSUS agrees on the necessity for a uniform designation for the General Studies degree. We recommend that all such programs in Louisiana be designated Bachelor of General Studies.

Responses to General Recommendations:

1. LSUS agrees that General Studies students should be only those students pursuing a degree in General Studies. The University is taking immediate action to classify as General Studies students only those students who have been formally admitted to the General Studies degree program.
2. LSUS agrees that admission to the General Studies program must involve formal advising and screening of students before they are admitted to the BGS program. At LSUS, admissions to the BGS program is determined by the Dean of the College of General Studies and the General Studies faculty advisors.
3. LSUS agrees that General Education Requirements be met by all General Studies students. The BGS student at LSUS is required to complete the general core requirement (39 hours) that is required of all LSUS graduates. In addition the BGS graduate at LSUS must complete 32 hours in one or more of the major groups (Enrichment Electives) of Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, or Applied Sciences.
4. LSUS presently requires two areas of interest (18 hours each) totaling 36 hours. The faculty is reviewing the recommendation of reducing this to a single area of concentration of 24 hours.
5. The LSUS General Studies Faculty Council believes that the recommendation of 45 hours in upper division courses is not compatible with the present course numbering system in some areas at LSUS. The faculty does recommend an immediate increase from 24 to 36 hours of upper division courses.
6. LSUS agrees that a minimum grade point average of 2.0 be required on upper division courses.

7. At LSUS General Studies students do have the same residency requirements as students in the other academic colleges.
8. We strongly agree with this recommendation that General Studies should have a distinct administrative base. At LSUS General Studies does have its own operational base and definite lines of administrative authority--the College of General Studies. The College is recognized as an academic administrative unit, and the Dean of General Studies is a member of the Deans' Council and the Administrative Council.
9. The College of General Studies does have a stable financial base.
10. LSUS strongly agrees that every General Studies program have a Faculty Advisory Committee. The College of General Studies at LSUS does have a General Studies Faculty Council. This Council, representing all academic colleges, advises the Dean and recommends the candidates for degrees. Faculty members are appointed by the Chancellor.
11. LSUS agrees strongly that "the success of a General Studies program stands and falls with advisement." Therefore, the Dean of General Studies with cooperation from the other academic deans selects highly motivated, competent faculty to act as advisors to General Studies students. As the General Studies degree is highly individualized, faculty advisors are selected from a variety of disciplines including English, History, Computer Science, Criminal Justice, Communications, Psychology, Education, and Business Administration. Also, at LSUS five of these advisors serve on the General Studies Faculty Advisory Council.
12. General Studies faculty advisors understand the importance of their role in advising non-traditional students and students with diverse educational goals. LSUS will explore ways to provide positive incentives for faculty advising in General Studies.
13. The College of General Studies recognizes the need and agrees with the recommendation to provide training for advisors. This will be accomplished through workshops which will address the needs of non-traditional students.
14. LSUS presently has a brochure describing the General Studies program. However, it is out of date and will be revised for wide distribution throughout the community.
15. LSUS supports the need for a statewide organization and conference on General Studies. The College of General Studies and LSUS would be pleased to host and plan such a conference.

Figure 2. Dean of General Studies' responses to Statewide Review Committee.

The Dean of General Studies submitted Change of Curricula paperwork in October of 1983 to reflect many of the proposed changes. According to the documents, the degree requirements included completing 24 hours in an area of concentration such as Humanities or Social Sciences. Students would then choose 36 hours of enrichment electives that reflected a multi-disciplinary interest and supported or enhanced the student's area of concentration. All students would also be required to complete a minimum of 45 hours of upper-level (junior/senior) courses. The 1984-85 LSU Shreveport catalog does not show that the 2.0 grade point average requirement on all upper division courses was ever instituted. However, the institutional grade point averages of 2.0 did apply, and the curricula changes submitted by the dean were implemented in the new catalog.

Besides bringing some uniformity to the degrees across the state, the recommendations also revealed the importance of academic advising, especially for the non-traditional student. According to Levine (1978), advising is the process of counseling students or potential students on their chosen curriculum. Academic, vocational and career, personal, and special group are the four different types of advising. Although advising has been a part of the American college system since its beginnings, it was not until the late 1820's at Kenyon College where faculty created an actual system of advising. However, the most significant changes with widespread acceptance occurred in 1878 at Johns Hopkins University in large part because of the diversification of the student body and the increase in the number of subjects being taught in colleges and universities (p. 134). Faculty should be involved with academic advising because it is

...concerned with the intellectual or cognitive components of the curriculum such as course selection, prerequisites, major cognates, requirements, and student performance

and progress....Major advising is usually the responsibility of the academic departments, of faculty groupings that offer interdisciplinary or non-disciplinary majors, or for student-centered majors, of an adviser or advisory committee chosen by the student. (Levine, 1978, p. 136)

Because of the “open-ended” nature of the general studies degree, it was and continues to be of great importance to have dependable and knowledgeable academic advisors readily available. Initially, the dean of the college was the advisor for all of the students enrolled in the general studies program; however, a plan was implemented to select and train advisors from disciplines across campus to have a diverse faculty work with such a varied population of students.

Second Transformation

The late 1980s saw a different, unexpected change, not for the GS program but for the administration of the College of General Studies. A new university administration brought forth a new perspective of how degree programs should be administered on campus. In 1986, the new Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Wilfred Guerin, decided to eliminate the College of General Studies, placing the administrative duties of the general studies program under the College of Liberal Arts. The now former Dean of General Studies became the Dean of Continuing Education, with general studies’ students now reporting directly to the Dean of Liberal Arts. Dr. Guerin responded to the question as to why the decision was made to eliminate the College of General Studies:

First, I would approach this question from a position that might almost be called theoretical. For me, a first principle is that a degree is offered by a faculty with a scholarly foundation in the area of the degree. This faculty ideally has a consensus as to

what constitutes the core matter of the content field. This faculty is charged with development of and enforcement of standards for that content. To this theoretical approach....There should be, ideally, a correlation between the integrity of the faculty granting the degree and the integrity of the degree itself. What we had in the 1980s was a “college” that was in a sense described above not a college. There was a committee of faculty members from other colleges, the members of which shared some duties or responsibilities akin to those of a faculty, including advising students. In my judgment, this situation did not lend itself to a sense of unified purpose and direction....The students in this unit sometimes were not well self-directed, and were enrolled there because they did not know what they wanted. Now, that situation is not always bad, provided there is close and ample advising of the student, and close attention to the student’s pursuing necessary core subjects or mandated general education that would be appropriate and necessary regardless of what the student might later choose as a major. (W. Guerin, personal communication, February 24, 2010)

This theoretical response to the general studies degree program exemplified the prevailing thoughts of the time that many scholars held about degrees that did not follow the prescribed “discipline” format. As reported in Robles (1998), the 1980s was a period of reform for most colleges and universities. There were several reports such as *A Nation at Risk; To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education*; and *Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community*, which all reported on the quality of higher education (p. 27). There existed an “impetus for yet another shift in higher education toward a common core curriculum and against what was perceived to be excessive specialization promoted by overly autonomous academic departments to the detriment of liberal

learning....Whereas the 1960s and 1970s had been concerned with access of underrepresented constituencies in academe, the 1980s could be characterized by concerns over quality, a characteristic response of academe to periods of ‘loosened’ standards” (as cited in Robles, 1998). The dismantling of the College of General Studies was a reflection of the belief that the quality of the program was not on par with the quality of other more traditional disciplines.

Dr. Guerin also provided some interesting perspective on the belief that the program was lacking in quality:

There was sentiment among some that the degree granted in this unit was less demanding. In one instance while I was chair of English, a staff member of the Board of Regents was on campus to study programs, apparently in this instance the degree in general studies. Department chairs in small groups met with this official. I heard one chair argue for keeping the degree for those students who were majoring in a challenging major but not succeeding; the chair said that such a student would be advised into the general studies program. (W. Guerin, personal communication, February 24, 2010)

Placing the general studies program under the purview of the College of Liberal Arts was an attempt to provide the program with more visible integrity and possibly structural integrity. However in Erickson & Winburne’s (1972) research, they sent questionnaires to 34 institutions that administered general studies or interdisciplinary programs in order to compile a profile of the general studies’ student across the country. The researchers concluded that general studies programs are not inferior: “Students choosing the broadly-based oriented degree are highly creative, intellectual and perhaps unconventional, interested in the humanities and social sciences. They are usually highly motivated self-starters, serious and demonstrating a wide range of interests” (p. 24). Even though there were external and internal changes to the curricula

and to the administration of the program, these changes did not affect the demographics of the students entering and graduating with a degree in general studies as shown in Table 2. For Table 2 and any subsequent demographic tables, years to complete degree refers to the number of years from the time the individual entered LSU Shreveport until the student earned the GS degree. Because of the inconsistency in this demographic from the original demographic table from archives, employing these parameters provides a more consistent measure of the student profile.

Table 2

General Studies Graduates May 1987

| Age | Hrs at LSUS | Hrs Transferred | Curricula Changes | Universities Attended | Yrs to Complete Degree | LSUS GPA | Overall GPA |
|-----|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|
| 33 | 131 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 2.19 | 2.19 |
| 25 | 110 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 3.13 | 3.13 |
| 21 | 104 | 81 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2.14 | 2.45 |
| 26 | 54 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| 23 | 135 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 2.5 | 2.5 |
| 28 | 104 | 67 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2.69 | 3.12 |
| 22 | 125 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 2.64 | 2.64 |
| 25 | 64 | 75.5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2.62 | 2.09 |
| 23 | 59 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2.61 | 2.61 |
| 23 | 98 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 3.44 | 3.44 |
| 26 | 123 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 2.17 | 2.17 |
| 36 | 51 | 89 | 1 | 2 | 14 | 3.33 | 2.27 |
| 28 | 83 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 9 | 2.87 | 2.87 |
| 24 | 84 | 52 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2.37 | 2.29 |
| 32 | 105 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 3.03 | 3.03 |
| 22 | 132 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 2.54 | 2.54 |
| 25 | 54 | 87.59 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3.27 | 2.89 |
| 25 | 55 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2.1 | 2.1 |
| 34 | 69 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 2.95 | 2.95 |
| 60 | 106 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 10 | 2.7 | 2.7 |

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued).

| Age | Hrs at LSUS | Hrs Transferred | Curricula Changes | Universities Attended | Yrs to Complete Degree | LSUS GPA | Overall GPA |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|
| 40 | 122 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 10 | 2.73 | 2.74 |
| <u>AVERAGES</u> | | | | | | | |
| 29 | 94 | 22 | 1.19 | 0.62 | 5.7 | 2.68 | 2.62 |

“Years to Complete Degree” and “Universities Attended” did drop significantly over the ten year period; however, the “average age” remained high at 29, which is still 8 years above the typical graduation age. Only 7 out of the 21 students had an age of 24 or below. The demand for the alternative degree program did seem to waver with the lower number of graduates recorded; on the other hand, it is most likely because of more favorable economic conditions and not because of reforms being made by the university.

Period of Stability (1987-1997)

Reassessment of Guidelines

As the preceding decade was a time of reform, the years following did not reveal any adverse effects to the changes implemented. In fact, many theorists rejected the belief that there existed a “quality control” problem within the curricula of programs:

Alternative theorists challenged fundamental assumptions of traditional curricular theory by conceiving of knowledge not as a common body of knowledge to which all students should be introduced, but as a set of discourses governed by ideological conflicts of class, race and gender....The alternative theorists assumption was that how an institution arranges components of the curriculum commits the institution to philosophical and

political choices, whether recognized or not, i.e., what students do and do not have the opportunity to learn and what is and what is not taught. (as cited in Robles, 1998)

Therefore, the focus of the General Studies Advisory Committee was on improving the curriculum of the program, but not necessarily focusing on the needs of the student. The purpose of the program in the 1987-88 catalog shows a more narrow focus than in previous catalogs:

The bachelor of general studies is a non-specialized degree program in which the student pursues an area of concentration in one of four broad subject matter groups, not a departmental major. The potential BGS student must assume responsibility for developing a personalized program of study that reflects a coherent interdisciplinary goal. This flexible and individual program of study may be a meaningful and appropriate alternative for mature adults whose educational needs are not met by existing curricula. The flexibility of the program's personalized approach enables the student, with faculty advisement, to develop a program that is meaningful and appropriate. (p. 138)

This statement reveals the importance of choosing an area of concentration and the higher level of responsibility placed upon the student to develop a coherent and cohesive plan of study as before. The most notable aspects of this statement, however, are that it does not use the terms "non-traditional" or "working adult." Instead, the term "mature adult" is used to identify the program's clientele. However, the program is identified as a "nonspecialized" degree, still signifying that the prevailing belief is that the general studies degree must be distinguished from traditional disciplines. The perception is that students completing this program will not have a strong knowledge base in any particular area; therefore, earning this degree somehow places the individual at a disadvantage. However, several scholars disagree with this presumption. "Birnbbaum charges that specialization ultimately leads to trained capacity in one connection but

‘trained incapacity’ in another” (as cited in Robles, 1998). “Also questionable is the notion that expertise in a discipline automatically qualifies one to teach it (Robles, 1998). ‘No one has yet explained why the minute investigations of the modern specialist constitute him at the same time the best teacher of young students’” (as cited in Robles, 1998). Therefore, it appeared that any changes made to the program were still being based on the belief that the general studies degree curriculum needed to mirror the pattern of more traditional degree plans.

So, two years later in September of 1990, Courses and Curricula paperwork was submitted listing three changes to the general studies curriculum, bringing the degree requirements into better compliance with the Board of Regents Guidelines submitted by the Statewide Review Committee in 1983, while also providing the degree with an outward appearance more like that of a traditional degree plan. The requirements were changed so that students needed to earn 20 hours of electives that enriched and supported the area of concentration. Students also needed to complete 33 more hours of electives; however, the electives had to consist of 9 to 12 hours from three of the broad subject area groupings: Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Applied Sciences. The third requirement change stated that students needed to complete 45 hours of courses numbered 300 or higher, with a minimum of 15 hours at the 400 level. Again, the focus appeared to be on the quality of the program, strengthening its requirements to provide integrity to the program, not necessarily focusing on student needs.

Student-Centered Transformation

Moreover, it was in 1990 that focus began to move from the administrating of the degree program to actually ensuring that students received instruction in courses that benefited their particular needs. The General Studies Advisory Committee saw the need for a capstone course

that specially targeted the skills related to a student's chosen area of concentration. According to Newell (1994), it is vital that students have a chance to integrate their coursework to develop a deeper understanding of how the disciplines are interconnected:

The holistic interdisciplinary perspective develops from the integration of reductionist insights from individual disciplines. The integration is accessible to students only if they can get behind the pronouncements of the discipline on the course topic and understand how those insights have been arrived at. Students need to develop some feel for the worldview of each discipline, and ultimately they need some awareness of the key assumptions on which those worldviews are predicated. (p. 44)

Bringing the students together would give them a chance to analyze and research particular topics in their respective areas of concentration. This would provide them the ability to see how disciplines function with and apart from each other, and how they can integrate those disciplines to form integrative views. Newell (1994) also believes that the course must have a thematic thread that created a pattern of understanding; moreover, selected readings would need to focus on this theme and pique the interests of the students. Motivating the students to be active in the learning process would be key to the success of the class. The authors also note that the assignments are crucial to the success of the course. They suggest using journals so that students are able to make reflective comments about their own progress, and that teachers take on the role of guides to foster active discussion within and outside of the classroom. The Advisory Committee developed just such a course in October of 1990 and presented Courses and Curricula paperwork to have the course approved. Figure 3 details the background and rationale for the new course, and Figure 4 is a sample syllabus for the new course.

Background and Rationale:

A faculty committee consisting of Dr. Laurie Morrow, Ms. Patricia Meador, Dr. Stephen Brennan, Dr. Michael Williams, Dr. Fred Hawley, Dr. Anne Torrans, and Dr. Charlene Handford met during the Spring semester of 1990 to design a proposed course for General Studies students that would meet the following needs:

1. Since a General Studies curriculum emphasizes breadth and diversity in the place of a sequenced hierarchy of courses, General Studies students need at least one advanced course that will develop depth of analysis, synthesis, research, writing, and speaking skills related to their area of concentration.

2. General Studies students at present have no opportunity to come together as a group participating in a shared intellectual experience.

3. At present, there is no formal means to assess the General Studies major's ability to conduct research, to think critically, and to produce coherent extended written and oral presentations on topics related to their areas of concentration, as required by SACS.

The faculty committee thus designed a course, which was presented to the campus General Studies Advisory Committee for approval, that would meet these needs.

The goals of the General Studies Senior Seminar are:

1. To provide General Studies students with a shared intellectual experience that will alleviate the sense of academic isolation engendered by their individual academic plans.

2. To develop depth of analysis, synthesis, research, writing, and speaking skills.

3. To verify the students' ability to conduct research, to think critically, and to produce extended essays and oral presentations directly related to their areas of concentration in applied sciences, natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities.

This course will be required of all General Studies majors; at present, the university core and Computer Science 111 are the only courses required in the 128 semester hour General Studies curriculum. The proposed course requirement will thus place no undue restriction on the students' ability to design their curricula with faculty guidance.

A sample syllabus for the course is attached. The pilot offering will be in the Spring of 1991. The course will be monitored carefully and the faculty committee will meet with the instructor to evaluate the initial offering, its strengths and weaknesses, and to suggest means of improvement.

Figure 3. Background and rationale for general studies seminar.

Sample Syllabus

General Studies Seminar

Text: The Shape of this Century: Readings from the Disciplines, eds. Diana Wyllie Rigden and Susan S. Waugh. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1990.

Assignments:

Journal and Class Participation (10% of grade):

Each 1-page journal entry should be a thoughtful response to the issues raised in the "Before You Begin Reading" section beneath the headnote to each essay. Journals will be collected 3 times a semester. The journal entries will facilitate preparation for class participation.

Oral Presentation (30% of grade):

In a 10-minute speech, a student may (1) rebut an argument offered in one of our readings; (2) rebut the arguments made in a speech by another student; or (3) present the main lines of argument he/she expects to undertake in the seminar paper. The speech should give evidence of research in its contents and through the bibliography and handout accompanying it; the student will not read a paper. Following each speech will be a 5-minute question and answer period.

Paper (30% of grade):

This 8-10 page paper should discuss a topic using the insights and/or techniques of one discipline to enlighten the reader about another area. This isn't the sort of "research paper" in which one compiles others' ideas; rather, primary and secondary sources are to be used only to support or clarify arguments. This paper is designed to encourage innovative, independent thinking.

Someone whose concentration is in humanities, for example, might examine Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" from the perspective of a sociologist; the student with a social sciences emphasis could consider the psychological appeal of Bauhaus architecture; someone interested in applied sciences could consider ethical aspects of some management issue.

Examinations (30% of grade):

A minimum of two examinations consisting of two in-class essays of 750-1000 words. Bring your essay anthology to the exams, as you may wish to consult it.

[A possible essay question: Which three essays from our text would you like every student with a concentration in your field to read? Write a persuasive argument to support your choices.]

Figure 4. Sample syllabus GS 490: general studies' senior seminar.

Both the rationale and the syllabus reflected the theories of interdisciplinary course development. General Studies' students needed a shared intellectual experience that allowed them to feel that their academic goals and achievements were valued just as much as the traditional student. The course itself was all inclusive, requiring journals, oral presentations, research papers, and a final examination. It was important that the assignments took the insights of one discipline to explain another. The text for the course provided readings from all the disciplines, which as mentioned earlier is necessary to pique the interests of all students. The course was approved and became a requirement of the program for the 1991-92 academic year. The catalog description follows:

GS 490 Senior Seminar Prerequisite: Completion of 90 hours of course work toward the general studies degree. An interdisciplinary course based on readings from the disciplines of applied science, humanities, natural science, and social science, designed to provide students with an opportunity to use skills in research, analytical thinking, writing, and oral communication. (p. 236)

Discipline Recognition

Until 1992, all students under the general studies program reported to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, and to be admitted into the program, students had to submit a written application to the dean, which had to demonstrate that the student's educational goals could not be met through a traditional degree program. Entrance to the program required approval of the dean. At the start of the 1992-93 academic year, however, three changes had been made. First, the additional admissions process was eliminated. No longer would students need to provide a rationale for entering the program. The second most significant change was the addition of a Director of General Studies. The person in this role would take on the administrative and

advisory duties of the program that were previously held by the dean. Newell (1994) noted that in most institutions of higher education, “these [interdisciplinary] programs continue[d] to ‘float’ on the white space of administrative charts, often reporting only intermittently to the dean of the college” (pg. 54). This was the case with the leadership of the program at LSU Shreveport. Although the dean had an appointed coordinator of the program, this individual did not make curriculum decisions or lead the advisory council. These duties remained with the dean. In 1992, Dean Ann McLaurin requested and garnered approval for a new position, Director of General Studies. The position did not include a salary increase or stipend, but there would be a one-course download for the individual in the position. The submitted position request also contained the new job description for the director, shown in Figure 5.

Job Description for Director of General Studies

The Director of General Studies will be responsible for the following:

- maintaining and keeping current all records of General Studies students;
- working up the initial curriculum sheets for all potential incoming General Studies students;
- assigning all General Studies students to an appropriate advisor;
- obtaining, training, and supervising the General Studies advisers from the various colleges;
- completing graduation check-outs for all General Studies students;
- working each registration period;
- preparing publicity materials and brochures for the program;
- marketing the program to the community;
- chairing the General Studies Advisory Committee;
- assuming responsibility for the teaching of General Studies 490;
- representing LSUS at state and national meetings of the Association for General and Liberal Studies.

Figure 5. New job description for director of general studies.

One of the most important aspects of the new position was the transference of control of the program from the dean, whose responsibilities were tied to all programs, to one individual who would focus on the general studies program itself. A second key concept was that the director would be responsible for training advisors. Casey (1994) contends that interdisciplinary leaders must have the ability to form and work through participative teams, stimulating the group members, developing ownership, and managing any problems that may occur.

A third, essential, change implemented by the new director was in the language used to describe the program:

The bachelor of general studies is an interdisciplinary program allowing students to select an area of concentration, not a departmental major, in one of four broad subject-matter groups: Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Applied Sciences. (p. 150)

The term “nonspecialized” was finally removed from the descriptive language, giving credence to the philosophy that the degree had the same value as traditional degree programs.

Moreover, none of the changes made to the program or to the administration had an adverse effect on the demographics of students enrolled in the program. In fact, as Table 4 shows, the demographics appeared to have remained constant by the end of the ten-year period.

Table 3

General Studies Graduates May 1997

| Age | Hrs at LSUS | Hrs Transferred | Curricula Changes | Universities Attended | Yrs to Complete Degree | LSUS GPA | Overall GPA |
|-----|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|
| 27 | 104 | 67 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 2.31 | 2.31 |
| 42 | 60 | 124 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2.01 | 2.00 |
| 27 | 32 | 107 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 2.54 | 2.06 |
| 49 | 69 | 108 | 3 | 2 | 17 | 2.47 | 2.00 |
| 23 | 66 | 89 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 3.04 | 2.86 |
| 45 | 66 | 64 | 3 | 1 | 13 | 3.2 | 3.42 |
| 24 | 128 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 6 | 3.07 | 3.07 |
| 24 | 123 | 14 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 2.76 | 2.8 |
| 29 | 57 | 77 | 2 | 0 | 6 | 3.36 | 2.49 |
| 46 | 79 | 76 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 2.86 | 2.33 |
| 49 | 78 | 90 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 2.00 | 2.55 |
| 27 | 66 | 72 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 3.12 | 3.12 |
| 43 | 111 | 26 | 3 | 1 | 24 | 2.55 | 2.37 |
| 33 | 133 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 15 | 2.8 | 2.8 |
| 44 | 103 | 69 | 2 | 2 | 11 | 2.92 | 2.51 |
| 39 | 82 | 54 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 3.7 | 3.52 |
| 25 | 63 | 72 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 2.7 | 2.48 |
| 24 | 81 | 50 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 2.76 | 2.68 |
| 35 | 106 | 30 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 3.49 | 3.68 |

(table continues)

Table 3 (continued).

| Age | Hrs at LSUS | Hrs Transferred | Curricula Changes | Universities Attended | Yrs to Complete Degree | LSUS GPA | Overall GPA |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|
| 24 | 66 | 91 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3.03 | 2.98 |
| 47 | 69 | 88 | 1 | 4 | 16 | 2.2 | 2.68 |
| 24 | 91 | 50 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2.36 | 2.1 |
| <u>AVERAGES</u> | | | | | | | |
| 34 | 86 | 64 | 1.64 | 2.09 | 7.7 | 2.78 | 2.67 |

The average age of the students remained high at 34 years old, 12 years higher than the normal graduation age range of 21-22. “Years to complete degree” was a little higher during this ten-year frame at 7.7, but there are several with very high numbers taking as many as 24, 17, and 16 years to complete the degree. Large differences do not exist among the demographics of the graduating classes of the program from the 1977 to 1997 periods.

The New Millennium (1997-2007)

Unexpected Realities

By 1997, the main issues in the debate on interdisciplinary education were “issue[s] of institutional mission and an issue of balance between generalized and specialized education. The debates are largely the result of external influences such as social turbulence related to economic developments; technological developments (industrial and information revolutions); international economic competition; and internal or domestic conflicts” (Robles, 1998, p. 29). During this period, the focus shifted from internal development of academic programs to higher education responding to rising external pressures, which can be characterized by one word—accountability:

Legislators and their constituents are asking what is the “value added” from a college education and what are the outcomes that they can expect from a baccalaureate? The most obvious pressures are tightening public budgets. “What are we getting for our money?” is always a question that taxpayers and their representatives ask, but they ask it with a special edge when budgets are being cut. Substantial fiscal shortfalls are forcing all institutions and their funders to respond to issues of accountability far more direct and clearly in the 1990s than in preceding decades, and institutions of higher education are not exempt. (Ehrlich, 1997)

All stakeholders, especially those whose monies were going toward higher education, wanted more accountability or proof of measures of success. These demands for accountability presumably led to a higher demand for assessment of academic programs and student success, which in turn led to more pressure on faculty success. Americans wanted to see concrete results such as graduates obtaining jobs and graduates becoming “good” citizens. According to Orill (1997), the internal pressures for reform and the external pressure of accountability gave rise and power to the assessment movement which had subsided in the 1970s. Capstone experiences for seniors and examinations in concentrations began to resurface in the 1990s.

Along with accountability, economic forces led to a shift in philosophical beliefs about what students needed to learn. As mentioned, state funds were shrinking, and institutions of higher education were not exempt from receiving cuts in their budgets. Institutions were forced to look for alternative revenue sources, and many turned to corporations to bridge the gap in their budgets. However, this new source of funds brought with it unwritten stipulations. Academic programs began to make changes to their curricula based on the needs of their donors. In their article “The Commercialization of Higher Education,” Brown and Clignet (2000) clearly saw

this as a detriment to higher education: “As a result, American educational relations have become disheartened and corrupt, more a subject of the labor market and economical values than an autonomous creative force in society” (p. 18). On the other hand, responding to the labor market was not necessarily a damaging practice as preparing students to be productive in the workforce is an inherent philosophical and realistic goal that many institutions aspire to achieve.

Implications for General Studies

The general studies program was not shielded from the internal or external forces that were taking place during this period. Accountability and market forces prompted the director of the program to make changes believed to be appropriate responses to growing concerns of quality. Courses and Curricula paperwork dated April 1998 show the request to change the number of hours required in the area of concentration chosen by students. Instead of 24 hours, students would need to complete 33 hours, stipulating that the extra nine hours be upper-level credit. As there was no examination to test the knowledge in such broad areas of concentration, this would be an attempt to ensure that students received some specific discipline knowledge, focusing more on individual learning. The number of electives required would be decreased to accommodate this change and keep the total number of credit hours required at 128. The changes were approved and implemented by the Fall 1999 semester.

A new addition to the program was the inclusion of career tracks. A revised copy of the 1998 General Studies’ Curriculum Guide shows four proposed career tracks that were not on previous documents. As stated on the university website, the purpose of the career tracks is to provide students with a varied yet cohesive plan that will benefit them professionally as well as members of the larger community. The career tracks listed on the curriculum guide are American humanics, public administration, computer science, and international studies. A

common thread of each track is that of combining business with other academic areas.

According to the document, students choosing to complete the American humanics career track would receive certification in that area. The additions of these career tracks are a reflection of the growing emphasis on tying university degrees directly to the labor market. Students would receive at a minimum 21 hours of courses that are “marketable” in the workforce.

Curriculum guides dated 2001-2002, however, document changes to the proposed career tracks of 1998. Instead of public administration, international studies, and computer science, the tracks listed on the approved degree plan are business information systems, health care services, and religious studies. The only track from the original proposal was the American humanics certification. Two of the new tracks, business information systems and health care services, follow the original proposals intended purpose of combining business courses with another related field to provide a marketable, experience-based background. The religious studies track does require students to take an introductory management course; however, it appears to be more focused on providing students with a philosophical and historical knowledge base. The four tracks currently listed on the approved curriculum guide for general studies are American humanics, health care services, business information systems, and religious studies.

Before beginning the new millennium, more changes were forthcoming for the general studies program. In September of 2000, Courses and Curricula Paperwork was submitted to add a specific writing requirement to the curriculum. All general studies’ students had to complete 12 hours of English courses, 6 hours of freshman composition and 6 hours of literature; therefore, the requirement would be that instead of 6 hours of literature, at least 3 hours should be a writing course. The rationale submitted with the paperwork is as follows:

A large percentage of general studies students have transferred from other institutions, and often have received little or no training in fundamental writing and research skills. As a result, many students have difficulty in upper-level courses with a writing and/or research component, including the General Studies 490 Senior Seminar. Requiring general studies students to complete either English 226 (Advanced Composition), English 325 (Technical Writing), or English 326 (Writing in the Humanities) will ensure that they receive instruction in writing and research skills above the freshman level, and will increase their likelihood of succeeding in upper-level courses.

Having these writing skills would be beneficial to students on several levels because it would build upon their writing skills so that they would be able to write effective research projects or essays. Secondly, it would fulfill a labor market need as many employers continually indicate that graduates lack the written and communication skills necessary for the workplace. In fact, in the 2004 Report of The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges: Writing: A Ticket to Work or a Ticket Out, they report that poor writing skills can be a crippling setback to access to professional occupations:

A survey of 120 major American corporations employing nearly 8 million people concludes that in today's workplace writing is a "threshold skill" for hiring and promoting among salaried (i.e., professional) employees. Survey results indicate that writing is a ticket to professional opportunity, while poorly written job applications are a figurative kiss of death. Estimates based on the survey returns reveal that employers spend billions annually correcting writing deficiencies. (p. 3)

Having excellent writing skills empowers the student as they are skills that transcend beyond the classroom.

A second change to the degree requirements followed the addition of the writing requirement. Paperwork also documents the addition of a minimum grade requirement for completion of the General Studies 490 Seminar course and courses in the area of concentration. As mentioned earlier, the seminar class was devised to give students in the program a capstone course, one that brought all the students together to have a shared learning experience. The area of concentration comprised of courses selected from the four different enrichment blocks, representing an interdisciplinary and cohesive collection of subjects. As other students on campus were required to have an overall 2.0 grade point average, calculated based on the courses required of the major, the general studies student would now also be required to meet this quantitative measure. Students would also be required to earn a minimum grade of “C” in the seminar course. These quantitative measures are again a reflection of the accountability movement. There must be some outward, visible indication that students are succeeding not only in college, but that they will be successful once they leave the institution.

Administration and Advising

A third alteration occurred in the form of administrative/advising changes. In 1974, the Council of Deans at LSU Shreveport created a General Studies Advisory Council whose purpose was to be an advisory body to the Dean of the College of General Studies. The advisory body consisted of one faculty member from each college and two members of the faculty to serve as advisors. With the elimination of the College of General Studies in 1985, a new advisory committee was established by the fall of 1986. The dean of Liberal Arts, Mary McBride, recommended that the new advisory committee consist of the dean of Liberal Arts, the registrar, the chair from each department in the college, who would also serve as advisors to students, three faculty members, one from each college, and one dean of a college other than Liberal Arts.

The committee would maintain the purpose of advising the dean of the College of Liberal Arts on all aspects of the degree program. In the fall 1986 semester, there were 310 students enrolled in the general studies program. This number was skewed because non-preference and undecided students were included in the calculation. However, they were slowly being removed from the designation as the university revised its classification system. In the spring of 1987, there were 193 students in the program, which more accurately reflected the number of students pursuing the bachelor's degree. It is also important to note that there were only three faculty members assigned to advise such a large number of students.

By 1992, the new director of the program enlisted the assistance of five faculty members. This small group of advisors worked with students in their respective areas of concentration. There was one faculty member who worked with students under the humanities concentration, two for social science students, one for students under natural sciences and one faculty for applied sciences. In fall 1992, there were a total of 94 enrolled GS students, and for the spring 1993 semester, there were 102 students enrolled.

In 1996, the director, Dr. Linda Martin, conducted a study of the structure of the program. The main conclusion from the restructuring proposal determined that the administrative and advising structure of the program was insufficient:

The current general studies structure is barely sufficient to serve the current 130 majors. The Director is available only when not involved in service to students or preparation for the [9]-hour teaching load. All advisers serve general studies secondary to their regular teaching/advising loads. As programs grow, the Director's teaching role will diminish accordingly.

One of the main concerns listed in the proposal included the need for the director to be a full-time faculty member with a 6-hour teaching load. This change would allow the director more time to advise students on an on-going basis, participate in recruiting events, and allocate more time to complete graduation paperwork. According to the proposal, administrative support was lacking in this area as the dean had to make arguments to provide a 3-hour course download for the director. The proposal also highlighted that there was no permanent point-of-contact for students. Student files followed the director from office to office, which were distributed to advisors during registration periods. The program had no identifiable place of operation. The proposal further suggested that the faculty advisory council be continued but the composition of the council should include one faculty member from each college. A fourth suggestion was to hire a full-time counselor/secretary to be a coordinator for the program. With the addition of an academic counselor, students would have consistent academic advising and someone just as knowledgeable and accessible as the director as a resource. The first three of these recommendations were implemented. An office on the second floor of the liberal arts building, across from the dean, was designated for general studies, and it continues to be housed in the same office today. The director was given a 6-hour teaching load instead of 9, and the advisory committee was changed to meet the suggested composition of one faculty member from each college. The only recommendation that did not come to fruition was the addition of an academic counselor to aide with maintaining records and advising students.

By 1998, a new director, Lynn Walford, had 14 faculty members assisting her with advising 190 GS students; however, for an undocumented reason, this ideal scenario did not last. By 2001 when the current director entered the office, there were no advisors that assisted the director with advising duties, and this had been the norm for the prior two years. The number of

students kept increasing, while advising support kept diminishing. Having only one person responsible for advising over 190 students while also maintaining a six-hour teaching load was a heavy burden. The situation was far from ideal and not in-line with the Board of Regents study from 1984:

The success of a general studies program stands and falls with advisement. This conclusion was reached by all three Regional Committees, and the Statewide Review Committee desires to reaffirm it as strongly as we can....A successful general studies program is also one in which the program does not rest too exclusively in the hands of a single person, no matter how dedicated. It seems essential to the Committee to involve in general studies advisement as many faculty as possible from a wide variety of disciplines.

Being the sole advisor to so many students would not allow the director enough time to focus on making personal connections with the students. Advising sessions would have to be strictly informational such as what courses an individual should take and how many hours a student has accumulated. But these types of advising sessions miss a very critical role of the advising process, overlooking the link to student satisfaction. As cited in Carduner's article *Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience Through One-on-One Faculty-Student Advising* (2003), "often the one-to-one relationship between the student and advisor is the only opportunity a student has to build a personal link with the institution"(as cited in Carduner, 2003, p. 5). With the large number of students, the director would not be an effective mentor; instead, he or she would be an administrator, merely herding through the students so that they could select their courses. Carduner (2003) further states that "while initial advising appointments focus primarily on courses and requirements, subsequent sessions can explore long-term goals. In addition to

helping students select courses, faculty advisors can help students select minors, second majors, graduate schools, and study abroad programs”(p. 7).

The number of students enrolled in the program constantly changed over the next few years. Fall enrollment count for 2001 was 192, fall 2002 was 187, fall 2003 was 175, fall 2004 was 244, and fall 2005 was 234. With only one person responsible for so many students, it was not possible to create a culture of advising as Carduner’s (2003) article suggests.

Quality Enhancement Plan

By 2005, LSU Shreveport had been preparing for a visit from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the accreditation body for colleges and universities. One of the main components of the SACS review was that LSU Shreveport needed to have a Quality Enhancement Plan. The plan’s main purpose was that an institution had to develop an ongoing plan of improvement that specifically supported student life and/or learning. The QEP Committee established by the chancellor in 2003 decided that the entire university should focus its resources on enhancing academic advising. The QEP Committee’s report states that “our [LSUS] academic advising has tended to focus on course selection and scheduling.” This type of advising does not create the culture of advising needed to achieve student satisfaction. The report also notes that “most students were not aware that academic advisement could also include discussions about academic performance, their involvement in out-of class experiences, and their academic career goals.” More importantly, the document iterates that because of the flexibility in the general studies program “effective advising is crucial and, in some ways, more challenging to deliver.” Therefore, the committee made several recommendations that began in 2005. All faculty members went through advisor training. Each College determined how their majors would be assigned to advisors. The university created evaluation documents for advisors and

students to be completed after advising sessions. A final part of the plan was the addition of a section on the yearly faculty performance reviews, evaluating advising.

The implications for the general studies program were not realized until fall 2006. During the 2005-2006 academic year, the director of the program was on educational leave; therefore, no administrative changes occurred until his return. Upon returning, the dean of the college expressed his concern for advising general studies students and the lack of assistance for the director, especially with the fall semester seeing an enrollment of 242 students in the program. In a correspondence to the director, the dean stated that “it would be beneficial if we [Liberal Arts] could develop a cadre of advisors who specialized in general studies....If this were to occur...the director would oversee this group of advisors, assign the advisees, perhaps conduct meetings of the advisors to stay current, and to process graduation checkout paperwork. This person [the director] could manage these administrative duties because their advising load would be greatly reduced” (L. Anderson, personal communication, August 2, 2006). Having a group of advisors would bring advising the GS students into the 21st century, where somehow it was lost at the turn of the century. The students in the program would be with the same advisor until graduation. This would allow the student and advisor ample opportunity to have conversations other than about scheduling and program requirements. This would also help foster a culture of advising, where students would hopefully make connections to the university which would in turn create more positive experiences in and outside of the classroom. The new group of advisors would also serve as the General Studies Advisory Committee. Because the advisors would be from various departments in liberal arts, the diversity of faculty involvement would be kept in place.

Since 2001, the director had been creating digital copies of all curriculum forms and creating a database of student records. File folders would not have to travel from office-to-office as student files would be accessible from the school's mainframe. This meant that advisors would have the ability to access student records at any time and place on campus. With no secretarial support for the program, advisors would be able to assist the director in keeping all the student files up-to-date.

General Studies Senior Seminar

With the increased assistance of the cadre of advisors, the director's advising load dropped and allowed for more time to focus on program requirements, one of which being the General Studies Senior Seminar course. As previously mentioned, in 1990 the advisory committee requested and received approval to create the GS 490 seminar course. This course was to provide the students in the program with a "capstone" experience, an avenue to come together as majors to learn from each other's experiences. By 1997, the course was not being taught according to its original intent. The director's teaching load consisted of courses in her own discipline; therefore, she was not able to teach the seminar course developed by the committee. Instead, the course would be cross-listed with already established courses in the College of Liberal Arts. Records from a September 2000 Advisory Committee meeting revealed two problems with this scenario. This first was that the GS 490 course was being used to "ensure that low-enrollment classes 'ma[d]e.'" As long as the coursework for the class required one term paper and an oral presentation, the course could be cross-listed as GS 490. It did not matter if the course was interdisciplinary in nature; therefore, this would not provide the cohesive environment needed for the student who has taken courses from multiple disciplines. The second concern noted was that there were too many offerings of the course, which caused

unnecessary competition. The situation was not ideal, and students were not receiving a true capstone experience.

In 2006, the dean requested that the director develop a new seminar course and to court members of the advisory committee to also develop courses that were interdisciplinary in content. The director requested to have a new course number approved to differentiate the course from others with a similar number. Instead of GS 490, the number for the course changed to GS 491. The director wanted the course to be a capstone experience, so only seniors nearing graduation would be allowed to enroll in the course. The course focused on the interdisciplinary aspects of the degree plan, allowing students to integrate their learning experiences with the completion of a final project, including a paper and presentation. The syllabus mirrored the original course syllabus from 1990, upholding the rationale that general studies students needed some culminating reinforcement that their studies were all interrelated whether or not they were from different disciplines. The course was placed on the fall 2008 schedule, and the syllabus is reproduced in Figure 6.

Lonnie McCray, Instructor

GS 491 Senior Seminar

Fall 2008

Director General Studies

Office # 230 Office Phone # 318-797-5256

Office Hours: MWF 10am to 11am and 2pm to 3pm

TTH 1:30 pm to 3:30 and by appointment

Catalog Description: Prerequisite: Completion of 90 hours of coursework toward the General Studies degree. An interdisciplinary course based on readings from the disciplines of applied science, humanities, natural science, and social science, designed to provide students with an opportunity to use skills in research, analytical and critical thinking, writing, and oral communication.

Goals and Objectives:

1. To provide General Studies students with a shared intellectual experience.
2. To develop depth of analysis, synthesis, research, writing, and speaking skills.
3. To verify the students' ability to conduct research, to think critically, and to produce extended essays and oral presentations directly related to their areas of concentration in applied sciences, natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities.

Assignments:

Class Participation (25% of grade)

Because of the nature of a seminar class, your attendance and participation has an important weight in determining your overall semester grade. This class involves discussion, which means you will be expected to come prepared with the reading material for each class period. You are also expected to fully participate in each student presentation giving your attention and respect to the presenter. You will engage in the discussions, raising questions, expressing opinions, or responding to views expressed by others. If you are unprepared for class, uncooperative, or unwilling to participate, your grade will be lowered by at least 2.5 percentage points for each occurrence. You are allowed 3 absences over the course of the semester. On the fourth absence, 2.5 percentage points will be deducted from your participation grade. Another 2.5 will be deducted for each subsequent absence.

Oral Presentation (25% of grade):

Each student will be responsible for one class period. During this time, the student will make a 30 to 45 minute presentation to the class, with time for discussion. The purpose of this assignment is **not** to read a paper. You will choose a topic that falls within your area of concentration. This topic is what you will research and present to the class. You should use all available resources at your disposal to develop your presentation. For example, your concentration is social sciences, and your interest is truly peaked by psychology. In particular, you remember wanting to learn more about Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory. You will do an in-depth study of his theory and then share your

knowledge with us. Perhaps for your presentation, you will have us perform different exercises to determine if we are verbal/linguistic or kinesthetic learners. In other words, the class can be just as involved in your presentation as you are. Following your presentation, there will be a short question and answer period. As a class, we will create a grading rubric for your presentation.

Research Paper (25% of grade):

This will be a 10-15 page paper that supports and expands upon your presentation topic. With the research paper, you will attempt to use the insights and/or techniques of one discipline to enlighten the reader about another area. Primary and secondary sources will be used to support or clarify your arguments. This assignment is designed to encourage innovative, independent thinking.

For example, let's say that your area of concentration is applied sciences and in particular you are interested in Kinesiology and Health Science. You have decided to present on the techniques of certain sports. For your paper, you could examine sports from the perspective of a psychologist. Or, if you are under applied sciences and favor management, you could examine some ethical aspect (humanities) of a management issue. Your presentation and paper can cover the same material.

Annotated Bibliography (5% of grade):

Once the assigned research period has been completed, you should submit to me an annotated bibliography. (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/>) You should have at a minimum 10 entries with summaries. The link will take you to Purdue Online Writing lab which discusses annotated bibliographies.

Journal (10% of grade):

You will keep a journal. After each presentation, you should write a one page journal entry summarizing and analyzing the presentation. Your final journal entry should be a summary/analysis of your own presentation. The journal will be due the week of finals.

Type Focus (5% of grade):

This will be available through the LSUS Career Center. Once completed, you will receive credit.

International Presentation (5% of grade):

You will select a country of interest. You will then perform some research on your chosen country and present your findings to the class. For example, you should look for general information such as languages, historical points of interests, interesting facts, economics, politics, and people. Try to discern any connections the country might have with the US.

Tentative Schedule

August

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Tuesday 26 th | Introduction to course |
| Thursday 28 th | Brainstorming of topics; select presentation date; selection <i>Adam and Eve</i> |

September

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Tuesday 2 nd | Philosophy of Education |
| Thursday 4 th | Philosophy cont. |
| Tuesday 9 th | International Studies |
| Thursday 11 th | Leadership Dr. Ruth Ray, Chair Dept. of Education |
| Tuesday 16 th | Career Development Gina Starnes, Director Career Services LSUS |
| Thursday 18 th | Health and Fitness Jason Thomas, BS, Personal Trainer |
| Tuesday 23 rd | Research |
| Thursday 25 th | Research |
| Tuesday 30 th | Research |

October

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Thursday 2 nd | Research |
| Tuesday 7 th | Research |
| Thursday 9 th | Presentation #1 |
| Tuesday 14 th | Presentation #2 |
| Thursday 16 th | Fall Break |
| Tuesday 21 st | Presentation #3 |
| Thursday 23 rd | Presentation #4 |
| Tuesday 28 th | Presentation #5 |
| Thursday 30 th | Presentation #6 |

November

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Tuesday 4 th | Presentation #7 |
|-------------------------|-----------------|

Figure 6. New GS 491 syllabus for fall 2008 course.

Newell (1994) advocates the importance of a clear syllabus that establishes the nature, goals, objectives, and purposes of the course. He asserts that the syllabus needs to reinforce the subtext that all disciplines will be used in creating a cohesive learning environment. According to the goals and objectives listed on the syllabus, the course would provide a shared intellectual experience whereby students with varying areas of concentration could bring their knowledge of different disciplines together and integrate that knowledge to provide new perspectives.

Another important design concern for the course was the consideration of selected readings to be assigned. Instead of long novels being assigned, which Casey (1994) believes are best avoided, the director established a series of mini-lectures and workshops. To review the philosophy of education, students would be given selections to read such as Genesis, specifically the story of Adam and Eve, Socrates, Aristotle's *Politics*, Plato, Rousseau, and Russell. All of these philosophers were important in the development of education, and their inclusion in the course readings would open up discussions about why people become educated. The readings would "focus on the subtext while directly exploring the more general or abstract issues underlying the course" (Newell, 1994, p.47). For the international component, students would be asked to research other countries and ascertain their connections to the United States. With leadership, the students would be asked to research individuals they believed to be leaders and to discuss the characteristics of those individuals. A guest speaker was scheduled to facilitate the conversation. The career development workshop would be an opportunity for the students to bring in their resumes and any questions they might have had for the director of the career center. And, finally, the students would hear about fitness and wellness from a former student and personal trainer and discuss the importance of overall healthy living.

Students would also be asked to keep a reflective journal that would document how they viewed each presentation, including their own. The main two assignments, the presentation and research paper, would be the culmination of their interdisciplinary experience. The students are asked to combine two elements, one discipline from their area of concentration with a discipline from a different area. So students could take a management issue yet explore the issue through the lens of ethics. The research paper and presentation would reveal the students' written and oral communication abilities. One final aspect that Newell (1994) considers vital to an interdisciplinary course is that of class participation:

Class participation in seminars can usefully be thought of in an interdisciplinary course as an assignment that has some burden of moral obligation. Students familiar only with disciplinary courses need to be informed that their role and hence their responsibilities are different in an interdisciplinary course....The teacher becomes a guide or coach, the students explorers or active players. Since class discussions become group explorations or team efforts, cooperation is valued over competition....When student contributions are seen as valuable as faculty contributions, failure to contribute to class discussion becomes immoral-a matter of taking without giving. (p. 48)

Class participation for the GS 491 course carries the same weight or graded value as the presentation and final paper. Therefore, students would be able to view in the beginning the importance placed on participation. The instructor's purpose would be to facilitate discussion and foster learning from all those involved instead of lecturing on topics. Students would not only hurt themselves by not participating, but they would also hinder the learning environment.

This course, and others created by the advisory committee, would take the place of cross-listing the GS 491 course with established courses in liberal arts that may not allow the students to truly explore the interdisciplinary nature of their own degree program.

Demographics for the New Millennium

According to Donaldson and Townsend (2007), the National Center for Educational Statistics reported that “7.1 million adults age 24 or older constituted 43% of all undergraduates in U.S. institutions of higher education, compared to 5.73 million adult students enrolled a decade earlier (1989-1990)” (p. 27). The traditional aged student, usually defined as between 18 to 22 years of age was shrinking. However, Shugart (2008) contends that even with these large increases, the adult higher education population has never fully materialized and that in fact the same characteristics of the adult learner can now be found in students who are in the 20 to 24 age range:

The effect of the “new traditional student,” who works while schooling, takes a lighter course load, lives away from campus, changes institutions one or more times before attaining a degree, and takes more than four years to complete a bachelor’s degree (or more than two for an associate degree), is clearly visible in the growth of the 20- to 24-year old group. (p. 19)

Shugart (2008) describes these students as “employees who study rather than students who work” (p. 19). Work has become the priority, and education has become a means to an end. In a 2009 correspondence to the Louisiana Board of Regents Finance Committee, the chancellor of LSU Shreveport Dr. Vincent Marsala remarked:

LSUS is now best viewed as a Senior University as over 80% of our undergraduate degree recipients in the last five years were transfer students. Only 19% of these

graduates entered as freshmen at LSUS. The average age of these graduates is 30 years old and took five years to graduate.

Therefore, the demographics of the entire student population at LSU Shreveport grew to mimic the population of the students enrolled in the general studies program. Table 4 displays the demographics of the students at the end of the spring 2007 semester.

Table 4

General Studies Graduates May 2007

| Age | Hrs at LSUS | Hrs Transferred | Curricula Changes | Universities Attended | Yrs to Complete Degree | LSUS GPA | Overall GPA |
|-----|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|
| 40 | 66 | 87 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2.47 | 2.06 |
| 51 | 78 | 102 | 2 | 1 | 11 | 2.66 | 2.33 |
| 37 | 136 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 17 | 2.57 | 2.57 |
| 25 | 36 | 96.31 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 2.91 | 2.75 |
| 33 | 70 | 88 | 2 | 3 | 12 | 2.56 | 2.26 |
| 35 | 37 | 115 | 3 | 2 | 12 | 2.06 | 2.22 |
| 24 | 51 | 77 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2.37 | 2.41 |
| 23 | 91 | 44 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2.63 | 2.8 |
| 27 | 36 | 107.5 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3.66 | 3.15 |
| 31 | 40 | 108 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2.62 | 2.11 |
| 62 | 40 | 106 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 3.1 | 2.92 |
| 25 | 69 | 69 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2.5 | 2.63 |
| 35 | 103 | 48 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 3.11 | 2.97 |
| 33 | 111 | 59.28 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 2.91 | 2.99 |
| 27 | 90 | 78 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2.63 | 2.94 |
| 28 | 111 | 60 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 2.02 | 2.00 |
| 25 | 82 | 72 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3.29 | 3.17 |
| 24 | 131 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 2.79 | 2.79 |
| 27 | 43 | 118 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 3.06 | 2.92 |
| 29 | 50 | 105 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2.79 | 2.51 |

(table continues)

Table 4 (continued).

| Age | Hrs at LSUS | Hrs Transferred | Curricula Changes | Universities Attended | Yrs to Complete Degree | LSUS GPA | Overall GPA |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|
| 22 | 51 | 77 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2.76 | 2.72 |
| 26 | 48 | 135 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2.17 | 2.99 |
| 23 | 85 | 73 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2.63 | 2.96 |
| 24 | 101 | 46 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2.08 | 2.23 |
| 29 | 113 | 52 | 4 | 1 | 11 | 3.36 | 3.38 |
| 26 | 103 | 31 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 2.24 | 2.19 |
| 27 | 59 | 67 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 2.08 | 2.43 |
| 24 | 129 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| 43 | 100 | 90 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 2.98 | 2.91 |
| 27 | 58 | 106 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2.31 | 2.57 |
| 22 | 38 | 91 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3.21 | 3.19 |
| 24 | 59 | 90 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2.69 | 2.76 |
| 37 | 111 | 80 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 3.13 | 2.93 |
| <u>AVERAGES</u> | | | | | | | |
| 30 | 77 | 75 | 1.48 | 1.76 | 5.1 | 2.69 | 2.67 |

The average age of the graduating students was 30, the exact age reported by the chancellor as the average age of all graduating students at the university. Over the 40 year period, this number did not fluctuate greatly as shown in the previous tables for 1977, 1987, and 1997 with the averages being 33, 29, and 34 respectively. At least eight students were 24 years old or younger. Out of the thirty-three graduates, only two were not transfer students, which calculate to 94% of

the class being transfers. The average number of years to complete the degree is 5.1 years with at least five students taking 10 or more years to complete their degree program. These numbers reflect the overall trend that Shugart was describing. Institutions of higher education need to recognize that the characteristics of the “traditional student” are changing, and degree completion programs such as general studies are excellent avenues for these students to earn a bachelor’s degree.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, SUMMARY of FINDINGS, DISCUSSION of FINDINGS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

After almost forty years in existence, general studies at LSU Shreveport has proven to be a viable degree program and vital to the constituents of the community. The program has consistently been an invaluable avenue for the nontraditional student to complete a bachelor's degree. The research questions which guided this study were these:

- 1) What were the major key events in the development of the general studies program at LSU Shreveport?
- 2) What were the social, economic, and political factors that contributed to the development of the GS program and curriculum?
- 3) Who have been the educational clientele of the GS program?
- 4) What career paths have graduates of the GS program chosen?
- 5) What are the plans for future development of the GS program?

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1: What were the major key events that contributed in the development of the general studies program at LSU Shreveport?

The research for this case study led to the identification of four periods of development for the GS program: 1. Early Period or Foundations (1967-1977), 2. Period of Change (1977-1987), 3. Period of Stability (1987-1997), and 4. The New Millennium (1997-2007).

In 1972 when the university was given permission to award baccalaureate degrees, the four-year general studies program was created and became available to students. The spring

class of 1977 saw the first students from LSU Shreveport graduating with four-year degrees in general studies.

In the 1983-84 academic year, the Louisiana Board of Regents created a Statewide Review Committee to assess general studies programs across the state. The committee made several recommendations which the Board of Regents accepted and requested that all institutions implement.

In conjunction with this review, the administration at LSU Shreveport saw this as an opportunity to change the administrative structure of the program. In 1984, the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs dissolved the College of General Studies, and the general studies degree program was moved under the purview of the College of Liberal Arts and its dean.

In 1992, the dean of Liberal Arts saw a need to have a full-time individual manage the program, transferring the duties from the dean's office. The Director of General Studies would advise students in the program, make curricular changes, and chair the advisory committee. In 1996, the program was given a permanent "home" across the hall from the dean's office, providing a centralized location for students.

Because of rising demands of accountability in the late 90s and early 21st century, career tracks were added to coincide with the GS curriculum. In addition, requirements for completing writing courses were added to the curriculum, and the general studies capstone course became a gauge for learning outcomes as students had to earn a passing grade in the course before being allowed to graduate.

In 2007, with permission from the dean, the director created a General Studies Advisory Committee that would serve as advisors to GS students as well as the program. This reinvention of the committee was a direct result of the university's Quality Enhancement Plan.

Research Question 2: What were the political, economic, and social factors that contributed to the development of the GS program and curriculum?

Political Factors

This study discovered four key political factors that fostered change within the GS program.

1. Campus approval to move from a two-year to a four-year institution in 1974
2. Statewide Review Committee Report submitted to Regents in 1983
3. Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs reassignment of the College of General Studies
4. Accountability Movement in the 1990s

Economic Factors

This study revealed several economic conditions that affected student enrollment in higher education.

1. Recession of the 1970s
2. Competition for Resources in the 1990s
3. The Internet “Bubble Burst” at the end of the 90s
4. Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom
5. Economic Recession in 2007

Social Factors

This study also exposed two social factors that influenced the development of the interdisciplinary program.

1. The Progressive Movement of the 1960s, which saw such social events as The Civil Rights Movement and The Women’s Liberation Movement

2. Life Adjustment Philosophy

Research Question 3: Who have been the educational clientele of the GS program?

In reviewing the student demographics at the end of the ten-year periods, there appears to be a large cross-section of the student population for this case study that graduates with a GS degree. Moreover, the students who are classified as nontraditional compose a large portion of the students who take advantage of the flexibility of the program.

Research Question 4: What career paths have graduates of the GS program chosen?

Students who graduate with a degree in general studies have a myriad of options available to them. Students can immediately go into the workforce, or they can apply and attend graduate school to continue their educational pursuits. Graduates have entered professions such as teaching, counseling, administration, government, medical, legal, and the military, representing a diverse representation of goal attainment.

Research Question 5: What are the plans for future development of the GS program?

This case study investigated any plans for future development over five years (2008-2012) and identified two areas of development and goals that would strengthen the GS program. The first important plan for the program is to continue to improve the advising process for students and faculty according to the current university QEP document. The second plan is to improve access to the general studies degree by developing an online curriculum.

Discussion of Findings

Political, Social, Economic Factors

Political factors. The historical development of the GS program has been an interesting dynamic of the university's culture since its associate degree status in its beginnings to its four-year, interdisciplinary focus in the present. Throughout the existence of the program at LSU

Shreveport, four key political factors exhibited influence on the development of the curriculum. The first factor was the institutional change from a two-year college to a four-year institution in 1974. The College of General Studies added junior and senior level courses to its program to coincide with the institutional change. General Studies was marketed to students who were not served well by traditional degrees. The program would offer evening and weekend classes to assist students in completing their four-year degree plans. In the current educational environment, traditional degree programs have begun offering their courses at unconventional times to meet the needs of their constituents, just as the GS program has always done. The second political factor that affected the development of the program was the creation of the Statewide Review Committee by the Louisiana Board of Regents in 1983 to study the general studies programs across the state. Because of the non-traditional nature of the programs (flexible and interdisciplinary), the Board of Regents felt that program development and implementation lacked consistency across the state. After the Statewide Review Committee completed its assessment, they provided the Regents with a list of recommendations that fostered consistency from institution to institution. The committee made curriculum suggestions, such as requiring students to complete at least 45 hours of junior and senior level work, while also making administrative recommendations, such as requiring all programs to have an advisory committee. The recommendations continue to serve as the foundation for the curriculums of GS programs across the state of Louisiana and at LSU Shreveport. These guidelines not only provide consistency but also ensure that the GS program maintains a high level of rigor that individuals equate with traditional programs.

The third factor occurred directly after the committee's recommendations were implemented. In 1984 the new Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs, based on his theoretical

beliefs, dissolved the College of General Studies. The College did not have a faculty to support its programs because courses were taught by faculty working in traditional disciplines; therefore, the vice-chancellor believed that the College of General Studies was not truly a college at all. The GS program was moved under the purview of the Dean of Liberal Arts and the former college became the Division of Continuing Education. This was a missed opportunity for the university to develop the college. Instead of dissolving the College of General Studies, it could have been beneficial to the university to develop a faculty for the university's general education curricula. All freshmen and sophomores could have begun their studies in the College of GS. The implications for the GS program could have been tremendous as there would have been a faculty that could have created truly interdisciplinary courses for GS students. Instead the GS program began to lack the visibility it once held under the former college.

Finally, the fourth factor to contribute to the development of the program was the accountability movement in the 90s. This movement brought about the addition of a senior seminar course as a means of assessing student abilities at the end of the program. Students would need to earn a certain grade in order to exhibit competency in written and oral communication skills. Along with the seminar requirement, writing course requirements were also added to ensure that students exiting the program obtained specific writing skills. Career tracks were added to the program to provide a visible component that the degree program was a viable alternative to traditional degree programs in the job market. All of these factors assisted in keeping the program relevant, while maintaining the flexibility and rigor of the curriculum.

Economic factors. By the late 1970s, the GS program at LSU Shreveport recorded high numbers of enrollment and graduating students. Some assert the increased numbers were direct results of the economic conditions during the 70s, which caused individuals to search for

alternatives and increased the need for them to expand their educational knowledge base to become more marketable. Freeman's (as cited in Kerr, 1994) view asserted that "...the economic conditions of the early 70s with recessions and economic depressions, and with the baby-boom generation entering the labor market..." caused an increase in the number of people entering the labor market with at least "47% of the existing force [having] attended college for one year or more, and 27% for four years or more."

Moving into the 1980s, all American universities experienced a period of normalcy. According to Kerr (1994) the 1980s "were a nonhistorical decade – nonhistorical in the sense that so little happened that made history. It was a status quo decade. Enrollments increased moderately. Financing was static" (p. 118). This was evident in the enrollment numbers for the GS program at LSU Shreveport. Enrollment and graduation numbers declined throughout the late 80s and early 90s. During this time, the technology industry rose to economic prominence in the US, and students saw more opportunities in obtaining traditional majors or not needing a four-year degree at all. However, the mid to late 90s was a time of competition for monetary resources. Kerr (1994) described this as a period of "ferocious competition" (p. 130) because the US moved from being the world's "greatest creditor" to "greatest debtor" (p. 130). All institutions of higher education would be involved in this struggle for scarce monetary resources, and this fight would trickle down to even degree programs struggling to become accountable for the funds they received. By the end of the 1990s, the technology bubble burst and interest rates rose while the stock market crashed. Once again, the economy would drive people back into university programs. Many of these people had previous educational experience but never finished their degrees because the labor market had previously been so lucrative. The GS program at LSU Shreveport began to have an increase in enrollment because of the falling US

economy. The program would also experience competitive attacks as traditional programs were vying to attract students who saw GS as a better option.

As the economy began to recover in the early 21st century, enrollment in the GS program remained constant. As the US became the major military force involved in the Gulf War in 2001 and with a recession slowly taking hold and finally impacting the US in 2007, people once again were enrolling in institutions of higher education. Enrollment and graduation numbers for the GS program at LSU Shreveport began surpassing its previous levels of program enrollment and graduation rate.

Social factors. According to Slaughter (2002) social movements have the ability to force universities to change their curriculums to accommodate new groups of people:

I see faculty and administrators as making little effort to accommodate the curricular interests of new groups until student and community activists demanded that knowledge central to these groups be incorporated into the curricula. In other words, institutions did not change the curricula in response to demographic change, but rather in response to social movements originating outside the university. (p. 269)

The Progressive Movement of the 1960s opened the doors for many changes to come to fruition. Progressivism embraces the idea that education should evolve as our society around us changes. It is a movement that supported natural and social sciences as incorporated entities. The 1960s saw several important social movements such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Liberation Movement, and the Black Power movement. These social movements, along with the philosophical beliefs of the progressives, allowed for the creation of Black Studies programs, Women's Studies, and other nontraditional degree programs that our society saw as necessary and relevant to academic pursuits. This provided universities with the opportunity to create

interdisciplinary programs, such as general studies, in response to demands for more flexibility in curricula.

Once the Progressive Movement began to end, Wittenburg and Johnson (1982) stated that Life Adjustment Education arose as a philosophy that affected curriculum change. This philosophy stemmed from the progressive philosophy of changing to meet the changes of society, but also took a realistic approach to curriculum development: “Life Adjustment Education...attempted to prepare students for the practical realities of life, not just academics” (p. 9). The addition of career tracks to the GS curriculum could be attributed to this movement. The GS degree would not only provide the basic general education required of all students, but the degree plan would also prepare the individual for real-world, work, and life experiences. Another final and current philosophical belief that is also evident is Humanism. Humanists reason that strengthening one faculty such as linguistics will inevitably strengthen other faculties. This reflects the idea that students do not have to focus on only one discipline to understand the concepts of another. Individuals learn from multiple disciplines to create a holistic plan of study.

All of these social, economic, and political factors can be viewed as influences over the curriculum changes within the GS program at LSU Shreveport over its 40 year existence. Although there is no direct evidence that these social movements are responsible for the creation of new interdisciplinary programs, the inferences and connections to the factors mentioned above provide excellent yet arguable explanations for the development of the GS program. The implications, however, for the GS program are evident. Because of the flexibility in the creation of a degree plan, the degree can be applicable to most student aspirations. As society changes, the curriculum of the program is able to adapt to those changes. As new careers surface or as new social movements arise, the GS curriculum is able to fulfill the needs of the changing

society. As more re-entry and transfer students enter the university, the GS curriculum is poised to accommodate their growing needs by creating new career tracks while utilizing the majority of their prior credits. The flexible curriculum appeals to a wide cross-section of students.

Educational Clientele

The clientele of the GS program at LSU Shreveport has continually represented a cross-section of the student population. Although most students could be classified as nontraditional, there continues to be interest from traditional students as well. Table 5 provides the averages from the previous tables of student demographics from 1967 to 2007.

Table 5

Bachelor of General Studies Overall Averages of Student Demographics

| Year | Age | Hrs @ LSUS | Hrs Trans | Curr Chgs | Univ Att | Yrs to Comp | LSUS GPA | Overall GPA |
|-------------|-----|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| 1977 | 33 | 81 | 53 | 2.73 | 2.78 | 12.86 | 2.90 | 2.75 |
| 1987 | 27 | 94 | 22 | 1.19 | 0.62 | 5.7 | 2.68 | 2.62 |
| 1997 | 34 | 83 | 64 | 1.64 | 2.09 | 7.7 | 2.78 | 2.67 |
| 2007 | 30 | 77 | 75 | 1.48 | 1.76 | 5.1 | 2.69 | 2.67 |
| Overall Avg | 32 | 84 | 54 | 1.76 | 1.81 | 7.84 | 2.76 | 2.68 |

Four of the eight demographics identify the clientele of the program, which are age, curricula changes, universities attended, and years to complete the degree. The ages of students at the end of the ten-year periods ranged from 18 to 62, which identifies quite a varied group of students. The majority of the students had at least one curricula change, bordering on an average of two while attending LSU Shreveport. The average number of years to complete the degree is almost at 8 years, which is 4 years more than what is expected of an incoming first-time full-time freshman, who is projected to complete the bachelor's degree in 4 years. Most students also attended more than one university before graduation. Therefore, these demographics aid in identifying the main clientele of the program as being nontraditional students. They are students who re-enter or begin college at later ages rather than at the traditional age of 18. These students transfer hours from previous universities attended, and most did not begin their studies as general studies majors.

From the overall averages, it is apparent that the GS degree consistently attracts the nontraditional student. Additionally, the university as a whole recognizes that the transfer student accounts for the majority of overall graduates. With 18% of the graduating class earning a GS degree, the program is positioned to expand its availability. The GS degree is an option and not in competition with other degree programs. Because of the high number of transfer students at the university, more focus should be given to the recruitment and retention of this group. Providing and promoting the flexible GS curriculum gives the university an advantage as the program obviously appeals to the nontraditional group.

Career Paths

As noted, students who graduate from the GS program do not choose a major, instead they choose an area of concentration; therefore, they do not focus on only one discipline.

Instead, they select courses from several disciplines that provide them with a meaningful compilation of study. Students who graduate with degrees in Marketing or Public Relations, for example, are expected to search for and obtain occupations in those particular fields. This leads to a peculiar situation for the GS graduate who does not have the specific focus as other graduates from traditional majors. However, obtaining the GS degree does not lead to the inability of students to develop a career. In fact, because the background of the student's education is so varied, so are the opportunities afforded to the student. The 2007 LSU Shreveport Alumni Association's 40 Years of Excellence project captured a snapshot of former graduates of the GS program, and the career paths that they followed. The project garnered 584 responses from former graduates of the GS program, and Table 6 documents the careers chosen by those graduates.

Table 6

Career Paths of GS Graduates

| Occupation | # Grads | Occupation | # Grads |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------------------------|------------|
| Accounting | 23 | Insurance | 11 |
| Administrative/Clerical/Secretarial | 9 | Interior Decorating/Design | 1 |
| Advertising | 2 | Journalism | 1 |
| Agriculture/Ranching | 2 | Law/Legal Services | 17 |
| Architecture/Urban Planning | 1 | Library Science | 6 |
| Art | 2 | Management | 21 |
| Arts-Fine | 1 | Manufacturing | 11 |
| Aviation and Aerospace | 3 | Marketing | 4 |
| Banking | 19 | Media | 1 |
| Brokerage/Securities/Investments | 2 | Medical/Health | 54 |
| Business-Entrepreneur/Owner | 26 | Military | 11 |
| Communications | 4 | Ministry | 13 |
| Computer/High Technology | 22 | Nursing | 8 |
| Construction/Contracting | 5 | Personal Services | 2 |
| Consulting | 2 | Personnel/Human Resources | 5 |
| Counseling | 12 | Pharmacy | 2 |
| Dentistry | 1 | Physician | 4 |
| Education-Administration | 11 | Public Services | 7 |
| Education-Student Affairs | 1 | Real Estate | 11 |
| Education-Teaching | 75 | Sales | 33 |
| Energy Resources | 5 | Science | 1 |
| Engineering | 6 | Social Work | 17 |
| Entertainment | 1 | Sports | 2 |
| Financial Services | 7 | Student | 6 |
| Fundraising | 2 | Trade/Craft | 2 |
| Funeral Services | 1 | Transportation | 7 |
| Government-Elected | 1 | Travel Industry | 4 |
| Government-Non-elected | 42 | Utilities | 4 |
| Graphic Design | 1 | Volunteerism | 2 |
| Homemaking | 21 | Writing | 2 |
| Hotel/Restaurant/Catering | 4 | Total # Repondents | 584 |

Just as the students in the program have varied backgrounds and interests, their chosen career paths also reflect this variation. Table 6 shows 61 different occupations that former GS students reported as their career with education being the most chosen path at 75 respondents. Teaching accounts for almost 13% of the total. The second most reported career field is medical/health with 54 respondents, which accounts for 9% of the total. The important concept to note is that even though GS graduates do not focus in a particular discipline, they are still able to obtain the knowledge and skills to be productive in a multitude of occupations. The composition of the occupations includes individuals who are in accounting, finance, and marketing to art, architecture, interior design, and ministry. There are 4 who identified themselves as physicians and 17 who have gone into law or law services.

Excluding the first graduating class of GS students in May of 1977 (as I could not obtain overall graduation numbers for that year), there have been 1707 graduates from the GS program since 1978 to 2007. With 584 respondents to the alumni project, this accounts for 34% of the total number of graduates from the program. The total number of LSU Shreveport graduates over the thirty years of offering four-year degrees is 12,178. This equates to GS graduates accounting for 14% of the overall graduating body. The percentages over this time span have ranged from a low of 6% to a high of 26%. Figure 7 documents the percentages of graduates from 1978 to 2008, and Figure 8 documents the total number of graduates from 1978 to 2008.

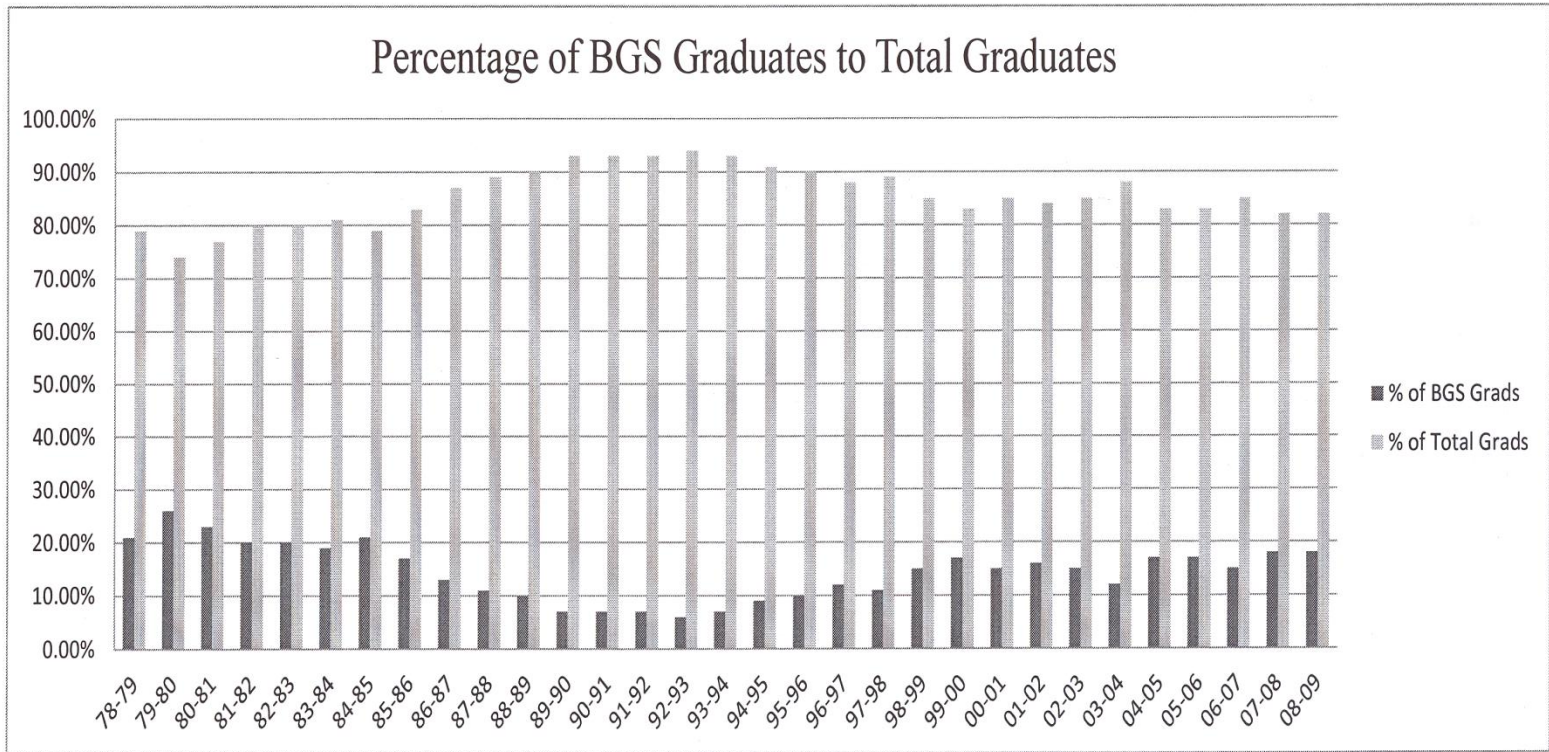


Figure 7. Percentages of GS graduates to total graduates.

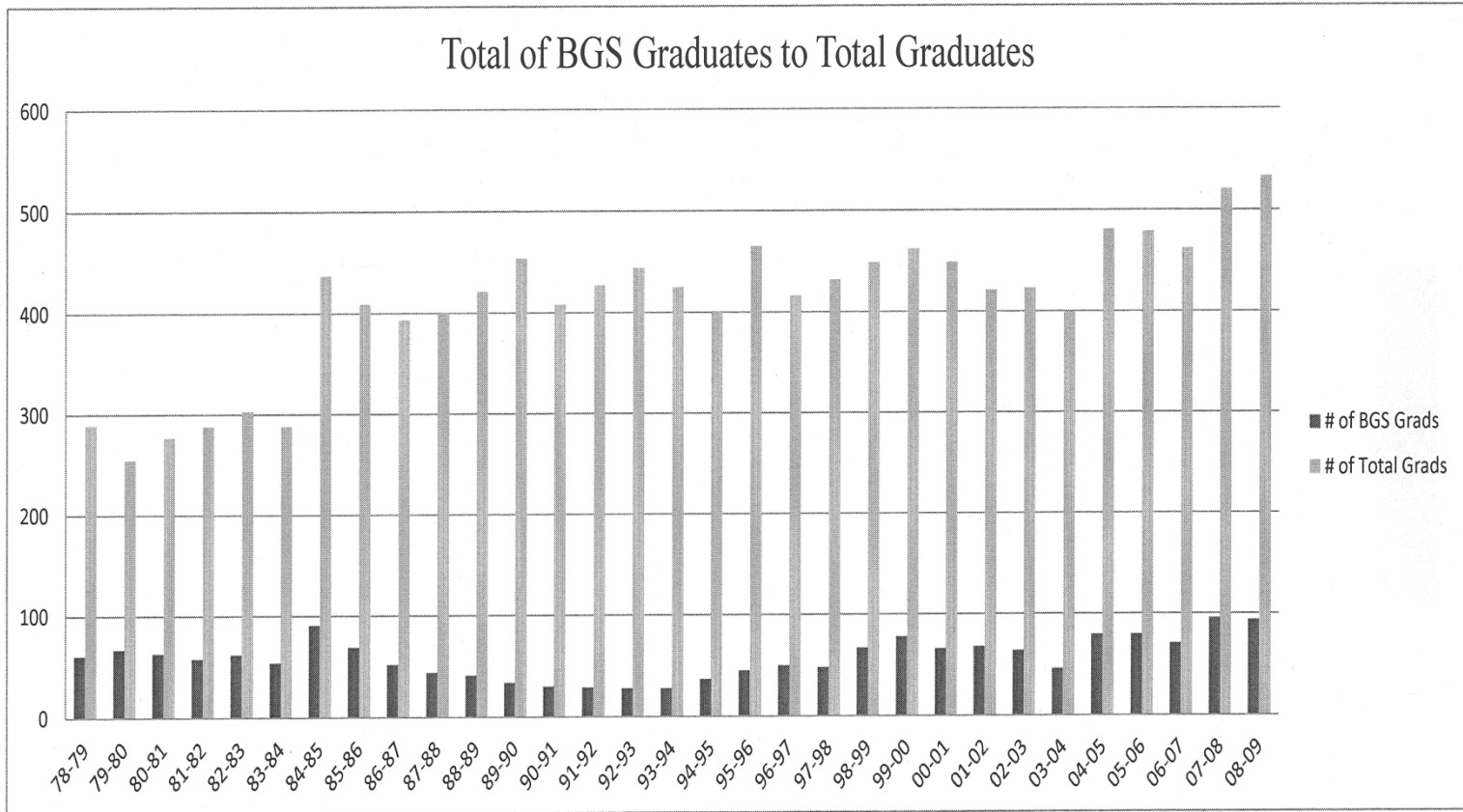


Figure 8. Total number of GS graduates to total graduates.

Both charts reflect the trends that affected all of the university's population. As the 70s came to an end and the 80s began, there was a spike in the number of students graduating from the GS program. Perhaps, this could be attributed to the end of the Vietnam War, just as there was a spike across the country at the end of World War II, and the oil crisis during that time causing a recession. More people wanted to attend school, and this is when the GS program produced 26% of the graduates from LSU Shreveport. However, during the late 80s and 90s, the program experienced some of its lowest production numbers, but the economy had recovered, the technical/Internet revolution had begun, and people were either working in successful careers without the benefit of a bachelor's degree, or they were pursuing traditional majors. As the 21st century approached, the graphs exhibit a slight rise in students returning to the GS program. With a recession approaching and finally taking hold by 2007-2008, the GS program was again rising in the percentage of graduates with the number amounting to 18% by the end of 2007. The total number of graduates from the university has steadily increased over the past ten years, and the GS program has consistently graduated 15% to 18% of the total numbers. The GS program is a vital part of the LSU Shreveport community as well as the community at large, producing a consistent number of graduates that contribute to a myriad of professional careers.

Future Development

The current Quality Enhancement Plan for the university was adopted in the spring 2005 semester after the initial Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) visit. The basic premise of the plan is to improve academic advising. Within the plan, it is noted that advising within the general studies program has its own challenges as students choose from multiple concentrations in a flexible, interdisciplinary course of study. This statement, in particular, mirrors what was stated in the 1983 Statewide Review Committee Report. The committee

reported that effective advising should be at the forefront of concern for those in the GS program. Over twenty years later, this concern continues to remain vital to the success of the GS student. In August 2007, the General Studies Advisory Committee, which consists of nine faculty members from various degree programs, also began to serve as advisors to GS students. The committee will continue its training sessions on academic advising and assist the Director in making advising an ongoing process, instead of a course selection activity during registration periods.

Another crucial development for GS is to create more access to the program. Since the end of World War II, a primary focus of all institutions of higher education has been to provide access to education to anyone who wishes to pursue his or her educational goals. Although the GS program serves the on-campus student population well, the rising online population is not currently being reached by the program or any other program on the LSU Shreveport campus. It is vital that the director and the university examine ways to expand the program offerings to students who wish to pursue their educational goals in an online environment. In minutes of the university's Distance Learning Council, the members discussed offering a fully online degree program:

With respect to program offerings, we discussed the possibility of developing an entire degree online, specifically the bachelor of general studies, since it is a flexible, interdisciplinary program that draws from four subject-matter groups. (S. Mabry, personal communication, May 19, 2010)

There are already at least four universities from across the state that are participating in the LaCall program. This program is designed for the adult learner, who has never attended or who is returning to college. Once enrolled in the program, these students are able to complete their

degrees in an entirely online program; furthermore, the primary degree being offered is the general studies degree. The Director must work with the Distance Learning Council to move the GS degree at LSU Shreveport to have an optional online format. Because the degree is interdisciplinary, it creates a unique problem. Because of the organizational structure of the program, there are no faculty that specifically teach in the GS program; as a result, the program relies on faculty from other departments to create and instruct online courses. Therefore, it becomes essential to establish a cooperative relationship with faculty members from various departments as they are the key to developing an online option for the degree. If an online degree option is established, again advising will play a critical role in sustaining the program's flexibility and continued success.

Recommendations

The GS program has been an integral part of the curriculum at LSU Shreveport since the inception of the university in 1967. It continues to provide an alternative method of curriculum development for students who believe that traditional degree plans will not meet their needs.

Recommendation 1:

The Director of the GS program should begin working with the university's Distance Learning Council to create a 100% online degree plan for the GS program. Because of the flexibility and interdisciplinary nature of the program, the GS degree is a logical choice to be one of the first programs at this institution to be offered online. This would also follow what other universities in the area have already accomplished, providing LSU Shreveport with a new outlet to recruit students who need alternative methods to reach their educational goals.

Recommendation 2:

If the university seeks to offer the online degree through the GS program, more faculty and staff support should be given to the program. There is currently no full-time staff support for the program, yet there are currently 220 students enrolled in the program every fall and spring semester. This number would likely increase if an online program were offered. Faculty support is needed to offer more online courses and to provide assistance in advising such a large number of students. Staff support is needed for clerical and operational duties.

Recommendation 3:

The GS Director should implement some measure of assessment of the GS program. An exit survey would serve the program well. Currently, no information is collected on students within or exiting the program. There is no documentation of student outcomes or attitudes toward the GS program. This information could certainly be used to create more concentrations that cater to the needs of students, and the information would undoubtedly provide a means of demonstrating the importance of the program to the university and to the community.

Recommendation 4:

The GS program should explore more options for concentrations within the program. Instead of the four areas that are currently employed, the curriculum could include concentrations in areas such as Film Studies or Women's Studies. This would allow students to pursue a bachelor's degree while satisfying their internal desires of pursuing interdisciplinary studies. This could possibly open the door to the university defining the program as multidisciplinary instead of interdisciplinary.

Recommendations for Future Research

The GS director should begin working with the alumni association in tracking what paths GS students take after graduation. Although the alumni association's project revealed what careers the students were in, there is no information on what steps the students took to achieve their goals. For example, there are many students who reported working in accounting, but the question remains as to if they were able to obtain that position with only the GS degree, or did the student have to pursue further education. This type of information not only would assist current GS students in planning their futures, but the information would also highlight the impact the program has graduate programs at the university.

Another area that deserves further study is academic advising. With the implementation of the QEP, it will become vital to ascertain if the changes made to the advising process are effective. The connection an advisee develops with an advisor can be the single most important connection that a student makes. The advisor becomes the student's link to the university. The information obtained from a well-developed exit survey, which should contain questions about advising, can provide evidence of effectiveness or ineffectiveness. However, semester to semester research can provide feedback that would allow the advisors to adjust their practices in a timely manner.

Finally, these recommendations would assist in moving the GS curriculum to the 21st century, while capitalizing on its strengths as a multidisciplinary, degree completion program. The GS program is essential to LSU Shreveport because it upholds to the mission of the university, which is to produce graduates who have the intellectual and professional resources and personal skills to become productive citizens in our ever changing global community.

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