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**Remarks at Kutztown University**  
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I am very pleased to be at Kutztown University to talk about a topic very near and dear to me: undergraduate general education. A few years ago I spoke to a system-wide conference here in Pennsylvania, and it is good to learn about one campus in greater detail. When Linda Goldberg called and told me about your initiative to restructure general education and invited me to visit today and tomorrow, it was easy to accept.

Today and tomorrow morning I intend to do four things:

1. Discuss a new and richer concept of general education;
2. Highlight changes in the relationship between general education and professional education;
3. Offer a list of curriculum trends; and
4. Tell a story about how general education helped vitalize one institution.

Before we plunge into these serious topics, let's acknowledge that change in colleges and universities is difficult and uncertain. Academic folklore holds that it is easier to move a cemetery than to change a curriculum.

Irving Kristol, the social critic, asserted that colleges and universities are the social institutions most resistant to change—with the possible exception of the Post Office.

A young professor was quoted in a 1911 book on the curriculum as saying, “The progress of this institution will be directly proportional to the death rate of the faculty.”

Frederick Rudolph, the academic historian, observed: “The professor was an optimist. College faculties by the late 19th and early 20th centuries had developed an authority that made the course of study a jealously guarded compound of special interests. By then, it seldom mattered who died.”

Despite the folklore, change does occur in the academy, and the last two decades have been a particularly fertile time for fresh thinking and experimentation with alternative approaches. One change important to your initiative is in the concept of general education.

The term “general education” admits of no simple—or single—definition. A heuristic one offered by an earlier report from an association (AAC&U) (Task Group on General Education, 1988, 1) is “the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all of us use and live by during most of our lives—whether as parents, citizens, lovers, travelers, participants in the arts, leaders, volunteers, or good Samaritans.”

While avoiding advocacy of any particular content, this definition has the advantage of inviting individuals into a conversation, so that a group such as a college faculty, can determine what are the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes for students to acquire. If agreement can be reached, then the group can assess the adequacy of the existing curriculum to cultivate such qualities, or devise a curriculum that would more intentionally nurture those attributes.

Such a conversation about the ends of education takes place today in a climate of serious public concern about the quality of education. The concern centers on the curriculum—at least at the college level—because the debate focuses on what students should know. The concern is not primarily about students being competent specialists in biology, philosophy, or sociology, for instance. It is that students do not possess the marks of a generally educated person—that is, having such qualities as a broad base of knowledge in history and culture and mathematics and science, the ability to think logically and critically, the capacity to express ideas clearly and cogently, the sensitivities and skills to deal with different kinds of people, sophisticated tastes and interests, and the capability to work independently and collaboratively.

Indeed, a new concept of general education seems to be emerging at a large number of institutions that have analyzed undergraduate education. I want to draw a contrast between two quite different concepts. The *old idea* equated general education with breadth and, in an institution organized around academic departments, involved a sampling of courses from the broad array of academic disciplines. The method of securing breadth was by means of distribution requirements, and students were typically given a great deal of latitude to choose among alternative courses within broad domains of knowledge, such as the humanities, social, and natural sciences. Usually all courses designated by a department met the requirements. These courses were usually introductory level, and were regarded as a “foundation” on which specialized study would build. Such a program required little administrative coordination, simply a registrar to verify that requirements were met. Faculty members tended to view teaching such courses as unwelcome “service” to students who were concentrating in other fields, and students were advised to “get your distribution requirements out of the way, so you can get on with more important work in your major.” Each of these elements is part of an old, and increasingly discredited, way of thinking about general education.

A *new concept* is emerging from conversations among faculties about the qualities of an educated person and the redesign of their curricula. One after another, college faculties are concluding that general education must be much more than breadth and simple exposure to different fields of study. Collectively, they are deciding that students should:

- Receive a generous orientation to the intellectual expectations, curricular rationale, and learning resources of an institution;

- Acquire specific skills of thought and expression, such as critical thinking and writing, that should be learned “across the curriculum” and imbedded within several courses;
- Learn about another culture and the diversity that exists within our own culture in terms of gender, race, ethnic background, class, age, and religion;
- Integrate ideas from across disciplines to illuminate interdisciplinary themes, issues or social problems;
- Study some subjects—beyond their majors—at advanced, not just introductory levels;
- Have an opportunity near the end of their course of study to pull together their learning in a senior seminar or project; and
- Experience a coherent course of study, one that is more than the sum of its parts.

Surely, study of various disciplines is important, but distribution requirements are increasingly seen as a minimalist definition that is not sufficiently rigorous for the demands that students will face in their lifetimes. A more robust concept is needed to raise the quality, stature, and frankly, the value of general education.

However defined at an institution—and there is much variation—the new concept is full of educational purposes beyond that of breadth. A loose distribution system, which maximizes student choice within broad categories, is inadequate to guarantee that all students acquire this kind of general education. Some prescription, whether specific graduation requirements or guidelines for certain kinds of courses (such as “writing intensive”) is necessary. Courses offered by departments must be reviewed by an institution-wide committee to assure that they meet specific educational criteria. A great deal of coordination among departments, faculty members, and students is necessary to foster coherence. That is why many institutions with reformed general education curricula create new administrative positions; a director of general education is needed to see that purposes are addressed and coherence is achieved.

Rather than seeing such intentional courses as demeaning “service,” faculty members tend to view them as special opportunities to teach the most fundamental ideas, methods, and perspectives of their disciplines to students who may never take another course in the field. Such important courses obviously cannot be “gotten out of the way”; they are essential to the educational enterprise. And a more useful metaphor than a “foundation” may be a “scaffolding,” a structure that exists alongside a major and provides a context and framework for erecting that edifice.

This new concept is a richer, more purposeful, and more demanding idea of general education. Although many of the educational purposes can and should be addressed in academic majors, this new concept gives far more substance and stature to general education. It demands a better balance with the major. Indeed, as the late

Ernest Boyer reminded us, “Rather than divide the undergraduate experience into separate camps, general versus specialized education, the curriculum of a will bring the two together.”

We have moved from an agrarian economy, to an industrial one, to a knowledge-based one. This requires well educated workers with both specialized and general expertise.

In a knowledge-based economy, liberal or general education is practical, a new kind of career preparation. This reverses the dictum of Robert Maynard Hutchins that liberal education is anything not practical.

Reading from labor economists Anthony Carnevale and Jeff Strohl,

“The largest share of current jobs and the fastest job growth today is occurring in the high-paying, high-skilled services sector—in areas such as management, finance, marketing, business services, and the education and health care professions. These are the generalists who are best served by a liberal arts education (Carnevale and Rose, 1998).

One of the greatest strengths of a liberal arts education is that the environment encourages student-to-student and student-to-faculty interactions. This learning process mimics the changing work environment and the increasing value of general cognitive, problem-solving and interpersonal skills over specific and technical skills. The high-skilled managerial, professional, and service jobs that dominate the new economy entail non-repetitive functions and overlapping team-based assignments rather than the standardized tasks of yesteryear.

The new knowledge economy has also spawned a more complex set of performance standards, requiring broad general skills. These new standards include quality, variety, customization, customer focus, speed of innovation, and the ability to add novelty and entertainment value to products and services. To meet these new standards, companies need conscientious workers who are able to take responsibility for the final product or service, regardless of their level in the company. Variety and customization require workers who are creative problem solvers. A focus on customers requires empathy as well as good communication and interpersonal skills, and continuous innovation requires an ability to learn.”

I would now like to give you a profile of Hamline University. I went there as the dean of the College of Liberal Arts in 1983. That fall, they lost enrollment. In two years they had lost 100 FTE's and seven faculty. Because Hamline is tuition dependent, we faced a budget problem. Additionally, there was low morale. A fall

faculty conference revealed that there was little common identity. Admissions was stressing “warm fuzzies,” rather than academics, for example. Since Hamline had a good reputation and tradition, something had to be done—and fast.

We appointed a task force to review curriculum and develop more rigorous, engaging, distinctive general education program. The task force developed and the faculty approved the “Hamline Plan”:

- Writing across the curriculum
- Oral communication across the curriculum
- Computer utilization
- Freshman seminar (attractive to freshmen, skills focused, small)
- Distribution targeted to non-majors
- Course connecting study to workplace
- Marketed aggressively

Our results:

- Many new courses, approved by the new General Education Committee and evaluated positively by the students
- Admissions went up 33% for freshman in the first two years
- Retention went up 7% for freshmen to sophomore year in the pilot year
- Obtained grants of \$1.5 million to implement the plan
- Positive publicity
- Capital campaign
- Better budgets and morale
- Hired more faculty
- Largest enrollment ever

I will end with a quotation from Norman Cousins, who was one of my cultural heroes:

“The irony of the emphasis being placed on careers is that nothing is more valuable for anyone who has had a professional or vocational education than to be able to deal with abstractions or complexities, or to feel comfortable with subtleties of thought or language, or to think sequentially. The doctor who knows only disease is at a disadvantage alongside the doctor who knows at least as much about people as he does about pathological organisms. The lawyer who argues from a narrow legal base is no match for the lawyer who can connect legal precedents to historical experience and who employs wide-ranging

intellectual resources. The business executive whose competence in general management is bolstered by an artistic ability to deal with people is of prime value to his company. For the technologist, the engineering of content can be just as important as the engineering of moving parts. In all these respects, the liberal arts have much to offer.”