Understanding the Importance
of a
General Studies Program

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

by

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The roots of liberal arts education date back over 2000 years, when liberal arts was considered to be the ideal education of the Western world. Plato argued that only those trained in the liberal arts could analyze objects and see beyond the object to everything that was involved with it (Winter, 1979). According to Plato, one's thinking must be deep and abstract in order for the person to be a good philosopher, the goal of those educated in the liberal arts. Only philosophers should be rulers, not only because of their advanced way of thinking and reasoning, but also because liberal arts was the only way for one to realize true happiness in all of life (Winter, 1979).

In the 20th century, training in the liberal arts has become a concern of many Americans. In the 1960's, liberal arts colleges became popular. Such schools, some Americans asserted, were turning the nation's top students into tools of an imperialist establishment (Winter, 1979). The students desired an extensive knowledge of the world, i.e., how and why it functioned as it did, in order to attain the consummate education. With the emergence of the vocational consciousness movement in the 1970's, many students began to wonder whether they were receiving the quality of education they desired. Their concern was that in studying only very specialized courses, they could not acquire a comprehensive education (Winter, 1979). However, industry demanded vocational study.
Today, for the first time, educators, students, and industry have begun to explore cooperatively the potential of liberal arts education.

Many industries have discovered the advantages of employing liberal arts graduates. Fields such as engineering, science, and business began hiring liberal arts graduates for their superior communication skills (Crowder, 1983). Industry has become so technically competitive that competition has diverted its focus from products to services, thereby creating the need for effective communicators. Not only has training in the liberal arts always given people a broad-based background in history, literature, and the arts, but also taught ways to learn and think. Liberal arts graduates have consistently been credited with the ability to evaluate and resolve complex problems quickly (Crowder, 1983). Many liberal arts courses were designed to show students the difference between a career and a succession of jobs (Delattre, 1983). Students developed socially by learning ways to manipulate their free time (Delattre, 1983). The liberal arts gave students a chance to learn, "the concepts basic to thinking about their future in a comprehensive way" (Delattre, 1983, p. 117). Students learned to plan their lives and careers in order to be better, happier workers. Liberal arts is now considered a marketable degree because it can, "create an educated person able to function in public and private life" (Varmer, 1980, p. 220).
Some businesses are looking for employees with more than just the casual exposure to the liberal arts offered at most universities in the form of general studies. Many employers feel that liberal arts graduates are more adaptable to new situations and analyze concepts and arguments better than others not trained in the liberal arts (Smith, 1981). The Career Related Skills Project (CRSP), a national research project, reports that liberal arts teaches the skills needed in the field of commerce, as well as all other occupational fields (Cook, 1981).

Some liberal arts graduates do face special problems when looking for employment. Because many college placement offices have not made an effort to educate recruiters on the values and advantages of liberal arts graduates, some corporate recruiters are unaware of their value (Paulson, 1980). Therefore, some liberal arts graduates have trouble securing a job due to a simple lack of awareness on the part of recruiters.

Not all corporations have overlooked the value of a liberal arts education. The Bell System hires many liberal arts graduates for management positions (Beck, 1981). Bell also feels that all liberal arts graduates should look for employment in the field of business due to their advanced communication skills which are so critical to industry today (Beck, 1981). These advanced skills are one of the reasons why more engineering firms are seeking liberal arts graduates. The scientific fields also are turning to liberal arts
graduates for their advanced critical thinking and problem solving skills. With the increase in computer usage, corporations in the business field are looking for employees who can deal with people and are finding this ability in liberal arts graduates (Bernstein, 1983). According to 89 employers and the academic departments at 13 liberal arts colleges, liberal arts graduates do develop the required skills for entry level jobs and do not need extra training (Hicks, 1984). General Motors started hiring liberal arts majors beginning with a small group of liberal arts colleges in the Midwest (Smith, 1981). While a degree in liberal arts is more marketable today, many recruiters feel that a business minor makes liberal arts graduates more competitive in finding that first job (Garis, 1985). Although there may be difficulties in getting hired with a liberal arts degree due to the lack of awareness on the part of the employers and the failure of many placement offices to show the advantages of a liberal arts degree to recruiters, the skills obtained from the degree are desired by employers today. A liberal arts degree clearly shows evidence of a focused commitment and training for a career, and that is the key to being hired as a liberal arts graduate (Hillstrom, 1984).

Many colleges have studied the increased interest of recruiters in liberal arts graduates and are beginning to add liberal arts curricula to their course offerings. Many of the courses are in the form of required general studies.
classes. "Colleges must help students see that a liberal education is often the most effective occupational preparation, be responsive to student choices and enrollment patterns, and provide labor market information" (Stager, 1983, p. 66). Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, increased its general studies requirements in 1985 as a way to help students realize the importance of a liberal arts education. The program requires that all students take a course in speech, math, and history, and two courses in English. The program contains an increased number of general electives in specified departments within the university to provide a more "well-rounded" education. The University of Minnesota Technical College in Waseca, Minnesota, instituted liberal arts into its curriculum in 1981 (Nelson, 1981). The university also attempts to relate liberal arts to every aspect of the students' lives (Nelson, 1981). Using student advisors, the new curriculum promotes cultural and artistic events, provides regularly scheduled trips to special events, and allows students to be involved in faculty discussions of cultural activities (Nelson, 1981). The courses within the curriculum are designed to increase interest in literature and art, especially as they relate to agricultural studies (Nelson, 1981). Students at the University of Minnesota Technical College study poetry, art, and film to enrich the liberal arts curriculum and make their college experience more enjoyable (Nelson, 1981). Faculty and student discussions have become a popular way to increase student
awareness of liberal arts and its importance. Typically, faculty and students discuss critical thinking issues and value judgments (Kirby, 1986). Also, they discuss ways to prepare for interviews and attempt to promote all-around better teacher-student communication (Kirby, 1986).

Foreseeing heavy retirement of faculty in colleges in the next 10 years and noting that faculty members are moving more and more into the higher paying business world, colleges are looking to hire liberal arts graduates as replacements (Watkin, 1986). They want "bright young liberal arts scholars and want curriculum change" (Watkin, 1986, p. 1). However, it will be difficult for colleges to recruit liberal arts graduates due to the low salaries offered. Many educators, on various levels, feel that in order to improve education, changes have to be made. By making the curriculum more oriented toward liberal arts and hiring liberal arts graduates, the change can be instituted to make the colleges better able to meet the needs of students.

Colleges are now beginning to answer the needs of liberal arts undergraduates by offering networking systems with liberal arts graduates. Associated with the establishment of one such network, a survey revealed that 79% of the graduates were satisfied with their jobs, and of all majors, liberal arts had the least amount of unemployment (Woodlief, 1982). Another service provided by some universities is a program which provides liberal arts students with a chance to meet and talk with successful liberal arts graduates (Hess, 1982). Speaking
series have been set up for each academic discipline, and
discussion has been encouraged between faculty, alumni, and
students (Hess, 1982). These new services and the new
employment information available are helping to make liberal
arts study more popular with students, as well as helping
them network to find jobs. But even with the new information
available, some liberal arts graduates have trouble finding
employment due to the differing perceptions of liberal arts
within industry.

In 1980, the Michigan State University Placement Service
made a statement that liberal arts and education graduates
will find the market in their area closed (Singleton, 1980).
While this may have been a bit of an exaggeration, there are
weaknesses in liberal arts education that cause some to look
unfavorably on liberal arts study. According to the Bell
System, the greatest weakness is in the quantitative skills
of graduates (Beck, 1981). It seems that placing a liberal
arts graduate in a position requiring advanced quantitative
skills necessitates much costly training, a major drawback
(Beck, 1981). In the field of accounting, for example, a
liberal arts major would require far too much on-the-job
training (Beck, 1981).

Furthermore, liberal arts graduates find difficulty in
getting hired into jobs which require certain specialized
skills. For example, in the broadcasting industry, a liberal
arts degree is not desired. Broadcasters look for a broadcast
news background in making hiring decisions for entry level
positions (Hudson, 1981). It appears that business and public service are the most promising fields for a liberal arts graduate.

Additionally, liberal arts graduates change jobs more than those with specialized degrees (Beck, 1981). In spending an entire college career studying liberal arts, a person does not have the time to specialize in a field to see if he or she would be happy in that field; so there is more job shifting. There could be various reasons for this, such as their adaptability to change; they are not easily satisfied; or they must find new jobs in order to obtain the income they desire (Hudson, 1981).

Strong argues that there is more value in specialization if a person is trying to secure an immediate position (Strong, 1985). But if one were not too concerned about finding an ideal position immediately after college, liberal arts should be considered. The first job may be difficult to secure, but the values learned through liberal arts help the graduate advance through the ranks of an industry more quickly than someone with a specialized degree.

There is a renewed interest in this society in liberal arts. The changing work environment and a service oriented society call for liberal arts skills. Communication, writing, and critical thinking skills are a must for college graduates. Most colleges are attempting to train students in liberal arts through a general studies program. Since colleges are striving to meet the needs of students, it is
imperative to learn if the students and faculty perceive the liberal arts benefits of general studies.
Research Questions

Liberal arts is growing in importance to faculty, administrators, and industry. But do the students realize the values and advantages? Universities in the past five years have added general studies programs and strengthened existing programs to show their interest in a liberal education. But what is being done to make students aware of these values? Some students view general studies as a "hodgepodge" of work requirements and not as a structured program (Stark, 1988). "... If graduates are expected to understand the sociological or economic context for professional practice or the history of the profession, these should not appear merely as added burdens. It is essential to clarify for students the crucial relation of this knowledge to practice" (Stark, 1988, p. 40).

The intent of this research is to begin to determine what is being said or done to emphasize the values of general studies to students. Do students already realize the value and importance of general studies? Is there a need to point out the value of general studies to students? Does the faculty have a basic set of the values of general studies understood by everyone associated with the university? Can a list of such values be identified? Perhaps the greatest concern is in what areas do the perceptions of faculty and students disagree on the subject of general studies.
Methodology

The intended method for this research was the Q-Method, to be conducted at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. Q-methodology was chosen as a process to identify types of images about the general studies program held by students and faculty. However, while conducting the interviews required to formulate the statements for the Q-sort, the interviewer made an interesting discovery. The statements made about general studies were very strong. In comparing the statements of students to those of the faculty and administrators, the researcher concluded that this topic did not require an advanced quantitative research method such as the Q-Method. The statements of students, as compared to those of faculty, reflected a profoundly different valuation of general studies. A number of other interviews were then conducted with faculty and students, making a qualitative analysis of the interviews the method of research.

The interviews were face to face and lasted approximately twenty-five minutes each. Tape recording the interviews was the most effective way to keep records of the statements made. All of the interviews were conducted by the same person in hopes of providing a uniform approach. Each interview began with the reading of a prepared statement explaining the research method and the purpose of the research. It was also important to assure respondents of the confidentiality of their participation, as set forth in the human study.
research proposal required by the university, before interviews could begin. Lastly, in reviewing a list of the general studies courses required by Ball State University (See Figure 1), the respondents became more confident about the subject under investigation.

The same questions were asked of all participants, although they were phrased differently for interviews with faculty and administrators than for student interviews. The unanswered and avoided questions were probed in hopes of generating a response to each question. As new topics were introduced by the respondent, more probing was required. Careful listening was necessary to be sure that respondents were revealing their true feelings rather than what they felt the interviewer wanted to hear.

At the conclusion of the interviews, the tapes were reviewed and the main themes recorded in writing. These themes were the basis of the research. The researcher identified the key issues and proceeded to compare and contrast the views of students and faculty.

Subjects

The sample contained a number of people in order to try to gain a representation of the Ball State population. There were two administrators--college deans--interviewed since this is the smallest group on campus. The faculty sample contained six professors in the Colleges of Sciences and Humanities and Business. Logically, there were more
students. A total of twelve students were interviewed, of which one was a freshman, three sophomores, four juniors, and four seniors. The numbers increased with the class ranks simply because upper classmen had more experience with general studies and, therefore, it was felt that they were more knowledgeable in responding to the questions asked.

Limitations of the study

The current investigation does not purport to be a comprehensive investigation. The samples of subjects are admittedly small. The investigation is heuristic in value. It attempts to identify the broad picture--the major issues and concerns that students and faculty express toward general studies at Ball State University. These themes can lay the groundwork for additional investigation.
**Figure 1**

**The General Studies Program at Ball State University**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Hours</th>
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<tr>
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<td>English 103, English Competency 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>English 104, English Competency 2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Junior Competency Exam, Written exam to test all writing skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Math 105, Math Applications</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>History 150, Western Civilization</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Speech 210, Fundamentals of Public Speaking</td>
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**Choose**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Physical, Earth and Life Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Social and Behavioral Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Humanities and Fine Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>International and Global Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Physical Education and Fitness</td>
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<td>3</td>
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Introduction to Findings

The responses to the interviews fell into six major themes. Each theme is discussed separately. First the responses of the students are presented. Then the faculty's and the administrators' answers are examined. Lastly, a comparison of the views of the two groups is made in each section.

The sections are required courses, values, skills, well-roundedness, wish list, and conclusion. The required courses section examines the students' views of the worth of some of the courses in the general studies curriculum. While faculty and administrators tended to avoid discussing specific courses, students were quick to volunteer their reactions. The views of those who had actually taken specific courses rendered some insight into the program at Ball State University. The values section identifies the importance which students and faculty place on general studies. The values section also attempts to determine whether the respondents viewed the general studies program as a whole, or as a set of unrelated courses. The skills section examines perceptions of the skills gained from the general studies program through either learning or developing as a result of taking specific courses. In the well-roundedness section appear the results of asking each group to define a "well-rounded individual." The wish list identifies those changes nearly everyone would make in the
general studies program, if they had the opportunity. The conclusion of the paper contains a general overview of the research results.

**Required Courses**

The interviewer asked faculty and students to identify those general studies classes which were the most beneficial. The researcher hoped that answers to this question would provide insight into the value and importance of a general studies program. The researcher reasoned that respondents would find it easier to discuss individual courses rather than the general studies program as a whole.

Faculty and administrators had opinions but were basically unwilling to cite the general studies class that most benefited students. Instead, they tended to answer that because communication was the most important skill taught, classes which developed communication skills were valuable.

Students, however, gave very definitive answers. Generally, all of the students interviewed reported that they took the required courses with the attitude that they "had" to take them. Their grades were not always "that great" because, as they said, they really did not care. After all, "It is not my major or my minor." There were mixed reactions toward the speech requirement. Some felt that it was a burden; however, one student felt more confident about herself after taking the course and another
student listed it as the favorite course. It was the consensus of the students that psychology helped to make one understand why they make the decisions they do, as well as how to deal with people in all aspects of life. It was noted that physical education has become very academic and is no longer just a matter of fitness. This change was greeted with mixed emotions. Classical culture, a course commonly selected to fulfill humanities requirements, was often described as a waste of time unless one learned Greek and Latin roots which can be used in understanding English. Still, students reported taking these courses for the most part due to classical culture's reputation for being an easy course. Some students reported that the basic 100 level courses were not challenging because they were either a rehash of high school or strictly memorization.

One of the themes expressed was that class sizes were too large. Many times there are 100 to 200 people in a class which allows for very little or no personal involvement with the professor. Another theme was that nearly all of the tests were multiple choice, so students memorize for the test but never really learn the material and soon forget it. This kind of information about courses could only come from students.

Interestingly, no student related the courses he or she had listed to their effect on his or her future or life in general. Most did seem to appreciate material in at least
one course. This led the researcher into more depth in search of perceptions of general studies.

Values

Students, faculty, and administrators were asked to identify the values of general studies. There was no real agreement on this point. Faculty and administrators saw a "big picture" that escaped students. Students picked up parts of the picture but seemed unable to put the pieces together. Faculty and students also tended to disagree concerning the responsibility of the faculty to explain the values of general studies.

The value of a general studies program is a philosophical issue that prompted a wide range of responses from the students. A few students admitted outright that they had no opinion or just did not know the value of general studies. Most stated that had they known, they probably would have gotten better grades. These students also claimed that the faculty should have explained the value of general studies. Most of the faculty reported no real need to explain the value of general studies to students. Even with no help from the faculty, most students gave some reasons why these classes were important. Increased awareness of the world in which one lives was a popular response. Some students could only give reasons such as meeting people through various classes outside one's major and learning what one really wants to study in college. Only one student of all those who were
interviewed identified the same value that faculty gave. She defined that value as the understanding of the way the whole of everything works—the world, relationships, careers. "It is all related."

The faculty and administrators focused on "the big picture," i.e., the way and the reason the world works as it does and the way each and every person fits into the scheme of things. They identified specific values such as being able to see others' viewpoints and the manner in which various disciplines, as well as people, approach problems. Also, several cited as important the ability to change and adapt to fit into any desired situation. Most asserted the necessity of teaching students to teach themselves because the learning process goes on forever. The ability to have a general understanding of the world, as well as exposure to the world, is vital. Hence, the distribution classes are set up as they are to help students develop a broad background. In the broadest sense, the distribution courses put into perspective whatever the students choose to do with the rest of their lives.

The values of students and faculty did not actually conflict. The students' values were generally very shallow. They either have not taken the time to evaluate general studies or, more likely, are just unable to see "the big picture." The students did make the point over and over that the faculty should explain why they, the students, must take these classes. In other words, the value of the classes
remained nebulous for most of the students. In fact, most students reported they had no idea of the faculty's perception of general studies.

Skills

While values evolve from general studies, skills also develop. By looking at skills, another dimension of learning can be examined. It was the goal of this portion of the interview to give students another chance to relate what they receive from general studies to their lives. All interviewees listed communication as the most important skill, but only the faculty and administrators further added critical thinking.

According to the students, the most important skills to be gained from the general studies program were writing and speaking. The English classes, as well as the Junior Competency Exam, appeared to be the basis for their listing writing skills. These classes force students to practice their writing skills and improve them. Most students judged communication skills, both written and oral, as important. Most students seemed to feel that they gained a lot from their required speech class. All of the respondents agreed that speaking was important to their future. Through speech class, the students claimed to learn not only to speak before a group, but also to present their thoughts in an organized fashion. In some cases, speeches were memorized, which required a great deal of discipline. So, not only
did students improve their skills in written and oral communication, they also learned organization and discipline.

The faculty and administrators agreed that communication skills were the most important skills taught through general studies, but mathematical skills were thought to be a close second. Additionally, they asserted that a process of thinking should be developed, that is critical thinking. Reasoning, they claimed, should be a part of all general studies courses. General studies also should teach students to feel comfortable with new ideas. New approaches to problem solving and analysis also were mentioned as being valuable skills cultivated by general studies.

Educators broadened their explanation of skills by adding that general studies provides an education, not just training. This education is carried into every aspect of life--career, recreation, and home life. An education allows one to be able to "do it all" as opposed to the "tunnel vision" developed through training. However, some faculty perceive that many students are not interested in the broad "picture." One faculty member, for instance, feared that students saw college as a white-collar DeVry or Lincoln Technical Institute.

The professor who worried that students viewed college as a training institute can rest easy. Everyone agrees that communication skills are the essential skills taught in the general studies program. Once again, the faculty were able to broaden the perspective of the uses for these skills, as
well as add ideas about thinking. The students recognized the obvious skills taught by English 103 and 104, the Junior Competency Exam, and Speech 210; however, they failed to relate the values of core classes to the rest of the general studies program, as well as to their lives outside of their professional future.

Well-roundedness

Probably the term most easily associated with general studies is "well-rounded." The term itself is vague, so a definition had to be obtained. On this point it was important to see if there was agreement on the definition by respondents.

When asked why the university required them to take general studies, the students first responded, "To make me a well-rounded person." Because the term is broad, the students were then asked for their definition of "well-roundedness." The general consensus was to know "a little about everything." When asked to elaborate, they explained that general knowledge enables a person to be able to do more than one thing and aids one in determining his or her future.

For comparison purposes, the faculty and administrators were asked what "well-rounded" meant to them. An unexpected definition was that students see "well-rounded" as a "physical metaphor" or exercising all parts of the body, when it really means understanding oneself and being able to take part in society or, more specifically, the ability to see everyday
accomplishments as well as problems from more than just one viewpoint. Generally, a well-rounded person is one who appreciates and is somewhat conversant on different disciplines and cultures.

In general, students and faculty seem to agree that a goal of general studies is to become "well-rounded." However, the students' definitions of "well-rounded" are quite general and focus on themselves as persons. The students added that they had neither asked nor been told the definition before. Few students reported seriously thinking about the meaning of being a "well-rounded" individual. Faculty felt that students might see the concept of a "well-rounded" person as being one who can carry on intelligent conversation at cocktail parties; however, this idea was never mentioned by students. The faculty and administrators were able to explain "well-roundedness" in terms of not just oneself, but one's society and the world in which he or she lives.

The faculty and administrators and the students appeared to have a long way to go to reach an understanding concerning the value and importance of general studies. Because students feel that "well-roundedness" is the goal to be attained by general studies, it seems valuable that students and faculty strive to reach a general consensus on the definition of "well-rounded." A failure to communicate on this definition could reduce the significance of a general studies program to students. Perhaps the faculty's sharing
of their practical working definition could mold students' general and rather vague definitions into ones with more significance. The desired definition extends beyond the way general studies help each individual to the way this in turn helps society.

Wish List

A wish list was developed to identify solutions to the apparent problems that students and faculty/administrators saw in the general studies program. After letting the respondents share their views on general studies, the logical place to end the interview was to ask what they would do differently if they alone were in charge.

Every person interviewed was asked what they would do to change the general studies program at Ball State University. The majority of students felt that the program was well designed and should not be changed. For those who were not satisfied, their solution was to minimize the requirements. Some felt that the overall hours should be decreased to allow more time for one's major and minor. One student felt there should be fewer science requirements, and another felt that fewer physical education requirements was the answer. One very insightful senior reported that his wish would be to tell incoming freshmen that the general studies classes are there for a purpose--to help--and should be taken seriously.
The faculty and administrators were more oriented toward changing the structure of the classes than the course requirements. One idea was for a three-hour block of time that would be counted as history, speech, and English, for example, and during this time, three professors would team teach all three subjects collectively. The major thesis of the faculty and administrators was that students were missing "the big picture." They felt that students see the general studies program as just classes, and not as a collection of related courses. Each and every class is related to every other and a three-hour block of classes can help to illustrate this. An administrator recommended a year-long sequence in which a group of about 30 students took three or four general studies requirements together and had team teachers. Team teachers work together in determining the curriculum and plan together ways to draw connections between seemingly unrelated courses. Such an approach, known as clustering, is currently in the testing stages at Ball State University. The College of Business and the College of Sciences and Humanities are working on a plan to bring various departments within the colleges together to show students the connections among courses by having faculty teach classes outside of their departments. Many faculty fear that even with innovative approaches, students will not have the maturity or experience to really see the connection. One faculty member argued that the students, not the university, have the responsibility to assess the
applicability of the general studies program. But none of the changes can be instituted unless the faculty are educated on, or express, the value of a liberal arts component within the educational system. The hope of all faculty and administrators is that with the help of the general studies program, each and every student will walk out of Ball State University with a profession and a liberal education.

The difference between student and faculty/administrator views on this issue is relatively simple. The students generally view the program as a list of classes they must take, so there is no reason for them to even think of trying to connect the courses. Because they are not exactly sure why they have to take the classes in the first place, they logically conclude that improvement means reducing the requirements. The faculty and administrators appeared to be genuinely involved in trying to better the program for the students. They seemed to feel that the key to getting students to do well and enjoy the classes is to help them to see the way courses are related, not just to each other but also to oneself and the world in which he or she lives. Accomplishing an understanding of the general studies program will take a great deal more communication than is currently being practiced, especially among the faculty and administration. Additionally, faculty must share their perceptions of the values and importance of general studies with the students.
Both the students and faculty who were interviewed expressed that an organized class to teach the relationship and values of general studies appeared to be out of the question. They feared that the students would be bored and become even more disinterested in general studies. The goal of the faculty and administrators is to really involve students in general studies by showing, not telling, the students the values. Relating courses, clustering, and team teaching appear to be logical ways of "physically" connecting or showing students the values of general studies. Teaching the values of a general studies program elicits the hope that students will develop the ability to relate what they learn with the rest of their lives. Since faculty and students are not communicating on the importance and value of general studies, this goal is not currently being reached.
Discussion

There is a great deal to be gained from a solid general studies program. It is unfortunate that more students do not realize what they could and should be gaining from these courses. This researcher did not fully comprehend the value of general studies before researching for this thesis. It is difficult for students to see the worth of the courses at this point in their lives. Both of the administrators interviewed said that graduates will normally see the value of their general studies program anywhere from five to ten years after graduation. To certain faculty, time is a must and no one should try to explain the value of general studies to students still in college. Time to mature and experience all of the things gained from a general studies program cannot be the only way for students to recognize the value of general studies. Implementing a program to emphasize the value of general studies is necessary.

The College of Business and the College of Sciences and Humanities at Ball State University are performing an experiment. They are trying to see whether team teaching involving faculty of different departments can have an impact on students' attitudes toward general studies. Ball State University is also experimenting with clustering courses. In its current experimental stages, clustering is placing the same students in three or four general studies classes in the same semester. Once again, team teaching is
used to show students ways that all general studies classes are related. It is hoped that by showing students and faculty the importance of the general studies program, there would be far less apathy on the part of everyone involved.

It was the purpose of this thesis to explore the importance of general studies and determine what was being done to explain the purpose of general studies to students at Ball State University. To specifically answer the research questions, students do not fully realize the value and importance of general studies. The students interviewed claimed there is a definite need for faculty to point out what they feel are the values of general studies. All faculty need not hold the same values for general studies. If a list of faculty values was created, it would be both beneficial and detrimental. Students would understand more clearly the values by getting the same information from every faculty member at Ball State. But this forces everyone to conform to the list creator's beliefs about general studies. This is exactly the opposite of what general studies is trying to teach. If everyone were required to expound the same values, critical thinking would be eliminated. Faculty and administrators do have a responsibility to share their beliefs about the values of general studies. This is a good way to ensure that students will get the most from their college education.

There are other ways, without showing or telling general studies values, to make certain that faculty and
course curriculum meet the goals of the program. A system of checks and balances should be developed between the General Studies Subcommittee and departments that are part of the program. The general studies course curriculum should be checked yearly to ensure that the goals of the program are being reached. Also, the departments should give students surveys or evaluations about their course and share these findings with the General Studies Subcommittee. Ball State University employs a General Studies Coordinator, which is also helpful. The coordinator works with students and faculty to create an understanding of the importance and values of the general studies program. This is achieved basically through fliers, advertisements, seminars, and lectures about general studies.

The hope is that by receiving an explanation of the importance of general studies, the students would put as much effort into this program as they give to their majors and minors. This would make college a better experience and create more "well-rounded" graduates at commencement rather than five or ten years in the future.
Conclusion

The ties between a liberal arts education and a general studies program run deep. Ball State University's response to the growing interest in liberal arts was to create a more stringent general studies program. The purposes behind liberal arts and general studies are the same. The desired end result is a "well-rounded" communicator capable of problem solving and critical thinking. It is exciting to see cooperation among the university, students, and industry. The growing interest could create an entirely new system of education. It has at least created a heightened interest in the way that the values of liberal arts are seen by society.

If the students understood this tie between liberal arts and general studies, then a step would be taken toward a desire to do well in these required courses. By explaining the ways industry has taken an interest in a liberal arts education, the faculty would be able to show students that the broad-based background provided by a general studies program can help them find a career. After all, students go to college in the first place to be qualified for a career, not just a job. Having a good general studies program gives students the best of both worlds--they can specialize in their major course of study and also reap the benefits of a general studies program. They will be specialists who can learn, think, problem solve, and adapt. Knowing this would put the students ahead after graduation. The values of
general studies should not be a secret that students are expected to stumble onto five to ten years after graduation. General studies teach about life. Why wait five to ten years after college to really start living?
Bibliography


