

**AN INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SAINT OLAF COLLEGE  
GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS TO PEER INSTITUTIONS: BASED ON THE  
ASSOCIATION FOR CORE TEXTS AND COURSES’ “TRENDS IN THE LIBERAL ARTS CORE”  
NATIONAL DATABASE**

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Dr. James May Provost and Dean of has asked, after consultation and collaboration with faculty curriculum committees, for an Institutional Profile history and Comparative Analysis of the current general education requirements at Saint Olaf College. The Institutional Profile and Comparative Analysis are benefits of participating in the Association for Core Texts and Courses' (ACTC's) project, *Trends in the Liberal Arts Core: A Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. An extension of a former American Academy for Liberal Education, Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education and Andrew W. Mellon (FIPSE/Mellon) project, *Trends* traces national developments in general education programs for the last 24 years in 66 "first phase" universities and in a growing list of "second phase" institutions. Indeed, St. Olaf has joined the second phase of the *Trends* project, and ACTC is honored that it should do so.

Administrators and faculty participating in the project have found the Institutional Profile Histories (IP's) to be extremely valuable because they provide an outside view of the development of one of the most significant elements of any institution – its general education requirements. This outside review often raises questions about the reasons and causes of change in cores and for newer faculty it provides a glimpse of the pan-institutional liberal arts traditions of the institution that, oftentimes, set it apart from other institutions. The Comparative Analysis (CA) is usually found to be valuable for (1) the CAs place the current program in the context of the AALE/FIPSE/Mellon *Trends* database, thus affording program comparison to national trends and to institutions within the database which have similar characteristics; and (2) the CAs suggest the bases of innovation for institutions interested in furthering their reviews or reforms.

*Trends* is a national project which seeks to examine causes of change in general, liberal education. So that the larger national audience of *Trends* and the project director may better share that understanding, we have included, in blue typeface, questions concerning the development of a number of aspects of the St. Olaf program. During our site visit or, alternatively, via electronic communications, we would welcome answers to these questions by faculty and administrators who have been involved in them.

Similarly, special questions that St. Olaf has requested the *Trends* project to address are discussed in maroon color typeface, below.

One of the conclusions of the *Trends* study is that general education has become central to both institutional educational excellence and institutional identification in the education marketplace. Put differently, whether institutions are seeking to revive their fortunes or, like St. Olaf, have a secure niche among comparable excellent institutions, *a wide and varied spectrum of institutions are centering their institutional development upon core, general liberal education*. Thus, *Trends* has become a valuable project for colleges and universities engaged in long-range institutional planning. Conversely, *Trends* provides to faculty and administrators models and innovations employed across the national landscape for successful general education administration, curricular design, co-curricular support (including orientation, advisement, learning communities and teams, and supplemental instruction), faculty support, student learning outcomes based assessment processes, and accreditation preparation. As a project of ACTC, it addresses issues of successful curriculum design employing core texts and courses.

An explanation of the project and, then, an Institutional Profile of St. Olaf's general education curriculum follows. The CA offers statistical comparisons to *Trends* institutions; the Peer Comparison further examines peer institutions.

## **EXPLANATION OF “TRENDS”**

The original *Trends* project had two goals: to study the evolution and causes of change in general education requirements and the liberal arts curricula in sixty-six colleges and universities in the United States from 1978-1998 and to help institutions implement general education reforms and assessments. Those purposes remain the same in the Phase II extension of the project to 36 new institutions.

In order to generate statistics and models from Carnegie Class Research and Doctoral institutions, the database has a larger percentage of those institutions than the national figures, and this representation is, thus, purchased by lowering the relative percentages of the Masters institutions. Baccalaureate institutions are represented in the same proportions as they occupy in the national universe of four-year institutions. As Phase II of the project develops, however, we would expect proportions to more nearly approximate national averages. The *affiliation* of institutions within *Trends* divides as do national proportions among public and private, secular and religious institutions. We are encouraged in our confidence in the representative ness of the study by the convergence of our general education statistics with those of earlier, commonly accepted studies and with findings of other FIPSE publications, since 1978, which confirm some of the major trends that we have found.

For each institution, Phase II of *Trends* follows a series of steps that matches the pattern of the original AALE/FIPSE/Mellon Phase I. Institutions submit seven catalogs, spaced at four-year intervals from 1978 to 2002. Data from general education programs and a host of other categories are recorded.

Depending on what the institution desires to know, patterns of data from the database make possible the production of various kinds of reports, such as this one.

The reports are followed up by site visits conducted by the *Trends* project director. This visit involves discussions of causes of success and failure in general education and innovations that may be of interest to faculty and administrators given the traditions of the institution. Discussions with faculty and administrators on the causes of changes in their general education programs contribute to the entire project's growth. Some findings of the site visit are used in future site visits.

Finally, a representative from St. Olaf College and one from each of the 35 other institutions participating in the second phase will gather at the conclusion of the site visits for an ACTC *Trends in the Liberal Arts Core* national conference to report on the success of their review or reforms and the impact that the *Trends* project had in helping to forward their institutional improvements in general education.

## **THE STRUCTURE OF THE CURRENT GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS**

In Carnegie classification, St. Olaf College is a Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts institution of a little more than 3000 undergraduates, all but 70 of whom are full-time, residential students. Enrollment seems to have peaked in 1989-1990 with 3202 and, subsequently, fluctuated between 2950 and 2975 in the years running up to 2002. St. Olaf is a private, religious institution that is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

St. Olaf awards two baccalaureate degrees, the BA and BM. Administratively, for many years the catalogs recorded that the College was organized into six divisions, all comprised of departments: Fine Arts, Language and Literature, History-Philosophy-Religion, Applied Sciences, Behavioral Sciences, and Natural Sciences and Mathematics. According to Dean May, “the old division structure gave way about 6 years ago to a faculty structure: we now have ‘faculties’ in the Fine Arts, Humanities, Social and Applied Sciences, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, and Interdisciplinary and General Studies. Each faculty is headed up by an Associate Dean for that faculty” (correspondence 12/07/02).

*Trends* has, for the sake of consistency, regarded subject matter majors and education majors in the same subject as one and the same major, even though we recognize the additional education courses that education majors may take. Thus, in our 2002-04 catalogue copy, St. Olaf appears to offer about 44 majors, with virtually no change in totals since 1978. Graduation requires 35 courses in a 4-1-4 system that has been in place since the early 1960's.

Within the time frame of the *Trends* study, overall, St. Olaf's general education requirements have become more structured and larger. The story of St. Olaf is actually one of great diversity within its general education program. St. Olaf's Bachelor of Music, its Paracollege, its Great Conversation, and more recently the Asian and American Conversations have all presented alternatives to the general education program which have been less extensive or structured (the BM and Paracollege) and more structured though only a partial fulfillment (the Great Conversation, Asian and American Conversations). Generally, St. Olaf's current main general education program would be characterized as a very strong, liberal arts, general education core. The changes within the College that we have seen are consistent with national trends. *Trends data indicates that the decision to build strong, general education programs based in liberal arts traditions has become extremely important to institutions seeking to meld general education reform with a distinctive institutional identity.* There has also been a tendency to develop "alternative tracks," though St. Olaf seems to be developing more alternative tracks than any other institution in our study – a notable development.

St. Olaf characterizes itself to prospective students, on its website, as offering a conservative education which is innovative and exploratory as well. Even if we were to ignore the College's history of innovation (4-1-4, Paracollege, many interdisciplinary majors and concentrations, an international program that is one of the best in the nation) or its sound disciplinary education (nationally, highly ranked departments and significant numbers of graduates going to top of the line graduate institutions), the statement would be true of its general education programs. Clearly, the history of St. Olaf is the history of faculty located in departments, but frequently moving out of departments – especially in the humanities and somewhat in the social sciences, and, lately, in the sciences – to form new, sound curricular developments in general education, be it in the main program or in the alternatives. Conversely, students have been offered a variety of ways to accomplish a liberal, general education. And, all of this has been done as the basic structure of general education has been elaborated and increased. Again, a remarkable development.

We may examine the current core program and its historical development, with attention to its alternatives as a way to set the stage for a comparison of St. Olaf's program to national trends in general, liberal education.

**2002.** St Olaf's general education program current requirements now occupy 18 courses or 51.4% of the 35 baccalaureate courses required for graduation.

The number above is at variance with the total number that St. Olaf assigns to general education in both its catalog and its website. There, the figure is between 14-16, though totaling up the possible courses would, in fact, exceed the number *Trends* has found. St. Olaf states that the proportion of courses devoted to general education may vary for each student. Calculating the minimal, general education courses that St. Olaf requires for graduation is done without reference to the credits that the College will allow students to test out of or the minimum that students transferring into the university must take. Nor does this calculation attempt to discriminate percentages based on courses which apply to general education but are used for majors, or the courses that satisfy two or more general education requirements (Those fulfilling two or more requirements were above 150 in the fall of 2002.) St. Olaf, in particular, requires an intermediate level of foreign language training which varies between three and four courses depending on the language. Further, students may place into or out of the sequence of courses, depending on their respective abilities. For the sake of consistency with *Trends* records, we have treated this as a three-course requirement. Ultimately, it appears as if the 14-16 figure is based either on a probable calculation of cross-listed courses taken by students, or that the figure is based on, say, the empirical range of one standard deviation off the average number of courses that actually satisfy St. Olaf student's general education requirements. Dean May has noted that the multiple (sometimes as much as triple) cross-listing is probably responsible for the figure. Whatever the case, the calculation *Trends* has used is below the maximum of 23

courses plus the two physical education quarter credit courses, but above the suggested proportion St. Olaf employs in the catalog. The reasons have to do with how *Trends* assigns courses in light of rules for course taking that institutions employ.

While by no means unprecedented, the extent of the use of double-dipping or two-fors is, probably, greater at St. Olaf than all but a few institutions in the Trends study. To get a sense of this, faculty may wish to recall the earlier structure of general education at St. Olaf which seemed to assign courses to categories almost exclusively by department. (This is to be distinguished from courses which fulfill both majors and general education – a different kind of two-for – which has been employed at St. Olaf since before the *Trends* project began and is found in the majority of our institutions.) Hence, this double-dipping is, in fact, a structural feature of St. Olaf's program. Below, for the sake of a convenient term, we treat it as an "interdisciplinary" feature. We understand by the peculiar use of this term not that all double-dipped courses are thought of by faculty as combining two disciplines, but rather that they do treat qualities, skills, and to a large degree, historical, geographic, or ethnographic "areas" of study, in addition to any disciplinary concerns, which the faculty believes it is desirable to specify and require of St. Olaf students. Perhaps the best way to think about this is that courses that satisfy two or more general education requirements are tending to venture beyond the boundaries that earlier educational traditions might have assigned to a given discipline; one might say these are "extra-disciplinary."

*Trends* is designed to treat the structures of general education that faculties construct as "real" and not simply "epiphenomenal." The current St. Olaf structure is based on three categories and twelve subcategories. Foundation Courses comprise the First Year Writing, the Four Writing Courses, Foreign Language, Oral Communication, and Mathematical Reasoning. Core Courses are made up of the following subcategories: Historical Studies in Western Culture, Multicultural Studies, Artistic and Literary Studies, Biblical and Theological Studies, Studies in Natural Science, and Studies in Human Behavior and Sciences. These subcategories, for the most part, are further subdivided by varying requirements. Finally, the Integrative Course is a single Ethics Issues course, variously filled by a variety of courses offered in different departments and programs.

### **Foundation Courses:**

The First Year Writing (FYW) represents the first of several courses by means of which St. Olaf addresses the skills of writing and their effectiveness within college learning. Originally named First Year Seminar as a replacement for a composition course, the FYW appears to have been designed as a writing across the curriculum effort (Mary Steen, email correspondence 12/02/02). In recent times, as many as 24 sections have been staffed by the English department, though Dean May notes that up to 8-10 other sections may be staffed by faculty outside the department. [Dean May notes that this faculty will have been trained. This suggests that the training would be in teaching writing processes and expected products; whatever the case we would appreciate hearing more about this training.](#) The new name, adopted after the 2000 catalog, may reflect a certain reality about both its aims and the faculty dedicated to achieving them. We find the following offerings in the spring of 2003: Films, short stories and novel, "Redefining Slavery," "Reading and Interpretation," "Imagining the Frontier," "Chance and Choice," "Friendship, Love, and All That," "Unlearning American Culture," "Growing Up Poor in America," "Cases of Conscience," "Writing to Change the World," "The Trickster," Essay? Memoir, Journalism?, "Kierkegaard and the Meaning of Life," and "Time." With three exceptions, are all these courses are taught by the English department faculty members, suggesting, of course, not only that FYW has become (or remained) predominantly an English department concern, but that the faculty's range of topics which participating professors find appropriate to the attempts to inculcate symbolic skills in students is far broader than the former Composition course's attempt to treat writing and literary analysis. ["The St. Olaf College General Education Curriculum: Requirements, Guidelines, and Comments"](#) (hereafter GEC/RGC) offers specific guidelines and recommendations for FYW courses. The guidelines include focusing upon prose for a general reader, attention to process, and basic research and bibliographic and internet resource instruction. Comments or recommendations include avoiding introductory courses and specialize disciplinary writing, use of a variety of "formal and informal" prose, non-imaginative forms for writing and, at least, six finished pieces per year. Are the criteria and recommendations used to review either for acceptance or after first offering WRI courses?

Four Courses with Writing (WRI) would seem to be another writing across the curriculum effort. Since writing courses depend on instructors, the catalog does not list the designated courses, but these can be found on the Class and Lab schedules. American Conversation, Chemistry, Dance, Economics, English, Great Conversation, History, Interdisciplinary Courses, Philosophy, and Religion all offer courses which are accepted writing courses. Of particular interest to other institutions would be Chem 252 Organometallic Chemistry, Economics 111 Transition Economies, and the Interdisciplinary, Computers in Health – all of which would be unusual writing courses. Is there training for such courses, as there is for FYW? Trends has seen many wac/writing intensive programs with varying efforts to ensure that writing training and practice takes place. According to the GEC/RGC instructors have authority to designate their own course “in consultation with the director of writing and the department chair” a writing course. It seems in deference both to personal and disciplinary authority, “the GEC is not issuing quantitative or definitional guidelines concerning the amount or kind of writing” in a course, though the guidelines comment that “writing must be central to student learning in the course” and such courses provide “explicit instruction in writing.” Have there been cases where a proposed course for WRI was not accepted or where suggestions in intensifying the writing along these lines were accepted by the instructor before the course was listed as a WRI?

Foreign Language St. Olaf offers French, German, and Spanish, as well as Chinese, Greek, Japanese, Latin, Norwegian, and Russian. The former group requires four courses to fulfill the language requirement, the latter three. We know of no other arrangement quite like this in our database (though analogies to it do not make the distinction seem that unusual – see below) and are curious for the reasons behind this differential. Is the differential related to the actual “empirical” number of courses that most students taking the three Western European languages are likely to take? One of the objectives of language study at St. Olaf is “to generate insights” into a culture other than one’s own. A number of the abroad programs mix language study in Chinese, Japanese, an unspecified language of India, apparently using the programs to introduce the languages. But the European site opportunities seem to be reserved for students who have proved their mettle in the language, having passed the 232 mark. Why is there this seeming difference in application? Noteworthy, as well, is the FLAC, Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum, Program. Not really a general education program, since it requires proficiency at the fourth semester level, we are still curious whether the faculty has debated the efficacy of attempting something like the FLAC program for entry level students?

Oral Communication is a category which is satisfied, much like the writing courses, by taking a course that is designated as having an oral communications component. The GEC/RGC states that the requirements for this category were revised and adopted in November 2002. Field Ecology, Principles of Education, Literary Studies, German History, Exploring the Arts, Mass Media, Advanced Conversation in Norwegian, Health Assessment, Health Psychology, Religion in America, the Russian World, Social Work Methods I, Contemporary Native American Issues, Foundations of Social Science Research, Oral Interpretation, Beginning Acting, and Voice and Phonetics all satisfy the category. The GEC/RGC notes that “the process of approving and monitoring the ORC attribute is slightly different from that of most other GE attributes. Instructors ... go through the usual process of proposing the course attribute to the GEC. Upon approval by the GEC, ... the instructor is free to teach the course with or without the ORC attribute. . . . The oral communication requirement is intended to help students achieve a level of oral communication competence appropriate to the generally educated student. . . In order to develop understanding, skill, and confidence, oral communication courses should include a minimum of three opportunities to practice oral communications skill [and] should comprise a coherent sequence [with] feedback to students.” Such a statement suggests review of every course for the general education program by the GEC. Are such reviews practiced on a case-by-case basis? Are denials/revisions ever an outcome of this process? Does the promised up-coming general education review envision a large-scale review of all courses?

Physical Activity requires two quarter courses of activity and, of course, the Physical Education department supplies many such courses. But so do Theatre and, particularly, Dance, another instance of multiple satisfaction of general education categories.

While it seems, from the many cross-listings, unquestionably true that the linguistic and physical arts have become in many cases interdisciplinary (in the sense noted above) at St. Olaf, in a fashion perhaps analogous to the older, liberal arts claims of grammar, rhetoric and logic to universal application, the same is not the case in Mathematical Reasoning, at least in the case of the Foundation courses.

Mathematical Reasoning, it is true, is satisfied by a Principle of Computer Sciences course and several Statistics courses, but at least in the fall of 2002, the professors who teach these courses all have their appointments in mathematics. In other institutions it is not uncommon to see sociology, economics, occasionally psychology methods courses, computer science, and management or business courses satisfy mathematics requirements. On the other hand, few institutions possess a mathematics department with the reputation of St. Olaf's. [What this reservation of courses to mathematics faculty would seem to suggest is the desire by the mathematics faculty with the concurrence of the rest of the St. Olaf faculty that mathematical reasoning be understood in its "pure," rather than "applied" form, though, notwithstanding theories in each field, statistics and computer science are instances of applied fields. From this it might follow that the general education objective of the category, in part to develop "an understanding... of mathematical problem solving" would, then, be pure problems. We would be curious to know if this is a matter of disciplinary authority or a matter of the distinction between pure and applied or some other distinction that is relevant. It seems worth remarking that a Gateways to Mathematics course, which centers on topics such as dynamic geometry, games, and cryptology, seems to be designed to draw the non-mathematics student into the world of mathematics, for it begins, apparently, in applications and moves to "mathematical literature and exposition." We note that in the GEC requirements MAR courses "must place the topics studied within some broader context. Why was this provision adopted?](#)

[Has the approach to mathematics that goes beyond solving algorithms toward description of a student's approach to a problem, justification of answers, or illustrating concepts and theorems changed mathematics instruction for general education students?](#)

#### **Core Courses:**

In varying degrees, the multiple listing of courses, seen as a function of interdisciplinarity as described above, also marks many of the subcategories and sub-sub categories in the Core Courses.

Historical Studies in Western Culture, unlike many of the subcategories in the Core, does not subdivide, and since the category is not a "history" category, but a "history of culture" category, many departments do, in fact, list their courses in this category as well as others. For example, Art History offers, currently, six courses (down from eleven between 1998-2002; five such courses remained in the catalog but were removed from a HWC listing); Economics one; English one; (interestingly) Environmental Studies one; German three; Philosophy four; Political Science two; Religion eight; Russian one. This does not exhaust the list; it simply illustrates. [That said, the GEC/GRC does insist on sufficient historical coverage and sufficient long-term impact of the phenomenon under investigation so as to assure a study of origins and development of a subject and to provide sufficient materials for learning what counts and how to use historical evidence. Would this imply that an effort as historical recovery would be seen as more of a specialized course, not suitable for GEC? Psychology, Sociology/Anthropology, Physics, and Biology, to name a few, are not conceived of, apparently, by either the departmental faculties, divisional faculties, or entire faculty as speaking to the History of Western Culture in a way that should be acknowledged within the curriculum, for these departments do not have courses listed in HWC \(according to the 2002-04 catalog\).](#)

Despite this spread of courses among departments other than the History department, that department still appears to supply the plurality of the History of Western Culture courses: 32.

A contrast to the Multicultural Studies category is interesting.

Multicultural Studies, unlike History of Western Culture, has no identification with a given discipline or department and is subdivided into two sub-subcategories. One requires students to take a course "focusing on a culture outside of the Western tradition" (MSC-G) and the second requires students to take a course

“focusing on cultural diversity within the United States” (MSC-D). Comments in the GEC/RGC note that “those working in the area of race, ethnicity and gender recognize that all three of these categories are significant primarily as social categories or constructions, rather than as biological or physical categories.” The guidelines specify that “Multicultural Studies introduce students to non-Western traditions and societies, [but does not include courses that] are appropriate for the multicultural component,” while “Cultural studies focus on patterned systems of belief and behavior that may be expressed broadly in world views, values, and social institutions and, more specifically, for example, in notions of time and space, custom, and gesture.” In the latter case, the comments specify that “Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and women ... best increase our understanding of diversity” though “the experience of ethnic groups like Irish Americans and Jewish Americans, whose cultural traditions differ(ed) significantly from those of the dominant British-American society to which they came and whose inclusion in American society was problematic for so long, would probably also count for this component.”

Quite a few departments and programs supply courses that satisfy both MSC-G and another category. For example, if we look at Artistic and Literary Studies in the fall list of 2002, we find Africa and the Americas, Art History, Asian Studies, History, and Music contributing courses that satisfy both categories. By definition, it would seem that no MSC-G would be an HWC.

On some campuses, including colleges which St. Olaf would probably consider to be peer institutions, the parallel development of Western Culture and Multicultural requirements has provoked an intellectual problem. Clearly, to some extent Multiculturalism is located through identification of “the other” in cultural terms. Just as clearly, the story of “the other” has, through research and liberal education, been shown to be part of the Western story. Where, then, do such courses as Women in America fit? [Colorado College, e.g., has been experimenting in developing a mixed category, satisfying both Western and MSC-G type courses as well as a few MSC-D type.](#) Perhaps in a course dealing with encounters between the West and other civilizations, there might be courses which could be cross-listed as HWC and MSC-G (adjusting the non-Western provision to be more like the earlier Cross-Cultural International Studies requirement), but surely in MSC-D, there would be room cross-listing. And, at St. Olaf, there is. For example, seven History courses are so listed, and it is a mark of the impact that diversity studies have made upon higher education and our concepts of the “West” that courses with titles such as America 1490-1865 and the United States Since 1865 are listed as both MSC-D and HWC. Also, the committee specifically mentions Russia as a problematic case in the Euro/non-Euro designation and relies on “the principle emphasis of the course.”

Excepting level III courses and independent research, usually programs and departments which consistently supply MSC courses also consistently have their courses cross-listed in two areas. This is true of African and the Americas, Asian Studies, Sociology/Anthropology, and Women’s Studies.

Artistic and Literary Studies The category is divided into “artistic form” and “literary form” but the distinction seems to be between studio/performance and literature or history/appreciation. For example, in Theatre no ALS-A course is an ALS-B course and the ALS-B (literature/appreciation) courses that are listed are Plays and Playwrights and History of the Theatre. As will be readily apparent from the above, ALS is also a site of considerable interdisciplinary double counting. Dance, for example, offers many courses which satisfy both the physical education and the artistic-A (studio or performance) requirement. In the GEC/GRC “literary forms” are specified to the “genres of poetry, prose, and drama as text” with courses “helping students achieve an informed appreciation of the aesthetic and formal properties of the literature being studied and an understanding of the place of the literature within the broader context of human life and culture.” [In general the GEC seems to be seeking courses that “concentrate on primary rather than secondary or critical texts.” Does the combination of the aesthetic and textual criteria imply that they courses each have a kind of systematic exploration of aesthetic behind them?](#) When creative writing courses are accepted, courses “must give equal attention to creative writing and to the reading of primary works” and the “courses should offer a broad selection of literature. These cannot be single author courses. They should include work by half a dozen or so writer....” We have noted the English department’s contribution to WRI, ORC, with courses that are also listed under ALS. Similarly most of the Foreign Language departments double list HWC or MCS courses as ALS “in-translation” courses. [Interestingly, the Classics department does not cross-list its courses in Greek or Latin literature as satisfying the ALS-L requirement. We are curious about the reason for this.](#)

(The faculty has asked about the use of the distinction between performance and appreciation in music and what courses fulfill the requirement at other colleges. This will be treated below.)

Biblical and Theological Studies as a subcategory enjoys the one required course on campus with a core text element in it – the Bible in Culture and Community. The course is subject to considerable thematic variation and while the Religion department indicates there are shared texts, it is unclear to this researcher that all St. Olaf students would be reading, say, one or more passages out of the Bible. Be that as it may, this course will probably stand as the one course that everyone, save those in the various Conversations, would consider shared. It may be of interest to St. Olaf faculty that many religious institutions tend to adopt a core program somewhat like the Great Conversation, but that in those that do not we find at least one institution that has recently re-adopted the notion of a common text religion course.

The other subcategory belonging to BTS is one advanced course in Theology. Now, one might think that, here, if anywhere, in the Religion requirement we would find that all of the department's courses were classified as "T" courses – whether the connection to theology was slight or strong. But such is not the case. GEC/RGC descriptions state that "Since the heart of the church's teaching is the biblical God and this God's Christ, this course must be explicitly and thematically concerned with the biblical God and Jesus the Christ." There are 26 Theology courses, but just as interestingly there are 7 MCS, 8 HWC, 5 ethics, and one ALS course. None of the Theology courses are cross-listed and none of the religion courses that have the MCS, HWC, or ethics (EIN) listing are cross-listed as satisfying the BTS requirement. It is true that the theology courses are supposed to be specifically concerned with critiquing and understanding Christian religious belief and that cultural courses which do discuss thought and belief (versus culture, institutions, and practice) are never solely focused upon Christian doctrines as cultural practice. Yet, that does not negate the essentially interdisciplinary nature of the Religion, cultural courses.

Anyone who knows anything about the development of religious studies and concerns would not be surprised by the interpretation of religion as cultural phenomenon (e.g., witness Martin Marty's interests and affiliation with St. Olaf). But the religion department actually acts as a kind of mirror of the interdisciplinary strain to the curriculum of St. Olaf. **It seems (and we would welcome confirmation or disconfirmation of this speculation) that the "price" that the department pays for having two courses reserved to it among many other humanities and social science departments is that its Bible and Theology courses cannot be placed elsewhere among the core course categories, while it may double list them as fulfilling the foundational, particularly writing, subcategories.** (The pattern seems repeated by the Mathematics requirement, a requirement which seems entail that Mathematics courses no longer satisfy the Natural Science requirement.) At the same time, its cultural courses are not counted as Bible or Theology courses, but are, instead, seen to compete for students with history, fine arts, humanities, interdisciplinary, and social science courses in, mostly, the cultural categories. (The analogue for the Mathematics department is that many of its courses though not counted as science courses are prerequisites for other science courses, particularly physics.)

As we cross into the Natural Sciences the range of interdisciplinary courses shrinks dramatically, but not to a null set. Natural Sciences requires one course from biology, chemistry, or physics in one subcategory, one course from either a department or interdisciplinary program, and one of these courses must be a lab.

Aside from the standard sequence of majors courses in each discipline which would satisfy general education requirements, St. Olaf does have a small number of science courses which are not for majors: Introduction to Astronomy, perhaps Geophysics: Perspectives on the Dynamic Earth, Fundamentals of Chemistry (which appears to examine the history of the discipline through "important early discoveries"), Environmental Chemistry, and Chemistry of Life's Beginnings (which reaches as far back as the solar system's formation and chemical properties of the early earth). Biological Science (health and the environment), Human Biology, and the Biology of Women all count towards the major.

It is easy to see in some of the courses above influence of intellectual interests that simply were not found in the 1978 curriculum and which may be thought to be found elsewhere in the current curriculum. But this can be confirmed, as well, by examining the *interdisciplinary programs* which may contain courses that

satisfy one of the Natural Science course requirements. Environmental Studies is the site where science, social science, and humanities meet, but they do not cross-list. It is worth noting the following description of Biosphere Ecology: “This offers a unique setting to study community and ecosystem ecology, especially through comparison with natural biomes present in the surrounding area. Study at Biosphere 2 Center will be combined with a variety of field trips to arrive at an understanding of biosphere ecology as well as the scientific and public interest in this field.” Yet, like all other courses, this satisfies only NS requirement.

Not surprisingly, there are no cross-listed courses in physics, chemistry or biology that work their way into the social or humanistic disciplines. Indeed, the distinction that is made in the Multicultural specifications that professors “working in the area of race, ethnicity and gender recognize that all three of these categories are significant primarily as social categories or constructions, rather than as biological or physical categories” would seem to preclude such cross-listing, and similarly GEC guidelines that “courses which are primarily about science...may ordinarily fit better into other areas in the curriculum” seem equally designed to reserve empirical, problem-solving with controlled variables and experimental or instrumental manipulation to the sciences much as social constructions are reserved to the Multicultural category. Nor are there any jointly produced “natural science” courses as we find at some Trends institutions. But, as with other Trends institutions, there is the occasional course in philosophy that counts as a science course: Philosophy and Science.

Psychology, a “swing” discipline, lodges primarily in the Natural Sciences at St. Olaf. [It offers the one course that this researcher has been able to find that is cross-listed in both the MSC and NST categories – that is, Principles of Psychology.](#) We would be extremely interested to know how and why this particular course achieved both designations. And we would be even more interested to know what particular topics within the course were thought to reflect, simultaneously, [both](#) areas of intellectual endeavor.

The Social Sciences, though they do venture into cross-listing, as we noted above, in the cultural areas, are largely confined to the [Studies in Human Behavior and Sciences](#) category. The sub-subcategories are specified simply by the requirement that students take two courses from two different departments or programs. [The way in which this category for course taking is organized is found in a similar pattern across the United States.](#) Yet the guidelines for the category present an interesting feature. By apparent faculty agreement, they are able to characterize the social sciences in ways which distinguish them from the humanities and sciences. While undoubtedly the differing social sciences would interpret such guidelines and comments as “for courses with a social emphasis, human behavior can be understood as patterns of choices made in response to social and institutional systems” in, sometimes, extraordinarily different ways, and while undoubtedly until interpreted those words are ambiguous terms, have the social sciences ever considered constructing an optional course, satisfying the general education requirements, that would bring all of the social sciences together to discuss and layout what it means to “think like a social scientist”?

The departments differ widely on their participation in general education. Almost all of the Level I and II courses of Sociology are HBS, as are the Anthropology and areas courses. Almost all of these courses are MCS courses, as well. Yet, interestingly, the History of Sociological Theory is an HWC course. Political Science lists eight of its courses as HBS. (Family Studies which might be thought to offer courses here, instead offers two in MSC.) Economics offers four HBS courses, Social Work, one.

History, another “swing” discipline, was treated in earlier general education programs as belonging to the same group as Philosophy and Literature. In a sense, then, it has with this reformulation migrated out of the traditional humanistic groupings of departments and disciplines toward a more (post)modern category of cultural concerns and studies, but it is not seen, in St. Olaf’s general education program, as part of the social sciences for none of its courses belong to HBS, while almost all of its courses are listed either in HWC or MCS. (One might compare this to, say, English which is predominantly ALS and MCS.)

### **Integrative Course**

While the objectives of the Integrative Course category stipulate that the courses should analyze ethical issues from perspectives that provide norms of justice, and that the Christian perspective should be included, at least during the fall of 2002, the perspectives go outside the traditional disciplines which have

been seen as the origins of political and moral perspectives: i.e., Philosophy, Political Science, and Religion. Asian Studies, English, and Interdisciplinary Studies are, this fall, offering courses, and the catalog lists Economics as offering an Economics Justice EIN course.

Beyond that, and to a larger point as well, The Great Conversation and the American Conversation both offer EIN courses. We mention this because the spread of EIN courses beyond the traditional disciplines and these two interdisciplinary, strictly general education programs point to the ultimate form of the interdisciplinary line of curricular development on St. Olaf's campus. Unlike Wabash College, which has a final comprehensive oral exam for every student which tests not only that student's achievement in light of a major but in light of their entire baccalaureate career, and unlike the University of North Carolina at Asheville, the state's liberal arts college, which offers a four-year common core-text interdisciplinary sequence, the culminating moment in interdisciplinary exploration at St. Olaf is this integrative category – a category which in its demand for a Christian perspective also seeks to ensure that *other* disciplines than religion take the religious, Christian perspective into account.

We may work “backwards” through two interdisciplinary programs, the recent American Conversation and its longstanding earlier model, the Great Conversation. The American Conversation gives credit for four courses in six subcategories, FYW, HWC, MSC-D, ALS, HBS, and two Writing Courses. The Great Conversation does even more: BTS, FYW, HWC, ALS, three Writing Course, and OC. American and Asian Conversations are clearly modeled on the success of the Great Conversation. The Great Conversation, it is true, was formed as the culture wars were heating up (as was the original Cross-cultural International Studies course). But, at least, as important a concern for its formation would have been likely to have been the coherency of a vision of education that, like the much older liberal arts traditions of the ancient Greek and Romans academies and medieval universities could only be achieved by some form of (a) interdisciplinary (b) coordination of courses, or as the Catalog description of the program puts it: “the program traces the development of literary and artistic expression, philosophic thought, religious belief, and historical reflections on western culture and the modern world.”

Of less definite, but possibly equally important, preparation for the interdisciplinary strain of St. Olaf's current program would be the Paracollege. Without any doubt, the Paracollege was the original “alternative track” program through general education and the baccalaureate. Whatever its virtues, deficiencies, costs, and achievements, there can be little doubt that it presented an alternative to the departmental, disciplinary mode of general education that existed in the 1978 program. While the history of St. Olaf's general education shows the Paracollege, clearly, responding to the need to account for competencies similar to those produced by the course structured general education program, it seems likely that the personal teaching by tutors who were regular faculty members, as well, provided a seed for thinking about the curricular, course-driven general education programs. The Paracollege may not have become the model for baccalaureate education at St. Olaf, but, given the history and outcome of the current program, it seems likely to have been influential in thinking about how to restructure the College program in the early nineties.

There are many ways to produce an excellent liberal arts degree in the spirit of the liberal education offered in ancient and modern times through attention to the integrative, interdisciplinary studies. We have remarked earlier that the St. Olaf's current general education program is one of the stronger ones in the *Trends* study. Yet, liberal education and liberal arts are not, strictly, a disciplinary matter in the same sense that physics, psychology, or history might be conceived to be, for liberal education lives in institutions alone, not in pan-national or international consortia of faculties and larger institutions concerned with one corner of the world of learning. Hence, it is of no small importance that the reform of 1992-1995 at St. Olaf produced a radically altered general education program, more structured in its requirements and more interdisciplinary in its opportunities. Both the large-scale interdisciplinary ferment in the humanistic and social science disciplines – particularly in the concentration on cultural matters – and the particular developments on campuses across the nation, like the development of the Great Conversation, were seeds, elsewhere, for more wide-ranging reforms which *Trends* traces throughout its twenty-five year history. [Whether they were, both, seeds for reform, here, we ask the faculty to instruct us.](#)

We turn first, then, to the history of curricular changes that led up to the 1994 reform (as it appears in our 1994-1995 catalog copy), and, then, to a comparison of St. Olaf College's current general education structure to large-scale historical trends and current statistical patterns across the United States.

## **HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ST. OLAF'S PROGRAM**

The overall view of the development of St. Olaf's Core program appears to be a kind of "punctuated evolution." That is, changes in structure have been gradual but are marked by the significant structural change that took effect in the Fall of 1995. We begin, thus, to trace how changes have accumulated and structure has diverged from a 1978 origin.

**1978.** St. Olaf was, then, as it is, now, on a 4-1-4 system, which meant that students took 35 courses to graduate. There were seven, not three, categories, with Western and Multi-cultural studies not represented by any category or subcategory. A composition requirement, English 11, was in place. Foreign Language required only three courses. Religion required three courses, but at the time there was no single introductory course. The remainder of the program was a strictly departmental distribution affair into four areas: prosaically named A, B, C, and D. These did, as we suggested above, represent the Humanities (literature, philosophy, and history), Fine Arts (Music, Art, Speech), the Social Sciences (Economics, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology) and the Natural Sciences, including Math and Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. Aside from the required Composition, a course, a required lab course, and the Religion structure requiring one freshman level course and two upper level courses, there was little structure and no interdisciplinarity. We make this comment because either the interdisciplinary majors programs did not have their own courses (Asian Studies) or those that did did not have entrée to the general education program: American Minority Studies' Introduction to Minority Studies would have, apparently, had no way into general education.

Composition was the common "core text" course, but the description of it seems to have nothing in common with either the Religion course of the present day or the courses of the Great Conversation. The catalog remarks simply that "various literary forms, ...good writing [and] practice in composition" were promised to students.

Religion, instead of offering one core text course with many thematic variations, offered students four level 1 (11-19) courses. Possibly still in an environment where St. Olaf students would have carried with them the standard cultural equipment of some familiarity with the Bible, the fourth course examined "answers to the chief religious problems of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century." No distinction was made between Biblical and Theological courses, though only one course in the requirement could involve a non-Christian religion.

African, Latin American, and Asian History courses were listed in the History department and would have qualified for the Area A, but students would not have been allowed to satisfy further general education requirements with another history course. Hence, students were not directed toward both Western and Multi-cultural courses. Conversely, a course such as the Introduction to Women's Studies had no place in the general education curriculum. Of course, the same rules would have applied to Philosophy and Literature courses for Area A. Indeed, if the Ethics course of the current curriculum does consistently demand moral consideration, then in contrast no St. Olaf student would have been directed toward any philosophical area at all in 1978.

While it is true that the requirement for Composition would have brought students into contact with literary products, there would have been no necessity for them to confront the fine arts. This writer is a product of rhetorical training and he considers speech to involve art, and a liberal one at that. But students could have passed through four years of St. Olaf without ever having taken a fine arts course, for Area B, in 1978, required only one course in Art, Music, and Speech, and Speech courses. Speech, while including many theatre and oral interpretation courses, was also concerned with public speaking, communication and interpersonal relations, and introduction to small group communication. Hence, in 1978, St. Olaf students could have avoided either the liberal art of speech or a fine art within a liberal education.

The Social Sciences, Area C, would be recognizable to a current St. Olaf student, the requirements being virtually the same and the departments that offered those courses being much the same as well. Some of the courses were different: Contemporary Society, “the sociological perspective and its uses,” led off Sociology’s offerings. In 2004, the Anthropology of Jazz leads off the Sociology/Anthropology offerings, while the corresponding course to the one listed above, Introduction to Sociology, speaks not of “structure and dynamics of contemporary society” but of “challenging questions such as ‘do we have a human nature’ and ‘why does social inequality exist?’” while promising to develop in students a “sociological imagination.” Principles of Economics treated micro and macro economics, whereas now the Economics department offers varying “Gateway” courses which, apparently, take topics of current general interest and use these as entry ways into what to students, at the threshold, might still regard as the dismal science. [We would be interested in the success and innovation of these courses, the descriptions of which do not appear in the catalog.](#) Political Science commenced with the standard American Government – a seemingly constitutional interpretation. Though hardly straying from the American scene, 2004’s American Politics, not Government, examines the “promise... of equal freedom of all” by examining racism, class, interest groups, and political parties.

Physics did offer ½ courses of “planetary” and “galactic” astronomy for non-majors. Chemistry started students off with General Chemistry, but Biology had developed the Biological Science course, at this time its focus was evolution, heredity, their “relevance to man” and “social implications.”

Most importantly, “Mathematics and Sciences” was one category. It would have been possible, apparently, to take two courses in any discipline, though one would have been compelled to take, at least, one natural science course since a lab was required. Math would have been escapable.

One element of the Paracollege deserves special mention, at this point. The Paracollege was, of course, largely driven by tutorials, concentrations, and final examinations at the end of baccalaureate career. However, in the freshman year, students were required to take “the Freshman Seminar” – a “year-long [seminar that] provides direction for approximately one-quarter of the student’s time... It offers entering students training in reading, analytical thinking, and essay writing in the context of discussions of literature and religion.” [Did experience with the seminar aid in the development of the Great Conversation and, later, the First Year Seminar of the 1990’s?](#)

*Trends* shows a significant change in institutions in the 1980’s. Like many other institutions of the time, St. Olaf began to change.

**1982** in the catalogs supplied to *Trends* marked the first structural change in the general education or core curriculum. It was in a sense both gradual and quite radical. [While, unquestionably, the changes resulted in greater directivity of student course selection, it would seem, in light of the earlier structure, that these changes were motivated by a concern with the nature of what a baccalaureate liberal education should entail. Was this so?](#)

The main program saw gradual changes. Course requirements were added to Areas A and B, so that in the former case students now had to take one history, one philosophy, and one literature course, while in Area B, two courses distributed among the three departments assured students of taking a fine arts component, but did not assure them of any oral/speech requirements. For the first time the underlying stratification of the curriculum by department was changed with the addition of the Cross-cultural International Studies requirement. This was, in the main program, the first introduction of double-listing: “A course meeting this requirement might satisfy another general or distribution requirement as well,” and following our line of reasoning above the category was, in this sense, widely multi- if not inter-disciplinary. Courses were to have 1/3 of their content be either non-European or non-American. The minimum number of courses students must take thus rose from 14 to 16, or 46% of the curriculum.

The more radical, yet at the same time more traditional, break with the general program came in the development of the “Great Conversation” which was explicitly designed “to emphasize the inter-

relationship of the great expressions of Western tradition so that students might gain a broader understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of study in the liberal arts.”

The Cross-cultural International Studies requirement and the Great Conversation would seem the obvious predecessors to the current Multi-cultural Studies and Historical Studies in Western Culture categories. Would the success of generating courses and the discussions on campus be considered to be, ultimately, responsible for the development of these categories?

We simply note that for a general education program structured on the basis of interdisciplinary contribution to general education and multiple credits in categories, the “Great Conversation” appears to be the model that eventually informed the 1992-95 reforms. The traditional element is stated in the quote above; the radical nature was that students were (a) following, in general education, a path through two years of work and (b) gaining credit for seven requirements in the general education program based on (originally) six courses. A further novelty existed at the program’s inception, though it was not long-lived. There was a science course during the Interim, “The Structure of Scientific Thinking” (Kuhnian in conception?) that satisfied the natural sciences requirement. We would like to know why this course disappeared shortly.

It is not stated in the catalog whether the program immediately adopted what might have been precedents in the Paracollege: that is, whether the 120 participating students (60 per class) were living together and whether, as later catalogs state, the students were essentially “tutored” by having the same three professors over the life of their journey through the program. Dean May has assured us in correspondence that “almost, if not right from, the start” the Great Conversation was adopting these practices. We would be interested to know faculty memory and opinion on this influence.

Whether or not the Paracollege had such influence on the Great Conversation, then or later, it is clear that, at least in its public documents, the Paracollege was paying more attention to what were to become “watchwords” for general education in succeeding decades: “students in the Paracollege demonstrate *competencies* required for the St. Olaf Bachelor of Arts degree ...” Generally, these competencies were discussed in terms of four of the general education categories: Religion, Foreign Language, Creative Arts, and Physical Education. And more importantly, the Paracollege located the demonstration of these competencies not only in courses taken (“seminars. . . or college courses”), but on evidence of student achievement: “papers, journals” Since these had not appeared and, whether through pressure within the general college or in order to articulate its particular education, it was discussing its achievements in words that have become familiar within the last ten years: “Educational Outcomes: ...A comparison of Paracollege students and regular college students on achievement and skills has shown that those in the Paracollege have done as well...” The point of citing this public statement is not to raise what might have been a controversial issue at St. Olaf over time (and which may or may not have led to the demise of the program by 2000), but to show that, indeed, the Paracollege was seeking ways and a vocabulary to discuss education in 1982 which have become part of the educational assessment and controversies of the late 1990’s in the liberal arts. Though the word is never used, all of this implies a sense of educational “objectives” for pathways of baccalaureate study.

And, indeed, 1982 in the general education program saw the introduction of “objectives” or goals to the general education program. *This is one of the earliest of such efforts in the Trends database that we are aware of.* Of course, the intriguing issues of objectives are two: were they used to formulate and select courses for general education, and were they used, sooner or later, to assess the achievements of students or the ultimate goals of general education and the mission of the college? We would appreciate faculty views on this matter.

1986 saw no change in structure, but as the college grew, so the course offerings were changing. One way to see this is in the growth of non-departmental and, mostly, interdisciplinary concentrations; in 1978 there were six; by 1986 there were eight; by 1990, there were 12. Concentrations bring with them new introductory courses and an opportunity to attract students through departmental offerings of courses that would also appear in the concentration – frequent inhabitants of general education programs in many institutions. Yet, at the time, the Cross-Cultural category was defined as non-European and non-American,

so such courses as Introduction to American Minority Studies, American Culture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, and Introduction to Women's Studies would have had no "place" in the general education curriculum. Hence, we would expect over time for faculty to conclude that changes in the general education curriculum were needed, in part, to serve the interests of opening these courses to selection by students in the general education program.

In addition, St. Olaf has for many years has had a source for curricular experiment – the Interim. Thus, in 1986 we see the first appearance of "The Biology of Women" and "The Chemistry of Life's Beginnings." Here, in cases like this, the catalog does not reveal whether such "trial" courses counted toward fulfilling the general education requirements, or, rather, if tradition, committees, or regulations required that a course "prove its mettle" outside the general education program before being admitted. We would appreciate knowing the answer, here.

1990 was bringing to a close the largely disciplinary based general education structure. From this point on, we imagine that faculty were formulating review committees in a process that probably took a couple years to generate the 1995 reforms. Of course, no mention of this appears in the 1990 catalog, but there is mention of developments which would have, at least, had an impact on freshmen and, possibly been a response to retention concerns.

Academic Support assistants were now trained by the Academic Support Services and assigned to residence halls. And the case for such attention particularly focused on core studies seems to have been made most explicitly by the Great Conversation; for the first time in the catalog, the Great Conversation notes that "Students selected to participate live together for the first year in the same residence hall" and "students are taught by three faculty members who remain with them through the sequence of courses."

Here, again, of course the Paracollege would have justly claimed special attention to students through the individual instruction by means of tutorials, *but the significance of the Great Conversation would have been that this would have put such practices into use in learning communities based on learning teams – an extremely early use of these practice, especially for a non-honors program.* And the spread of what amounts to tutors into residence halls would have, at least, acknowledged the need of similar, if far less coordinated attention for all students. What these three efforts represent, then, is a spectrum of attention far different than would have been seen in 1978.

*This devotion of resources to students to enhance their initial, non-majors educational experience in general, liberal education is, in some institutions, a signal change in recognizing the importance of general liberal education to both the student's success and, indeed, the character of the college's particular form of liberal education.*

1994 shows the announcement of the Fall 1995 structural reform. The reform was slightly greater in scope than the current program. At the time, the Oral Communication requirement was allotted an extra quarter course credit for all courses that incorporated a component, while the Speech department offered a course particularly designed to fulfill the requirements. Subsequent to this time, the Speech department was changed to the Communications and Theatre department and, finally, to the Theatre department. *Perhaps, the number of students majoring in speech and taking classes in speech/communication was in decline and this particular arrangement – balancing wide-ranging selectivity of courses with a full course in the department – was a way to try to bolster speech course attendance. We would be interested if this or other considerations entered in.*

1998 saw the program fully operational. The oral communication requirement was modified to current requirement. Bachelor of Music students, as had been the case prior, took a reduced version of the current program.

**After 2000:** Though perhaps outside the scope of this study, we note that as the Paracollege closed its doors in 2000, the Center for Integrative Studies was set up, perhaps as an aftermath of the paracollege, to help with students interested in self-designed integrative majors, but it did offer a curriculum of seminars -- all "to enhance coherence of academic careers."

In another effort, more directly applied to general education, First Conversations, a learning community/learning team collaboration by the Religion and GE 111 program was established. The successful precedents seem clear.

With this we turn to the statistical comparison of the movement toward and the configuration of the current Core program to national trends and structures in general, liberal education.

### **THE RELATION OF ST. OLAF COLLEGE'S GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM TO STATISTICAL PATTERNS WITHIN *TRENDS***

Here, we place St. Olaf's general education requirements, as well as their large-scale historical developments, within the wider contexts of the *Trends* study of 75 institutions, including 32 Carnegie class baccalaureate, 52 private, and 28 religious institutions. With these comparisons in mind, we may suggest what the general education requirements look like as a whole.

Nearly 85% of our schools have experienced at least one structural change in the twenty-four year history of their general education programs which *Trends* spans. Thirty five percent have experienced two structural changes. Eighteen percent have three or more. St. Olaf has had two seen in our 1982 and 1994 catalogs.

For many schools, 1980-1982 marked the years when reform in general education first began. 1990 was a time of significant, though not quite as extensive change, as well. St. Olaf seems to have participated in both eras of reforms.

*Over twenty years, the basic story of general education in the United States, across all cross-sections of institutions, is an increase in credits (about 3%), a significant increase in categorical and sub-categorical structures, an elaboration of tracks and clusters, a slight increase in mandated courses, and development of "qualitative options," that is, categories of course-taking with specific qualities that may be applied to other categories, as well. Examples at St. Olaf would be the Oral Communications and Writing courses (though we have discussed the extensive use of double listing at St. Olaf.) Much of St. Olaf's 24-year history as recorded in the Trends database fits this picture.*

St. Olaf College's General Education program occupies 51.4% of the baccalaureate degree credits (or 18 courses), up from 46% in 1982 restructuring and 40% in 1978. In 1998, the records of all institutions in Phase I of our study show that 41.4% of baccalaureate degree credits are devoted to general education (the median is 40%). On average, baccalaureate institutions devote 42.3% of their total BA credits to gen ed. 51% is higher than the baccalaureate average. When we stratify by percentage of credits required in general education by institutional affiliation, religious institutions average between 44.4% and 47% of the baccalaureate be devoted to general education, depending on whether we accept one outlier that requires 100% of its program be devoted to general, liberal education. St. Olaf is above this average. When we stratify further by Protestant institutions, the average is the same, 44.5%. Bearing in mind that few if any institutions have as extensive cross-listing as St. Olaf does, and using the 14-16 course figure that St. Olaf employs in its publications, the average range would then be 40-46%, well within all of these averages.

General Education programs for an entire campus are not a universal of higher education. Often, the Colleges of Arts and Sciences form a pattern off of which other schools or colleges are free to develop. Boston University, Howard, IUPUI, and Georgetown have no universal general education requirements. Fully one-quarter of *Trends* institutions allow significant (more than one course) variation in the compliance with the basic structure of general education. Conversely, anecdotal and local evidence about the difficulties that professional degrees, pre-med programs, and science programs encounter with general education often make either growth or universal application of general education requirements seem impossible, but the truth is that nearly three-quarters of *Trends* institutions do manage universal general education. Common exceptions in liberal arts institutions are professional programs; here, St. Olaf splits

the difference, with the Bachelor of Music using only a portion of the general education program while Nursing has followed the general education program to the letter for years.

All institutions that have any general education curriculum at all (in the early years of our study there were some with none) direct course-taking behavior through *categories and subcategories*. In trying to assess the articulation of curricula, it makes sense to add the categories and subcategories together for three reasons. First, sometimes when curricula are restructured what was once a category becomes a subcategory. Second, categories and subcategories represent the primary paths which students follow in their course taking behavior and almost all general education programs do direct student course taking to, at least, these two levels. Third, the more categories and subcategories there are, the more an institution is shaping the course paths and course taking behavior of students, not to mention the course giving opportunities for faculty. In short, categories and subcategories are a measure of differentiation that an institution undertakes in its liberal, general education.

From 1978 to 1998, the number of categories and subcategories – that is, the articulation of general education programs – increased 41.6% in our national database, better than 2% a year. Across both phases of our study, the average number of categories and subcategories from which courses must be taken is currently 13. The median number of categories and subcategories in religious institutions is 14. We count the current version of St. Olaf's curriculum to have fourteen (a drop from eighteen in 1978). Clearly, this does not, in St. Olaf's case, reach sufficiently into the depth of categorizing, and, indeed, if we go to the sub-subcategorical level (a level not found in the 1978 program), then we discover 12 sub-subcategories of which St. Olaf students must engage 11.

Another indication of an institution's direction of course taking behavior is in the number of categories that are satisfied by one or two departments or programs; in effect, this number indicates the decision by an institution that some subjects must be attended to in the continuum of its curriculum. Significant numbers of schools reserve categories to a limited number of departments, programs, and courses. Of the 33 baccalaureate institutions in 1998 Phase I and II, 18 have *one or more* categories that are fulfilled by one departments. Again, this is categories. When we reach into the subcategorical level at St. Olaf, we find two: the Religion and Math requirements.

Since 1978, the number of schools requiring, at least, one course for all its students has risen from 45/66 (in Phase I schools) in 1978, to a peak of 57 in 1986, to a current 53. Phase II figures indicate that 7/10 institutions required at least 1 course in 1978, while 9/10 require at least one course in 2002. 42% of Phase I institutions have three or more required courses; 80% of Phase II institutions require three or more; seven have five or more required courses. (Required courses do not include First Year Seminars where the subjects are left up to the instructors). Twenty-three out of 33 of our baccalaureate institutions, in 1998, indicate, at least, one required course in a general education curriculum. Here, again, we are speaking of directing the course taking behavior of students.

Finally, within the lifetime of our *Trends* study, we have seen the spread of general education programs into the junior or senior year. This takes two forms: either an institution requires that more than 50% of its baccalaureate degree be devoted to general education, or the institution requires course work – e.g., gen ed minors, interdisciplinary seminars, capstone experiences – in the junior or senior year. Thus, in the last 20 years, Trends has seen a rise from 22% to 43% of institutions devoting some portion of the junior or senior year to general education course work. St. Olaf has entered this group of schools through both the percentage of baccalaureate degree credits devoted to general education as *Trends* has calculated this and through its Integrative Course. (Empirical tracks of students, given departmental dispositions of the student's general education course taking – e.g., in the sciences -- may lead to much core course taking in the junior and senior years.)

We now turn to what is to be taken within the 2002 program in the light of national trends. We may proceed through divisions of curriculum commonly reflected at many universities and colleges.

The norm in composition courses is around two. St. Olaf no longer has a composition course but has, instead, substituted a First Year Seminar and Four Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing Intensive courses. First Year Seminars are found in over 18% of Trends institutions and are, certainly, gaining in use throughout liberal arts colleges. Writing intensive courses have increased dramatically. In 1978 they were not quite unheard of; by 1998 they were found in 24% of Trends institutions. In 1978, foreign language was required by 34.9% of our *Trends* institutions; in 1998 this figure had risen to 51.5%. Phase II institutions of Trends are maintaining the same percentage. It may be of interest to faculty that there are four levels of requirements found in the database: one year, one and one-half or two, two years, and above two years. Institutions at the beginning and intermediate level have both gained by 50%, but the numbers of institutions that have added two years of foreign language exceed the number that have added only a year by a two-to-one margin. (St. Olaf has asked us to address the issue of the uniqueness of course requirements and components “tacked on” to some courses and not others. We have stated a judgment, that St. Olaf uses this more extensively than many institutions [Bard College would be comparable in this respect], but it is hardly unique. For more on this issue, see below when Western Culture and Multi-Cultural courses are discussed.)

St. Olaf has asked about the unusualness of the requirement that in more common languages four courses are asked for and in less common three. Beyond this inquiry, St. Olaf has expressed a concern about the kind of control institutions with extensive overseas programs exercise on courses which count for general education credit but which are taken abroad.

We have already suggested above that St. Olaf may be employing a kind of “empirical” analysis that may have informed and justified this distinction: students with the more commonly taken languages would probably tend to enter the college with more years of high school language behind them. If the College is concerned about collegiate linguistic experience and the relative proportion of that experience within the overall curriculum, the differential makes perfect sense. A course differential for language is certainly not unusual. St. Olaf itself instances this in the case of Bachelor of Music requirements. Institutions with Bachelor of Science requirements (but not with BA’s in sciences) do often require fewer foreign language semesters than do their counterpart BA programs. So, differentials in proportion to a curriculum are hardly unusual. Beyond that, a small number of institutions allow students to take one year of two separate languages, one institution accepts either a third year reading course or a second year with demonstrated proficiency in speaking as well as the intermediate competency. One institution requires a proficiency in the third year of language. The range of course requirements 3 to 4 courses.

Concerns with quality control of general education courses taken abroad is not an issue which has come up largely because few institutions in Trends have the variety, depth or commitment to overseas programs that St. Olaf demonstrates. Some institutions do limit their overseas programs, at least partly, out of concern that the quality of the courses be maintained, to courses taught by faculty overseas. However, Loyola College of Maryland does have a strong commitment to overseas programs without the presence of faculty, especially in the junior year. Faculty advisors of the major which is accepting the overseas courses are responsible for approving the compatibility of the courses with the Loyola curriculum. Actual assessment of the courses is not, evidently, performed though the Dean does informally monitor them through interviews with students. This writer has contacted Lewis and Clark college. L & C is strongly committed to general education overseas. Though students may substitute on campus courses, embarking overseas is highly encouraged. Many, not all, of the programs are language intensive and, then, combine study of other subjects with the language learning. This seems to be a way in which the college assures itself of the quality of the programs. This writer has contacted Lewis and Clark for further information and will be happy to supply it during his site visit.

St. Olaf has also expressed curiosity about the unusualness of the Oral Communication component. While the represents an area as yet unanalyzed by *Trends*, we may suggest that institutions within and without Trends do and are increasingly expressing concern that students be, at least, minimally proficient in some

form of oral address. For an institution which shares St. Olaf's particular curricular method of insuring that concern, administration or faculty may wish to speak with Eckerd College.

Above, we spoke of increasing articulation, or differentiation, of categories and subcategories. The addition, by many universities, of a foreign language requirement is one example of what is "filling" such differentiations. In 1978 among all institutions only 30% of institutions distinguished math from the sciences as a separate requirement; in some institutions math was frequently mixed with foreign language or music. By 1998, 59% of institutions tracked students into a math requirement, while 50% were making the distinction between math and science requirements (see below), and 40% of baccalaureate institutions were making the distinction. In Phase II institutions, the 2002 records indicate universal adoption of the distinction. Clearly, St. Olaf joined this trend in the 1995 reforms.

Lab components are another big gainer in national, curricular trends – indeed, treated as a category labs are found in 59% of our institutions, a rise from 30% in 1978. Here, St. Olaf has always required a lab.

Social Science as a separate category appears in over 70% of our Trends institutions and in 73% of our baccalaureate institutions. Without question, the standard practice is to divide up the social sciences into two to four subcategories; often a separate category or, sometimes, reserved subcategory for history of civilization is developed and the remaining social sciences are parceled out either into standard pairings: economics and political science, sociology and psychology, and anthropology and sociology, or students are required to take two courses from two separate departments. These courses are almost invariably introductions to the various fields. St. Olaf conforms to this pattern.

As we noted above, history is a "swing" discipline, found sometimes in the social sciences division, sometimes in the humanities division of institutions. It appears as a separate category in 26% of our institutions. And, even when it is found in the social sciences division, it is as likely to find disciplinary "allies" in political science, philosophy, and other humanistic disciplines as it is in psychology, sociology, economics or anthropology. Because of this breadth, Western Civilization – represented in St. Olaf's General Education by the History of Western Culture subcategory -- has undergone interesting and significant change within the last 24 years. Overall, Western Civilization and Great Books or Humanities-based History of Western Culture categories have grown substantially across the nation, appearing in 22% of institutions' curricula in 1978 and in 50% now. Western Civ courses taught by history departments, exclusively, are still found. But if these are incorporated into the broader notion of Western Civilization as an interdisciplinary study, particularly based on original sources in the social sciences, religion, arts, humanities, and, even, sciences, then we see a profound growth and change, much like the interdisciplinary Great Conversation, but for all students. Indeed, this area has been one of the fastest growing in the last 20 years.

Equally significant have been the development of diversity and multicultural courses – usually, but not always, as a "qualitative option" (that is, cross-listing/component) which attaches to courses fulfilling other categories. This was, of course, the original pattern that St. Olaf followed in its early 1982 reforms. It is worth noting that St. Olaf was early in these efforts and unlike many others institutions has continued to develop the category into its present form. Both the HWC and MCS requirements at St. Olaf are readily satisfied, still, by cross-listed courses. The extent of the former is a bit unusual. A somewhat comparable effort matching Western Tradition with Multi-cultural and Diversity requirements can be found at Colorado College.

The Humanities tends to span both the liberal arts and the fine arts. Here, the biggest gainer in the last 25 years has, unquestionably, been Fine Arts categories. St Olaf faculty have asked for the treatment of an issue involving the fine arts, whether applied lessons in music should count. The issue is actually quite complex, not simple, and consequently I have attached a detailed analysis of the experience of a comparable institution, Augustana, to the mailing accompanying this report. I suggest, here, simply that studio/performance credits are not unusual in the fine arts, but that music performance credits are unusual, not unprecedented. I will also suggest, based on the materials attached, that there are well-founded, liberal education intellectual, civil/religious, moral, and aesthetic grounds for including these courses but that considerations of availability to all students, professional versus "amateur," and considerations of

competition among departments and courses offered do need to be sorted out and well defined for the college. For further explication of some of the issues and their interrelation please see the accompanying document: “Competition, Credits, and the Core: Music and The Fine Art of Politics.”

Returning to the a survey of Humanities categories: Without any question, the most significant development in this area over the last twenty four years are the development of whole curricular categories or, sometimes, alternative tracks of interdisciplinary courses – like the Great Conversation, along the lines discussed above under Western Civ. It should be pointed out that to my knowledge, St. Olaf was the first institution in our database to develop such a program *as an alternative to a more orthodox general education program*. Institutions which later developed similar programs include Sewanne, the University of the South, Mercer University, and Boston University. There is simply no question that with the additional development of the American Conversation and the Asian Conversation, St. Olaf has embarked on a development in general education which, while it may become simply a feed to specific interdisciplinary majors, may also herald a pattern of development for the future in general education.

Literature, which is represented in the St. Olaf curriculum through the fine arts “literary form” sub-subcategory, is found as a separate category, distinct from writing, in 26% of our institutions. Of course, in some institutions it is understood that literature courses require more writing than the “average” course.

Religion categories are currently found in 23% of the institutions of the Trends study. As indicated above, religious institutions devote a greater percentage of the baccalaureate to general education than do secular institutions. Of course, religious studies tend to contribute significantly to that difference. In religiously-based institutions, religious studies are sometimes the focus of something like a Western Civ series, frequently with a “critique” of modernity implied by contrast to the past. Catholic institutions tend to differentiate religious and philosophical categories. Protestant institutions are less apt to do so. However, philosophy as a separate category is found in nearly 17% of Trends institutions and these are not all religiously based or Catholic. Again, since institutions sometimes offer a mixture of disciplinary programs (sciences, math, and statistically based social sciences) and interdisciplinary courses discussed above, this simply means that the Humanities have been taking *greater* structure in general education over the last 20 years, but that often the structure takes the form of philosophy, religion, history, literature, and writing cooperating in jointly produced courses. **This is a rather “disguised” reason why the cross-listing by St. Olaf ought not necessarily be construed to be that unusual.**

## PEER INSTITUTIONS

Every institution is unique. This apparently banal statement is an important one in liberal education. A n important element in any disciplinary department is that what is taught in that department can be found elsewhere in other institutions. It is true that individual expertise, sheer brilliance, and the development of some concentrations may distinguish one department from another, but underlying departments is the notion of shared, trans-national disciplines of knowledge. Liberal general education programs in institutions across the country are almost certainly more variable than a collection of departments from different institutions under one discipline. Despite the argument of interdisciplinarity in this analysis, there is no question that disciplines do underlie large portions of the St. Olaf and other general education programs across the nation. But different disciplines are found in different institutions and the multi-disciplinary nature of liberal education has encouraged, since the ancients, varying attempts to find curricular unities or coherencies to the possibilities offered by those many disciplines and their necessary intra-disciplinary correlatives. Add into these possibilities the differences that arise between large, medium and small institutions, between public and private institutional purposes and organizations, between secular and religious traditions of education, the varying ethnic, regional and sectional backgrounds of institutions and it becomes possible to see that what, under old distribution requirements may have seemed to many as a rather a undifferentiated, unexciting area of higher education, is actually a place reflecting and shaping the intellectual interests of many different publics in the United States. The shared perception by faculty and administrators that much could be done with general, liberal education changed its face into many faces across the nation over the course of a 25 year development at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Add to this the discovery, beginning around 1990 or so, that general education was largely responsible for both the

retention of students and the institutional marker of a university's or college's market niche, and one sees both how important liberal, general education has become and why it is differentiated as it is.

Hence, "peer" comparisons are difficult. Are we to select institutions that have the same student characteristics? Fine, but those students will almost certainly be treated quite differently in general liberal education programs of each institution. Should we pick the same faculty characteristics and reputations, relying on publication and research? Fine, but general liberal education, while indubitably informed by research, is also shaped by real concerns with pedagogy and student entrée into the intellectual, academic, and liberal arts life. Moreover, what one model of research and publication is suitable to characterize general, liberal education – as a whole? True, the structural features of general liberal education, including the innovations which take place in general liberal education, do offer the best grounds for "peer" comparison, but some of the best innovations are often found in institutions that faculties and administrators in other institutions would not, at first glance, consider peer and, hence, suited for consideration.

That said, to what institutions in this study might St. Olaf wish to turn to examine further? Obviously, Carleton. Since there is close cooperation and knowledge, enough said. Bard College and Eckerd College, less structured than St. Olaf, still enjoy curricular features and traditions of innovation which St. Olaf would recognize and applaud – particularly in the question of interdisciplinary efforts. Augustana and Carthage have each crafted programs which would seem similar, though less articulated, than St. Olaf's. Loyola College of Maryland and St. Mary's College of Moraga, would also afford comparisons, in the former case, to large, disciplinary based core curricula, and in the latter case to a general education program that spans much of the four years of the institution.

Outside of this range of consideration, Wabash College, with its final defense of a thesis before a representative of the college, not just the department, would afford another example of how a fine liberal arts college has imbued the entire program with liberal education objectives and means. More distantly, some state universities have learned how to compete with private colleges in the kind of care they give to students, especially entering students. This is simply a fact. Hence, St. Olaf with its various efforts in learning communities might wish to see how a core curriculum and learning communities can actually be implemented – well – at an institution such as Ball State. As St. Olaf slowly makes its way into assessment, it might wish to consult with St. Bonaventure University or with the University of North Carolina at Asheville.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The uniqueness of St. Olaf's general education program, then, resides in the Lutheran tradition, combined with an extraordinary range of curricular innovations. These include a clearly building concern that student course selectivity be balanced by an exposure to specific areas of knowledge, by the repeated practice of linguistic skills, and that student selectivity be offered the opportunity for faculty-crafted course and subject *combinations* (especially in interdisciplinary curricula, e.g. The Great Conversation and recent Conversation innovations), and, ultimately, that students be brought to ethical reflection, in part in the Christian tradition. This extended effort has produced a strong set of general, liberal education requirements, balanced between disciplinary and interdisciplinary considerations, which has simultaneously permitted a development of rich liberal education alternatives to satisfy the requirements. Not many institutions can claim all of these attributes.

No general education curriculum is ever "perfect" in the sense of being complete or finished for all time. Since there is ample evidence that the administration supports the faculty in the development of new programs and serious liberal education, there is reason to be confident about the future.

The Association for Core Texts and Courses is honored to have St. Olaf College participate in its national project, *Trends in the Liberal Arts Core* and it looks forward to further developments in its curriculum and baccalaureate education.

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