# RECONCILING ACCESS WITH QUALITY

## GOAL OF THE 60'S - NECESSITY FOR THE 80'S

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Stockton State College was built at the end of the 60's around the goal of making the kind of interdisciplinary, and individualized instruction, which had traditionally been reserved for honors students at exclusive colleges, available to state college students at state college prices. As a result, we confronted, ten years early, the task of reconciling access with quality; a task which the 80's may very well impose as a brute necessity on most of higher education.

We believed, then as now, in the civilizing impact of traditional liberal arts education. But we also believed that state college students were unlikely to view that impact as a sufficient justification for a maximum effort on their part, in the absence of any clear evidence that it would contribute directly to career success. On the other hand, we wanted to avoid specialized career education because we believed that shifts in the job market, and the shifting day-to-day demands of particular jobs, would quickly render much of such specialized education irrelvant for our graduates. Instead we tried to build a bridge between traditional liberal arts education, on the one hand, and professional education, on the other, by emphasizing: a) broad <u>interdisciplinary courses</u> designed to give students an idea of what there was to choose from, in college and after graduation, together with b) intensive training in the broadly applicable intellectual <u>skills</u> necessary to explore a number of those choices. We hoped that this dual emphasis would give our students: a) the ability to explore widely in college, and hence make an intelligent choice of specialty, b) the ability to be better specialists after gradua-

tion, because of their ability to draw on a number of related specialties in dealing with specific problems, and even c) the ability to move with some facility from one specialty to another, if the market demanded it.

We did not hire special faculty to teach these interdisciplinary and skills courses, nor did we assign them to any particular departments. Instead, we asked all our faculty to stretch beyond the limits of their disciplinary graduate school training to teach these courses, and to subject themselves to collective colleague scrutiny as well as support while making that effort. We housed these college-wide efforts in a General Studies division, which was separate from the divisions in which our degree-granting "programs" (i.e., the Stockton equivalent of "departments") were housed. This paper focuses on our efforts in the General Studies division.

Because of the difficult and fragile nature of this enterprise, we collected a good deal of data on the effectiveness of this kind of instruction. It appears to be working. The message is, then, one of hope. First generation college students can transform themselves by means of education. Faculty can collectively retrain themselves to help such students. It is possible to combine access with quality in general, and liberal arts with career education in particular. We can handle the 80's.

## THE INITIAL GOAL: COMBINING LIBERAL ARTS AND CAREER EDUCATION

We have called the central capacity which we hoped to build in our students by a variety of names -- the capacity for "inde-

pendent decision making," for "self-direction," for "continuous learning," for "adaptability." But, while the phraseology has changed, the central concept has not. It is grounded in the notion that, in a rapidly changing world, mastery of specialized substantive bodies of knowledge might be less important to students, in the long run, than a breadth of education which gives them the capacity for continuous learning and the resultant ability to adapt to changing circumstances. In other words, we argued that some of the central traditional goals of liberal arts education also constituted the best possible career education -- not in the vague sense of making students "better people," but in the sense of providing them with very concrete abilities which constituted a much more realistic preparation for the uncertain market they faced than did specialized career education. Specifically, in addition to the general civilizing effect traditionally claimed for breadth of education, we hoped to give students two sets of very concrete and very practical abilities -- one related to their college careers and one related to their lives after graduation.

During their college careers, we hoped that breadth of education would provide students with both the broadly applicable intellectual skills necessary to explore many of the major areas of the curriculum, and to perform successfully in them, and an understanding of the general content of those major areas and hence an understanding of what there was to choose from.

After graduation, we hoped that this same breadth of education would provide students with both the ability to be better

specialists by virtue of their capacity to draw on areas of knowledge outside their specialty when necessary, and the broad background which would permit them to move from one specialty to another if the shifting demands of the market required it.

We created a separate curriculum of multidisciplinary courses to help students achieve this breadth of education, rather than following the traditional approach of a distribution requirement among narrower disciplinary courses. This decision was based on the belief that multidisciplinary courses which explicitly addressed the relationships among the specialized disciplines would give us a better chance than introductory disciplinary courses of insuring: a) that even poorly prepared students would come to understand the relationships among the specialized bodies of knowledge and would achieve the resultant sense of direction and enhanced motivation that comes with that understanding; b) that they would have that experience early enough in their college careers for it to impact beneficially on most of their college education; and c) that such a breadth of understanding could be achieved with a sufficiently limited number of required courses to permit students some room in their transcripts for individual choice, once those broad courses had laid the basis for intelligent choice.

We created a separate Division and Dean of General Studies, and contractually obliged all faculty members to teach part-time in that division, because of the belief that asking faculty members to undertake the continuous learning involved in stretching beyond their disciplinary training in graduate school would be

difficult. We assumed, accordingly, that a separate advocate for, and faculty obligation to, this part of our students' education would be necessary to resist the temptation to slide back into the comfort of the disciplinary forms of education in which most faculty had been trained. Thus, while all faculty were appointed to degree-granting programs (these collected, in turn, under four other divisional Deans, of Arts and Humanities, Natural Science/ Mathematics, Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Professional Studies), faculty were also contractually obliged to teach two of their six courses each year in General Studies.

The specific programs which were eventually collected in the General Studies division were designed to help students achieve the specific component parts of the general capacity for "self-direction" and "continuous learning."

1. The Basic Skills Program (BASK) was designed to provide students with the broadly applicable intellectual skills necessary to an exploration of a variety of intellectual and career options, both in college and after graduation.
2. The broad multidisciplinary courses which comprised General Studies Curriculum were designed to provide students, once those basic skills were mastered, with a general understanding of the content of the specialized disciplines and of the relationships among them, so that students could explore a number of specialties in college, draw on bodies of knowledge related to their

specialties after graduation (and hence be better specialists in their chosen area of work), and even, if circumstances changed, move gradually into specialties different than the ones in which they majored.

3. The Preceptorial Advising System, which involved all of the faculty and most of the higher level staff in advising, was designed to provide students with sound advice during this process of choosing among curricular and career options.

4. Finally, we hoped that the collective impact of all of the above would also be to provide the essential underpinning for quality instruction in the specialized degree-granting disciplines in which our students would major.

   -- By providing assurance that all students in upper level disciplinary courses would have the basic academic skills necessary to permit quality instruction and quality performance in those courses;

   -- By screening out of college early those students who were unable or unwilling to meet demanding standards in the rest of the curriculum;

   -- By helping those students who could meet these standards to make an intelligent choice of major and hence increase their sense of direction, level of motivation, and level of performance in that major.

## STATE COLLEGE STUDENTS: PROBLEMS OF PREPARATION AND MOTIVATION

Many of the initial difficulties and resultant adaptations of the General Studies efforts just described did not result from any fundamental flaw in the basic goal of developing in students a capacity for intelligent choice among college and career options, and hence a capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. They resulted rather more from the fact that the college had overestimated the capacity for making such choices on the part of entering students, and, accordingly, underestimated the amount of collective faculty effort that would be necessary to help students achieve that ability. The capacity for intelligent choice, even among curricular offerings, implied sufficient knowledge of the major areas of the curriculum to know what there was to choose from, and the broadly applicable verbal and quantitative skills necessary to explore a number of those curricular areas. Many of the entering students apparently had neither of those prerequisites to the exercise of intelligent choice. At the same time, it became increasingly clear that the General Studies division lacked sufficient authority or resources to assume the substantial task of seeing to it that all students developed these bases for intelligent choice. This state of affairs caused initial difficulties in all of the major areas of the General Studies program.

### Basic Skills

The college initially tried to provide basic skills instruction by means of a voluntary, drop-in Skills Center, and some of

the more motivated students presumably benefited from that opportunity. But a special task force study on skills, carried out in the college's fourth year, revealed skills deficient students in numbers much larger than those using the Center. This raised the possibility that precisely those students who were the most in need of skills training might be the least motivated to take advantage of the Skills Center, and that many students might therefore derive less benefit from their courses than they would have with a good basis in academic skills. Of even greater concern was the possibility that those poorly prepared students might drag down the general quality of instruction, even for those students who arrived at college well prepared in basic academic skills.

The General Studies Curriculum

In the early going the General Studies curriculum was generated one course at a time by individual faculty members, operating under very few collective or institutional constraints. It was hoped that this approach would generate innovation, faculty enthusiasm and the ability to communicate an enthusiasm for learning to students, and an environment in which faculty and students would explore new areas together. This approach did generate an interesting and diverse curriculum. But, as a mechanism for dealing with entering students who had no clear idea of what a college curriculum had to offer, this initial General Studies curriculum suffered from the absence of the shared graduate school models and collective faculty discussion and scrutiny which the degree programs provided for the disciplinary half of the curriculum. The college lacked a mechanism for insuring overall coherence in the

General Studies curriculum -- in the sense of insuring that all students were exposed to the broad range of curricular and career options necessary to provide them with a basis for intelligent choice among those options. Effective in the college's fifth year, a new scheme for grouping General Studies courses, according to their educational purpose, was adopted in an attempt to provide greater overall coherence and clearer guidelines for students' choice. But, in the absence of collective faculty scrutiny of the curriculum, the Dean of General Studies continued to be confronted with a choice from which the other deans were saved by the collective faculty review of the curriculum in the degree-granting programs -- the choice of either permitting the General Studies curriculum to become the accidental accumulation of individual course offerings, or of engaging in the intellectually and politically impossible task of attempting to unilaterally approve or disapprove individual courses, most of which lay, inevitably, outside the expertise of any individual dean. As a result, while the formal process of course approval changed somewhat from year to year, the Deans of General Studies lost effective control over the content and coherence of the curriculum for which they were responsible. Indeed, with the personnel and budgetary processes which affected faculty located almost entirely within the four disciplinary divisions, the Dean of General Studies was left with few rewards and punishments with which to encourage even quantitative support of General Studies. As a result, even the expectation that all faculty would teach two General Studies courses a year was eroded, and General Studies courses slipped from 34 percent

of the total course offerings in the first year of the college, to 31 percent in the second year, and then hovered between 25 percent and 30 percent thereafter.

Preceptorial Advising

The advising system worked reasonably well for program students who had reached the point of declaring a major -- because the program requirements provided them with structure, because their faculty advisors were expert in their program areas, and because the students, by that time, had developed some sense of direction of their own. But the preceptorial advising in General Studies suffered from the fact that most of the entering students arrived with less of a sense of direction than anticipated, the unstructured General Studies curriculum did not provide them with that sense of direction, and the faculty performed unevenly in terms of their willingness and ability to take on the task of explaining options to students and carefully monitoring the choices they made.

The difficulties with respect to advising students in regard to their general education may also have been exacerbated by two changes in college policy. First, the week-long advising period of the college's first year was gradually reduced to two days. Secondly, the college's initial attempt to assert the equal importance of General Studies and Program Studies, by assigning each student both a preceptor (to monitor general education) and a program advisor, was dropped at the beginning of the college's third year, largely because it took too much of everyone's time. It was replaced by an advising system in which each stu-

dent had only one advisor at a time -- a preceptor before declaring a major and a program preceptor after declaring a major.

Whatever the cause, a study of transcripts from a random sample of students graduating at the end of the college's second, third, and fourth years indicated that, while a majority of graduates had achieved breadth of education, a substantial minority of 26 percent had managed to use their General Studies courses primarily as extensions of their majors.

Breadth of Education in General

All of the above difficulties led to a concern that the freedom which Stockton offered students might not be leading them to explore the broad range of options necessary to build in them the capacity for continuous learning and for adaptation to changing circumstances -- because they lacked a good grounding in the basic academic skills necessary to explore outside limited and familiar curricular areas, and because even those with such skills frequently lacked sufficient knowledge of the college curriculum to know what there was to choose from. It became a clear possibility, in short, that many students might be using the freedom which Stockton afforded to pursue relatively narrow educational paths. The relatively rapid turnover of Deans of General Studies (Stockton has had six Deans of General Studies in ten years) also raised the clear possibility that the Dean of General Studies lacked the authority to deal with that problem alone. The result was the gradual modification of the General Studies effort both to insure greater breadth in the educational programs of the students and to help the Dean of General Studies

to draw, from the faculty, an amount of intellectual and political support commensurate with the broad responsibilities of that office.

## RECONCILING ACCESS WITH QUALITY: COLLECTIVE STANDARDS AND COLLECTIVE EFFORT

The modification of the General Studies program, in response to those initial difficulties, began in the college's fifth year and has included the adoption of a tough basic skills program and upper level writing program, the institution of a distribution requirement in the General Studies curriculum, and the organization of the Freshmen Preceptor program. But these changes were not intended as an abandonment of the initial goal of helping students to develop the capacity for intelligent choice and hence the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. We took great care not to reinvent an elaborate course-by-course set of requirements which would obliterate the opportunity for choice. Rather, we instituted a self-consciously tough but "thin" set of standards to insure that all Stockton students, many of whom arrived at the college poorly prepared, would have the common minimum basis of knowledge and academic skills necessary to make the initial concept of intelligent choice meaningful.

In a more general sense, Stockton was addressing, early, an emerging national problem. We constructed two institutional mechanisms for reconciling the moral and practical need to maintain broad access to higher education for a significant number of poorly prepared students, on the one hand, with the potentially contradictory goal of maintaining rigorous standards and

quality instruction, on the other. Those two devices were: a) a three-tiered set of college-wide standards which all students must meet at specified points in their educational careers if they are to continue at the college, and b) the assumption by the entire Stockton faculty of collective responsibility for setting and enforcing those standards, and for the substantial instructional efforts necessary to help students meet them. We anticipated major advantages both from setting such explicit standards and from seeking a college-wide faculty effort to support them.

By setting explicit minimum standards and requiring students to meet them as a condition for continuing at the college, we intended to provide poorly prepared students with a maximum incentive to make the major effort which would be necessary to overcome the educational deficiencies with which they entered the college. Indeed, the anticipated effect of such standards was to retain those poorly prepared students who are willing to make a maximum effort and dismiss those who are not. This separation of poorly prepared students according to their level of effort was intended to be both the fairest criterion morally and the most accurate predictive criterion -- to the degree that level of effort turns out to be the single best predictor of future success both in college and after graduation. At the same time, the insistence that all students must meet those standards before moving on to the next stage of their education was designed to protect the general quality of instruction, and hence the quality of instruction that would be available

to the portion of the student body which was well prepared academically.

We hoped that, if the Stockton faculty would accept the responsibility for working collectively to set the standards which students must meet, and to shoulder the considerable instructional burden necessary to help students meet those standards, then Stockton would derive three important advantages, compared to those institutions in which college-wide mechanisms for setting and maintaining standards have not been developed. First, the standards would be more coherent than the patchwork of required introductory courses that sometimes results from establishing college-wide requirements by means of barter among disciplinary departments. Secondly, attention to these standards would be more widespread throughout the curriculum, and hence more regularly reinforced, than if they were made the responsibility of junior faculty in selected departments and enforced only in freshman-level courses. Finally, the standards would be more demanding than if the setting of those standards and the evaluation of student work were left entirely to individual faculty members.

I have summarized below, with respect to each of the four major elements of the General Studies effort: a) the mandatory minimum standards which students must meet to demonstrate that they have, indeed, developed at least the minimum academic skills and knowledge base necessary to intelligent choice; and b) the collective faculty support which has been mobilized to help students meet those standards.

The Basic Skills Program:
Competence by the End of the Freshman Year

Since the approval of the Basic Skills program in the college's fifth year, all Stockton students have had to demonstrate competence in college-level writing, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning by the end of their freshman year, or face dismissal from the college.

The standards which students must meet in order to demonstrate competence are collectively set by the faculty who teach in the Basic Studies program, and instructional responsibility for that program has been assumed by the faculty as a whole. Less than half of the Basic Studies courses are offered by six "core" skills faculty. The rest are offered by a part-time commitment from "rotating" faculty. These faculty are drawn, on a voluntary basis, from all of the college's regular degree programs, receive training in skills instruction from the core faculty, and share ideas about teaching techniques in annual workshops. For the most part, these rotating faculty are recruited selectively from among those instructors who already have reputations as effective classroom teachers. Thus, contrary to the all-too-frequent practice of foisting off skills instruction onto inexpensive adjuncts or hostile junior faculty who would rather be doing something else, we give those students who most need help the best teaching talent we have.

The Upper Level Writing Program:
Proficiency by the End of the Sophomore Year

If the plans for an upper level Writing program approved in May 1980 are implemented as planned, all Stockton students will

have to demonstrate proficiency in expository writing (i.e., the ability not only to write correctly, but also to make effective use of logical analysis and evidence) by the end of their sophomore year, or face dismissal from the college.

The standards which students must meet in these upper level writing classes will be set collectively by the faculty members who teach these courses. Instructional responsibility for upper level writing proficiency, like the responsibility for basic skills competence, will be assumed by the entire faculty -- many of whom will offer, each year, either an upper level writing course or a Writing Across the Curriculum course (i.e., a content course in which the faculty member agrees to include a specified amount of writing and to evaluate that writing by generally agreed upon standards). These faculty members will also exchange ideas about teaching techniques in annual faculty workshops.

The General Studies Curriculum:
Breadth and Adaptability Before Graduation

Since the adoption of the General Studies distribution requirement in the college's seventh year, the 25 percent of their total course work which students must take in General Studies must be broadly distributed among five categories of multidisciplinary courses, each of which is designed to introduce students to one of the major areas of human knowledge (the arts and humanities, the social sciences, the natural sciences and mathematics), or to help students to understand the inter-relationships among those broad areas of knowledge.

As with the Basic Skills and upper level writing programs,

instructional responsibility for the General Studies curriculum has been assumed by the entire Stockton faculty, all of whom contribute one or two courses a year. The standards which courses in each portion of the General Studies curriculum should meet have been collectively defined by the faculty teaching in that area and the content and teaching techniques for all courses proposed for each area are reviewed by those same faculty in annual workshops.

The Freshman Preceptor Program:
A Helping Hand With All of It

Absolutely no exceptions are made with respect to the requirement that all entering students must demonstrate competence by the end of their freshman year, and a similar policy will presumably be followed if the recently enacted upper level writing program eventuates in the requirement that students demonstrate proficiency by the end of their sophomore year. Similarly, the previous policy of granting partial waivers with respect to the General Studies graduation requirement has been sharply curtailed. The presumption now is that all students who receive a Stockton degree will have met the college's graduation requirements in General Studies.

To insure that students will meet these minimum requirements and will meet them on schedule, and to help them to choose a major intelligently once that minimum basis for choice has been built, we organized a special corps of freshman preceptors. As is the case in the skills programs and in General Studies, these freshman preceptors are drawn from among our best faculty advisors

on a voluntary basis. We are attempting, once again, to give freshmen, as the group most in need of good advice, the best advisors we have. Finally, as is the case with the faculty participants in the skills program and in the General Studies curriculum, these advisors meet in annual workshops to review the college's graduation requirements and to discuss the relative effectiveness of various advising techniques.

## DATA ON EFFECTIVENESS: REDIRECTING LIMITED RESOURCES

The entire modification of our general education effort, just described, was carried out without any additional resources, by asking the faculty to do more and to do it in different areas. The effectiveness of such a redirection of faculty effort in the long run hinges on the answer to two questions. Will the faculty accept that additional burden, and can they learn to teach effectively in areas which often fall outside their areas of formal graduate school training. Accordingly, we collected two kinds of data on effectiveness: a) data on the level of faculty support for General Studies, and b) data on the apparent educational impact of General Studies on the students.

Data on the level of faculty support is critical to assessing the effectiveness of the General Studies program in all of its major components because the program requires an extraordinary level of faculty effort -- in terms of the faculty's willingness to undertake the additional training and instructional burden involved in teaching skills classes; in terms of their willingness to stretch beyond the boundaries of their graduate school training

when constructing multidisciplinary General Studies courses; in terms of their willingness to assume the additional burden of advising frequently confused freshmen; and in terms of their willingness to do all of these things by means of collective mechanisms which subject their efforts to external scrutiny by their colleagues. In spite of the fact that most of these activities lie not only outside the faculty's contractual obligations but also outside any generally accepted definition of their professional responsibilities, the data on the level of faculty support, considered as a whole, indicates that the faculty have indeed been willing to assume this responsibility. If there is a weakness, it is in the unequal distribution of these efforts and in the absence of institutional policies which would equalize that burden, or at least reward those who do more than their share.

The impact on student performance of the General Studies program has been measured directly in the area of skills, and the results are very encouraging. The attempts to measure the impact of the General Studies curriculum and the advising process are much newer and provide data only on perceptions of effectiveness. But those data are also encouraging. The weakness in this area lies in the apparent reluctance of the students to attach as much importance to the General Studies component of their education as the college does.

I have summarized below the available data on effectiveness for each of the three major components of the General Studies division -- dealing in each case, first, with the level of facul-

ty support and, then, with the impact on student performance.

Basic Skills

The level of college-wide faculty participation in the skills effort has been extraordinary, albeit uneven from division to division. Of a total faculty of 170, no fewer than 40 of Stockton's current faculty, in addition to the six full-time skills faculty, have taught skills classes, and many now teach those classes on a regular cycle. But this impressive college-wide effort is composed of decidedly uneven divisional contributions. Of the total number of skills sections taught by non-skills faculty since the fall of 1977 when a serious effort to recruit volunteers college-wide was first undertaken, arts and humanities faculty have accounted for 10 percent of those sections, natural sciences for 20 percent, professional studies for 21 percent, and social sciences for 49 percent. Faculty support for the nascent upper level writing program can be measured only at the level of intent. But in response to a questionnaire, 28 faculty indicated that they would be willing to teach an upper level writing course, 54 faculty indicated that they were already teaching regular content courses with a substantial writing component which might be suitable for inclusion in an upper level writing program, and 91 faculty indicated that they would be willing to consider such courses.

The impact of the skills program on student performance has been measured along four dimensions since the inception of the program: a) retention/attrition, b) pre-post testing, c) subsequent grades in non-skills classes, and d) student perceptions of effectiveness.

With respect to retention/attrition, Stockton has stood virtually alone in the State of New Jersey in its insistence that students must demonstrate basic skills competence by the end of their freshman year or face dismissal from the college. And that policy has been enforced. Approximately one-half of the students in each entering freshman class are required to take at least one skills course. Of that group, 10-15 percent on the average have failed one or more of their skills classes, and have either withdrawn from the college or have been dismissed for failure to meet the skills requirement. But the remaining 85-90 percent have demonstrated competence in basic academic skills within a single year, and a number of independent measures, delineated below, indicate that their competence is real.

Students are tested at the beginning and at the end of skills courses to see how far they have progressed. Those students have invariably made statistically significant gains, and those gains in writing and in mathematics have usually raised their scores, after only one semester of intensive instruction, to a level of "competence" which would have resulted in their exemption from the skills program if they had achieved such a score at the point of admission to the college. The gains in Critical Thinking, while invariably significant, have not been as great -- this in spite of the fact that students who do well in Critical Thinking classes are even more likely to do well in their other non-skills classes than are the students who succeed in writing and mathematics courses. We are not yet sure whether these smaller pre-post gains indicate that our instruction is less

effective in Critical Thinking, or simply that Critical Thinking course work changes factors such as level of effort and study skills, which do not show up on standardized post tests but do show up in the student's performance and grades in non-skills classes.

Our long-term tracking of the grade performance of former skills students is not yet complete. But we have tracked the performance of some students over a period of five semesters. That data indicates that the 85-90 percent of the skills deficient students who successfully complete their skills courses, in spite of entering SAT scores and high school averages which would predict poor performance in college, go on to achieve grades in their subsequent non-skills courses which are as good as the grades achieved by those students who entered the college well prepared enough to be exempted from the skills program. Nor is there any evidence that former skills students manage to achieve this success by majoring only in "easy" areas. The data indicate that they move into the various majors in roughly the same proportions as do those students who arrive at the college well prepared enough to be exempted from the skills program. There are only two exceptions to this general rule: a) a slightly larger proportion of skills students than non-skills students major in social and behavioral sciences (possibly a result of the recruitment effect of the disproportionately large number of social science faculty members who teach in the skills program); and b) a slightly smaller percentage of those students who enter the college deficient in mathematics major in the natural sciences. But preliminary evi-

dence indicates that these differences in choice of major between skills and non-skills students are small, are predictable in direction, and do not seriously call into question the apparent ability of skills deficient students, who subsequently complete their skills courses successfully, to move, also successfully, into all of the major areas of the curriculum.

The objective data on the effectiveness of the program is confirmed by the perceptions of skills students, gathered on anonymous questionnaires administered at the end of every skills course. Over a period of three years, student response to the program was overwhelmingly favorable, in particular with respect to their view of faculty concern for their welfare and their view of the program's likely contribution to their chances for success in college. This is true, in spite of the fact that they were responding to courses which were mandatory, which necessarily confronted them both with the potentially insulting fact of their deficiency in some basic skills and with the threat of expulsion if that deficiency was not removed, and which they saw themselves as more demanding in terms of time and effort than most of their other non-skills courses. Even more remarkable was a study of the relationship between student reaction to program and student grades in their skills courses. It showed no significant difference in the positive reaction to the program between those students who were doing well in terms of grades and those students who were doing poorly. This last bit of data was totally unexpected, and raises the possibility that students may respond to heavy demands, accurately, as a sign of concern for their well-being, if those demands

are made by faculty whose own visible level of effort is such as to demonstrate that they are giving the students, in the words of one student, "their best shot."

The General Studies Curriculum

The extraordinary level of faculty support for skills courses, which are designed to provide students with the ability to explore and choose among a variety of intellectual and career options, also extends to collective faculty efforts to insure the quality of General Studies courses, which are designed to help students understand what is available to choose from. All faculty are obligated contractually to teach in General Studies. But they are not obliged to accept any collective scrutiny or guidance as to how they do that; nor have academics traditionally accepted such intrusions willingly. Nevertheless, over the last two years, the Stockton faculty has established a process for bringing its collective expertise, and collective scrutiny, to bear on the General Studies curriculum, and the overwhelming majority of the faculty has voluntarily participated in that process.

Specifically, when the Faculty Assembly passed the new distribution requirement in General Studies for students, the faculty also voted unanimously to adopt guidelines for each of the five types of General Studies courses and to adopt a process by which those courses are collectively reviewed by the faculty. For the three successive terms since this process began, 85-90 percent of all of the faculty teaching General Studies courses have voluntarily submitted course outlines for distribution to and review by their colleagues. Three successive sets of faculty workshops to

discuss those outlines have drawn heavy faculty participation (70, 80, and 110 faculty respectively of 170 total faculty), in spite of the fact that those workshops had to be scheduled during summer vacation or on weekends in order to secure sufficiently long periods of uninterrupted time. Finally, additional review sessions, for faculty not able to attend the detailed workshop discussions, insure that virtually all General Studies courses are now discussed by the faculty teaching in the area of the General Studies curriculum for which the course is proposed.

The effort to measure the impact of the General Studies curriculum on student performance is currently confined to measuring perceptions of that impact. This data on perceptions was collected by questionnaire from current students, alumni, and current faculty. The results are generally positive with respect to a) the rigor of General Studies courses (always a concern when faculty are asked to stretch a bit beyond the boundaries of their formal graduate school training) and b) the effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving its educational goals, but they are not so positive with respect to c) the amount of importance which students attach to their general education compared to work in their majors.

Specifically, the majority of students and faculty (with substantial minorities dissenting) see General Studies courses as being comparable in rigor to program courses. On one of two student surveys just completed, dealing primarily with upperclassmen, 63 percent had found General Studies courses as difficult or more difficult than program courses. On another question-

naire, a sample of the entire student body ranked General Studies courses 4.4 on a scale on which 7.0 was the highest possible rating for rigor, and ranked program courses only slightly higher at 4.8. Faculty attitudes on the comparative rigor of the General Studies and program courses they teach are similar. Thus, 71 percent said that their General Studies courses were as difficult, or more difficult, than their program courses.

The majority of Stockton's current students also feel that General Studies courses are making the kind of specific contributions to their education for which the college had hoped, and that attitude is even stronger among Stockton's alumni. Thus, 68 percent of the current students indicate that General Studies courses stimulate new interests (80 percent of the alumni), 73 percent, that they improve proficiency in the general intellectual skills of logical thought and communication (78 percent of the alumni), and 78 percent, that they increase appreciation for the relationships among different areas of knowledge (85 percent of the alumni).

But while students concede that General Studies courses are demanding and see them as beneficial, they are not willing to grant them the same importance as specialized study in the program major. Thus, only 23 percent of current Stockton students thought that their General Studies courses would be as important to them personally as their program courses. Similarly, they saw their program courses as more "stimulating" than their General Studies courses (5.2 v. 4.4 on a 7.0 scale). Finally, even though 63 percent of the students conceded, as noted above, that

their General Studies courses were, in fact, as rigorous as their program courses, only 30 percent of those students thought that they should be that rigorous. We clearly have some distance to go in convincing our students of the glories of general education.

Preceptorial Advising

The general level of faculty support in the area of preceptorial advising, as in the areas of basic skills and the General Studies curriculum, is impressive. But because of a system which permits students to float freely from preceptor to preceptor, contingent only upon the consent of the receiving preceptor, the tendency of some faculty to carry much more of the burden than others is even more marked in this area than in the other two areas.

All faculty are obligated by contract to serve as preceptors. They are not, however, obliged to serve as freshman preceptors, i.e., to take on a group of entering freshmen in addition to advisees from their own major. Participation in the Freshman Preceptor program is voluntary. And yet, in each of the three years since that program was instituted, 50 to 80 faculty volunteers have been found who were willing to provide advising to that portion of the student body most in need of it. But the burden of this extraordinary level of support is not being shared evenly. At the divisional level, the average preceptorial load ranges from a low of 17 students per faculty member in the arts and humanities, to a high of 36 in professional studies. The inequity is even greater at the program level, ranging from an average of 12 students per preceptor to an average of 40. The inequity is greater still if comparisons are made among individual faculty members. Twenty-six of the faculty have fewer than 10 preceptees,

while, at the other extreme, 14 of their colleagues labor with loads which range from 40 to 77 students.

The data which is available on the impact of the advising process on students is mixed.

A random sample of the transcripts of 1973-75 Graduates indicated that 74 percent of those students had achieved the breadth of education which the college intended. An identical study on students who graduated in 1980 indicates that breadth of education has been achieved by 84 percent of those students -- an improvement which might be attributed to improvements in advising, inasmuch as it occurred after the introduction of the Freshman Preceptor program, but before the new distribution requirement in General Studies would have legally mandated such breadth.

Questions to current Stockton students and alumni about the functions actually performed by their preceptors produced a mixed response. A heavy majority said that their preceptors helped them with course scheduling -- 87 percent for current students/82 percent for alumni. The degree to which preceptors were viewed as performing other intended functions was uneven. Sizeable minorities (but they were minorities) reported additional assistance with respect to: long-term curricular planning (35 percent for current students/44 percent for alumni), monitoring academic progress (28 percent/34 percent), dealing with bureaucratic red tape (21 percent/37 percent), career planning (21 percent/24 percent), personal counseling (17 percent/21 percent), and tutoring (10 percent/13 percent).

Responding to a question on their level of overall satisfaction with the preceptorial system, students ranked it 3.6 on a

5.0 scale (3.5 for alumni) -- a full point into the positive half of the scale, but substantially short of ecstasy.

## THE FUTURE: FIGHTING EXHAUSTION AND THE LURE OF TRADITION

Traditional ways of doing things last long enough to become traditional not only because they are good ways of doing things, but also, and perhaps more often, because they are easy ways of doing things. In breaking with tradition, Stockton has constructed a General Studies edifice which floats, somewhat uneasily, on an extraordinary outpouring of faculty effort. It simply requires more effort for the entire faculty to undertake the additional training and instructional burden necessary to teach skills classes than it does to foist the job off on adjuncts or on instructors in the English and math departments. It takes more effort to stretch beyond the boundaries of disciplinary graduate school training to construct multidisciplinary courses than to handle general education by teaching introductory disciplinary courses, with the hope that students will somehow divine the nature of the connections among those disciplines on their own. It takes more effort to explore, with frequently confused freshmen, the full range of curricular and career options than it does to confine advising efforts to declared majors in one's own area of expertise. Finally, it is bound to be more threatening to undertake all of these unfamiliar tasks in an arena which subjects your efforts to collective colleague scrutiny than to work solely within the relatively safe haven of your home discipline.

The fact that we have been able to sustain the necessary level of voluntary faculty effort this long is, to some degree,

an accidental result of the timing of the college's birth -- at the end of the 60's. The climate of those times and some early farsighted leadership gave us an interdisciplinary structure and, more importantly, a young, idealistic, and interdisciplinary faculty which has, to some degree, replicated itself in recruiting new faculty. In short, the legacy of the 60's gave us a structure and a collection of faculty which are remarkably well-adapted to the necessities of the 80's.

But the potential weakness of a general education effort based to such a large degree on extra faculty effort is already clear -- in the degree to which the burden of that effort, as noted repeatedly above, has not been distributed equally. To some degree permitting varying levels of participation in the various components of the General Studies effort is necessary to insure that those faculty who participate in each of the programs are committed to, and capable of, making a quality contribution. For that reason, insisting on idential contributions from each faculty member to each element of General Studies would clearly be a mistake.

But, ten years down an exciting but exhausing road, contributions to General Studies still have not been factored into the institutional reward system, with the result that some faculty members contribute to the point of exhaustion, without reward, while others can safely contribute nothing. If we do not soon explicitly recognize the institutional importance of that effort, and support that recognition with some symbolic and concrete rewards, General Studies will begin to suffer quiet attrition even

among committed faculty members. The greatest danger to our General Studies effort, then, is that this simple exhaustion, together with an appetite for respectability as prestigious institutions have traditionally defined it, will lead us to slip back into less demanding traditional modes of instruction. If we do that, we may very well pass, along the way, many of the prestigious institutions we seek to emulate. At least some of them will be moving in the other direction -- away from traditional modes of instruction, now seen as ill-adapted to the necessities of the 80's, and toward new instructional mechanisms very much like some of those which Stockton will have built ahead of them, but then abandoned.