

## **Selected Principles for Effective General Education Programs** **[*Strong Foundations*, AAC, 1994]**

What follows are statements of five of the twelve principles put together as part of a large project at the Association of American College (now AAC&U) intended to “explicate what is basic to implementing and sustaining strong general education programs” (p. xvii). It is around these five issues (and the related items from the modified *Assessing General Education* survey) that the Task Force has chosen to organize our campus conversations about general education at Millersville. A brief expansion of the principle, drawn largely from the *Strong Foundations* monograph, follows each of the five principles stated below.

### **Part 1. Articulating a Compelling Vision for General Education**

#### **1. Strong Gen Ed programs explicitly answer the question, “What is the point of General Education?” (p.3) [Relates to Survey Items 1, 2, & 17]**

“... the single most important thing that colleges and universities need to do to ensure the long-term viability of their education reforms is to keep clearly in mind what the point of general education is.” (p. 3) So what is the point of Millersville’s Gen Ed program? To prepare students for effective citizenship? To provide breadth and some depth in traditional liberal arts? To instill a commitment to lifelong learning?

#### **2. Strong Gen Ed programs continuously strive for educational coherence. (p.12) [Relates to Survey Items 3 – 6]**

While the purposes of Gen Ed may be to provide diverse perspectives and exposure to intellectual pluralism, at some point it must strive also to demonstrate the “connectedness of things” and help students develop the “integrative habit of mind” (p. 12 -13). There may be several ways to achieve this coherence in the curriculum. Some schools have a “true core” or “modified core” where students all share a common set of courses. Coherence can also be garnered through interdisciplinary coursework. A focus on the development of a particular set of “intellectual and communication skills” or particular personal qualities (e.g., open-mindedness) can also help to tie the curriculum together by providing some unifying framework. How coherent is Millersville’s Gen Ed program? How often are links made from one course to other courses in the curriculum? Is there any sense of skill building across some set of courses?

#### **3. Strong Gen Ed programs are self-consciously value-based and teach social responsibility. (p. 18) [Relates to Survey Items 7 – 9]**

“... general education programs have a common responsibility to confront multiple problems of the modern world in such a way that students complete our programs prepared not only in their disciplines and professions but also in their abilities to imagine and construct better – more humane, just, and equitable – futures for themselves and for others.” (p. 20) “Strong general education programs provide a rich variety of ways for students to consider the question ‘How should we live?’ ...” (p. 20). In what ways are students at Millersville prepared to meet the Gen Ed objective related to “personal, ethical, and civic values and decision-making?” Are values and social responsibility conveyed intentionally (i.e., self-consciously)? In what ways do our programs reflect a commitment to global perspectives, multiculturalism, and other aspects of diversity?

(over)

## **Part II. Forming an Evolving Community Based Upon a Vision of General Education**

### **4. Strong Gen Ed programs require and foster academic community. (p. 31) [Relates to Survey Items 10 & 16]**

“... intellectual isolation, disciplinary fragmentation, and minimal interaction among faculty and students are still facts of life at many American colleges and universities. Viable general education programs work to counteract these alienating forces by creating forums for community.” (p. 32) Astin (1993) has identified student peer group interaction and interaction among faculty and students as the two most important influences on undergraduates’ growth and development (in that order!). Cross-disciplinary interactions among faculty are also crucial for maintaining a healthy sense of academic community. Are cross-disciplinary connections made in our curriculum? Are these connections made explicit to students? Are the interactions among students, between students and faculty/staff, and among faculty/staff sufficient to develop this sense of academic community?

### **5. Strong Gen Ed programs reach beyond the classroom to the broad range of student co-curricular experiences. (p. 48) [Relates to Survey Item 11]**

“The contexts of students’ meaning-making extend well beyond the walls of our classrooms. ... However, the approaches of many general education programs do little to capitalize on the extraordinary resources for learning that already exist in the varied activities in the daily lives of students.” p. 49 In what ways do co-curricular experiences at Millersville (e.g., life in the dorms, Greek organizations, clubs, campus government, other formal and informal activities outside of the classroom) contribute to the development of a well-educated, liberally educated student? How are these experiences (or how could they) be integrated into the learning that takes place in our classrooms?