

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "A Plea for New Attitudes about General Education," by Bruce Henderson, 11/1/99

Bruce, I say "hurray" to you for a very thoughtful essay on the importance of Gen Ed at Western. I have been mystified by the antipathy toward Gen Ed at WCU shown by faculty and students. Given WCU's identity as a teaching, rather than a research institution, one would assume some significant consensus across the university that students should possess a broad understanding of human history and culture as well as skills that lead toward immediate employment. If marketable skills without an understanding of cultural/ historical context define a WCU graduate, how is WCU different from a trade school? The accelerating pace of change in our society is requiring all of us to be life-long learners. The most effective strategy for developing life-long learners, I would argue, is to offer students a rigorous grounding in General Education as well as some marketable skills.

Oak Winters, Continuing Education and Summer School

Bruce challenges us to cast off previously held assumptions and think about General Education and/or Liberal Studies courses in new ways. He's right, of course, but we must do more. We must reexamine and reconsider our clients, the educational process, and all the courses we teach. What if our course content and our delivery methods are simply irrelevant to our students and their needs? Can we hope to generate interest and motivation unless students are empowered to take control over their learning goals and objectives? Do we have the courage to move from telling students what they need to learn and in what order (in our learned opinions) to assisting students as they follow their own lines of inquiry regardless of discipline? Do we have the vision and courage to abolish discipline-based departments, traditional academic majors, and outmoded grading schemes? Do we dare to become learning facilitators in a non-disciplinary world? We should all read and discuss the 1995 book, Engines for Education, by Roger C. Schank and Chip Cleary of Northwestern University's Institute for the Learning Sciences.

John Moore, Communications and Theatre Arts

If we are really apathetic about General Education, as Bruce implies, we are not likely to respond, are we? Duh!

anonymous