

# Avoiding the Potholes: Strategies for Reforming General Education

Some committees have learned the hard way that the strategies for curricular change are as important as the substance, and their experiences may help fellow travelers on the road to general education reform

JERRY G. GAFF

General education is undergoing a revival of interest today: hundreds of colleges and universities have assembled committees and task forces to review their general education programs. Members of such committees and task forces usually bring much talent and enthusiasm to the task of reforming general education, but few have experience in providing leadership for institutional change.

Faculty members tend to be attracted to substantive issues—the nature of general education, the qualities of an educated person, problems with the current program, facets of an ideal general education—and much less interested in the strategies and procedures to be used by the group. Furthermore, committees and task forces tend to adopt common-sense approaches to fashion a report. Unfortunately, some common-sense approaches turn out to be naïve, and proposals—even good ones—hit potholes along the way. Such potholes can slow down the progress of curriculum reform and, in some cases, lead to a breakdown altogether. Although common-sense approaches sometimes prove to be best, they are more likely to work if they are consciously chosen in the light of alternatives rather than regarded simplistically as the only way to proceed.

The biggest pothole to avoid, then, is the notion that strategies are unimportant and that they enter the picture only after a proposed program is approved and about to be implemented. Rather, strategies are critical; they are as important as the substantive issues and they need to be considered from the outset.

The information presented here is based on a three-year Project on General Education Models (GEM), sponsored by the Society for Values in Higher Education. Initiated in 1978, Project GEM consists of twelve diverse institutions, including state colleges and universities, private colleges and universities, community

colleges, and a technical institute. Each institution has designated a task force consisting of administrators, faculty members, and students that provides leadership for strengthening the general education program. The Project has a small staff and an advisory board that assist the work of campus task forces by holding workshops, assembling resource material, providing consultation, conducting studies, publishing a newsletter, and awarding modest activity funds. The Project is supported by grants from the Exxon Education Foundation and the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. Much has been learned in this effort about the process of curricular change in different campus settings.

Some committees have learned the hard way that the strategies for curricular change are as important as the substance, and their experiences may help fellow travelers on the road to general education reform. Forty-three common strategies for change—potholes, if you will—have been culled from the work of general education reform committees. For each pothole an alternative strategy is suggested.

## Misconceptions About the Task

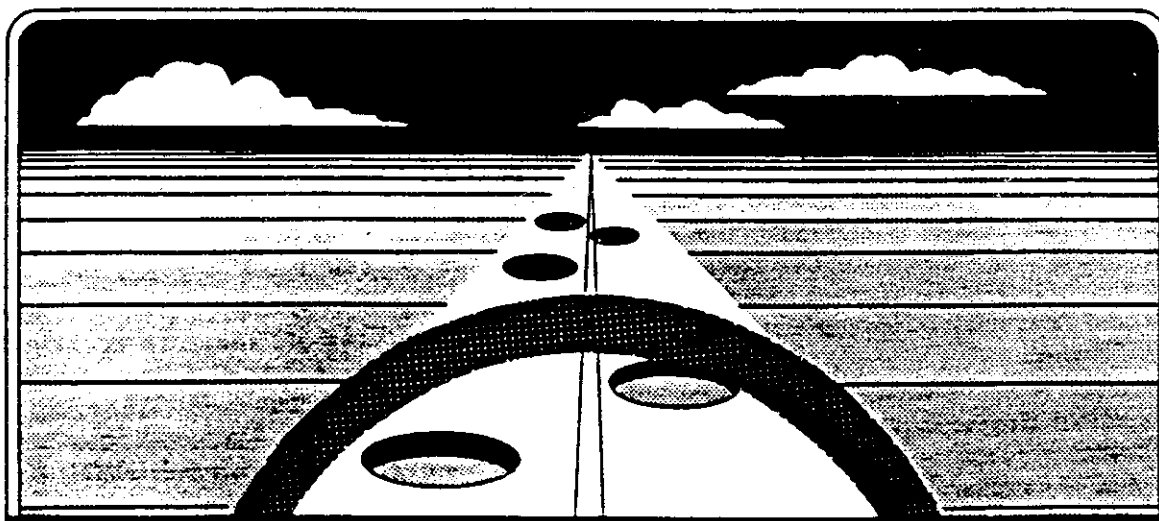
1. *Find a program to import.* During the first workshop of the Project on General Education Models (GEM), many participants—task force members from GEM institutions—came with the idea that they would be presented with an array of model programs. They expected to look over this menu, make their selections, and take a proposed program back to their schools for debate and speedy approval. Instead, the staff urged the task force members to develop their own home-grown program with the advice and support of the workshop and Project staff. Some participants thought the staff members were incompetent because the staff couldn't offer them a "quick fix" for their institution's general education needs; other participants were angry because they thought the staff wouldn't provide ready-made solutions. In contrast, within a year some of the

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same participants were on a panel at a professional meeting and were asked by members of the audience for program models to take back to campus. Every GEM task force presenter on the panel replied that a program for reforming general education should be designed around each institution's character, the strengths and interests of its faculty, and the needs of its students.

2. *Expect a holistic change.* Some committee members approach a curricular reform assignment expecting to fashion a comprehensive curricular program that is to be introduced all at once to produce revolutionary change. Radical departures from established traditions are, in fact, rare in the history of American higher edu-

state conventional distribution requirements, which largely consist of introductory courses in traditional liberal arts disciplines usually taught by standard lecture or seminar methods. This approach may indeed improve the general education of students at some institutions, but it has three major limitations. First, although most institutions have had extensive experience with a distribution requirements system (approximately 85 percent of all colleges and universities have one), distribution requirements have spawned the very problems that current reform efforts are seeking to overcome.<sup>3</sup> These problems include fragmentation of the curriculum; erosion of an accepted education rationale; lack of commitment on the part of the faculty; loss of interest by students; and absence of any central



cation. They have occurred but usually because of the creation of a new institution, such as Empire State College and Evergreen State College in the 1960s. In addition, crises have sometimes forced major change, for instance, when Antioch College's curriculum was radically restructured in 1919; charismatic individuals, such as Robert M. Hutchins of the University of Chicago, have sometimes fashioned distinctive programs. But most changes are evolutionary and introduced in a piecemeal fashion or phased in over time.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the holistic approach is a high-risk strategy. A comprehensive proposal takes a long time to fashion, yet a faculty can turn it down in a single meeting, thereby aborting the entire effort. A proposal designed to effect change through evolutionary, piecemeal action has a greater chance of having at least a portion of it accepted. A footnote in the Carnegie Foundation report, *Missions of the College Curriculum*, declared, "Curricular reform of significance requires (1) overall thought but (2) piecemeal action."<sup>2</sup> Several committees that have seen their proposals rejected can attest to the practical wisdom of this strategy.

3. *Reinstate distribution requirements.* Amid the current debate about general education, two approaches have emerged. One approach seeks to rein-

administration or supervision of the general education program. Second, most people think of breadth of knowledge as only one component of general education. But the Carnegie Foundation report, for example, cited learning skills—such as communication, mathematics, statistics, and possibly a foreign language—as a second component and various forms of integrative learning across the various disciplines as a third component.<sup>4</sup> Neither of these other two components is well served by distribution requirements. Finally, distribution requirements represent a return to earlier forms of general education that may not be suitable today. However useful they may have been, distribution requirements may be inappropriate for a student clientele that consists of more adult, underprepared, minority, women, and other nontraditional students. Furthermore, general education has traditionally stressed western civilization, and no matter how important this

1. JB L. Hefferlin, *Dynamics of Educational Reform* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969), pp. 22-32.

2. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Missions of the College Curriculum* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), p. 16.

3. A. Levine, *Handbook on Undergraduate Curriculum* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978), p. 11.

4. Carnegie Foundation, *Missions of the College Curriculum*, pp. 167-69.

one tradition has been, it is necessary today to incorporate more nonwestern perspectives and knowledge. Lockwood has expressed skepticism about the distribution requirements approach:

The current trend at colleges of reviving distribution requirements does not convince me that we are improving the quality of education. Giving the curriculum more structure doesn't necessarily give it coherence. I am skeptical that meaningful educational reform can occur if it is not based on a new philosophy of education and shared assumptions by faculty members of what education should be in the last quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, rather than merely reviving distribution requirements, Project GEM has taken another approach, where different member institutions are helped to develop new philosophies for building contemporary programs of general education. Such philosophies seem to provide a sound long-term basis for specific reforms.

#### Erroneous Task Force Procedures

4. *Working through the curriculum committee.* That curriculum review or reform should be conducted by the standing curriculum committee seems reasonable. However, forming a special task force might be a better route to take. Although a standing committee has its regular business to accomplish, which can consume large amounts of time, a task force can devote all its energy to a single purpose. In addition, unlike a special task force, a standing committee has provisions for regularly changing membership, and more than one group has found that new members can sidetrack its work by reintroducing issues and arguments that had been settled earlier. Furthermore, curriculum committees traditionally react to proposals from faculty members or departments and operate with a veto-power mentality. Efforts to reform general education require a group to develop a proposal and actively gather campus support for their ideas.

5. *Assembling the best thinkers.* A common-sense approach is that the best thinkers on the faculty should be assembled to prepare the best possible proposal. In practice, however, this approach may generate heady debate about high principles but little action. Robert Chambers, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Bucknell University, lamented, "I'm afraid we will spend three years talking about change rather than doing it." A good task force needs various kinds of talent—thinkers and doers, idealists and pragmatists, educational innovators and conservatives, and campus politicians and persons knowledgeable about national trends and resources. Failure to include a mix of talent may result in more progress reports like the one issued by Richard Clinton of Oregon State University: "When all is said and done, more is said than done." Furthermore, Project GEM task forces are required to include other persons in addition to faculty members. Guidelines specify that each task force should have from five to seven faculty members to pro-

vide faculty leadership, an administrator to provide institutional support, and from three to five students to remind all that *they* are the ultimate beneficiaries of the curriculum. Each of these constituencies has a legitimate interest in the quality of general education, and each should be represented in the reform process.

6. *Working without any special support.* An amazing number of committees try to effect massive curriculum reform without adequate support. This situation frequently occurs when the task is given to a standing committee, because such committees seldom receive any special budget or other assistance. Project GEM institutions were required to provide three kinds of support to their task forces. First, reduced teaching assignments were deemed essential if faculty members were to have the time and energy to provide leadership for the curriculum revision. In some cases, a half-time reduction in teaching assignments was provided for the chairperson; in others, a similar reduction, and sometimes a greater one, was distributed among several task force members. Schools were urged to either pay students with work-study funds or structure the task force's work so that students could earn academic credit for it. Second, schools were expected to pay travel expenses to send their GEM task force members to projectwide meetings. Third, each task force needed a modest fund to purchase materials, hold retreats, invite consultants, reproduce papers for campus distribution, and the like. Some funds were provided by the project, but usually these were supplemented by the institutions. Unless adequate support is given, a task force or committee cannot be expected to provide creative and effective leadership for curriculum reform.

7. *Planning for a short-term project.* Many committee members assume that their work will span only a few months and then become frustrated and disappointed when the work takes much longer. Harvard University provides an example of how the curriculum reform process can take many years. In 1974 a group was first assembled to address the question of the quality of undergraduate education at Harvard. A report of the Task Force on the Core Curriculum was issued in 1977, when the faculty approved it in principle. In 1978 a more detailed proposal was presented and approved. Subsequently, a standing committee to oversee this part of the curriculum was established, and specific course proposals were solicited from the faculty and negotiated. In 1982 the program will be fully operational—eight years after the process began. General education reform committees would do well to keep in mind the dieter's dictum: Fat that took years to put on cannot be removed in a few days. The difficulties surrounding general education are so severe and deep-seated they cannot be resolved overnight.

5. T. O. Lockwood, "A Skeptical Look at the General Education Movement," *Forum for Liberal Education* (Washington: Association of American Colleges, November 1978), p. 1.

and more time than is usually anticipated is needed to rectify them.

8. *Having the committee work by itself to develop a proposal.* The rationale for committees is that a small group can probe a subject in depth, issue a report, and have the larger group make an informed decision without investing all of the time of the larger group. This rationale has led some committees to work in isolation, survey the state of the art around the country, examine alternative forms of general education, and issue a report to the faculty at large. The faculty frequently perceives such reports as coming out of the blue and accuses the committee of holding secret discussions; the faculty feels that its prerogative to be actively involved in curriculum policy making has been ignored. This procedure was followed by a summer planning group of faculty at Eckerd College, and the rest of the faculty killed the report without its ever being submitted to a formal vote. A reconstituted committee, which spent a great deal of time at the outset outlining a procedure for involving the entire Eckerd faculty, is now engaged in a number of institutionwide activities, such as a monthly colloquium on general education, to prepare a proposal that has a better chance of winning widespread support.

9. *Issuing a single final report.* When writing scholarly papers, academics typically wait until their ideas are fully developed and well expressed before submitting papers for publication or critical scrutiny by their colleagues. Applying this common-sense approach to the preparation of a curriculum proposal can be catastrophic. One institution had a committee working laboriously for two years to develop an elegant and comprehensive proposal. The document, although lengthy, was impressive in its philosophy of education, analysis of the institution, and number of recommendations. Unfortunately, it contained something for everyone to dislike and was defeated by a coalition of opposition. Other groups are finding they are more successful when they issue a series of reports, hold discussions of each report along the way, and seek approval of portions as the enterprise unfolds. Several schools have used this procedure to obtain consensus on some learning goals for students. For example, at Valparaiso University, a set of assumptions about general education was developed and debated before a specific program was developed. And at the Community College of Denver, a framework for the curriculum was presented for discussion and approval before specific courses and other details were fleshed out. Such a procedure has the advantage of involving the faculty as the committee progresses with its task.

10. *Analyzing the big issues.* One way task forces are sidetracked is debate over large and enduring issues, such as the plight of undergraduate education, faculty lack of interest in teaching, or the absence of professional incentives for teaching general education

courses. These are important and legitimate issues, and they deserve a portion of any group's time. But a committee is often stymied for an inordinate time by hand wringing about matters over which it has little control. In contrast, productive groups tend to take a practical stance and focus on "what we can do here using our own resources." The large-scale changes toward competency-based curricula at Alverno College and Mars Hill College were effected because leaders of the reform efforts kept a practical focus on their agendas.

#### **Mistaken Concepts of General Education**

11. *There is only one true meaning of general education.* Each committee member tends to vest his or her own definition with unmerited authority. Naturally, different concepts, strongly held, can lead to disagreements and even conflicts. After hearing members articulate their views over and over again, some members

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lament that the group cannot even agree on the meaning of general education, let alone ways to strengthen it. Eventually the committee may realize that general education is fraught with meaning, that it has several definitions, and that each person has a legitimate claim to his or her view. The committee may then adopt a provisional definition, attempt to explore and elaborate its meaning as work progresses, and seek to understand the assumptions and values that underlie the various concepts of general education. Typically, the committee will have a richer sense of the meaning of the term at the conclusion of their efforts than at the outset.

12. *General education deals only with breadth of knowledge.* This common presupposition tends to be associated with the notion that students should be introduced to an array of academic disciplines. Few would dispute the contention that breadth of knowledge is part of general education. However, in addition to breadth of knowledge, the Carnegie typology included learning skills and integration of knowledge as important components of general education. As soon as a committee learns to substitute a definition for the definition of general education, it is free to consider various ways to enhance this part of the curriculum. Indeed, some thinkers argue that a core curriculum that is based on common needs, concerns, and themes and that takes the form of interdisciplinary courses is more productive than distribution requirements.<sup>6</sup>

13. *General education is only cognitive in character.* The starting place for many faculty members is asking

6. E. L. Boyer and M. Kaplan, *Educating for Survival* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Change Magazine Press, 1977).

Smith, dean of the college at the University of Chicago, has declared an "iron law": "Students shall not be expected to integrate anything the faculty can't or won't." The rationale for this principle is that the integration is not likely to occur unless it is consciously planned and structured as a regular part of the academic program. When such a principle is rigorously applied, faculty members from different academic disciplines must engage in dialogue over substantive issues and build an academic community to sustain their general education program. Lockwood has expressed it well:

For several decades—from the 1930s until the mid-50s—the general education movement represented much of what was best in undergraduate education. The late Lionel Trilling has recalled that, for most of that period, he and his colleagues, at Columbia and elsewhere, "inhabited an academic community which was informed by a sense not merely of scholarly but of educational purpose and which was devoted to making ever more cogent its conception of what a liberal and humane education consists in." Does a similar sense of purpose, some shared conviction, characterize most current curricular reforms? I tend to doubt it.<sup>8</sup>

#### Misunderstood Notions About Program Planning

18. *Change by addition.* In recent decades academic change has been accomplished largely by adding new programs, securing larger budgets, recruiting more students, and hiring more instructors. Today this avenue is closed off at most institutions. Now programs are being introduced by shifting priorities, reallocating resources, reassigning faculty members, and developing the professional competence of existing personnel. Although a much more complicated route to reform than change by addition, it is the only road available to most schools.

19. *Keep the debate internal to the campus.* Many committees begin their deliberations by having the members share their best thinking and offer their ideas for improving general education. This approach is guaranteed to pool a great deal of ignorance and half-truths, and it frequently results in premature polarization of the group. Other task forces have embarked on an exploration of the topic and have consciously cultivated a spirit of inquiry so that each person learns to expand, refine, and alter his or her initial ideas. These task forces read the literature, secure a consultant or two, attend a conference or workshop, or visit other institutions. For example, the University of Tennessee committee is launching an extensive educational campaign by creating a series of faculty study groups and providing participants with a few key volumes to read and discuss; specific proposals will not be pursued until the faculty develops sophistication on the topic of general education. Project GEM has prepared a guidebook about ideas, programs, and literature to help GEM task force members in this area.<sup>9</sup>

20. *Proposals are autobiographical.* Innovators frequently lament that faculty members, because they are

relatively isolated, offer ideas that are largely autobiographical. Although proposals may be motivated by personal experience, the danger is that faculty members will prescribe for today's students what was done for (or to) them in their own general education. Groups that encourage members to transcend personal experiences have a better chance of designing programs that are responsive to the interests of today's students and to contemporary realities.

21. *Assume that the committee knows the experiences and views of relevant constituencies.* Because members of a committee are from the campus, they are often presumed to be aware of faculty and student perspectives. Some committees have found it instructive to conduct studies to test their preconceived ideas, and sometimes reach surprising conclusions, as in the SUNY-Buffalo example mentioned in 16. As another example, the Rochester Institute of Technology has surveyed its students, faculty members, alumni, and members of the local community as an aid to planning. To assess the two key constituencies of students and faculty, Project GEM has used a survey of students and developed a faculty interview.

22. *Plan rationally.* Virtually all rational planning models call for planners to specify goals, assess needs, determine alternatives, design and implement a program, and evaluate outcomes. Although such models are useful, effective programs are actually fashioned in many different ways. For example, the Community College of Denver was faced with the requirements of

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a new state law, and it hastily devised a promising program with little help from any rational planning model. Columbia University is creating a series of "teaching companies," upper-division interdisciplinary study groups, by having faculty members identify common interests that transcend their disciplines and by offering courses on such topics. The university is building this part of the program around faculty rather than the usual practice of recruiting faculty to staff the program.

23. *Use "either-or" thinking.* Because some people regard alternative ideas as anathema, preliminary conversations often pit one pet idea against another. However, general education is so complex that several steps must be taken to strengthen it at most institutions. Some committees have discovered that "both-and" thinking

8. Lockwood, "A Skeptical Look at the General Education Movement," pp. 1-2.

9. Project on General Education Models, *General Education: Issues and Resources* (Washington: Association of American Colleges, 1980).

allows many additional features to be incorporated and avoids the political fallout of rejecting polar alternatives. For example, the Community College of Denver adopted a program that calls for all degree students to take four skills courses—communication, critical thinking, computation skills, and interpersonal skills—and for students seeking an Associate of Arts degree to take in addition three disciplinary courses and three interdisciplinary courses. This scheme not only follows the Carnegie Foundation's creative thinking on the topic but also incorporates the desires of those faculty members who demand attention to basic skills, those who favor surveys of academic disciplines, and those who prefer some interdisciplinary mode of integration. Thus, by using the "both-and" thought process, a committee can develop a sophisticated program with greater political support.

24. *Search for the "one best" program.* In *Growing Up in America*, Fred and Grace Hechinger concluded that educators have a penchant for standardized answers to all problems.<sup>10</sup> The American educator's search for the "one best way" is largely responsible for education fads that rage from one extreme to the other. Many general education committees search for the one best program without realizing that because of human diversity, any single program is likely to be a Procrustean bed. Some schools are seeking to avoid such rigidities by providing a good measure of freedom of choice for students. Some, like Harvard, provide a limited array of courses for each required area of study. Others, such as Spelman College, are developing a series of interdisciplinary and thematic courses of study, and students select from these structured alternatives. Even more radical approaches include the creation of an alternative, tightly integrated core curriculum at Pacific Lutheran University, a series of federated learning communities with thematic topics at SUNY-Stony Brook, and an alternative college at St. Olaf College. Each approach is based on a respect for common standards as well as an aversion to standardized solutions.

25. *Keep the committee out of politics.* The committee at Southern Illinois University, seeking to avoid partisanship within its ranks, was guided for many months by the rules of "objective scholarship," under which members were expected to keep their personal biases out of the discussions. The hope was that this technique would help prevent partisan political issues from arising within the committee and spreading throughout the campus. Other committees take the opposite tack and strive to uncover the biases of various groups so that those views can be explicitly incorporated into their proposals. This strategy involves consciously building coalitions and showing how the self-interest of various departments and other campus groups is served by a proposal.

26. *Couch proposals in the language of innovation.* Because committee members think of themselves as

being engaged in innovation or reform, they naturally use such language in their reports and written materials. Because this rhetoric may create resistance to change, some groups have chosen to heed the lesson cited by A. Lawrence Lowell in his 1938 book, *What a University President Has Learned*: "If he desires to innovate he will be greatly helped by having the reputation of being conservative, because the radicals who want a change are little offended by the fact of change, while the conservatives will be likely to follow him because they look on him as sharing their temperament and point of view."<sup>11</sup> Proposals that seem to advocate

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### *The American educator's search for the "one best way" is largely responsible for education fads.*

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a return to fundamental purposes and procedures rather than a radical departure from present practices may draw support from both liberal and conservative campus groups.

27. *Assume that the plan is the end of the process.* The process of planning a program is so demanding and time-consuming that a committee is only too eager to complete the planning so that it can turn the responsibility for approving and implementing the program over to somebody else. The preparation of a plan that merits the support of the committee is seen as the end of a long haul. One institution dropped out of Project GEM in part because once the committee had prepared its report on the general education program and submitted it to the faculty, its work was seen as completed. But as James Q. Wilson, who chaired Harvard's task force, said after the faculty approved the new core curriculum, "To paraphrase Churchill, we are not at the end, or at the beginning of the end, but at the end of the beginning."<sup>12</sup> A responsible committee must secure approval of its proposals and help implement them.

#### **Faulty Methods for Securing Approval of Proposals**

28. *Have the committee play a passive role in the debate and approval process.* Some committees adopt the scholarly model of publishing their best thinking and waiting for the reviews and reactions from their professional colleagues to come in. The faculty must have a full and fair debate on the issues, of course, but several task forces have learned that they must take an active part in the debate and orchestrate the approval process if their proposals are to have any chance of passing. The role of the committee may shift from that

10. F. M. Hechinger and G. Hechinger, *Growing Up in America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975).

11. A. L. Lowell, *What a University President Has Learned* (New York: Macmillan, 1938).

12. J. Q. Wilson, cited in "The Core Curriculum: What It Means for Undergraduate Education," *Harvard Gazette*, June 8, 1978, p. 7.

of a study and recommending body to that of an advocate for the proposals. After all, if the committee members will not speak for their own recommendations, who will? The faculty has only a few months to process all the issues, problems, recommendations, and rationales that the committee grappled with for perhaps years. Committee members can greatly aid the approval process by initiating conversations with key people such as committee chairpersons, department chairpersons, faculty leaders, and deans.

29. *Present the proposal in an open hearing.* GEM task force members at Northeastern Illinois University held a productive two-day retreat during which they developed a set of goals, brainstormed some possible model curricula, and planned strategy. Toward the end of the retreat, one person suggested that the task force members hold an open hearing on campus for interested faculty members and present the task force's best thinking to their colleagues for a critique. Another person remarked that the task force's ideas had grown out of the constructive and enjoyable atmosphere of the retreat and expressed the fear that an open hearing would provide a negative atmosphere in which faculty members would criticize the task force's best efforts. The decision was to try to recapture the spirit of the retreat by having several small group meetings before attempting an open hearing. Although time-consuming, this technique succeeded in engaging more people in thinking about how to enhance the quality of general education, and it laid the groundwork for subsequent efforts.

30. *Seek approval of a comprehensive proposal.* Although a comprehensive proposal can generate a coalition of opposition, at least some of its recommendations

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may be accepted if it has several features that can be debated and acted upon separately. For example, at the College of Brockport in the SUNY system, the first collegewide Committee on General Education was created before the nature of the general education program was voted on. This procedure helped resolve some of the political ambiguities before the program itself was discussed. Other schools break down a comprehensive proposal into preliminary portions that are brought before the faculty.

31. *Assume that the political task is to get others to accept the committee's proposal.* Most committees eventually ask the question, How can we get them to approve *our* recommendations? When the question is

posed that way, it is very difficult to answer, because faculty members will not vote for something that they perceive to be undesirable or not in their best interest. The most reliable strategy is to make sure the proposal contains portions that represent the ideas and values of those who must approve it. Fostering a sense of ownership among the faculty for portions of the proposal is the key to gaining speedy and convincing support for the proposal as a whole.

32. *Avoid and isolate opponents.* Because avoiding persons who disagree with one is human nature, critics are often isolated and ignored. Ignoring them does not make them go away; indeed, they may become more persistent and vocal. Some committees have deputized members or small delegations to meet quietly with these critics, hear their concerns, and either incorporate features that respond to their concerns or explain why that cannot be done. This procedure may improve the proposal as well as silence some of the opposition.

33. *Assume that any opposition is irrational.* Some committee members have difficulty acknowledging that a person may have good reasons for opposing new policies to strengthen general education. However, many potential supporters may have legitimate concerns and, therefore, some groups go out of their way to reassure faculty members that the group's proposals to strengthen undergraduate general education are not, for example, antithetical to specialization, a threat to graduate education, contrary to the interests of departments, or a way to rid the institution of some faculty members. Some committee reports make it clear that not all faculty members would be involved in teaching new courses, and other reports insist that resources be available to assist faculty members in adjusting to new courses and the new program.

34. *Assume that faculty members understand the proposals.* Distributing a written report and holding discussions are essential to educate faculty members about a proposed program. Yet, rare is the vote that takes place without at least some people misunderstanding portions of the report. Some opposition comes from simple misinformation about the current situation, the proposed improvement, the implications for other parts of the institution, and the like. One committee decided to do everything in its power to ensure that nobody would vote on the basis of misinformation. This decision requires having someone talk with known opponents to make sure that they are genuinely in disagreement rather than merely misinformed.

35. *Use regular voting procedures.* Some task forces never question the business-as-usual approach for voting on a major curriculum proposal. But the University of Tennessee adopted its current curriculum by a mailed secret ballot to minimize the oratorical influence of opponents in open faculty meetings and the undue influence that some persons might wield over others in a

public vote. Because any curriculum should ideally have widespread faculty support, some institutions require a majority that is greater than the usual 51 percent for passage of a curriculum reform proposal. At the University of the Pacific, the voting procedure for a curriculum proposal was determined by a group other than the committee preparing the proposal. Because this group ruled that a nonvote would be treated as a no vote, not only did the committee members have to persuade the faculty of the merits of their proposal, but also, as in any political campaign, they had to get out the vote.

36. *Schedule a vote after a reasonable time for discussion.* This method seems to be sensible; however, after a task force has spent years working on a proposal and holding extended discussions with the faculty, scheduling a definitive vote would be suicidal if the outcome is in doubt. Further discussion and negotiation can keep the proposal alive and perhaps win a few more advocates. The Machiavellian answer to the question of when to put the proposal to a vote is, "When the votes are assured."

37. *Assume a negative vote is final.* The road to curriculum reform is strewn with abandoned vehicles that have fallen into the trap of interpreting a negative vote as the end of the road. The University of the Pacific

committee found that its proposal was narrowly defeated in the college of liberal arts, where it was first acted upon. Instead of abandoning the proposal, the committee immediately activated a contingency plan that had three steps. First, the dean asked every department to state in writing specific problems with the document and specific ways it could be modified to meet their objections. Second, committee members were added from the professional schools where there was strong support for the committee's recommendations. Third, another vote was planned to occur after additional work would have been done. Because the group had met and worked on their plan for nearly three years, they were not about to abort the effort when they were so near the end of the journey.

#### **Illusions About Program Implementation**

38. *The task force should issue a report for others to implement.* Typically, when a faculty committee issues a report and its recommendations are accepted, an administrator is given responsibility for carrying out the new policies. With curriculum revisions, however, there must be some continuity between the planners and the implementers and, therefore, at least some members of the planning group often play central roles in implementing the program. For example, Eva Wanton, the chairperson of the GEM task force at Florida A&M University, was asked to serve as direc-

## A Tax Guide for College & University Presidents

By Bruce R. Hopkins. Compensation to college and university presidents often places these administrators in a unique tax situation. Understanding the distinct nature of these tax dilemmas is difficult at best and impossible at worst. This volume gathers together for the first time all the information pertinent to the president. Changes in the tax code have been addressed to make this small compendium the most up-to-date book available.

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tor of the new general education program that her group had developed. Furthermore, committee members frequently end up teaching courses in the new program and helping to secure colleagues to teach with them. Committee members often find that the program operates best when they take an active part in the actual implementation.

39. *Faculty members are willing to teach in the program. Just because the faculty approves a new program does not necessarily mean that faculty members are willing to teach in it.* The SUNY College at Brockport program called for a freshman course, Dimensions of Liberal Education, to be offered to all entering freshmen. Nearly seventy sections were planned, so that each section would be small enough for personal interaction and discussion. A major concern was to attract enough faculty members to teach this course, which is only one part of the college's overall general education program. In general, some rewards are necessary to attract and retain faculty. Often the opportunity to learn a new subject, to teach in a new context, or to work with stimulating new colleagues is seen as a stimulus to growth and renewal and will suffice to lure faculty members. But sometimes material rewards or, at the very least, assurances that this kind of teaching will not be held against faculty members in decisions about salary, retention, and promotion are necessary.

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*Some committees expect that once the program is approved, it can be implemented in one fell swoop.*

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40. *Anybody can teach general education courses.* Courses that stress skills rather than content, that range beyond disciplinary boundaries, or that deal with value implications of knowledge pose challenges for any teacher, and such courses are especially difficult for teachers who are cut out of a traditional mold. Several institutions have found it necessary to provide for the professional development of faculty members who teach these courses. For example, Pacific Lutheran University held intensive workshops for the faculty members teaching in the Integrated Studies Program, which is an alternative to the standard core curriculum. In addition, team-teaching and periodic faculty meetings throughout the term helped professors integrate course material to provide more coherence for students.

41. *The entire program should be implemented at once.* Some committees expect that once the program approved, it can be implemented in one fell swoop. On the contrary, Ohio University is phasing in its new program with positive results. According to Dean William Dorrell, phasing in the new program makes securing the necessary personnel easier, is less dis-

ruptive to the rest of the instructional program, and helps identify problems that can be more easily dealt with on a small scale before the entire program is in place. Other schools, such as Bucknell University, are attempting to run a pilot program involving a few faculty members and students before a course or an entire program is fully implemented.

42. *The program will work well the first time.* After investing so much time and energy in developing a new curriculum, committee members naturally have high expectations, but often the expectations are too high. A committee member does not have to accept Murphy's Law—"If something can go wrong, it will"—in order to realize that any new program will encounter some difficulties. Personnel problems, misunderstandings, personality conflicts, logistics, and other difficulties cannot all be avoided, even with the best advanced planning. The first time that courses, programs, or services are offered, even on a permanent basis, program implementers might aid their mental health by conceiving of the offerings as a trial run with the goal of improving the operation on succeeding trials.

43. *Evaluation is unnecessary.* By the time a committee travels this far it will look for any excuse to stop its work. The committee may regard evaluation as a dispensable burden, the esoteric exercise of an arcane specialty, or the reduction of grand purposes and aspirations to mere numbers. Furthermore, committee members often feel that an unspecified "we" will know whether the program is working. But a careful study of the program, the reaction of students, faculty teaching effectiveness, and the like—particularly if the study is focused on identifying problem areas that can be corrected during subsequent rounds—can significantly aid program implementation. Evaluation is one means of providing continual monitoring of the general education of students. What is more, there are political points to be gained. As one person put it, "If we conduct an evaluation of our program, they won't be able to get us on that one."

In traveling the road to general education reform, committee members should keep six basic ideas in mind. First, potholes should be expected because the task of reconstructing the general education program of a college or university is difficult and complicated. Second, no one piloting a curriculum proposal down the road toward approval can expect to miss all the holes in the road; even the best driver is jarred occasionally. Third, hitting a hole or two can slow the pace, but it will seldom knock the vehicle off course. Fourth, falling into too many potholes can make people take another road altogether (or, if care is not taken, abandon the entire journey). Fifth, alternative routes can be bumpy, too, so the best route may be the original one rather than the suggested alternative. Finally, avoiding potholes is an art; it involves some luck, but one's skill can be improved.