

An Interdisciplinary Framework for General Education Reform

**Jean Schwind
Elon University
January 22, 2009**



ELON UNIVERSITY

General studies goals

- 1) Effective writing and speaking skills
- 2) Complex quantitative reasoning skills
- 3) Information literacy skills
- 4) The capacity to view issues from other cultural perspectives
- 5) The ability to communicate effectively with people from other nations and cultures
- 6) An understanding of our interconnectedness with other people and the environment, as well as our responsibility to both



General Studies Goals, cont.

- 7) A mature understanding of how knowledge is constructed through academic inquiry within and across disciplines
- 8) The intellectual curiosity essential to life-long learning
- 9) Ethical decision-making skills to promote the common good
- 10) A vital and integrated sense of self: mind, body, and spirit



Elon's General Studies Program

- First-year Core
 - College Writing
 - Statistics
 - Wellness
 - **The Global Experience**
- Distribution Requirements in Expression, Civilization, Society, and Science
- Foreign Language Proficiency
- Experiential Learning Requirement
- Advanced Study
 - Arts and Sciences
 - **General Studies Interdisciplinary Seminar**



The Global Experience

- Interdisciplinary seminar for first-year students
- Taught by faculty from every department
- All sections address six themes:
 - 1) The importance of individual responsibility
 - 2) The relationship of humans to the natural world
 - 3) Globalization and tribalization as powerful world forces
 - 4) The impact of colonialism and imperialism
 - 5) The nature of culture
 - 6) The plights of disempowered groups
- Individual instructors decide which themes will be emphasized in readings and assignments



Advanced Interdisciplinary Seminar

- Taken in the junior or senior year
- Created with the assistance of two NEH grants (1993 & 1995)
- Taught by faculty from all departments
- Proposals submitted to General Studies Council
- Approved courses must satisfy five criteria:
 - Advanced subject matter
 - Interdisciplinary approach
 - Effective teaching
 - Writing-intensive methodology
 - Advanced critical thinking



Advanced Interdisciplinary Seminars: Sample Topics

- The US and Iraq
- Health Care Strategies for the 21st Century
- Food and the Environment
- Women, Culture, and Development
- Aspects of Laughter



How Interdisciplinary Seminars Advance General Studies Goals

- Writing intensiveness develops writing skills
- Contextual study (examining subjects within sociohistorical frameworks) promotes understanding of interconnections between ourselves and the worlds we inhabit
- Critical interdisciplinarity promotes epistemological reflection on how knowledge is constructed through academic inquiry within and across disciplines

