

# Current Trends in Liberal Education Curricular Design: A Primer

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“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.”

--Jerry G. Gaff

“Avoiding the Potholes: Strategies for Reforming General Education” 1980

Part I:

# The Trends and Rationales



Breadth  
Models

- 2 Social Science
- 2 Arts and Humanities
- 2 Math
- 2 Natural Science
- 2 Foreign Language
- 2 PE

(Possible additions:  
Writing 101 and 102)

Integrative  
Models



Breadth  
Models

2 Social Science  
2 Arts and Humanities  
2 Math  
2 Natural Science  
2 Foreign Language  
2 PE

(Possible additions:  
Writing 101 and 102)

Integrative  
Models

Common Core  
Learning Communities  
Interdisciplinary Courses  
Integrative Courses  
Team-taught Courses  
Capstone Courses  
Campus-wide themes  
ePortfolios  
Service Learning

# General Education 1.0

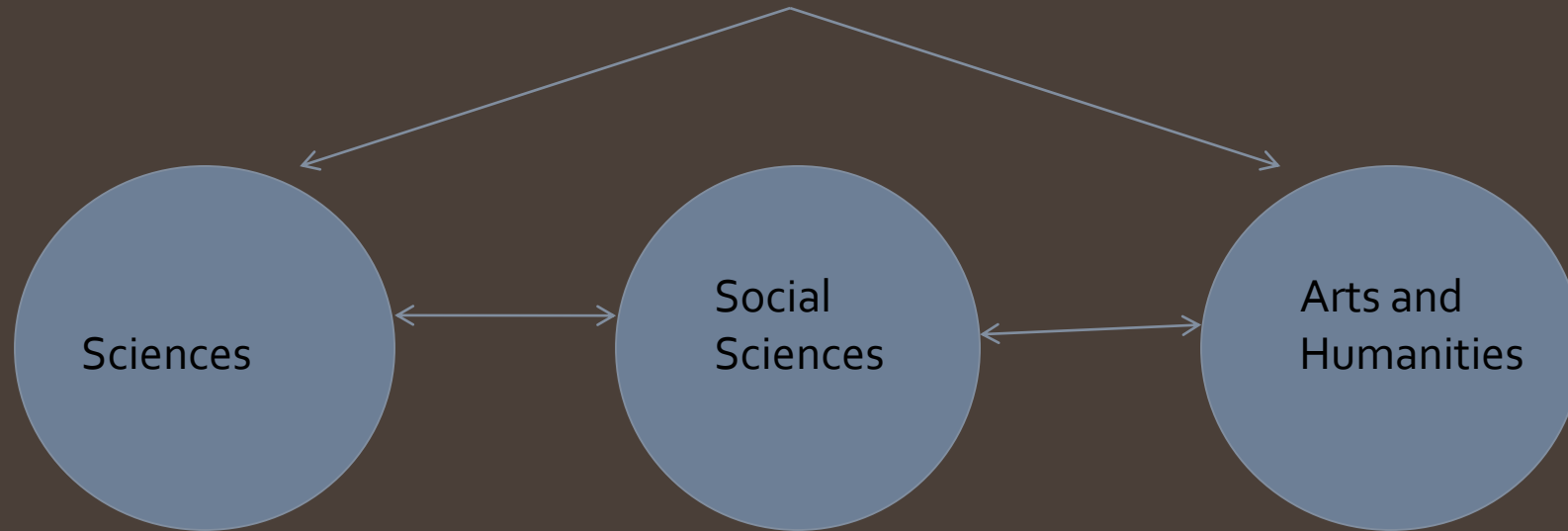


Sciences

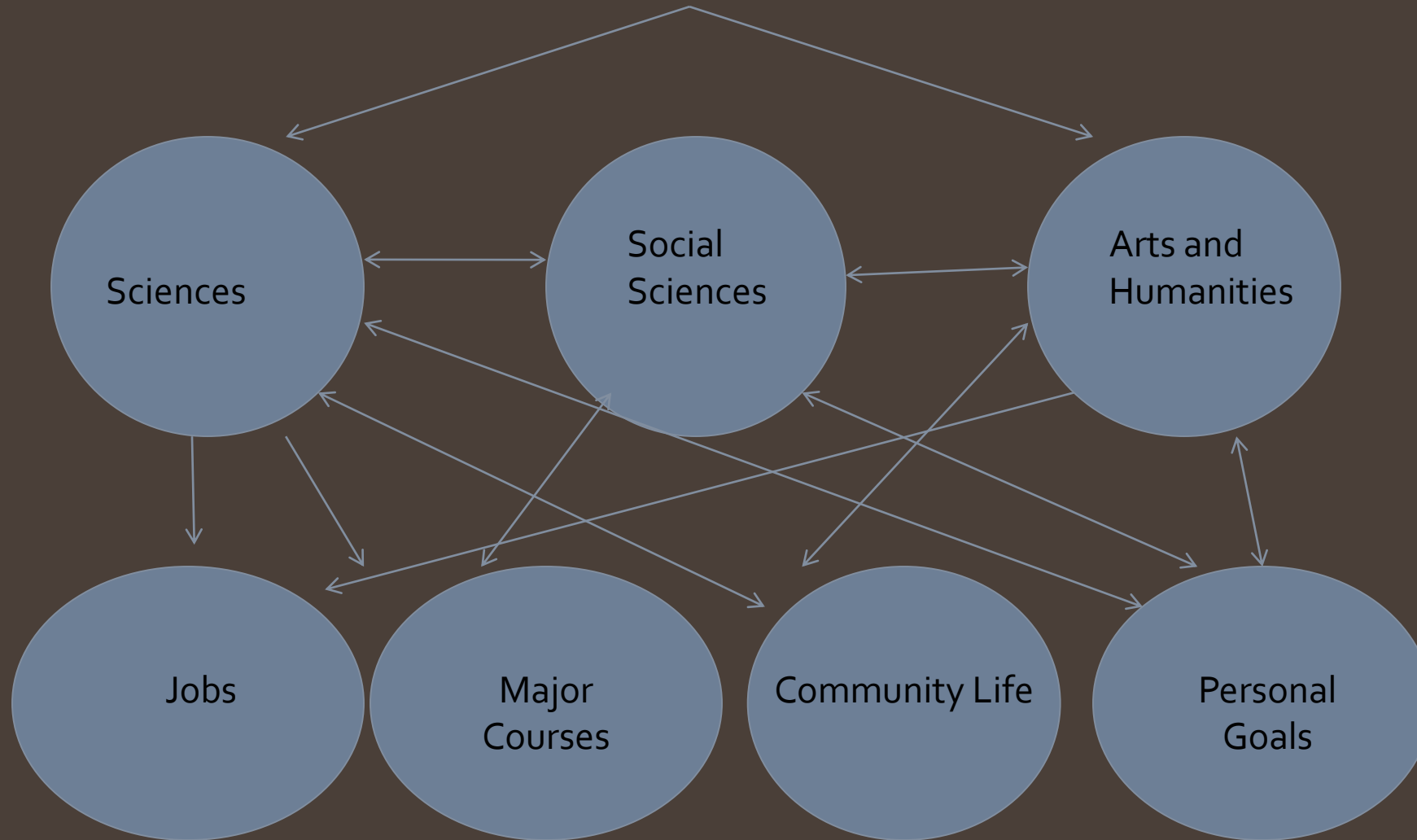
Social  
Sciences

Arts and  
Humanities

# General Education 2.0



# General Education 2.0





General Education 2.0





Breadth  
Models

Integrative  
Models



15%

64%

18%

## Reasons for this shift:

1. The changing dynamics of the workplace and the world—**Wicked** problems require **Wicked** competencies
2. The complexity of our students' lives
3. The exponential growth of knowledge in our fields—coverage is becoming increasingly difficult
4. This is how the brain works

# Citizenship in a wicked world

## Wicked Problems

- Deepwater Horizon
  - FBI vs. iPhones
    - Zika
    - Opioids
  - Immigration
- 2016 Election and its aftermath

## The Dynamics of the Workplace

- Students don't always go into the fields they study
- Or get the jobs they want
- Or stay in the fields they start in
- Or stay in the positions they start in
- The workplace isn't divided into "PSYC," "ENGL," and "BIOL"



## Growth of Knowledge in Our Fields

### English:

- Traditionally: The Cannon—Chaucer, Dickens, etc.
- More Recently: Multiethnic/World Literatures
- And also: Critical Theory

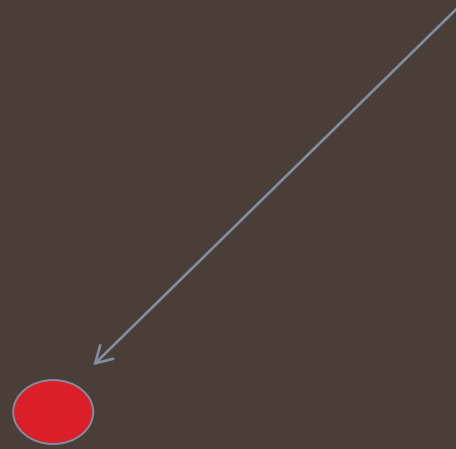
## Growth of Knowledge in Our Fields

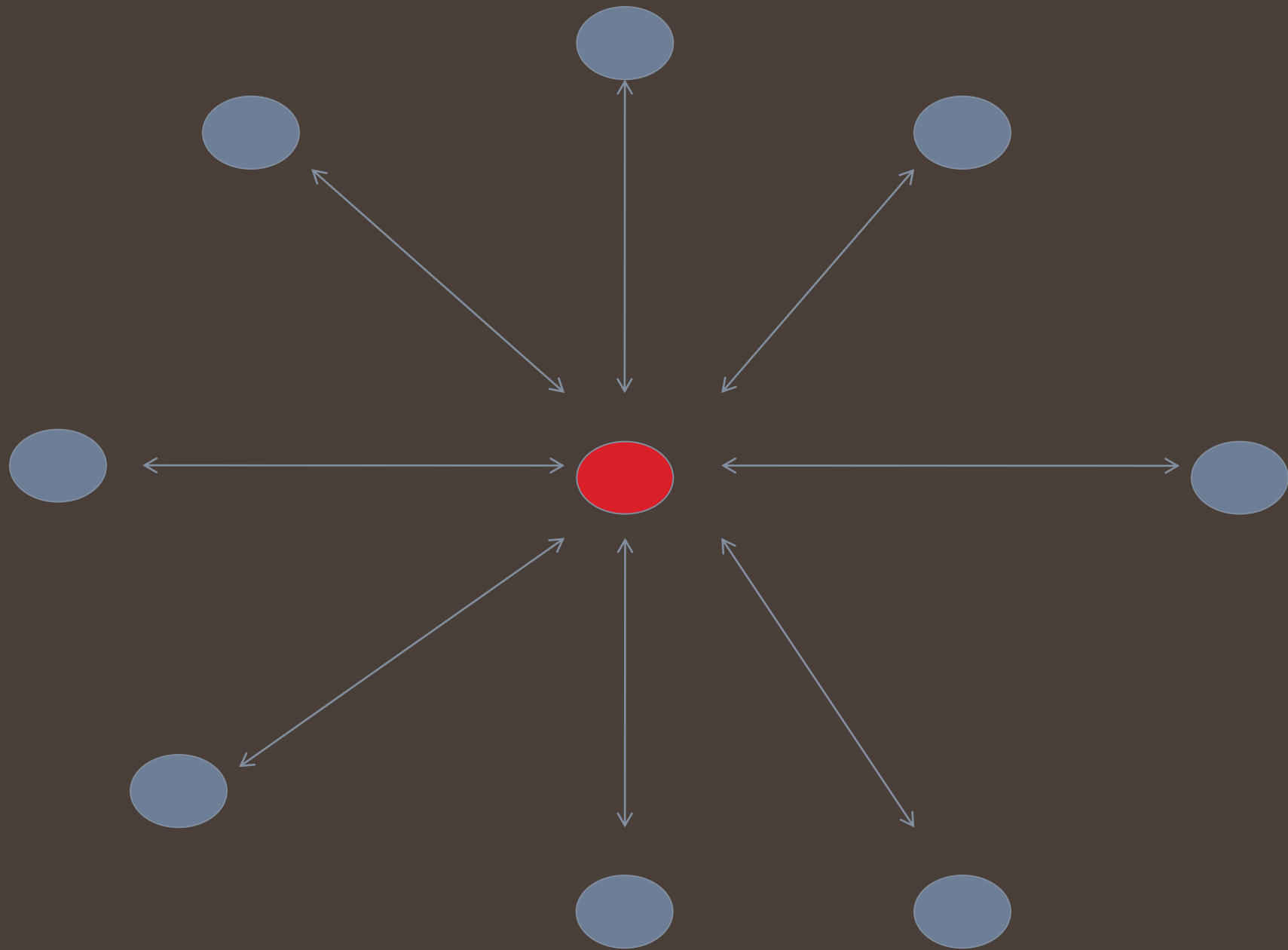
### Psychology:

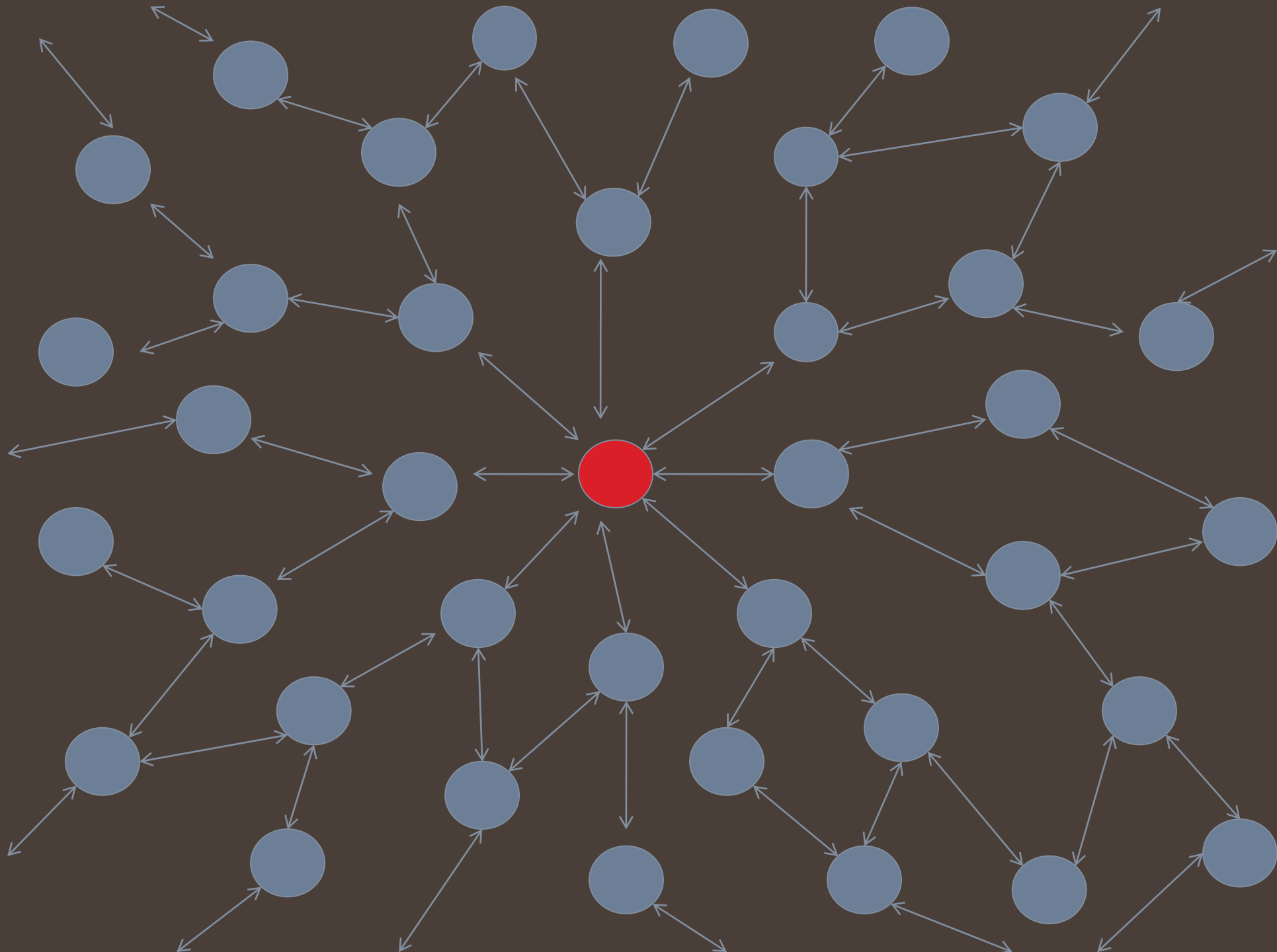
- Traditionally: Social, Clinical, Developmental, etc.
- More Recently: Evolutionary, Socio-cultural, Positive
- And also: Industrial Organizational, Neuroscience, Environmental, Sports . . .



# How the Brain Works







## A brief pause:

- What's the most striking thing you've heard thus far?
- Of the four rationales, which would most sway your faculty back home?
  - Wicked problems
  - Complexity of student lives
  - Exponential growth in our fields
  - How the brain works

Part II:

# Models (Simple)

# A "Strands" Model

Social Sciences

Nature & Technology



A Purposeful Life

Arts and Humanities



Globalization

Natural Sciences



# A "Strands" Model

Social Sciences

Arts and Humanities

Natural Sciences

Nature & Technology

A Purposeful Life

Globalization



# A "Strands" Model

	Nature & Technology	A Purposeful Life	Globalization
Social Sciences	✘		✘
Arts and Humanities	✘	✘	
Natural Sciences		✘	✘



# A "Strands" Model

Social Sciences

Arts and Humanities

Natural Sciences

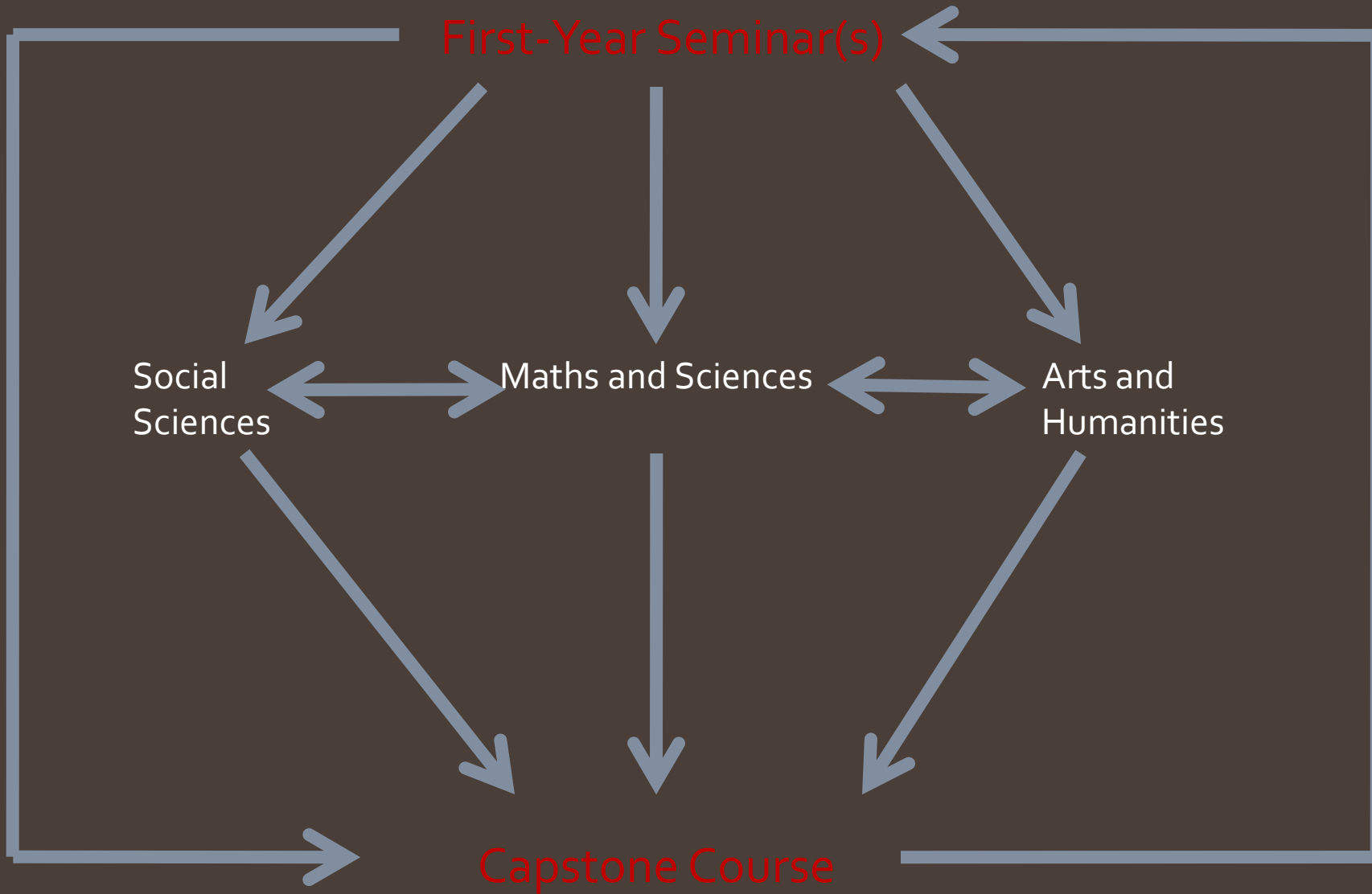
Nature & Technology

A Purposeful Life

Globalization



# A Core-Distribution Model



## A Core-Only Model

Term One	Term Two
The Contemporary Situation	The Modern World
The Roots of Civilization I	The Roots of Civilization II
Humanity in the Universe I	Humanity in the Universe II
Intercultural Studies I	Intercultural Studies II
Capstone I	Capstone II

Part II:  
(Cont.)

# Models (HIP)



## Integrative Models

Common Core  
Learning Communities  
Interdisciplinary Courses  
Integrative Courses  
Team-taught Courses  
Capstone Courses  
Campus-wide themes  
ePortfolios  
Community-based Learning

## High-Impact Practices

- First-year seminars and experiences
- Core courses
- Writing-intensive courses
- Undergraduate research
- Collaborative assignments and projects
- Diversity/Global learning/Study abroad
- Community-based learning
- Internships
- Capstone courses/Signature projects
- ePortfolios

# General Education 3.0

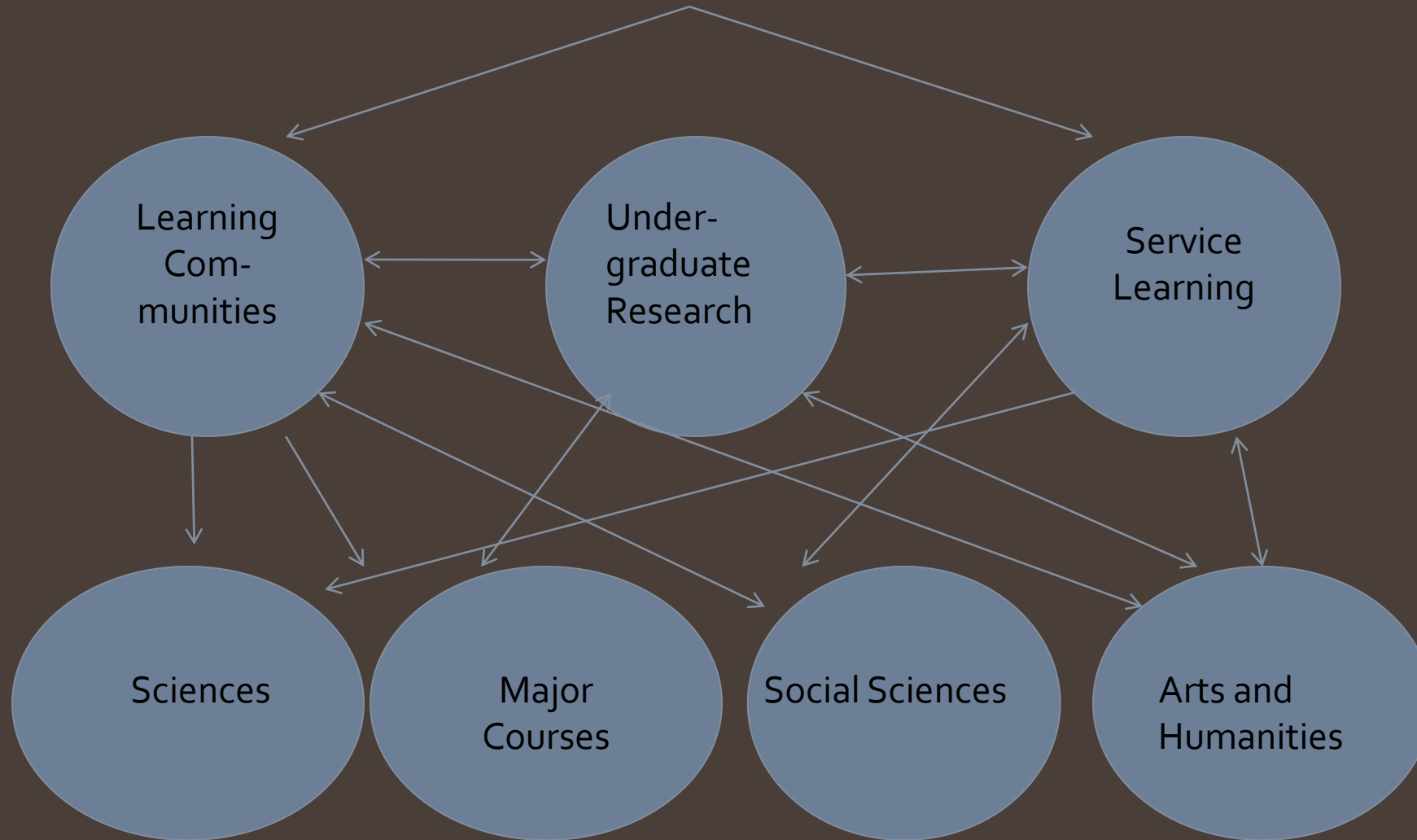


Learning  
Com-  
munities

Under-  
graduate  
Research

Service  
Learning

# General Education 3.0





# General Education 3.0

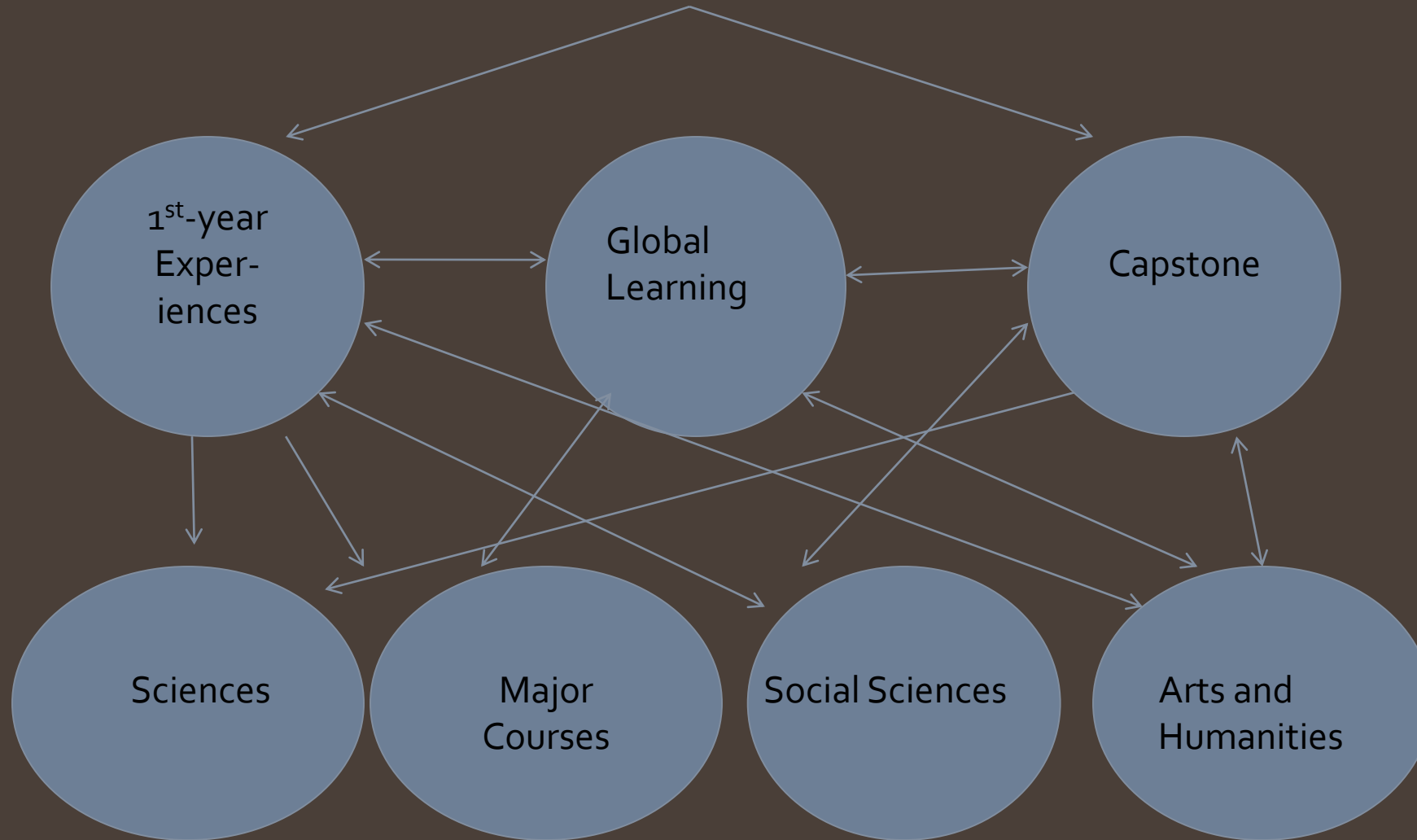


1<sup>st</sup>-year  
Experiences

Global  
Learning

Capstone

# General Education 3.0



# Wagner College

- Three learning communities (1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and ? years)
- Learning communities have experiential component
- Distribution requirements overlay learning communities

# Worcester Poly

- Initial Qualifying Project
  - Come from external sponsors
  - Interdisciplinary in nature
  - Students work in small groups
  - Often international
  - Counts for three courses
- Major Qualifying Project
  - Small groups
  - Within the major
  - Counts for three courses

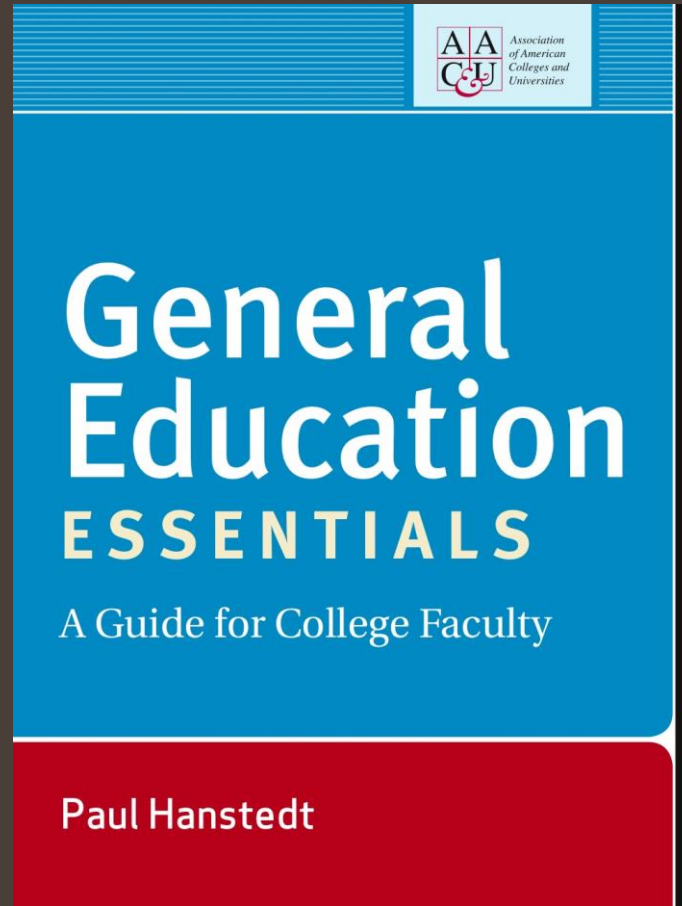
A brief pause:

- Of the models discussed, which might you see working on your campus?
- Why?

## A Few Key Ideas:

1. GE spread throughout a college curriculum will lead to greater learning and a better chance of integrating the values of the program into life-long learning
2. GE courses should not necessarily be “basic”
3. GE courses provide an opportunity for strong pedagogy
4. Spreading the responsibility for GE amongst a greater number of instructors will lead to a stronger program

Just for what  
it's worth . . .



Questions or thoughts?



Thank you for your patience!

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