

Understanding Current Trends in General Education Design

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Perhaps the most important
thing to remember:

“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

Outline:



∞ Part I: Trends and Rationales in
General Education

∞ Part II: Some Institutional Models

But first:



A man walks into a bar . . .



Louise is going home. . .



Meanwhile, in a
neighborhood in
Charlottesville, Virginia . . .

What do all of these have in common?

∞ The obvious logics don't make sense

∞ They require lateral thinking, indirect approaches, creativity

What **DON'T** they have in common?

∞ The first two are riddles

∞ The third is real life

What's my point?



As often as not, these are the kinds of problems our students will face in their jobs and lives.

Because . . .

- ❧ 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


Further . . .

The workplace is changing

- ∞ New technologies
- ∞ New markets/new clientele
- ∞ New regulations
- ∞ New challenges

Perhaps even more importantly . . .

- ∞ Engaged citizens are barraged by data/information/opinions/complex problems daily . . .
- ∞ . . . and must find ways to sift through this information to find solutions that extend beyond any single lesson they've encountered in their classes.



∞ Medellin: Cable Cars

∞ Chicago: PTSD vets and PTSD children

∞ New Orleans: Low-income retirees and vets with brain trauma



Wicked Problems

require

Wicked Solutions

Which raises the question:




What does it take to live in
today's world?

The Answer:



Wicked Competencies




Breadth
Models

Integrative
Models

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

(Possible additions:
Writing 101 and 102)



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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

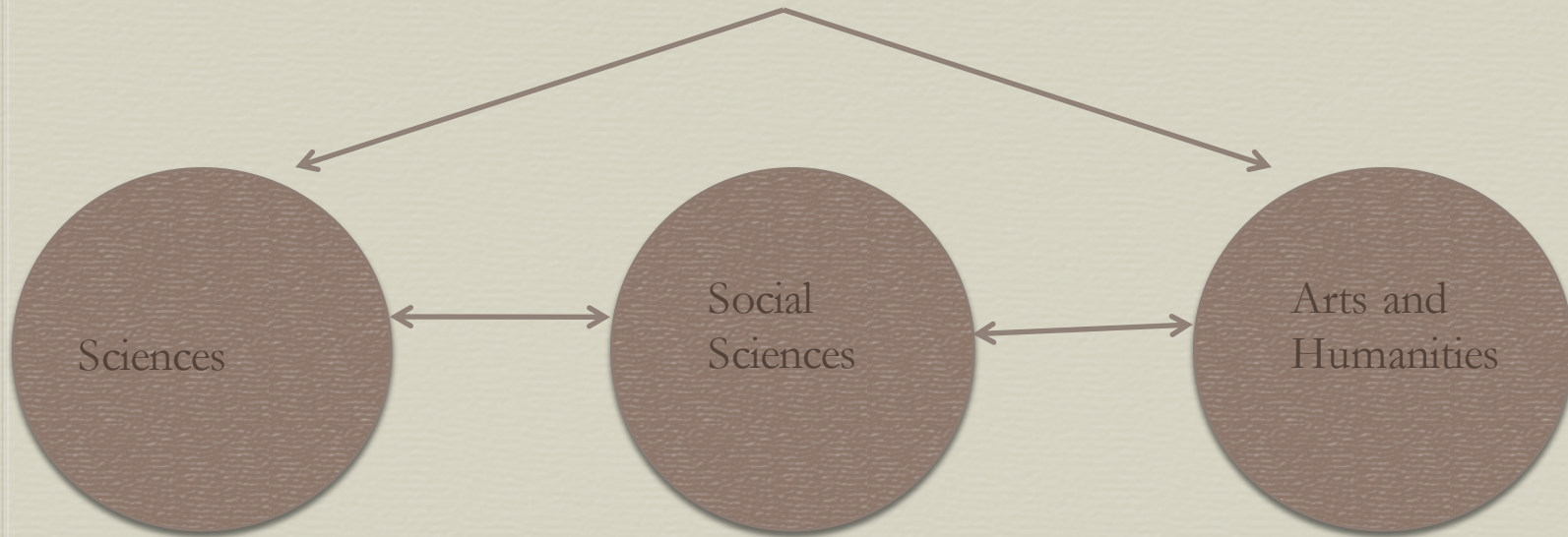


Sciences

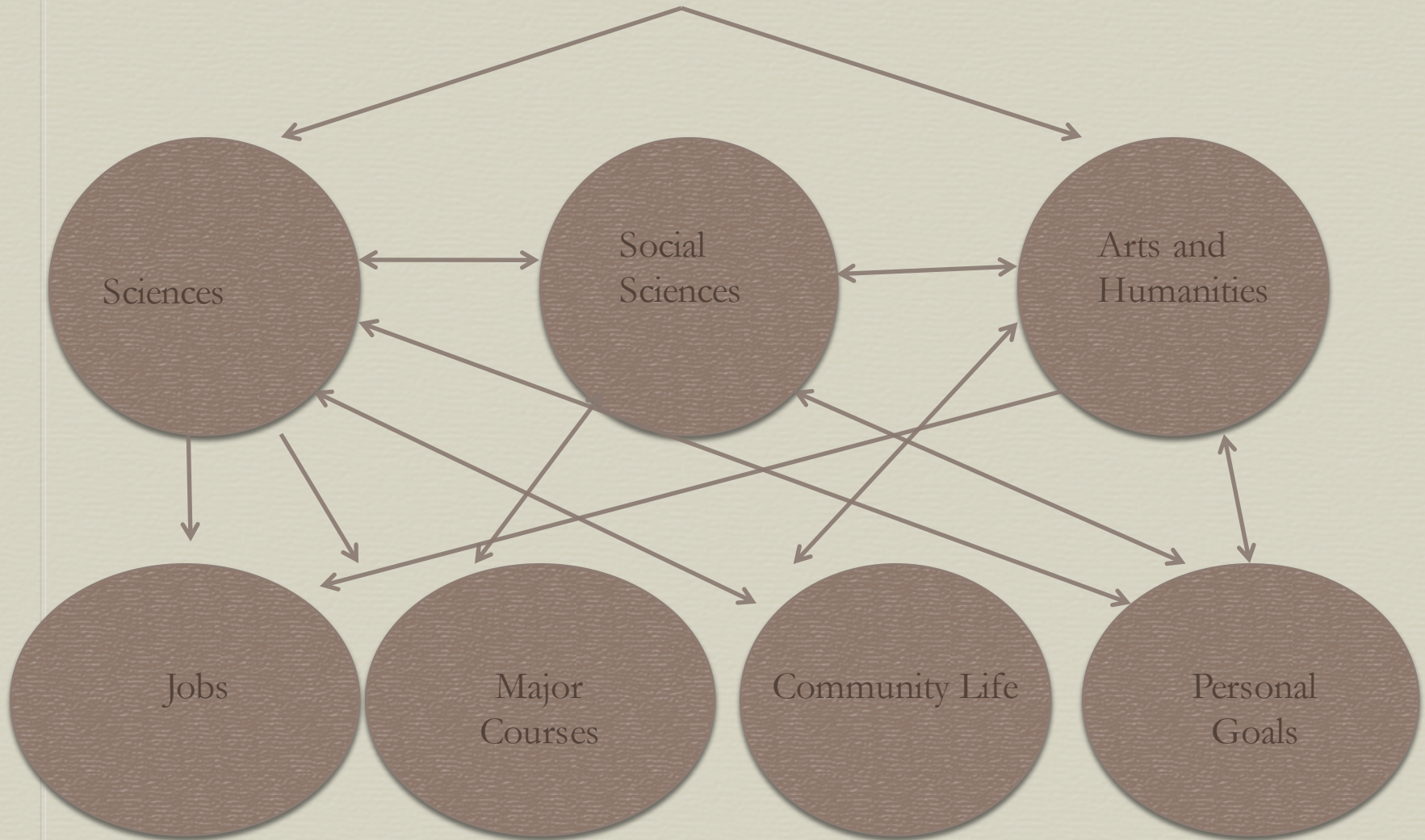
Social
Sciences

Arts and
Humanities

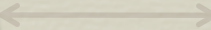
General Education 2.0



General Education 2.0

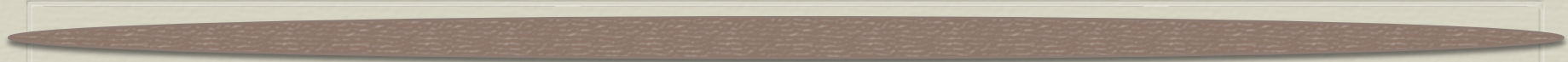


General Education 2.0



Liberal Education





Breadth
Models

Integrative
Models



15%

64%

18%

Reasons for this shift:



1. The changing dynamics of work and citizenship
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

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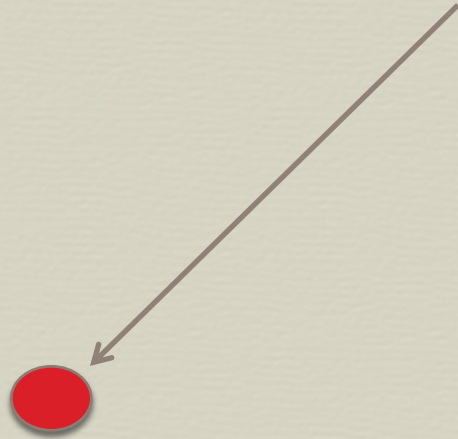


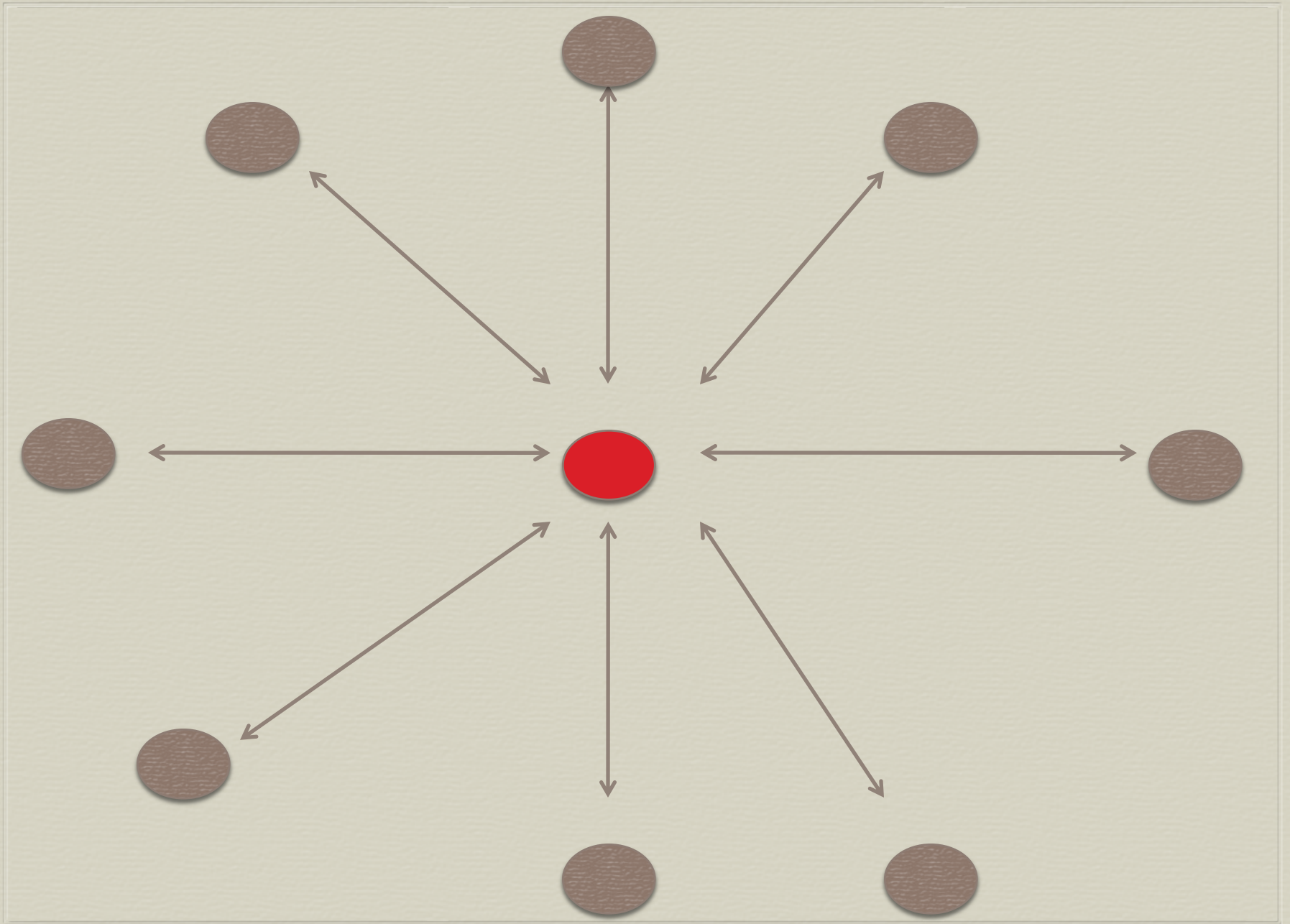
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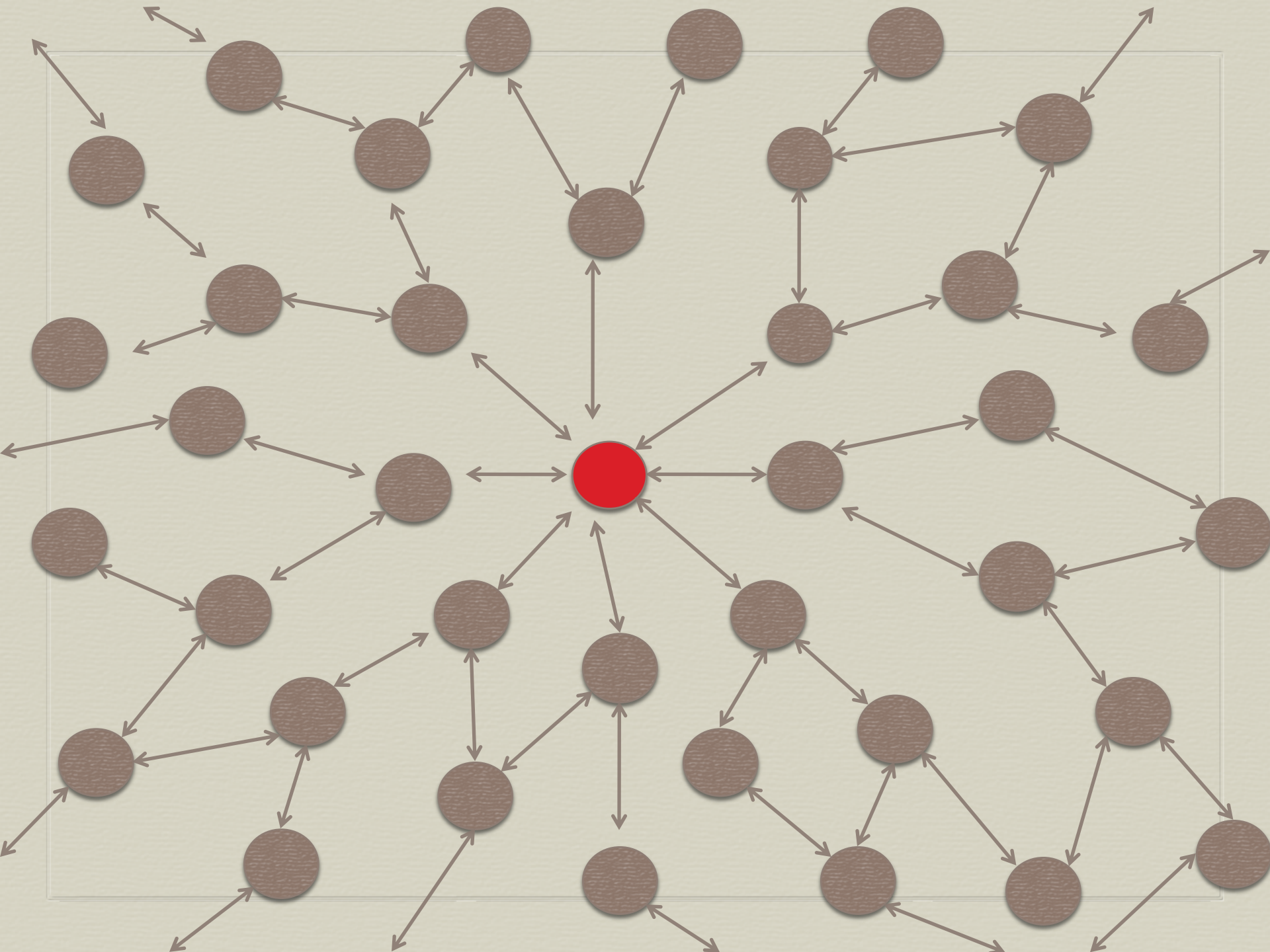
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Part II: Some Institutional Models

A gentle reminder:



- ∞ These models are merely descriptive. Every institution should begin this conversation by asking: “What kind of graduates do we wish to produce?”
- ∞ Once they’ve answered that question, the curriculum should be designed to meet those aspirations.

A “Strands” Model

Nature &
Technology

A Purposeful
Life

Globalization

Social Sciences

Arts and
Humanities

Natural
Sciences







A “Strands” Model



A “Strands” Model



A “Strands” Model

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

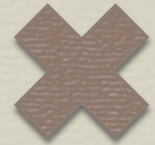
A “Strands” Model

Nature &
Technology

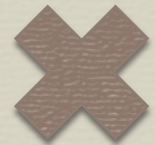
A Purposeful
Life

Globalization

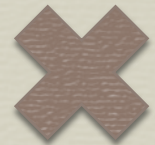
Social Sciences



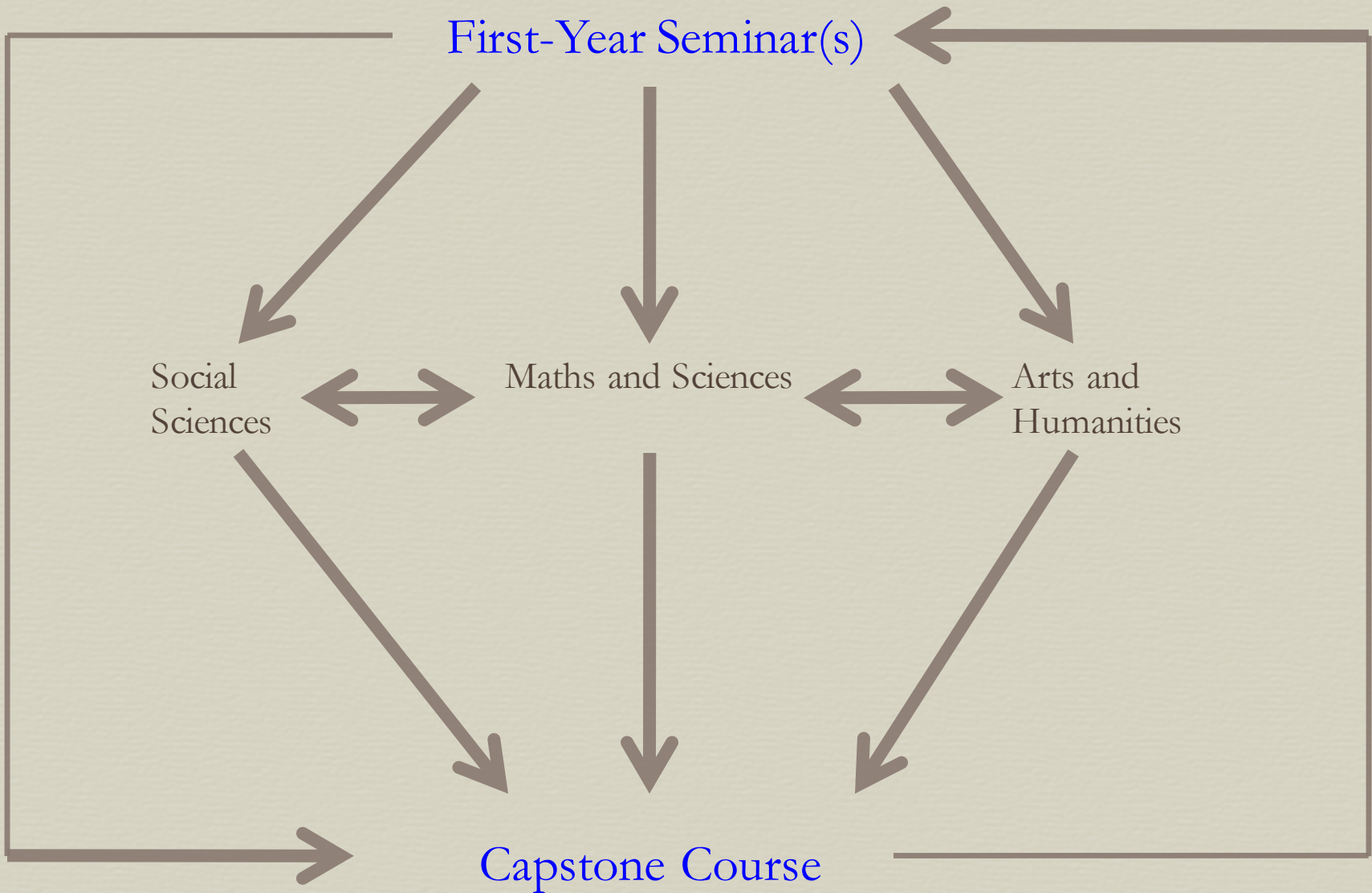
Arts and
Humanities



Natural
Sciences



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

Wagner College



- ∞ Three learning communities (1st, 4th, 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 Few Final Thoughts:

1. GE spread throughout a college curriculum and over four years 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

A Few Final Thoughts:

5. One of your greatest strengths as a small college is your ability to talk across disciplinary lines
6. It's important to avoid an algorithmic approach to GE
7. Tinker
8. Do not forget the complexity of your students' lives after graduation



Thank you for your patience!

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