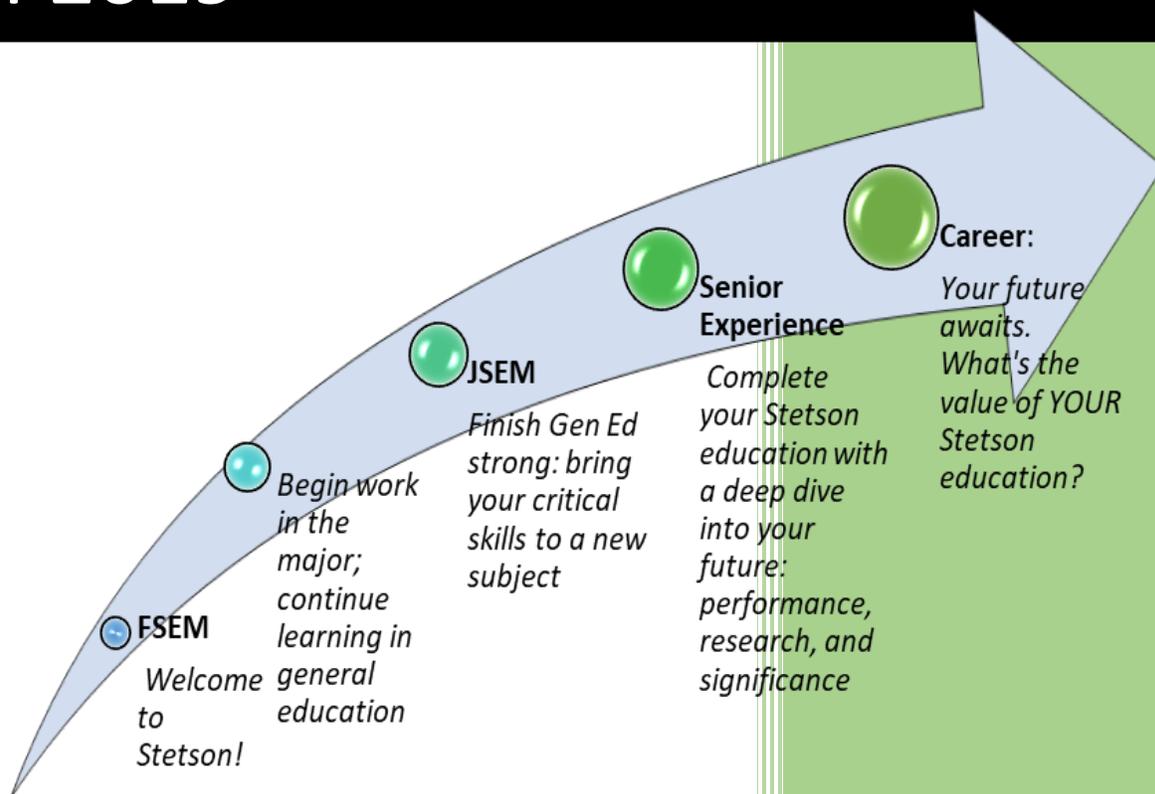


2019

Report and Recommendations: JSEM 2019



Core Learning Committee

Stetson University

5/10/2019

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Statement of Charge, Context, and Purpose

In August, 2017, Provost Noel Painter charged the Core Learning Committee with identifying pathways into and through Stetson University via the core learning experiences FSEM, JSEM, and Senior Experience. Since that time, the committee members (Grace Kaletski-Maisel, Colin McFarlane, Stuart Michelson, Megan O'Neill, Chair, and Daniil Zavlunov) have met twice a month to collect and review data, from which we have developed a clearer understanding of goals and potential pathways.

Last year, we focused on FSEM, and with the appointment of FSEM Director Ranjini Thaver, there is great new energy there; this year, we have focused on JSEM. This document, "Report and Recommendations: JSEM 2019," presents a vision that should be implemented while guided by faculty input into shape and details.

Review of qualitative assessment

The Core Learning Committee has met twice a month during fall and spring semesters (see [the Core Learning Committee minutes](#) for details). Considerable research into archival documents has reminded us of the JSEM's original intentions and learning goals. We've also learned how the Stetson JSEM has evolved over a decade of practice by reviewing dozens of JSEM syllabi, conducting a survey among JSEM faculty, and holding a series of interviews and focus groups. Finally, we've heard about what JSEM faculty need to best deliver on the promise of the junior seminar experience.

Our research indicates that JSEM is functioning reasonably well. Faculty are typically pleased with their courses and the quality of their teaching and student learning. It's clear from our research, however, that some elements of JSEM are not optimally realized. A quick review of our findings is in order (see appendices for additional data). Qualitative data collected from faculty and from syllabi indicated:

- ❖ lack of shared understanding around a set of definitions important to JSEM ("interdisciplinary" and "integrative")
- ❖ disparity across JSEM sections in terms of academic expectations
- ❖ inconsistency across JSEM syllabi (inclusion of learning goals and course goals, primarily)
- ❖ wide disparity across JSEM faculty in terms of preparation, support, and resources
- ❖ a recurring desire for experiential learning funding
- ❖ a clear desire among less experienced JSEM faculty for a sense of community
- ❖ a clear need for support and mentoring

These realities are the predictable result of approximately ten years during which tremendous resources were poured into FSEM, beginning at the same time that JSEM was getting

underway. During two subsequent shifts in upper administration, some JSEM support resources were created, centralized, and then lost. (The first was a JSEM coordinator, who was in place for only two or three years before the position was eliminated. The second was the faculty financial support, which was used for Library purchases and to provide a small stipend for faculty to enhance their JSEMs with experiential learning projects.) The outcome of those administrative shifts, in addition to the absence of dedicated attention to JSEM and the resulting reduced support, is an uneven relationship between JSEM and FSEM, an uncertainty around expectations and goals across JSEMs, and a loss of clarity and informed commitment around this important teaching assignment.

Recommendations

Minor structural changes can make JSEM a more vivid learning and teaching experience. These changes should be understood as bringing consistency and commonality to a course whose value seems often to be in its diversity of approach, but they are not intended to stifle that diversity and creativity. A shared understanding among the faculty is essential before students can see their JSEM experience as building from FSEM, important in its own right, and unique in their Stetson experience.

None of our recommendations is curricular; however, nearly all of them require a certain flexibility in our thinking that we believe will create greater coherence and a broader sense of engagement and commitment for faculty, as well as a more consistent set of academic experiences for students.

1. Establish a refreshed and shared vision of JSEM to build a community of practice

- characterized as a capstone or frame for General Education work
- understood as an important step in a student's learning trajectory through the core learning experiences
- envisioned as a course whose cross-disciplinary nature is initially created when students from a range of majors enroll
- reinforced in its accessibility to a range of disciplines by assignments and/or by the inherent complexity of the course content
- re-imagined as a site for reflective and integrative learning by way of the instructor's focus and approach to the values component
- articulated consistently in syllabi through the intentional inclusion of both Gen Ed learning goals and course learning goals and
- articulated consistently in the creation of university websites and other information resources

The Core Learning Committee has developed an inclusive paragraph to accurately capture the spirit of JSEM:

The Junior Seminar is intended to be the culminating experience of the Stetson General Education curriculum. The course builds upon, reinforces, and enhances foundational skills—in reading, writing, speaking, critical thinking, and information literacy—introduced in the First Year Seminar and subsequently developed in other General Education and major-specific courses. At the heart of each JSEM are Stetson’s core values: personal growth, intellectual development, and global citizenship, which manifest themselves through deep engagement with one of the five areas of Personal and Social Responsibility: Ethical or Spiritual Inquiry, Health and Wellness, Human Diversity, Social Justice, or Environmental Responsibility. Whatever the course’s actual subject, each JSEM helps students develop their capacities for ethical reflection and action in their personal, professional, and public lives. Although offered from a particular department or program, a cross-disciplinary environment is created that promotes the integration of learning through the disciplinary training students from a variety of majors bring to the course. Such diversity allows each class to transcend the paradigms or methods of any one major and to make connections across intellectual borders. JSEMs are enriched through active discussion and writing-enhanced pedagogy; and many, though not all, courses include some sort of experiential component: fieldwork, hands-on assignment, and/or community engagement.

-- (JSEM website: <https://www.stetson.edu/other/junior-seminar/>)

2. **Appoint a faculty JSEM Coordinator**, who will organize, maintain, and make available a range of resources (examples of successful course proposals, strong syllabi, and “best practices” assignments; potential professional development opportunities including a Fall JSEM Meeting; the JSEM faculty and student webpages, and so forth).

JSEM faculty agreed strongly that support and resources were more necessary than “directorship”—accordingly, this Coordinator is intended to be a resource, not a Director, and should rightly be a faculty member with experience in teaching JSEM.

The JSEM Coordinator will report to the Core Academic Experience Director, with outreach to various faculty groups (professional development, assessment, curriculum).

3. **Establish and sustain an annual JSEM meeting.** This annual meeting will commence in the Fall of 2019, as part of renewed and sustainable support for JSEM and its faculty. The annual meeting will draw us together, start developing a community, and prepare us for Spring semester, when most JSEMs are taught. Topics will include course refreshing, consultation with colleagues, availability of resources, discussion about purposes and practices, and the ongoing challenge of the Gen Ed course taught from a discipline at the 300 level.

- 4. Invest sufficient financial resources** to enable experiential learning opportunities. specifically, and practically, faculty need easy access to and support for excursions (including transportation logistics).

The recent JSEM survey (Spring 2019) as well as the faculty-wide survey (Spring 2018) included responses from faculty that asked for these opportunities. Specifically, survey data indicate that JSEM's nature as cross-disciplinary and integrative could be strengthened by offering courses abroad, field experiences, and community engagement practices. Indeed, at the beginning of Stetson's offering of the JSEM, such opportunities were funded (minimally); those opportunities dried up when JSEM-specific leadership was subsumed into a bigger General Education leadership structure under former AVP John Pearson.

The benefits for students in this structure would be substantial. High impact practices at any point in the general education curriculum are strongly encouraged; their use in the JSEM course is a natural fit. The benefits we see for student learning in their FSEMs would be mirrored in the JSEM student experience, providing, as an additional benefit, an opportunity for students to reflect on both courses and their impact.

We envision a structure of competitive grants. For example, a semester ahead of time, any JSEM instructor could propose a community engagement project, provide a budget, and report back after the experience on student learning. Although study abroad opportunities would be substantially more expensive, given enough pedagogical flexibility, the value of these experiences would be worth exploring the investment.

What do “integrative” and “interdisciplinary” mean?

Stetson University General Learning Outcome 8.1, Integrative Learning:

“Students can make connections across ideas and concepts and can synthesize ideas across perspectives.”

Although the phrase “integrative learning pedagogies” appears in the documents creating the Course Unit/LEAP system and is emphasized particularly in the section regarding the Junior Seminar, JSEM faculty in interviews and focus groups had questions: what are we helping students learn to integrate? What are the objects of integration? How are faculty practicing this critical kind of teaching and learning? How do we know if students are integrating what they have learned?

Interview, survey, and focus group data indicate that JSEMs vary widely in their approaches to integrative learning. (Most faculty saw this variability as a positive feature of JSEM, although many of those same faculty indicated that a fundamental understanding of possibilities should underlie individual choices and practices.) Thus, “integrative learning” in practice is represented in a number of ways:

- Focus on students learning to integrate their own disciplinary practices and theory with a new, out-of-field content area;
- Focus on integrating all of Gen Ed learning into JSEM final projects;
- Focus on the given Value area as integrative for student learning about personal and social responsibility
- The individual course might focus on issues or ideas that are inherently interdisciplinary (health/sociology/politics; gender/sexuality/media; psychology/history/biology)
- Integrating volunteer and community engagement opportunities into or alongside classroom learning
- The course itself might be the site of integrative practice by means of the range of students enrolled, with sufficient opportunity for interaction across student disciplines

Ultimately it seems clear that a single approach to integration is not required so much as a single learning objective, realized in a number of different ways. This perspective is complicated by a lack of shared understanding of “integrative learning” and its relationship to “interdisciplinary thinking.”

Survey data included widely inconsistent definitions, sometimes conflating the two notions and sometimes defining one in terms of the other. This disconnect is of long standing: the original General Education Curriculum Map, created in 2009 with the adoption of the Course Unit/LEAP curriculum, identifies GLO 8.1 as “integrative learning/interdisciplinary thinking,” despite the facts that Stetson does not claim to teach to or in any way assess for “interdisciplinary thinking” and that these two concepts are not interchangeable.

Stetson University prizes student learning that spans disciplines, ideas, and concepts; however, it is not clear that we prioritize “interdisciplinary thinking” over “integrative learning.” Rather, one seems to be *a priori* to the other: we create opportunities for students to encounter multiple disciplines/concepts/practices/ideas in order to create integrative thinkers. Our language around these learning principles should reflect our intentions more transparently, and sharing that language is critically important.

Conclusion

Other questions and issues arose as a result of the two years of work by the Core Learning Committee; these will form the body of a different document, to be submitted under separate cover. It will include:

- ❖ Assessment and “closing the loop” on critical/intellectual skills instruction in the Core Seminar sequence
- ❖ Wider distribution of critical skill designations across Gen Ed courses
- ❖ Consequent revision of General Education curriculum map
- ❖ The Stetson Portfolio
- ❖ Senior Experience
- ❖ Proposal for Task Force around Senior Work and Faculty Workload

Appendix I: Survey data

Appendix II: Focus Group Data, Spring 2019

Tuesday, 12-1 p.m., LBC 429

Melinda Hall, Shawnrece Campbell, Melissa Parks, Nancy Vosburg, Julia Metzker, Susanne Eules, Danielle Lindner; Stuart moderator, Megan taking notes

Wednesday 130 4/3/19 LBC 318

Nicole Denner; Rachel Core; Michael McFarland; Yohann Ripert; Chris Jimenez; Cathy Day; Mayhill Fowler; Mitchell Reddish; Daniil moderator, Megan taking notes

Wednesday 130-230 p.m. LBC 429

Harry Price, Grady Ballenger, Ken McCoy, Kimberly Reiter, Laura Crysel; Stuart moderating and taking notes

Below is a compilation of focus group results. The following pages are the notes taken during the three meetings and combined into one set of answers for each question. Names do not appear near their answers. Some answers have been condensed. While some discussion points were raised, the conversation around them is not recorded unless participants agreed on a specific element.

- What should an ideal JSEM accomplish?**
 - General agreement that the JSEM is a place where different viewpoints and perspectives come together (via enrollment, via course subject, via prior learning) at a high Gen Ed level to provide students opportunities to learn from different people about different ideas and to develop and demonstrate high quality critical and intellectual skills (writing, speaking, thinking, research, values) in the service of integrative learning.
- What do you do in your JSEM to facilitate integration of learning? What are your practices?**
 - General practice is realized through writing (reflective writing primarily, but research prompts that incorporate multiple approaches are also popular)
- How do you integrate writing in your JSEM? What kinds of assignment practices?**
 - Essays, research projects, reflective writing, reading responses, personal writing.
- What do you do in your JSEM around experiential learning? Practices?**
 - Strong consensus that experiential learning strategies don't work for all classes. The participants didn't indicate that it should be expected, but there was clear understanding that it can enhance learning when it's used appropriately. Wide and exciting range of experiential practices.
- What additional resources do you need to teach JSEM effectively?**
 - Strong consensus that additional support for teaching and JSEM orientation is essential. General agreement that JSEM should not be "directed," but needs voiced in response to two different questions indicate that someone needs to be the point-of-support person for pedagogical resources, calling JSEM faculty together, and orienting new JSEM instructors

Raw notes from focus groups. NOTE: Bold print indicates trend across all three focus groups

☐ **What should an ideal JSEM accomplish?**

- **Interdisciplinary or cross disciplinary** conversation; faculty need to bring in questions that each student can contribute to. **Teach and practice talking across disciplinary boundaries**
- Ideal JSEM: **being discerning about their research/information literacy** (use of information)
- **Meeting higher level expectations**
- **Social justice: Stetson values commitment: students should engage in depth on a social justice issue outside of their discipline**
- **Integrative learning**
- **Transfer skills from one major to another major;**
- Work outside their [student's] major
- **high impact, writing intensive oral skills, discussion based,**
- **WE with revisions,**
- **mastery of: research, argumentation, teamwork;**
- Should build community; as a waystation, then regroup and discuss; concern: where is the role of content in all this?
- Heightened critical skill expectations: speaking; honing research skills; need to cite materials; using class material to support
- An exciting class where people with different perspectives come together
- broad set of experiences, class projects –
- reflect on how her academic work reflects on this topic through written and oral;
- Skills development: writing, reading, discussing real things,
- Ideal JSEM: Finding their own voice (by learning as writers who are more sophisticated than FSEM)
- Concern that JSEM tries to do and be too many things

General agreement that the JSEM is a place where different viewpoints and perspectives come together (via enrollment, via course subject, via prior learning) at a high Gen Ed level to provide students opportunities to learn from different people about different ideas and demonstrate high quality critical and intellectual skills (writing, speaking, thinking, research, values)

☐ **What do you do in your JSEM to facilitate integration of learning? What are your practices?**

- **Reflections/meditations....repeat...then they come together**
- **Group different majors together to encourage diverse perspectives when approaching a project**
- Overt scaffolding and examples of what they'll need to do.
- Frame the prompts to incorporate reading but also outside sources, including from their discipline
- Drawing from different disciplines
- Combining skills
- Integration of cultural texts

General practice is realized through writing (reflective writing primarily, but research prompts that incorporate multiple approaches are also popular)

☐ What do you do in your JSEM around experiential learning? Practices?

- Write a series of papers about a group that they're uncomfortable with...then they have an immersion experience with that group and write a reflection
- Excursions to various restaurants to observe how culture is practiced or Otherness is observed
- Body image project: Post-its on a wall of body image comments in the res halls
- Crafting letters to advertisers
- Site visits throughout the semester, with reflection writing
- Simulation exercise: experiential...
- Harry's students set up two cultural credit events,
- Course is totally experiential learning, blogs to begin class discussion,
- field trips, paleo dinner, guest speakers,
- worked w/ Center for Community Engagement to work on a project with underprivileged children,
- students have personal experience & work experience to bring to class,
- skype guest speakers to class when you teach a JSEM
- interactive technology
- work on developing fundamental life skills (going to career fair, crafting a resume, experimental salary assignments, etc.)
- "Nothing" (response from at least three participants in one group)

Consensus that experiential learning strategies don't work for all classes. No sense that it should be expected, but clear understanding that it can enhance learning when it's used appropriately. Very wide and exciting range of experiential practices.

☐ What additional resources do you need to teach JSEM effectively?

- **Need a stronger shared understanding of the importance of the course.**
- More time!
- **How to handle differing levels of skill**
- **Better mentorship opportunities**
- Better general knowledge of what JSEM is
- **Better understanding of the community of JSEM**
- **Faculty wide buy in about what it is**
- **travel money – at least a pool to apply to**
- **Better community understanding of the range of potential expectations (range of pages etc, for example)**
- **JSEM fair for FSEM & JSEM > materials, templates, hearing successful strategies**
- **Maybe a course-fair opportunity in the fall** to help them choose a JSEM in the spring with an understanding that the course is not an elective or an "easy" course (how can you grow as a scholar and person as a result of this course) (make sure faculty have a one minute

teaser trailer video for students; possibly watch the videos and then choose from there after course hold;

- Think about a different format: perhaps 3 credits in the classroom; then follow up and do an experiential thing after the semester to earn the last credit. More options and flexibility for students to do their work
- Different framing in the syllabus to indicate to students that this isn't an elective.
- Importance of advising.
- More training or orientation about what the thing is and how you're supposed to do it
- Faculty workload issue: not just teaching a JSEM, why can't I teach a 300 level course in my discipline? Is this a staffing issue; but being pushed into JSEM is problematic when it happens all the time
- have more classroom spaces set up for JSEMS (seminar room that is large enough for 18 people),
- more respect and publicity for JSEMS (banners, electronic displays, advertising) recognition & celebration,

Strong consensus that additional support for teaching and JSEM orientation is essential. General agreement that JSEM should not be "directed," but needs voiced here and below indicate that someone needs to be the point person for pedagogical resources, calling JSEM faculty together, and orienting new JSEM instructors

☐ How do you integrate writing in your JSEM? What kinds of assignment practices, and what are their purposes?

- **Two page response to a prompt; followed by a unit paper; then research.**
- **Short term (1 page responses) longer term (respond to prompt); then grows, revises, and library research**
- **2 low stakes reflections; pre and post look at those ideas; medium stakes research that revisits an earlier idea; lengthier research paper**
- 1 longer research paper; 1 shorter research paper;
- Integrate reading assignment with writing assignment
- Need to find ways to leverage the writing elements much more effectively. How to make the writing do much more for the learning?
- Everything, regular summaries after each "thing" is completed.....
- reflection, final paper, (mentioned by all) reflection papers,
- apply critical thinking to the readings, blogs, experience paper,
- final exam in essay;
- fewer longer papers so shorter position papers, then present papers,
- personal writing project,
- 5 one page reaction papers

☐ Survey responses were split: What are your thoughts on JSEM Coordinator?

- **Course itself: Concerns about making a template JSEM course; nobody wants a standard approach or expected pedagogy; need to balance that with the need to meet general expectations about learning goals**
- Orientation for new JSEM faculty

- Pull JSEM faculty together once a year
- Would provide mostly pedagogical material; shared syllabi and successful course proposals; exercises; shared community of practice(s);
- Need a coordinator if resources available,
- advocate for resources
 - define the role of the coordinator:
 - coordinator needs a budget,
 - coordinator needs to meet w/the deans regularly,
 - coordinator needs to have taught a JSEM,
 - give JSEM instructors freedom,
 - don't change JSEM or restrict