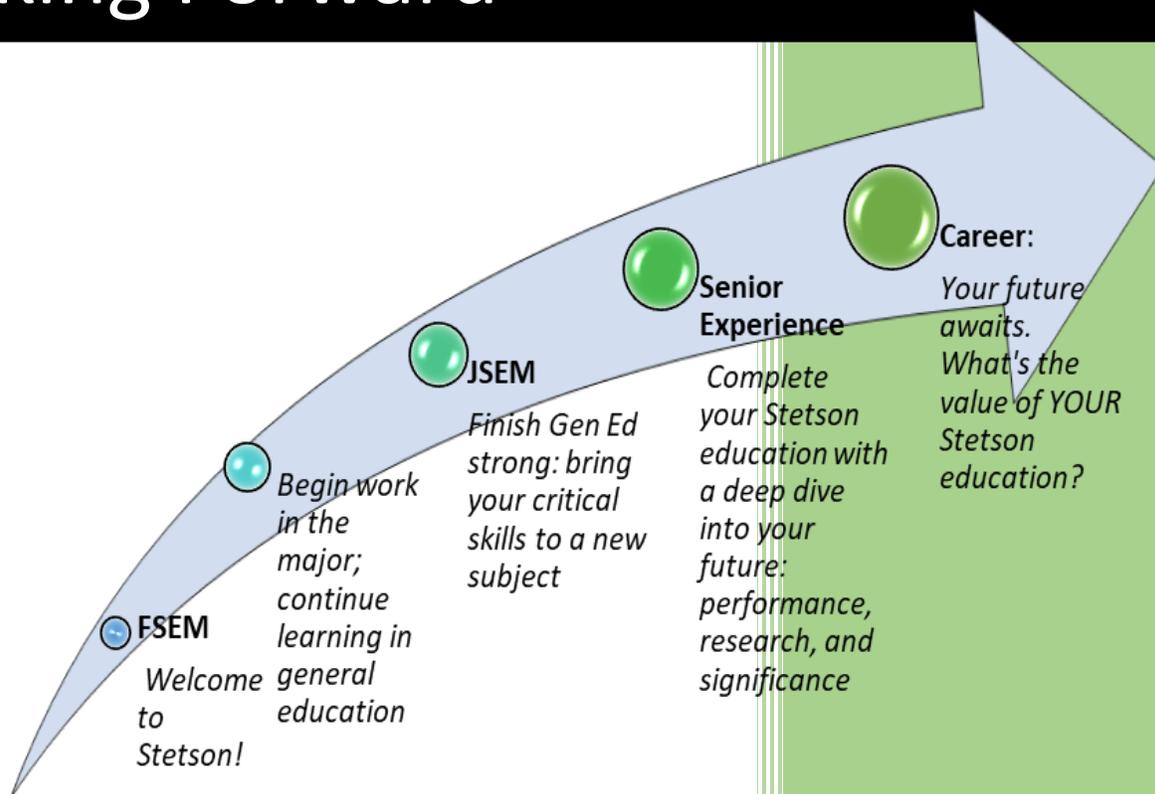


2019

# Core Academic Experience: Thinking Forward



Megan O'Neill, Director  
Stetson University  
5/10/2019

## Contents

Introduction .....	2
Thinking Forward: Integrating and Developing the Core.....	2
Assessment and Closing the Loop.....	2
Even Distribution of Core Critical Skills.....	3
Revise Gen Ed <i>LOs and</i> map.....	4
The Stetson Portfolio .....	5
Senior Experience: Common Learning Goals and Interdisciplinary Study .....	5
Proposal for Task Force.....	7

## Introduction

At the close of the 2018-2019 academic year, the Core Learning Committee will have spent two years working on the Core Learning sequence of FSEM, JSEM, and Senior Experience. Our first year clarified the FSEM experience and created a renewed discussion about the critical and intellectual skills we teach, since they form the core of the liberal arts skill base and are in fact common across FSEM, JSEM, and Sr Experiences. Our second year clarified and should strengthen the JSEM experience and continue the conversations about critical skills, now including the integration of learning. Next year, we focus on Sr Capstone or mastery level expectations across the undergraduate units on the DeLand campus. This report details some of the issues we will face in the interim.

This year, among other advances, a new Core Learning Calendar brings together the work of the University General Education Committee and the work of the FSEM Director insofar as these units support the mission of the Director of the Core Academic Experience. This leadership structure systematizes our workshop and faculty development time much more intentionally on areas to be assessed. Such a system prioritizes faculty preparedness and, subsequently, faculty proficiency at teaching the given skill.

## Thinking Forward: Integrating and Developing the Core

### Assessment and Closing the Loop

General Education assessment efforts over the last ten years have revealed a gap in the process: “closing the loop,” the stage at which assessment results are communicated back to faculty for discussion and action, has rarely happened when it comes to critical and intellectual skills. The table below reviews assessment data in these areas:

Skill assessed	Year First Assessed	Methods	Results	Reassessed
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	2008	CLA*	80% percentile	2014: 86% percentile
<b>Writing</b>	2009	Embedded, authentic FSEM samples	82% proficiency FY 76% proficiency SR	2014: 82% proficiency FY 95% proficiency JR 2018: results pending
<b>Speaking</b>	2010	Embedded, authentic samples	66% proficiency	2013: 50% proficiency Anticipated 2019
<b>Integrative Learning</b>	2012	Embedded, authentic JSEM samples	60% proficiency	Anticipated 2019

<b>Information Literacy</b>	2013	SAILS (all FY students)	15% proficiency	Anticipated 2019
-----------------------------	------	-------------------------	-----------------	------------------

(\*The CLA does not assess student learning per se; it assesses the support given by a particular university toward a specific learning goal)

As the table shows, Critical Thinking, Speaking, Integration of Learning, and Information Literacy assessments have each demonstrated the need for more directed development and support, but none has been forthcoming or, indeed, seen to be necessary. This is largely due to two elements: 1) we have consistently prioritized effective content knowledge assessment over skills assessment, and 2) we have no faculty experts to lead us in Critical Thinking or Integration of Learning, and our few Speaking experts have rarely been drawn into assessment initiatives, since Comm Studies lacks both resources and staffing to do so. That is to say, although we seem to value Speaking as a University learning goal, we have no systematic pedagogical or curricular support for it. It's useful to remember that Writing is one of the critical/intellectual skills whose assessment data generated wide interest and subsequent curricular revision—in other words, closing the loop. Dedicated faculty leadership and a clear and shared value around student writing made the difference. (It should be noted here that none of the other critical/intellectual skills have had a faculty champion or an opportunity to rise to our collective attention.)

Assessment data likely reflects our attention to content, as mentioned above; however, it is also related to our methods and priorities around where such skills are to be taught and reinforced, from introductory through developing to mastery. To unify and integrate the Core Learning sequence, I urge us to take these next steps, which I believe are essential to building a sound, sustainable, and stable core.

### Even Distribution of Core Critical Skills

Currently, Stetson's course development, proposal, and approval protocols require that FSEM and JSEM courses answer direct questions about critical and intellectual skills (writing, speaking, critical thinking, integrative learning, and information literacy). Our system of approval for writing-enhanced courses (WE courses) requires that faculty seeking that designation answer questions about information literacy. No other Gen Ed courses are explicitly tasked with introducing, developing, or refining those skills.

The situation is problematic for two primary reasons. First, faculty teaching Gen Ed courses are in many cases strengthening student skills, but that laudable work is invisible. Faculty doing this work should be recognized, and courses whose nature relies on one or another of the critical/intellectual skills should be made visible for students and other stakeholders to expand and inform choices. (COMM 201 Public Speaking, for example, obviously relies on Speaking.) In our current system, the FSEM and JSEM are top-heavy with skill-based goals; this is in large part because other Gen Ed courses are not expected to develop or reinforce any skills, and so are not assessed, and so are unable to contribute to the picture of learning at Stetson University

More important, however, is that a more transparent and accurate understanding of where Gen Ed skills are introduced, developed, reinforced, and mastered will allow us to be more intentional, both with our learning assessments and our use of that assessment data. It does faculty in Political Science, for example, very little good to learn the results of Gen Ed writing assessment (which happens only in FSEM and JSEM) if the Poli Sci program offers no WE courses. Small wonder that faculty at large have been less than interested in the results of Gen Ed skills assessment when the only places we assess for that learning are in two Gen Ed courses and not everywhere it's actually being taught.

In effect, we are working to achieve better results in Gen Ed while we are unaware of what happens in any non FSEM or JSEM Gen Ed courses. That is not a sustainable situation.

### Revise Gen Ed LOs and map

The above discussion of distribution of critical/intellectual skill teaching is directly related to the ongoing need to revise the General Education curriculum map to reflect current practices and values.

The map has not been substantially reviewed since 2009. Since that time, the Personal and Social Responsibility courses have been changed to “Values” courses; “Writing” has been introduced, developed, and reinforced throughout and across our curriculum in ways that may be challenging to visually represent; and both SoBA and SoM have begun offering Gen Ed courses that should be accounted for on the map. In 2009, however, the vision of the Course Unit/LEAP curriculum included only A&S, and that is how it remains.<sup>1</sup>

More troubling for work on the Core Learning sequence is that the progression and development of “integration of learning” is left undetailed: from first year to fourth, across all learning indicated on the map, no course other than JSEM is tagged with integrative learning outcomes but all are implicitly held accountable for it.

While the work of supporting the teaching of Speaking, Critical Thinking, and Integrative Learning must continue and develop, the strength of the Writing assessments demonstrates that writing must be the primary vehicle by which to “lift” and make visible student learning in these areas. Doing so will create a very visible pathway for Stetson students as they enter, move through, and leave our curriculum.

---

<sup>1</sup> A potential model that might both recognize differences and value each of them:

*Proposed changes to Sr Project courses on Gen Ed curriculum map*

PROPOSED 2018 Sr Experience	Writing 1.1	Info Lit 2.1	Speaking 3.1	Critical Thinking	Integrative Thinking 8.1
Sr Res A&S	D, M	D, M	D, M	D, M	M, R
Sr Exp SoBA	D, M	D, M	D, M	D, M	M, R
Sr Recital SoM	D, M	D, M	M	D, M	M, R

## The Stetson Portfolio

Conversations this year with a very wide range of faculty—not just in FSEM and JSEM but across disciplines and academic units—have seeded the idea of using e-portfolios to demonstrate student learning. This idea is demonstrably not new; Stetson has been dancing around the notion of an e-portfolio for 20 years or more. However, the technology now powering e-portfolio systems—and their ubiquity at institutions who have embraced their usefulness—has now provided many choices among e-portfolio platforms, including a wide range of software not exclusive to e-portfolios. WordPress, for example, has been in use at UCF and is available at Stetson (although it is very deep under the radar). We have the opportunity and indeed the evident need to move ahead. Further than that, several independent units and programs at Stetson have already instituted e-portfolio learning opportunities for students, anecdotally reported as unique and effective vehicles for teaching, learning, and reflection. These responses mirror the national data on e-portfolios and could transform our creation of an integrative structure. Perhaps it could be called the Stetson Portfolio.

The Stetson Portfolio's strength is that it need not be a University *template*, just a University *mandate*. Each individual department and unit would likely have different needs and priorities for student learning; an e-portfolio would recognize and honor that. Each student completing an e-portfolio could work not just with his or her advisors and mentors but also with staff from Career and Professional Development (conversations with Tim Stiles and his team are underway). The Stetson Portfolio might begin as individual portfolios have already begun in units and programs that prioritize integration and reflection (for example, Education, Physics, Theatre Arts, and Creative/Digital Arts, who already have program e-portfolio expectations).

Enough faculty have evinced interest in learning more about teaching for integration to take the next step forward: a pilot project. Beginning Summer 2019, with the support of the Brown Center, a cohort of between 10-12 faculty across A&S and SoBA have agreed to take their teaching to the next level. Many of them are teaching JSEM; some are using courses in the lower levels (ENGL 209, for example) that value integration. All of us will be creating assignments that target integration of learning, using an e-portfolio to house that learning, and meeting regularly with plenty of teaching resources in order to map out the territory for colleagues who want to join. At the close of the pilot project on integration, we will review the results, refine our methods, and (after wider discussion) launch a concerted effort in the JSEMs. Using our colleagues and our own classrooms as experiential learning for ourselves, we can begin to share the idea of the integrative e-portfolio as a very productive way to demonstrate student learning—and student ability to describe the value of their educations at Stetson. Given momentum, which will develop faculty buy-in, we can expect the use of eportfolios to grow, and ultimately perhaps reach, with wide faculty support, an institutional and learning-rich mandate.

### Senior Experience: Common Learning Goals and Interdisciplinary Study

Looking forward to the work of the Core Learning Committee in AY 19-20, the question of how to approach senior capstone and mastery learning as it relates to FSEM and JSEM. Although it's

clear that FSEM and JSEM share a core of critical and intellectual skills, it's not been entirely clear how Senior Experience might fit on that trajectory.

During the summer of 2017, then-Dean Karen Ryan led a Chairs' Retreat to focus on core competencies required of senior capstone work in the College. A list of expected skills was developed in a draft form. They included Critical Thinking, Writing, Speaking, and Information Literacy. Building from that work, Interim A&S Dean Tom Farrell asked a few A&S Chairs to work together to form a consensus across the College. That work, although slow, has steadily taken shape: Nathan Wolek, Tandy Grubbs, Emily Mieras, and Tom Vogel have been instructive in these conversations, which have developed to emphasize a few points:

1—in A&S, the core liberal learning skills are fairly easy to identify across the senior capstone experiences

2—the work of aligning senior outcomes would certainly have to include and honor the learning goals and values of SoBA and SoM. This should not be taken as advocating that the learning goals at mastery level should be identical. The School of Business and the School of Music are not extensions of the College and the interests of each academic unit should inform its curriculum and learning. However, students coming to Stetson deserve a set of clearly-mapped pathways through their education, which obligates us to ensure that mastery level learning is, in some way, consistent across the board.

3—The alignments of all three of our academic units raises the very timely question of truly interdisciplinary work, which at the moment is not valued sufficiently to allow students who really want to pursue this angle to do so.

This last point is of some importance. As the situation currently stands, an A&S student who is interested in combining and integrating her studies in, for example, Psychology and History faces two choices: completing her senior research in one field, with agreement from the other field, or (as in the case of some double majors) completing two senior research requirements. Neither of those options effectively mentors a student who seeks to unify her interests in an inter- or cross-disciplinary way. Rather the reverse: because our current system creates a need for faculty to negotiate differences rather than connect them, students lose the chance to work with two significant faculty mentors. This loss of agency is significant.

Chair of Creative Arts Nathan Wolek has (informally) proposed that 499 courses—Senior Project courses in the College—be redesignated as College or University requirements. (XXXX 499 could easily be added to the Foundations list on Degree Audit.) Such a move would make important but subtle changes in how we encourage student learning across disciplinary boundaries. Nathan's proposal eases that challenge for students and allows faculty the opportunity to test their own disciplinary boundaries as they mentor these students. Working carefully through the questions created by such a move would include addressing common learning goals at the mastery level, meaning that this proposal encompasses the undergraduate campus at large and not just A&S.

## Proposal for Task Force

There are certainly identifiable and specific issues and questions that need to be addressed before this proposal goes much further; however, those questions and issues are well outside the purview of the Core Learning Committee.

Rethinking the place of 499/sr research courses cannot be ethically implemented before finally resolving the often dramatic disconnects of faculty workload across the College, and, in a larger way, across the University. In some programs, senior research is a course, and the instructor mentors all the enrolled students; in other programs, senior research is an independent process, for which faculty are often not compensated and during which students and faculty collaborate very closely. The disparity in workload around senior research is not new, but attempts to resolve it stalled when Karen Kaivola left Stetson several years ago. That work should be resumed and completed.

Taking all this into consideration, I recommend the creation of a University Task Force for the 2019-2020 year, with the specific charge of understanding the causes of unequal faculty workload around senior project/capstone work and working to create balance and alignment across A&S, SoBA, and SoM. This recommendation is preliminary to achieving and capitalizing on a coherent, consistent set of learning goals across senior mastery courses (proposal and 499 courses in A&S, senior performance in SoM, and SoBA capstone management work in MGMT 495).