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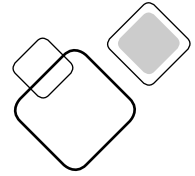
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University Studies Leadership: Vision and Challenge

MAURICE HAMINGTON AND JUDITH A. RAMALEY

ABSTRACT | Although University Studies at Portland State University often receives attention for its signature curricular structure of year-long thematic mentored Freshman Inquiry, thematic mentored Sophomore Inquiry, thematic departmental Cluster courses, and community-based Capstone courses, it is the underlying pedagogical values and philosophy that represent the real revolution in higher education—a revolution that is ongoing at Portland State. Few large state universities can claim to offer a quarter-century of experience with general education change of this magnitude. This article addresses how a shared purpose evolved over the course of University Studies' history and was impacted by what various leaders emphasized during their tenure. Representing bookends of the quarter-century existence of University Studies, two voices make up the authorship of the article: the president of Portland State at the time of the founding of University Studies, who catalyzed the processes that led to this ground-breaking program, and the current executive director, who has made transparent the ethic of care embedded in the program from the start. Together, the authors tell the story of University Studies' past and present and look to its future, highlighting how evidence-based, relational, caring innovation has resulted in the program through the collaborations of its empowered constituents.

KEYWORDS | care, care ethics, history, institutional change, lessons learned, relationality

The real genius of the revolution in general education that faculty instigated at Portland State University during the early 1990s is the evidence-based assumptions about what makes for effective and meaningful college pedagogy.¹ Academia is still pursuing this vision today. These assumptions included:

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- Students are not to be taught but rather empowered to undertake a shared journey of inquiry.
- Life’s compelling issues traverse disciplines.
- Skills are as central to an educated person as is academic content.
- Inquiry engaged in service of society brings relevancy and meaning to education.
- Relationships are central to any rich academic endeavor.²

Although University Studies often receives attention for its unique curricular structure of year-long thematic mentored Freshman Inquiry, thematic mentored Sophomore Inquiry, thematic departmental Cluster courses, and community-based Capstone courses, it is the underlying pedagogical values and philosophy that represent the real revolution in higher education—a revolution that is ongoing at Portland State. Few large state universities can claim to offer a quarter-century of experience with general education change of this magnitude. This article addresses how a shared purpose evolved over the course of University Studies’ history and was impacted by what various leaders emphasized during their tenure.

Representing bookends of the quarter-century existence of University Studies, two voices make up the authorship of the article. The first section of the article, “The Origin Story,” is written by Judith Ramaley, President of Portland State from 1990 to 1997. Although she never directly led University Studies, her groundbreaking administration created the innovative environment that helped bring University Studies into existence. For example, Ramaley initiated the motto “Let Knowledge Serve the City” to capture the core mission of the University; and these words have been essential to the community-based learning emphasis in University Studies. Given her eyewitness account, the first section is written in the first person. The subsequent sections of the article are by Maurice Hamington, who currently serves as Executive Director for University Studies. The second section addresses the leadership of UNST after its initial start-up. The third section focuses on the present and future of the program and will also be written in the first person, this time representing the voice of Hamington.

The Origin Story: Affirming Our Identity

—*Judith Ramaley*

This is the story of Portland State’s conversion of a traditional distributive general education curriculum into a structured pathway entitled University Studies. Two external events set the stage for the remarkable reenvisioning

of the curriculum at Portland State and created the opportunity to think in new ways about the institution and its relationship with the broader Portland metropolitan region. These external forces were a state budget crisis resulting from the passage of a tax reduction referendum in November 1990 and the simultaneous report of the Governor's Commission on Higher Education in the Portland Metropolitan Area that laid out a clear mission for Portland State as an urban research university. Together, our responses to these two major upheavals in our external environment changed how the campus community looked at both challenges and opportunities and set the stage for a remarkable re-envisioning of the meaning, design, and expectations of general education at Portland State University. The key lesson is how we turned a crisis into an opportunity and changed our basic mindset at the same time.

A Budget Crisis, and a New Mission and Identity

In 1990, the voters of Oregon passed a tax limitation measure in the form of a referendum called Measure 5. As is often the case, this one had some very complex, challenging, and unintended consequences. Among those consequences was a rapid redistribution of state general fund support from the State's colleges and universities into K-12 education. Along with its sister institutions, Portland State was faced with the specter of rapid and massive cuts in its state general fund support.

The emerging budget crisis created by the passage of Measure 5 coincided with the work of the Governor's Commission on Higher Education in the Portland Metropolitan Area that was concluding its deliberations that year about how to provide the Portland region with the educational resources and advanced research needed to support a rapidly growing economy. During the weeks before I moved to Oregon to become Portland State's president in the summer of 1990, I was in frequent communication with faculty leaders at Portland State to develop a compelling case to ensure that the Commission's decision would be an affirmation of an urban-serving identity for our university and support for our growing role in the economic and social development of the greater metropolitan region. We designed a working model of an urban university built upon the principles already developed in the Higher Education Act of 1986. These diagnostic features included location in a major metropolitan region, a diverse student body drawn primarily from the region, a culture of responsiveness to the interests and needs of the region and its people, a pattern of collaboration with other organizations and groups in the region, and a scholarly agenda shaped in large part by the questions and experiences of an urban environment. Portland State clearly reflected these characteristics in the programs and community relationships that the institution had

developed over the years from its very beginning in 1946 as an extension center. The experience of working together to advocate for an urban mission created a new level of collaboration and trust between the administration and faculty leadership and a sense of hope for our future.

Thinking in Different Ways

This budget crisis and the focus that arose from embracing a clear urban-serving mission set the stage for creating the capacity to think in new ways about how to enact our mission and use our resources. Portland State had dealt with budget downturns in the past by reducing risks, making across-the-board cuts, eliminating programs, working hard to do more with less, and waiting for the storm to be over. This time, we chose a different path by recognizing that a budget crisis can create conditions for clarifying an institution's identity, mission, and values. We spent more time working on how best to use the budget we were likely to have to invest in our urban mission, rather than confining ourselves to the cuts we would have to make. We undertook an accelerated round of highly participatory strategic planning to define our mission and the strategies we would use to achieve it.

Although the faculty emitted a collective groan (Reardon & Ramaley, 1996) at the prospect of undergoing yet another strategic planning process, there was a compelling reason to do this in order to embrace the mission of an urban university and identify investments to make. While strategic planning was going on, we began looking for ways to reduce our administrative costs and to protect our academic programs. We knew that this would not by itself solve our budget problems, as the looming budget cuts were too large to be squeezed out of an already lean support structure, but we knew we had to start there. As Weikel (1999) explained later, this first round of budget reductions “reflected both old habits and the new administrative style” (p. 68). The faculty, experienced in strategic planning and cutting the budget since the 1980s, “proceeded along familiar paths” while “the new president did not” (p. 68).

The provost, Michael Reardon, and I kept asking what Weikel called “provocative questions” (p. 69): *Who are our students today and how is the composition of our student body changing? How do we interact with our students today, and what will our students expect of us in the future? How are we educating our students now, and what values underlie the curriculum we offer? What are the trends in our continuation and graduation rates? How are the economic, social, and environmental conditions changing, and what skills and knowledge will our graduates need in the future? How are we connecting with the region now and what more can we do to learn about and support the changing needs of the metropolitan area in the future?* We were instinctively modeling the idea that

meaningful, large-scale change is built upon acts of scholarship and the articulation of meaningful questions and must derive its strength from the deep and traditional values of the academy (Reardon & Ramaley, 1996).

In August 1991, we completed the strategic planning process, calling it *Creating the Urban University of the 21st Century*. The plan was shaped by five key assertions: (1) We were living in a vital and growing metropolitan region with a future-oriented industrial base and a growing international focus; (2) the increasing importance of the Pacific Rim would give Portland a growing and important role within the next decade; (3) Portland State had always benefited from the Portland environment and had developed programs that reflect the character and needs of the region; (4) our future would lie in continuing to play a key role in strengthening the metropolitan environment; and (5) we would become so woven into the fabric of the region that our own fortunes would be shaped by those experiences, and the boundaries between our institution and the surrounding community would gradually fade away.

The strategic planning process itself and the framework we created to describe the defining features of a twenty-first century urban university served as the platform first for our approach to managing the budget issues imposed on us by Measure 5 and later for launching the University Studies program in 1994. This framework was supported by a new mission statement:

The mission of Portland State University is to enhance the intellectual, social, cultural and economic qualities of urban life by providing access throughout the life span to a quality liberal education for undergraduates and an appropriate array of professional and graduate programs especially relevant to metropolitan areas. The university conducts research and community service that support a high-quality educational environment and reflect issues important to the region. It actively promotes the development of a network of educational institutions to serve the community. (Portland State University, n.d.)

Setting the Stage for Innovation: Approach to the Budget

For many years, observers of higher education have been calling for institutions to shed “bad habits” and deal with financial crises in new and more effective ways (Jones & Wellman, 2010). Rather than simply tightening our financial belts and trying to do more with less, we need to think differently about the task ahead of us when budgets cuts loom. The approach that we took to thinking about the budget crisis facing us set the stage for how we would a year later think about and address our general education curriculum. In 1990, we were in the middle of a two decades long pattern that Jones and Wellman

(2010) later described as the “new normal” in higher education—regular budget reductions.

So, what can an institution do when faced with yet another significant reduction in state support? The only response possible in those circumstances was to invent a new way to operate the institution and to reframe the budget-building task ahead. Rather than “cutting the budget,” we chose to create a plan to invest our resources in our urban-grant mission. Our guiding principle was to “be clear about the outcomes you seek from budget planning.” We looked at every aspect of our budget and asked the following questions before making any budget decisions: (1) Will this help us to remain attractive to potential students? (2) Will this contribute to the success of our current students? (3) Will this protect and enhance the quality and integrity of our academic core? (4) Will this allow us to generate additional revenue for investing in our future? (5) If we were planning to reduce or eliminate some aspect of the organization or its programs, have we found the best way to do so or should we look for other ways to ensure that we preserve what we can or minimize the damage this action may cause (Ramaley & Johnstone 2011, pp. 18–19)?

To make this investment strategy work, we had to trust the members of our campus community to design better and more affordable ways of doing things and create a real connection between our educational goals and how we build the budget. The roles that we played as president and provost were to provide tools, information, strategies, facilitation, and support, and to ask probing questions at critical moments. We studied our own institution and asked critical questions about the return on investment that we could expect for each major component of our budget. We drew upon external experience by bringing scholars to campus to advise us and by sending members of our faculty to national meetings where the future of education was being explored.

To identify resources that could be reallocated to more useful purposes and to build a stronger sense of collaboration across different academic and support units, we empowered working groups of faculty and staff to study their own programs and to look for ways to enhance their productivity and value. This process had two important outcomes. First, we were able to release “frozen” assets of both time and money to create a more supportive environment for our academic mission. Second, our experience challenged some of the ideas that people had at that time about why change was so difficult. Staff and faculty learned that phrases such as “they won’t let us do that” or “why bother to complain, no one will listen” were simply not true. The combination of our approach to managing the budget crisis and our study of the meaning of an urban-grant mission was now complemented by a new positive mindset in which the campus community began to see itself as the architect of

its own future. We were prepared to address the challenge of general education.

The Creation of University Studies

In the early 1990s, most of our students were coming to us with a significant number of college credits, usually from enrollment in a community college but sometimes through transfer from another four-year institution. Fewer than ten percent of our students lived in campus-related housing. Most were what we called in those days “nontraditional students” who were combining their education with work and family responsibilities. Many were beyond the traditional undergraduate age of 18–22. We were also steadily becoming more diverse in a variety of ways.

The provost and I formed a committee to study the question of retention and student success by gathering useful data from other urban-serving institutions that were similar to us in size, complexity, and enrollment. The results were challenging. Our graduation rates were the worst of the lot. We discovered that much of our problem could be laid at the door of an overly complex general education curriculum that cost too much to offer to a student body that needed more flexibility than a more traditional group of students required. While we had other assets frozen in a number of low enrollment specialized courses, the largest opportunity to contain costs and release funds for investing in our future clearly existed in addressing our approach to general education.

Instead of posing a problem, this discovery created an opportunity. To stave off the worst of the budget reductions, I persuaded the chancellor of the Oregon State System of Higher Education that we could reduce costs and generate additional tuition revenue through redesigning our general education curriculum. I argued that we could support greater student success and improve our graduation rates. Fortunately, he bought the argument and agreed to allow us time to prove it. We still had a budget problem, but it was now less severe.

In 1992 we began to tackle what Levine called “the junkyard curriculum” (Levine, 1985, p. 128). The provost and I modeled a different way to think about change as a scholarly act informed by thoughtful internal research and enhanced by a study of external sources of evidence and lessons that we might adapt to our own situation. Reading the trends that colleges and universities were being asked to respond to, we also focused on drawing energy and advice from across the campus, involving faculty in both the arts and sciences and professional schools and insisting that every suggestion or recommendation be supported by evidence and not just personal opinion or self-interest.

Fortunately, as the provost began in late 1992 to engage the faculty in the difficult and sensitive process of rethinking our approach to general education,

the Association of American Colleges (AAC), now called the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), held its annual meeting early in 1993 in Seattle. We sent a vanload of faculty to that conference and asked them to find out what other institutions were doing across the nation to address student retention and success. From that experience, these faculty became leaders who understood a new way to build a cohesive and meaningful general education curriculum, to address our graduation problem, to begin to free up resources for investment in academic excellence, and to tie our urban mission to the design of our undergraduate majors.

We kept four goals in mind: improving the quality and outcomes of undergraduate education, developing a stronger sense of community and shared purpose among the faculty across disciplines, connecting academic and student support resources in new and integral ways, all while accomplishing the budget reductions and working to achieve long-range cost containment at the same time (Reardon & Ramaley, 1996).

The story about how we approached the task of moving from our old general education model built of distribution requirements across the arts and sciences to a new approach based on a fundamental rethinking of the design and purpose of this vital part of an undergraduate education has been told in detail before (Ramaley, 1996; Ramaley & Holland, 2005; Reardon & Ramaley, 1996; Rennie-Hill & Toth 1999; Spring, 2015; Tetreault & Rhodes, 2004; Toth, 1999; Weikel, 1999). I only summarize the logic behind this approach, and the lessons we drew from the experience.

We engaged the entire campus community and a broad cross-section of our partners in the Portland community in exploring the ideas, values, and expectations underlying our general education curriculum. From these discussions, the General Education Working Group formed by the provost in the fall of 1992 came to the realization that they could not “state with any conviction” that the distribution requirements then in place “were meaningful” (Portland State University, 1993, p. 1). The Working Group, led by Professor Charles White (1994), then created a portrait of what it would mean to be well-educated in a time of rapid change and proposed a clear statement of purpose informed by both an honest study of our own experiences and the outcomes for our students and an examination of the experiences of others across the country who were seeking to enhance student success:

The purpose of the general education program at Portland State University is to facilitate the acquisition of the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes which will form a foundation for lifelong learning among its students. This foundation includes the capacity and propensity to engage in inquiry

and critical thinking, to use various forms of communication for learning and expression, to gain an awareness of the broader human experience and its environment, and appreciate the responsibilities of persons to themselves, to each other, and to community. (p. 177)

A Cycle of Innovation is Set in Motion

The creation of University Studies set in motion the first meaningful cycle of large-scale change at Portland State (Ramaley, 1996; Ramaley & Holland, 2005). The stage was set by a new mission statement and a mindset created by how we had handled our budget crisis (phase 1). Our first target, the general education curriculum, emerged from our research on the student experience (phase 2). The curricular redesign benefitted from the same leadership behavior that had supported the budget review. The provost and I continued to ask probing questions at critical moments. We supplemented our own research on Portland State with insights from across the country by sending faculty to national meetings and by inviting scholars to campus to offer insights and advice.

Once the faculty had proposed a remarkable new approach to general education (phase 3) and recommended that we launch it all at once and not start with a smaller pilot project, the rest of the cycle began to unfold. As the implementation began (Phase 4), it became clear that rebalancing campus support structures (phase 5) would be needed. We were beginning to learn from our experience (phase 6).

Learning from Experience

Soon after University Studies had been fully implemented, David Pratt came to campus to study our curriculum (Pratt 1999). He wrote that we had assembled the most critical ingredients for future success, including (1) initiating other reforms on campus (including new tenure and promotion guidelines, new management strategies, and new budgetary systems) that either supported or were complementary to University Studies and that contributed to the momentum that the launching of the new curriculum generated; (2) a scholarly approach to the reform of the general education curriculum; (3) adequate program funding, technical support, and physical spaces for the program; and (4) a sense of excitement and engagement that infused a fresh energy into the experience of teaching and learning within University Studies. As a student of organizations and how they change, Pratt was intrigued by the question of how we had been able to undertake such a major and rapid change in our approach to the curriculum. Were there lessons to be learned even that early in our efforts? In his 1999 report, he concluded that the key variables were the presence of a crisis; the effect of fresh leadership that blended the perspectives of a new president

who drew upon the wisdom and experience of a provost who had been at Portland State for many years, and our collective ability to mobilize the community; the presence of a coalition of faculty leaders who had the social and intellectual capital to envision a new way to approach general education; and the impact of the urban mission on the organization of Portland State itself and its ability to support a new approach to education.

Sustaining Reform Amidst Challenge³

In the days and years following a revolution, there remains the question: “What do we do now?” When the committees and the white papers are done, it is up to the faculty and staff on the ground to carry out the vision. In this section, we discuss the experience and lessons of the leaders who made University Studies an ongoing reality. Each carried the weight of high expectations for the innovative program and each had to meet new challenges and adapt to the context.

The central architect and campus spearhead of the reform, political scientist Charles “Chuck” R. White, was named the initial Director of University Studies as Associate Dean and served from 1994 through 2000. The rolling implementation of the four-year curriculum meant that it was not fully in place until 1998. University Studies was still new and unproven. Despite widespread faculty support, the early years of the program were characterized by scrambling to fulfill the dream amidst pockets of campus skepticism. Portland State had to adapt to a new way of delivering general education, including offering thematic course clusters, requiring of upper-division courses, and creating for the time and intellectual “room” for peer mentors. White describes one microcosm of the needed adaptation: physical space. Classrooms had to be adapted to match the program’s pedagogical philosophy, necessitating tables, chairs, and technology that could easily be moved to structure small group discussions in the classroom—an aspect of the program not explicitly covered in the planning documents.

Given the sudden quantity of courses needed, White had to identify faculty from across campus who could deliver the new curriculum. Furthermore, extensive faculty development was engaged in over the first few years to get everyone up to speed on the new pedagogy. Faculty had to become accustomed to both interdisciplinary instruction, as well as the relational issues of working with student mentors (see Fernandez, Kerrigan, and Lundell, in this volume). White felt the pressure to demonstrate success and implemented assessment processes consistent with the evidence-based formation of University Studies. As White describes with some hyperbole, “everyone was trying to get rid of University Studies,” and assessment data were a means to demonstrate how

effective the program was. However, an assessment regimen and culture does not develop quickly (see Carpenter and Fitzmaurice in this volume), and early assessment processes evolved and improved under the leadership of subsequent directors.

One of the additions during White's tenure as University Studies director was a "Transfer Transitions" course to help transfer students adapt to this unique general education curriculum. Given the high percentage of transfer students who make up the Portland State undergraduate population, this was an important innovation. The process of developing the course was not easy, given that students transfer at various points in their undergraduate journey. Several years of trial and error occurred before a curriculum was settled on (Boesch et al., 1998, p. 169). Ultimately, the course created was an offering of Sophomore Inquiry, with an additional quarter credit added to help students transition into University Studies (and thus Portland State). Unfortunately, the course was not offered after 2008—and transfer students' transition remains a major topic of concern for the program to this day.

White led University Studies through its sometimes awkward, sometimes embattled formative years. However, he recognized the goal was worth the effort. Perhaps English Professor Shelley C. Reese summed up the transition of the early years best when in 1998 he claimed, "teaching as an instructor in Freshman Inquiry has been the most satisfying work—and the hardest—in my 40-year career" (1998, p. 166).

After White, long-time dance professor Judy Patton took over the helm of University Studies for the years 2000 to 2007. During this period, University Studies went from being a new experiment in higher education to passing its 10th anniversary. Portland State's student-run newspaper, *Vanguard*, ran an article, "University Studies turns 10." The article begins:

During its ten years at Portland State, University Studies has been met with everything from praise to scrutiny to harsh criticism. Proponents of the program claim that it represents the future in general higher education, with several other colleges having studied the program in order to improve their own general education programs. Critics have attacked everything from the size of the program's requirements to the quality of teaching, and some students have even sought to have the program abolished. "We know there are complaints about it," Judy Patton, director of University Studies at Portland State said. "We're not perfect yet, but I think the attempt is worth it." (Petrie, 2004, para. 1-4)

In many ways, the above description characterizes the dichotomous opinion of University Studies across its history. While simultaneously garnering national

and international attention, as exemplified in the Patton era with articles in peer reviewed journals (Kerrigan & Jhaj, 2007; Ramaley & Holland, 2005; Rennie-Hill & Toth 1999; Tetreault & Rhodes, 2004; Toth, 1999; Traver et al., 2003), the program received internal criticism. As Patton indicates, some criticism was warranted, but some of it stemmed from reasons beyond the control of University Studies. For some faculty, the concern was that their academic departments had lost large enrolled general education courses that used to be requirements. For some students, resentment toward general education, which on most campuses would be directed at a number of departments, was focused solely on University Studies at Portland State.

Patton had the difficult task of responding to the rapid enrollment growth of Portland State. University Studies was trying to establish a community but had to rely on agreements with faculty in other departments to deliver courses. As Patton colorfully describes, “we were trying to change the tires on the car while it was running.” Important adaptations were initiated. Assessment processes were strengthened as the need for evidence was crucial to stave off criticism. In particular, electronic student portfolios were established, and regular portfolio reviews began in an effort to apply assessment rubrics to the work of students. The Peer Mentor Program and community-based learning were further developed. Originally, University Studies had the benefit of major grant support, but much of that was depleted by time Patton was the director, and she still had the task of building the infrastructure for the program. Many faculty stepped up to take a number of leadership positions throughout this time.

Some experiments were successful, and some failed. For example, the workload involved in the year-long Freshmen Inquiry course led to an experiment in rotating the faculty during the year. The lack of continuity made this a detrimental experience for students, resulting in higher failure and withdrawal rates. Rotating faculty is avoided today.

Not unusual in higher education—and at the heart of the founding of University Studies in the first place—financial challenges precipitated a threat to the program during Patton’s tenure. She was replaced as Director of University Studies by architect and University Studies faculty member Sukhwant Jhaj, who ushered in an era of extensive change for University Studies.

Responding to the continuous drone of limited but vocal criticism of the curriculum, as well as the existential financial threat, Jhaj engaged in a campus-wide discussion with department chairs. The result was four major changes. First, Jhaj shut down all but one of the high school partnerships of Senior Inquiry (which delivers the curriculum of Freshman Inquiry to local high school seniors; in order to shift resources back to campus programs. Second,

he negotiated 25 new tenure lines to shift the program away from extensive use of fixed-term faculty with their academic home in University Studies. These new positions were “shared lines” made up of tenured/tenure-track faculty housed in disciplines across campus but who were assigned to teach University Studies courses. Third, he engaged in a major reduction of Junior Cluster courses, removing all courses with a prerequisite. Finally, he negotiated an agreement with the School of Business to consolidate their Business Strategies course with University Studies’ general education Capstone. Each of these changes was met with resistance, and the fallout from these shifts continue to be addressed today. For example, assessment data indicates that business students are not experiencing the robust level of diversity and ethics engagement in their Capstone course as do participants in traditional Capstone courses. The history of University Studies includes moments of negotiation between interests viewed as competing—such as between general education and disciplinary curriculum. Although the mid-2000s was a tumultuous time for the faculty of University Studies, Jhaj reversed the fiscal fortunes of the program and left it as one of the most cost-efficient and financially sound units on campus.

Beginning in 2010, Jhaj was tapped to play increasingly larger roles on campus, which precipitated the naming of social psychologist Yves Labissiere as Assistant Director. Subsequently, Labissiere stepped into the Director role from 2012 to 2015. Given his emphasis on relationships, Labissiere was the perfect leader to help University Studies faculty recover from systemic upheaval which had occurred in the previous years. In a short period of time, Labissiere created an atmosphere where innovation and change could continue. As with every previous leader, assessment was an important focus. Assessment was moved online, and the turnaround time for formative and summative evidence of learning was improved to allow for ongoing course corrections. During this time, assessment continued to be a means of counteracting campus criticism of University Studies. Labissiere led another effort to stem criticism by coordinating a campus-wide conversation about disciplines adopting learning outcomes that resonated with University Studies’ goals. This effort helped establish that University Studies’s goals were, in fact, not different from those of other units at Portland State.

Labissiere also oversaw several substantial grants involving University Studies. One was a Department of Education Gear-Up Grant that increases “the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education” (US Department of Education, 2018). Labissiere rebuilt the Senior Inquiry courses in area high schools, in part, through Gear-Up grant investment. University Studies was also instrumental in bringing a

National Institutes of Health BUILD EXITO grant to Portland State. BUILD EXITO helps underserved students become scientific researchers through a variety of supportive interventions (Portland State University, About BUILD EXITO). In this case, University Studies leveraged its thematic general education to support students with STEM interests.

To close out this section, Labissiere offers some philosophical insight regarding the internal criticism that seemed to be a constant companion for all the leaders of University Studies when he observes that the program sustains an important conversation about general education in higher education. The criticism is healthy. There is still an important tension between visions of higher education. Because the curriculum stands for something as a unique whole rather than a disparate collection of courses, the critique is an important sign of progress as faculty are forced to reengage with the significance of this effort. There can be no complacency in advancing comprehensive, holistic general education for all.

University Studies Today: Articulating Care

—*Maurice Hamington*

In fall of 2015, I had the good fortune of stepping into the Executive Director role following the outstanding leadership of Labissiere. In terms of an innovation life cycle, I entered the program at a much different stage than many of my predecessors. University Studies had long been a renowned program in academic circles by the time I arrived. There were faculty who had taught in it for decades and alumni with distinguished accomplishments of their own. No longer a start-up innovation, University Studies was established and humming along. Although I wanted to contribute to the success of the program, I also did not want to mess up a good thing. So, I looked to solidify what was already operant in University Studies by exploring its humanity.

Sustaining general education reform does not merely entail articulating the ideas and values of critical interdisciplinary pedagogy and curriculum, although that work is important. Sustainance also includes supporting the people who carry the reform forward. To that end, the leadership in University Studies has recently adopted the language of care, and in particular, care ethics, in its practices. More than mere sentiment, care ethics is “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Fisher & Tronto, 1990, p. 40). Although not a care ethicist, Paulo Freire often speaks to the centrality of relationships and the importance of humanization in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice *co-intentional* education.

Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge” (Freire, 2000, p. 69).

Care ethicists also take up the centrality of the student-teacher relationship. Education scholar and care theorist Nel Noddings made the claim that “the student is infinitely more important than the subject matter” (1984, p. 176). This statement is challenging in the contemporary academic climate that emphasizes disciplinary expertise, and the commensurate passion for one’s subject. Noddings reminds us that educators are—or at least should be—there for the whole student. Student context, challenges, and dispositions matter. This is the essence of care ethics: being responsive to those in need, which includes us all. Care ethics is a relational approach to morality that views ethics as more than a system for determining the outcomes of dilemmas. Born of feminist scholarship and women’s experience, care is a moral method of being with significant implications for how we come to knowledge (Dalmiya, 2016) and who we are (Robinson, 2011). Accordingly, its implications for the education process and the education community are enormous (Noddings, 2007). In University Studies, care manifests in many ways, including how faculty relate to students and one another. Ultimately, when bureaucracies, budgets, and shifting political priorities fail to support general education reform as found in University Studies, it is care—care for students and care for one another—that can provide sustaining leadership.

The ongoing challenge in University Studies is how to maintain the values of a student-centered interdisciplinary education—the paradigm shift pronounced in White’s original statement of purpose—against contemporary forces that favor minimizing the powerful impact of skills-based interdisciplinary education. University Studies continues to provide dynamic general education yet finds itself repeatedly explaining and justifying itself to students and faculty. Since 2015, the faculty and leadership of University Studies have undertaken efforts to sustain, fortify, and clarify the University Studies identity and role by developing artifacts, namely written symbols, of its character. In particular, University Studies has created a Vision and Mission Statement, updated its “diversity” learning outcome (discussed elsewhere in this issue), and created a Teaching Ethos to capture the intended classroom experience. Each of these vetted articulations is intended to balance descriptive and aspirational characterizations of University Studies in order to translate the University Studies program of study to others and remind the University Studies community of its own identity and aims.

The University Studies' Vision Statement does not limit the understanding of University Studies to delivering general education content but rises to offer a higher purpose through participating in and imagining a better world. The eliding of educational experience with broader social goals is reminiscent of the philosophy of John Dewey, who claimed, "If I were asked to name the most needed of all reforms in the spirit of education, I should say: 'Cease conceiving of education as mere preparation for later life, and make of it the full meaning of the present life'" (Dewey, 1893, p. 660). The vision, mission, and teaching ethos (represented below) endeavor to name previously unnamed aspects of the program. The sense of a greater intention—bridging social progress and academic goals—helps support a common sense of purpose among members of the University Studies community.

University Studies' Vision

Challenging us to think holistically, care deeply, and engage courageously in imagining and co-creating a just world.

The Mission Statement supports the vision by addressing three major constituencies or audiences for University Studies: students, colleagues, and the profession.

University Studies' Mission

Our inclusive, interdisciplinary, and inquiry-based pedagogy

- provokes students to build self-efficacy through relational learning across difference
- encourages a community of educators to practice engaged teaching for transformative learning
- advances civic engagement, reflective practice, and the scholarship of teaching and learning

Resonating with Freire's notion of co-intentional education, this vision and mission express the critical social and political pedagogy of transformation that the University Studies community participates in. These statements serve as a symbol of collective identity beyond the curricular architecture of Freshman Inquiry, Sophomore Inquiry, Junior Clusters, and Senior Capstones.

Following the collaborative efforts to produce a Vision and Mission Statement and to revise the "Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice" goal, University Studies began a process in Fall 2017 of articulating a Pedagogical Philosophy in an effort to create a description of the unique classroom experience found

in University Studies. Given that the history of University Studies has largely been governed by arguments regarding curriculum, program leaders felt that an important missing element was the classroom experience and its unique social dynamic. A pedagogical philosophy was an effort to capture the innovative student-faculty learning environment of grounded in the spirit of consequential engagement.

An inclusive dialogue elicited input from faculty, staff, and peer mentors to the prompt, “you know you are in a University Studies classroom, if/when/because. . . .” The (numerous) responses were aggregated, then pared down to essential elements. What emerged moved the committee members steering the process to suggest that the resulting words were actually indicative of a “Teaching Ethos” rather than a “Pedagogical Philosophy.” An ethos is “the characteristic spirit of a culture, era, or community as manifested in its beliefs and aspirations” (Ethos, n.d.). This ethos took the form of poetry rather than a propositional definition, as the evocative nature of poetry seemed the best way to convey the heart of the University Studies classroom experience.

University Studies’ Teaching Ethos

How we teach is what we teach.

Planting seeds, sharing power, and facilitating learning,
the instructor is the quietest student in the room.

In community,
we outlove and outlast discrimination and privilege
through inquiry, equity, empowerment, and respect.

We are co-creating
connecting
caring
collaborating
and building relationships.

Who the student IS
—their heart mind body experience identity culture—
matters.

Faculty and mentors invite participation
and offer compassion.

Being seen, known, and honored,
students experience belonging and inclusion in a learning community
in which their voice is present, skills are built, and emergent knowledge
is produced.

We make expectations clear and consistent
so that students have choice and control
and enough physical and emotional safety to deeply engage
social identities and power.

So empowered, we become aware and,
through discomfort and by epiphany,
discover that we can do what we thought we couldn't.

We support each other.
We make consequential choices together.

Our worlds transform.

The statements above are intended to capture a cultural philosophy 25 years in the making. They complement and support the education revolution. Because University Studies is so large and diverse, these artifacts of identity are both descriptive (albeit inconsistently so) and proscriptive, representing the type of community we aspired to create and to be. Operationally, they will serve as touchstones to help explain the program to newcomers, as well as remind those in the community of its collective desire.

University Studies makes for a wonderful case study regarding how a willingness to take an institutional risk and subsequently support that risk through rough patches can pay off and persist if there is a passionate and caring community committed to the success and well-being of students. From its earliest days, caring was always present in University Studies. The original founding documents of the program were not only evidence-based but wise in their consideration of the importance of human relationships to the education process. But those blueprints alone did not make University Studies successful. It is the faculty, staff, mentors, and students who find education to be a just and ethical endeavor that make this and any other academic reform successful. University Studies is not just innovation—it's innovation with heart.

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NOTES

1. The authors thank Vicki Reitenauer and the many helpful anonymous reviewers who through their comments greatly improved this article.
2. These assumptions are not explicitly located in founding documents (White, 1994) but emerge from the values expressed then and over the history of the program.
3. We would like to thank Chuck White, Judy Patton, Sukhwant Jhaj, and Yves Labissiere for taking the time to be interviewed for this section of the article.

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