

# Alverno's general education curriculum ranks high in Carnegie study

A college's general education curriculum — the studies required of all students, regardless of major — should help students face important questions about meaning, value and their relationship to the world, according to Ernest Boyer's, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (Harper & Row, 1987).

And according to 1,310 American academic deans surveyed for the book, Alverno's faculty conducts one of the most successful general education programs in the U.S. Asked where they thought general education was succeeding best, the deans' most frequent responses, in order named, were: Harvard, the University of Chicago, Alverno, St. Joseph's College (Indiana) and Brooklyn College of the City University of New York.

Boyer's book reports the survey among the many findings of a three year study of American colleges, conducted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The book stresses the importance of the general education curriculum as an organizing framework for all learning and warns of a gradual weakening of such programs in many colleges and universities.

What successful general education programs have in common is an integrated approach to general education requirements, the report said. Their structure draws connections across the disciplines, stressing communication, the arts and humanities, social, global and scientific awareness, valuing and

self-understanding.

"Sequences in the social sciences, arts and humanities, and physical and biological sciences should do more than distribute a student's experience," Boyer wrote. Neither should they be a cluster of courses that students must "get out of the way" in their first two years, he added.

Ideally, the general education program extends over all four years of college, serving as the backbone of a liberal arts education, Boyer stated. Undergraduates long for a more coherent view of knowledge, he added. In a survey conducted for the report, three-fourths of the students questioned said that general education enriched the other courses they had taken.

By taking an integrated approach to general education, Boyer argues that colleges engage the students with questions and themes that unite their learning. Such an approach also encourages development of the thinking abilities that enable lifelong learning.

Alverno's general education curriculum covers eight abilities that students must master in order to graduate. They are critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, social interaction, consistent valuing in decision making, effective citizenship, global awareness and aesthetic appreciation.

The entire curriculum is structured to help students develop these abilities while they are mastering the subject matter required for a bachelors degree.