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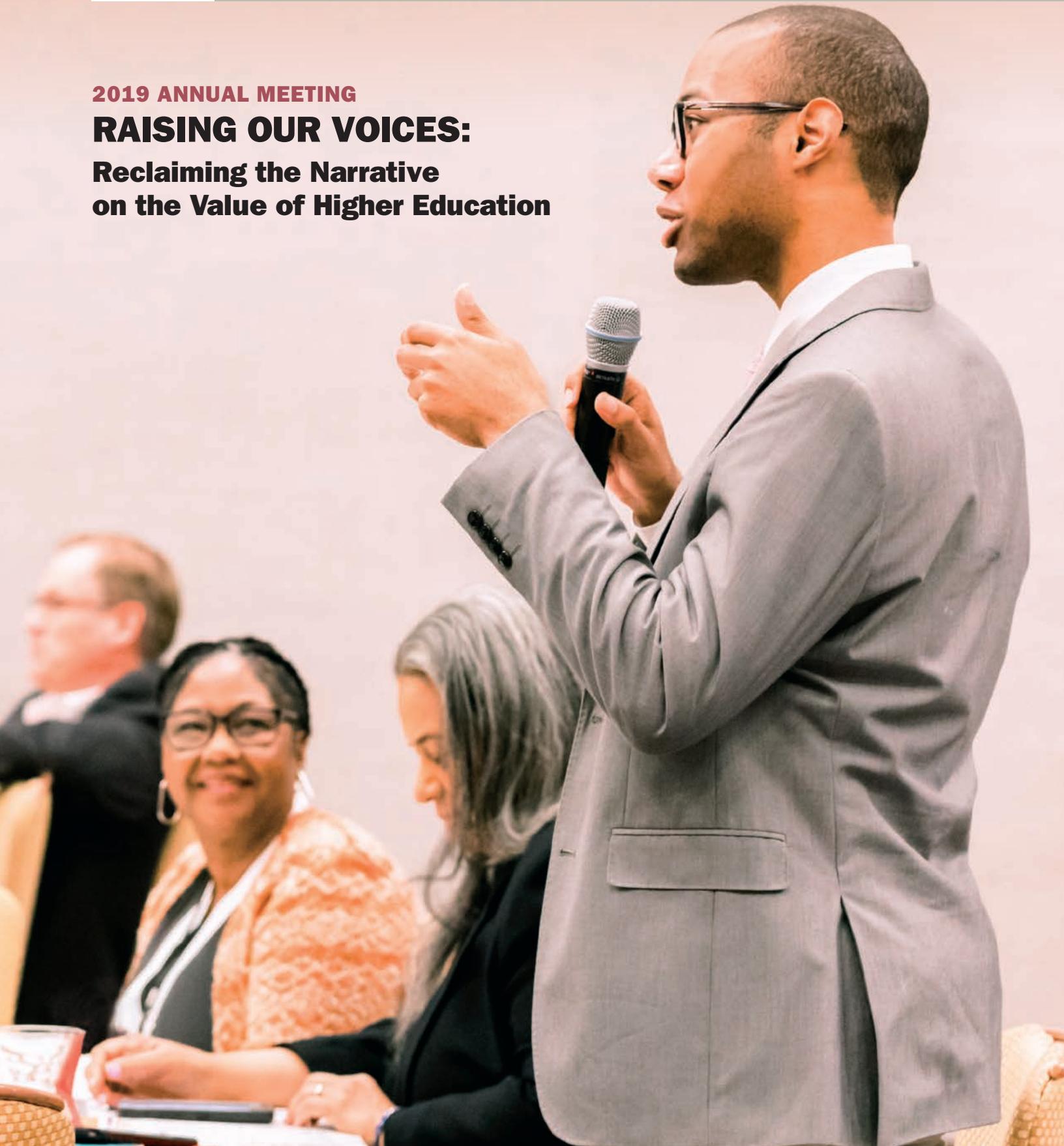
# Liberal Education

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

**2019 ANNUAL MEETING**

**RAISING OUR VOICES:**

**Reclaiming the Narrative  
on the Value of Higher Education**



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**RAISING OUR VOICES:**  
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—Cathy N. Davidson



Unless otherwise noted, all photos in this issue, including the cover image, were taken by XXIII Photo Studio at AAC&U's 2019 annual meeting in Atlanta, Georgia.



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## The Value of Liberal Education in a Post-Truth Era

THIS PAST SUMMER, I found myself in Hamburg, Germany, at a global forum on the role of universities in society, at which I had the pleasure of serving on a panel discussing the impact of the current political climate on American higher education. The final question to the panelists was to identify a politician, living or dead, with whom we would most like to have a conversation regarding the challenges we are facing in higher education. I chose Abraham Lincoln, who lived at the most extreme moment of polarization in our nation's history, and who, despite the backdrop of the raging Civil War, signed a bill making higher education available to the general public. The Morrill Act of 1862, which has profoundly influenced the landscape of higher education, was followed a year later by the creation of the National Academy of Sciences to promote science, engineering, and medicine as central to the progress of our society. Lincoln recognized, perhaps better than anyone, that if a nation is to thrive, it must advance the public purpose of higher education by investing in colleges and universities as the foundation for individual and societal transformation.

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The public purpose of higher education, however, has been obscured amid

widespread criticism regarding escalating college costs, the return on investment, and campus cultures. Thus, over the past year and a half, the Association of American Colleges and Universities has been implementing a comprehensive strategic plan ([aacu.org/about/strategicplan](http://aacu.org/about/strategicplan)) centered on restoring public trust in the promise of liberal education and inclusive excellence. The plan seeks to create an ascendant narrative that contests accusations of irrelevancy and illegitimacy leveled against higher education, in general, and liberal education, in particular. Moreover, it constitutes a collective call to action to make visible the transformative power of colleges and universities. For those of us who believe that higher education is inextricably linked to the mission of educating for democracy, this work is more urgent than ever. We are living in an ostensibly post-truth era, characterized by the denial of authoritative knowledge and the disdain for experts, and in which rational inquiry built on evidence has all but been abandoned.

AAC&U's 2019 annual meeting, "Raising Our Voices: Reclaiming the Narrative on the Value of Higher Education," served as an enjoinder to all leaders in higher education—faculty, staff, students, alumni, and administrators—to collectively reaffirm the role that a liberal education plays in discerning the truth; the ways in which it serves as a catalyst for interrogating the sources of narratives, including history, evidence, and facts; the ways in which a liberal education promotes an understanding that the world is a collection of interdependent yet inequitable systems; the ways in which it expands knowledge of human interactions, privilege, and stratification; and the ways in which higher education fosters equity and justice, locally and globally.

The inextricable link between liberal education and the imperative of educating for democracy was highlighted throughout the conference, from Kwame Anthony Appiah's

opening address on the meaning, purpose, and overarching value of liberal learning to journalist Linda Greenhouse's closing plenary on "The Role of Journalism in Preserving, Undermining, and Reclaiming the Narrative of American Society," which built off of her engaging memoir, *Just a Journalist: On the Press, Life, and the Spaces Between*.

Greenhouse directly confronts the question of what role journalists should play as citizens and as purveyors of the truth. Positing reader empowerment as the highest goal of journalism, Greenhouse maintains that in this post-truth era it is not enough simply to report what has happened. Instead, she insists, readers need context about events leading up to what happened and about "why it happened, and what might come next."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Greenhouse, a veteran Supreme Court reporter, contends that "the opposite of objectivity isn't partisanship, or needn't be. Rather, it is judgment, the hard work of sorting out the false claims from the true and discarding or at least labeling the false."<sup>2</sup> Throughout her book, Greenhouse details the perils of a "he said, she said" approach to journalism, grounded in the tenet that two sides to every story must be reported if objectivity is to be preserved. She notes, "When 'he said, she said' journalism takes hold on a particularly contentious issue, it can distort or even shut down the kind of public debate that is critical in a democratic society."<sup>3</sup> For Greenhouse, participation in the mechanics of citizenship requires providing citizens with the information necessary to make informed choices, which, at times, mandates prioritizing the pursuit of truth over striving for balance.

The same holds for higher education. As Phi Beta Kappa's Secretary Frederick M. Lawrence demonstrates in his piece, "For the Love of Learning," while addressing certain issues might itself seem partisan, nonpartisan advocacy is possible when it involves endorsing a set of ideals central to the mission of the institution or organization. American colleges and universities share a fundamental mission of knowledge creation and education for work, citizenship, and life. As our nation becomes increasingly polarized, institutions of higher education have a greater obligation to ensure that our institutional structures, curricula, and systems of shared governance are fulfilling the promise of educating for democracy. The authors in this issue, writing alongside Lawrence, each offer avenues for making clear the value of colleges and universities in ways that thwart the politics of identity and ideology that have served to undermine the pursuit of truth in contemporary discourse, and we are grateful for their contributions.—LYNN PASQUERELLA

**As our nation becomes increasingly polarized, institutions of higher education have a greater obligation to ensure that our institutional structures, curricula, and systems of shared governance are fulfilling the promise of educating for democracy.**

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#### NOTES

1. Linda Greenhouse, *Just a Journalist: On the Press, Life, and the Spaces Between* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 128.
2. Greenhouse, *Just a Journalist*, 62.
3. Greenhouse, *Just a Journalist*, 46.

## Raising Our Voices

AS I PLANNED THIS ISSUE—which highlights sessions from AAC&U's 2019 annual meeting, "Raising Our Voices: Reclaiming the Narrative on the Value of Higher Education"—I was reading essays by A. Bartlett Giamatti. President of Yale from 1978 to 1986, Giamatti produced many inspiring words about the importance of a liberal education. But the particular essays of his that I had saved for the dark cold of February were ostensibly on another topic: baseball. I was reading them in anticipation of spring training and the promise of sunshine and green fields and hummingbirds returned from southern climes.

Giamatti became commissioner of Major League Baseball in 1988, and in writing about the game, he explored morality, integrity, and even the essentialness of a liberal education to a fulfilled mind and spirit. He considered baseball as leisure, noting in *Take Time for Paradise: Americans and Their Games* that in Greek, *leisure* is *scholé*—the origins of the English word *school*. The classical concepts of leisure, he writes, parallel the purposes of a modern liberal education: "In pure play, liberal study, and 'free time'—a condition of freedom of spirit is actively induced and consumed, as nourishment. . . . The result is to be careless, or carefree. It is to be happy."

Giamatti directly connects baseball, a game that draws fans from all walks of life, to the existential necessity

of a liberal education. His example is an important one. As discussed throughout the annual meeting, higher education

### FROM THE EDITOR

institutions need to better demonstrate and communicate their value, in general, and the importance of a liberal education, in particular. This issue's authors further that discussion. Cathy N. Davidson calls for fundamentally changing the way we view higher education's purpose, Farah Pandith points to the role of colleges and universities in ensuring more women participate in policy making, and Mays Imad presses for making STEM classes more holistic and creative. Ann Kowal Smith describes a program that facilitates literature discussions in the workplace. Frederick M. Lawrence explains why institutions must engage in nonpartisan, mission-based advocacy, with William T. Bolling offering advice on communicating with lawmakers. Raynard S. Kington talks about fostering cooperative approaches to campus activism. And Lily D. McNair looks at creating real change around diversity and inclusion.

Giamatti, who died in 1989 just weeks after banning Pete Rose for life from baseball, worked to preserve the integrity and ideals of professional baseball and of other national institutions. A liberal education, freedom, and order, he wrote in a letter to Yale freshmen in 1981, "must be asserted at this particular time in our country's history, in the teeth of a storm that blows across the landscape. . . . There are now in America powerful voices which attack and will continue to attack these very ideas." Giamatti's admonishment could have been spoken today. Indeed, we must speak up and make clear the power of a liberal education.—CHRISTEN ARAGONI

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## NEWS AND INFORMATION

### Globe-Trotters

#### AAC&U leaders have been traveling around the world in support of liberal education

**Beijing, China:** International Forum on Industry and Education, May 15–21  
Higher education in China is receiving heightened national attention, says forum speaker Terrel Rhodes, vice president for quality, curriculum, and assessment. Chinese educators are enhancing “whole person” aspects of the curriculum with a keen interest in US liberal education, especially general education requirements. “They see VALUE rubrics as key to assessing student learning in conjunction with a liberal education emphasis,” Rhodes says.

**Hamburg, Germany:** German Leaders Council, June 1–7  
President Lynn Pasquerella spoke on “The Place of Universities in Society.” “We considered the growing gap between what societies demand from their universities and the capacity of universities to satisfy those demands,” Pasquerella says.

**London, Canada:** Teaching Excellence Summit, June 5  
Tia Brown McNair, vice president for diversity, equity, and student success, participated in the panel “What Challenges and Opportunities Will Universities Face as They Collaborate on the World Stage?” “We discussed the importance of educators understanding the systemic barriers faced by students who have been marginalized and

the need to make our structures and ways of knowing more expansive,” McNair says.

**Toronto, Canada:** Worldviews Conference, June 13–14  
The conference focused on democracy and the changing relationships in higher education and the media, especially the challenges of communicating in a “post-truth” world, the impact of technological change, and the emergence of diverse voices and new directions in collaborations between media and higher education, notes President Lynn Pasquerella, who presented at the event.

**Limestre, Italy:** Business for the Common Good Conference, June 16–17  
Global corporate social responsibility leaders discussed collaboration opportunities. “The CEO of Abercrombie & Fitch spoke about the importance of social responsibility at every level of her company,” says attendee Andrew Flagel, vice president for advancement and member engagement. “Johnson & Johnson and IBM leaders highlighted aligning social responsibility with a company’s mission and marketing.”

**Strasbourg, France:** Council of Europe Forum on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy, and the Future of Democracy, June 19–21  
In the face of a global erosion of functioning and flourishing democracies, academic freedom

#### Upcoming Conference

- November 7–9, 2019  
**Transforming STEM Higher Education** Chicago, IL

and institutional autonomy can serve colleges and universities in educating students to be informed, constructive, and compassionate democratic citizens, notes forum organizer Caryn McTighe Musil, senior director of civic learning and democracy initiatives. Attendees, including several AAC&U institutional presidents and leaders, affirmed a Declaration on Academic Freedom and Institutional Autonomy ([aacu.org/af\\_declaration](http://aacu.org/af_declaration)).

**Ho, Ghana:** International Symposium on Global Community-Engaged Learning, June 23–29  
Practitioners from the United States, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Uganda, and Togo discussed models for engagement between universities and community organizations. “Nothing works if you don’t allow those who have been at the margins to come to the center and join as equal partners,” says participant Dawn Michele Whitehead, vice president of the office of global citizenship for campus, communities, and careers.

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CATHY N. DAVIDSON

# Why We Need a New Higher Education

## We have a responsibility to the next generation of students

THE PAST DECADE has seen a concerted effort by pundits and experts at the nation's think tanks to say both that higher education is no longer worth the soaring tuition costs and that the public's confidence in higher education is falling. Yet the supposedly negative view of higher education is not borne out by the statistics. The simple statistical fact is that, if people can afford it, they send their children to college. Indeed, there is an almost perfect correlation between wealth and college attendance. The more money you have, the more likely you are to send your offspring to college. More than 92 percent of those in the upper 5 percent of incomes in America send their children to college.<sup>1</sup>

I begin with this simple fact because higher education is receiving a lot of negative attention right now. Who bears the brunt of this negative evaluation? If college is not "worth it," presumably those with the most resources to pass on to their children would be most likely to encourage their children not to go to college. But the opposite is true: if you are rich, you make sure your child receives a college education.

Higher education remains important to the public good but is also in need of reformation. Indeed, because postsecondary education is vital, it is incumbent on those of us who work in higher education to make sure our field is doing what we say it is doing: training the next generation not only for jobs but also to be leaders who can create better and more equitable futures—in the workplace, in their communities, and in the larger world. We have to fight for our universities, but we also need to create universities worth fighting for.

We need a revolution in the Copernican sense: a fundamental change in the way we think about the purpose of higher education. Implicitly, now, our majors and minors are designed to replicate the professoriate. Professors train students the way they were trained, in specializations that have been developed in our academic fields and not necessarily in skills and specializations that map onto the needs of the contemporary world our students are inheriting.

Equally important, we have a glaring disparity between our rhetoric about the purpose of higher education and the demographics of the professoriate. Despite decades

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AAC&U 2019  
annual meeting site



Cathy N. Davidson gives the Ness Book Award Lecture at AAC&U's 2019 annual meeting.

of research and theory about race, gender, and ethnicity, the number of scholars of color and women in higher education, especially in leadership positions, has not significantly changed.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, theorizing about equality has not changed the actual profession. We cannot alter structural inequalities simply with good words and goodwill. We have to build new structures that put equality at the core.

This extends to our students, too. We are passing on value systems as well as implicit

bias. Who speaks in a classroom? Who is encouraged to move ahead? Why are some fields (in our universities and in the world beyond) still mostly male or almost entirely white?

Why are others female?

Who is making this selection? We will not see changes until we know who our students are, who our faculty are, and what our challenges are.

In making that paradigm shift, we need to ask two main questions: Are we doing what we actually say we are doing, and is it working?

We don't have to blow up higher education in order to make this shift. We already have the elements we need. However—and this is our major challenge—all of those ingredients

### **The technocratic solutions we've had for higher education assume that technology makes the world a better place. It does not, unless we take charge of it and remember that humans made technology.**

need to be redistributed, reconsidered, and realigned if we are truly going to remake higher education in a way that supports our students' futures. If our main goal is certification, not much needs to change. If, however, we believe our rhetoric about higher education being a training ground for democracy, then we have to think about the ways that we can transform the university to empower students. We need to shift from a model of learning that is about the transmittal of our expertise to a model in which we give students the tools to become experts themselves. These changes are crucial to the future success of our students, especially first-generation college students.

#### **School bells and standardization**

Before we look at what we might do to transform higher education, let's take a few moments to consider how higher education came to be what it is today.

In US higher education, our inheritance is a hierarchical, industrial set of structures and infrastructures. The great project of the nineteenth century was to train farmers to be factory workers and to turn shopkeepers into a professional managerial class. Everyone from Karl Marx to Adam Smith talked about how formal, compulsory schooling was designed to train children to time, task, duty, hierarchy, and authority. This is one reason the school bell became the century's symbol of public education.

The modern American research university arose between 1860 and 1925, and a range of systems and structures for regularizing, specializing, and measuring learning became fully institutionalized at that time, including majors, minors, electives, graduate and professional schools, degree requirements, credit hours, grades, multiple-choice tests, college entrance exams, tenure, sabbaticals, faculty pensions, school rankings, donor-named chairs, corporate-sponsored research, failure, and more.

In the United States, perhaps no one had more impact on the shape of modern higher education than Charles Eliot, president of Harvard from 1869 to 1909. The Harvard he attended as a student had changed little from its original goal of training ministers, even though only 10 to 20 percent of Harvard graduates went on to the ministry. Eliot's goal was to transform the Puritan college into the American research university, with the purpose of preparing students for the new, industrial world of global capitalism.

Eliot was influenced by the great corporate leaders (also known as “robber barons”) of his day and partnered with many of them in financing the newly specialized and expansive version of Harvard.

At the same time, Frederick Winslow Taylor was theorizing what he called “scientific labor management.” Taylor was also from America’s elite but, instead of going to Harvard, he (like Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg in our own era) decided industry, not education, was where his future lay. Taylor worked in a pig iron factory and wrote treatises on measuring worker productivity. He emphasized timeliness, uniformity, regularity, outputs, and outcomes. He believed workers needed to be machine-like. He rewarded the “soldier” (his term) who was equally productive at 8:30 in the morning, when he was just starting out, and 6:30 at night, when he was ending the day. That thinking and those methods were translated into higher education when Taylor became the first professor of business at the first place in the world to offer a master’s in business, the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College. Part of Taylor’s calling was to translate scientific labor management into scientific learning management.

Evaluation moved from extended comments and conversations with each student to “scientific” outcomes-based grading, namely reducing everything a student learns in a course to a letter or a numerical grade. Similarly, institutions, departments, and individual faculty members were also being ranked and graded. Almost all of America’s higher education professional associations were formed at this time, partly to standardize, regularize, and sometimes credentialize what counted as “professional.”<sup>3</sup> In addition to serving as Harvard’s president for forty years, Eliot founded the accrediting body the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Not surprisingly, the implicit standard by which other institutions were judged was Harvard, America’s oldest, richest, and most elite institution.

Our students and our institutions vastly differ from one another, yet we have inherited rigid ideas of “standards” for what counts as “excellence” across these differences. Today, eighteen million undergraduates attend college. More than 40 percent of those students are enrolled at a community college. More than 40 percent are working thirty hours a week, with 25 percent working full time and attending

school full time. Twenty-five percent of undergraduates are older than twenty-five and usually have family responsibilities. Thirty percent are first-generation college students, 24 percent are from low-income backgrounds, and 25 percent face food and housing insecurity.<sup>4</sup>

The Ivies are not representative of the majority of our students, our faculty, or our lives. Only 0.4 percent of those eighteen million undergraduates are enrolled at an Ivy League institution,<sup>5</sup> yet a disproportionate number of today’s books and articles about college students are written by people who went to the Ivies, who have kids at the Ivies, or who assume the Ivies are the metric for everybody else. And the grading and accreditation systems—from what we do to our students to what institutions do to us, to what is done to our institutions—are standardized hierarchical systems that were made for another era and a completely different kind of undergraduate population.

### Saving ourselves from technology

In early 1993, the scientists at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois made the Mosaic 1.0 browser available for free for all noncommercial use. This meant that anyone who had an internet connection could communicate directly with anyone else who had an internet connection without an editor, a publisher, or a censor. At that time, all the world’s websites could be listed on a single sheet of notebook paper. By 1995, more than ten thousand websites existed, most of them user-created, and internet use grew exponentially.<sup>6</sup>

Much has changed since 1993. As technology scholar Zeynep Tufekci has noted, Web 1.0 was all about information. In Web 2.0, we went social. Now in Web 3.0, we have weaponized and monetized fraud, bots and trolls, the manipulation of attention, Uber-ized unregulated labor, unequal access, censorship and information blocking, the end of net neutrality, and ubiquitous surveillance.<sup>7</sup>

My traditional college-age students were born after 1993. They didn’t experience life before the internet, but they are learning how to interact and learn in a system of higher education created for the world of the Model T and the telegraph. The technocratic solutions we’ve had for higher education assume that technology makes the world a better place. It does not, unless we take charge of it and remember

that humans made technology. Technology is not going to save us from technology. We have to be involved. Anne Balsamo, inaugural dean of the School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas, has suggested that we should teach computer science like we teach epidemiology: What does this code do? For whom does it do it? How does it spread? Is it toxic? If so, how do we safeguard against infection? Balsamo suggests that “for game and app designers who want their products to ‘go viral,’ it would be useful if they understood the way viruses and biological agents are spread, reproduced and mutate within populations of people who may or may not realize they are infected.”<sup>8</sup>

For a while, it seemed like the only solution educators (and for-profit companies) could

propose for remaking higher education for the internet age amounted to putting everything online. The results were, far too often, thoughtless, mechanical, and standardized in an assembly-line way.

Hand-in-hand with the MOOC (Massive Online Open Courseware) mania came rhetoric about the need to “unbundle” the university and streamline it by getting rid of everything that wasn’t STEM—teaching “skills,” advocates said, not “frills.” This educational philosophy turned out to be bankrupt. Even at Google, a company dedicated to hiring only “A” students with computer science and engineering degrees, it turns out that advancement requires a range of those “frills,” or what in business are often called “soft skills.”

When Google conducted Project Oxygen, the biggest human resources survey a company has undertaken, it found that technology skills were not what led to advancement at Google.<sup>9</sup> The top skills for those who rose in the company were the human skills that are a part of a general education with a liberal arts foundation: writing, reading, cross-cultural communication, and the ability to translate technical information so that a nonspecialist can understand it.

Next, Google conducted Project Aristotle, a study of its two types of teams, which I will call the A and the B teams. For the A teams, Google grouped together the smartest people

in every subfield and told them to compete against each other to come up with the company’s most brilliant ideas. The B teams consisted of people with different skills organized so that everyone had a chance to contribute ideas.

It turned out that Google’s most important products and innovations came out of the less competitive teams. Google was shocked. It has since changed the organization of its groups. The longevity of an A group was about six months. The B groups last longer, are healthier, and are more productive. The most important rule: no bullying. Learning how to listen to one another turns out to be a vital workplace skill.

#### **Teaching the “why”**

There is ample evidence that one factor (after material conditions) for students’ staying in school—especially first-generation students—is knowing why they are learning what they are learning and how they can apply it beyond the classroom. If you look at the thousands of syllabi online in different subjects, you quickly see that we tend not to be very good at making that “meta” connection. I would suggest that we all need to master the art of revealing what we are doing, why we choose the books and topics we do, and what we believe students will be able to take from our classes to other courses and to their lives beyond school.

Several instructors, schools, and departments have forged ahead to tackle learning with a purpose in a deep and meaningful way that can be useful to all of us. Each year, Arizona State University’s School of Arts, Media, and Engineering organizes its general education curriculum around a problem that students must address together. A recent problem was “What will life be like in Phoenix when there’s no more water?” This question deals with hydrology, toxicology, social systems, law, business, ethics, and history. What is, for instance, the history of water in Arizona? Phoenix doesn’t look like it did even twenty years ago, but its infrastructure still does. The problem-based curriculum tackles profound questions. When I visited, undergraduates talked about the water problem with interest and dexterity and learned from each other in a remarkable way. The mind-set was the opposite of “Oh my gosh, it’s 8:00 in the morning, and I have to get to that chemistry class I have to take in order to graduate.” Students instead felt as if they were learning skills that could help them address the most pressing problems of their time.

### **We all need to master the art of revealing what we are doing, why we choose the books and topics we do, and what we believe students will be able to take from our classes to other courses and to their lives beyond school.**

Yale University's history department has also recently taken on the task of redesigning itself. This is significant because Yale's history program is typically ranked as number one in the country. They do not need to change. But they have. They created two tracks for history majors—a “specialist track” and a general “global track” that focuses on comparative history. Their thinking was that history is crucial for anything one does in life, and history courses should not just be for those going on to graduate school to become history professors. The global track draws into contention two things that define history as a discipline: period and nation. Courses make comparisons designed to disrupt pat answers. For instance, one class on the US Civil War might be team-taught with a scholar of Indian partition—a different way of addressing massive social differences and a way for students to understand that solutions are complex and varied. Another feature of the new program is a cohort model. Each year, history majors take one class with their cohort, with a theme and books chosen just for that cohort. This promotes intellectual community without resorting to the “core” model, which requires every student over decades to read the same dozen canonical texts.<sup>10</sup>

### Raising your hand

In his forties, the science fiction novelist Samuel Delany taught his first course at Wesleyan University. Although brilliant, Delany had never attended college himself. He couldn't wait to teach his first class, where he thought every student would be throbbing with ideas. The first day, though, he asked a question, and only three or four students shot up their hands. Most of us feel quite satisfied if a few students participate, but Delany was devastated. What about the other 27 students? He later commented on that experience: “Don’t you realize that every time you don’t answer a question, you’re learning something? You’re learning how to make do with what you got. You’re learning how not to ask for a raise. You’re learning how to take it. That’s not good.”<sup>11</sup>

He now tells his students that whenever he asks a question, everyone has to put their hand up—whether they know the answer or not. If they don’t know the answer, they should say clearly, “I don’t know the answer to that, Professor Delany, but I would like to hear what that person has to say, and we’ll pass it on.”<sup>12</sup> Delany really does this. When he asks a question, his students raise their hands. Everyone participates.

## Thank You

This issue, which focuses on AAC&U’s 2019 annual meeting, could not be a more appropriate place to pay tribute to **Suzanne Hyers**, our longtime annual meeting director. After working at AAC&U for nearly thirty years, she has decided to use her extraordinary talents to write a new chapter for this next phase of her life.

Always modest and shunning the spotlight, Suzanne was the invisible maestro behind the annual meeting. She coordinated the meeting logistics through legendary lists and cross lists, maintaining a vision of how all the pieces fit together. Suzanne also contributed ideas for the rich design and variety of sessions, as well as for speakers, especially those who would bring a provocative, fresh perspective.

With the late Lee Knefelkamp, Suzanne shepherded the development of the K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award. She orchestrated ways the recipients could benefit from the annual meeting as well as offer transformative visions for the future of higher education.

Distinguished for her integrity, indefatigable work ethic, and deep devotion to AAC&U’s mission, she strove to recognize staff colleagues, especially those who were not the public face of the association but whom she knew were key to making the wheels on AAC&U’s bus go round. We honor Suzanne for the journey she has carried the association on for twenty-eight years and wish her bon voyage on this next journey of her own making.

Cognitive neuroscience tells us that even the simple act of raising your hand says, “I am here. I deserve to be here.”<sup>13</sup> Most professors have experienced reading a brilliant final paper from someone they didn’t know was smart, because the student never spoke in class. That’s a tragedy.

We can figure out ways for every student in a class to participate, hear themselves speak, and have a way of integrating their knowledge in a group situation. When I teach, I use several inventory techniques, methods where each student participates in a low-risk, low-stakes activity. The American Psychological Association calls this total participation, or “teaching techniques that require evidence of participation and higher-order thinking from all students at the same time.”<sup>14</sup>

Classic inventory methods are “entry tickets” and “exit tickets”—rapid, low-stakes, ungraded exercises that can be

used in small seminars or large lecture classes. In the former, one begins a class by asking a question, having everyone respond quickly in writing, and then having some way of

sharing the responses. Some people use clickers; I tend to use pencils and index cards that do not rely on bandwidth in my classrooms. I rarely give students more than ninety seconds to respond, because I want them to think of these not as exams but as a method with no grades or evaluative components, designed entirely as a platform for supporting their contribution. A few years ago, one of my students came up with an excellent entry-ticket exercise: write down one sentence from this week’s readings that moved you in some way. We then went around the classroom, and everyone read their sentence out loud—no discussion, just reading. It is a quick exercise, and students immediately see that, although we read the “same” text, it’s not really the same at all. It’s a great way to begin a class discussion, and it gives students a voice from the beginning. A colleague in the social sciences who teaches enormous lecture classes ends each lecture with a question and has students answer it on index cards. Students sign their cards, so it’s an efficient way of taking roll, and the method also creates a jumping-off place for teaching assistants as they lead discussion sessions, again with every students’ ideas part of the conversation

**We can figure out ways for every student in a class to participate, hear themselves speak, and have a way of integrating their knowledge in a group situation.**



(not just the two or three eager ones who always raise their hands).<sup>15</sup>

Another way of having all students involved in learning together is to design techniques for students to help write the syllabus, come up with teaching methods, and take charge of the class. Sometimes I compose the first half of the syllabus and then have students work in groups to create the second half.<sup>16</sup> Of course, I meet and talk with the groups, but I also give them the responsibility of choosing subtopics and texts that fit within the course theme. It changes the dynamics of the class, the desire to learn, and students’ sense of themselves. Sitting in a classroom, even a small seminar, where the same three students always answer the professor’s questions is demoralizing and demotivating, especially for first-generation students. Total participation invites everyone into the conversation. It’s one step toward changing the hierarchies of higher education and something all professors can enact in their own classrooms tomorrow.

### Preparing the next generation

I wrote my book *The New Education: How to Revolutionize the University to Prepare Students for a World in Flux* with one mission: to inspire higher education transformation. I wanted it to be a page-turner so that it might reach the maximum number of readers—all kinds of readers—who might learn from the different ways educators have succeeded in making meaningful and significant changes at their institutions. If we’re going to change higher education, we need a community of students, faculty members, administrators, and trustees all engaged with these issues. In writing the book, I spent a lot of time talking to young people about what they wanted. This is an amazing generation of students.

They're working against formidable odds. The world we have bequeathed to them has myriad problems. The least we can do is think about the kind of higher education that will give them the tools to address those problems wisely and equitably. **[E]**

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LILY D. MCNAIR

# Advancing Our Vision

## Breadth, depth, and impact of diversity and inclusion work

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, areas of diversity have become prominent in academia as institutions have created and expanded programs for black studies, Latino studies, Asian American studies, gender studies, and multicultural studies. This has opened up the academy to comprehensive work on diversity, especially as it affects student learning. At higher education

gatherings today, for instance, we offer workshops and discussions on diversity and inclusion, and we hold entire conferences on these topics and issues. For example, the Association for American

Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) held its 2019 Diversity, Equity, and Student Success conference in March, and NASPA: Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education is holding events throughout the year on equity and diversity. In addition, news publications focused on higher education are providing more and more stories on diversity, such as *Inside Higher Ed's* articles “An Overlooked Solution for Diversifying STEM”<sup>1</sup> and “The Effective Diversity Statement.”<sup>2</sup>

Advice and recommendations about diversity and inclusion in the workplace and other spheres have also become more frequent. *The Harvard Business Review* recently offered “4 Ways Managers Can Be More Inclusive,”<sup>3</sup> while the online recruiting site The Muse laid out “The 5 Things

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All Inclusive Leaders Do Every Single Day.”<sup>4</sup> BetterUp, a mobile professional coaching company, advises, “To Become More Diverse, Start Being More Inclusive.”<sup>5</sup> We’re also seeing more books on inclusion and diversity, with titles like *Demystifying Diversity*,<sup>6</sup> *The Inclusion Revolution Is Now*,<sup>7</sup> and *The Inclusion Imperative*.<sup>8</sup>

So we have the depth of thought and content about diversity and inclusion, but what about breadth or impact—the implications for scholarly work and applications for students and clients? In higher education, we live in an atmosphere where we can talk about diversity and inclusion, but how do we make sure all of our work in these areas leads to real cultural change?

### Putting our words to work

The terms *diversity* and *inclusion* are often conflated, with people regularly using one term when they mean the other. According to AAC&U, *inclusion* is the “active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in the curriculum, in the cocurriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions.”<sup>9</sup> AAC&U defines *diversity* as the “individual differences (e.g., personality, prior knowledge, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations).”<sup>10</sup>

Inclusion goals often reflect increased diversity, but when addressing how to create an inclusive community, some in higher education fail to



Lily D. McNair at the  
AAC&U 2019 annual  
meeting Networking  
Luncheon for Faculty and  
Administrators of Color

assess how their community reflects the diversity necessary to have inclusion. There is often talk about inclusion and ways to promote diversity, but little consideration of the campus being an open place for all.

Colleges and universities need to focus on diversity as a first step to inclusion and be aware of how diversity shows itself in the classroom. Sometimes it's obvious, but other times, you simply can't "see" diversity by scanning the faces in the room. Diversity comes from having students who represent different genders and who have different religious beliefs and socioeconomic backgrounds. It comes from having students who are first-generation college students, veterans, and adult learners. It comes from having students with a variety of learning styles. And, it is

reflected in having students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

While the strategies for increasing diversity are specific to each campus, leadership is key. Presidents and other top leaders have an incredible

platform from which to communicate a vision that includes a diverse campus. The ways in which presidents talk about diversity at the

campus level affect how students, administrators, faculty members, and other staff think about and work toward a more diverse campus. When a president makes diversity a priority, the campus community knows that it is OK to talk about diversity and that it is valued.

When I was provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at Wagner College, I worked closely with faculty department chairs. I decided that our focus for the 2017–18 academic year would be diversity. As we were beginning to delve into the topic, the August 2017 white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, took place. During the event, a white supremacist drove his car into peaceful, racially diverse demonstrators protesting the rally. He killed one demonstrator and injured others. This tragedy, and the racism that spurred it, made the focus on diversity even more relevant and imperative.

What started as a one-year focus with our department chairs turned into a two-year process. During that time, we included diversity as an item on the agenda of every monthly department chair meeting. The chairs developed a "what to do" list around diversity and then set goals. One goal was hiring an African American professor in a department that had no black faculty members but many black students. We also discussed ways to reach out more effectively to students of color to help them have a better learning experience, including assessing course syllabi to highlight works that address the experiences of people of color. Some department chairs decided to write a diversity statement to include on their syllabi. The statement indicated that we value students of all backgrounds and was a way to let students know that we care about all of them.

We also worked to help faculty members learn more about diversity. Unfortunately, many educators are not equipped to effectively approach the topic in class. To help them develop skills to do so, we held workshops for faculty members to better understand the array of backgrounds from which our students come. We also came up with strategies for being more open to students from different backgrounds and for helping students be more connected to the professor and members of the class. For example, African American students expressed feeling marginalized by other students in class, so we focused on class activities that required students of various backgrounds to work together in groups. Working together in this

**As we developed goals and action plans, and as professors learned more about students' varied life experiences, they became more enthusiastic about diversity work in the classroom.**

platform from which to communicate a vision that includes a diverse campus. The ways in which presidents talk about diversity at the



Lily D. McNair



way allowed the students to begin to get to know each other.

Faculty members often avoid talking about race and diversity because they're nervous that they will say the "wrong thing." In our workshops, we talked about what happens if you do say the wrong thing. We discussed how being open and respectful of students is just as important as having the right answer. In addition, we also held role-playing sessions to help professors handle actual situations with students and others around diversity and race. As a result, faculty members who were initially lukewarm toward the idea became more comfortable talking about diversity in the classroom. As we developed goals and action plans, and as professors learned more about students' varied life experiences, they became more enthusiastic about diversity work in the classroom. Faculty members learned so much over those two years of diversity work and really came to see how important it is in serving our students.

Now, I am the president of Tuskegee University. Because we are a historically black

university, where 85 percent of our students are African American, some mistakenly think that we don't have to deal with diversity. As a historically black university, though, we're really looking at different kinds of diversity in addition to race and ethnic background. It's important to understand the different ways students view themselves, and we need to be mindful of religious, socioeconomic, gender, and other differences. I've had some significant conversations with transgender students about how our campus can be a more welcoming place for them. They have made recommendations about training for administrators and faculty and designating nonbinary restrooms throughout campus. Often, we don't think about students who are both black and transgender. We need to make certain we are meeting their needs along with the needs of other students.

One of my priorities at Tuskegee is to enhance mentoring opportunities and career training to boost student retention and graduation rates. As part of our new mentoring initiative,

REACH—Road from Early Achievement to a Career High—all first-year students will be assigned a faculty adviser to help them start thinking about their major and how it might be related to their career goals. The full program started in fall 2019 and will help us ensure all students have a sense of belonging and feel supported. We want all students to know that we have high expectations for them and that we are here to help them succeed.

#### **Getting out into the “communiversity”**

When we talk about increasing diversity and inclusion, we also have to consider what that means beyond our campuses. We should be creating broad awareness of the synergistic relationship between our institutions and our larger communities. What are the ways in which diversity plays into town-gown interactions? What are the communities just past our university gates like? For many of us, our neighbors are communities of color.

Wagner College, for example, is just two miles from Port Richmond, a community that was once a bustling center for shopping and business in Staten Island. This area now has large percentages of Latinos, African Americans, and working-class whites. In 2008, the college and Port Richmond developed a partnership in which college students come to Port Richmond

and work with residents to support their goals in improving education, immigration, health and wellness, arts and culture, and economic development (“the five pillars”). As part of the initiative, faculty

**As long as I am thinking about the strategic plan of the university, I need to be thinking about the larger community in which our institution resides.**

members and students participate in programs to support each of these pillars in the community. For instance, professors and students helped develop business plans for community members with entrepreneurial aspirations. Another project involved working with the high school’s culinary program to promote healthy meals and lifestyles. Students also volunteer at after-school programs at local elementary and middle schools.

At Tuskegee, we’re also deeply involved in our local community. Tuskegee University is the largest employer in Macon County, Alabama. In the city of Tuskegee, the majority of residents are African American, and I am working with the mayor to plan how we can support each

other as the city is redeveloped and the university moves forward. The mayor talks about the idea of a “communiversity,” which is a much better term than “town-gown relationships.” One way the city and university have connected is through an experiential architecture class in which students are helping to rehabilitate a historic Victorian home (see “Welcome to Our House” on page 20). I’ve also been meeting with the Macon County Schools superintendent about supporting local public K–12 schools in everything from college preparation for high school students to after-school tutoring. As long as I am thinking about the strategic plan of the university, I need to be thinking about the larger community in which our institution resides.

#### **Leading to create change**

So, how can we plan for lasting impact? Here are a few ways:

- Integrate the goals of diversity and inclusion with your institution’s mission statement and values.
- Be strategic and accurate when addressing diversity and inclusion for the campus as well as the community.
- Integrate your focus across all levels and with all members of your institution (students, faculty, staff, board members), as well as with community goals.

We will know that we have a lasting impact on our campuses when mention of diversity and inclusion no longer brings about reactions like “Oh, yeah, we need to focus on that” but is truly part of our institutions’ values. We will recognize enduring changes when we see examples of diversity work every day. Students of color need ways of connecting with one another and of being campus leaders on issues about which they feel passionate. If they don’t have such opportunities, then our retention rates will plummet.

As an undergraduate at Princeton University, I was the first in my family to go to college. At that time, I was also one of the first African American women to attend Princeton, just six years after the university became coed.

Throughout my life, I have always been aware of what it means to be female and African American—to be part of a minority. In high school, my advanced classes had a few other girls, but those girls weren’t black. One reason I went to Princeton was to be around other black kids who were “like me.” Once there,



I developed a supportive cohort of African American friends, but many times I was the only woman—the only black woman—in class. Still, I was going to succeed against all odds. I know firsthand the experience of feeling marginalized in class and what it means to have professors who actually see you as you are.

Now, as a university president, it remains important for me to be a role model who shows women, African Americans, and other students on my campus that they can do what they have set out to accomplish. When I talk with students, I aim to connect with them as individuals and see all of who they are. University leaders and staff truly care about the campus community, and I want students to understand that. An effective leader communicates and listens, and a vibrant campus community only comes to fruition when we address the needs of all students. We're here for all students. LE

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# Welcome to Our House

**Renovating a historic home connects Tuskegee architecture and construction students with the local community**

By Christen Aragoni

Tuskegee architecture and construction students are helping to renovate the historic Drakeford House, which was built in the 1890s in the late Victorian era.

Tuskegee University architecture and construction science and management students are simultaneously learning historic preservation skills and helping to rehabilitate their local community. In what aims to be one of the first projects of the university's new historic preservation program, students in the Robert Taylor School of Architecture and Construction Science and Management (TSACS) are taking part in renovating the Drakeford House, one of eight historic homes along East Water Street and North Main Street on the north side of the city of Tuskegee.

TSACS faculty and students will use both the Drakeford House and the Willcox E Trades Building on campus as learning laboratories for observing and participating in preservation training as both structures undergo renovation. The school's long-term goal is to develop Centers for Workforce Development and

Historic Preservation to advance the craft training skills of its students and the Tuskegee community at large, according to Carla Jackson Bell, TSACS dean and professor of architecture. The center would help make Tuskegee a leader among Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in offering historic preservation skills through its undergraduate, research, and outreach programs. It would also preserve Booker T. Washington's mission of "learning to do by doing" and his belief that by requiring students to build and restore their own buildings, they would feel a degree of ownership in their community. As early as 1892, Washington originally developed vocational training programs as part of the institute that became what is now Tuskegee University, located in Macon County, Alabama.

"Macon County is considered within the Black Belt of the South and has had a majority-black population since before the American Civil War," Bell says. "Tuskegee housing is split between students on the campus and in the community. Many young adults from the county don't have a place to go to acquire a skill so they can raise a family and stay in Tuskegee."

## Rebuilding community connections

In 2018, the owner of the Drakeford House, Michael Hicks, contacted Bell. Hicks, a physician who lives in Michigan but is originally from Tuskegee, wanted to know whether architecture students could develop a proposal for what to do with the Drakeford. While Hicks never attended Tuskegee, his mother, brother, and nephew (who graduated this past spring) are all alumni.



Photos courtesy of Stefan Smith/Tuskegee University

With oversight from Bell and Charner Rodgers, senior coordinator of industry relations and associate professor of construction science and management, third-year TSACS students took on the project. The Drakeford is in the Queen Anne-style from the late Victorian period of the 1890s, with a corner shingled turret, a gable roof, a porch curving around two sides, and a lawn ideal for landscaping. More recent additions include a screened second-story porch and a first-floor solarium. Because the house is a historic landmark—it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places Inventory in 1985—the students wanted to maintain the home's interior and existing framework. They decided to draw up plans to turn the home into a bed and breakfast, as well as a wedding venue.

"What we want to do is bring the house back to the original glory that it had in the 1890s," Bell says.

After the students submitted the plans to Hicks, he awarded the top three students a scholarship. He also called Bell again to say that he had funding to renovate the house and wanted to use the Drakeford as a lab for learning about historic preservation and restoration.

In what is now planned as a two-year project, TSACS students, as well as young adults from the community earning a trade certificate, will observe and assist contractors as they renovate the Drakeford. Because of liability concerns, students cannot work as laborers, but they will create architectural drawings and conduct historic preservation research. The certificate earners will do more hands-on tasks.

"With the funding from this grant, faculty are currently training

our students to learn restoration and craft training skills to become citizen architects, builders, and community leaders who are able to design and build sustainable communities," Bell says. "For the project, we're not just including our students, we're including the young adults in the community."

TSACS will also collaborate with the Rebuild Tuskegee Foundation, the Hope Crew/National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to restore the Drakeford.

The renovations on the house and the Willcox E campus building are just the first of what Bell hopes will be many local preservation projects TSACS faculty and students will tackle. The city and the university have other buildings—from small frame houses to historic campus structures—that need attention. The plans for the Centers for Workforce

Development and Historic Preservation to assist local residents in earning craft trade certificates, Bell says, are also directly connected to the diversity and inclusion that Tuskegee University's president, Lily McNair, has made a priority and that involves truly collaborating with the city and the larger community.

"We have a lot of work around Tuskegee that people need experience for," Bell says. "My vision first started with workforce development to have students and young adults in the community work together to learn a building trade. We still have issues of inclusion, and one thing we can do as an institution is to support and build our community."

**The renovation seeks to restore the Drakeford House to its "original glory."**



FARAH PANDITH

# A Seat at the Table

## The world is counting on women to speak up

IN THE LATE 1980S, campuses across the United States were experiencing ugly racist incidents. We felt this particularly acutely at Smith College, where I was an undergraduate. In 1986, racial slurs were spray-painted on the door of the Afro-American cultural center, and at the end of my junior year, in 1989, a group of black students received racist letters. The latter incident led to emotional interactions

and rallies, and our sense of community was broken apart.<sup>1</sup>

To address the situation, our president, Mary Maples Dunn, decided to hold a campus-wide discussion about race and diversity. I had just been elected student body president in the

spring of 1989, and I ended up on stage in front of all the students, the staff, and the faculty to take part in the conversation. It was our opportunity as students to talk about what we stood for and how important inclusion and diversity were to us. I had to represent our diverse student body and work closely with the administration to ensure that we were given a voice and that

**Why have we never had a woman serve as secretary-general of the United Nations? What are we doing to prepare young women in the pipeline for positions of power within the public sector, and what are we doing to interest young women to enter public service?**

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we came to a solution that allowed us to heal our campus.

That experience was pivotal. It is really when I began my journey of leadership and of understanding the importance of using my voice—and of the importance of women everywhere speaking up and taking part in shaping our society at all levels. We must ensure that women and people from a variety of diverse backgrounds have a seat at the table when it comes to creating policies that affect our world.<sup>1</sup>

**"I spoke about race, diversity, mutual respect, and how vital it was that our community be a community for everybody."**

During the summer vacation, a few months after the campus discussion on race and diversity, I received a letter from the college telling me that First Lady Barbara Bush would be attending Smith's convocation in September. It is a Smith tradition that the student government president speaks first—she opens the school year at convocation, and I had been thinking about the speech all summer. I was concerned about what I was going to say to my fellow Smithies and how, after the events of the spring, we had to do better. I wanted to start the new school year in the right way. With Bush listening on the stage as I stood at the podium, and thousands watching in the audience, I spoke about race, diversity, mutual respect, and how vital it was that our community be a community for everybody.

The next day, the White House called Smith and asked for a copy of my speech. Bush subsequently began quoting me when she spoke at other campuses, and it was incredible to experience, especially when college presidents wrote to tell me about it. It was crazy! Bush also used the speech in other venues, and I was sincerely



Farah Pandith speaks at  
the Women's Breakfast at  
AAC&U's 2019 annual meeting.

humbled. Even more incredibly, during that year (my senior year), I was lucky enough to correspond with her. She was warm and friendly but also gracious, writing back in her own hand. When I was close to graduation, I wrote to ask for advice on going out into the real world. She suggested I visit her at the White House and meet her chief of staff, Susan Porter Rose. That's how I landed a position at the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Because I gave a speech about race and diversity and Barbara Bush was sitting on the stage and heard

my words, I got my first job and experienced the honor of being in public service.

At USAID, my role was typical for a recent graduate and young staffer—answering phones, responding to faxes, and helping in any way that was needed. But I was doing those tasks for

the head of the agency and was in the front office, an experience that taught me how USAID worked in DC and on the ground around the world; how it connected to other parts of government, especially the White House; and how important it was to understand what was taking place at the grassroots level in the countries in which we worked. I was able to have that experience because I spoke up about creating an inclusive community and a first lady heard me and then took the time to help me.

**“One thing you should know about me, because we’re talking about women’s voices, is that I am not somebody who sits back.”**

That first government job led me to spend most of my professional life (so far) in the public sector. Serving this nation is one of the most amazing gifts that you can imagine receiving, because you truly learn about your own country and about who you are—and you have a chance to give back. As an American, but as someone born in India and raised near Boston, I feel strongly about how much this country means to me. It is extraordinary to see what you—through service—can do. You see firsthand what our nation is all about. You have a chance to help create policies that make a difference to us and to others around the world. Our leadership matters. I was so honored to serve our nation.

After USAID, I went to graduate school and was out of government for almost a decade. But I came back after September 11, 2001. I had earned my graduate degree in foreign policy—specifically working on issues around Islamic civilizations and international security—and after 9/11, I wanted to serve our nation. It didn’t matter to me what my role was so much as it mattered that our country was attacked. As an American and a Muslim, I wasn’t going to let a terrorist organization define either our country or my religion. One thing you should know about me, because we’re talking about women’s voices, is that I am not somebody who sits back.

I was asked to serve on the National Security Council (NSC) in the George W. Bush administration. In a role focused on Muslim outreach, I navigated some very scary things happening across the world. We were watching Al Qaeda continue to build steam. We had begun the war on terror, and US troops were in Afghanistan and Iraq. We were also dealing with terrorism in Europe—including the March 11, 2004, Madrid bombings and the July 7, 2005, London bombings. I was working on the non-kinetic aspect of this war—the war of ideas—and focused on the ideology of the terrorists and how they were able to recruit Muslim youth. In the aftermath of the Danish cartoon crisis, which involved protests by Muslims globally after a Danish newspaper published satirical cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad, I was asked to move from the NSC to the Department of State so I could do more on issues of youth and identity. I ended up spending two years focused on Muslim youth in Europe.

When the Obama administration came in, right before I was planning to leave government, I was invited to a briefing with the new secretary of state—and another (former) first lady—Hillary Clinton. Everyone was packed into the room, and I had a spot at the end of the table with a clear line of sight to Clinton. But I was sitting at the table. That is important.

The meeting was scheduled for only an hour, and I didn’t think we would get to the issue of Muslims in Europe. But after forty-five minutes, Clinton paused and said that she wanted to make sure that everyone sitting at the table had a chance to speak. She turned to me and asked why I was there. When I described my work on stopping radicalization in Europe, she was interested and engaged and asked several excellent

questions. Women's colleges also came up, and Clinton noted that she had gone to Wellesley College. I said that I had gone to Smith, and she smiled broadly and raised her hand to give me a high five. That might have been the best moment of the briefing for me—it was real and natural, and you could see her genuine interest in the person briefing her.

When I finished my briefing, my boss, the assistant secretary of state of European and Eurasian affairs, explained that I would soon be leaving the State Department. My going-away party was in two weeks. Clinton leaned forward and gestured to me, asking, "Where are you going?" The entire room was pin-drop silent as I told her that I planned to start a job at a think tank driving a new effort countering violent extremism.

Clinton looked at me and said, "We'll see about that." I thought she was being funny, but the next day, the State Department's chief operating officer asked to see me. When I went into his office, he smiled and said the secretary had asked what it would take for me to stay. I told him that when the secretary of state asks you to serve your nation, you salute. Clinton asked me to do what I had done in Europe but to do it around the world. That's how I became the nation's first special representative to Muslim communities.<sup>2</sup>

### **"So I stirred the pot and made it crazy."**

During the George W. Bush administration, when I was serving on the NSC, I attended a meeting in the Situation Room. Many people were crammed into the space to discuss an issue regarding Al Qaeda. As I looked around me, I suddenly realized that I was the only female in the meeting. I was astonished and then, internally, got really mad. Why weren't there more women at the policy table, especially on a subject that was so important?

My anger was not about how I was being treated—I was treated with full respect. Instead, I was upset about the lack of gender balance. It was wrong. After the meeting, I voiced my frustration to a colleague, whose wife is an alumna of Wellesley. He jokingly asked what it was with women from women's colleges. We both laughed and then I said, "Something needs to be done." He said, "Right. So do something."

I started thinking about how we could get women's colleges to cultivate more women leaders to sit around the policy table. A government mostly run by men shouldn't be telling women what to do. We should have open conversations, more on-ramps, practical tactics, and policies, as well as more opportunities for mentorship, that combine to help women move forward in their careers—and to build a



legacy of women's leadership. Multidimensional viewpoints need to be represented at the table, where not just policy people make decisions but a range of experts—historians, anthropologists, and more—offer input. Gender matters. Diversity of disciplines matters too (I call this “open power”).

I started talking to trusted colleagues and friends and then reached out to presidents at women's colleges. Once we developed our ideas and got buy-in, we piloted a relationship with the State Department and three of the Seven Sisters women's colleges to advance leadership training with minority communities in Europe. By the time Clinton became secretary of state, we were ready to expand our work on getting more women to the policy table. While part of the answer is electing more women to public

office, another piece is having more women in civil servant roles, including foreign service officers and appointees across the board and at every level—local, state, federal, and international. For instance, why have we never had a woman

serve as secretary-general of the United Nations? What are we doing to prepare young women in the pipeline for positions of power within the public sector, and what are we doing to interest young women to enter public service?

I wanted to ask these questions and more. So, I stirred the pot and made it crazy. I engaged a lot of people to find out what was happening around public service and women. The answer was, not much. Obviously, this issue had to be addressed.

Several women's college presidents helped craft what we believed to be the kind of program we could get our hands around. We were eager to draw attention to the issue and spark a global movement. Internally at the Department of State, I talked to the director of policy planning, Anne-Marie Slaughter, who urged me to work with the US ambassador for global women's issues, Melanne Verveer, to think through the idea. Verveer was inspiring and wonderful, and in time we presented the program idea to Clinton, who then asked us to formally develop the Women in Public Service Project. Launched in 2011, the project continues

to work worldwide to advance women into the public sector.<sup>3</sup>

### **“When women start to change, the whole community changes.”**

As special representative to Muslim communities in the Obama administration, I was tasked with engaging Muslim communities around the world. My work was about building new connections, listening to youth, finding ways to develop networks of like-minded thinkers, and creating programs at the grassroots level that build resilience to extremists. The narrative of the extremists is based on an “us versus them” ideology, which is easy to absorb if you are having a crisis of identity and asking questions such as, Who am I? What's the difference between culture and religion? After September 11, I discovered that for Muslims under the age of thirty, this crisis of identity was universal no matter where in the world they lived. Approximately one-fourth of the planet is Muslim—that's about 1.8 billion people. Around one billion of that number is under the age of thirty.<sup>4</sup> If we don't engage with the youth and understand how important it is to address the identity crisis, what are we doing? We have to focus on that issue because that is the very heart of how extremists prey upon youth.

Thus, instead of holding formal meetings at high diplomatic levels, as special representative, I worked at the grassroots level, traveling to eighty countries to visit places like schools, community centers, houses of worship, and nongovernmental organizations. I talked with members of civil society—mothers, fathers, young people, teachers, and activists. I spoke with young people who had amazing ideas about what was happening in their communities and what they needed in order to build resilience to reject extremist ideas. We helped them turn their thoughts into action through small grants, training, entrepreneurship skill-building, and the development of networks of like-minded thinkers. What I understood from these firsthand interactions was how dangerous it is when young people experiencing a crisis of identity lean on extremist content to feel secure about who they are. And now, unfortunately, the different types of extremist content affecting our world today aren't only from terrorist organizations. We need to protect vulnerable youth everywhere from becoming radicalized by an us-versus-them ideology—whether it comes from ISIS, white nationalists, or other groups.

### **We should have open conversations, more on-ramps, practical tactics, and policies, as well as more opportunities for mentorship, that combine to help women move forward in their careers—and to build a legacy of women's leadership.**

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During my international work, I also learned how important relationships (particularly maternal ones) are in preventing youth extremism. A mother is a child's first teacher, and she is usually the person who first notices a change in her child. We brought in experts to help us understand the impact of women within communities. Were women able to help prevent extremist ideology from spreading in any special way? Did their roles as mothers add value to the way we looked at how kids became radicalized?

We took information we learned from youth—what could be considered a form of ethnographic or cultural data—and used it to create a movement that would strengthen the role of mothers in a community. To consider what was possible, we looked to a grassroots example here in the United States: Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). We talked with the MADD's various chapters and leadership about how they were able to get mothers and other people in communities involved in preventing drunk driving. We realized that MADD could be a good model for setting up mothers to help on the issue of extremism and

identified several questions raised by such a role: What do mothers see happening in the home, and what can they do to help dissuade their children from finding extremist narratives appealing? What systems, tools, and programs can help mothers (as well as fathers and other community members) navigate the challenges kids might be facing? In other words, what resources do we need to make available for mothers before their children become radicalized?

While much more can be done to help women in communities build resilience against extremism, we also need to recognize that young women are not immune to being radicalized. Extremists have specialized, curated approaches for targeting females. This fact shocks a lot of people, particularly men. When I was working on countering violent extremism, the programs were designed only for men. Women getting radicalized was not the norm, and many in the policy world were not thinking about a plan for what to do if it became more common. We are not developing programs to counter violent extremism that are designed specifically for women, which is

unfortunate and shortsighted because when women start to change, the whole community changes. If more women become radicalized in a community, that can have a deep impact. With ISIS, for instance, we saw women forcing their husbands to become more extreme.

**"Where are you getting your news?"**

In an age in which a tweet substitutes for in-depth historical content, we have to work harder at ensuring youth are equipped with tools to help them discern real information from fake. We need more awareness about our world—basic knowledge like geography and history—and we need to help people understand the reasons they

see what they do in their newsfeed. We must ask people why they believe what they believe. We should be talking about who we are as humans before a crisis happens. On college campuses, we should be widening the understanding of diversity of human experience and

ensuring everyone has a voice. If we're not creating better awareness offline about the world we live in, we won't be able to combat misleading and biased information online.

During a trip to New Zealand as special representative, I met with a group of about two hundred young women of Somali descent who were Muslim. We spoke about identity and what it was like to live in New Zealand. One young woman asked a political question about Israel and the US position on the West Bank, Gaza, and Palestine, and I felt the best way to respond was with a US government talking point. But I also asked her, "Where are you getting your news?" She looked at me strangely. We spent the next ten minutes discussing how to gather and assess news, and I suggested that each morning, the young women visit the websites of five different US think tanks—two on the right, two on the left, and one in the middle—to understand how each reports the issue of Israel-Palestine differently. Then the young women had to make their own decisions about what to think and why. The more we can help students and people everywhere think more thoughtfully about their information, the better off we will be.

The lesson about assessing sources of information also applies to books. I love the feeling

of a book in my hand. The printed word is powerful—you believe what's written inside a book. The bad guys know this, too. In 2007, I visited the first Islamic academy in Lyon, France. In the library, I studied the wall of books on Islam with mounting anxiety. I recognized the titles and knew that the books offered particular translations of the Qur'an—translations that were made in Saudi Arabia and that omitted key words and nuances, inserted new meanings into scripture, and analyzed the text in a way that set up an us-versus-them ideology.<sup>5</sup>

Later, I asked the public diplomacy officer at the US embassy in France whether we could send the librarian from the Islamic academy to the United States to take a course in library science. The embassy did end up sending the librarian and several teachers to the United States to learn about library science so that they could better assess the academy's books and build a better library. Several years later, I returned to the school and found that its entire collection of books had changed. While we can do much more, ensuring students have access to the right kinds of books is a starting point in helping kids understand the diversity of Islam and the many different views on various topics.

**"We must help the next generation of women use their voices in ways that they haven't yet imagined."**

Today's students are learning to be the democratic participants and leaders that our nation and the world need. They are learning these skills at an early age through their activism on campus, through coalition building and networking, and in their formal and informal leadership roles. They're also learning from the people around them—who students are on a college campus comes from their peers, professors, and leaders of higher education. It comes from the way in which college presidents put forward their agendas. Role models are critical.

I learned how to be a leader, in big and small ways, both in high school and in college. I became skilled and comfortable at bringing different kinds of people together, because I did it over and over again as a student leader. I wasn't always great. But I practiced. We need to give young people the opportunity to explore and learn what they think while they are on our campuses. College is the time when you get to test yourself, and you get to do so, in some ways, without consequences. Students

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learn confidence and empowerment as they work on academic projects and participate in campus activities. Colleges and universities have the ability to prepare a diverse array of students to shape society at all levels—we can start by putting complicated issues front and center and build from there.

When I think about where change needs to happen, I think about the next generation of women. I think about what we need to do to help them achieve their mighty potential. I think about what we need to do to activate them and to help change the ecosystem to allow them to thrive. I think about what we must do to help them to believe that they can actually sit at the table and also use their voices in ways that they haven't yet imagined. We need to find new ways to make a difference. What we have been doing is not working. The change we want to see will not happen with the same old system of leadership and policy creation. Building a stronger world can happen, and bringing women to policy tables across the world is a start. Let's do that together. **[LE]**

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#### NOTES

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MAYS IMAD

# Reimagining STEM Education

## Beauty, wonder, and connection

WHEN I WAS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL, I was preparing for my comprehensive exam while the 2003 invasion of Iraq was underway. My extended family still lived in Baghdad. Each morning, I dialed the Red Cross 1-800 number and listened to an automated message to find out if my family's neighborhood had been bombed the night before. After determining that my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins were safe for yet another day, I went to the lab

and sat at the electrophysiology rig—and tried to pretend that all that mattered was my education and degree.

As an undergraduate, I was most intrigued by the philosophy of science and human consciousness.

A professor suggested that I read Antonio Damasio's *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*.<sup>1</sup> Halfway through the book, I knew that I wanted to study neurobiology—to continue to unravel the connection between the "purely" mechanical

**Our future depends upon scientists who represent greater diversity, which brings multiple world views, values, perspectives, cognitive styles, and experiences into the problem-solving processes.**

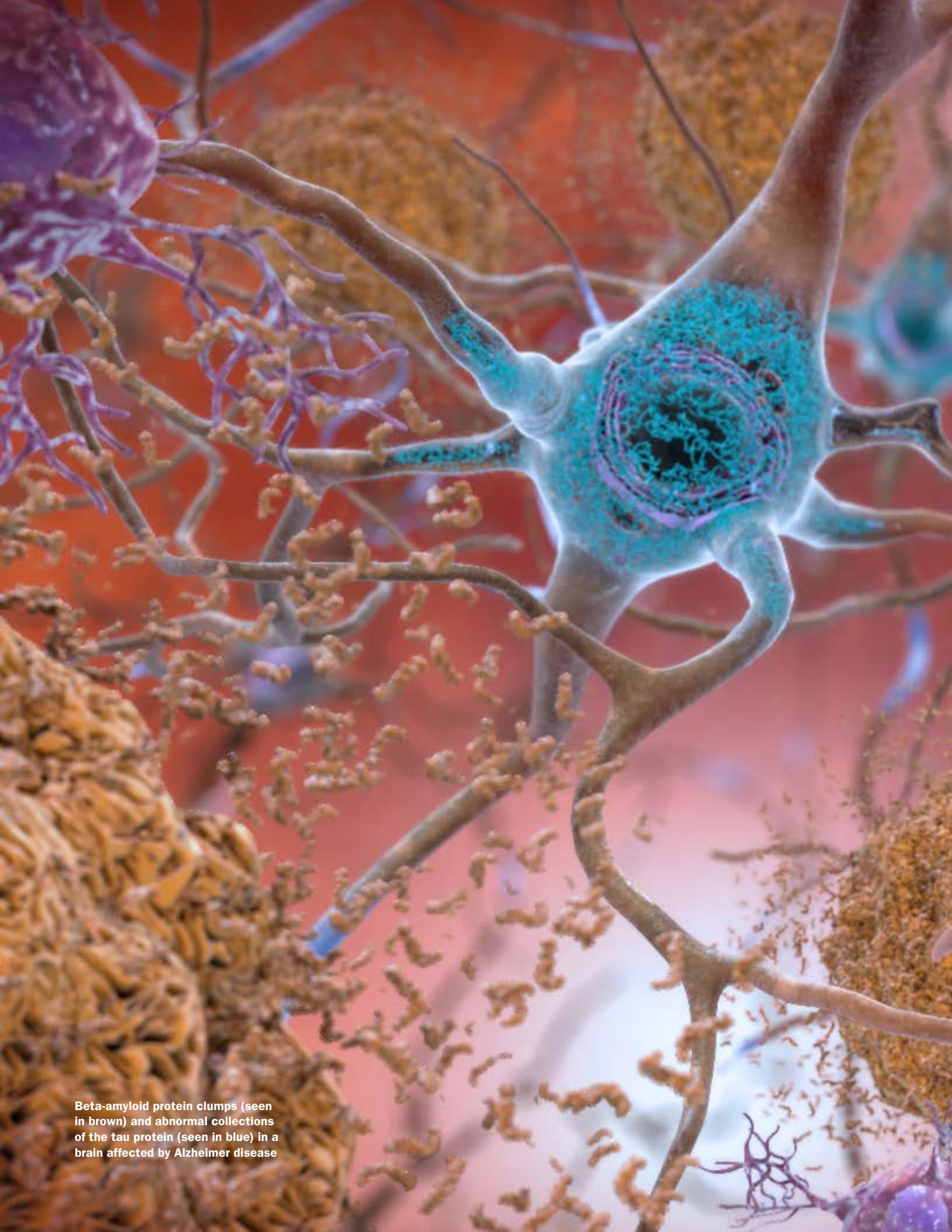
MAYS IMAD is a professor in the Department of Life and Physical Science and coordinator of the Teaching and Learning Center at Pima Community College. During AAC&U's 2019 Annual Meeting, she helped lead the session "Leadership for Equity and Inclusion in STEM: Practical Strategies That Help Colleagues Improve Student Learning and Success" and presented at the HEDs Up session "In Their Own Voices: Reclaiming the Value of Liberal Arts at Community Colleges." She thanks Bree Giddings, Ana Andrade, and Bryan Richter for their insights, courage, and inspiration. Part of the work presented in this article was supported by NSF Award #1730130 (CC BIOINSITES).

science of human action and the ensuing biological or chemical relation to emotion. But when I began graduate school, completing my doctorate suddenly felt insurmountable for two unforeseen reasons. First, my undergraduate training was in philosophy, with minimal coursework in basic sciences. Second, the intellectual passion and personal connections of my undergraduate years were increasingly absent, and I found the impersonal approach to my training difficult. From the beginning of my graduate education, the pressure to "publish or perish" and secure grant funding overshadowed the adventure of learning.

When I voiced my disenchantment with the way higher education expects students to prioritize purely intellectual pursuits and research over connecting who we are to what is happening in the world, some of my dissertation committee members encouraged me to become a social worker, suggesting that I was "too nice" and "too much of an empath." These professional educators, whom I greatly admired for their scientific acumen, seemed to believe that being a scientist and having compassion were mutually exclusive. My parents supported my educational goals, but they too wondered whether I was tough enough to persist against such strong, conventional headwinds.

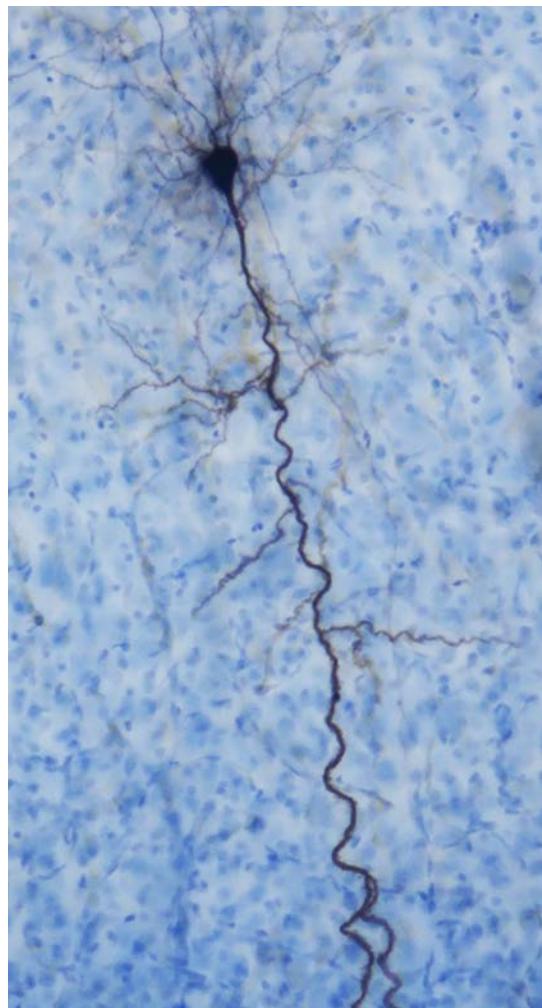
I stuck with it, however, and in 2006, I graduated with my PhD and went on to receive a National Institute of Health postdoctoral fellowship.<sup>2</sup> Despite my success, my professors' doubts about my suitability for a career in science haunted me. I experienced what I later learned was a powerful bout of "imposter syndrome."

When I began teaching, I again faced the dilemma of our tendency, as educators, to expect students to leave the world behind and concentrate solely on the day's lesson when they come into the classroom. I began to doubt



Beta-amyloid protein clumps (seen in brown) and abnormal collections of the tau protein (seen in blue) in a brain affected by Alzheimer disease

not only the way I taught science but also the ways our educational system has shifted from an integrative approach to learning to one that is overly concerned with quickly testable answers and job placement. Yet, even if higher education is to indeed focus on the pursuit of “satisfied customers,” we must listen to those student “customers” in order to deliver a rewarding educational experience. It has become cliché to bemoan the influence of the profit motive in higher education and to speak wistfully of a time when education was viewed as a self-justifying public good that valued and taught leadership, citizenship, and other contributions to society above employment,<sup>3</sup> but I am here to assure you, with concrete data, that students themselves are bemoaning this loss. Our students want more out of their education than courses packed with content and frequently devoid of personal connection and the creative and collaborative problem solving of real-world challenges.



A pyramidal brain cell

### Questioning assumptions about student expectations

In 2016, I was teaching general biology at Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona, when a student described how bored he was in class. At the time, I took his comment as a personal critique of my teaching. The following year, another student, Bree, waited for me after class one day. With tears in her eyes, Bree told me that her father had always said that when she went to college, she would learn about the interconnectedness of life. She had made it to college but felt as if she were learning only dry and lifeless information. When Bree walked into our science classroom, she felt as if she were expected to leave her vitality and curiosity at the door and transform herself into someone distant and detached from her thoughts, her life, and even her joy. She was “disappointed in the dissonant experiences” of her college education. Bree felt that she and her classmates had little opportunity to nurture and “expand their minds.” The compartmentalized world of science made her feel disconnected from the realities of her world.

Bree’s disappointment mirrored my own in graduate school, and our discussions left me wondering how typical her experience was. Did her classmates feel similarly disenchanted? What about science students across the multi-campus Pima Community College? Or students at other institutions of higher education across the nation? When I queried STEM colleagues (locally and nationally) about what they believed their students wanted to get out of science courses, they too often gave the oversimplified response that their students wanted only an “A” in order to get into graduate school or secure a job. Expressing disappointment, instructors often said that during class discussions and lectures, students incessantly asked, “Is this going to be on the exam?”

Although I sensed my colleagues’ frustration, I didn’t understand why a student asking whether information was going to be on an exam indicated that the student didn’t care about the course content or wasn’t motivated by the sheer pleasure of learning. As I continued to question more science educators, I realized that their *perceptions* of what STEM students want from their science courses and their educations were, in fact, *assumptions* rather than empirically accurate descriptions.

When I asked my students to describe, either in their journal entries or on anonymous surveys,

what they hoped to get out of college, I also expected such typical responses as “to get a job” or “to go to medical school.” Instead, their answers surprised me. One student wrote that the aim of higher education is “to get assistance in the growth of knowledge and understanding of concepts and ideas that help develop an individual.” Another student wrote, “I struggle with a lack of belonging and sense of purpose. Having opportunities to grow as an adult and be more social with others is something I always crave.” A theme was emerging in my students’ feedback—the longing to experience meaningful connections.

So, what do I do when one of my students writes, “I do not think my science education prepared me to be an autonomous and independent thinker,” pleading with me to include more critical reasoning and logic training in a science course? Or, when another student writes that “it is important that we bring social justice . . . into the class, because it already shapes the way we live our lives outside the classroom”?

I began to regularly ask myself, Who (or what) sets my pedagogical framework and, as a result, influences the design of my curriculum? Is it the quest for truth and knowledge, my students, industry and future employers, professional schools, or the scientific community that I respond to when preparing and delivering instruction? Do I have an ethical responsibility to truly listen and accommodate students’ suggestions and expectations, or should I adhere to a curriculum increasingly influenced by industry’s demands and expectations? What might I risk if I don’t listen and respond to my students who want more than rote learning?

I have watched talented, creative, high-potential students walk away from the sciences because STEM curriculum lacks ethical, political, and creative significance. As another student wrote to me, “Life is hard and can be coming on you on some days, and the world feels drab and dull without passion. I wish my teacher knew just how badly some people struggle with the weight of the work and the world as you try to wriggle your way through the tight and unrelenting cookie-cutter format of the educational system.” I fear that such “cookie cutter” and impersonal education may alienate our most vulnerable students. Perhaps even worse, I worry that such education will sell short all of our students by not pushing them to reach their full creative potential.

### A holistic approach to STEM education

As a neuroscientist, I recognize that learning is a complex endeavor reflecting the multidimensionality of human beings. Fundamentally, learning (and teaching) entails changing the shape and activity of our brain’s nerve cells.<sup>4</sup> In order for learning to occur, we must cultivate meaningful connections and relationships.<sup>5</sup> If my students are feeling disenchanted by a disjointed educational curriculum, they will likely not reach their learning potential.

For me, it became increasingly critical that I tune in to my students and rethink my approach to science education. The stakes are high for both our STEM students and society as a whole: any educational philosophy that does not actively integrate, affirm, and promote creativity and freedom threatens to model and reinforce conformity, fragmentation, and overspecialization. What might be the effects of professional overspecialization on the world of higher education? By narrowing our curricular pathways,

Mays Imad at AAC&U's 2019 annual meeting



science education risks failing today's students not only by limiting their potential career paths but also by essentializing science by minimizing or ignoring its broader connections to other disciplines. A narrowed scientific curriculum also results in a lack of appreciation for the essential humanity of science—the beauty it both illuminates and inherently possesses.

As today's workforce expects, and even demands, highly specialized skills from its employees, educators must guard against the downsides of extreme specialization, including a reduction in the number of scientists capable of critiquing work outside their small and contracting fields of expertise, as well as monopolization of

knowledge by those hyper-focused experts.<sup>6</sup> Research suggests that scientists working within super-specialized fields and subfields experience a pronounced level of monotony, resulting in a decline in scientific productivity and innovation.<sup>7</sup>

Divergent and interdisciplinary thinking is needed for nearly every major global issue—from climate change, adequate access to food and water, mental and physical illness, and potential pandemics to the extinction of species and even inequality and racism. These challenges will require complex, sophisticated solutions developed by highly trained scientists from multiple disciplines who are capable of drawing from a depth and breadth of knowledge. Our future also depends upon scientists who represent greater diversity, which brings multiple world views, values, perspectives, cognitive styles, and experiences into the problem-solving processes to engender more robust solutions.

Science education must support the development of the whole person rather than just “the scientist within” if we are to prepare such informed, reflective, and collaborative thinkers.<sup>8</sup> My students’ comments repeatedly allude to their desire for more than scientific facts and information. A chemistry student, for example, described his learning as lacking in humanity: “We—teacher and student—really don’t see each other as fellow people or beings,” he writes. “It is taught that we need to act robotic and scientific, without realizing that no matter how methodical we act and learn, we are people dealing with outside influences that affect us and our success in the classroom.”

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A holistic approach to science education necessitates that educators cultivate healthy and meaningful relationships between the learner and knowledge, self, peers, professors, and community. For my own teaching, this means highlighting how what we are studying connects both to the course and to the world beyond the classroom. I ask students how the topic affects their daily lives, their peers’ lives, and their community. In a recent class, I used a lesson on osmosis to challenge students to think about where water comes from and what water scarcity is. We discussed the current and predicted water crisis around the world and tied the conversation to learning about the technology of reverse osmosis.

Another way to ignite students’ passion for science is to intentionally focus on the beauty within science and bring a sense of awe into



the classroom. During a discussion of my views on the integration of aesthetics into science, one of my colleagues said, “But biology is full of beauty.” I replied, “We don’t teach the beauty of biology—we teach facts and content.” Or, as one of my students, Ana, puts it: “It is not until very recently that I have begun to appreciate the beauty and knowledge found in nature and our reality. . . . There is a difference between *understanding* and *appreciating*. While it is possible to teach students both of these through science education, the appreciation is often lost in the academics.”

Comments like these inspire me to intentionally point to the beauty of what we are examining in the course. I bring related poems, songs, or works of art to class. I assign articles and ask students to reflect on what they find beautiful about the topic at hand and why.<sup>9</sup>

### Science student input and feedback

Recognizing that integrative learning-informed pedagogies are centered on and influenced by the learner, we must ask what our students expect from their college education. Are students satisfied with the way educational institutions are shifting from idyllic sanctuaries where inquisitive young minds can go to learn about themselves and the world to factory-like institutions exclusively focused on workforce development and job placement?

While multitudes of studies have been conducted to explore factors that affect student retention, success, and employability, student input is missing from the discussion about how colleges and universities can and should be adapting to the changing economic, social, and political landscape.<sup>10</sup> The lack of student involvement in curricular content and development is especially notable when it comes to community college students, who higher education leaders sometimes assume are primarily focused on becoming workforce competitive and are therefore less interested in transformative experiences resulting from their education.

Rather than make assumptions, I decided to empirically investigate what my science students seek from their education. I employed a phenomenological approach that used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.<sup>11</sup> Because I had already collected enough qualitative information in the form of journal entries, interviews, and other student materials, I focused on gathering quantitative data. My intention was not to gather data to run sophisticated statistical analysis or derive mathematical models to solve student persistence and retention problems. I wanted to more fully understand the science students at Pima Community College in order to enhance my teaching to better meet their needs. I developed a thirty-item survey for first- and second-year students enrolled in general biology courses. Students’ journal entries and responses to previous qualitative data informed the survey statements, which students were asked to consider on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 4 = Strongly Agree). The survey included statements that examined students’ relationships with their peers, professors, community, and “knowledge.” That final category addressed students’ perceptions and expectations of their science education, specifically as it connects to a liberal education.

A total of 117 participants took the survey. This is what the survey found:

- Engagement and empathy: Students were asked to rate how much they agreed that “in my science courses, I often feel that the materials we’re studying are dry.” Out of those who participated, 41.9 percent either agreed or strongly agreed, while 39.1 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that, “the current state of college science education lacks empathy.”
- Stories and purpose: Students were asked to rate how much they agreed that “in class, having a clear sense of purpose helps me learn.” Out of those who participated, 99.1 percent either agreed or strongly agreed, while 72.9 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that “using storytelling to teach science would help me learn better.”
- Arts and beauty: Students were asked to rate how much they agreed that “I wish my science professors intentionally highlighted the beauty within science.” Out of those who participated, 76.7 percent either agreed or strongly agreed, while 56.4 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that “science classes should incorporate arts into the curriculum.”
- Logic and ethics: Students were asked to rate how much they agreed that “science classes should incorporate logic and critical reasoning skill into the curriculum.” Out of those who participated, 90.6 percent either agreed or strongly agreed, while 84.6 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that “science classes should incorporate ethical reasoning skills into the curriculum.”<sup>12</sup>

These survey responses suggest that educators’ assumptions about what factors motivate students, especially those attending community colleges, are inaccurate and damaging, resulting in misguided attempts to inform science education. The current focus on job placement and workforce development, especially in STEM, may not be well aligned with what our students actually desire to get out of their learning experiences. Yes, students want an education that will help them attain a good job after they graduate, but they also want more.

This inquiry has led me to the following realizations:

1. Educators should not assume that we know what our students want from their education. Instead, we should work with our students to make informed curricular decisions

that engage and retain them in science fields. Instead of viewing our students as data points or as customers, we should partner with them.<sup>13</sup> Our students hold the answers to some of the more difficult questions in higher education; they are insightful, brilliant, and ready to work with us.

2. Community colleges serve more than 40 percent of undergraduate students in the US, and it is critical that any higher education initiatives include the voice of community college educators and students.<sup>14</sup>
3. To deliver science content that is meaningful to our students, we must recognize that STEM students want a well-rounded education.

Fortified with these findings, I have begun to re-examine the reasons for the persistent gender and underrepresented minority gaps in STEM.<sup>15</sup> How much of the persistence in the achievement gap is, in part, due to the lack of a holistic, interdisciplinary, and culturally responsive approach to STEM education? What if our most vulnerable and marginalized students are leaving STEM because they are finding it difficult to connect and relate? We need a paradigm shift to a holistic approach guided by a student-centered, culturally responsive, liberal (and liberating) STEM education.<sup>16</sup>

### **Meaningful learning**

With humanities programs being pared down in the pursuit of STEM curricula, I fear that our students will miss one of the greatest opportunities to develop the means to think critically and creatively—that is, applying their newfound technical skills to real-world obstacles. Equally poignant, however, will be their concomitant loss of opportunity to explore the world’s different perspectives through a variety of lenses—both technical and artistic. Reversing this trend can be both rewarding and cost-effective, leading to graduates who leave college with more personal fulfillment and allowing employers to gain new-hires capable of dynamic problem solving.

While studying for a neuroanatomy exam in graduate school, one of my classmates commented on the beauty of the mechanism of brain development we were studying. His comment encouraged me to reflect on the unifying nature of science. Those accidental moments when science reveals beauty are what prevented me from dropping out of graduate school and

helped me remain committed to science. I learned to recognize and appreciate the power of knowing and of discovery, and I saw beyond numbers, equations, and job placement. I began to look for humanity and real-world connections in the subjects I was studying. While preparing for my dissertation defense, I tried describing a neuronal cell to my mother (who is not a scientist) and how each cell contains a world of its own that reflects my own beauty and that of the world around me. Perplexed, my mom said, “It’s like you’re in love.” Ten years later, I was grading an essay on the neurophysiology of the eye written by one of my students, Bryan. I could not stop smiling because of sheer joy. It was like I was reading poetry or a beautiful story. Bryan was in love.

I want my students to experience a pedagogy of wholeness and interconnectedness that allows us to uncover deeper truths about our inner self, our fellow human beings, and our world. Serendipitous discovery is at once the force for inspired teaching and the alluring epiphany behind self-sustained learning. I seek to empower my STEM students to learn to recognize and appreciate that through our interconnectedness, we can glimpse our connection to the eternal and discover meaning in patterns, order in chaos, direction in ambiguity, and enduring beauty in the face of uncertainty. 

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ANN KOWAL SMITH

# Shakespeare on the Shop Floor

## Literature at work and in the community

AT THE PHILADELPHIA-AREA MANUFACTURER GGBearings, employees representing every corner of the plant—from the company president to machinists, engineers, and finance staff members—have assembled in the conference room. The balanced mix of men and women varies in age, race, and background. Some are in uniform, others in business-casual dress. A

few wear steel-toed shoes and have safety goggles strapped to their heads.

At first glance, the gathering might appear to be a typical factory meeting. Leading the discussion, though, is

not the company president but a literature professor from Bryn Mawr College. The topic? *Othello*. While a four-hundred-year-old play whose main characters speak in iambic pentameter might not seem related to a twenty-first-century manufacturing plant, it turns out that Shakespeare has a lot to offer contemporary employees.

“To think that [Shakespeare] can write a book like that, that is still relevant today and can still be discussed, in a way he was so far ahead of his time,” says a GGBearings tooling machinist in his fifties. “It really opened my eyes.”

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ANN KOWAL SMITH is founder and executive director of Books@Work ([www.booksatwork.org](http://www.booksatwork.org)), a national nonprofit organization that humanizes the workplace, from the shop floor to the C-suite, through facilitated conversations about narrative literature. This article expands on a panel session about demonstrating the value of the humanities outside of academia, which she led at AAC&U’s 2019 annual meeting.

The reading program at GGBearings, run by the nonprofit Books@Work, is much more than a book club for nostalgic English majors. It is a bridge between a liberal education and the workplace. Literature offers an unparalleled lens on the human experience; it unlocks the conversations we don’t usually have at work and helps us to make sense of the world we share, individually and together. Literature matters because it challenges us and forces us to reflect on how we want to live. Classes that only analyze literary texts fail to connect literature to students’ personal experiences and rob it of its powerful ability to offer reflection, insight, and interpersonal connection. Books@Work, which delivers book and story discussions facilitated by local college professors, aims to demonstrate the impact of literature in workplaces and communities across the country and around the globe.

“Literature was written not for us in the classroom—it was written to reflect real life,” points out frequent Books@Work partner Alexis Baker, assistant professor of English at Kent State University. When she leads a Books@Work session, she says, “we’re not even talking about the book in terms of character or plot but about the [larger] issues and themes. We’re talking about the book but in a very broad, real-life kind of way.”

### Company connections

Started in Ohio in 2009 with a pilot program involving food service employees at AVI Food-systems and professors from Hiram College, Books@Work today partners with companies in health care, manufacturing, distribution, technology, and professional services, as well as a variety of nonprofit organizations. It has also worked with urban parents, facilitated discussions



Employees at the manufacturing company GGBearings and Books@Work executive director Ann Kowal Smith (at the far wall) participate in a small-group discussion during a Books@Work "Big Read."

of short stories among Cleveland police officers and residents, and helped conduct a court-mandated life-skills class—which included literature discussions—for women to take in lieu of serving time in prison.

Books@Work has so far facilitated 360 reading groups for 6,265 participants at 60 organizations in 22 states and nine countries (including Brazil, China, Germany, and Mexico). Most sessions take place on company time, and a program usually runs for ten to twelve sessions, with the length and frequency tailored to the needs of the company. Courses use a variety of literature, ranging from the pillars of the Western canon, such as Greek tragedies and Shakespeare, to contemporary novels, short stories, poetry, and narrative nonfiction from diverse and emerging voices. Books@Work selects texts based on the interests of the group and the passions of the professor.

Managers say the program has increased employee contributions and collaboration, with confidence and communication skills built during the course spilling over into participants'

professional work. Companies use the program within teams (such as sales, project, or leadership teams) and across hierarchies and functions, with groups

consisting of participants from all levels of an organization. Susan Sweeney, president of GGBearings, takes part in Books@Work by participating in both a cross-functional group and a group composed of her own leadership team. “There is a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other after exchanging personal insights and sharing stories,” she says. “One team member said that this was the most genuine form of community building and culture creation that he had ever experienced.”

The employees at GGBearings have been reading and meeting together for more than three years with professors from several local colleges and universities, including the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, and Swarthmore College. Program participants gather around a table, some eating lunch as they animatedly discuss the assigned reading. The professor leading the discussion asks open-ended questions and encourages the entire group to offer layered and nuanced responses about the book or story they are reading together. Participants hear

and share diverse perspectives and actively contribute to the formation of a community where they live and work. These conversations build powerful bridges between diverse groups of people who, due to company culture, hierarchy, and job roles, would not likely be in the same room together—let alone sitting at the same table—as peers.

“I don’t care if you’re the president of the corporation or the custodian, you have an equal voice in the discussion,” Baker says. “It levels the playing field. We’re just people trying to figure stuff out.”

The GGBearings tooling machinist says that he’s noticed a change in the relationship between the reading group participants, that they’ve come to better know and understand each other. A coworker he’d only known in passing he now considers a friend. “I knew her by name, but we talk a lot more than we ever would have before,” he says. “You build friendships through [these discussions], and you understand that there are people who see things a bit differently, but they open you up to so many other avenues to look at things.”

The tooling machinist describes how his colleagues broadened his understanding of *Othello*. The machinist saw a father mourning the theft of his daughter. But to his surprise, many of the women described the romance they saw in the play. “As a father myself, when [Brabantio’s] daughter just eloped in the middle of the night, who wouldn’t be angry?” the machinist says. “I can’t believe this stuff is hundreds of years old.”

“We’ve all gotten comfortable with each other. I know [others] are going to come at things with a different view,” says one administrative employee at a health care company. The reading program, she says, has opened her up to listening to more views: “This has definitely made me think more as somebody starts to talk that I really want to hear their opinion, so I’m just going to shut up and listen and see what they have to say.”

Baker led her first Books@Work sessions at a law firm in the Midwest with a group of clerical staff, paralegals, IT support staff, and a few lawyers, including a senior partner. They challenged each other and openly debated their views, irrespective of seniority. “Everybody had a voice. It was equity, it was equality, it was democratic, it was open access in its truest form,” Baker says. “I had been teaching for sixteen years at that

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point, so not much surprises you, but I remember being absolutely delighted by the depths and complexity of discussion."

Recently, Baker helped conduct a Books@Work "Big Read" at a Veterans Affairs domiciliary in Cleveland, a residential treatment facility for veterans struggling with addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder, and traumatic injuries. For the Big Read, Baker and seven other professors from Case Western Reserve University, Oberlin College, and other institutions led small-group discussions of Philip Levine's "What Work Is." The poem's narrator describes the experience of waiting for work at a Detroit automobile plant and mistaking another waiting worker for his brother. The poem challenges the assumptions we make about our colleagues and their life experiences. The veterans "understood it from a totally different perspective than I ever could—what loyalty means, what brotherhood means," Baker says. "I learned something."

#### A facilitator mind-set

Books@Work professors—as of this writing, 300 professors from 111 institutions have led reading groups, often more than once—do not teach but, rather, they facilitate discussions of literature. Grounded in, but not limited to, the literature, these discussions encourage emotional awareness and social interaction. Because for many professors the experience of working with nontraditional learners is new, the organization coaches and supports professors in transitioning from teaching to facilitating.

For professors, the opportunity is powerful: to explore literature and its effect in the real world with a diverse set of readers. But the impact is huge. By bringing the liberal arts into the world, Books@Work communicates the value of a liberal education and underscores the role of the humanities as a mirror for the multiple ways we experience the human condition. As the liberal arts continue to suffer from the misguided perception that they are unnecessary or even frivolous, Books@Work professors help demonstrate how much we need broader rather than narrower approaches to the contemporary challenges of the workplace and the community.

Michelle Hite, assistant professor of English and director of the honors program at Spelman College, is a frequent Books@Work professor who embodies the facilitator mind-set. Through Books@Work, Hite has led discussions with manufacturing leaders, consultants, and employees

in a manufacturing learning and development center in the Atlanta area. She was the first in her family to go to college but says she was "far from the first intellectual." During quiet afternoons on her family's front porch, her grandfather used to sit quietly thinking. Family members and visitors never found his behavior odd and, in fact, were drawn to his contemplative presence and the insights he used to offer. "He was offering them something, and I associated it with the times that I saw him thinking," she says. "He restored them, healed them, gave them something meaningful."



In leading Books@Work sessions, Hite delights in finding the familiar feeling of her grandfather's porch as she helps colleagues build community around their ideas about literature. When she teaches a class at Spelman, she presents a formal persona. When she leads a Books@Work session, however, she goes by Michelle, rather than Dr. Hite. When she's Michelle, she's less concerned about teaching and more focused on facilitating. Instead of analyzing the text or its context like she would with a college class, Hite helps Books@Work participants use the reading as a platform to explore humanity and engage with the stories and characters through their life experiences.

As on Hite's grandfather's front porch, Books@Work conversations are casual, but through the collision of different perspectives, the experience builds and deepens sustainable relationships. "The work of the facilitator," she explains, "is to know the story well enough that you can take for granted that you know what happens in it. So, you can be available to listen to what people are saying about it."

**GGBearings employees share diverse perspectives during Books@Work reading sessions, interacting with colleagues from across the company.**

And the listening is critical. Well-crafted questions create opportunities for quality reflection and listening. A good question is about making space for a variety of answers that open people up to the possibility of alternative points of view. The queries need not be complicated, but they must be varied and open-ended; the best questions have no single or correct answer.

Hite's first Books@Work session was held with employees of EnPro Industries, a large engineered-products manufacturer based in Charlotte, North Carolina. The predominantly male group of plant leaders and manufacturing experts read Charles Johnson's "Menagerie, a Child's Fable." In this provocative short story, a pet store owner goes missing, and a mischievous monkey convinces the watchdog to retrieve the keys and unlock the cages so that the animals don't starve. Although the animals try to behave, they ultimately cannot move beyond their own

singular interests. The story ends in disaster, and only one animal survives. The fable raises complicated issues of leadership and collaboration and

touches on a topic of particular interest to the EnPro workers: the development and support of self-managed teams.

Hite began the discussion of "Menagerie" by asking the reading group to reflect on what the animals did well. Ready to discuss the animals' failures, the participants were caught off guard by the question, which challenged their initial assumptions about the characters and their motives. Hite turned what might have been a moralizing discussion about the failure of cooperation into a debate on the nuanced challenges of collaboration and hierarchy, both directly and indirectly linked to the text and to the participants' shared work experiences. Because it challenged the readers to find the positive in a seemingly negative story, her question also caused them to revisit their initial impressions. They ended up returning to the text to mine for missed details. In the end, Hite unlocked the "cages" of traditional learning to encourage personal reflection enriched by both the discussion and the text.

"I'm trying to build trust with the group. I'm asking them real questions. It's not a prompt," she says. "When I ask my college students

questions about [Toni Morrison's] *Beloved*, for example, I'm prompting them to answer me in ways that prove that they've read the text. When I'm asking questions at Books@Work, I don't have a text-focused answer."

### **Back on campus**

If the Books@Work method makes literature more accessible in a nontraditional setting, then could approaching readings through life experience be effective in a college classroom, too? Laura Baudot, associate professor of English and associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Oberlin College, has built a career on literary criticism and scholarly productivity. When she started leading Books@Work sessions, the method of teaching literature proved surprising. "I knew it was going to be a different mode," she says. She was curious, because she had, by her own admission, little experience of how nonacademic readers approach and enjoy

### **A good question is about making space for a variety of answers that open people up to the possibility of alternative points of view.**

### **THE ART OF QUESTIONING**

In a Books@Work session, facilitators and participants use literary stories and characters to ask and explore questions about human nature and human relationships. On a more practical level, facilitators deploy questions to elicit deep responses from readers. Good questioning typically depends on an interplay of three categories of questions:

- **Text-based** questions probe neither literary device nor plot but rather the patterns, themes, and character traits that link the text to an exploration of shared experience. These questions are not about comprehension.  
*Examples: Did the character make the right decision? Which character was in the right?*
- **Human questions** connect to a more direct exploration of humanity, bridging the text and universal human experience.  
*Examples: What makes a good leader? How can power blind us?*
- **Life questions** encourage participants to see and share parallels between the stories and their own personal experience, or the circumstances or challenges they face in their work.  
*Examples: How necessary is it to love your work? Have you ever felt powerless despite your authority?*

—ANN KOWAL SMITH

literature. “I was interested in breaking down that fine area between literary critical approaches and personal relevance,” she says.

For one Books@Work session, she read short stories by John Steinbeck with employees at a manufacturing plant. The experience caused her to reevaluate the stories and their impact on readers. The plant employees balanced fresh, relevant perspectives with a genuine interest in more detailed literary analysis. Steinbeck’s stories, even for untrained readers, Baudot says, “raise broader social questions, but [they] also have these mysteries that you could only figure out by thinking more about a character, by engaging with the literary questions.”

The plant employees also recognized in their discussions the mix of personal interpretation and literary evaluation. “I didn’t even know you were supposed to or able to have different opinions or different interpretations of things that happen in books,” one participant says. “I know that sounds weird, but I thought it was black and white. I didn’t think that I could find my own conclusions.”

Intrigued by the richness and personal connections emerging from the Books@Work discussions, Baudot began to use the program’s discussion methods in her courses at Oberlin. While teaching James Joyce’s story “The Dead,” Baudot asked the students if they could personally relate to Gabriel, the socially awkward main character. A particularly adroit group of literature students usually dominated class discussions, but Baudot’s question created an opportunity for other students to contribute their thoughts and energy to the conversation. The students who normally shied away from literary critique came alive when asked to insert their own experience into the interpretation of the text, awakening a clear connection to a story written more than a hundred years ago.

Baudot recently created a retreat at Oberlin for sophomores to help them choose their majors. Eager for the students to explore the context of the decision in a more reflective and considered way, she asked me, as founder and executive director of Books@Work, for ideas of texts that might invite her students to reflect on their choices and on choice in general. I suggested Ken Liu’s “A Perfect Match.” The story’s theme of the balance between privacy and convenience spurred the students to examine the lengths we need to go in order to preserve free will and choice in times of rapid technological change.

The focus on the extent to which humans must fight to preserve autonomy also gave new importance to the decision at hand: picking a major with thoughtfulness, seriousness, and care.

In connecting literary works to students’ individual experiences, Baudot helps her students begin a relationship with literature that assists them in thinking about life’s biggest, hardest questions. She aims to “have taught them how reading teaches us how to have more meaningful lives,” she says. “Not to live better, not necessarily to be more moral, but to have a more meaningful existence.”

### A larger conversation

Literature allows readers to live through and make sense of others’ struggles and take meaning from them. By transporting literature from a classroom lesson to a conference room conversation, its characters, messages, and themes take on relevance and connection to the challenges of everyday life. “Literature gives readers the benefit of snuggling close to the human experience, and to the human condition, without having to endure the experience themselves,” Hite says.

Not only do the stories come alive, but the readers do as well. In an inherently social learning context, well beyond the walls of the traditional college classroom, Books@Work participants build bonds that extend into the workplace and deepen organizational trust, inclusion, and collaboration, as well as enhance personal skills like critical thinking, active listening, and collaborative problem solving. And they see each other and the stories they share (from the text and from their own lives) in new ways.

When Hite leads a Books@Work session, she’s facilitating not simply as a professor but as a wife, mother, and neighbor to foster a larger cultural conversation she and the participants can explore together. “Talking to people who reflect on how a story has helped them in their home lives to be thoughtful, to be engaged and present” has reinforced her faith in the power of the humanities in the world and reminded her of the value of literature. This reading group space, she says, “is my front porch.” 

FREDERICK M. LAWRENCE

# For the Love of Learning

OURS IS A HYPERPARTISAN MOMENT. For mission-driven nonpartisan institutions, operating in these times can be particularly challenging. My first board meeting as secretary and CEO of the Phi Beta Kappa Society was held a few weeks after the 2016 elections.<sup>1</sup> In crafting my opening remarks, I found myself in an awkward position. On the one hand, I wanted to convey a sense of urgency and the heightened relevance of a venerable American institution that, since its founding in 1776, has stood for the value of knowledge and free inquiry; on the other hand, I did not want to signal that these core commitments were linked to any one

political party or to a particular electoral outcome. My solution was to articulate the concept of nonpartisan advocacy as a way of emphasizing that Phi Beta Kappa's values are to be found beyond the

realm of partisan politics and offer possibilities for finding common ground in both nonpartisan and bipartisan work. Nonpartisan advocacy is a concept to which I have continued to return.<sup>2</sup>

Ten years ago, the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences (CCAS) honored Phi Beta

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**In our current political climate, the idea of nonpartisan advocacy seems oxymoronic. It is not. The value of nonpartisan advocacy for our civil society has perhaps never been greater.**



Kappa with the Arts and Sciences Advocacy Award. Then, as now, Phi Beta Kappa's advocacy for the arts and sciences flowed from the society's mission: to champion education in the liberal arts and sciences, to foster freedom of thought, and to recognize academic excellence. The society is not unique in conducting such nonpartisan advocacy. Other recipients of the CCAS Advocacy Award include such nonpartisan institutions as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Federation of State Humanities Councils, and the American Council of Learned Societies. Each in its own way advocates for the broad societal value of the arts, humanities, and sciences, and each does so in a manner that is not aligned with a politically partisan position. In our current political climate, the idea of nonpartisan advocacy seems oxymoronic. It is not. The value of nonpartisan advocacy for our civil society has perhaps never been greater.

## Nonpartisan advocacy and the mission of the university



### A flourishing state

Nonpartisan advocacy begins not with a party affiliation or platform but with the endorsement of a set of ideals, usually at a relatively high level of abstraction, that are central to the mission of an institution.<sup>3</sup> Phi Beta Kappa's historic commitment to the liberal arts and sciences provides the grounding for such ideals, in turn driving an advocacy agenda. Derived from a long history of commitment to the liberal arts, Phi Beta Kappa's advocacy work draws upon the conviction that these deep-seated values are relevant to the public good.

Phi Beta Kappa was founded on December 5, 1776, when five undergraduates from the College of William & Mary met in the Apollo Room of the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg, Virginia. They adopted the Latin name *Societas Philosophiae*, or Philosophical Society, and a motto in Greek, Φιλοσοφία Βίου Κυβερνήτης, from

whose initials the society draws its name: ΦΒΚ. We usually translate the motto as “love of learning is the guide of life.” However, in classical Greek, *Κυβερνήτης*, one of the roots of the English word “governor,” has a marine connotation—thus, “pilot” may be a better translation than “guide.” There is a subtle and significant difference. A guide takes us along a path that already exists; a pilot steers us out into the water where there is no path. Sometimes those waters are choppy and uncertain—as they were in 1776 and in so many ways are today. The founders of Phi Beta Kappa made an astonishing commitment to each other that night: when the waters were choppy, it would be the love of learning—not the crown nor any dogma—that would serve as their pilot.

This process of learning concerns both the inner shifts of vision that produce a meaningful life and the outward-facing process that builds community and brings about change locally, nationally, and globally. Perhaps the best example of the way in which the “love of learning” has directed Phi Beta Kappa toward nonpartisan advocacy is the society’s signature legislative accomplishment—the creation of the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities.

In 1963, Phi Beta Kappa, along with the American Council of Learned Societies and the Council of Graduate Schools in America, cosponsored the establishment of a National Commission on the Humanities, chaired by Brown University President Barnaby Keeney. The commission conducted a study of the “state of the humanities in America,” which concluded that a general emphasis on science threatened the study of the humanities from elementary school through postgraduate education. To address this trend, the commission in 1964 recommended that Congress and President Lyndon B. Johnson establish a national humanities foundation. With strong public endorsement from the White House, congressional supporters introduced a bill to implement the commission’s recommendations. Congress ultimately

approved the legislation by wide margins and on a bipartisan basis. On September 29, 1965, Johnson signed into law the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, which led to the creation of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts.<sup>4</sup>

The law sets forth the purpose of creating and maintaining national endowments to support the humanities and the arts, demonstrating a nonpartisan commitment to the advancement of the liberal arts not only on campuses but also throughout society. The statute opens with the ringing assertion that the “arts and the

humanities belong to all the people of the United States”<sup>5</sup> and proclaims that the purpose of such “scholarly and cultural activity [is] to achieve a better

understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future.”<sup>6</sup> Far from advancing a particular political vision of American society, the endowments support work advancing “the nation’s rich cultural heritage and [foster] mutual respect for the diverse beliefs and values of all persons and groups.”<sup>7</sup>

**To determine whether advocacy is nonpartisan, institutions must examine the advocacy's fundamental source. Does it come from a core apolitical value of the institution?**



AAC&U President  
Lynn Pasquerella

These words echo those of George Washington’s to Congress nearly two centuries earlier: “The assembly to which I address myself is too enlightened not to be fully sensible how much a flourishing state of the arts and sciences contributes to national prosperity and reputation.”<sup>8</sup>

I do not look to the legislation that created the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities in nostalgia for a lost world of consensus. Rather, I look to it as a statement of what nonpartisan advocacy in support of the arts, humanities, and sciences can achieve and as an example of concrete legislative action furthering society’s fundamental values.

**A public good**

A decade and a half later, in 1981, Phi Beta Kappa was among the founding members of the National Humanities Alliance (NHA), a nonpartisan advocacy coalition dedicated to advancing the humanities. More recently, over the past two years, Phi Beta Kappa staff and members, along with advocates from the range of institutions that belong to the NHA, successfully worked to prevent the defunding of public support for the humanities and maintain and even increase funding for the National Endowments. These advocacy efforts took the form of in-person meetings with members of Congress and their staffs, as well as written, phone, and electronic communication with congressional offices.<sup>9</sup> Rather than marking a reduction, fiscal year 2018 funding for both the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities ended up increasing from the prior year. Whereas the Trump administration had aimed to shut down the National Endowments completely, requesting appropriations of only \$42.3 million to transition to their closure, the actual appropriation was \$152.8 million, the highest level since fiscal year 2014, adjusted for inflation. The appropriations for fiscal year 2019 represented yet another increase, to \$155 million, and, in planning the fiscal year 2020 budget, the funding bill proposed by the House Appropriation Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies includes an appropriation of \$167.5 million for the National Endowments.

Phi Beta Kappa’s support for the National Endowments stems from its core commitment to the liberal arts in the broadest sense and to the concomitant belief that a broad public engagement with the arts and humanities is a

public good, and thus calls for appropriate public expenditure.<sup>10</sup> This is neither a liberal nor a conservative commitment, and it is certainly not a partisan commitment to support one political party or another. Indeed, the success of this advocacy is precisely its ability to bridge partisan divides.

The society's commitment to the liberal arts drives an advocacy agenda that goes beyond support for the endowments. Through its National Arts and Sciences Initiative, Phi Beta Kappa sponsors and facilitates programs and activities, on campuses and in the broader community, that seek to cultivate champions for the arts and sciences and to demonstrate the relevance and vitality of the liberal arts. Such work is itself a powerful form of advocacy for Phi Beta Kappa's historic values.

The line between nonpartisan and partisan may not always appear easy to draw. Some issues, while not in and of themselves partisan, have been seen to be partisan because of the correlation between positions taken on that issue and political affiliation. Consider, for example, the use of science-based research to provide a factual basis for a policy debate. Since at least the time of Francis Bacon, those engaged in understanding the physical world have used principles of inductive reasoning to produce refutable propositions that might be tested by data and observable phenomena.<sup>11</sup> Advocacy on behalf of such research per se ought not to be seen as partisan in any manner. Although any particular policy recommendation drawn from scientific evidence may be partisan, the scientific findings themselves and the methods used to derive these findings are not partisan. This underscores the importance of avoiding political intrusion into the process of evaluating grants to support scientific research.

To determine whether advocacy is nonpartisan, institutions must examine the advocacy's fundamental source. Does it come from a core apolitical value of the institution? Consider, for example, Phi Beta Kappa's core value that the liberal arts, in people's formal educations and throughout their lives, facilitates meaningful and productive lives and thereby produces a public good. A nonprofit may certainly engage in advocacy to advance its values. There are, of course, limits to advocacy by nonprofit organizations when that work is based on a political or ideological program or position. For example, what if an institution sought formally to endorse the

platform of a political party or to endorse a particular candidate? Here nonprofit groups would jeopardize their ability to advocate in a nonpolitical manner, to say nothing of their tax-exempt status.<sup>12</sup>

### **Underlying values**

Colleges and universities, too, must ask if the mission of their institution permits them—and perhaps even encourages them—to engage in some forms of nonpartisan advocacy. Although private and public institutions of higher learning may confront the question differently, the inquiry will be whether an institution's mission compels not only teaching and scholarship but also advocacy if the values underlying the education and research enterprise themselves are endangered. In its seminal 1915 *Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure*, the American Association of University Professors articulated three core functions of the university:

1. To promote inquiry and advance the sum of human knowledge
2. To provide general instruction to students
3. To develop experts for various branches of the public service<sup>13</sup>

To these we might add the quasi-constitutional role that the university can play in a broad system of checks and balances that goes beyond the branches of government. Colleges and universities, although not mentioned in the US Constitution, play a critical role in a democratic and self-governing society. Sources of authority are meant to be widely distributed in our democratic system, countering the risk of a concentration of power. In this sense, the public good of higher education institutions includes inquiry, scholarship, research, and expertise that check political power.

The advocacy that flows from such an understanding of the mission of the university includes advocacy for academic freedom, advocacy for free inquiry, advocacy for free expression, and advocacy for the liberal arts and sciences as a public good on our campuses and in our communities. Such advocacy can take the form of public programs and writings demonstrating the value of the arts and sciences, or outreach to public officials to urge support for higher education and to argue against interference with academic freedom and expression. Instrumentally, nonpartisan advocacy by the alumni of public colleges and universities may argue for increased

state funding for their institutions and for public higher education in general.<sup>14</sup>

Having concluded the institutions of higher learning *may* engage in nonpartisan advocacy begs the question as to the extent colleges and universities *should* be engaged in such advocacy efforts on their campuses, in their communities, and on a national level. To answer this, we must first consider another fundamental and essential question—on whose behalf would the institution be advocating? This in turn brings us to the very nature of our universities.

American colleges and universities have played a singular role in our society. They are the institutions that educate each generation of students so they can lead meaningful, productive, and engaged lives. They have been one of the core engines of social mobility from

colonial times, enabling the children of farmers to become professionals and opening a new world of higher education through the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act of 1862. From the late nineteenth through early twentieth

centuries, institutions of higher education have enabled children of immigrants to enter the American economy and society. The path was not always a straight one. Women and African Americans were excluded from higher education until Oberlin opened its doors to them in 1833 and Mount Holyoke did so in 1837. In the mid-twentieth century, colleges and universities allowed returning World War II veterans to advance through the visionary GI Bill. In our own time, higher education aspires for students from around the globe and every stratum of American society to obtain an education and thereby claim prerogatives promised by a free society.

#### In the name of the mission

To advocate on behalf of a college or university is to advocate less on behalf of its stakeholders and more on behalf of its mission. The point was well elucidated two hundred years ago this year in a celebrated Supreme Court opinion, *Dartmouth College v. Woodward*.<sup>15</sup> Although Dartmouth College is more remembered today as the initial case to interpret a fairly technical clause in Article I of the United States Constitution that prohibits a state from passing a law

“impairing the obligation of contracts,”<sup>16</sup> it is also the case in which Chief Justice John Marshall laid the legal foundation of institutions of higher learning in the new republic. Prior to adjudicating the constitutionality of New Hampshire’s attempt to amend the Dartmouth College charter, the court had to consider the question of legal standing, that is, who may assert this constitutional claim against the State of New Hampshire. Marshall found that the college trustees could assert the claim even though they had “no beneficial interest to be protected.” The standing of the trustees was derived from the charter itself which, Marshall wrote, created an “artificial immortal being,” a thing of “inestimable value.”

The thing that is of inestimable value is, strictly speaking, not the college itself but rather the *mission* of the college. Although the articulated missions of universities and colleges will vary, most—if not all—involve the pursuit and transmission of knowledge in the belief that the transmission of knowledge creates a public good. Knowledge is pursued both in teaching-centered colleges and in research-based universities, because the knowledge that is sought may be that which is inherited, discovered, created, or even reconsidered and revised. Similarly, both teaching and scholarship transmit knowledge. It is only by speaking in the name of the mission that one speaks in the name of an institution of higher learning, and advocacy on behalf of the institution must be derived from, and promote, this mission.

Marshall’s “thing of inestimable value” was captured by the founders of Phi Beta Kappa, who spoke not just of learning itself but of the *love* of learning that would be the pilot of their lives. Their words inspired and presaged an understanding of what would become the highest aspirations of the new republic founded contemporaneously with the society. As articulated in the National Endowments legislation, “The world leadership which has come to the United States cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth, and technology, but must be solidly founded upon worldwide respect and admiration for the Nation’s high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit.”<sup>17</sup> 

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#### NOTES

1. The governing board of the Phi Beta Kappa Society is known as the Phi Beta Kappa Senate.

2. This article is based on the author's lectures presented to the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences on the occasion of receiving the CCAS Arts & Sciences Advocacy Award on November 15, 2018, and to the New American Colleges and Universities on the occasion of receiving the Ernest Boyer Award on January 24, 2019. It is also drawn from materials in Frederick Lawrence, *The Rise of Campus Counsel: Higher Education and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).
3. This article is concerned with nonpartisan advocacy by nonprofit institutions. Nonpartisan advocacy on behalf of a particular industry, for example, would not be expected to fit the model of advocacy driven by a commitment to a set of ideals at a high level of abstraction.
4. See <https://www.neh.gov>.
5. National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. § 951.1 (1965).
6. National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, § 951.3.
7. National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, § 951.6.
8. George Washington, State of the Union Address (address, Philadelphia, PA, December 7, 1796), The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/200398>.
9. For the range of means by which advocacy for the arts and sciences may be accomplished, see the Phi Beta Kappa National Arts & Sciences Initiative tool kit, [toolkit.pbk.org](http://toolkit.pbk.org).
10. For an example, see Paul A. Samuelson, "The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 36, no. 4 (November 1954): 387–89.
11. Francis Bacon was the first to formalize the concept of a scientific method in the early seventeenth century, in *Novum Organum Scientiarum*, itself part of the larger work *Instauratio Magna* (1620).
12. See "The Restriction of Political Campaign Intervention by Section 501(c)(3) Tax-Exempt Organizations," [irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/the-restriction-of-political-campaign-intervention-by-section-501c3-tax-exempt-organizations](https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/the-restriction-of-political-campaign-intervention-by-section-501c3-tax-exempt-organizations).
13. *Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure*, American Association of University Professors, § 3 (1915).
14. For an example, see the advocacy efforts to support public higher education coordinated by the University of Texas at Austin (<https://www.texasexes.org/get-involved/advocate-ut>) and the Public Higher Education Legislative Advocacy Professionals (<https://phelap.wordpress.com/about>).
15. *Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, 17 U.S. 518, 589 (1819).
16. U.S. Const., art. I, § 10.1.
17. National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. § 951.8 (1965).

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WILLIAM T. BOLLING

# Making the Policy Case

**A former state politician offers insight on how higher ed can better convey its value and mission to lawmakers**

HIGHER EDUCATION—particularly the liberal arts—has been under attack for several decades, with the 2008 financial crisis intensifying questions about the value of a college degree. Attacks have only worsened in the current political climate. In a 2017 Pew Research

Center poll, 58 percent of Republicans—up from 37 percent in 2015—said that college had a negative effect on the United States.<sup>1</sup> In a 2018 Gallup poll, only 33 percent of Republicans and 56 percent of Democrats said they were

confident in US colleges.<sup>2</sup> Republicans cited politics, agenda, and subject matter for their lack of confidence, while Democrats most frequently noted cost as an issue.

With policies affecting funding, support for students, endowments, and more at stake, how can colleges and universities effectively demonstrate their value to policy makers and key community figures? For some insight and advice, *Liberal Education's* Christen Aragoni spoke with William T. Bolling, former Lieutenant Governor of Virginia (2006–14) and emeritus senior fellow

WILLIAM T. BOLLING is former lieutenant governor of Virginia (2006–14) and emeritus senior fellow in residence for public service at James Madison University. During AAC&U's 2019 annual meeting, he participated in the panel discussion "Affirming the Mission: The Liberal Arts and America's Future."

in residence for public service at James Madison University, about how higher education leaders can make their case.

**How did a college education make a difference in your life? How do colleges, even those reticent of appearing political, tap alumni ambassadors to help demonstrate the value of attending college?**

I grew up in the heart of the Appalachian coalfields. My dad had only an eighth-grade education, and my mom had only graduated from high school, but they both understood the importance of education in enabling me to have opportunities in life that they never had. They insisted from an early age that I was going to go to college, and, of course, I did. That enabled me to do things, go places, and achieve more than I would have ever dreamed possible. There are a lot of people out there who have similar stories, and getting them to share their experiences with young people who may not think it is possible for them to go to college can make a huge difference in their lives. I don't see that as being political. It's just common sense. The challenge is identifying these people and getting them engaged as mentors and role models.

**You served as a lieutenant governor of Virginia as a Republican. How can you help the higher education community understand the Republican negativity toward the value of higher education? How do higher ed leaders effectively respond to these critiques?**

The polling data certainly suggest that many Republican leaders and voters are growing



(Left to right) Aly Kassam-Reamtulla, Cass Cliatt, William T. Bolling, and Shirley Collado take part in the AAC&U 2019 annual meeting panel “Affirming the Mission: The Liberal Arts and America’s Future.”

more and more skeptical of the value of higher education, in general, and a liberal arts education, specifically. Frankly, I think that's because they don't always fully understand what a liberal arts education means or appreciate the value of a liberal arts degree. They are also skeptical of the increasing cost of higher education, and whether it still remains a good value. Colleges and universities and their alumni need to do a better job educating our leaders on the importance of the liberal arts and the difference it can make in people's lives. And we need to do a better job explaining to policy makers that every student on our campus is actively engaged in a job-training program. Whether they are studying education, health care, the sciences, engineering, technology, history, or the arts, they are all being trained to go into the workforce and be contributing members of society. That's what political leaders are focusing on today, and the truth is that we've been doing that in the liberal arts for years. We just haven't done a very good job of communicating it.

**What about reaching more prospective rural and lower-middle-class students and supporting such students as they earn their degree? There's a lot of criticism that this demographic is getting ignored.**

We talk a lot about the "rural horseshoe" in Virginia. It's those parts of Virginia that encompass most of the rural regions of the state. Students in these areas are less likely to complete high school and less likely to attend college. We've got to change that dynamic. In Virginia, we have a program to put more career coaches in public schools to identify and get these at-risk students to stay in school and seriously consider going to a community college or a four-year college after graduation. At James Madison University (JMU), under the leadership of President Jonathan Alger, we've started a Valley Scholars Program in seven localities surrounding JMU. The initiative identifies high-risk eighth-grade students who have college potential but might not be able to go to college due to financial hardship. We enroll them in an intense four-year program that supports their academic and social development and guarantees them admission and full scholarship and fees to JMU if they successfully complete the program. Our first cohort of thirty-five students enrolled at JMU in the fall of 2019, and we're excited to have them.

**Is the term *liberal education* too problematic in its political association—that is, do we need to refer differently to a liberal education? Would this make a difference in the political sphere?**

The term *liberal education* certainly has negative connotations in some people's minds, but that's because they don't really understand what the term means. Some people have suggested doing away with the term, but I don't think that's the answer. The answer is education. We need to do a better job educating people that a liberal education has nothing do with being a "liberal." It has everything to do with the breadth of knowledge that we impart to our students. We don't need to abandon the term—we need to do a better job of explaining it.

**What advice do you have for higher education leaders for reaching out to governors and state-level politicians?**

Everything at the state and federal level today is increasingly based on job-skill training, results, marketability, and making certain that we are using limited resources wisely. When we present the case for higher education, we need to present it in those terms. Otherwise, we're telling a story that no one wants to hear. We need to talk about the economic impact of higher education, how we are providing our students with the skills they need to obtain jobs in the twenty-first century, and the results we are achieving in graduating students, helping them find jobs, and helping employers find the employees they need to successfully compete in the marketplace. We've all got great stories to tell in each of these areas, and we need to tell them in a coherent and effective manner.

**As lieutenant governor, you found that meeting with college and university presidents was more effective than meeting with their government relations staff members. Why does this matter? What should leaders be prepared to present, convey, and ask in a meeting with policy makers?**

Elected officials have limited time. Most of them want to be accessible to their constituents, but the different pressures on them can make this challenging. Government relations staff members certainly play a critical role in monitoring legislation and influencing the outcome of legislation, but most elected officials are much more impressed when a university president takes



the time to engage with them. Most legislators will always take a meeting with a university president. And when you get that meeting, be prepared to talk about the economic impact that your university is having on the state and the effort you are making to educate students with the skills they need to fill jobs that employers are looking to fill.

#### **How do we better educate lawmakers on endowments?**

That's a tough one. In a world of limited resources and increasing tuition and fees, large endowments will always stand out as a point of focus and potential controversy for political leaders. The biggest problem is that legislators don't always understand the purpose of endowments or how they work. Like everything else, we have to be prepared to tackle that head-on and explain it to them. For example, they may not fully understand that these are donated funds, not rolled over general funds. They may not understand that most of the dollars are earmarked for use in certain ways. And it's always important to be able to show how endowment dollars are being used for other worthwhile purposes, especially things like

scholarship programs for students who need the extra help. If endowments are cloaked with an aura of secrecy, they will be viewed skeptically, but if we are transparent about where endowments come from and how they are used, we can overcome a lot of this skepticism.

#### **You've discussed the importance not only of college presidents going to the state capitol but also of getting politicians to come to campus. What are good ways to do this? How do colleges prepare for a politician's visit?**

It's critical to get political leaders involved at the university level, and there are a number of ways to effectively do that. At JMU, we invite our local legislators to campus to have lunch with the president, talk about issues of interest to higher education, and tour the campus. We try to get them engaged in the classroom. That might mean talking to a government class about their role in the legislature or participating in special projects like our semi-annual Health Policy Summit or our X-Labs program. We also ask them to be judges on public policy panels to evaluate student reports and presentations. And they always like to take advantage of a

Saturday afternoon football game or other sporting or arts event. They feel more a part of the university. That helps them better understand what we are trying to accomplish and how they can help support that mission.

**What about the importance of a university or college getting involved in the local community as part of demonstrating the value of higher ed to a broader audience?**

One of the best-kept secrets is the impact most universities have on their local communities, well beyond the campus. We often talk about the economic impact that the university has on a region, but we don't always talk enough about our specific community-based programs. We just finished a detailed analysis of JMU's community-based programs that impact education, health care, economic and community development, the arts, and much more. It's an eighteen-page report and still growing. We were shocked to see the breadth of those programs when they were all put together in one place. We're offering free clinics to low-income families and the homeless. We run a bus into low-income communities to encourage reading, and we also distribute food bags from that same bus to people in need. Our students, faculty, and staff are making a difference in people's lives every single day in ways most people know nothing about. I suspect that's the case at most universities. We need to tell that story better. We need to emphasize that while educating our students is our highest priority, higher education has an impact well beyond the work that takes place on the campus.

**You were serving as lieutenant governor during the tragedy at Virginia Tech. How do we get policy makers to work with campus leaders to make schools safer?**

April 16, 2007, was without a doubt the worst day of my life. Governor Tim Kaine was out of the state when the shootings occurred, and I was one of the first state leaders on campus that day to help support the students, staff, and families. I don't think you're ever prepared for something like that, and you're never the same after dealing with it.

When it comes to improving campus safety, the key is to focus on the things we can build consensus around. That's what we tried to do in the days, weeks, and months following the Virginia Tech tragedy. We significantly strengthened our statewide mental-health

service and reporting programs, and we put in place better training and response programs for tragedies like this. We often get wrapped up in the debate over gun control, which is certainly fair, but it is unlikely that anyone will change anyone else's opinion on that controversial topic. But that doesn't mean that there aren't a lot of other things that we can unite around that can make campuses safer and better enable us to reduce the likelihood that something like this can occur again. My best advice is to focus on the possible. Focus on the things that unite us, not on the things that divide us.

**To flip this conversation around: I've been asking about advice for campus leaders. But what would you want policy makers to think about in the context of valuing higher education?**

Well, this is easier said than done, but my best advice to policy makers is, don't assume that you know everything about higher education, and don't assume that everything you think you know is right, because it probably isn't. I've seen higher education from more perspectives than most people. I've seen it from the perspective of a student, a parent, a state senator, a lieutenant governor, a university board member, and now as a university employee. I've learned something different at every stop along the way. Higher education is a big and complicated institution and it has a lot of moving parts. It takes time to know it. My best advice to policy makers is to take the time to really understand higher education's strengths and challenges and how we can all work together to make it better. We need strong colleges and universities—both public and private—to make our society work, and we need partnerships with policy makers to accomplish the goals that we all share.

**At a time when colleges are struggling to increase the public's trust in them, what about politicians? The current Virginia governor has been dealing with a racist incident in his past and the current lieutenant governor is facing allegations of sexual assault. How do college communities and citizens more broadly have any faith in the people making policies that affect higher ed and beyond?**

Well, we've certainly been going through an unusual and challenging time here in Virginia. I don't know where that will all end up. The

situation involving the governor can be a learning moment. He has indicated that he wants to dedicate the rest of his term in office to racial reconciliation. We're trying to do the same thing here at James Madison University. We just named a new dormitory after Paul Jennings, who was born to an enslaved woman at Montpelier and became a household slave and later James Madison's personal manservant. After Madison's death, Jennings purchased his freedom. As a free man in Washington, he worked in the US Pension Office, raised a family, and purchased a home. He died in 1874 at age 75. His descendants include 2005 JMU graduate Raleigh Marshall, who earned a degree in computer science.<sup>3</sup> His is a story of hope and possibility. That's the challenge for us all—how do we take the difficult things that we experience in life and turn them into hope and possibility?

#### **Any hope to offer on the future of higher ed, liberal education, and/or the political climate?**

I graduated from a small liberal arts college in 1979—the University of Charleston in West Virginia. That little school was going through a lot of challenges at the time, and a lot of people didn't think it would make it. Today, the University of Charleston is not only still around; it's growing and doing some incredible things. That happened because the school had leaders who were willing to think outside the box and do things differently. Higher education and the liberal arts may be facing some peculiar challenges today, but strength can emerge out of that adversity as well. We have to remain focused on what we're doing and why we're doing it. We have to be open to change, and we have to be willing to embrace change. And we have to build relationships that can last into the future. **[LE]**

#### NOTES

1. "Sharp Partisan Divisions in Views of National Institutions," Pew Research Center, July 10, 2017, <https://www.people-press.org/2017/07/10/sharp-partisan-divisions-in-views-of-national-institutions/>.
2. Frank Newport and Brandon Busteed, "Why Are Republicans Down on Higher Ed?," Gallup, August 16, 2017, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/216278/why-republicans-down-higher.aspx>.
3. "JMU to Name New Residence Hall after Paul Jennings, a Madison Family Slave," James Madison University News, February 11, 2019, <https://www.jmu.edu/news/2019/02/11-jenningshall.shtml>.

## **K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award**

At its 2019 annual meeting, the Association of American Colleges and Universities recognized this year's recipients of the **K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award**. The recipients also took part in a conversation on American higher education at the session "Faculty of the Future: Voices from the Next Generation."

**Brianna Benedict**, Engineering Education, Purdue University  
**Naniette H. Coleman**, Sociology, University of California–Berkeley  
**Andrew Katz**, Engineering Education, Purdue University  
**Aurora Le**, Public Health, Indiana University  
**Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner**, Philosophy, American Indian and Indigenous Studies, Michigan State University  
**Hannah Volkman**, Public Health, University of Minnesota  
**Arley Ward**, History, University of Arkansas

The 2020 award winners will be recognized at, and participate in, AAC&U's upcoming annual meeting, "Shaping the Future of Higher Education: An Invitation to Lead," January 22–25, in Washington, DC. For more information, visit [aacu.org/AM20](https://aacu.org/AM20).



**K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award**  
**recipients Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner (left)**  
**and Brianna Benedict (right) at the 2019**  
**annual meeting session "Faculty of the**  
**Future: Voices from the Next Generation"**

# Getting to Shared Goals

RAYNARD S. KINGTON

THROUGHOUT MY NINE YEARS as president of Grinnell College, I have often been asked whether I have the opportunity to teach. I actually spend a significant part of my day teaching—just not in a classroom. Frequently, I find myself teaching and learning from our students outside of the classroom as part of the broader learning and engagement typical at residential liberal arts colleges. I try to meet regularly with the student government at Grinnell, for example, and these interactions have been among the most important and meaningful experiences of my presidency. Each meeting allows me to grow professionally and also to encourage academic and personal growth in our campus leaders.

## MY VIEW

**An us-versus-them approach does not have to lead to the end of the conversation. Instead, it can be reframed to lead to a starting point for complex conversations and genuine opportunities for learning to happen for all involved.**

Most of my interactions with students are effective. In some cases of student activism, though, the assumption that accomplishing goals and pushing the needle for social change can only occur through opposition results in wasted energy and unproductive work for all involved. This oppositional approach is not unique to campuses; we see this in the extreme polarization in our nation and in our divided government and its lack of bipartisanship.

With the future leaders of the nation at our campuses, we must question the notion that opposition is the only option for problem solving and effecting change. While protest and opposition are appropriate in some situations, there are often other methods through which students can learn and engage as informed, passionate citizens of whatever community they belong to. In my experience, a cooperative approach is often the most effective form of student engagement. It is motivated by the desire to either work with those who already share common goals or by making a strong, evidence- and value-based case to convince organizations or individuals to become supporters.

### A case study

Our institutions must be more creative about considering models of advocacy that are likely to result in teaching and learning on all sides. We should help students explore different viewpoints and get inside the mind of decision makers. At Grinnell, one way we are broadening all of our perspectives is through an approach that is analogous to the use of case studies in business schools or actors portraying patients in medical schools.

RAYNARD S. KINGTON is president of Grinnell College.



Article photo courtesy of Justin Hayworth/Grinnell College

**During Grinnell College's "Fred Friendly Seminar," community members used a fictional incident to explore the various and complex responses to challenging campus situations.**

## Alternative ways to achieve social change on campus



Grinnell community members served in their real-life roles in discussing how they would respond to a hypothetical bias-motivated incident. Participants included the lead college legal counsel, the local police chief, and the chair of the faculty.



In fall 2017, Grinnell sponsored our own version of a “Fred Friendly Seminar” for a fictional campus incident that raised fundamental questions about the tension between inclusivity and free speech. “The Fred Friendly Seminars” were a series of discussions broadcast on PBS over a thirty-year period using the Socratic method to explore a case raising important societal issues.<sup>1</sup> For our seminar, representatives from different areas of the campus community gathered on a stage and took on roles similar to their ones in real life. Participants included student government representatives, student activists, student newspaper staff members, the chair of the faculty, senior administrators (including myself, the academic dean, the dean of student life, and the head of security), the lead college legal counsel, the town police chief, a former editor of the *Des Moines Register*, and the president of the Iowa chapter of the American Civil Liberties

Union. A law professor, who is also an alumna, led the dialogue. The exercise allowed students, faculty, staff, and community members to hear people in various roles explain the thinking, constraints, and goals that guided their responses to a fictitious bias-motivated situation.

In the fictitious incident, which the moderator described in opening the seminar, people in a car yelled racial epithets at a mixed-race student couple. Throughout the hourlong discussion, the panelists took turns sharing questions they had and described actions they would take in response to the incident. As part of the scenario, new information was presented that complicated the situation and could potentially alter responses or actions. The incident brought to light how challenging it can be to respond to these types of incidents—they can affect us both professionally and personally (and not necessarily in the same ways). They force us to address,

sometimes simultaneously, issues of free speech and inclusivity, and they require a thoughtful, timely response when tensions are running high.

Conducting a “Fred Friendly Seminar” helped increase awareness of the ways in which tough situations can unfold and the plethora of issues they can raise. The simulation also deepened understanding of the different considerations that various campus community members have as they work to address an incident. The participants on stage, in playing their particular roles, helped the audience see how and why their approaches to the fictitious incident varied. We are not immune from the possibility of difficult events happening on campus nor from the challenges that can follow in their aftermath. The scenario allowed our campus community to confront complex questions about the best ways for the college to respond—from supporting students and others affected, to working with internal and/or external advocacy organizations in addressing such an incident.

### **The start of a conversation**

When students engage in oppositional advocacy, the focus can shift from achieving a worthy goal to opposing entities or individuals—often institutions or presidents but also other campus leaders (for example, faculty members or trustees)—believed to be responsible for the problem. But an us-versus-them approach does not have to lead to the end of the conversation. Instead, it can be reframed to lead to a starting point for complex conversations and genuine opportunities for learning to happen for all involved.

At Grinnell, for instance, administrators and students worked to develop a cooperative approach to grapple with the issue of fossil fuel divestment. Initially, student activists occupied parts of the administrative building that houses my office to demand the removal of our endowment funds from investments in fossil fuel companies. Though I personally agreed with the students on the importance of addressing climate change issues and on the negative impact of fossil fuels, on an institutional level the issue wasn’t so simple. As a college president, it can be challenging to separate your personal identity from your institutional role. Thus, I represented the opposition to these students.

We eventually, however, reached a point of shared learning. Students voiced concerns that merited a broader, more transparent look at the

ethical and environmental issues connected to fossil fuel divestment and climate change. Following a model established by the University of Denver, our board of trustees created a task force on fossil fuel divestment that was supported by a campus advisory group.<sup>2</sup>

Again, not everyone agreed with the task force’s recommendations or the board’s final decisions, but throughout the numerous convenings, presentations, and interviews, all members of the campus community were given

**Raynard S. Kington,**  
president of Grinnell  
College, meets  
with members of the  
Student Government  
Association.



access to the information and the opportunity to learn more about the complexity of the divestment issue.<sup>3</sup> The campus community heard numerous presentations from various campus stakeholders on the broader climate implications and the risks for the endowment and future Grinnellians. From discussions like these, we learn and gain context and empathy, and often we get confirmation that everyone around the table shares a lot of the same goals.

**The scenario allowed our campus community to confront complex questions about the best ways for the college to respond.**

### **Thoughtful engagement**

An exercise such as a “Fred Friendly Seminar” provides an opportunity to delve deeply into complex issues. We, as a community, can dissect a real-time response without the pressures and potential missteps of an actual incident. Everyone who participated in the seminar we held—whether they were playing a role on stage or listening in the audience—learned about how people in different positions approach a collective issue. The people on stage brought a range of perspectives and worked through an issue together with civility and respect. We hope that if and when our community encounters a

Grinnell's "Fred Friendly Seminar" allowed the community to dissect a real-time response to a difficult situation without the pressures and potential missteps of an actual incident.



problem like the one in that fictional case, we will be able to engage thoughtfully and effectively. We hope to hold more seminars to address other issues facing our campus community.

The higher education community is wrestling with many contentious issues, and unfortunately, when an incident occurs on our campuses, we don't always acknowledge lessons learned or consider the different perspectives influencing the actions of parties involved. We must do more to encourage our students—and ourselves—to pivot away from oppositional framing and into cooperative engagement during challenging situations. This encourages all parties to be thoughtful, respectful, and empathetic in their responses. To keep the focus on correcting and fighting injustice rather than individuals, it is

especially important to give our students more opportunities to practice a balanced approach to discourse as they become agents of change and our nation's future leaders. **LE**

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#### NOTES

1. "About the Seminars," Fred Friendly Seminars, accessed July 23, 2019, <http://www.fredfriendly.org/about>.
2. "Divestment Task Force—Board of Trustees," University of Denver, accessed July 23, 2019, <https://portfolio.du.edu/divestment/page/59248>.
3. "Recommendations on Climate Impact, Sustainability, and Divestment," Grinnell College, June 13, 2018, <https://www.grinnell.edu/news/recommendations-climate-impact-sustainability-and-divestment>.

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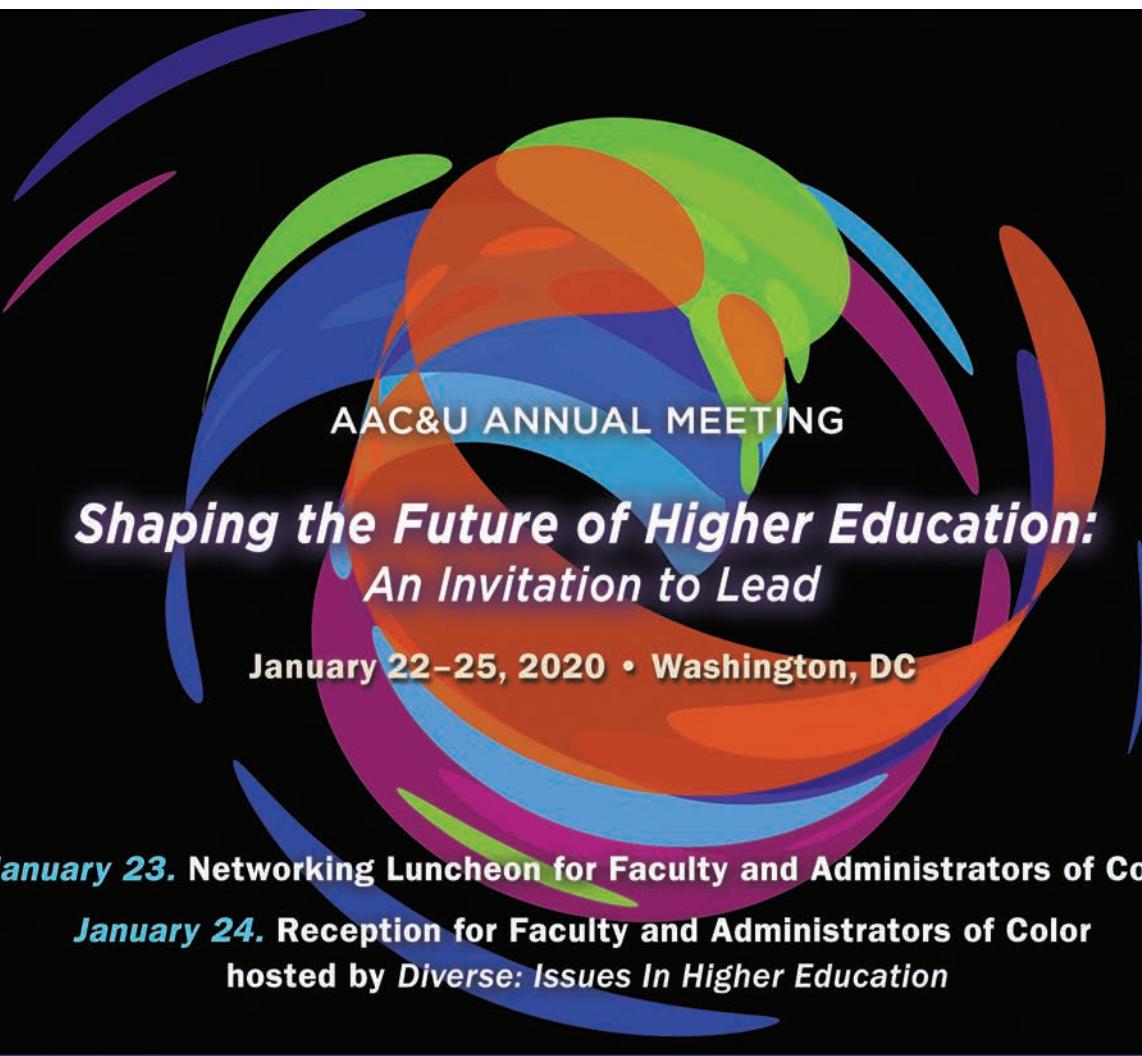
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