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Bologna Plus: The Liberal Education Advantage

For much of the past decade, many in higher education were intensely focused on responding to one perturbing idea after another as they emerged from either the Higher Education Act Reauthorization process or from Secretary Spellings’ Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Collectively, we shared a near-term focus born of necessity.

With this issue of Liberal Education, we shift gears and take a wider and longer view of the academy’s future. The near-term, of course, remains deeply unsettling as the economic crisis deepens. We face difficult times ahead. But this reality makes it doubly important to focus with new determination on the qualities that have made American higher education both strong and resilient. And a more global view brings both our strengths and their corresponding implications into even clearer focus.

While the Spellings Commission paid lip service to the new globalized environment, its report gave very little attention either to trends in higher education in other parts of the world or to the ways in which globalization is, or should be, changing how we educate the next generation. As is often the case, a wider view presents lessons on what we should do and also on what we should avoid doing at the local or national levels here in the United States.

Cliff Adelman’s careful examination of the Bologna Process in Europe, for example, presents in these pages a useful set of ideas for how we might address issues of student mobility, access, assessment, and transparency. We are all in Cliff’s debt for helping to make transparent an important set of developments. Paul Gaston’s companion article reminds us, however, that the long-standing strengths of the American system of higher education should not be abandoned even as we consider whether the Bologna Process holds useful implications for U.S. higher education.

America’s tradition of providing a liberal education to students at the college level, and not just in precollegiate studies, is more important than ever in this turbulent global era. The educational vision that AAC&U has been working with our members to develop builds on the enduring aims of American liberal education: broad knowledge, strong intellectual skills, a grounded sense of ethical and social responsibility. But—and this is equally important—the essential learning outcomes articulated in AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative also work to connect liberal education directly with the economic realities and societal challenges that shape our world.

Informed by a wider view of the changing nature of work and the increasingly interdependent global environment, the LEAP vision for student learning places strong emphasis on global and intercultural learning, technological sophistication, collaborative problem solving, transferable skills, and real-world applications—both civic and job-related. In all these emphases, LEAP repositions liberal education, no longer as just an option for the fortunate few, but rather as the
most practical and powerful preparation for “success” in all its meanings: economic, societal, civic, and personal. This vision builds from the historical strengths of American higher education. But, by integrating and applying learning across disciplines, it also engages a new era and new realities.

Some will point to the greater precision—criterion-referenced standards for specific disciplines—that is being attempted through the Bologna Process with its “tuning” of cross-national degree requirements. But the Bologna Process does not promise European students an integrative, cross-disciplinary liberal education that is clearly tied to the responsibilities of democratic and global citizenship. Absent that promise, both its vision and its precision are insufficient.

The Bologna Process has been driven by two overarching economic concerns—the need for greater mobility of students and workers and the need for all workers to have much higher levels of skills and abilities. But a clear understanding of the demands of a knowledge economy makes an American-style liberal education, with its emphasis on cross-disciplinary learning, economically indispensable. Virtually in chorus, employers emphasize the need for students to achieve cross-cutting skills and multidisciplinary knowledge. Whatever the major, employers want students to arrive on the job with global understanding and competence, and an examined set of ethical values. They also seek assurance that students can apply their learning to real-world problems, which almost by definition are multidisciplinary. AAC&U’s employer research shows that four out of five employers want students to get a well-rounded education, with only one in five preferring that student focus mainly on a specific field of study at the college level.

Over the long term, this nation’s future depends on higher education’s capacity to bring much higher numbers of students to significantly higher levels of achievement. This global era certainly requires that students learn far more about the rest of the world than ever before. But it also requires that we give priority to practices and processes that can help higher education achieve that goal.

The good news is that we know much more than ever before about what works educationally. Two new AAC&U publications add to that knowledge. The latest LEAP report by George Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices*, summarizes research on ten educational practices that have a significant impact on college student success. Kuh presents a summary of decades of research that shows that participating in certain practices correlates with higher levels of student achievement. And *More Reasons for Hope*, the latest in AAC&U’s Making Excellence Inclusive series, looks at the last ten years of progress in diversity education. This publication describes more than thirty exemplary campus diversity programs, all of which are preparing this generation for effective practice and responsible leadership in a diverse and globally engaged democracy. As always, both these publications draw on the inspiring work of AAC&U member institutions—work that responds directly and creatively to the most important challenges of our times.—CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER
College Learning for the New Global Century, the 2007 LEAP report, argues persuasively that the outcomes of a liberal education are “essential for success in a global economy” and, indeed, that “the capabilities developed through a liberal education have become America’s most valuable economic asset.” Yet whether college learning for the new global century will be available to all students in the new global century may well depend on how U.S. higher education responds to the challenges and opportunities of globalization.

In sussing out these challenges and opportunities, the articles in the Featured Topic section of this issue focus on two ongoing developments. The first of these is the creation, through what is known as the Bologna Process, of a European Higher Education Area within which the comparability of quality assurance and degree standards is intended to facilitate greater academic mobility. In the lead article, Clifford Adelman presents an overview of key elements of the Bologna Process and urges their adaptation to U.S. higher education. This is followed by a less sanguine look at Bologna by Paul Gaston, who, in response to Adelman, calls for “standing up for the singular strengths of U.S. higher education—our long-standing commitment to broad access, our embrace of diversity as an educational good, and, most notably, our distinctive commitment to providing ‘tertiary level’ students with a liberal education.”

The second development is the ongoing effort of the World Trade Organization to bring higher education services within the purview of the General Agreement on Trade and Services. One result of the anticipated liberalization of trade in education, Andrew Ross explains, is the headlong rush of Anglophone universities into the global market for higher education services. “Will [liberal educational] ideals (and the job base built around them) wither away entirely in the entrepreneurial race to compete for a global market share,” Ross asks, “or will they survive only in one corner of the market—as the elite preserve of those who are able to pay top dollar for such hand-crafted attention?”

Sheldon Rothblatt too is concerned about the potential for increased stratification. As he considers the recent phenomenon of “branding,” whereby efforts to enhance reputation and prestige culminate in the creation of the “celebrity university,” Rothblatt notes the irony that even as “the branded institutions declare their commitment to affirmative action or (in France) ‘positive discrimination,’ the elite or merit selection necessary for international recognition invariably works against such policies. It is no secret that the most competitive students, exceptions apart, are drawn from the more comfortable families in any society.”

Enter Charles Murray. At a time when the outcomes of a liberal education are more necessary than ever before, and just as global trends conspire to threaten access to it, Murray steps forward to persuade the country that the BA degree—and the liberal education at the heart of it—should be reserved for those who score in the top 10 percent on the SAT or ACT. In response, and as a coda to this issue, Anthony Carnevale explains that just as The Bell Curve was rooted in bad science, Murray’s new book, Real Education, is rooted in bad economics.—DAVID TRITELLI
New LEAP Public Forums
On November 6, academic leaders from across New England will meet in Providence, Rhode Island, for a forum on College Learning for the New Global Century, the 2007 report from AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative. On November 18, AAC&U will cosponsor “Common Wealth: College Learning and Virginia’s Shared Future,” a public forum at the University of Richmond. These are the first in a new series of LEAP forums designed to engage employers, civic and school leaders, academic administrators, and faculty with the purposes of college education in the twenty-first century. Over the next two years, AAC&U will sponsor additional forums across the country.

Global Forum Held on Diversity, Democracy, and Education
On October 2–3, an invitational global forum was held in Strasbourg, France, to address the issue of converging competencies for diversity and sustainable democracy and the role of higher education in developing these competencies. The forum was organized by the Council of Europe and the U.S. Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy—of which AAC&U is a member. The keynote address was given by Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University and member of the National Leadership Council of AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise initiative.

More information about AAC&U’s partnership with the Council of Europe is available online at www.aacu.org/civic_engagement/CouncilofEurope.cfm.

New LEAP Report on “High-Impact” Practices
High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter—the latest report from AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative—defines a set of educational practices that research shows have a significant impact on student success. Author George Kuh presents data from the National Survey of Student Engagement about these practices and explains why they benefit all students, but also seem to benefit underserved students even more than their more advantaged peers. The report also presents data that show definitively that underserved students are the least likely students, on average, to have access to these practices.

More information about this new LEAP report is available online at www.aacu.org/publications.
CLIFFORD ADELMAN

Accountability “Light”

Our Version Is Going the Way of the Dollar vs. the Euro

IT WAS JULY 14, 2006, when the Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education posted the second draft of its final report on the Web for all to see. It was the first of the commission’s drafts in which the alleged illiteracy of U.S. college graduates was placed in bold space along with all the other flagellations of higher education in which the commission delighted. The text of the Web posting, though, was an unhappy validation of the complaint: the cases of violation of subject-verb agreement leaped off the electronic pages, along with paragraphs that can be kindly described as strings of non-sequiturs. The commission’s draft would not be awarded a C- in English Composition on a generous grading day. Yet no one noticed the irony. After all, this was a distinguished panel. Higher education had not seen a federal undertaking such as this since 1984, and it was getting visible attention in the general press for topics other than college costs.

But it would not have been hard to notice, in both the Web-posted drafts and the final report of the commission, that the only references to higher education outside the United States recited ill-informed data putatively demonstrating how far we had “fallen behind” other nations. Nobody on the commission or its staff had bothered to examine the ways other countries are dealing with issues we also face—access, degree completion, and, most of all, accountability. In its insular and chauvinistic way, this major pronouncement on, and recommendation of remedies for, the state of U.S. higher education pretended, without looking, that the world is learning more, and we are not—a conclusion designed more to fit our appetite for bad news and self-degradation than to enlighten.

CLIFFORD ADELMAN has been senior associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy since the fall of 2006. Prior to that, he served for twenty-seven years as senior research analyst at the U.S. Department of Education, and ten years in both teaching and academic administration.
Now, if the rest of the world is learning more, would that be surprising? And in a global economy, would it really be so disappointing? Culture and language ensure that the world is not flat, but in terms of knowledge it is, and the world’s knowledge content, like the oceans, is rising. To the extent that the world learns more, we all benefit, and we cannot pretend that the United States holds a monopoly on knowledge. More seriously, because credentials awarded are used as a proxy for learning in international—as well as domestic—comparisons, nobody knows for sure whether students in other countries are, in fact, learning more. But nowhere in recent years have academic leaders, faculty, and students themselves wrestled more with the knots of credentials and learning than in the old nations of Europe. Through the largest reconstruction of higher education ever undertaken anywhere—known as the Bologna Process—they have come up with a convincing and credible scaffolding of accountability. When one considers what the Europeans have done—and where they have more to do—one realizes that we in the United States have a long way to go in understanding what “accountability” means.

The Bologna Process
The Bologna Process is named for the city where, in 1999, the education ministers of twenty-nine countries first reached a meeting of the minds on the future of higher education in Europe. It is an inevitable outgrowth of the process of European integration that began in 1950. By the 1990s, and certainly after the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, Europe began to resemble a quasi-federal arrangement. Although there were few economic borders, the common European workforce was, ironically, stuck within political borders because individual countries did not yet fully recognize—or even understand—their neighbors’ education credentials. In order to allow for the recognition of higher education credentials across borders and, thus, to provide mobility for the advanced knowledge workforce, some convergence of educational practices and standards was needed.

Bologna became a force for converting education systems into similar forms and processes. Its discourse is a type of technology transfer that brings nations from different platforms of educational development to the point of embracing compatible paradigms. In other words, they wind up singing in the same key—though not
With its simultaneous respect for distinctive national traditions and institutional autonomy, the Bologna Process became doubly attractive as the only game in town. In 1999 and subsequently—forty-six countries are now involved—the ministers agreed to an action agenda for dissolving educational borders in the same way that economic borders had been dissolved. The agreement was an inevitable consequence of reforms that had been stirring across European education during the 1990s. The feeling was that, having lost their way and their world leadership, ancient systems of higher education needed a kick-start. In 1998, the ministers of the four largest countries in Europe—France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom—met at the Sorbonne in Paris and planted the seeds from which the European Higher Education Area has grown. The Bologna ministers optimistically set 2010 as the date by which the transformations they imagined were to be realized. But inevitable inertia and resistance at the institutional level, new provisions, and additional partners have rendered the 2010 completion marker a mirage; 2020 is more likely.

The Bologna Process is a huge undertaking. Its action lines include revising degree cycles, establishing degree qualifications frameworks, overhauling the credit system, increasing access via more flexible paths into and through higher education, validating student attainment, establishing a quality assurance system, and increasing the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area for foreign students. Some four thousand institutions, which enroll sixteen million students, are now participating. Some of what has been accomplished has already been adapted in Latin America, North Africa, and Australia. Indeed, the Bologna model is well on the way to becoming the dominant global paradigm for higher education by roughly 2025. We cannot afford to ignore it.

**Real accountability**

The Spellings Commission report and the response to it from within the U.S. higher education community give the impression that accountability is a very simple matter. In order for colleges and universities to be “accountable” to those who subsidize them or pay their tuition and fees, they need only to make public their graduation rates, demographic mix, job placement rates, and some data from the National Survey of Student Engagement on what their students like about opportunities and services. They may perhaps also throw in a test or two to show that a sample of their students know how to write or solve a problem or that a random set of one hundred student volunteers produced an X-standard deviation improvement between entrance and graduation on a test of “critical thinking” (which improvement, of course, is attributed entirely to the institution?). But this is show, not substance. Wish lists for student learning, flowery goals statements, and agendas of commitment for the twenty-first century are sometimes offered in parallel rubrics and posed as accountability statements. But none of these efforts explains what credentials represent or what students must do to earn them. There are no public reference points or performance criteria. Students—our constituents who ought to be our partners as well—played no role in fashioning these efforts. And given how divorced these various approaches are from the actual work of most faculty and their students, their likely impact on student learning is limited indeed.

So what are the Europeans doing differently? They have essentially created an accountability loop that is executed by national systems and institutions. Although still a work in progress, the European accountability loop begins with degree qualifications frameworks and circles back with a document that serves as a public warranty, attesting to the institution’s judgment and the student’s achievement. In between are credential qualifications frameworks at the disciplinary level and a student-centered credit system to which a growing number of institutions have added levels of challenge. Countries outside of Europe have already adapted some of these elements for use within their national systems or institutions, and it is worthwhile to consider whether some elements might usefully be adapted to higher education in the United States.

**Qualifications frameworks**

Within the context of the Bologna Process, a qualifications framework is a statement of the
learning outcomes and competencies that a student must demonstrate in order to be awarded a degree at a specific level. It is not simply a statement of objectives or goals; it is not a wish list. Rather, it is a set of performance criteria. When an institution of higher education is governed by a qualifications framework, it must “demonstrate” that its students have “demonstrated”—all of its students, not merely a hundred volunteers who take a standardized test. While a qualifications framework does not dictate how that demonstration takes place or the nature or form of assessments employed, it does provide learning outcome constructs within which the demonstration is conducted.

A second key characteristic of a qualifications framework is that it clearly indicates the criteria for each level of credential offered. The language of the framework accomplishes this through a “ratcheting up” of learning benchmarks—that is, by increasing the level of challenge at each rung on the degree ladder. This “ratchet principle” pervades all of the content challenge and performance statements of Bologna, from individual courses to degrees, and has penetrated the credit system as well. This principle embodies content and performance standards, and it functions as an engine of accountability.

There are three levels and types of qualifications frameworks under Bologna: transnational, national, and disciplinary/field. The transnational Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area provides a wide-angle set of generic markers that clearly distinguish among the “short-cycle” degree (the equivalent of our associate’s degree), the bachelor’s degree, and the master’s degree. The distinctions are drawn not in terms of a number of credits or a minimum grade point average, but rather in terms of student learning outcomes across five bands of requirements: knowledge and understanding; application of knowledge and understanding; fluency in the use of increasingly complex data and information; breadth, depth, and range of audiences for communication; and degree of autonomy gained for subsequent learning. The language used to describe these requirements “ratchets up” the level of challenge as one moves up the degree ladder. This framework has been accepted by all forty-six countries participating in the Bologna Process.

One might expect each national higher education system to develop its own compatible version of the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area—adding detail, taking into account the peculiar varieties of its own institutions as well as their historical missions and commitments, and perhaps including “intermediate” qualifications between the three degrees. In practice, however, that’s not how the national qualifications frameworks have developed. Creating consensus on a national framework is a time-consuming challenge, and to date, only seven of the forty-six participating countries have completed the task. Among them are five highly distinct models that illustrate the way the Bologna countries can achieve “convergence” with variation. The Irish and Scottish framework is comprehensive, from kindergarten through the doctoral level, while the German framework offers a more parsimonious articulation of how university students must demonstrate knowledge through what are called instrumental competencies, systemic competencies, and communicative competencies. The Dutch framework references labor market positions and tasks, and the Swedish framework reaches into nineteen specific applied disciplines that lead to licensure occupations (e.g., nursing). The French framework requires every degree program in the country to undergo a central registry review, and the program dossier is made public via the Internet.

**Tuning and benchmarking**
The disciplinary qualifications frameworks are developed through what is called the “tuning” process. “Tuning” is a methodology for producing “reference points” that faculty can use in developing statements of learning outcomes, levels of learning, and desired competencies in the disciplines. The purpose is to ensure that these statements are both transparent and comparable. This does not mean that the content is standardized, however. The criterion-referenced competency statements that result from the tuning process are not straightjackets. To reprise the music metaphor: everybody winds up with the same music staves, range of time signatures, tempo commands, and system of notation. Then, all programs in the same discipline sing in the same key—engineering in A-minor, business in B-flat—but
they don’t necessarily sing the same tune. The first phase of the tuning project involved nine fields in 138 institutions across sixteen countries. In the second phase, sixteen other fields joined the model. Tuning is the largest Bologna “export” to date: twelve disciplines in 182 universities in eighteen Latin American countries have adopted the methodology.

However attractive “tuning” may be, it is not always executed to match its purpose. Faculty members have difficulty writing criterion-referenced learning outcome statements, and that’s something the Europeans—and we in the United States—need to work on. Discipline-based benchmarking, a strong suit of the United Kingdom’s Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), is an especially prominent alternative. Like tuning, benchmarking provides reference points and boundaries for designing, modifying, and evaluating the presentation of a discipline within an institution or a group of similar institutions. The QAA benchmarking statements for degrees in accounting, for example, clearly describe the subject-specific knowledge, skills, and cognitive operations that the graduate will have “demonstrated” at a level crossing a threshold standard. While institutions choose their own forms of assessment and set their own thresholds, a student who does not “demonstrate” does not earn a degree.

So what can we learn from the European experience with qualifications frameworks, tuning, and benchmarking? Accountability begins with the establishment of public definitions of degrees and criterion-referenced statements of performance. Once such definitions are established, the credential-awarding institution can say, “this is what this student did, and this is what the degree represents.”

The importance of discipline-specific content has been a consistent theme of the Bologna Process. After all, students go to college to earn a degree in anthropology, mechanical engineering, or nursing; they go to community colleges to earn a degree in medical technology or commercial art. When you ask them what they are studying, they will answer by telling you about their discipline or field. And, of course, faculties the world over are also organized by discipline or field. When our students enter a major—and when they graduate—they deserve to know what they are in for, and, later, what they have accomplished. Students are not likely to get this clarity from the institutional graduation rates, indicators of student engagement, “value-added” metrics of “critical thinking,” and generalized curricular goals one finds in so many “accountability” pronouncements in the United States. Our students deserve better.

Euro-Credits

While the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is built on a fundamentally different assumption from that used for U.S. higher education credits, if it plays out in its ideal form, it will go beyond functioning as a measure of accumulation and become another accountability tool.

In the United States, credit assignments are based on faculty contact hours, with the assumption that, in relation to each faculty contact hour, the student engages in other types of learning activities. In contrast, ECTS uses the student as the primary reference point, asks how many hours the average student must spend to accomplish the various tasks in a course module, and converts the total to credits. The conversion formula is based on the length of the academic year, the total number of hours available for study during that year, and a reference marker of sixty credits per academic year. The conversion formula ranges from twenty-five to thirty workload hours per credit.

The virtues and drawbacks of such a system are obvious. When faculty really have to think about what they are asking students to do, there is strong potential for curricular change. Redundancies, gaps, and opportunities for cyber-efficiencies can be identified, and appropriate changes in coverage and delivery can be made. The Bologna literature describes such reforms in fields ranging from music to chemistry. The obvious drawback can be simply phrased: when you have a formula, it becomes the default. Water finds the easiest way to flow downhill, and both academic administrators and faculty become much too mechanical and downright sloppy in assigning credits to course modules.

How does one connect student workload to learning outcomes, to the principle of the
ratcheting up of challenge and, hence, to qualifications frameworks and the structure of accountability? We don’t worry about such things in the United States. We grant three credits for Introduction to Sports and three credits for Econometrics or assign nine credits for a Recreation Practicum and four credits for Neuropsychology—and brush such obvious dissonances under the rug. Nobody—not the Spellings Commission or the various “accountability”-oriented responses of the U.S. higher education community—has evidenced any desire to acknowledge, let alone repair, these obvious holes in the academic integrity of our credit system. In the United States, credits live in the office of the vice president for finance, not the vice president for academic affairs; the student is incidental to it all. If we care about accountability for student learning, and if we are serious about matching practice to rhetoric, then we may need a redesign. If ECTS plays out in ideal form even among a plurality of Bologna participants, it will show us the way.

Given different modes of student work in the disciplines, our European colleagues have gone about the task of linking workload to learning outcomes with alternative proxies. In the most intriguing of these approaches, that taken by the United Kingdom and Scotland, credits are placed within degrees of challenge. That link—between the measure of estimated student time-on-tasks and the level of demand inherent in those tasks—creates a “credit level” defined as “an indicator of the relative demand, complexity and depth of learning and of learner autonomy.” There are nine such credit levels, and each carries a generic description that is independent of discipline but applicable to all disciplines. Every course is tagged with a credit level, and the number of credits awarded is treated as a separate issue. Once levels such as these are established, degree qualifications can be set in terms of minimums—40 percent of credits at level six, for example, and 65 percent of credits at levels five and six. If all colleges and universities in the United States added such indicators of the challenge of content to credits, quarrels about credit transfer would diminish considerably.

**Diploma Supplements**

After qualification frameworks, tuning, and an ideal credit system marked with parallel structures of challenge, what is left in this very different scaffolding of accountability? What evidence of learning and attainment does the graduate carry forward into the world, and how is that evidence communicated for all to see? The piece of paper we call a diploma does not say much, and our European colleagues have added something very important to it.

As the final element in the Bologna accountability loop, the Diploma Supplement serves as a kind of warranty, providing evidence of the graduate’s learning and attainment. In addition to including a transcript and indicating superior performance (i.e., honors), the Diploma Supplement is intended to convey information about:

- the national system in which the degree was awarded and the position of the degree within that system’s credentialing hierarchy;
- the status, type, and accreditation of the institution awarding the degree;
- the purpose and function of the credential;
- the student’s major field of study as well as the duration and the entry requirements of the program in which the credential was granted;
- discipline-level qualifications and degree requirements, including internships, theses, and final projects;
- modes of study, including enrollment intensity and distance learning.

Even if they included only the information listed above, Diploma Supplements would go some way toward providing public assurance about higher education credentials. Some serious revisions are needed, however. The absence of discipline-level qualifications statements, for example, is a very unhappy omission in light of the qualifications frameworks core of Bologna. And the intended warrantee, the student, plays too minor a role in the current version of the Diploma Supplement for the loop to close.

In addition to providing a public warranty for our students, the creation of a U.S. version of the Diploma Supplement would put institutions of higher education on the public record in terms of their standards for degree qualifications, and it would hold them to consistency. Setting aside the transcript as a separate document (as it should be), what should our version of the Diploma Supplement contain in addition to the bullets above covering the institution, the degree and its function, modes of...
study, and “compressed signals” of superior academic performance? I advocate the following:

- Not-so-standard boilerplate indicating all other institutions attended by the student from which credits were accepted as well as the percentage of the student’s credits that were earned at the institution awarding the degree

- A tuning-type qualifications statement for the student’s major and information about any required internships, theses, final projects, portfolios, or comprehensive examinations

- The title and a short description of the student’s thesis or final degree-qualifying project, if applicable

- Any external certification examinations passed or licenses granted to the student (although the institution is not the awarding body in these cases, the institution certifies that it has recognized and recorded them)

- A maximum of two noteworthy and documented services performed by the student for the institution or its surrounding community

- Student research, creative, or service participation, if applicable (field, title of project, and faculty sponsor)

- Documented proficiency in languages other than English, including method of documentation

To be effective and credible, these markers on a Diploma Supplement should be limited, based on unobtrusive institutional records of the student’s activities, concentrated on achievements related to the degree awarded, and verifiable and validated by whoever signs the document on behalf of the institution. Otherwise, they are properly part of a resume.

Such a Diploma Supplement would close the accountability loop. To repeat: it is both a public warranty and a private assurance of the meaning of the degree, of the standards for awarding it, and of what the student did to earn it. Thus the loop returns to the public definition of degrees and public criterion-referenced statements of performance, with real students carrying the evidence of having met both. This would be a far more convincing enactment of accountability than what we have seen in the United States over the past two years.

The accountability framework that has been developed through the Bologna Process is worth learning from and thinking deeply about, and I urge academics in the United States to take it very seriously—before the “dollar” of their enterprise loses further value, no matter how many degrees they award.

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NOTES
1. Comparisons among national systems rely principally on the methodology of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and its highly visible vehicle, Education at a Glance. Yet OECD itself has for some time been unhappy with its higher education indicators and, in the recently released 2008 edition of Education at a Glance, has made the first of a series of changes in data reporting: an indicator based on cohort graduation rates for first-time, full-time students in bachelor’s degree-granting institutions has been added. OECD’s traditional indicator for postsecondary attainment relies on population ratios—i.e., from census data or labor force surveys in each country, the number of people holding postsecondary degrees in relation to the total working-age population. Variations on this indicator also use population ratios for specific age brackets (e.g., twenty-five to thirty-four). The problems with this approach are numerous, beginning with different census methodologies and different definitions of degrees. This article is not the occasion for elaboration. For an overview, I recommend Jane Wellman’s Apples and Oranges in the Flat World: A Layperson’s Guide to International Comparisons of Postsecondary Education (American Council on Education, 2007). I also recommend reading the technical notes in Education at a Glance—particularly for the new indicator—as the notes demonstrate national variances in definitions, inclusions, and exclusions.

2. Not considered are a host of potential intervening variables such as whether the student volunteers were transfers-in or attended other schools as undergraduates, whether they were parents and/or veterans, whether they held jobs that provided learning challenges, whether they practiced debate in Bible or Talmud study in religious institutions, and whether their significant others spoke languages other than English.

3. Credit and HE Qualifications (Joint Credit Bodies for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, 2001). For text of a sample of four of these credit levels, see The Bologna Club: What U.S. Higher Education Can Learn from a Decade of European Reconstruction (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2008), 60.

How might advocates for liberal education respond most constructively and effectively to the vital principles of the Bologna Process?

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WRITING FOR THE Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), Clifford Adelman in May 2008 rendered higher education in the United States a considerable service. His 128-page report, The Bologna Club: What U.S. Higher Education Can Learn from a Decade of European Reconstruction, describes a process that has influenced higher education in Europe and appears likely to drive further change. In this first of three planned IHEP projects related to Bologna, Adelman also seeks to pose the challenge that Bologna offers to U.S. higher education and to provide suggestions for ways in which we might “join the club.”

The report has generated considerable interest. In an attention-grabbing May 21 headline, Inside Higher Ed summarized Adelman’s “jeremiad” as a “Wake-Up Call for American Higher Ed.” Scott Jaschik finds that the report asks American higher education to pay close attention to what the Europeans are doing lest we be “passed by.” A few days later, The Chronicle of Higher Education lowered the alert level with its headline, “U.S. Could Look to Europe for Accountability Ideas,” but Beth McMurtrie observes that the report “praises European efforts to define what students should learn at each step along the way.” By implication, we should aspire to do so as well.

Clearly, the Bologna Process, the Adelman report, and the subsequent analyses have moved forward on the agenda of American higher education important issues concerning consistency (how degrees are defined, how disciplines are structured), continuity (how one degree level should encourage students to attempt the next), quality assurance (“accountability ideas”), and mobility (issues of transferability and transcript transparency). Such issues are already receiving considerable attention here, of course, but Adelman counsels that U.S. educators should find inspiration in the efforts of European colleagues and follow others in joining “the convergence club.” “The smart money is on cooperation and conversation,” he says.

The challenge

Bologna offers more than a salutary example for U.S. higher education, Adelman emphasizes. It offers a direct challenge—to the principles, the practices, and, most especially, the international competitiveness of U.S. higher education.

Most notably, perhaps, Bologna’s sharp focus on building successful careers and sound economies confronts our diverse and somewhat less clearly defined aspirations. While we may speak of enabling our students to thrive as sensitive, curious, and responsible individuals, Bologna emphasizes demonstrable competencies, job readiness, and student persistence through carefully delineated educational sequences. Outcomes that can be defined most clearly in “operational” terms—that is, those that can present objective “benchmark criteria”—form the core.

As a means of developing this core, one element of the Process, the “Tuning” project, has convened representatives of various disciplines to create “reference points” for students progressing through the higher education levels.
The detail given in these points and their organization in terms of a clear sequence of incremental competencies create an appearance of rigor and consistency that few disciplines in the United States could match. So even while we may detect a curious inattentiveness in Bologna to some of the values we have traditionally identified as desirable outcomes of baccalaureate education, the challenge Bologna offers us may be thereby all the more direct. Our not taking that challenge seriously could weaken our own convictions regarding educational values long in development, ones that have been articulated with any degree of precision only within the past few years. But our simply reasserting such convictions without addressing the serious questions raised by Bologna may indeed increase the risk of our “being passed by.”

And that is one apparent intent. A clearly stated priority of the Bologna Process is Europe’s recovery of the dominance in higher education that it once enjoyed. The joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education (1999), which formalized “the European process,” was signed at and informally named for the oldest university on the Continent. The declaration itself makes clear the intent “to establish a more complete and far-reaching Europe,” “to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship,” and to build competencies among Europeans in tandem with “an awareness of shared values” arising from “belonging to a common social and cultural space.” There is a clear commitment, finally, to promote “the necessary European dimensions in higher education.”

While U.S. higher educators want to see their European colleagues succeed in making higher education on the Continent more accessible to Europeans, more understandable to those outside Europe, and more effective, our disregarding the challenge of Bologna and ignoring the potential risks the Process may create for U.S. higher education would be inattentive at best and negligent at worst. If Bologna were to accomplish only its most prominent aspirations, U.S. universities could face decreasing enrollments of students from Europe, a decline in opportunities for student and faculty exchanges between the United States and Europe, and, according to the most pessimistic perspective, a progressive marginalization of U.S. higher education on the world stage.

The opportunity
Yet as compelling as the Bologna reforms and the challenges they pose appear to be, the potential limitations of Bologna’s sharp focus are equally intriguing. From the beginning unashamedly utilitarian in its focus, the first priority of the Process has been to qualify students for the labor market more expeditiously through an abridged three-year baccalaureate. The evolution of the Process to include an increasing emphasis on the master’s degree has, if anything, further stressed the priority given to specialization and job readiness. And the “qualifications frameworks” that Adelman commends to state higher education systems in the United States make even clearer the economic and vocational thrust of the Process.

So while American colleges and universities continue their quest to prepare students for both successful careers and satisfying lives, Bologna has from the start concentrated more or less exclusively on the economic advantages enjoyed by competent individuals and the societies in which they live.

Here may lie an opportunity—not one to be easily gained, yet one that might offer an alternative to rushing the gates of the “convergence club.” Given a reasonable resolve to learn from the best that the Bologna Process has to offer, we might also respond to the challenge it offers by standing up for the singular strengths of U.S. higher education: our long-standing commitment to broad access, our embrace of diversity as an educational good, and, most notably, our distinctive commitment to providing “tertiary level” students with a liberal education. More effectively developed and articulated, this commitment could become an even more highly visible strength of U.S. higher education: our long-standing commitment to broad access, our embrace of diversity as an educational good, and, most notably, our distinctive commitment to providing “tertiary level” students with a liberal education. More effectively developed and articulated, this commitment could become an even more highly visible strength of U.S. higher education and, thus, an even more competitive asset internationally. Indeed, our aspiring to a liberal education for all college students may represent the best means available by which U.S. higher education can maintain or even advance its long-standing reputation for preeminence.

The question is whether U.S. higher educators will accept the challenge and seize the opportunity. And the answer may lie in the willingness of the academy to make the hard choices and the strategic investments required. Some of these choices have been a part of the higher education discussion for some years. Others may be prompted in the months ahead.
as we understand more fully the challenges posed by Bologna. As a provocation to further discussion, several possible initiatives are framed below as responses to a single question: how might advocates for liberal education respond most constructively and effectively to the vital principles of the Bologna Process?

Establish definitively, document, and articulate the benefits of a liberal education. Much has been done in this regard through the past decade, particularly through the leadership of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Among the many substantive tracts that could provide points of departure for further effort is AAC&U’s Liberal Education Outcomes: A Preliminary Report on Student Achievement in College (2005, 1), which describes progress made in validating student growth in “critical thinking, quantitative literacy, communication skills, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement”—competencies clearly of concern to employers and others. But as the report notes, much remains to be done. To the extent they have not already done so, institutions must “set clear goals, establish programs and lines of responsibility for achieving the goals, teach creatively and effectively, and assess to ensure that all students are learning” so as “to meet our society’s greater expectations for liberal education outcomes” (9). But thanks in part to Bologna, “our society” is now international as well, and if we are to meet the world’s expectations, we must be better able to make that case beyond our borders.

Achieve a higher degree of consistency with regard to the learning outcomes sought through liberal education. This priority would invite U.S. colleges and universities to join more fully in the development of an emerging national consensus regarding essential outcomes. Already, several institutions have found principles articulated through AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative a useful platform for curricular reform. But if liberal education in the United States is to achieve the competitive advantages that a united front could confer, agreement must become widespread. For instance, a broad commitment to LEAP’s “Essential Learning Outcomes” (see sidebar on page 18), while leaving institutions plenty of room to design programs expressing their distinctive identities, would have the important additional benefit of assuring on the world stage that students presenting an American baccalaureate degree possess clearly defined competencies and capacities that incorporate but improve upon outcomes sought through the Bologna Process.

Increase access and support mobility. Broad agreement as to the ends of a liberal education would greatly facilitate the acceptance of academic credit across state lines and among institutional categories domestically. By making the expectations of American higher education more understandable for international students, such consistency would also support student recruitment abroad. For large research universities, the advantage would be considerable, but for small liberal arts colleges, more effective recruitment of international students could be a critical survival strategy.

Expand the commitment to quality assurance. One limitation of the Adelman report is its less than vigorous acknowledgement of the significant advances in quality assurance that have been introduced in the United
States within the past decade. For instance, both regional and specialized accreditors have prompted their accredited programs to assess more meaningfully and to complete the “quality circle” by using what is learned to effect improvements. That the report gives little cognizance to such efforts offers a reminder that if this emergent success is to be acknowledged on the world stage, U.S. higher education must work harder to assure that the results of assessment, broadly considered, are both accessible and intelligible internationally. Doing so would bring U.S. higher education into far closer alignment with one of the leadership claims of the Bologna Process.

**Encourage progress through the degrees.** One of the most attractive elements in the Bologna Process may be its purposeful encouragement of baccalaureate students to aspire to master’s level study. Liberal education can play an important role in promoting such progression by enabling students early in their baccalaureate careers to appreciate the educational continuum in which they are engaged. But for such a commitment to become effective, all faculty members must understand and accept their responsibility for the liberal education of all students. Otherwise, study in the major can undermine the best efforts of liberal educators and, paradoxically, discourage the ambition to graduate study that a major should inspire.

**Achieve a common vocabulary.** While American colleges and universities strive for “retention”—that is, the persistence of students to graduation—high schools define “retention” as requiring poorly prepared students to repeat a grade level. If American educators cannot agree on such fundamental terms, how confusing must our educational jargon be to prospective students and faculty members in other parts of the world? One important effort in support of sustained international competitiveness might be our reaching agreement on the meaning of such terms as credit, term, degree, outcome, and competence. Another important benefit of a common vocabulary would be the clarification of differences with our European colleagues. By confronting real differences rather than rhetorical ones, we would make U.S. higher education more accessible to international students, just as the Bologna members seek to do.

**Celebrate and demonstrate the value of diversity.** Although the Bologna Process has expanded to include particular attention to “social dimensions”—most especially, the accessibility of higher education to less traditional constituencies—its documents make little reference to what American higher education regards as the educational value of diversity.

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**The Essential Learning Outcomes**

Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

**Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**
- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
- **Focused** by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

**Intellectual and Practical Skills, including**
- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

**Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance**

**Personal and Social Responsibility, including**
- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

**Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges**

**Integrative Learning, including**
- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

**Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems**

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More information about the Liberal Education and America’s Promise initiative is available online at [www.aacu.org/leap](http://www.aacu.org/leap).
Our efforts to substantiate our understanding of the educational value of diversity through rigorous and far-reaching research are vital, for our insistence on diversity as a discrete value may be a further way in which our example can enhance higher education worldwide.

Enable students to document their accomplishments more fully. Within the Bologna Process, this commitment takes the form of a “Diploma Supplement.” Such a credential functions as an educational passport, enabling students to interpret their educational histories to employers and graduate institutions beyond their borders. Again, however, the Bologna standards for such supplements appear so fixedly utilitarian as to risk the reduction of distinctive educational experiences to easily grasped, but less descriptive, common elements. Experiments in U.S. higher education with “portfolios,” which can capture not only measurable attainments but also idiosyncratic abilities, may offer a more promising approach to translating educational attainment into readily understood terms. But the challenge of Bologna should prompt us to scale up this approach so that it becomes standard practice—and to make certain that there develops uniformity among portfolios sufficient to support an increasing degree of transparency.

Caveats
Having argued persuasively for advances evident within Bologna planning, Adelman suggests that we “join the club.” But before doing so, we should perhaps consider certain caveats.

First, the relentless drive for objective evaluation, in some ways a very useful undertaking, should not obscure the reality that many of the most important evaluations within higher education will continue to rely on expert subjective judgment. Deny this, and we deny the value we properly assign to expertise itself. Even aviation, which employs extensive checklists and detailed objective measures, depends also on comprehensive assessments of pilot performance by experienced professionals.

Second, notwithstanding the aspirations of the Bologna Process, higher education in Europe remains highly diverse and idiosyncratic. Whether through A-levels in England or the Baccalauréat in France, make-or-break examinations continue to limit access to higher education. By contrast, by offering virtually universal access to higher education, the United States accepts and may want to acknowledge more directly deeply indigenous challenges and opportunities.

Third, the framing of qualifications frameworks and the creation of a bureaucracy to evaluate and enforce them requires a formidable investment. Even as we continue to move in this direction, we should observe closely the extent to which the benefits of the Bologna Process justify its costs over time.

While joining the club is an inviting option, a better idea might be to strengthen our own club by drawing on the strongest elements of the Bologna Process while maintaining values—specifically, those identified with liberal education—that continue to distinguish higher education in the United States. From that vigorous position, we could work with our European colleagues to create an alliance conferring benefits on both clubs—a kind of “SkyTeam” for higher education. With access to all that European and American colleges and universities have to offer, the world’s college students could enjoy an upgrade to first class.

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REFERENCES
The Council of Europe, the Bologna Process, and Education for Democracy

An Interview with Sjur Bergan

Liberal Education: Why did the Council of Europe launch an initiative on higher education and democratic culture?

Sjur Bergan: The Council of Europe is an organization dedicated to promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The council was established in 1949 as the first European organization set up in the aftermath of World War II. Of course, one of its purposes was to prevent the recurrence of horrors like those Europe experienced in 1939–45, but also during the 1930s. At the same time, the council was established as governments in Central and Eastern Europe came under Soviet influence, like Czechoslovakia in 1948. The council started out with some ten members, and it was only after 1989–90, with the end of dictatorships symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall, that the council’s membership could expand to encompass virtually all European countries. From twenty-three members in 1989, we now have forty-seven.

At the same time, our understanding of democracy has evolved. In the 1950s, both Europe and the United States looked mainly at the formalities, institutions, and procedures of democracy. In a caricature, if people were able to vote, they lived in a democracy. This is, of course, not intended to underestimate the importance of elections. They are crucial, as are democratic institutions and a democratic judiciary. Yet, if the institutions and processes do not ensure participation and minority rights, can we really talk about democracy? Are we in a democracy if women cannot vote, which was the case in some European countries until the post-war years? Can we talk about democracy if laws and practices effectively make it difficult for some groups to exercise their political rights, as was the case with blacks in the U.S. South? Can we talk about democracy if the press cannot or does not operate freely? Can we talk about democracy if people can vote but not engage more broadly in governing the societies in which they live?

Around 1990, many Europeans still had a relatively formalistic perception of democracy. In the course of the 1990s, however, there was increasing awareness that democratic institutions and democratic laws could only work in practice, in societies where they are embedded within a democratic culture. In other words, institutions and processes can only function if members of society have the attitudes, competencies, and ways of behavior to make them democratic. This is what the Council of Europe means by “citizenship,” which goes way beyond the concept of “citizenship” as designating the passport you carry.

Clearly, education at all levels is crucial to developing democratic culture, and that is why the initiative for working on democratic culture came from the Education Directorate. The importance of democratic culture was recognized by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe at the 2005 Warsaw Summit. The initiative on higher education and democratic culture was launched to underscore that higher education is every bit as important as other areas of education in developing democratic culture, and also because

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European higher education institutions are not sufficiently aware of their civic mission. Public discourse on higher education in Europe is very focused on the economic aspects of higher education—which are, of course, important. But the role of higher education in society is not just economic.

**LE:** The Bologna Process seems to be very narrowly focused on alignment and on credentialing students in specific content or skill areas. Where does a goal of advancing democratic culture—especially in the face of a very diverse contemporary Europe—fit into what European nations are trying to accomplish through the Bologna Process?

**SB:** In its first decade, the Bologna Process has been fairly strongly focused on structural reform, in particular on provisions for quality assurance, on reforming the degree systems and establishing qualifications frameworks, and on making it easier to have qualifications recognized across borders—and hence, on facilitating mobility. The reason for this is partly that there were serious issues in these areas, and partly the strong economic focus that I just referred to.

However, this is not incompatible with a concern for democratic culture. One of the council's concerns is to “decompartmentalize” the European higher education policy debate or, in other words, not to talk just about the economic importance of higher education or only about its importance in developing citizenship. Within the structural reforms of the Bologna Process, which were necessary and which have been largely successful, it is perfectly possible and even necessary to develop higher education policies to respond to what the Council of Europe has defined as the four major purposes of higher education, which incidentally we see as equally important: (1) preparation for the labor market; (2) preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies; (3) personal development; and (4) the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

We are now engaged in a debate on “the European Higher Education Area beyond 2010”—that is, on what the priorities of the second phase of the EHEA should be. I believe that the structural reforms of the first phase of the Bologna Process will provide a good basis for a second phase in which we need to look at some of the broader challenges, including the purposes of higher education. That will, in many ways, be a steeper challenge than the first phase—not least since progress will be more difficult to measure. But it is crucial that we succeed in increasing awareness of the composite mission of higher education. Qualifications frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms are essential instruments, and they need to be used with vision and purpose.

**LE:** In cooperation with the U.S. Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy—of which the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is a member—the Council of Europe organizes a series of forums on higher education in North America and Europe, including the upcoming forum on “Converging Competencies: Diversity, Higher Education, and Sustainable Democracy” to be held in Strasbourg in October. What are European universities and American colleges and universities learning from one another about important college learning goals through these partnerships and forums?

**SB:** Europeans and Americans tend to think we know each other quite well, and while this is often true, we constantly discover new things that we should perhaps have known but that we need to learn and discover. For U.S. higher education, I think it is important to learn about all aspects of the Bologna Process. I also believe the European experience with strong student participation in higher education governance should be of great interest to our U.S. partners, and it is certainly something we try to put forward through our joint forums. In all three forums (2006, 2007, and 2008), student representatives have featured in prominent roles. The strongest experience was perhaps in 2006, when Taciana Khoma from Belarus was a speaker. A few months earlier, she had been kicked out of her university in Minsk because of her involvement with the European Student Union and with the Belarus democracy movement. I am also proud that several European universities virtually competed to offer her a place of study when it became clear she could not continue her studies in her native country.

Not least, I think, U.S. higher education could and should learn from the European emphasis on the need to be able to work in a language other than one's native language. Native English speakers have both an advantage and a challenge. The advantage is that
you can almost always find someone who speaks your language. The challenge is that this does not easily motivate you to learn the languages of others. That is not only a linguistic disadvantage but also a very serious disability when it comes to understanding different ways of thinking. One of the most difficult things about learning your first foreign language is to understand that a concept may be expressed very differently in another language. As the saying goes, whoever speaks only his mother tongue is stuck in his mother’s world. The forums held at the Council of Europe are bilingual (English and French).

Still, from my perspective it is perhaps both easier and more interesting to talk about what European higher education can learn from our U.S. colleagues. One important lesson is to appreciate the diversity of U.S. higher education and to understand the roles and function of the huge variety of institutions, from community colleges to top-class research universities. Not least, it is important for Europeans to understand the role of community colleges and not brush them off as “unacademic.” Europeans are generally strongly committed to equal opportunities to higher education but often do not appreciate the important role of community colleges in furthering this goal.

The most important area in which European higher education has a lot to learn from our U.S. colleagues is the American concept of liberal education. I already referred to the strong emphasis on economic utility in European higher education debate, and that is certainly not absent from U.S. policy debate either. But U.S. institutions have a much clearer vision of their importance as civic actors as well as of the need to provide their students with a solid cultural, ethical, and philosophical basis of knowledge and understanding that may not be immediately useful but that is essential in
the longer term. Our societies will increasingly need to make difficult decisions on the basis of incomplete knowledge; we will need to bring together competence from many fields; and we will need to measure short-term gain against long-term risks, measured not only in economic terms but also in terms of values and how our activities and decisions will affect us, as individuals, and our societies. U.S. higher education has given much more serious thought to these issues than the vast majority of European institutions and colleagues. I am particularly impressed with the AAC&U report on College Learning for the New Global Century and have tried to spread it in Europe. I had the good fortune to be invited to AAC&U’s 2007 annual meeting in New Orleans, and I was very impressed by that gathering of 1,500 higher education leaders committed to the proposition that higher education has a purpose broader than economic well-being.

**LE:** What is the “social dimension” of the European Higher Education Area, and how is it being addressed in the Bologna Process?

**SB:** Broadly, the social dimension describes the role of higher education in improving not only access to higher education but also opportunities to complete quality higher education. Ultimately, the goal must be that everyone be given the opportunity to realize his or her full higher education potential, that no qualified candidate be forced to abstain from higher education for financial reasons, and that the term “qualified candidate” not be defined too narrowly. What counts is a person’s potential more than his or her past achievements. This includes the possibility to participate in academic mobility. That, of course, is a relatively easy goal to stipulate and a much more difficult one to implement.

Admittedly, the social dimension is one of the great challenges we will still face in the European Higher Education Area. One’s chances of benefiting from higher education still depend too much on family background, and we are still far from achieving the academic mobility we would like. This is also an area in which higher education policy will need to interact more strongly with other areas of public policy. You cannot discuss equal opportunity without discussing finance, and you cannot discuss finance without discussing what our social goals are. You cannot stimulate academic mobility without improving visa regulations and work permits, and that is a touchy area for many European governments.

**LE:** What are the arguments that the education ministers leading the Bologna Process rely on to describe what modern Europe needs from higher education in this age, and how prominent is the argument for higher education as a “public good”?

**SB:** The ministers of the Bologna Process have said twice—in Praha in 2001 and in Berlin in 2003—that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility. The fact that they said this twice makes one wonder whether they were stating the obvious or expressing the concern that what has been a key feature of higher education in Europe can no longer be taken for granted. My interpretation is that the ministers expressed a concern, and that raises the question of policies.

It is important to note that the ministers talked not only about public good but also about public responsibility, and that is in my view the more important part of the argument. Clearly, higher education is not a pure public good in economic terms, nor is it a pure private good. It may be of interest to discuss where on the continuum from pure public good to pure private good higher education is located, but the part about public responsibility is the operational part of the statement. This is perhaps more important in a European context, where public authorities have traditionally had a stronger role in higher education policies than their counterparts in the United States have had.

The key question, then, is this: if we want public responsibility to be a key feature of European higher education, what do we need to do? We can no longer be content with broad statements, and we can no longer be content with sloganizing about public vs. private. We need to take a hard look at what the proper role of public authorities should be in furthering higher education in modern societies. The Council of Europe started to do this in 2004–5 through a conference and a book, and this led to a policy recommendation by our Committee of Ministers, the council’s highest political body.

In some areas, public authorities should take exclusive responsibility. This includes legislation, the design of the degree system and the national qualifications framework, and making sure there is provision for quality assurance. In some areas public authorities
should take a leading responsibility, such as in ensuring equal opportunities to higher education. In other areas, such as financing and the actual provision of higher education, public authorities should play an important but not exclusive role. There should be room for private financing of higher education, but public authorities need to lay down the framework within which this financing is provided. They also should not use extensive private financing as an excuse to reduce public funding. The Council of Europe has, I believe, done important work in this area, but I also believe we need to continue the discussion of the role of public authorities as well as of other actors in higher education. This should definitely be one of the key issues in the European Higher Education Area beyond 2010.

To illustrate how important this issue is, let me close with one of my favorite references. Chile—which is my wife’s home country—has launched a series of publications gearing up to the bicentennial of its independence in 2010, incidentally the same year that the Bologna Process will end and lead to the European Higher Education Area. In 2005, the prominent Chilean sociologist Eugenio Tironi produced a volume in this series called El sueño chileno—the Chilean dream. In his book, Tironi says that the answer to the question, what kind of education do we need? is to be found in the answer to another question: what kind of society do we want?

I strongly believe that the key mission of U.S. and European higher education is in helping us develop the kind of society in which we would like to live ourselves and in which we would like our children and grandchildren to live. This requires vision and values, a sense of purpose, and the knowledge, understanding, and skills to put the vision and values into practice. In the age of the sound bite, we need institutions that take the longer view; but the time for action is now.

Higher education must provide society with highly specialized specialists, and it does that very well. Society is in even greater need of intellectuals, however, of people who not only have detailed understanding of a specific academic field but who also have the vision and the intellectual curiosity to understand how their chosen field contributes to the whole, to ask the fundamental question about the purpose and value of our lives, and to answer those questions. Much remains to be done in this regard, but higher education should see it as a pleasure and an honor to provide this type of competence.

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NOTES
REVIEWING THE STRUCTURAL CHANGES in higher education in the three decades following the Second World War, Ulrich Teichler (1988) of the Gesamthochschule Kassel, an authority on such matters, sensed a loss of interest in “grand visions of a possible optimal model in a modern industrial society.” None of the planning approaches—“diversified models,” “unitary models,” expansion, deregulation (by European governments), egalitarian policies—produced the expected reforms.

Two decades on, what do we find? Governments in Europe and federal and state governments in the United States continue to fuss with higher education systems. Their efforts are now driven largely but not entirely by budgetary considerations as the global economy falls victim to crises in housing markets and to high energy and food prices. These, defense expenditures, and natural calamities have increased expenditures for governments and universities alike. With so many demands on public budgets, governments have tried to rein in the costs of earlier expansionist policies by squeezing “efficiency” or “productivity gains” out of state-funded colleges and universities. Terms such as audit, accountability, performance-based learning (a phrase that means nothing in and of itself), and value-added learning have become familiar and contentious. In Europe, “metrics” measurements have entered the lexicon of assessment, leading to speculation over the survival of peer review.1

Besides seeking an “objective” way to measure productivity in teaching and research, government agencies claim that academics cannot always be trusted to evaluate themselves honestly or to keep track of institutional expenditures. It is certainly true that careless accounting does occur, that peer review sometimes misfires, and that some academics are prone to ideological decisions. Nonetheless, classic peer review needs no defense. It is the determinant of elite quality; there can be no superior university, indeed no university at all, without it. The history of quality assessments makes that clear. Furthermore, we do not have an accurate reckoning of just how much the new systems of accountability cost in terms of either the academic time spent on meetings and paperwork or the new academic, bureaucratic, and staff careers—and associated office expenses—created to enforce an obsession with dubious measurements.

There are no grand visions here. Rather, there is a messy mixture of assorted suspicions and trial-and-error policies undergoing dizzying revisions. Moreover, despite rhetorical charges and countercharges, there are no conspiracies here either. On the generous side, we might conclude that government efforts to influence the budgetary policies of higher education—and, through them, to influence access and exit—are, at bottom, part of the logic of the nation-state, especially since 1945 when mass-access higher education took off. Given the resources required to support a system of postsecondary education on a scale never before envisioned, attempts to rein in costs in public-sector colleges and universities, instead of passing them on to taxpayers, are at least understandable. Higher education expenses always outpace inflation in any case, which is one reason private colleges and universities in the United States are being pressured to use more of their endowments for tuition discounting.

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The global or “world-class” university
And yet there is a rather grand vision emerging, if not quite in the terms conceived of earlier. It is not of an optimal model for defining or managing a huge system of educational institutions or aligning them with secondary education or labor markets, as was typical in Europe. Nor is it a vision that will make all institutional or academic participants in national higher education systems particularly comfortable. It is by no means a total departure from past considerations, except in two ways. First, it does not affect all colleges and universities directly, although it affects them indirectly. And second, it represents a modification of the very notion of a national higher education system integrated through a mix of market and state (local, regional, national) incentives and funding. This emerging grand vision goes by various names, but it is most often referred to as involving a category of research-led institutions described as “world-class.”

The logic of the world-class university is the logic of the global economy. Although we are still far from the conception of an extranational or superordinate university, there is that implication. Historians might offer that the medieval university was such a creature, appearing before the evolution of the nation-state, occupying “territories” with un settled political boundaries, and enabling students and scholars to move inter- or cross territorially. Even as it shut down some academic mobility, the advent of the nation-state gave rise to an “invisible college” of gypsy scholars—a network now held together by modern technologies.

The grand vision of a world-class or global university offers one way of coping with certain categories of expenditures. Governments can concentrate resources on institutions with a proven or potential capacity to compete for graduate students, academic talent, and Nobel-quality researchers. The expected results enhance national prestige and generate income by producing cutting-edge innovation in science and technology. Such a university becomes “privatized” by attracting sufficient non-state financial support to meet its operating expenses, strengthen its endowment base, and compete even more vigorously. When an institution promotes excellence in several principal subject areas, the example is likely to spread to all disciplines. Excellence is difficult to acquire; once acquired, it is catching; once caught, it must be sustained (Clark 2004).

Globally ambitious universities are constructing “brands,” a term borrowed from consumer economics. In fact, an entire branding
industry has arisen. Expensive marketing consultants are being hired to improve brand recognition. “Tired-looking logos” are being redesigned, and courses are being shaped and reshaped to “sell” (Fearn 2008). While they are at odds with the conventional notion of slowly cumulating knowledge and quiet scholarship, these zippy business strategies have proven useful in attracting paying students from Asian countries. Australian universities have been particularly successful, enrolling more such students from China and Hong Kong than American institutions (Marginson 2008). If there is an example that excites the vision, it is that of the great American private universities, whose fabulous endowment wealth has intoxicated international academic leaders and civil servants. Their example has led such fabled English universities as Cambridge to engage in cooperative research with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a way to acquire market know-how.

Burton Clark (1998), the distinguished American sociologist, has studied those “entrepreneurial” universities in England, Scotland, Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands that have succeeded in attracting international attention and are close to achieving global status. The broad formula for success is clear, but not paradigmatic. Upward movement requires adept leadership with terrific cooperation from all other groups in the academic community, a willingness to restructure internally, strong working relations with outside business and governmental groups, a capacity to rise above internal rivalries to gain a sense of the common good, and a willingness to experiment and take bold decisions without fearing that mistakes will occur—because they will.

Other historians, political scientists, sociologists, and policy analysts have been quick to spot the leading edges of the global university. Particularly noteworthy are Ted Tapper and David Palfreyman (2008), who have shown just how governments are setting about to encourage the emergence of world-class universities within national settings. The hybrid university form prevails. As in the case of Clark’s entrepreneurial universities, institutional resources are drawn from numerous private and public funding streams: tuition, gifts, endowments, services, government support for operating expenses or capital projects, research income, science parks, and start-ups. In fact, the hybrid form has long characterized the principal American research universities, even if private. Clark Kerr, America’s leading university president of the past half century, famously remarked that the university is not only a “multiversity” because of its numerous interior partitions and plural responsibilities, but also a “Federal Research Grant University.” Government has always provided the bulk of research income as well as student financial aid and guaranteed loans.

Whether public or private, research universities in receipt of any form of government assistance are always accountable for their expenditures. They are also subject to external rules and regulations that often have an ideological dimension and, therefore, fluctuate according to prevailing political values. Furthermore, as a hybrid, the research university is subject to pressures from both governments and markets. If the research university is also global, it then acquires a third layer of pressures. The combination does not suggest a stable shelf life. In such circumstances, definitions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy are subject to reconsideration.

Global rankings
European Union planners are concerned that, apart from Oxford and Cambridge, none of Europe’s many research universities are among the top twenty globally ranked institutions according to a source that is now on everyone’s lips: the Shanghai Jiao Tong University index of prestige. The rankings game can be faulted from any number of perspectives. To be useful, rankings need to ignore most of the subtle and enduring inheritances of universities. They overplay features derived from market discipline. Yet while complaints are steady, the rankings are taken seriously as a measure of opinion. So vigorous discussions go on about how to gain or strengthen prestige, or what is most to the point, where to focus resources and how to gain more from a combination of government, non-governmental organizations, private foundations, parents, and industry.
Even the French universities, for centuries well behind the great specialized schools in public esteem, have succumbed to rankings pressures. The current universities minister has announced competitive bidding for campus renovation projects. This appears to be a first step in moving French universities away from the historical practice of regarding all as of equal quality, a fiction that many European universities have maintained until now. The fiction was reflected in social democratic policies, but the taboos are being broken where they were once very strong—in Germany, for example (Kehm and Pasternack 2008).

Devolution in the United Kingdom has allowed the Scots to consider entering the global contest for status branding. In the World University Rankings published by the Times Higher Education Supplement, the second of the two oft-cited global rankings, Edinburgh University currently occupies the twenty-third place. A task force composed of government officials and academics is now considering the steps required to move Edinburgh up a few pegs and into the top twenty. The leaning in preliminary speculation is that the ultimate function of such a university would be “the creation of economic growth” (Tahir 2008).

Even tiny New Zealand aspires to the top of the charts. Of eight research universities in the islands, the University of Auckland is acknowledged to be the status leader. Celebrating its centenary in 2008, Auckland is nevertheless a new research university in many respects. It acquired independence from a federal system on the London University model only a few decades ago, and it moved from a fairly open admissions policy for undergraduates in the arts and sciences to a system of select entry. Historically built on the attendance of part-time students, the University of Auckland now intends to increase full-time attendance. Auckland’s leaders also propose more emphasis on research, including the hiring of non-teaching staff, and they are following the privatization path now typical of the search for additional revenue. But insofar as privatization cannot possibly replace the income hitherto received from the state, Auckland and the other research universities in New Zealand are engaged in heated negotiations with government ministries over new ways of calculating student funding and defining the future autonomy of campuses.

Global branding trends
While the world-class university can be old or new, antiquity provides distinct advantages. Ancient universities have established reputations, well-placed alumni, attractive facilities, and centuries over which to accumulate donations. Yet it is fascinating to explore the reasons why so many senior continental European universities have not hitherto built global brands. The French case is easiest to understand. Revolutionary and Napoleonic France did not care for clerical influence in the universities, and its technocratic leanings favored the famous alternatives. German and Russian universities, and the universities of the Soviet empire, were destroyed by totalitarian governments and have struggled to rebuild. And in a sense, rebuilding is easier when only a few universities—rather than a national system—are singled out. Elsewhere, social democracy and underinvestment in higher education have had a leveling effect. Note the huge number of students competing for space in Italian universities, and the overcrowding in French universities.

In Italy, the domination of universities by politically connected professorial baroni has long restricted the upward mobility of younger academics. It is interesting to speculate on the degree to which academic reputations are individually acquired or first gained under the umbrella of an elite university. If the former, then institutional affiliation is not critical; but if the latter, campus reputation is vital, and faculty loyalty is therefore a factor in the branding phenomenon.

Anglophone countries seem to be particularly status-minded. One explanation lies in social class inheritances and conceptions of the gentleman. Academics are professionals. Samuel Haber (1991) has explained that in America the professions inherited a precapitalist gentlemanly ethic that later came into conflict with market-derived status. His examples are drawn from medicine, law, and engineering, but similar tensions are reflected in academic life. Less attractively, gentlemanly attitudes reinforced academic prejudices against Jews and Roman Catholics in the United States until the end of the Second World War. In England, Oxford and Cambridge absorbed the cachet of an aristocratic and Anglican establishment. While those institutions are essentially meritocratic today,
no one disagrees that past associations provide a distinct competitive edge. Both universities are now embarked on monumental fundraising campaigns, contacting graduates worldwide.

Elsewhere, antiquity also goes hand-in-hand with esteem. Japan has decided to bestow attention on its older institutions, favoring its sometime “imperial” Tokyo University and its premier private institution, Waseda. The Tokyo Institute of Technology, established in 1929, has risen to national standing. In Europe, Lund and Uppsala, despite the Scandinavian welfare state inheritance, often pop up in conversation, as do the Royal Institute of Technology and the famous medical university, the Karolinska. Norway’s government and universities are becoming more elite-minded and embarking on a policy of raising entry standards, restricting numbers, and emphasizing research and graduate instruction—to include American-style self-contained graduate schools (Vabo and Aamodt 2008). This is particularly significant in light of Norway’s pronounced egalitarian heritage. In Israel, the Hebrew University, as the second oldest institution of higher education, is venerated, and so too is the Technion, the oldest by a few years. The latter, with its recent Nobel Laureates, is well-positioned for privatization activities and draws considerable support from abroad.

These are the general trends. Social democratic heritages cannot be simply overthrown, but the world-class university is definitely regarded as an asset to the nation-state. While the word “elite” still has an invidious connotation for some and will continue to be used pejoratively, it is nonetheless regaining its former meaning of “best.” Similarly the diminished word “flagship” to describe the lead institution of a multi-campus federation is making a comeback. But the story cannot end at this point, and it is useful to point out some of the major ironies involved in the phenomenon of the world-class university.

**Lurking grand visions?**

It comes as no surprise that with so much attention and so many resources bestowed upon a few universities, there are new concerns about the wealth gap, which is already large. The United States is accustomed to immense disparities in institutional revenue, although the elite public universities are now particularly worried about their reputations since their endowments are, for the most part, substantially lower than the renowned privates. Universities in countries where private giving
is unfamiliar, or private wealth limited, have cause to worry that a stress on “world-class” institutions will mean less per-student income for them. It may also mean a cap on any aspirations for enhancing a research mission and a greater likelihood that they will become the skills and proficiencies workhorses of the global higher education system.

Ironically, while the branded institutions declare their commitment to affirmative action or (in France) “positive discrimination,” the elite or merit selection necessary for international recognition invariably works against such policies. It is no secret that the most competitive students, exceptions apart, are drawn from the more comfortable families in any society, those enjoying what it has become fashionable to call “cultural capital” (Rothblatt 2007).

While it is admitted on all sides that competition within a global economy requires maximum institutional flexibility—an ability to shift priorities quickly, gauge markets, rearrange interior disciplinary boundaries, and take risks—government ministers and bureaucracies are paradoxically reluctant to allow research universities an absolutely free hand. Charged with generating wealth, the celebrity university—roaming global markets in search of talent, students, and resources—is too valuable for states to ignore. And as more than one observer has noticed, operating in the world arena represents a threat to the national control of research universities that has been so much a feature of the modern history of universities, especially outside the United States.

Even though academics understand that a concern for standards is sometimes a euphemism for standardization—the enemy of intellectual curiosity and experiment—talk about “standards” is rife. But governmental and bureaucratic oversight bodies are not directly involved in research and classroom teaching, and they cannot easily assess the enormous and necessary variations in national mass higher education systems. The tendency is to “steer,” to establish “targets,” to measure “outputs,” to ask for “skills,” and to fine-tune prior methods of assessment. The vice chancellors in New Zealand, in a statement rather typical of today, fear that recent government funding and accountability proposals will lead to “sweeping and unfettered bureaucratic control over university activities” (University of Auckland 2007). The historian Thorsten Nybom (2008) is highly skeptical about whether the supposed uncoupling of the nation-state from the university is genuine. He sees a process of reregulation by other means.

The strength of the global university phenomenon is precisely that it functions across many different fronts and within innumerable
markets. But governments want their leading institutions to be accountable, and accountability requires that reporting lines be clear. Thus, conceptions of the world-class university invariably involve discussions of the principal authority: Should the principal authority lie at the top, with presidents, rectors, and vice chancellors? Or should collegiate forms of governance by committee—as, for example, embodied in academic senates—prevail? What should be the role of trustees? Burton Clark's analyses suggest that cooperation rather than rivalry is the path to success. But it cannot be denied that, at present, considerable faculty anxiety exists over what is decried as a managerial challenge to received traditions of shared governance, however much those traditions have in fact already departed from earlier centuries. Designating campus heads as CEOs does not help the case.

It has been common, if not necessarily accurate, for universities, even research universities, to claim that teaching and research are somehow “balanced.” In this metaphysical equation, because graduate and professional instruction is closely allied to research or vocational functions, “teaching” refers to undergraduate instruction. Suffice it to say that in the discussions about brand-name universities, little emphasis is placed on the traditional concerns of undergraduate liberal education, such as citizenship, self-realization, or the transmission of cultural legacies. Yet as Guy Neave has correctly observed (2001, 24), “even revolutions inherit values from those they overthrow.” So who knows? And to mix the metaphors, there may be a grand vision or two still lurking in the recipes of the past.

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NOTE
1. For example, citation indices, which have been around for some time and are used in international rankings. In Britain, the “soft” peer review research assessment will be eased out as metrics are brought in. Institutional audit for quality assurance in teaching and learning is to receive greater stress. But so controversial is the metrics issue that interagency quarrels have erupted (see Corbyn 2008). The Australian government has promised to use both metrics and peer review. Metrics “help keep costs down.” As to the issue of who exactly is to assess the worth of metrics, the Australians report that “expert review” remains essential for disciplines (see Gill 2008).
FOR SEVERAL YEARS, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has been pushing for the liberalization of trade services, of which higher educational services are a highly prized component. The estimated global market for higher educational services is between $40 billion and $50 billion—not much less than the market for financial services.1 Opponents of liberalization argue that higher education cannot and should not be subject to the kind of free trade agreements that have been applied to commercial goods and other services in the global economy. After all, WTO agreements would guarantee foreign service providers the same rights that apply to domestic providers within any national education system, while compromising the sovereignty of national regulatory efforts. Yet the evidence shows that, just as corporations did not wait for the WTO to conclude its ministerial rounds before moving their operations offshore, the lack of any international accords has not stopped universities in the leading Anglophone countries from establishing their names and services in a broad range of overseas locations. The formidable projected growth in student enrollment internationally, combined with the expansion of technological capacity and the consolidation of English as a lingua franca, has resulted in a bonanza-style environment for investors in offshore education.

The pace of offshoring has surged since 9/11, and offshoring opportunities are now being pursued across the entire spectrum of higher education institutions—from the ballooning for-profit sectors and online diploma mills to land-grant universities to the most elite, ivied colleges. No single organization has attained the operational status of a global university, after the model of the global corporation, but it is only a matter of time before we see the current infants of that species take their first, unaided steps. As with any other commodity good or service that is allowed to roam across borders, there has also been much hand-wringing about the potential lack of quality assurance. Critics argue that the caliber of education will surely be jeopardized if the global market for it is deregulated. Much less has been said in this debate about the impact on the working conditions of academics or on the ethical profile and aspirational identity of institutions. How will globalization affect the security and integrity of livelihoods that are closely tied to liberal educational ideals like meritocratic access, face-to-face learning, and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge? Will these ideals (and the job base built around them) wither away entirely in the entrepreneurial race to compete for a global market share, or will they survive only in one corner of the market—as the elite preserve of those who are able to pay top dollar for such handcrafted attention?

The General Agreement on Trade and Services
Education is the United States’ fifth-largest service export—generating $12 billion in 2004—and arguably the one with the biggest

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growth potential. New Zealand and Australia lead in this field of trade; education is New Zealand’s third largest service export, and Australia’s fourth largest. Given the intensification of global competition for high-skill jobs, educational services are increasingly the number one commodity in fast-developing countries.² The U.S. Department of Commerce will help any American university develop this trade, here or abroad, in much the same way as it helps corporations. For relatively small fees, its Commercial Service will organize booths at international education fairs, find international partners for university ventures, help with brand recognition in a new market, perform market research, and, through use of the premium Platinum Key Service, offer six months of expertise on setting up and marketing an overseas campus in one of over eighty countries.

The activities of the Commerce Department are fully aligned with the trade liberalization agenda of the WTO, where higher education falls under the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS). Dedicated, like all WTO agencies, to the principle that free trade is the best guarantor of the highest quality at the lowest cost, GATS was formed in 1995. Higher education services were added to its jurisdiction in 2000, largely as a result of pressure from the U.S. representative to the WTO backed by representatives from Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. The inclusion of higher education services has been fiercely opposed by most higher education leaders in WTO member nations, most prominently by a 2001 joint declaration of four large academic organizations in North America and Europe and the 2002 Porto Alegre Declaration signed by Iberian and Latin American associations.³ The signatories of these two declarations agree that trade liberalization risks weakening governments’ commitment to and investment in public higher education, that education is not a commodity but a basic human right, and that its reliance on public mandates should make it distinct from other services. Yet the concerted opposition of these professional bodies has made little difference to the forty-five countries (the European Union counts as a single country) that had already made commitments to the education sector by January 2006 (Knight 2006). Indeed, if the current round of WTO negotiations, the Doha Round, had not been logjammed by acrimonious disagreements over agricultural trade, GATS would have concluded its work some time ago, imposing severe constraints on the rights of individual governments to regulate education within their own borders.

Such constraints are particularly debilitating to developing countries, which will lose valuable domestic regulatory protection from the predatory advances of service providers from rich nations. Indeed, a new ministerial mandate at GATS allows demandeurs like the United States, New Zealand, and Australia to band together to put plurilateral pressure on the poorer target countries to accept their education exports (Robinson 2006). (Demandeur governments are those doing the asking under the WTO’s request-offer process). Officially, GATS is supposed to exclude services “supplied in the exercise of governmental authority”—that is, by nonprofit educational organizations—but most committed nations have chosen not to clarify the distinction between nonprofit and for-profit. There is good reason to expect creeping, if not galloping, liberalization in all sectors if the GATS trade regime proceeds. After all, the free trade culture of the WTO is one in which public services are automatically seen as unfair government monopolies that should, in the name of “full market access,” be turned over to private for-profit providers whenever possible.

Even in the absence of any such formal trade regime, we have seen the clear impact of market liberalization at all levels of higher education: the voluntary introduction of revenue center management models, which require every departmental unit to prove itself as a profit center; the centralization of power upward into managerial bureaucracies; the near-abdication of peer review assessment in research units that are in bed with industry; the casualization of the majority of the academic workforce, for whom basic professional tenets like academic freedom are little more than a mirage in a desert; and a widening gap between the salaries of presidents and the pitance paid to contingent teachers that is more and more in line with the spectrum of compensation observed in publicly listed corporations.
None of this has occurred as a result of an imposition of formal requirements. Imagine then the consequences of a WTO trade regime that legally insists that regulatory standards affecting procedures of accreditation, licensing, and qualification might pose barriers to free trade in services.

By the time GATS negotiations over education were initiated in 2000, the range of educational organizations that had established themselves overseas was already voluminous. In the years since then, the volume and scope of overseas ventures has expanded to include almost every institution that has found itself in a revenue squeeze, whether from reduced state and federal support or skyrocketing expenses. It is not at all easy to distinguish some of the new offshore academic centers from free trade industrial zones where outsourcing corporations are welcomed with a lavish package of tax holidays, virtually free land, and duty-free privileges. Indeed, in many locations, Western universities are physically setting up shop in free trade zones. The foreign universities in Dubai’s Knowledge Village are basically there to train knowledge-worker recruits in the Free Zone Authority’s other complexes—Dubai Internet City, Dubai Media City, Dubai Studio City, DubaiTech, and the Dubai Outsource Zone. In Qatar, the colleges share facilities with the global high-tech companies that enjoy tax and duty-free investments under that country’s free zone law. Some of China’s largest free trade locations have begun to attract brand name colleges to relieve the skilled labor shortage that is hampering the rate of offshore transfer of jobs and technology. The University of Liverpool—the first to open a branch campus in Suzhou Industrial Park, which attracts more foreign direct investment than other zone in China—advertised entry-level positions at salaries beginning at $750 per month.

Some readers might justifiably say that as long as the quality of education and integrity of research can be maintained, and the lure of monetary gain kept at bay, the push toward internationalization is something of a moral obligation for educators in affluent countries. Surely, it is a way of sharing or redistributing the wealth that the reproduction of knowledge capital bestows on the most advanced nations? Surely, the domestic hoarding of all this largesse only serves to perpetuate the privileges (not to mention the parochialism) of American students, while it sustains the grossly overdeveloped economy supplied by our universities? At a time when our multinational corporations are plundering the resources of the developing world in the scramble to patent genetic material and copyright indigenous folk tales, surely educators are obliged to set a better example.

In response, I would ask whether the overseas penetration of Anglophone colleges is really the best way of delivering such goals—especially when the main impetus for expansion to date has clearly been less philanthropic than revenue-driven, and when the crisis of domestic student debt is more likely to be exported in the form of a new “debt trap” for students in developing countries to bear. Isn’t there a more direct way for universities to make globally available the knowledge and research they generate?

One obvious alternative is to give it away for free, with no intellectual property strings attached. Through its pioneer OpenCourseWare project, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) makes its courses accessible online for self-learning and non-degree-granting purposes. Other institutions, including Tufts, Utah State, and Carnegie Mellon, have followed suit. Today, MIT courses are being translated in China and other Asian countries.

While laudable in inspiration, the content that is being imported has a clear cultural standpoint. Unless it is absorbed alongside teachings from a local standpoint, it remains to be seen how this export model will differ, in the long run, from the tradition of colonial educations. All over the developing world, governments desperate to attract foreign investment, global firms, and now global universities are channeling scarce public educational resources into programs tailored to the skill sets of a “knowledge society” at the expense of all other definitions of knowledge, including indigenous knowledge traditions. Under these conditions, higher education is increasingly regarded as instrumental training for knowledge workers in tune with capitalist rationality as it is lived within one of the urban footprints of corporate globalization.

**Offshoring the university**

If universities were to follow closely the corporate offshoring model, what would we expect to see next? The instructional budget
is where cost reductions will be sought first, usually through the introduction of distance learning or the hiring of local, offshore instructors at large salary discounts. Expatriate employees, hired to set up an offshore facility and train locals, will become a fiscal liability to be offloaded at the first opportunity. If the satellite campus is located in the same industrial park as Fortune 500 firms, then it will almost certainly be invited to produce customized research for these companies, again at discount prices. It will be only a matter of time before an administrator decides it would be cost-effective to move some domestic research operations to the overseas branch. And once the local instructors have proven themselves over there, they may be the ones asked to produce the syllabi and, ultimately, even teach remote programs for onshore students in the United States.

Inevitably, in a university with global operations, administrators who have to make decisions about where to allocate budgets will favor locations where the return on investment is relatively higher. Why build expensive additions at home when a foreign government or free trade zone authority is offering free land and infrastructure? Why bother recruiting overseas students when they can be taught more profitably in their countries of origin? If a costly program can only be saved by outsourcing the teaching of it, then surely that is the decision that will be made.

Along the way, there will be much high-minded talk about meeting the educational needs of developing countries, and some pragmatic talk about reducing the cost of education for domestic students. Substandard academic conditions will be blamed on foreign intermediaries or partners, or on “unfair” competition. Legislators and top administrators will grandstand in public, and play along in private. Clerical functions and data-dense research will be the first to go offshore. As for teaching instructors, those in the weakest positions or the most vulnerable disciplines will feel the impact first, and faculty with the most clout—tenured full-timers in elite universities—will be the last and the least to be affected.

As far as the domestic record goes, higher education institutions have followed much the same trail as subcontracting in industry: first, the outsourcing of all nonacademic campus personnel, then the casualization of routine instruction, followed by the creation of a permats class on short-term contracts and the preservation of an ever smaller core of full-timers, who are crucial to the brand prestige of the collegiate name. Downward salary pressure and eroded job security are the inevitable upshot. How do we expect offshore education to produce a different result?

From the perspective of academic labor, I don’t believe we should expect an altogether dissimilar outcome. But the offshoring of higher education, if and when it occurs, will not resemble the hollowing-out of manufacturing economies. There will be no full-scale employer flight to cheaper locations; nor will there be select outsourcing of white-collar services, where knowledge transfer involves the uploading and downloading of skills and know-how from and to human brains on different sides of the planet. The scenario for education will be significantly different, given the nature and traditions of the services being delivered, the vested commitment of national governments to the goals of public education, and the complexity of relationships among various stakeholders.

Moreover, for all the zealous efforts to steer higher education into the rapids of enterprise culture, it would be easy to demonstrate that, with the exception of the burgeoning for-profit sector, most universities do not and cannot, for the most part, function fiscally like a traditional marketplace. The principles of collaboration and sharing that sustain teaching, learning, and research are inimical or irreducible, in the long run, to financialization after the model of the global corporation. Yet one could say much the same about the organizational culture of the knowledge industries. High-tech firms depend increasingly on internationally available knowledge in specialized fields; they collaborate with each other on research that is either too expensive or too multisided to undertake individually; and they depend, through high turnover, on a pool of top engineers to circulate brainpower throughout the industry. So, too, the management of knowledge workers has diverged appreciably from the traditions of Taylorism. It is increasingly modeled after the work mentality of the modern academic, whose job is not bounded...
by the physical workplace or by a set period of hours clocked there. Modern knowledge workers no longer know when they are on or off the job, and their ideas—the stock-in-trade of their industrial livelihoods—come to them at any waking moment of their day, often in their freest moments (Ross 2001). From this perspective, talk about the “corporate university” is lazy shorthand. The migration of our own academic customs and work mentalities onto corporate campuses and into knowledge industry workplaces is just as important a part of the story of the rise of knowledge capitalism as the importation of business rationality into the academy, but the traffic in the other direction is all too often neglected because of our own siege mentality.

In all likelihood, we are living through the formative stages of a mode of production marked by a quasi-convergence of the academy and the knowledge corporation. Neither is what it used to be; both are mutating into new species that share and trade many characteristics. These changes are part and parcel of the economic environment in which they function. On the one side, a public commons unobtrusively segues into a marketplace of ideas, and a career secured by stable professional norms morphs into a contract-driven livelihood hedged by entrepreneurial risks. On the other side, the busy hustle for a lucrative patent or a copyright gets dressed up as a protection for creative workers, and the restless hunt for emerging markets masquerades as a quest to further international exchange or democratization.

It may be all too easy for us to conclude that the global university, as it takes shape, will emulate some of the conduct of multinational corporations. It is much more of a challenge to grasp the consequences of the coevolution of knowledge-based firms and academic institutions. Yet understanding the latter may be more important if we are to imagine practical educational alternatives in a civilization that relies on mental labor to enrich its economic lifeblood. □

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NOTES
1. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figure, which only covers students studying abroad, is $30 billion for 1999 (Fuller 2003, 15). Estimates of the global market for educational services vary wildly. For example, Richard T. Hezel, president of Hezel Associates, a research company focused on e-learning, valued the market at around $2.5 trillion in 2005 (Redden 2006).
2. For an ultimately enthusiastic, though broad-ranging, summary of some of the salient issues in the GATS debate over educational services, see Sauvé 2002.
Growing Government Demands for Accountability vs. Independence in the University

A. LEE FRITSCHLER, PAUL WEISSBURG AND PHILLIP MAGNESS

The trend toward greater government involvement in assessing quality in U.S. universities is being driven by powerful forces. Universities today receive a tremendous amount of government funding on the local, state, and federal levels. This has led to an increasing pressure on governments to account for how tax money is being spent. The very reasonable public questions are: What are we receiving for our money? Is higher education delivering on its promises? What are students learning?

In a modern global economy, a premium is placed on higher education. A nation is less competitive if its population is not well educated. That means that a nation's higher education system has become an integral element of its larger economic plan and a crucial determinant of future economic growth. Therefore, government has a responsibility to ensure that the higher education sector is functioning well.

Further, it is becoming increasingly clear that a university degree is the key to a better life for individual citizens. The issue of accessibility is critical. If the current system is truly worsening income and other measures of equality in the United States rather than helping to bridge them, it behooves the federal government to explore how this negative dynamic can be changed.

The current emphasis on quality is quite different from earlier regulatory approaches. In the past, government regulations focused on finances, the environment, antidiscrimination, and a variety of human relations and civil liberties concerns that were being implemented by government across all sectors. Universities were subject to these regulations in much the same way as any other organization, public or private. However, the challenges to peer review and regulatory incursions in the core function areas are something new—especially in the United States, where the federal government clearly wants to play a central role.

Peer review and academic freedom
University faculties, operating as self-regulated professional societies, have traditionally been the sole deciders of the university’s core functions—namely, the development of curricula; student evaluation; and the hiring, retention, and promotion of faculty. Peer review has been the operational norm in these areas.

Historically, peer review has been the vehicle for quality control and assessment in U.S. higher education. From our beginnings as a nation in the late eighteenth century, the United States has followed the European model of self-regulation.
The American concept of academic freedom has its historical and ideological origins in the post-enlightenment liberal and democratic traditions that emerged in Western Europe and America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These traditions of freedom and sovereignty, which flourished in German universities at the time, included three elements: freedom to teach, freedom to learn, and freedom of the institution from governmental interference in its internal affairs. From these traditions emerged the American concept of academic freedom, which in recent years, has extended important constitutional protections through the American judiciary that do not exist in other nations. (Rupe 2005, 13)

Why are the core functions of higher education better left to those in higher education and not to the regulatory hand of government? How can one justify a self-governing regime in a tertiary education sector that is functioning within a democratic system of government? And how does one defend self-government in a sector that receives such extensive public funding and that is of such critical importance to the general public? History and early political philosophy provide some answers. In an overview article, Guy Neave wrote:

As early as 1798, the philosopher Kant sought to provide a suitable model to balance, on the one hand, the necessary independence from bureaucratic intervention that constitutes the sine qua non of scholarship, and on the other, the requirement that the state have some measure of control over those professions that an American political scientist, David Easton, has termed the “value-allocating bodies in society”—in effect, law, theology and medicine. These three professions, Kant argued, were the legitimate area for state regulation, since they affected its well-being and influenced the thinking of its citizens. Philosophy, by contrast, did not fall into this category. Concerned with the pursuit of scholarship and truth, not only was it free to judge the teaching of other faculties, but because Man is by nature free and thus not under any constraint but the one of that pursuit, state regulation in such an area was inappropriate. In short, the Kantian model was one in which the relationship between the state and the university was based on a fundamental dualism, expressed not so much in the field of teaching and learning as in the distinction between those areas where the state might intervene and those where it might not.

On one side, for instance that of the state, this boundary (between the university and the state) may extend officially into the administrative workings of the university, regulating budgetary headings, appointments to chairs where these involve civil servant status for their holders, as well as providing the juridical basis for such matters as staff-student participation and the various forms of governance. On the other, seen from the university’s standpoint, the boundary ceases at the point where such matters as methods of teaching, evaluation and assessment of individual work are involved. (1982, 231–2)

It might be sufficient simply to invoke the American tradition of limited government as an explanation of the independence of the higher education sector. The principles of democracy—which contain subsets of theories on freedom, the tyranny of majorities, and failures of representation as well as the philosophical foundations of academic freedom and theories of professionalism—were well represented in early American thought.

Suspicion about pure majoritarianism is actually rooted in the founding principles of American political philosophy. James Madison famously expressed this distrust in the Federalist Papers, where he wrote that “if a majority be united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will be insecure.” To guard against this potential for injustice, he reasoned, “ambition must be made to counteract ambition” (2003, 319–20). It follows that a multitude of divergent interests will be necessary to sustain a healthy and truly representative democracy; their absence, in turn, could become its downfall.

What Madison described as the dangers inherent to democratic government apply no less to higher education, if subjected purely to popular whim. In one sense, academic freedom directly mirrors Madisonian government, where competition between numerous political factions, each potentially disruptive if left unchecked, produces in the aggregate a healthy and responsive republican democracy. It is conceivable that strong, cohesive interest
groups could lobby for curricular control with relatively little organized opposition. Creationist groups, for example, would undoubtedly object to the teaching of Darwin’s theory of evolution. Environmentalist interests could bias scientific inquiry into climate change. History attests to these dangers. In the late nineteenth century, many universities sought economists who followed the discipline’s emerging consensus on free trade. It was said at the time that only a protectionist could obtain employment at the University of Pennsylvania, where business interests and policymakers pressured the board of trustees to require courses in protectionism as a requirement for graduation. The relationship between iron and the Keystone State’s economy was not lost upon its high-tariff economists.

Delegates to the Constitutional Convention briefly entertained a proposal to establish a “national university” with direct federal oversight. Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and founder of Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, first suggested the idea in January 1787.

Though delegates to the Constitutional Convention ultimately rejected a clause creating a national university, Rush’s initiative gained a proponent in George Washington, who suggested it to the first Congress. According to Albert Castel (1964), the national university proposal was motivated by several commendable ideals. Like Rush, its proponents sought a means of establishing the American university system beyond its infancy. They also perceived the proposal as a “unifying force” and a tool to instill civic education in the new nation’s first generation of leaders.

Washington advocated the proposal for the better part of his presidency, as did John Adams, who briefly entertained an offer from a University of Geneva professor to relocate his faculty to the United States. When brought before the first Congresses, however, other founders were more skeptical. Despite its lofty intentions, a national university was vulnerable to factional dominance. In reflection, Castel observes that “only a miracle would have prevented a national university … from being wrecked in the fierce North-South controversies over slavery, or...
from being reduced to sterile mediocrity by political pressures and religious bigotry” (1964, 298). Recognition of this danger was not lost upon the founding-era Congresses, which rejected the proposal.

On the other hand, peer review, with its reliance on expertise, does not fit well with some elements of popular democracy. Policy decisions often require detailed information and access to expertise, yet the typical voter is notoriously underinformed about most policy issues save those that immediately impact his or her well-being. By its very nature, higher education is a domain of knowledge, itself divided across dozens of highly specialized disciplines. The peer review process permits scholarship within an area of expertise to be assessed by other qualified experts on the same subject. A historian’s work is read, scrutinized, and built upon by other credentialed historians, each possessing a similar depth of knowledge on the same subject. This process succeeds precisely because a scholar’s peers have invested similar time and effort in their field of expertise, permitting an informed and reasonably effective evaluation of each other’s work.

Surely it is not elitist to note that a legislator attempting to regulate curricula, or constituents advocating for additional regulation, might lack the level of knowledge investment that is found in the peer review process. Regulation introduces the politics of faction, augmented by asymmetrical political organization and subjected to the whims of a rationally ignorant electorate. The consequences for a profession that depends heavily upon high levels of knowledge expertise could be devastating.

In 1915, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) declared academic freedom to be a fundamental principle of higher education. Academic freedom expanded gradually so that it was no longer limited to the classroom and laboratory; it included the right to express political and social ideas.

Yet, as Altbach has noted (2001, 207), “there is no universally accepted understanding of academic freedom.” Certainly it could be argued that the U.S. judicial system has been unable, thus far, to reach any sort of consensus concerning the limits of academic freedom or even to determine whether the concept has any legal standing at all (Rupe 2005). This is not to suggest, however, that academic freedom is not a highly valued ideal in the United States. As stated by the United States Supreme Court in Sweeny v. New Hampshire in 1957:

The essential freedom in the community of American universities is almost self-evident. No one should underestimate the vital role in a democracy that is played by those who guide and train our youth. To impose any straitjacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of our Nation. (354 U.S. 234)

Academic freedom is a widely recognized principle in the United States; it has been cited over the years by those within the academic community as a justification for preventing government from involving itself in curricular
and pedagogical decisions. Those decisions have been left to the academic professionals within universities.

Professionalism and academic freedom are closely related phenomena. Teaching first became a profession in the United States during the 1870s. Cohen states that an important element of the professional is that he or she “gains a specialized body of knowledge during a long period of formal education. Ministry to a client population, autonomy of judgment, adherence to ethical standards, licensure or formal entry requirements, and associations that monitor all the above characterize the group” (1998, 124). He then points out that prior to the rise of the university, faculty at colleges were little more than tutors, teaching a wide variety of subjects with little or no area of expertise. With the development of the university, however, faculty became professors, each with a specialized area of knowledge and “a commitment to long-term, full-time employment” (124–5).

One of the distinguishing characteristics of most professions, as the word is used today, is that they are largely self-regulating. There are several reasons for this practice, the foremost
being that professions require expertise. Therefore, it is argued, policy decisions about professions are best made by those within the industry itself, for they alone have sufficient knowledge about the subject to make optimal decisions (Freidson 1984). Who but professional physicians, for example, would be able to decide a curriculum for an MD? Who but professionals would be qualified to determine the successful fulfilment of those requirements?

Accreditation
One of the earliest concerns of academic professionals was the need for clear admissions standards, and there were also concerns about the quality of the numerous secondary schools and colleges that had suddenly sprung up. The first of the professional associations to form was the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, created in 1885. This was the beginning of the accreditation movement. But, according to Young (1983), accreditation did not truly emerge as “a national phenomenon” until August 1906, when the National Association of State Universities met to discuss the standards by which admissions to colleges would be defined. The meeting ended with all four existing regional associations agreeing to organize a commission for the purpose of accrediting schools. This process would ultimately lead to the creation of a nationwide system of accreditation for institutions.

Standards were developed in 1909, and in 1913 the very first list of accredited higher education institutions was published (Young 1983). Shortly thereafter, the Association of American Universities (AAU) began the process of maintaining a widely recognized list of “accredited” higher education institutions, which ran from 1914 to 1948. The AAU was followed in 1949 by the National Committee of Regional Accrediting, which produced its own list of regionally accredited institutions (Harcroft 1983).

The federal government did not become a major factor in U.S. higher education until the passage of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act—also known as the G.I. Bill—in 1944 (United States Department of Veterans Affairs). The original purpose of the act had less to do with preventing massive unemployment after the end of World War II. The result, however, was a surge in the number of students attending colleges and universities and, according to one study, “a national transformation from elite to meritocratic, and then to mass or universal, higher education” (Prisco et al. 2002, 2).

Along with the increase in government funding came the beginning of a second trend that would continue throughout the rest of the century: an increased demand by the government for accountability. With the sudden surge in federal spending on higher education, huge numbers of schools of dubious quality opened up overnight. Fraud was rampant, and by 1952 it had become apparent that the government would have to take active steps to determine which schools were legitimate and which were not.

In 1952, with the passage of the Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act, the Commissioner of Education began officially to “recognize” accrediting agencies (Martin 1994). The commissioner published a list “of nationally recognized accrediting agencies and associations which he determines to be reliable authority as to the quality of training offered by an educational institution” (Public Law 82-250). Those accreditation agencies that received recognition were given the power to determine which schools were eligible to receive federal student aid and which were not.

The federal government chose to rely upon private accreditors at least in part because they did not wish to run afoul of the rule that education was to be regulated by state and local authorities and not by the federal government (Martin 1994). To help further clarify the relationship between the federal government and the education system, and to assure concerned parties that the old rules still applied, Section 102 of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 stated the following: Nothing contained in this Act shall be construed to authorize any department, agency, officer, or employee of the United States to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution or school system (Public Law 85–864, 1580–1605).
The relationship between the federal government and institutions of higher education was becoming more complex, however. In 1972, amendments made to the Higher Education Act “established equal opportunity as the principal focus of federal policy toward higher education” (Hannah 1996, 504). The federal government was beginning to use accreditation agencies, and through them the postsecondary institutions that depended upon their accreditation for federal funding, as instruments of social policy. Accrediting boards were now expected “to foster ethical practice, such as nondiscrimination and equitable tuition refunds” and to “encourage experimental and innovative programs” (Chambers 1983, 259). While few argued with the worthiness of those goals, the fact was that there was no statutory authority for the commission to make such demands. “The statutes were clearly limited to the purpose of establishing institutional eligibility for federal funding programs” (Chambers 1983, 260). This trend has continued, however, up to the Department of Education’s most recent attempt to use accreditation agencies as a means of enforcing “standards of quality” on higher education institutions.

Although the relationship between government and universities in the United States has become more complex and nuanced, the traditional approaches characterized by separation and independence have been maintained over the years. The challenge for universities today is to maintain that precarious separation. As institutions of higher education in the United States are challenged to prove their worth via global standardized tests and international ranking schemes, the challenge remains for schools to commit themselves to a far higher, largely immeasurable standard.

The primary function of higher education has never been, and should never be, to accommodate political trends. The self-regulation of higher education, via the accreditation system, helps protect academic freedom and must continue to do so if U.S. higher education is to fulfill its responsibility, namely, the open pursuit of knowledge and the celebration of critical inquiry free from political restraint.

REFERENCES
The Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) is an aggressive effort by public universities to supply crucial information to important constituencies: prospective students, families, governing bodies, and legislators. The goal for participating universities is to become more transparent about the undergraduate student experience. The VSA is a partnership between the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC). By early July 2008, more than 265 public universities joined the Voluntary System of Accountability, representing more than one-half of the member universities of AASCU and NASULGC.

The VSA initiative is not without controversy. In particular, the effort to measure learning gains in broad cognitive skills has generated much debate and some criticism within the academy and the assessment community. Unfortunately, many of the concerns are based upon misunderstandings, incomplete and faulty information, and outdated research. This article responds to the concerns by correcting misinformation and putting the measurement of core educational learning outcomes into a larger context. The article begins with a brief overview of the development of the VSA and then systematically addresses the main controversies surrounding the measurement of core educational learning outcomes.

About the VSA
The VSA, created by more than eighty higher education leaders from seventy public institutions, was designed as a community-developed approach to greater transparency and accountability. The development and implementation of the VSA was funded in part through two grants from the Lumina Foundation.

The data elements included in the College Portrait, the VSA Web-reporting template, were identified and evaluated based on input from student/family focus groups, feedback from the higher education community, and research on higher education. The majority of the data elements are from currently available data sources with established definitions and reporting conventions. This approach is designed to enhance comparability, accuracy, and confidence in the data as well as to minimize the burden on institutions.

The College Portrait is organized into three primary sections: (1) student and family information, (2) student experiences and perceptions, and (3) core educational outcomes. The College Portrait accommodates differences in institutional missions by providing opportunities to add university-specific text and institution-specific links. Participants may add an extra page to feature data elements unique to their institution or state system.

1. Student and Family Information. The data elements in these pages address the question, what information would be most helpful to prospective students and their families in deciding which college or university best fits
of Accountability

University of California, Berkeley
their educational wants and needs? Costs of attendance, degree offerings, living arrangements, student characteristics, graduation rates, and postgraduate plans are included.

There are two innovations of particular note: the student success and progress rate and the college cost calculator. The success and progress rate tracks students across institutions, providing a more complete picture of student progress than the much-criticized federal graduation rate. The college cost calculator is an interactive tool for students and their families to more accurately estimate the net cost of attending a particular institution. The calculator is especially beneficial for low-income students and their families.

2. Student Experiences and Perceptions.
   The second section of the College Portrait provides a snapshot of student experiences, activities, and perceptions on campus by reporting a common set of results from one of four surveys. Institutions select from among the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), College Senior Survey (CSS), University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), or College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). Results are reported in six specified constructs that academic research has shown to be correlated with greater student learning and development: group learning, active learning, experiences with diverse groups of people and ideas, student satisfaction, institutional commitment to student learning and success, and student interaction with faculty and staff.

3. Core Educational Outcomes.
   The third section of the College Portrait reports evidence of student learning in two ways. First, institutions provide a description of how they evaluate student learning with links to institution-specific outcomes data such as program assessments and professional licensure exam results. Second, core educational outcomes are measured and reported through a VSA pilot project designed to measure student learning gains in critical thinking (including analytic reasoning) and written communication. To measure these broad cognitive skills at the institutional level across all academic disciplines, an institution selects from one of three instruments:
   • Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP)—two modules: critical thinking and essay writing
   • Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)—complete test, including performance tasks and analytic writing tasks
   • Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP)—two subscores of the test: critical thinking and written communication

The learning gains (or value-added scores) reported reflect the difference between the actual and expected scores of graduating and entering students, taking into account the academic ability of the students. Each of the three testing organizations will use the same method to compute and characterize their learning gains or value-added scores for VSA purposes as above, below, or at the level expected given the characteristics of the institution’s students.

Since the measurement of student learning at the institutional level is not widespread, many institutions need additional time to identify effective methods for test administration and to determine how to use the test results to improve educational programs. That is why this section of the VSA is designated as a pilot project. VSA institutions may elect not publicly to report test results until after a four-year trial period.

Controversies about the VSA’s core educational outcomes measurement
   Measurement of core educational outcomes is the portion of the VSA that has attracted the most controversy. The typical challenges and our responses are summarized below.

The demand for core educational outcomes testing will fade once this administration leaves office. Rather than constituting a fad, we see core educational outcomes testing as a reasonable response to changing needs for information and a valuable tool for the improvement of U.S. higher education. In addition to the recommendation put forth by the Spellings Commission, eminent scholars such as Derek Bok and many House and Senate members of both parties have called for such testing before and after the Spellings Commission report was issued. We were reminded of the priority that important members of Congress attribute to measuring core educational outcomes in June 2008 when David P. Cleary, an education policy adviser to Senator Lamar Alexander, Republican of Tennessee, told attendees at the Council for Higher Education’s summer meeting that “if we don’t have thoughtful dialogue and thoughtful responses, we will come to that same No Child Left Behind moment of a [required] reading and math test in higher education.”
The assessment of core educational outcomes within the VSA is not intended to replace the assessment of outcomes and skills in disciplines.

It should be strongly emphasized that the assessment of core educational outcomes within the VSA is not intended to replace the assessment of outcomes and skills in disciplines. To suggest that a focus on core educational outcomes at the institutional level excludes the focus on outcomes by majors is a false distinction. It’s not either-or but both-and.

Value-added cannot be measured reliably. During the VSA development process, researchers debated whether value-added could be measured in any meaningful way. On one side, Trudy Banta (2007) argued that the value-added measurement is inherently unreliable with very low test-retest reliability across individuals. Stephen Klein, Richard Shavelson, and Roger Benjamin (2007) countered that test-retest reliability for value-added testing across groups of individuals is high.

Ultimately the eminent psychometrician Howard Wainer was retained to sort out the differences and advise the VSA task force on this issue. He sided with Klein, citing recent research findings to support his conclusions (Braun and Wainer 2007). A key point is that Banta’s focus was on reliability across individuals, while Klein’s focus was on reliability across aggregations of individuals. The institutional assessment of core educational outcomes within the VSA evaluates the difference in core educational outcomes across aggregations of individuals—that is, freshmen in one institution and seniors in that same institution—and is, therefore, a reliable measure.

Outcomes testing must be discipline-specific if it is to be valid. Policy makers, employers, board members, and others increasingly express the conviction that all college graduates must possess skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and written communication that can be applied across a wide array of situations, not just those related to their college major. Today’s knowledge-based economy places less emphasis on acquiring content knowledge and more on evaluating data and sources, solving problems, and effectively communicating information to a variety of audiences.

The “stovepiping” that occurs within the major is the university’s way of ensuring that students thoroughly learn a disciplinary
subject. However, when students leave the university, relatively few enter work that directly relates to their major. Even those who do enter discipline-connected employment generally find that, over time, they are asked to take on broader responsibilities by their employers. Thus while testing of students within the major is important to ensure that education in the major is effective, testing of critical thinking, problem solving, and written communication across all majors is an essential element in determining whether student are ready for the broad set of situations in which they will apply their skills after graduation.

We increase the tendency to focus excessively on majors when we confine the acquisition of skills like critical thinking, problem solving, and written communication to general education. If a student’s work in the major does not build on the foundation of core skills acquired in the first two years of university study, those skills are likely to atrophy rather than grow. In the development of writing skills, for example, we have learned that when writing is stressed throughout the curriculum—not solely in first-year composition courses—much more progress occurs. Assigning the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills exclusively to the domain of “general education” serves our students poorly and does not adequately prepare them with the skills demanded by the labor market.

“Standardized” tests cannot measure high-level skills. Those who argue this position do not recognize the differences among CLA, CAAP, and MAPP, and they fail to recognize that their criticism is equally applicable to any kind of written exercise. One of the tests, the CLA, for example, is entirely essay-based—similar to the exams faculty members commonly administer in many courses. An essay exam is hardly what one thinks of when one imagines a “standardized” test. The CAAP and MAPP also utilize essays to measure written communication skills as well as the true-false, multiple-choice, and short-answer formats that are more typical of “standardized” tests—both in and out of the classroom. The construct validity study described above will help determine whether the essay type of test and the more standardized testing measure the same phenomena and relate equally well to other measures of critical thinking.

Measuring all the core educational outcomes of a college education is impossible; measuring and reporting only a subset of outcomes shortchanges universities. Pragmatically, it is not feasible to measure all the core educational outcomes of a college education. Therefore, the challenge undertaken by the VSA is to measure a subset of important core educational outcomes that the vast majority of public universities seek to produce. After significant discussion, the VSA task forces agreed to focus on measuring three core educational outcomes: critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and written communication ability. The judgment that these outcomes are desired is shared among most universities; furthermore, they are commonly named by employers as skills employees need to succeed in the workplace (Conference Board et al. 2006).

In reporting student attainment in only these three areas, the VSA seeks to achieve uniformity in reporting and provide roughly comparable data on core educational outcomes across universities. Because this minimum set of measures does not reflect the breadth and depth of knowledge individual universities strive to foster (including that which a student would acquire in the major), the VSA encourages universities to report additional measures of core educational outcomes on the College Portrait in the space provided.

The VSA will lock into place existing learning outcomes tests and will foreclose the possibility of better measures as they come along. Some suggest that there are better ways to evaluate core educational outcomes than the current options within the VSA. This may be the case, but more research is needed. To gather the needed evidence, two investigations are underway—in addition to the construct validity research described above. As part of the FIPSE project, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), NASULGC, and AASCU are working together on the development of a survey instrument to measure civic and career-preparation skills as well as the creation of
metarubrics that permit the use of portfolios in the evaluation of core outcomes skills and, perhaps, comparisons of student growth across institutions.

The tests now used to measure learning outcomes are not fixed in place, in contrast to government-imposed requirements like the federal graduation rate. The VSA is the higher education community’s self-directed project. The instruments currently included are subject to further evaluation and research, and other instruments may be included or substituted as research continues. The VSA gives the higher education community the opportunity to collaborate, experiment, and refine current models and approaches to assessment. The VSA Oversight Board, in its annual review of the VSA protocols, will use the findings from these investigations and from other academic studies to determine which measures of core educational outcomes ought to be included as options within VSA, thus assuring that the initial structure will be responsive to new understanding and new knowledge.

We recognize that the assessment of core educational outcomes is still in its infancy, but we cannot simply do nothing until the “perfect instrument” appears. To be unwilling to engage in this work, to claim that it is too difficult and uncertain, is to confirm the worst suspicions of critics who charge that higher education is resistant to change. It may also spur more rapid governmental intervention.

Conclusion

The Voluntary System of Accountability will strengthen American higher education by creating a community-developed, amendable public system to report on cost, progress and success, student engagement, and core educational outcomes. This new system has already reduced the pressure to mandate more onerous and less beneficial accountability schemes, while providing valuable new content information to students, families, and policy makers. Yet we hope that the greatest benefit of the VSA will be to higher education itself. Institutional outcomes, as well as outcomes at the program and course levels, reinforce the idea that an institution is more than a collection of individual programs; institutions are collectively responsible for the learning outcomes of all their students. As we focus more on learning outcomes, and as we learn more appropriate ways to measure them, we hope this initial effort, over time, will contribute to a greater understanding of how changes in the curriculum and cocurriculum contribute to improved outcomes and more effective undergraduate education.

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the authors’ names on the subject line.

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NOTES

1. The maker of CAAP, the American College Testing Company, holds that problem solving is subsumed within the concept of critical thinking and should not be identified separately.

2. The thirteen universities and colleges are: Alabama A&M University; Arizona State University at the Tempe campus; Boise State University; California State University, Northridge; Florida State University; Trinity College (Hartford); Massachusetts Institute of Technology; University of Colorado Denver; University of Michigan-Ann Arbor; University of Minnesota-Twin Cities; University of Texas at El Paso; University of Vermont; and University of Wisconsin-Stout.
CHARLES MURRAY, who argued in *The Bell Curve* (1994) that low test scores among minority students are caused more by nature than nurture, has now extended his argument from race to class. In *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America’s Schools Back to Reality* (2008), Murray concludes that efforts to prepare children from working-class or poor families for the Bachelor of Arts degree are doomed to fail because parental income reflects innate ability: children inevitably inherit their parents’ abilities and, thereby, their socioeconomic status. Murray proposes to reserve the BA for those who score in the top 10 percent on the SAT or ACT because, he asserts, “whether we like it or not . . . America’s future does depend on an elite that is educated to run the country” (2008, 107). Trying to prepare kids in the bottom 90 percent of the test score distribution for the BA is a waste of time, because even “if” there were marginal improvements in academic performance the “effects would predominantly occur among children with low academic ability” (2008, 60).

It is tempting to dismiss Murray as a throwback who keeps exhuming the junk science of eugenics for its shock value. But he deserves to be taken seriously, if only because he represents an extreme version of a lingering set of biases that is shared in varying degrees by many Americans.

**Real Education ignores the real economy**

There is a lot wrong with Murray’s book. *Real Education* is easily dismissed as fruit of the same poisonous intellectual tree that produced *The Bell Curve*. And Murray’s argument for limiting access to the BA is little more than a rearguard argument in the United States, where access has been expanding inexorably since the GI Bill. In general, he ignores the cultural and political value of the BA in

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making good neighbors and good citizens in an increasingly complex global society. But my quarrel with Murray, and those who agree with him, is mostly about the economic implications of their views.

In the United States, the distribution of money, status, and personal power is increasingly determined by the distribution in access to education. With the death of the blue-collar economy, college is the preferred route, if not the only route, to middle-class status and earnings. The BA is also the gateway to the graduate and professional degrees that confer the highest levels of personal empowerment and power over others. That’s why young people and their parents flee vocational programs and aspire to the BA degree.

The BA has long been the keystone in preserving middle-class status and upward mobility. Historical data from the Current Population Survey show that since the early seventies, those with a BA or better have either remained in the middle class or climbed into the top 20 percent of the income distribution. Meanwhile, about half of those with some college but no BA have stayed in the middle class or moved up. The other half have lost economic ground as have the majority of those who ended their education with high school or less (U.S. Census Bureau).

In Murray’s America, college education becomes a device for promoting the intergenerational reproduction of elites and a society divided into BA-haves and BA-have-nots. He proposes effectively to truncate upward mobility for most of those who are not in his select 10 percent of BA-worthies. Those who score in the top 10 percent on the SAT or ACT come from families with a minimum income of $175,000 per annum and with average earnings that are at least twice that amount. Murray’s top 10 percent would be very elite indeed. Ultimately, Murray’s vision for America leads to the proliferation of elites-only education for generations to come.

What Real Education ignores about the real economy is a lot. Murray’s arguments are clearly on the wrong side of economic history. He argues that too many people are going to
college, but the evidence says otherwise. Since 1972, the percentage of jobs that require at least a BA has increased from 16 to 32 percent of all jobs—or from fifteen million to forty million jobs. The future promises more of the same, and shortages of qualified workers are likely. Our preliminary projections at the Center on Education and the Workforce show an increase over the next decade of over ten million jobs that require at least a BA. Moreover, the flat performance in BA production and increasing replacement needs brought on by baby-boom retirements make shortages an even safer bet.

Murray continues to assert that racial and economic class differences in educational performance are driven by innate ability, not by differences in the opportunity to learn. On race, class, and test scores, Murray insists on raising questions settled long before he dredged them up the last time for *The Bell Curve*. The core assertion in Murray’s argument is that cognitive ability is fixed at birth, immutable, and one-dimensional. Murray clings stubbornly to this view despite the fact that it was relegated to the status of junk science in the mid-twentieth century. The psychometric literature is very clear on the relationships between race, class, and test scores, especially in fresh work done, but not well advertised in the public dialogue, since *The Bell Curve*. A recent example is the work of Eric Turkheimer and his team at the University of Virginia (2003), which shows that for most low-income kids there is no relationship between abilities measured in childhood and aptitudes developed by the time they are old enough for college. In other words, if you come from a poor or working-poor family, the chances are about 60 percent that you won’t be able to “be all you can be.”

Among low-income youth, measurements of ability in their early school years do not predict developed ability measured when they are ready to go to college. Conversely, measured ability in the adolescent years does predict developed ability of college-age youth about 60 percent of the time among middle-class and upper-class kids. For example, Turkheimer and his team found that most of the difference in the developed aptitudes among college-age youth...
can be accounted for by measured differences in their innate abilities when they were children. For the most part, kids who come from families that make more than $60,000 a year do get a good shot at being all they can be.

Murray’s book validates an America where the reproduction of class and race hierarchy is inevitable. He argues that the current distribution of educational attainment is an inevitable result of innate ability. For Murray, the differences in educational attainment by parental income reflect natural endowments that parents pass on to their children. In his view, differences in educational attainment as well as class and race differences in opportunity are merit-based and inevitable.

Real Education ignores the evidence that a forced choice between merit and opportunity is a false choice. We can remain faithful to merit-based college admissions and still increase access to the BA. There are lots of young Americans from working-class and low-income families who are ready for college but never get college degrees. Murray asserts that BA attainment is about ability, but the data say otherwise. For example, according to the National Education Longitudinal Study, among students in the top half of the test score distribution in their high school graduating class, 17 percent (or 560,000) do not get a two- or four-year degree within eight years. Of these top students who don’t make it, 185,000 come from families in the second income quartile from the top ($50,280 to $83,000, with a median income of $65,512 in 2005); 140,000 come from families in the third income quartile from the top ($26,730 to $50,279, with a median income of $38,306 in 2005); and 106,000 come from families in the bottom income quartile ($26,729 or less, with a median income of $15,000 in 2005).

As shown in figure 1, equally qualified students have vastly different college-going opportunities, depending at every level on their socioeconomic status. For example, among the most highly qualified students (the top testing 25 percent), the kids from the top socioeconomic group go to four-year colleges at almost twice the rate of equally qualified kids from the bottom socioeconomic quartile.
Murray assumes that individual ability is the barrier to BA attainment, but there is a lot more than academic readiness involved in getting a BA. Even among the highest scorers on the SAT or ACT, differences in parental income have powerful effects on actually getting the degree. For example, as Table 1 shows, among students whose SAT or ACT equivalent score is between 1200 and 1600 (out of a possible 1600 points), BA attainment ranges from 82 percent in the top socioeconomic status quartile to 44 percent among equally qualified students in the bottom socioeconomic quartile.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Status (SES) Quartiles and SAT/ACT* Score Bands</th>
<th>1200–1600</th>
<th>1100–1199</th>
<th>1000–1099</th>
<th>800–999</th>
<th>400–799</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top SES</strong></td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd SES</strong></td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd SES</strong></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bottom SES</strong></td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Murray’s assertion that ability is fixed, immutable, and class-based leads him to suggest in *Real Education* that we should begin sorting students into those with and without BA abilities in the first grade. While Murray’s armchair theories have always sold well in the better clubs, they still cannot withstand analytic scrutiny. In the real first-grade classrooms in American schools, ability is not faithful to racial and class divisions. Ability is broadly distributed in the early grades. But early ability does get sorted by differences in the opportunity for students to develop their abilities as they move through the social and educational gauntlet along the way to the massive sorting of American youth by race and class that occurs between high school and college.

Analysis of the longitudinal data on K–6 student performance, for instance, shows that among students in the top tested quartile of ability in the first grade, almost 75 percent of the more affluent students will still be in the top quartile of their class in the fifth grade, compared with only 45 percent of the students from less affluent families. Among students in the first grade who are not in the top quartile of school performance, affluent students will move in the top quartile performance at more than three times the rate of equally qualified students from lower-income families (Wyner, Bridgeland, and Dilulio 2007).

### Historical context

Murray’s argument in *Real Education* resonates with a long history of elitism in our culture, which can be traced all the way back to the precious arguments over the Calvinist elect. Most still believe that talent is bred in the bone, rather than developed in schools, and Murray is not alone in his cavalier dismissal of the abilities of other people’s children. Americans are of two minds about who should get a BA. The vast majority of American parents believe that their own children are qualified for college, but that other people’s children are not. When asked if every child should aim for college, a majority of Americans say no. When asked if their own children should go to college, an even larger majority say yes (Carnevale and Rose 2004; Career College Association 2008).

Ideas about the innateness of cognitive ability are a consistent thread running through the history of American higher education. The exquisite tension between the four-year college’s role as a bastion of privilege and its role as a fount of opportunity continues to be relevant at a time when only 3 percent of the students in the top 150 colleges come from the bottom 25 percent of the nation’s family income distribution. American colleges are stuck with the daunting challenge of reconciling our cherished value of selectivity in admissions with an equally strong commitment to upward mobility and diversity.

Murray dismisses the cultural tensions between test-based educational merit, upward mobility, and diversity in favor of a no-nonsense exclusivity. Exclusivity is a persistent feature of leading institutions, including institutions of higher education. Exclusion survives in every culture, less as a fixed idea than as a resilient scavenger of ideas living off whatever cultural scraps come to hand. Exclusion by race, class, gender, and religion have lost their mojo as a spur to exclusion in higher education, but snarky class biases and the latest international threat survive as fodder for...
exclusivity. Murray contends that the majority of kids—many among the working class and the poor—don’t have the right stuff for college, and so we need to give up on college and “teach the forgotten half how to make a living” (2008, 147). He argues further that we must focus on the gifted or risk our future: “America’s future depends on how we educate the gifted.”

Murray’s views are reminiscent of an elitist view of higher education that staged its last hurrah in the immediate post-World War II era. In those early days of the Cold War, the United States scrambled to create an elite cadre to lead the new superpower and hold off the Soviet threat to the East. James Conant, then president of Harvard University and one of the indispensable Americans in the righteous fight against fascism and communism, spoke for American elites at the time (Hershberg 1993). In Conant’s view, American higher education had
to mobilize the best and the brightest in the fight against communism. Conant opposed the GI Bill and federal student aid. He argued that college should be reserved for a ruling class of meritocrats developed from the top 15 percent of high school students with IQs over 115. Murray ups the ante to an IQ of 120.

Ironically, the same arguments for building an elite governing class made then by Conant to protect the United States from international communism are now being made by Murray to protect us from international capitalism. Like Murray, Conant was a self-styled realist who regarded the idea of democratizing higher education as self-destructive democratic romanticism. Like Murray, he believed that cognitive ability is innate, fixed, and one-dimensional. For Conant, cognitive ability was expressed as a single test number, called an IQ. For Murray, the single number is the SAT score—the old IQ wine in a new bottle. Since Conant’s time, the bold but disreputable notion of IQ morphed into the more genteel notion of aptitude as measured by the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). And when “aptitude” lost its uptown intellectual standing, the Scholastic...
Aptitude Test became the plain old “SAT,” and the ineffable capacity the SAT measures became the homely ability known only to the cognoscenti as “Spearman’s g,” the humble and mysterious yet all-powerful hero in Murray’s narrative.

It is instructive but unfair to compare Conant and Murray. Conant positioned talent to challenge conventional social arrangements, while Murray believes conventional social arrangements signal talent. Conant’s own journey took him from Dorchester, a working-class suburb of Boston, to the Harvard presidency and beyond. He believed talent ought to trump social standing—a radical view in the elite colleges of his day. Initially, Conant liked IQ tests because he thought they might turn up another Einstein stuck behind a plow somewhere in the American heartland. Conant sent his admissions director, Henry Chauncey, off to start up the Education Testing Service and the SAT (Lemann 2000). In the end, however, Conant opposed the SAT because he saw it as a way to smother talent and preserve the dead hand of elites. Conant was willing to disturb conventional social standing in order to mobilize talent in the national defense of democracy in a hostile world. In contrast, Murray believes that social standing is the primary proof of talent and claims that all the research from the Coleman report to the latest studies on No Child Left Behind proves it.

What separates Conant and Murray is fifty years’ time. In his time, Conant urged strict merit-based selection as a step forward from the clubby Ivy League and as a short-term stopgap against world communism. He said that his “recommendation for the academically talented was very largely based on national need,” and that he would not recommend it “if we were not living in such a grim world.” As a leader in a generation that put down fascism, Conant was still dug in to fight Stalin. To his credit, he defended standards in higher education in a postwar world in which the British and Europeans were systematically destroying their higher education systems by outlawing selectivity and standards altogether.

Conant’s views seem quaint in the wake of the GI Bill, federal student aid, and the surge in higher education degrees that has resulted from increasing skill demands on the job. Mass higher education coevolved with the economy and culture, and it quickly outgrew Conant’s original vision. Nonetheless, many still believe, like Murray, that “too many people are going to college” and that expanded access to the BA has come at the cost of lower standards. But Murray and the rest who worry over declining standards get it exactly backward: In truth, expanding access to the BA does not lower standards; instead, higher educational standards for work and citizenship require expanded access to the BA. We don’t need less liberal education, we need more.

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**REFERENCES**


MY VIEW

LERITA COLEMAN BROWN

Advising a Diverse Student Body

Lessons I’ve Learned from Trading Places

RECENTLY, the director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the small liberal arts college for women where I teach asked me to join a panel discussion about advising a diverse student body. The panel was part of a larger series of discussions to be held at our annual faculty retreat focused on the question, who are our students? My first response was to ask whether she was kidding. Who would want to address the entire faculty at an event my colleagues called “the snooze”? Besides, it had always been my sense that faculties everywhere are an intimidating group. Yet the idea of speaking to my predominantly white colleagues sparked a memory about facing a sea of white faces at an earlier time. I flashed back to my experience as one of one hundred African Americans at a campus of five thousand students at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in the early 1970s. And as I sat there half-listening to my colleague, I relived some of the excitement, the terror, and the pain of that earlier experience.

When I arrived at college thirty years ago, an innocent and naive eighteen-year-old, I expected that my professors would be like the nurturing figures I had known in high school—teachers and counselors eager to nurture my blossoming intellect and what they called my “unbridled intelligence.” Yet most of my college professors did not think “blossoming intellect” or “unbridled intelligence” when my little brown face appeared in their classrooms or at their office doors. Struggles to reconcile these perceptual contradictions permeated my first year of college.

As my colleague stared at me waiting for an answer, I returned to the present. I gazed back, trying to keep the tears at bay. She asked me to think about joining the panel and to let her know of my decision.

I thought long and hard about whether to address the faculty, and what I would say if I did. A week later, I found myself sitting in silence for three days during an annual personal retreat. As my then uncluttered mind basked in the stillness, an idea emerged. What I longed to share with my colleagues was a kind of wish list. Knowing what I know now, some thirty years later, what would I want in an adviser?

LERITA COLEMAN BROWN is professor of psychology at Agnes Scott College.
What would I want in an adviser?

As a new college student, I would want an adviser who looks beyond my racial and cultural background and sees an individual, a person who wants to be heard and known. I would want an adviser who understands that, due to my “differentness,” I am likely to have arrived on campus wounded in some profound way. More than just the wounds acquired simply by living and by surviving childhood and adolescence, mine are also the wounds that come from being a member of a devalued ethnic minority group. The causes of these wounds—inflicted daily and often inadvertently by teachers, strangers, and the media—range from casual slights to outright and obvious racial discrimination. Owing to years of implied racial inferiority, innuendo, redirection away from intellectual prowess, or just plain lack of encouragement, I come to college burdened with a heavy load of self-doubt.

As a new student, I would want an adviser who aids me in identifying my weaknesses so I can turn them into strengths and who gently steers me toward the assistance I need to become stronger. I would want an adviser who has compassion for the terror that I experience inside and that I mask in numerous ways—by saying “everything is fine” when I am failing two classes, for example, or by wondering why I cannot achieve a grade point average above 2.0 while working two jobs. I would want an adviser who finds innovative ways to connect me to the available campus resources or even just encourages me to ask for help.

The seeds of fear germinate quickly and grow rapidly among college students like me. In particular, as a woman and a student of color, I fall prey to the notion that I cannot excel in certain disciplines like math and science. “Stereotype threat” haunts me as I hide in my dorm room or in the library. I languish alone over problem sets and potential test questions, despite the evidence showing that by joining a study group I would enhance my performance and be more likely to persevere in math and science courses. Like many of my classmates, I believe I am an imposter and dread the day when someone discovers that my alleged intelligence is a lie. As I run from these fears, I become overwhelmed. I fall far behind in my coursework, stop attending classes, and basically lie to myself and others about my circumstances.
If I were a new college student, I would want an adviser who supports and nurtures my blossoming intellect because I am either unaware that I have one or I am deeply ambivalent about it. This may be because I have just left an environment where African American intellectual students are commonly ostracized and berated for “acting white.” I would want an adviser who holds high expectations for me and offers genuine concern and guidance—but who does not cross boundaries and become my caretaker. I would want an adviser who truly believes in me, recognizes the innate potential that I possess, and fosters its emergence.

The importance of advising

In the end, I did agree to join the panel discussion, and I shared my wish list with my colleagues. Many of them approached me afterwards to tell me how moved they were by my remarks. As I reflect on their comments to me that day, I realize how vital advising and mentoring really are. They are the essential pieces in the college-experience puzzle. In order for students to get from point A (entering college) to point Z (graduating from college), they need excellent advising. But too often, we faculty do not recognize the importance of our role as advisers. Many of us perceive advising as yet another task to be added to an already too-long “to do” list. Especially at small liberal arts colleges, our plates are overloaded with teaching, research, and committee responsibilities. Yet we are expected to advise students and to do it well.

In many ways, the new college students we once were still live within us all. In many ways, the new college students we once were still live within us all. We still long for the “perfect adviser” to manifest in our mentors, colleagues, friends, and significant others. We seek someone who is kind, empathetic, and gentle—someone who will help us exceed our own greatest expectations. Despite a multitude of awards and a lifetime of accomplishments, we still yearn for affirmation.

During significant transitions in life—from high school to college, for example, or from college to work—the hidden and unhealed wounds of unworthiness can reappear and interfere with or distract our students and ourselves alike. The process of healing these wounds and helping to develop the innate potential of our diverse students begins with an examination of the assumptions we bring to the relationships we have with them. We cannot view them as representative of anything other than who they are as individuals. Their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, or status as a student athlete is just the tip of the iceberg, the window to an entire world within a unique person. I always say that I am an African American woman, but I am so much more. Each student is someone’s daughter or son who now faces a major and often terrifying life challenge. By being compassionate companions on their journey, we can begin to foster new growth in ourselves as well.

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