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The great strength of this association, the focus that brought us together and that still sustains our energy and commitment, is the investment we make in the lives of our students.

—Carol Geary Schneider

Guest Message

The AAC&U Centennial as a “House Mountain” Opportunity

By Kenneth P. Ruscio

Our Centennial provides a House Mountain opportunity, not only to reflect, not only to achieve that perspective that only some distance can provide, but also to return to our work in the years ahead, indeed in the century ahead.

Looking Back at One Hundred Years of the Association of American Colleges and Universities: An Interview with Presidents John W. Chandler, Paula P. Brownlee, and Carol Geary Schneider

By David Tritelli

AAC&U presidents past and present reflect together on the history of the association, their own roles in helping to shape that history, and their hopes for the future.

Crisis and Opportunity: The Founding of AAC

By Mark H. Curtis

The Association of American Colleges came into being to provide a means for the besieged colleges to help themselves by taking counsel together about first things. Despite the vicissitudes of time and circumstance, AAC still exists to keep colleges and universities at the end of the twentieth century mindful of first things.


By Carol Geary Schneider

Since 1985, when Integrity in the College Curriculum was first published, AAC&U has focused extensively on each of the report’s major constructive themes and has also developed important initiatives on other topics developed in Integrity. What have we accomplished through all this attention to curriculum, teaching, and learning?

The Search for American Liberal Education

By Frank F. Wong

As we approach the twenty-first century, the traditional liberal education model, which has its origins in Anglo-European culture, needs to be replaced by an American liberal education model that has its origins in American culture and experience.

Making Excellence Inclusive: Liberal Education and America’s Promise

By Carol Geary Schneider

The ninetieth anniversary of the Association of American Colleges and Universities offers an opportunity for reflection. Where are we now in our shared commitment to the values and practices of liberal education, and where do we need to go, within the academy as a whole and within AAC&U itself?
**PERSPECTIVES**

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By Johann N. Neem  
University education in our country is increasingly not academic; it is vocational; it is commercial; it is becoming anti-intellectual; and, more and more, it is offering standardized products that seek to train and certify rather than to educate people. If and when we can no longer call the university a home, we will need to build new shelters in civil society.

60  **The Boutique Liberal Arts?**  
By Scott Cohen  
Could we be headed toward a future in which liberal education is only available at a handful of boutique colleges and has no role in shaping curricula at public institutions?

66  **Contagion in the Classroom—Or, What Empathy Can Teach Us about the Importance of Face-to-Face Learning**  
By William Major  
If we want clues to classroom dynamics in the “interface” between teacher and students, and between students themselves, then we might look to primatology, neurobiology, and cognitive science and advances in the understanding of empathic primate behavior.

**MY VIEW**

70  **Bobby Fong: Man on a Mission**  
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If we as a community—his students, his colleagues, his friends, and his family—if we strive each day to recognize the needs of those around us, to make ourselves available to those who need us, to inform the way we learn and the way we live with opinions and beliefs that we don’t agree with, we will create the culture of higher learning he fostered his entire life.
The AAC&U Centennial as a
“House Mountain” Opportunity

We commemorate the Centennial of AAC&U during a challenging time for higher education. We face questions of access, equity, college ratings, completion rates, return on investment, student debt, online education, the promise of technology, the perils of technology—the list could easily be much longer. The cover of the September 2014 issue of *The Atlantic* depicted a wrecking ball blasting through ivy-covered walls with the bold-faced headline, “Is College Doomed?” About the same time, *The Economist* weighed in on the “welcomed disruption” facing higher education.

But the story of higher education today is more about confusion than disruption—confusion about the purposes and values of higher education and its role in society. There are few voices speaking with clarity in the midst of the din. In that respect, at least, the Centennial of AAC&U comes at a fortuitous time. I worry with many others about the velocity of communication and the reduction of complex and nuanced topics to overly simplistic formulations. We have too few reasons to pause, step back, and regain perspective. This issue of *Liberal Education* offers such an opportunity. There will be others throughout the year as AAC&U considers its past and, more important, its future.

Imagine for a moment how higher education looked in 1915—who went to college; who taught there; what they taught; the public policy environment; the economic model; its role in our economy and our democracy. Much has changed, and much for the better. Our student bodies are more diverse. Our institutions and their missions are more diverse. Curricular offerings have far more breadth. We have a greater understanding of pedagogy and how students learn. But the evolution has not been without its stress and without the ebb and flow of failure along with success. And we have more to accomplish.

What has not changed, however, is the constancy of liberal education. It has served as AAC&U’s guiding star. We each have our favorite ways of expressing it, but I find it captured so well and concisely by Carol Geary Schneider in the interview published in this issue of *Liberal Education*: “The enduring goals, to my mind, are the following: fostering the broad knowledge—of history, culture, science, and society—one needs to navigate and provide leadership in the wider world; developing the powers of the mind to make reasoned judgments about complex and difficult questions; and cultivating a sense of ethical and societal responsibility—obligations to self and others.”

**GUEST MESSAGE**

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If AAC&U has served one overriding purpose these last one hundred years, it has been to elevate the discussion of higher education by reminding all constituencies that student learning is central to everything we do, and that while students acquire their own personal benefits from greater education, the public good is also served by having an educated, informed, and responsible citizenry.

Along with the privilege of serving as chair of the AAC&U Board of Directors during this time, I also have the privilege of serving as president of one of the nation’s oldest universities. When I speak with our students, I sometimes call upon my own institution’s past and the lessons it provides for the future. In 1839, for example, one of my predecessors, Henry Ruffner, published a novel titled Judith Bensadi. One passage describes a group of students who hiked House Mountain, a local landmark visible on the horizon from almost any point on our campus. The mountain “hides the setting sun and not infrequently turns the summer showers that come from the west wind. . . . It stands like an island of the air, with its huge body and sharp angles to cut the current of the winds asunder.” From their perch atop the mountain, the students looked down upon the “little homesteads that spotted the hills and valleys under the mountain, the large farms and country seats farther away, and the bright group of buildings in the village of Lexington.” It was a vista that “relieved the mind from the painful sublimity of the distant prospect and prepared us, after hours of delightful contemplation, to descend from our aerial height and return with gratified feelings to our college and our studies again.”

Our Centennial provides a House Mountain opportunity, not only to reflect, not only to achieve that perspective that only some distance can provide, but also to return to our work in the years ahead, indeed in the century ahead. We do so with gratitude for AAC&U’s leadership over the years. As you read through the seminal essays in this issue of Liberal Education, try to imagine, as I did, the ones still to come, as higher education enters yet another challenging period; and be thankful, as I am, for a clear and enduring voice promoting liberal education, excellence, equity, and access to all for the benefits that higher education provides.—KENNETH P. RUSCIO, president of Washington and Lee University and chair of the Board of Directors of the Association of American Colleges and Universities

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In January 2015, when the AAC&U community comes together at the annual meeting in Washington, DC, we will mark the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the association. Beginning with a special daylong symposium and continuing through the meeting and across a series of events to be held around the country, AAC&U will celebrate its Centennial throughout 2015. The focus of this sustained celebration will be forward-looking, as, together, we explore connections between the "equity imperative”—the urgent need to provide an empowering liberal education to “new majority” students—and individual, social, and global flourishing.

But anniversaries are times not only for celebration, but also for reflection. All of us involved in the work of the association today are participants in a long, rich, and still evolving history. And so, on the eve of the Centennial, we thought it appropriate to take stock of the achievements of our predecessors, to review and reflect on the past hundred years, to explore key aspects of the legacy we carry forward into AAC&U’s second century—in short, to acknowledge exactly what it is we are about to celebrate.

This issue’s lead article is an interview with Carol Geary Schneider, AAC&U’s current president, and her two immediate predecessors, Paula Brownlee and John Chandler. Together, these three presidents, who have led the association for the past thirty years, reflect on key moments in AAC&U’s long history and on key issues and values that continue to drive our work. This is followed by four articles reprinted from the archives. The first of these—by Mark Curtis, who preceded John Chandler as president—presents a history of the association, from the founding through the late 1980s. The second picks up the history from there, focusing on the programmatic work of the association from 1985 to 1994, a particularly vibrant decade. At this point, with the third reprint, we step back from the history of the association to consider the ongoing emergence of a distinctively American model of liberal education, one that adapts the broader tradition in order to accommodate the needs and aspirations of a pluralistic democracy.

The Featured Topic section culminates in a reprint of Carol Geary Schneider’s address to the association on the occasion of its ninetieth anniversary. In this fresh context, the address has the effect of summarizing the history—of both the association itself and its animating ideal, liberal education—by describing the twenty-first-century vision of liberal education and inclusive excellence, the twin—and now mission-level—commitments we carry into the next phase of the association’s history.

As this issue of Liberal Education makes plain, we truly do have much to celebrate.—DAVID TRITELLI
Centennial Year to Be Launched at the Annual Meeting

The year 2015 marks the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of AAC&U. To mark this milestone, the association will devote the entire Centennial Year to a far-reaching exploration of the connections between high-quality liberal learning and Americans’ global future and of the changes needed to drive equitable access to high-quality learning for the millions of students who remain underserved at all levels of our educational system. This year of exploration will begin at the Centennial Annual Meeting, which will be the first in a series of special events to be held throughout the year. For more information about AAC&U’s yearlong Centennial celebration, visit www.aacu.org/centennial.

New National Surveys of Employers and Students

AAC&U has commissioned two new national surveys exploring what is required for college graduates to succeed in today’s competitive global economy. The surveys canvass the views of students and employers on the most important outcomes of college and how well prepared today’s graduates are for workplace success. The findings cover such issues as what employers value in new college graduate employees; what outcomes and educational experiences are most important for future success in a global economy; and how students judge their own readiness and the help they are getting as they transition from college to career, regardless of their chosen field. Both surveys were conducted by Hart Research Associates. The full reports will be released on January 20, 2015, and available online at www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research.

AAC&U Responds to US Department of Education Ratings System

Carol Geary Schneider, president of AAC&U, and Daniel F. Sullivan, president emeritus of St. Lawrence University and chair of AAC&U’s LEAP Presidents’ Trust, coauthored an op-ed in Inside Higher Ed commenting on the ratings system recently unveiled by the US Department of Education. Schneider and Sullivan point out that, although the stated aim is to publish data in order to rate colleges and universities on their “value,” the new federal ratings system is silent on student learning outcomes. They note that, while “a national, federally devised and controlled system that would specify what the learning goals of college should be” is definitely not what’s needed, there is a clear need for discussions of accountability in higher education to recognize that “the most important outcome of higher education [is] the impact a college or university has on student learning outcomes.” The op-ed also describes progress on developing alternative forms of assessment that provide evidence of actual student learning and, therefore, the true value of higher education.

Upcoming Meetings

- January 21–24, 2015
  AAC&U Centennial Annual Meeting: Liberal Education, Global Flourishing, and the Equity Imperative
  Washington, DC

- February 19–21, 2015
  From Mission to Action to Evidence: Empowering and Inclusive General Education Programs
  Kansas City, Missouri

- March 26–28, 2015
  Diversity, Learning, and Student Success: Assessing and Advancing Inclusive Excellence
  San Diego, California
Looking Back at One Hundred Years of the Association of American Colleges and Universities

An Interview with Presidents John W. Chandler, Paula P. Brownlee, and Carol Geary Schneider

EDITOR’S NOTE: John W. Chandler was president of the association from 1985 to 1990, Paula P. Brownlee was president from 1990 to 1998, and Carol Geary Schneider has been president since 1998. This interview took place via email in the late summer and early fall of 2014. It was conducted by David Tritelli, editor of Liberal Education.

David Tritelli: When the Association of American Colleges (AAC) was founded in 1915, membership was limited to independent liberal arts colleges and colleges of liberal arts within universities. The total membership was 179. One hundred years later, membership has been expanded to include colleges and universities of all types and sizes—small and large, two-year and four-year, public and private, nonprofit and for-profit, “bricks-and-mortar” and online. In 1995, the name of the association was changed to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in order to better reflect the full diversity of member institutions. Today, the total membership is 1,336—an increase of almost 650 percent over the century.

How have the addition of so many new members over time and the inclusion of new types of institutions changed the purpose and focus of the association? Have these developments simply expanded the reach of the association, or have they also resulted in a significant shift in direction away from the animating purposes of the founders?

John W. Chandler: The founding of AAC&U a century ago came in the wake of profound changes in the landscape of American higher education. After the achievement of national independence, the dominance of the Oxbridge model that began with the founding of Harvard in 1636 came under challenge, perhaps most forcefully by Thomas Jefferson’s design for the University of Virginia. That challenge gathered powerful momentum in the latter half of the nineteenth century with such developments as the German research-based universities and their large influence in the United States, and by the land-grant university system that emphasized applied research and training in such practical fields as agriculture, engineering, and manufacturing.

This was also an era that produced a class of enormously wealthy industrialists, many of whom applied their wealth to the founding and support of institutions of higher learning. Prominent among this group were Johns Hopkins, Leland Stanford, Andrew Carnegie, Cornelius Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller, and Andrew Mellon. Not surprisingly, the leadership style of the bold industrial entrepreneurs helped give rise to powerful presidents of colleges and universities. One thinks of Charles Eliot, president of Harvard (1869–1901), who transformed a provincial New England college into a world-class university; William Rainey Harper, the founding president of the University of Chicago (1891–1901), whose large ambitions and dreams were realized through John D. Rockefeller’s
Looking Back at One Hundred Years of the Association of American Colleges and Universities
massive gifts; Coit Gilman, founding president of Johns Hopkins (1875–1901), who created a university with the central mission of creating new intellectual capital produced through investigative research; Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia (1902–1945), who brought unprecedented attention and wealth to his institution through his participation and connections in the most powerful political, cultural, and financial circles; and William Jewett Tucker, president of Dartmouth (1893–1909), whose leadership of a tiny (just three hundred students) New England college brought it into the front ranks of universities with doctoral programs and a panoply of professional schools.

It is not surprising that in such an environment some impatient and ambitious presidents were given to removing obstacles by autocratic means. Nicholas Murray Butler was notorious for firing faculty members with whom he disagreed. Thus, it is not surprising that the American Association of University Professors, higher education’s advocate for academic freedom and due process that protects against arbitrary and autocratic personnel decisions, was founded in 1915 and so shares AAC&U’s birthdate.

It was against this background of yeasty ferment in higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the heads of the nation's private colleges and universities founded the Association of American Colleges as essentially a president’s club. It was a forum for exchanging views about what was going on and what the future might hold for higher education, in general, and for their institutions, in particular. At that time, private colleges enrolled the majority of undergraduates. Most colleges had been founded by religious groups and continued to be identified and defined in varying degrees by that history.

It is a tribute to the presidents who founded AAC and to the succession of those who have provided executive leadership to the association that they constantly enlarged the tent, recognizing that the enterprise of liberal learning has pertinence for many types of institutions, academic programs, societal goals, and personal growth and fulfillment. During my tenure at AAC,
tent is far more diverse. Women now constitute approximately 60 percent of undergraduate enrollments, and far larger proportions of women are in the professoriate and in the executive leadership ranks in higher education. In 1971, AAC established the Project on the Status and Education of Women (PSEW), thus becoming the pioneering and leading national agent in addressing the issue of equal rights for women in higher education. During its first twenty years (1971–91), the director of PSEW was Bernice Resnick Sandler, who became known as the godmother of Title IX.

The larger and far more diverse membership of AAC&U has greatly amplified its voice as the preeminent organizational advocate for liberal learning. And the internal dialogue among its members has enriched and deepened the insights, conclusions, and recommendations it is able to offer its member institutions, government policy makers, and foundations.

**Carol Geary Schneider:** The association was founded in part to promote the interests of the college in an age when universities were expanding and community colleges had also been invented. As I read the early literature, it seems to me that the 1915 founders were juggling some four goals simultaneously: (1) defining what it means to be a viable college—e.g., a minimum of seven faculty members!—and helping institutions meet those standards; (2) determining what a liberal arts college should actually teach; (3) identifying ways to connect that learning with the lives of students and with democracy; and (4) reinforcing the moral ethos of colleges devoted to Christian virtue. (The founders were not self-conscious at that time, or so it seems, about including all faiths.)

The membership was initially limited to colleges of liberal arts and sciences, both free-standing and those in larger universities. There were some public institutions early on, but for the most part, we represented the independent liberal arts college.

Within a few years, AAC was reporting to its members on the teaching of specific disciplines; how many taught chemistry, for example. And for the better part of a century, we expressed views ranging from “concern” to hostility about the ever-threatening impulse to vocationalize college learning.

To my mind, the profound change in our direction came in the 1970s when we ceased federal representation for private institutions, and became very proactive about providing liberal education to what are now the nation’s new majority students: diverse, often older, often working, often first generation, drawn from all socioeconomic segments. I believe this shift—and the outreach to community colleges that followed—forced us to think more deeply about what we meant by liberal learning and about what it should mean for students’ lives beyond college.

I recall, and perhaps Paula does too, one of our board members saying fiercely: “So can’t a person who majors in nursing be liberally educated?” And, of course, that’s the key point. It’s not our role to circle the wagons around a set of disciplines that count as “true liberal learning” but rather to ensure an empowering form of learning for our graduates. I believe we certainly do want our nurses, business managers, educators, health workers, and engineers to be liberally or broadly educated. But what does that mean, exactly?

Not too long thereafter, our board issued a statement—the 1998 statement on liberal learning—which says plainly that “liberal learning is not confined to particular fields of study. What matters in liberal education is substantial content, rigorous methodology and an active engagement with the societal, ethical, and practical implications of our learning. The spirit and value of liberal learning are equally relevant to all forms of higher education and to all students.” The person who drafted that statement, Peter Stanley, had been president of Pomona, a classical liberal arts college. In many ways, everything I have done as president of AAC&U has been inspired by that vision, and by the importance of that vision for our students’ hopes for the future.

**Paula P. Brownlee:** Carol draws upon the AAC&U board statement of 1998 as the inspiring vision for her work as president. I select two key words from that statement: “active engagement,” which refers, of course, to students’ learning. I believe it was the decade of the 1980s that saw us all gradually shift our focus from mostly faculty-centered teaching to encompass effective student-centered learning. AAC&U publications and various funded activities for members supported our institutional leaders, academic administrators, and faculties as they grappled with the implications of this shift. On some campuses, I personally noted faculty resistance to the very idea that “we the faculty” might no longer be the best focus of the teaching process.
As AAC&U moved through the 1980s and 1990s, the board and staff worked consciously to position the association in order to promote and instill the importance of liberal learning in multiple types of institutions. Our “voice” for liberal learning became more practically useful, and more forceful on campuses. Campus leadership teams came together at workshops and meetings in order to be helped to develop their teaching/learning practices as well as their curricula.

In the 1990s, within 1818 R Street, we moved from typewriters to personal computers that enabled rapid communications back and forth. We began using these then new and poorly understood technologies. We did not even realize what loomed another decade ahead—smart phones gripping a majority of adult and then young persons’ eyes and ears. Today, I believe we have not yet scratched the surface of the impact of these ever-ready devices on student and faculty learning and teaching. At AAC&U, colleagues are still working to understand the implications of online courses on the integration of learning for students.

I love the notion of students’ “active engagement” inspiring Carol’s superb presidency. I ask her now, gently, “is undergraduate engagement powerful enough to last a lifetime and to inform that lifetime?” I suggest that we need stronger language evoking passion or enthusiasm. The student who has been motivated to become passionate about the liberal learning context of his or her developing specialization will not become entirely narrow, but will be continually engaged with the “societal, ethical, and practical implications of our learning.” Such individuals will become our future faculty—to the great benefit of tomorrow’s students.

**Tritelli:** The mission of the association has always centered on liberal education, a fact attested to by the slogan adopted for the centennial year: “celebrating one hundred years of leadership for liberal education.” Yet, this may overstate the level of continuity that has persisted over the past century. From the curricular architecture designed to support it and the pedagogies used to promote it to the types of institution regarded as appropriate to its delivery and the kinds of students who have had access to it, liberal education has undergone significant changes since 1915.

What exactly is liberal education, and how has it evolved over the past century? In what ways is the liberal education that AAC&U advocates today similar to the kind of education AAC was established to promote, and in what ways is it different? Finally, why has it been so important to retain the term, to identify the kind of undergraduate education to which the association is committed as “liberal education”—especially in the face of widespread confusion among the public over the meaning of this term?

**Brownlee:** In the mid-1970s, I was elected to the AAC Board of Directors as one of only two deans asked to join a board whose membership had until then been composed exclusively of presidents. Our board discussions were largely focused on making the “new” AAC’s focus financially viable. This focus was on curricular reform and the advocacy of liberal education in both public and private colleges and universities; we had given up (to the newly established National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities) the powerful lobbying motive for private colleges to be AAC members.

By the early 1980s, widespread criticism of the state of US baccalaureate education led AAC President Mark Curtis and a “Select Committee” to conclude that “more time and effort had been spent in analyzing the weaknesses of American College education than in determining effective ways to overcome them.” Thus, AAC led a new movement “to discover what measures for reform might be most appropriate.” *Integrity in the College Curriculum,* published by AAC in 1985, summed up their forward-looking conclusions.

By 1990, John had led AAC to a very sturdy financial position around the clear mission of advocacy for liberal education being important in all types of higher educational institutions. With Carol, landmark reviews of undergraduate arts and sciences majors built on an AAC study of general education practices.

During the 1990s, the AAC/AAC&U board frequently discussed the meaning of the terms “liberal learning” and “liberal education” in the context of strategic planning for the association. We wanted to update the mission and seek board consensus around fundable new directions for the association. Even back then, we recognized the serious misunderstanding of the terms.

I recall participating in an AAC&U annual meeting session in the mid-1990s—titled something like “What Do I Understand ‘Liberal Learning’ To Be?”—at which presidents and foundation heads were invited to talk together...
about the intellectual foundations of our work. I remember that discussion as one of the most interesting and stimulating of my career. The conversation was lively and diverse, and people’s understandings were quite varied.

Like Carol, I recall that board member’s fierce question about whether a person who majors in nursing can be liberally educated. A year or two later, I was on a member campus—a regional public university—evaluating the work of the library and science departments. Nursing was among those departments, and I had the privilege of actually observing some of the teaching in action. At the end of my time there, I turned to the head of the department and her colleagues and said with newfound respect, “you are giving your students a first-rate liberal education, alongside all the pre-professional and professional skills they need.” I saw the faculty members engaged in quite broad-ranging discussion and activities around students’ actual clinical work with patients. They drew the students in to discuss some aspects of the sociology, psychology, and economics of the situations surrounding their patients’ lives. This experience led to my thinking again about liberal education. Part of the definition is certainly setting a broad and capacious context for the students’ studies.

Chandler: The enterprise of US higher education is obviously vastly larger today, a hundred years after the founding of AAC. Advances in all the disciplines commonly taught and studied in liberal arts institutions have transformed the content and methodologies of all those fields.

The population of students, faculty, and administrators is far larger and more diverse. And yet, there are many continuities. When AAC was founded, there was much preoccupation with the packaging of the curricular content of liberal arts programs. Woodrow Wilson, as president of Princeton (1902–10), created a curricular organization of the liberal arts disciplines that was widely imitated and that would still be recognizable today. It provided for a major and for curricular divisions. It defined Princeton and lifted it into the front rank of liberal arts colleges. Still, Wilson had a difficult struggle persuading the faculty to approve it. He com-

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pared changing the curriculum to “moving a graveyard.” With regard to the objective or purpose of a liberal arts education, Wilson spelled out the answer in a famous speech that he repeated all over the nation titled “Princeton in the Nation’s Service.” Civic virtue he presented as the main purpose of liberal learning. Harry Garfield, Wilson’s friend and Princeton colleague who became president of Williams College (1908–34), also trumpeted civic virtue as the desired result of a liberal education, stressing that a liberal education should result in political activists devoted to social reform. This was compatible with, but also significantly different from, the aim of Mark Hopkins (president of Williams from 1836 to 1872), which was to produce Christians whose private piety would guide their behavior.

It may be impossible to define exactly what liberal learning and the liberal arts are. Bruce Kimball demonstrates in Orators and Philosophers
that the definitions of the liberal arts and liberal learning vary over time according to the characteristics of particular eras and cultures. If we accept this argument, does that not suggest that the role and mission of AAC&U should be to widen the never-ending dialogue concerning the liberal arts to include natural allies of the academy? This means reaching out to employers who depend upon the graduates of our institutions, policy makers who represent the public interest, and philanthropic individuals and organizations that provide crucial financial support. AAC&U is already doing a commendable job in this area, and its impressive list of statements and reports supplies a repertoire of concepts and definitions on which to base and bound the discussion. Our aim should be develop a loud enough and clear enough voice and a large enough conversation that the larger public will listen in and join in, thus broadening the understanding and support of our enterprise.

Schneider: I take it as a given that liberal education is always being remade to better connect with the needs and realities of a changing world. As a historian and as someone entrusted with concern for the past, present, and future of liberal learning, I have made it my goal to distinguish between what I see as the enduring goals of liberal learning, on the one hand, and the contemporary translations of those goals into educationally generative practices, on the other. The enduring goals, to my mind, are the following: fostering the broad knowledge—of history, culture, science, and society—one needs to navigate and provide leadership in the wider world; developing the powers of the mind to make reasoned judgments about complex and difficult questions; and cultivating a sense of ethical and societal responsibility—obligations to self and others.

AAC was founded in a period of transition concerning views of the curriculum and its organization. The classical approach to liberal education, with its emphasis on languages and texts, had already been overthrown. But AAC’s first report on the structure of the curriculum, which came in 1916, did not incorporate the concept of a college major, which was still an emerging idea following leadership initially from Johns Hopkins and then, far more influentially, from Princeton and Harvard in the first decade of the twentieth century.

AAC’s founding approach to liberal education assumed a shared curriculum, with what is best described as “general learning” across a range of studies in the arts and sciences, including Bible study. Soon thereafter, however, we fell into line with the curricular organization traditionally described as breadth and depth. When we published Integrity in the College Curriculum in 1985, we began to upend that “broad learning first, specialized learning second” approach. Specifically, we advocated for a set of “goals across the curriculum” influencing learning in all fields of study. But the ideas expressed in 1985 were very general. Later, building on Integrity, we ran a major initiative exploring the purposes of study-in-depth or the major. The report issued from that study, The Challenge of Connecting Learning (1990), was, I believe, our first iteration of a “spiral design” for liberal learning. Specifically, we argued that advanced study should prepare students to connect different parts of their learning. It should teach students to make connections between their majors and other disciplines, and between their studies and the world beyond the academy.

Today, we are working energetically through our Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative to break out of that “broad learning first, specialized learning second” set of constraints. This is very challenging, because most students today study in public institutions. Many states have written the distribution design for broad learning or general education into their regulatory systems. In fact, some states are working right now to cap broad learning at thirty hours, finished in the first two years of college, with institutions specifically prohibited from adding general learning requirements at the advanced level.

AAC&U’s goal, however, is to teach students to connect and apply their learning, so that general learning helps students create richer contexts and contours for specialized learning. This virtually requires upper-level “rules of the road” that expect students to work on problems that require for their completion the integration of knowledge from different domains and skills practiced across the curriculum.

Through LEAP, we have developed a flexible but guiding framework for twenty-first-century liberal learning that includes four intersecting strands: (1) broad learning across the liberal arts and sciences, from first to final year; (2) strong intellectual and practical skills, practiced at deliberately higher levels across all areas of
study; (3) examined commitments to ethical, civic, and intercultural responsibility, pursued in relation to general and specialized studies; and (4) what I call the twenty-first-century liberal art, which is the demonstrated ability to integrate and apply knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to unscripted problems and new settings.

To put it differently, we’re arguing that breadth and depth should be woven together with skills and responsibilities, across the entire educational experience—from cornerstone to capstone, from first to final year. We already were working on these ideas when John was leaving and Paula was arriving: they were initially outlined in The Challenge of Connecting Learning, which made a strong argument for integrating broad and specialized study at an advanced level. Today many members are using this approach.

Tritelli: Over the past several decades, the association has provided strong leadership with respect to diversity in higher education. In 2012, in response to the developing understanding of the educational benefits of diversity and the emerging recognition of a dialectical relationship between inclusion and excellence, the AAC&U Board of Directors adopted a revised mission statement that formally elevates diversity and inclusion to a mission-level priority: “The mission of the Association of American Colleges and Universities is to make liberal education and inclusive excellence the foundation for institutional purpose and educational practice in higher education.”

What exactly is “inclusive excellence,” and how is it related to liberal education? How do you understand the history behind this important change to the association’s mission? And how do you expect this newly refocused mission to influence the future work of the association?

Chandler: It is relevant to note that the liberal arts remained in robust condition following World War II, buoyed by the enrollment surge of war veterans supported by the GI Bill of Rights and by an expanding economy that eagerly awaited new college graduates. The OPEC oil embargo of 1973 brought that era to a jarring halt. A series of aftershocks kept the economy in turmoil for eight years. During that period, there was a sizable outflow of enrollments from the liberal arts and into professional and pre-professional undergraduate programs. Many liberal arts colleges became hybrid institutions that offered both liberal arts and professional programs. AAC&U wisely recognized and adjusted to this change and continued to serve the needs of those institutions in their revised missions.

Over the years, perhaps influenced too much by Cardinal Newman’s Idea of a University, the AAC&U mindset has shifted from a kind of awkward embarrassment about recognizing any utility in liberal learning to proclamation of its long-term benefits in enhancing career advancement and civic influence. That is precisely the right message for these times—and all times. To amplify and sharpen that message will require the strengthening of alliances that AAC&U has been building very effectively in recent years.

Participation in annual meeting programs and various commissions and committees is one obvious way of building such alliances, and it is pleasing to observe the increasing presence of representatives from business, foundations, and government agencies. Perhaps the time has arrived when the AAC&U Board of Directors should reflect those alliances.

Among the institutions long known as the bastions of liberal learning, enrollments in STEM disciplines are growing rapidly at the expense of the humanities. Once again, AAC&U is in the vanguard of the effort to understand and guide this trend. AAC&U is appropriately engaging the STEM trend with an ecumenical and inclusive spirit.

For the past several years, there has been a special focus on college-attendance patterns among high-ability students from the ranks of those in the bottom two economic quintiles of the American population. Research findings point to some commendable records among premier colleges and universities, but the general picture reveals underrepresentation of this population in those institutions. Higher education has long played a central role as a vehicle of social mobility in America, and AAC&U has had a history of promoting and encouraging it in this role.

As I think of what “inclusive excellence” means for AAC&U in an operational and policy sense, those are the thoughts and reflections that come to mind.

Brownlee: I attended my first AAC annual meeting in 1971. I was a brand-new academic dean, with no prior experience of academic administration or curricular reform. I still remember sitting near the back of a plenary session and noticing the uniformity of the audience: a
vast sea of grey-haired men with a scattering of nuns, many still in habits. There were very few minority men or women.

At the same time, my public university was struggling for the first time to discern how to retain and move a large influx of underprepared minority students successfully through their college careers. Additionally, the undergraduate colleges of this university were single sex, and their process of becoming coeducational was another educational challenge. I do not believe any of us at that time gave a thought to such a bold idea as “inclusive education.” As a faculty member, I struggled to offer individual minority students the support they needed to get through. It was an individual task and a daunting one. We had so much to learn, and little help was available.

By 1990, however, US higher education was in a very different place, and AAC was in the forefront of winning grants—from, for example, the Ford Foundation and FIPSE among others—in order to fund projects to further study and practice what it meant truly to engage students and faculty of color in reformed curricula as well as in engaging classroom activities. I point particularly to our American Commitments initiative, which over time spawned a constellation of ground-breaking projects and publications.

So, what is inclusive excellence? Mine can be only a very partial answer—linked, however, to liberal education. Earlier, I referred to an annual meeting discussion that probed our understanding of liberal education. One especially thought-provoking part of that discussion, which was new to me at the time and has remained with me since, concerned a suggestion that the inclusion of “discourse” is essential to becoming liberally educated. Today, discourse through AAC&U includes a rich diversity of participants with varied points of view and cultural backgrounds. The benefits of such discourse are fully realized only by the inclusion of multiple voices, all heard with attentiveness and respect.

Schneider: Our understanding of “inclusive excellence” is a work in progress. Both John and Paula contributed to its unfolding, in different ways, by their early commitments to include all students, not just some students, in the most powerful forms of learning, and by their support of AAC&U’s fairly passionate engagement with questions about what it means to prepare students to take responsibility for the integrity and future of a diverse and still highly stratified society.

An educational system is neither excellent nor even adequate when it routinely steers some students—especially the affluent and the highly talented—toward an empowering education, while simultaneously steering low-income learners and students of color toward more blinkered and instrumental forms of learning

—Carol Geary Schneider

Today, the most succinct answer I can give to this question of definition is the following: inclusive excellence encompasses both the substance of a high-quality liberal education and the commitment to provide that kind of horizon-expanding education to all students, with special attention to those from groups that have historically been underserved across our educational system. To be excellent, education must
engage diverse cultures, communities, histories, and values; it must build the skills needed to learn with and from people different from oneself; and it must help students explore their specific responsibilities within the diverse democracy they inhabit and the complex world whose future they will influence. In other words, an education that ignores diversity is not “excellent” at all. It is an insufficient education because it leaves students poorly prepared for the world they actually inhabit.

But, similarly, an educational system is neither excellent nor even adequate when it routinely steers some students—especially the affluent and the highly talented—toward an empowering education, while simultaneously steering low-income learners and students of color toward more blinkered and instrumental forms of learning. Unhappily, our current educational system is stratified in exactly this way, at all levels.

Trillet: Initially, as has already been noted, AAC was effectively an association of and for presidents. The founding constitution stipulated that “every institution recognized as a member of this Association shall be entitled to representation in each meeting of the Association through the President or Chief Executive Officer of the institution.” At the same time, college presidents were founding AAC, faculty members were forming their own association: the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) was also founded in 1915. Soon, beginning in 1925, the two associations came together in fruitful partnership to work out the shared principles set forth in the highly influential statement known as “The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure.” AAC and the AAUP continued to refine the statement, jointly issuing interpretive comments in 1969 and, in 1990, adopting changes to make the language gender neutral. Meanwhile, representation and active involvement in AAC expanded beyond presidents to include the full range of administrators, faculty, and staff at member institutions.

Today, the principles enshrined in the 1940 Statement are under assault as never before. Consider tenure. According to the statement, “Tenure is a means to certain ends; specifically: (1) freedom of teaching and research and of extramural activities, and (2) a sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability. Freedom and economic security, hence, tenure, are indispensable to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society.” Despite AAC&U’s lead role in formulating this principle and its formal endorsement of it, it is clear that large segments of the association’s membership are no longer committed to tenure. By 2009, according to a recent report of the AAUP, “75.6 percent of US faculty appointments were off the tenure track and 60.5 percent of US faculty appointments were part-time appointments off the tenure track, including graduate-student-employee appointments. . . . Though many people inside and outside of higher education think of tenure-track appointments as the norm, in reality tenure-track faculty are a dwindling minority on American campuses: while in 1975, tenure-track faculty accounted for 45.1 percent of the instructional staff, by 2009 they accounted for only 24.4 percent.”

What does the dramatic erosion of tenure—and the corresponding decline of academic freedom and shared governance—portend for American higher education? Why have colleges and universities abandoned their longstanding commitment to the principles articulated in the 1940 Statement? How do the changes in the status and composition of the faculty affect student learning, liberal education, and the public good? As an association historically invested in and publicly committed to these principles, how should AAC&U respond?

Brownlee: These issues are very important indeed, and those data reflect my own perception of the profile of today’s overall professoriate—largely part-time and therefore contingent, anxious, and grappling with huge technological change and changes in students’ preferred modes of learning. Should AAC&U partner again with the AAUP to address the viability of tenure today, and if not, how can the “freedom and economic security” of the professoriate be safeguarded?

Let me try first of all to place my sub-question in the larger context of national workforce issues. Over the past thirty to forty years, working Americans have experienced the removal or transformation of thousands of stable, solid workplaces along with the stable jobs that these workers have assumed would always be there. Such employees include “white-collar” supervisors as well as the more numerous “blue-collar” workers. There are professions where
such shrinkage has not been so marked, including K–12 education, medical care at all levels, and, so far, higher education.

In the former workplaces, although an equivalent of tenure was not utilized, the jobs were there and few workers were dismissed unless for poor performance. “Downsizing” was uncommon. Furthermore, unions safeguarded the rights of many workers.

For those employees who were retained by their employers, the workplace demands changed radically, requiring new skills in technology, computer-aided manufacture, and working with greater speed. I suspect that many were not retained, though I have not seen any information on this. Some community colleges, at least, tried to help with retraining, and I believe there has been some federal and state funding to assist individuals.

The context I outline can be related to some of the circumstances within higher education. Some educators believe that traditional methods will continue to suit today’s and tomorrow’s students very well. Beyond the challenge of changing practice to ensure quality education for diverse students lies the insistent call by political and media representatives for drastic reduction in the cost of educating students of widely varied abilities and backgrounds.

This is the new background against which we must consider the institution of tenure. The need for academic freedom remains paramount. It may be the expectation of economic security that is now difficult to argue in these times. Why do faculty members need assurance of lifelong employment in one institution, more than those other professions?

As a former academic administrator at different colleges and a university, I do see the importance of collective courage, enhanced by tenure, given to the collective faculty. Administrations sometimes do take egregious actions, and it takes courageous action to counter that power. On the other hand, great changes must be undertaken now, equally courageously, to examine and execute best teaching and learning practice in very different times. Sometimes deans and presidents need to have leadership power to get these changes under way.

As I think about AAC&U’s role in grappling with the question of tenure, I can imagine the staff and then the board taking up the discussion first. Where would AAC&U’s membership stand on this contentious question? If AAC&U should take it up publicly, should it do so with a partner—the AAUP, for example—and would it be really tricky now that AAC&U is no longer a presidents’ association only? I suspect more faculty members are now actively involved in AAC&U’s work than deans and presidents put together.

Even if the board decided the question was too important and central to AAC&U’s mission to ignore, there is always the question of funding. Are there funding sources worth the time and trouble to pursue? Again, the question is so contentious in an anxious time for faculty that it would be very difficult (but also very courageous) for AAC&U to tackle.

Chandler: I agree with Paula that protection of academic freedom trumps protection of tenure. The academy is in a very weak position regarding job security. Given workplace conditions in most other areas of the economy, where almost everyone is vulnerable to the threat of becoming obsolete, it is difficult to make a special case for faculty members.

My take is that it would be desirable for the AAC&U board to initiate a discussion of these matters and decide whether a blue-ribbon commission is needed. I’d be leery—at least at this point—of partnering with the AAUP or any other group. I judge that the AAUP doesn’t enjoy the standing it once had.

Adjuncts are going to be around for the indefinite future. I’d like to see AAC&U reach out to them. I judge that in that large, amorphous group there are many very able and effective people who would find validation in AAC&U and contribute importantly to its programs.

Threats to academic freedom seem to be increasing from both inside and outside the academy. The increasingly pluralistic demography of the academy is a celebratory development. It also carries the risk of muzzling discussion of issues that are uncomfortable for some members of the community. The creation and maintenance of civility, openness, and honesty becomes more challenging under such conditions.

Schneider: I believe that our future advocacy for faculty leadership and standing will need to be tied to a contemporary understanding of the role faculty play in fostering students’ development as thoughtful people, knowledgeable citizens, and creative contributors to work and
the economy. Our work on academic freedom was tied to an early-twentieth-century conception of how knowledge and learning were best advanced as well as to the dangers that a scholarly faculty faced at the time. A new approach would need to take into account the changing demography of students, the changing role of the academy in society, and the reality of the digital revolution.

The first step, however, is to persuade influential philanthropies that there actually is a faculty problem. They are the ones who would need to pay for a commission, and at the moment they are just starting to flag “the faculty question.”

We made a strong statement on these issues with our 2013 strategic plan: “The continued increase in contingent faculty appointments is an ‘elephant in the room’ for American higher education, threatening the future of scholarly community and putting at grave risk AAC&U’s commitment to high-quality liberal education and inclusive excellence for all.” Clearly, faculty are fundamental to everything AAC&U cares about. But our support for their role and standing needs always to be grounded in a vision of what and how students learn.

AAC&U currently is cosponsoring the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success, which is based at the University of Southern California. The Delphi Project is exploring new models for faculty work that respond constructively to the changing economic climate, while staying firmly focused on the importance of economic stability, academic freedom, and engaged scholarly community for the faculty of the future. The Delphi Project is preparing AAC&U and higher education to tackle the contingency challenges with fuller knowledge of the issues, the options, and the implications for higher education’s mission. Another group working on the needs of contingent faculty, the New Faculty Majority, is headed by a former AAC&U staff member and continuing colleague. These partnerships will be important to our work with faculty needs and roles as we go forward.

Tritelli: Higher education is a distinctively dynamic enterprise, one that is in a constant state of reform. Many reforms are driven by internal pressures; for example, the inexorable expansion of knowledge and the increasing diversity of the student body both have led to curricular and pedagogical reforms. The impetus for reform also comes from the need to prepare each new generation of students to take their place in a constantly changing world—as citizens of a democracy, as participants in a globalizing economy, and as human beings seeking after lives of fulfillment and purpose. Over its long history, AAC&U has served as an incubator of change, promoting and supporting the development of best practices and promising innovations on member campuses. Through countless initiatives and projects, in collaboration with philanthropy, and through conferences and publications, the association has been at the forefront of educational reform.

As you reflect on your tenure as president, what accomplishments or areas of work do you feel best about? As the association begins its second century of work, what are some of the issues on the horizon that are likely to drive change in higher education, and what advice would you give future presidents of AAC&U concerning how to approach them?

Chandler: When I agreed to become president of AAC after retiring from Williams, the momentum from the Integrity report was still apparent. That report was a wonderful climax to Mark Curtis’s presidency. I soon learned, however, that there were serious issues relating to the future of AAC and its financial stability. Board discussions relating to future directions for AAC and some personnel decisions relating to that question seemed to me unwise. It was not surprising to learn that there were staff morale problems and confusion in the ranks regarding the future. The board approved a list of program and project proposals that I presented, and I set about raising money from various foundations to support those enterprises. The project in which we worked with ABET to ensure that the liberal arts content of engineering curricula would be more intentionally determined received considerable attention. So did our project in which we worked with a large list of disciplinary organizations in developing model major programs in the various disciplines. Although the program never became as large as I’d hoped, it was exciting to create a network of linkages between major research universities and nearby liberal arts colleges whereby PhD candidates had supervised apprenticeships in teaching undergraduates.

All those experiences and others indicated to me that the AAC staff included considerable
creative talent and energy. It was a pleasure to watch those individuals grow and contribute as I gave them larger responsibilities. Bringing Carol from the University of Chicago as vice president was the most fruitful personnel move I made. She freed me up so that I could visit campuses to address various groups of faculty, governing boards, and others. Becoming acquainted with numerous campuses and various cultures was a valuable learning opportunity that suggested more effective ways of relating to and serving our member institutions.

In summary, then, I believe my challenge was to provide momentum, focus, and financial stability. Paula and Carol have made their own valuable contributions to the work of AAC&U as they met new challenges. AAC&U, in my view, has had a good thirty-year stretch as it closes out its first century, and it is poised to reach greater heights as it enters its second century.

**Brownlee:** During the decade of the 1990s, we worked purposefully to expand our membership base to encompass good representation of institutions with every Carnegie classification. After a year or two of occasionally divisive debate in the board, members finally agreed to a name change for the association: AAC became AAC&U. We had discovered in our new work on the international front that many countries associated “colleges” with only secondary schools. The new name solved this problem for them. Membership grew, and participation in the annual meeting and the expanding number of conferences and workshops grew also. We were encouraging campus team participation; faculty became part of every team. We recognized the importance of presidential leadership of effective liberal education programs at the campus level, and worked hard to retain and grow their diminishing participation in our annual meetings.

It was near the beginning of the 1990s that we launched our first effort at strategic planning for AAC&U. I feel very good about this effort, partly because it fully engaged our staff leadership and board in what became productive, collaborative activity. Furthermore, this early effort launched a succession of such endeavors. Each would be pertinent to its time and challenges, and under Carol, this continues, and has enabled AAC&U to grow from strength to strength and adapt its vision and work to current times. Our mission remained unaltered and was the bedrock of our work.

I feel good about the funded programs and the annual meetings offered in the 1990s. Among the programs, of course American Commitments and new work in international arenas (including Russia, Japan and China, and later South Africa and India, among others) expanded our association’s relevance to thousands of member colleagues. The Preparing Future Faculty work was groundbreaking in partnering graduate students at notable major universities with internships on smaller campuses devoted to liberal learning. From all accounts there were countless eye-opening experiences in being mentored additionally by faculty members at such institutions. We heard that some of these students subsequently sought academic careers in community and liberal arts colleges. I suspect that the need for this kind of program continues today. A small partnership with the Wye Faculty Seminar helped more faculty members live a liberal learning experience themselves, and continues with the Aspen Institute today. Informal work with Project Kaleidoscope brought more STEM work into partnership with AAC&U and led, after many more years, to actual incorporation of that wonderful project into AAC&U with Carol’s leadership.

In the 1990s, print publications continued as the order of the day. New ones were launched—Peer Review and Diversity and Democracy—while Liberal Education was well received by our readership as it too, changed with the times. Monographs emerged from the many funded projects, and some of these have been mentioned in previous responses. I keep these periodicals and monographs on my shelves to this day, referring to them as needed.

In concluding, I should mention my continuing pride in the quality of work for which AAC and AAC&U have continuously stood. In my time, it was always gratifying to hear campus leaders exclaim that our board meetings included intellectual challenge as well as the necessary financial and administrative business. Our annual meetings were presented with intellectual vigor and were admired for provoking new thinking about the academic enterprise. Campuses competed energetically to be included in the annual general education and diversity workshops. This century-old association is as young and vigorous now as it was, I imagine, shortly after its founding.
Schneider: I inherited an opportunity to lead an age of synthesis at AAC&U. The LEAP framework for learning draws on an extraordinarily broad vein of creative reinvention across all parts of higher education—institutions large and small, public and private, two year and four year. As one foundation leader said to me, the LEAP framework of Essential Learning Outcomes and the emphasis on high-impact practices (such as service learning, research, writing-intensive courses, learning communities, etc.) has moved the liberal arts beyond “pious aspiration” and given it a much needed specificity.

Listening to all the rhetoric about accountability that was flourishing when I took office, we said: Fine. Let’s make ourselves accountable for whether students are actually achieving the outcomes our members say they consider important.

Moreover, against the extraordinary pressure in higher education to focus only on completion (signified by credit accumulation) and education for careers, we have relentlessly argued that quality is what makes completion worthwhile, while making the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes a reference point for the meaning of quality.

And, not least, we have insisted fiercely that education goes beyond job preparation and absolutely must include the learning needed for responsible, informed, participatory citizenship. Starting in the late 1980s, AAC&U began to explore in detail the connections between diversity and democracy as a crucial frame for articulating the kinds of learning needed to contribute to the success of a diverse and still inequitable democracy. We articulated those goals through the work accomplished in the 1990s and beyond in our major initiative, American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning. The insights drawn from that work strongly influenced the content of our larger framework for liberal education, the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes. They also influenced our decision to enlarge our mission in order to clarify that excellence requires attention not only to what is taught, but also to ensuring broad and diverse participation in the most powerful forms of college learning.

Starting in 2010, we worked under the aegis of the US Department of Education to study where higher education is now in terms of its approach to civic learning and where it should go next. I am very proud of the resulting core text, A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future. I also am very pleased that, following the release of Crucible at the White House in January 2012, Caryn McTighe Musil, the prime author of Crucible, agreed to lead a coalition of thirteen associations and organizations that share our commitment to making civic learning pervasive and expected, rather than available but optional in higher education. This, to my mind, exemplifies AAC&U’s willingness to take on issues that are not at the top of the conventional wisdom list, and to fight for their importance until they become the new wisdom.

My advice to future presidents is to immerse themselves in studying how we have related the enduring goals of liberal learning both to the needs of a changing society and to the needs of diverse students. I would also encourage presidents not to assume that the conventional wisdom ought to govern their priorities. Especially today, the conventional wisdom is promoting a view of education that is extraordinarily instrumental, narrow, value-free and, in my own judgment, ultimately dangerous both to democracy and to economic creativity. The “courage to question” should be AAC&U’s guiding maxim.

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org.
Crisis and Opportunity

The Founding of AAC

Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of dispositions are forever forming associations. . . . At the head of any new undertaking . . . in the United States you are sure to find an association.

—Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1835

It should not surprise us that presidents of American colleges formed an association. What is cause for wonder is why it took them so long. By 1869, there were 563 colleges in this nation. Yet not until 1914 did a handful of presidents feel the need to band together and found the Association of American Colleges.

What led them to take action at that time? Hindsight makes it apparent that several developments in the last half of the nineteenth century foreshadowed a time of crisis for the traditional college, but until the early years of the twentieth century there had been no clear and present danger. By 1910, long-standing conflicts in American thought about higher education, abetted by the growing strength and popularity of new institutions and new approaches to science and learning, culminated in conditions and attitudes that seriously called into question the very raison d'être of the traditional American college.

About the time of the Civil War, deeply rooted American ideas on education that were basically inimical to the classical New England college began to gain influence. Somewhat paradoxically, the Jeffersonian principle that the state should nurture democratic leaders by providing free public higher education to those who could profit by it combined with the Jacksonian belief that colleges should be open to everyone and provide education that was primarily vocational and utilitarian. Together, these two ideas created a climate of opinion that responded favorably to new and far-reaching movements challenging American colleges.

The 1860s witnessed two landmark events that set in motion some of the most dynamic developments. The first was the Morrill Act of 1862, which provided incentives for every state to create a college “where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific or classical studies, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts.” These colleges soon became highly competitive models of higher education and began to attract a steadily rising number of students. Moreover, the architect of one of the most influential among them, Andrew D. White of Cornell University, viewed them as a replacement for the classical colleges, which he scornfully said were as “stagnant as a Spanish convent, and as self-satisfied as a Bourbon duchy.”

The second event, the election of Charles W. Eliot to the presidency of Harvard in 1869, brought about just as forceful an attack on the fundamental character of traditional colleges, because it led to the transformation of the prototype of all American colleges. Eliot’s leadership in justifying and applying the elective principle as the means for students to determine their programs undermined the classical curriculum and set the conditions for both the introduction of new fields of study and the fragmentation and multiplication of courses within all disciplines.

The resulting revolution in the curriculum had no more far-reaching repercussion than its influence on the rapid development of American universities. It provided justification for changing from a rigid prescribed system to a flexible one inspired by a commitment to free inquiry. Andrew White used it in developing Cornell as both a land-grant college and a university. James B. Angell introduced it at the University
of Michigan. And it was fundamental to the planning of those powerful exemplars for all later universities—Johns Hopkins and the University of Chicago. It was also compatible with other major contemporary influences on higher education: the advance of scientific studies, the cultivation of “scientific” methodologies in other branches of learning, the formulation and definition of new fields of knowledge induced by such new methodologies, and the mounting influence of the German universities that enshrined research leading to the discovery of new knowledge as the principal objective of higher education.

Onset of crisis
By the early twentieth century, signs of trouble loomed high and dark over traditional colleges. From the perspective provided by the new universities, the traditional college looked best like a vestigial remain. As Frederick Rudolph succinctly says, “President Harper of Chicago, at the turn of the century, expected three out of four existing colleges to be reduced to the status of academies or modified into junior colleges. President Butler of Columbia was convinced that if the American college was to be saved, it would have to reduce its course of study to two or three years. David Starr Jordan of Stanford looked into his crystal ball in 1903 and decided that ‘as time goes on the college will disappear, in fact, if not in name. The best will become universities, the others will return to their places as academies.”

The exigencies of the time brought little comfort for the traditional college. From 1890 to 1910, the number of US institutions of higher education declined from 998 to 951 while total enrollment mounted from 156,756 to 355,213, an increase of more than 100 percent. In other words, even in the face of unprecedented demand for college education, the traditional college appeared to be losing out both to the new private universities and to public tax-supported institutions like land-grant colleges and state universities.

Questions were being raised, moreover, as to whether all colleges really were colleges. Major graduate and professional schools did not consider all equal and had begun to classify colleges according to how well they had prepared their graduates to pursue postgraduate programs of study. In 1913, as an extension of this practice, the Association of American Universities, founded in 1900, assumed the task of accrediting American colleges and did so until regional accrediting agencies came into being. Even before 1913, two newly established philanthropic foundations had highlighted the need for American educators to give serious attention to the issue of what constituted a college. In 1902, John D. Rockefeller set up the General Education Board. Besides making its grants contingent upon an institution’s raising a certain proportion of matching funds, it established standards that colleges needed to meet even to be eligible for consideration. In 1914, it justified its policy by stating, “The states have not generally shown themselves competent to deal with higher education on a nonpartisan, impersonal, and comprehensive basis. Rival religious bodies have invaded fields fully . . . occupied already; misguided individuals have founded a new college instead of strengthening an old one.”

These efforts were reinforced by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which from its founding in 1906 focused attention on the quality of programs offered in higher education. Nowhere did it manifest concern more directly than in its plan to establish a system that would assure every American college professor a reasonable pension. It was an ambitious undertaking, and to make it manageable the Carnegie Foundation had to define what it meant by a college. It eliminated technical institutes, tax-supported universities and colleges, and denominational institutions, the latter two on the grounds that states and churches could well provide pensions for their faculties as they did for other professionals on their staffs. For the remaining institutions, Carnegie set specific standards based on admissions requirements; staffing; endowment; and, in curriculum, “a course of four full years in liberal arts and sciences.”

The actual state of affairs can perhaps best be understood from the words of a concerned college president of those times: “There are in the United States about 1,000 institutions calling themselves universities or colleges. Many of these are trifling affairs with no serious claim to either title. . . . The lack of significance of the term College or University is shown by the fact that a number of ‘universities’ have been transferred to the list of secondary schools.”

Robert L. Kelly summed up the situation in a memoir for the thirty-fifth anniversary of
AAC: “More than a third of a century ago, the colleges of the United States were under fire from without. Many of them were [also] estranged one from the other, one group from another group; not a few colleges maintained a proud isolation. Many were weak in personal and material resources, doubtful and timid at heart, lacking definite objectives, limited by the comparatively low horizons of tradition. . . .”

AAC’S early years

Facing such conditions, a small group of college presidents met at the invitation of the Council of Church Boards of Education in July 1914 in St. Paul, Minnesota, to consider what might “turn a dire threat into a challenge.” In line with proposals that originated with the Council’s Standing Committee on Relations with Other Bodies, they decided that the time had come to found an association of colleges—national in scope—and framed a tentative constitution for it. To enlist the support and membership of others and secure ratification of their plans, they joined the Council of Church Boards in issuing a call for representatives of other institutions to meet with them at the Sherman Hotel in Chicago in January 1915.

Responding to their invitation, 150 college presidents convened in a joint session with the Council of Church Boards on Thursday, January 14, 1915. Robert Kelly, president of Earlham College and vice president of the Council of Church Boards of Education, had been the chief moving spirit as chair of the convening committee, and he presided. After this session, devoted to “The Moral and Religious Phases of Education,” the assembled college presidents met for two more days in which they adopted measures that endorsed the steps taken in St. Paul to found the Association of American Colleges and completed its formal organization.

On Friday, January 15, a Committee on Temporary Organization nominated a slate of officers headed by Kelly. All were duly elected. Later that day, the committee presented a draft constitution that was discussed and adopted by the assembled delegates. This document specified the official name of the organization to be “Association of American Colleges.” To be eligible for membership, institutions had to require fourteen Carnegie units for admission into the freshman class and the completion of 120 semester hours of coursework for graduation.

The association’s purpose was “the consideration of questions relating to the promotion of higher education in all its forms, in the independent and denominational colleges in the United States . . . and the discussion and prosecution of such questions and plans as may tend to make more efficient the institutions included in the membership. . . .”

Although the Council of Church Boards convened the group that founded AAC and for several years the annual meetings of both organizations were held at the same times and places with provision for at least one joint session, AAC was from the beginning composed of colleges and universities from all sectors of higher education, including the public or tax-supported. And even though the new association was sensitive to the religious concerns of denominational institutions, it was careful to distinguish between their special interests and its own. Thus the Executive Committee in March 1915 adopted a “Minute of Interpretation” to explain that an ambiguous action taken at the first annual meeting did not make a “Campaign in the Interest of Christian Education” an AAC program but only implied a “sympathetic attitude on the part of the Association.” To emphasize AAC’s nonsectarian policy, the executive committee then passed a motion on membership and activities stating that “‘inclusiveness and inter-helpfulness’ [sic] rather than exclusiveness’ be regarded and announced as the policy of the Association.” Thirty-five years later, Kelly summed up the significance of such beginnings: “Face to face, the Protestant Colleges, the Catholic Colleges, the independent colleges, and the tax-supported colleges . . . banded themselves together to attain peace through a policy of inclusiveness and interhelpfulness.”

It took two or three years for AAC to develop the administrative structure that would serve it effectively. For three years, its officers—except for Secretary-Treasurer R. Watson Cooper, president of Upper Iowa University—were elected annually and served only one year. Its founding president, Robert L. Kelly, was elected to the Executive Committee after his tenure as president ended and thus was available to counsel his successors. When he left Earlham in 1917 to become executive secretary of the Council of Church Boards of Education, he apparently found that his position did not demand all his time and energy and, therefore, that he also could serve AAC without slighting either organization. In any event, when the Executive Committee decided to have a permanent officer, it recommended to the
What never changed, however, was AAC’s dedication to liberal education and the strength and effectiveness of the institutions that provided it became clear and distinct in 1923, when the ninth annual meeting voted to admit new members and amended the original motion to read “College of Liberal Arts” in the case of universities or other institutions having several departments [schools].

For the first several years, AAC operated largely through either ad hoc or standing committees but occasionally used commissions. By 1921, however, it adopted the policy, to which it adhered for nearly fifty-five years, of charging permanent commissions with issues and concerns and giving them the responsibility of deliberating on and making recommendations about both short- and long-range implications of such matters. In line with this policy, AAC then established eight commissions—on college architecture, organization of college curriculum, distribution of colleges, faculty and student scholarship, objectives and ideals, sabbatical leave, academic freedom, and publications.

Over the next fifty-five years, this list would change in light of changing needs and circumstances. What never changed, however, was AAC’s dedication to liberal education and the strength and effectiveness of the institutions that provided it.

Cooperation with other associations

From the first, AAC cooperated with other agencies in facing some of the pressures on higher education. In 1915, for instance, AAC joined with the Council of Church Boards to study “the efficient college.” At the same time, AAC also appointed a member-president to work with representatives of ten other associations as a joint committee on the classification and standardization of American colleges.

At the request of the Association of American Universities, AAC’s 1918 annual meeting named a person to discuss with delegates from other associations how “better to organize the colleges and universities . . . for service to the government.” The upshot was the formation of an emergency council that worked so effectively to coordinate the activities and interests of the groups it represented that in 1919 it was established permanently as the American Council on Education. AAC was a charter member of that new coalition and had the right to elect three delegates to serve on it.

Setting the course

The dual goals of AAC’s initial projects are still guides for its activities. The first is to assist members in efforts to upgrade and strengthen themselves as effective institutions of higher education; the second is to encourage and promote liberal education as the basis for sound undergraduate programs.

During AAC’s first three years, a session at each annual meeting was devoted to critiquing a study on “the efficient college.” At the same time the question of what constituted a proper and responsible financial report was being examined. Besides such major projects, annual meetings usually included at least one session on topics such as “The Best Manner in which an Executive of a College Can Employ Time” and “Cooperative Purchasing for Colleges.”

Gradually, however, more and more attention was given to the goals and purposes of colleges and to the curriculum by which they were to be attained. The second annual meeting had a session on “Relation of the College Course to Vocational Training.” The presidential address at the third annual meeting was “What a College Stands For,” and a major program at the 1918 annual meeting focused on “Prospects of Liberal Education in America after the War.” That AAC’s interest in the curriculum centered on liberal education membership the establishment of the office of permanent executive secretary and the appointment of Kelly to it. This arrangement was approved at the 1918 annual meeting, and Kelly faithfully served AAC until his retirement in 1937.

With the appointment of Kelly, AAC got a fixed home as well as a permanent chief executive officer. From 1918 to mid-1920, its headquarters were at 19 South La Salle Street in Chicago. In 1920, both the Council of Church Boards of Education and AAC moved to New York City, where they shared offices until 1935. In 1948, AAC moved its headquarters to 926 Jackson Place, NW, Washington, DC, in Lafayette Square. When the Executive Office of the President of the United States preempted that space in 1957, AAC bought the mansion at 1818 R Street, NW, from the estate of Senator Hiram Bingham and made its final move in 1958.
A list of other joint efforts, not exhaustive but long enough to illustrate the breadth of AAC’s cooperation with other organizations, includes:

- consultations with the Association of American University Professors on issues of academic freedom and faculty tenure;
- work with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching on possible revisions in the pension system funded by that body;
- deliberations with the Committee on Education of the American Institute of Architects on the value of art and architecture as subjects to be introduced into the college curriculum;
- membership in the National Conference Committee on Standards of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

**Highlights of AAC’s contributions**

To sketch AAC’s history would require a small book of several chapters. Reciting a few accomplishments, however, will exemplify its distinctive contributions to American higher education.

AAC’s early concern about academic freedom and faculty tenure as matters that affect the quality of a college led the organization to enter into a joint venture with the American Association of University Professors, founded in 1915, to endorse and promulgate the “Conference Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure” of 1925. Again and again since then, AAC and AAUP have joined in similar projects; in this way, AAC has taken the lead among institutionally based associations in developing and promulgating advisory statements to assist colleges and universities in evolving their faculty personnel policies. In 1940, representatives of AAC and AAUP, culminating six years of multilateral conferences, agreed upon a new and more comprehensive “Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure” that was endorsed and promulgated by the 1941 annual meeting. In 1979 and again in 1988, confronted by changed conditions because of new laws on mandatory retirement, the two associations revised their joint “1958 Statement of Principles on Academic Retirement and Insurance Programs.”

Characteristic of AAC is its readiness to recognize and acknowledge that some activity for which it once may have sensed a need either might not be compatible with its long-term goals or might better be carried out by other agencies. In 1949, AAC established a Commission on Colleges and Industry to work with member institutions in developing strategies for colleges to use jointly in appealing to corporate donors for operating funds. Experience soon showed that while such activities were worthwhile, they could be seen as competing with those of member institutions and diverting the energy and talent of AAC officers from projects that were more compatible with the association’s mission.

About the same time, furthermore, it became apparent that a new specialized agency might well be more effective in coordinating the activities of state fundraising coalitions that were being created. As a consequence, in 1958 AAC joined with the emerging state associations of independent colleges to found the Independent College Funds of America, which for the last thirty years has been instrumental in raising general operating funds for independent colleges and universities from American business and industry.

Similarly, in the 1960s and 1970s, AAC gradually assumed more and more responsibility to represent—lobby for—collective bargaining and universities in Congress and among federal agencies. In 1970, after “numerous meetings,” AAC’s Board of Directors and the board of the Federation of State Associations of Independent Colleges and Universities agreed that the federation be reorganized as the National Council of Independent Colleges and Universities, with a membership inclusive of all private college members of AAC, and that an enlarged staff be housed at AAC’s headquarters and work “under the administrative supervision of the President of the Association.”

This arrangement soon caused serious problems within AAC. Public, tax-supported members, who constituted at least one-sixth of the membership, questioned whether their dues were being used properly. To them, AAC was becoming too closely identified with an agency that many times had opposed their position on issues before Congress or federal agencies. AAC members in the independent sector were not fully satisfied either, because they did not believe their case was being presented to federal officials as effectively as it could be.

Both sides, moreover, were fearful that in the face of rising challenges to liberal education such as declining enrollments in liberal arts courses and an increase in bachelor’s degrees in professional fields AAC needed to concentrate its resources on its basic mission.
Acting at the sixty-second annual meeting in 1976 on recommendations of a blue-ribbon committee that had been working for more than a year, the association voted to divest itself of any connection with federal relations for solely private or independent institutions; to reddenicate itself to its mission of being the “voice for liberal learning” in the United States; and, at considerable sacrifice in dues income for a year and with the possibility of a decline in membership thereafter, to assist in establishing the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.26

This decision at the time raised serious questions about whether AAC could remain a viable organization. Indeed, though it brought several years of grave financial stress that necessitated major restructuring of the operations of AAC, in the long run the decision has well served all of higher education by reinvigorating concern for and attention to the basic purposes for which colleges and universities exist.

Throughout this period of sturm und drang, AAC found and received, as it had from its earliest days, strong support from major philanthropic foundations. In particular, the Ford Foundation, the EXXON Education Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation showed confidence in the future of AAC and endorsed the value of its mission by making generous grants to support its projects, both old and new.

Noteworthy among the post-World War II programs that AAC had pioneered and succeeded in retaining during the years of stress and transition is the Project on the Status and Education of Women (PSEW). First among the programs of Washington-based associations aimed at overcoming gender stereotypes and discrimination based on sex, PSEW is no longer dependent solely on funding by foundations and is now incorporated fiscally in the basic operations of AAC.

The most telling sign that AAC continued to play a major role in American higher education after 1976 was the Project on Redefining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees. The project was begun in 1982 and financed by a major grant from the Pew Memorial Trust, with supplemental funding from the EXXON Education Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Johnson Foundation, and the Buhl Foundation. After three years of work, a select committee produced the influential report

Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community. This was released at AAC’s annual meeting in 1985 and immediately became a best-seller that continues to influence academic planning and programs on campuses across the nation.

The center holds

In 1914, American colleges were besieged from without by intellectual and institutional developments that challenged their raison d’être and from within by self-doubts and fear. All came to bear on the issue of their mission in undergraduate education. In 1989, American colleges and universities continue to face critical problems. Although undergraduate programs and baccalaureate degrees are far more diverse than they were seventy-five years ago, the basic questions about the fundamental purposes of college education still remain. The Association of American Colleges came into being to provide a means for the besieged colleges to help themselves by taking counsel together about first things. The center holds. Despite the vicissitudes of time and circumstance, AAC still exists to keep colleges and universities at the end of the twentieth century mindful of first things. Its programs and projects are designed to help members incorporate liberal learning in all baccalaureate programs so that college students today, no matter what their field, can graduate with what Milton would call a “complete and generous education”—one that fits them to perform duties both public and private and to live life to the full.

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

NOTES
2. Ibid., 443.
4. In 1911 when the US Bureau of Education, following the practice of the leading universities, prepared a list of colleges classified in four groups—of which the highest was those whose graduates could earn a master’s degree in one year. A leak of this list before publication raised such a protest that President Taft suppressed it. See Frederick Rudolph, Curriculum: A History of the

5. Ibid., 224.

6. Ibid., 221–22.


9. Ibid. Cf. Council of Church Boards of Education, Third Annual Report, 14–15. The members of the committee were Robert L. Kelly, chairman; R. Watson Cooper, president, Upper Iowa University; Hill M. Bell, president, Drake University; George R. Fellows, president, James Millikin University; John S. Nollen, president, Lake Forest College; H. D. Hoover, president, Carthage College; Thomas H. McMichael, president, Monmouth College; J. H. T. Main, president, Grinnell College; Rush Rhees, president, University of Rochester; F. W. Hinitt, president, Washington and Jefferson College.

10. A “Carnegie unit” was defined as a course that required five recitations a week throughout the high school year.

11. Minutes of the First Annual Meeting (Fayette, Iowa: AAC, 1915), 6–9. Although AAC received its constitution in 1915, it was not incorporated until 1938. In January of that year, the beginning of Guy Snively’s second year as chief executive officer, he and the directors of AAC, namely, James L. McConaughy of Wesleyan University, John L. Seaton of Albion College, LeRoy E. Kimball of New York University, Remsen D. Bird of Occidental College, Mildred H. McAfee of Wellesley College, Edward V. Stanford of Villanova, and Raymond Walters of the University of Cincinnati, signed a petition to the Regents of the University of the State of New York for incorporation. It was granted on March 23, 1938. A matter of at least passing interest to some members is that James L. McConaughy is one of the few directors of AAC who later became the governor of a state—Connecticut.

12. The University of Chattanooga was among the original members; within a year, the Municipal University of Akron and the University of Cincinnati had joined. Minutes of the First Annual Meeting, 19; and Minutes of the Second Annual Meeting (Fayette, Iowa: AAC, 1916), 15–16. In the first ten years, representatives of Pennsylvania State College and the University of Michigan served as chairs of AAC commissions.


15. Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting (Chicago: AAC, 1918), 9. Kelly acted as executive secretary for both agencies for seventeen years. He left his position at the Church Board in 1935. His successors at AAC have been Guy E. Snively (1937–54), for whom the title was changed to executive director in 1938; Theodore A. Distler (1954–65), who was the first permanent executive of the association to be called “president,” a title he received in 1964; Carter Davidson (1965), who died after only nine months in office; Richard Sullivan (1965–69); Frederic W. Ness (1969–78); Mark H. Curtis (1978–85); and the present incumbent, John W. Chandler (1985–).


17. Minutes of the First Annual Meeting, 112; Minutes of the Second Annual Meeting, 11–12; and Minutes of the Third Annual Meeting, 6.

18. Minutes of the Ninth Annual Meeting (New York: AAC, 1923), 12. This phrase was later interpreted by the Executive Committee to apply to institutions belonging to the Association of American Universities, the National Association of State Universities, the Association of Land Grant Colleges, and the Association of Urban Universities. In order to clear up confusion on this matter that had been allowed to develop inadvertently, the committee also recommended that this rule be applied to all “member-institutions having several departments [schools].” See Minutes of the Tenth Annual Meeting (New York: AAC, 1924), 8.


23. For another perspective on relations of AAUP and AAC, which were antagonistic until after the First World War, see Walter P. Metzger, Academic Freedom in the Age of the University (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 206–16.


TEN YEARS AGO, AAC&U (then AAC) issued a landmark report, *Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community.* Anticipating the academy’s sternest external critics by nearly a decade, *Integrity* offered a sweeping and incisive critique of curricular practice throughout higher education. “As for what passes as a college curriculum,” said *Integrity*’s authors in an often-quoted passage, “almost anything goes. We have reached a point at which we are more confident about the length of a college education than its content and purpose. . . . The curriculum has given way to a marketplace philosophy: it is a supermarket where students are shoppers and professors are merchants of learning.”

Despite the tone set by many such quotable phrases, *Integrity*’s authors intended to be constructive as well as critical. Challenging the cafeteria ethos that by 1985 largely governed curricular and student decision making, they framed a broad agenda for educational change, an agenda applicable both to individual campuses and to the work of AAC&U as a whole. Higher education’s academic leaders, argued *Integrity*, must work to

1. “revive . . . faculty [responsibility] as a whole for the curriculum as a whole”;2
2. foster for every student, whatever the choice of major, a “minimum required curriculum [of] intellectual, aesthetic, and philosophic experiences . . . methods and processes, modes of access to understanding and judgment, that should inform all study”;3
3. restructure college majors to foster study-in-depth, interdisciplinary learning, and overdue attention to the inherent limitations of any disciplinary framework;
4. assess in new ways both program effectiveness and the quality of student learning;
5. broaden and deepen graduate students’ and faculty members’ preparation for the profession of college teaching.

Since 1985, AAC&U as an association has focused extensively on each of *Integrity*’s major constructive themes. AAC&U has also developed important initiatives on other topics developed in *Integrity*, especially its challenge to the traditional divide between liberal and professional learning and its argument for international and multicultural learning as component parts of “a minimum required curriculum.”

Altogether, AAC&U has, over the past ten years, led more than two dozen funded projects involving several hundred institutions and thousands of faculty members in efforts to translate *Integrity*’s recommendations into practice across higher education. As *Integrity*’s ten-year anniversary approaches, it is time to review these various centers of educational initiative.

What have we accomplished through all this attention to curriculum, teaching, and learning? What are the various sites of activity, and how do they connect with one another? How would we rewrite *Integrity* today, after a decade of sustained attention to its recommendations? What remains to be addressed?

**Faculty responsibility for the curriculum as a whole**

Although *Integrity* largely avoided the conventional curricular architecture of “general education” and “majors,” its call for attention to the curriculum “as a whole” intersected with a revival of concern for general education already gaining momentum as *Integrity* was...
Reform Initiatives • 1985–1994
A DECADE OF CURRICULAR LEADERSHIP

Integrity in the College Curriculum (1985) identifies nine dimensions of liberal learning to be addressed in any liberal arts program, regardless of a student's choice of major. These essential experiences have been used across the country as a framework for general education review and curriculum planning.

A New Vitality in General Education (1988). A complementary perspective to the Integrity report, it emphasizes changes that campuses need to make in curricular planning, teaching, assessment, and institutional leadership, if general education programs are to fulfill their stated goals. The report highlights the importance of institutional leadership to help both students and faculty make a serious and intellectually rewarding investment in general education courses and programs. Filled with specific examples drawn from across the country, A New Vitality is a road map documenting ways to bridge the gap between educational goals and effective learning.

Structure and Coherence (1989) reports on transcript studies from thirty-five different campuses and provides concrete evidence of the lack of breadth and depth in many students' courses of study. Through research now under way, AAC&U, in cooperation with the Institute for Research in Higher Education (IRHE) at the University of Pennsylvania, is analyzing transcript data from a nationally representative sample of one hundred institutions.

An Engineering Student's Guide to the Humanities and Social Sciences (1988) and Unfinished Design (1988) explore ways to bring intentionality and intellectual coherence to engineering students' general education in the humanities and social sciences. The reports provide suggestions to help students construct clusters of general education courses that serve both their professional development and their liberal learning. They address both institutions willing to make programmatic changes in liberal learning for engineering students as well as those where advisors will continue to work within a framework of loosely structured general education guidelines.

The AAC&U project Liberal Learning, Study-in-Depth, and the Arts and Sciences Major issued a report in 1990, The Challenge of Connecting Learning, that questioned the educational value of the common distinction between the major (depth) and general education (breadth). The report proposes that majors and advanced general education can work together to help students develop the capacity to translate learning from one context to others.

Proceedings of the 1991 Asheville Institute on General Education and a companion sixty-four-minute videotape, “The Heart of the Matter,” present research and recommendations on general education by scholars such as Alexander Astin, Robert Pollack, and Sheila Tobias and from an array of institutions that have successfully restructured their general education curricula.

Engaging Cultural Legacies created a national network of sixty-five institutions to work on developing general education course sequences that help students develop a critical understanding of their own cultural inheritance and those of other people. Supported by two grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project published Core Curriculum and Cultural Pluralism: A Guide for Campus Planners in 1993.

Strong Foundations: Twelve Principles for Effective General Education Programs (1994) builds on the work being done across the country to reform general education and, learning from these accomplishments, constructs the means to sustain their vitality. The project examined the experiences of seventeen selected institutions with different general education programs; their insights were distilled over two years of collaborative effort to identify the principles and describe an array of models and practices that animate and extend effectiveness. The results are published in Strong Foundations.
that serves institutional teams working on general education planning.

Out of all this work with institutions addressing general education, several lessons emerge. The first is the absolute necessity of local educational dialogue and invention. The curriculum is one arena in which it pays dividends to carefully redesign the wheel. Hundreds of institutions have used *Integrity* over the past ten years in the context of general education reviews. But no institution simply adopts a recommended framework for general learning. Each must go through a laborious examination of its own mission, resources, campus needs, and program history in order to craft locally owned, collegially meaningful goals for student learning.

Yet through the many varieties of local idiom, the second lesson from general education reform is that the direction recommended by *Integrity* now predominates, at least in statements of

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**CURRENT INITIATIVES**

The Asheville Institute on General Education, co-sponsored by AAC&U and the University of North Carolina at Asheville (UNCA), is an annual week-long event held on the UNCA campus. Approximately twenty institutions are competitively selected to send five-person teams to the institute to study particular aspects of general education and work, with the help of nationally recognized consultants, on a reform project they have conceived. In 1994, the institute focused on interdisciplinary general education. The 1995 institute will address the connections between diversity and democracy as they shape general goals for liberal learning. Project Directors: Joseph Johnston and Jane Spalding.

American Commitments—Faculty and Curriculum Development Clusters (1993). This general education project, supported by the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, has linked twenty-two “resource institutions” with forty-three “planning institutions” to work on faculty study and curriculum development on US democratic and cultural pluralism. Consultants from the resource institutions are providing models and assistance in the curriculum development effort. A grant from the NEH supports a ten-day institute at which over two hundred faculty members will study contemporary scholarship on US diversity and democracy. The project is developing an interactive “map” of diversity curricula and pedagogics as well as bibliography and curricular exemplars. Project Director and Co-Director: Caryn McTighe Musil and Gwen Dungy.

The Curriculum Assessment Service (1994). AAC&U and its partner, the Institute for Research on Higher Education (IRHE) at the University of Pennsylvania, have recently completed an analysis of student course selections based on the transcripts of 1991 graduates from a nationally representative sample of eighty-one institutions. The resulting Curriculum Data Base will be utilized for further detailed studies over the next two years. AAC&U and IRHE will share the results of these studies, upon request, as they become available. Project Director: Joseph Johnston.

The Network for Academic Renewal: General Education Workshops (1992). Drawing on resources and colleague networks developed through grant-supported projects, AAC&U annually offers workshops throughout the United States on curriculum, teaching, learning, and academic leadership. The workshop series regularly addresses topics in general education. Project Director: Jerry Gaff.
principle. Frederick Rudolph, emeritus professor of history at Williams College and one of Integrity’s authors, notes that he and his colleagues self-consciously pitted themselves against “those who would furnish the mind [rather than] sharpen it, those for whom course content and subject matter were paramount.” What matters most they thought, is not what subject matter is taught, but how it is experienced.4

Characteristically, faculty groups endorse this emphasis on capacities and ways of knowing as goals for all students’ learning. Locally developed goals for general education almost always focus on what students can do with knowledge, rather than designated content per se. Discussions of the knowledge “most worth having,” once a staple in curriculum debates, have become rare. In this sense, well-publicized debates such as Stanford’s faculty struggle over the common course, Culture, Ideas, and Values, can be misleading. The Stanford debate was part of a discernible trend toward reviving a set of courses that all students take in common. But typically, this “true core” curriculum is almost never more than a handful of courses; at many institutions only one or two. And even within such designated “true core” courses, many institutions, including Stanford, set general course goals while allowing individual section instructors to differ significantly in their content and assignments. So, in core curricula too, broad educational goals, rather than specified content coverage, constitute the dominant trend.

A third lesson from general education reform is the intellectual benefit to faculty members of broad-based debates about what matters in college. Such overarching faculty dialogue becomes especially significant now that a generation of faculty is reaching retirement. Many faculty members now assuming positions of leadership within their institutions took their own first degrees in institutions where general education had become a formless list of distribution requirements, and their graduate degrees in departments characteristically uninvolved with the goals of “the curriculum as a whole.” The national dialogue about general education has thus been an important source of professional development for faculty members who take an active role in the discussions.

**Improving teaching and learning**

Similarly, a decade of debate about the curriculum as a whole has provided an important context for the contemporary discussion about improving the quality of collegiate teaching and learning. Absent a clear focus on what students are expected to achieve in college, discussions of teaching always run the danger of featuring technique and pedagogical processes as ends in themselves. The broad-based campus debate about general goals for all students’ learning helps faculty members develop new intentionality about specific courses. How does the first-year seminar contribute to students’ analytical and communication skills? What progress should students have made in both arenas by the time they complete a capstone general education seminar? AAC&U’s work on curricular projects over the past decade persuades us as an organization that improving teaching is most effectively addressed when it is clearly tied to particular curricular goals and processes.

The challenge now confronting campuses is to turn what have been topical discussions about general education into continuing forums for faculty attention to the “curriculum as a whole.” Too many institutions assume that general education review is a cyclical experience, undertaken to launch a new curriculum and then concluded with a collective sigh of relief.

The dangers of this episodic engagement with curricular goals and practices are substantial. Without a continuing dialogue about what a requirement seeks to achieve and how well these goals are being met, an institution’s new general education program may soon become little more than a rhetorical artifact of the catalog. Especially because curricula now emphasize how students should approach problems rather than what all students should know, faculty members need to work with one another and with findings from assessment studies to develop a shared expertise and new levels of continuing cooperation in fostering complex intellectual abilities across disparate courses and programs of study.

The final lesson from general education reform is the need for greater realism about
what general education can and cannot contribute to educational integrity. Despite its usefulness in shaping broad-based educational dialogues, a decade of attention to students' intellectual development in college teaches us that general education cannot unilaterally create the curricular wholeness that many of Integrity's admirers envision.

It is time to distinguish—more than many campuses have—between general goals for collegiate learning and general education requirements. The goals typically espoused in general education reviews are simply too encompassing to be effectively fulfilled in the limited curricular time most institutions actually assign to their general course requirements. It is surprising that faculty committees across the country characteristically overlook this structural flaw in their carefully crafted recommendations for general education.

Take, for example, the first set of capacities recommended in Integrity's minimum required curriculum: inquiry, abstract logical thinking, critical analysis. Some version of this language is almost universally present in campus statements about general education. Yet complex capacities in inquiry, logic, and critical analysis cannot realistically be developed in one or two designated general education courses. As college curricula are now structured, students are most likely to develop sophisticated inquiry skills through their major programs, where they learn particular theories and subject matter well enough to be able to subject them to analysis and critical evaluation.

Campus leaders should beware, therefore, of too completely identifying attention to the curriculum as a whole with general education requirements. What is needed now are clearer connections between the work of general education and the work of particular majors. AAC&U addressed this point directly in The Challenge of Connecting Learning, a 1991 successor report to Integrity. The major has its own responsibility to foster general outcomes from college and cannot contribute to educational integrity on the quality of students' learning across the curriculum.

Several current AAC&U projects and open workshops now address these needed connections between general education and the major. Equally important, AAC&U is taking its commitment to integrate general and specialized education directly into the graduate departments where future faculty members are initially trained. Drawing impetus from an earlier AAC&U pilot project on graduate education funded by FIPSE, this new effort, Preparing Future Faculty, involves seventeen research universities in path-breaking efforts to broaden their graduate students' preparation as future faculty members.

With generous support from the Pew Charitable Trusts, Preparing Future Faculty links faculty members in graduate departments with colleagues from a broad range of collaborating institutions: comprehensive, liberal arts, and community colleges. The goal is to involve institutions where young faculty will eventually teach with graduate institutions in developing more realistic preparations for future faculty members. These new preparatory programs will focus on the educational challenges and questions most teaching faculty members now confront: goals for general learning, connections between majors and general education, students' disparate preparation and interests, ways of establishing connections across the curriculum that pay off in better learning. Led by Jerry Gaff, an AAC&U vice president who helped launch the national revival of general education in the early 1980s, this project honors Integrity's ultimate insight: that to reclaim the integrity of the curriculum, faculty members must come to think in entirely new ways about the nature and scope of their calling.

Restructuring majors

Integrity had especially stinging things to say about the lack of educational purpose and structure in college majors. “The major in most colleges is little more than a gathering of courses taken in one department, lacking structure and depth . . . or emphasizing content to the neglect of the essential style of inquiry on which the content is based. . . .”

Following Integrity's analysis, AAC&U has worked extensively across several projects both on learning in arts and sciences majors and on liberal learning in such popular professional majors as engineering, business, and education. Since 1985, the association has sponsored eleven separate initiatives on college majors,
four concerned with arts and sciences majors as a group, one on student learning in women’s studies majors and minors, and half a dozen on liberal learning in education, engineering, and business studies.

Two themes dominate these efforts: a view of majors as highly intentional learning communities and an insistence that majors must foster integrative or connected learning.

AAC&U’s 1990 report on the arts and sciences major, The Challenge of Connecting Learning, succinctly identifies the connections between these themes. Integrity, it suggests, had unduly emphasized the metaphor of majors as primarily an experience of “study-in-depth,” or mastery of a particular field of knowledge. The “depth” metaphor, Challenge’s authors suggest, “conceals, rather than illuminates, the social dimensions of the major that are intrinsic to its special role in undergraduate learning.”

“Neither students nor faculty members,” Challenge continues, “can inhabit the totality of the wide world of human knowledge. Recognizing this, the major invites students to enter a quite particular culture.” This culture offers an initial “home” in which students can focus their intellectual inquiries, a community of peers with whom students can engage, and a faculty charged to care about specific “students’ intellectual and personal explorations as well as their maturation.”

The major as a “home” for liberal learning, Challenge argues in its deliberately revisionist restatement of Integrity, has multiple responsibilities: an obligation to help students learn a particular field, but an equally important obligation to help students connect their learning across disparate fields. “To fulfill its role in liberal learning, the major also must structure conversations with the other cultures represented in the academy, conversations that more nearly reflect the diversities within our world and require patient efforts of translation. Ultimately, the goal of the major should be the development of students’ capacities for making connections.”

On a variety of fronts, AAC&U is now working to translate these premises into practice. One current project, a FIPSE-funded campus initiative on Re-Forming Arts and Sciences Majors, focuses on developing majors as effective learning communities. Through both national workshops and collaborative efforts in more than sixty departments, this project has worked with faculty members to reconsider the educational purposes of introductory, intermediate, and culminating study within their specific programs. Because most of the institutions in the Reforming Majors project are veterans of recent general education reforms, this initiative is also working on ways of connecting newly revised goals for both general education and majors programs.

Under the leadership of Joseph S. Johnston, Jr., one of AAC&U’s vice presidents for programs, several projects on liberal learning in professional majors have explored additional ways of fostering integrative liberal learning. Integrity challenged the unproductive gap that still prevails between liberal and preprofessional studies and AAC&U’s initiatives on professional majors have tried to close that divide.

Drawing on our systematic study of teacher preparation curricula, Those Who Can, AAC&U’s 1988 Rockefeller Foundation–funded report on teacher education challenges the Holmes Group’s influential recommendation that future teachers should first learn a subject through a liberal arts major and then, in a separate graduate program in education, learn how to teach that subject. Instead, Those Who Can suggests, the academy should create interdisciplinary preparatory courses that recognize the interconnections between learning the content and methodology of a field and learning how to teach that field. Such integrative courses, drawing together disciplinary subject matter and knowledge about teaching and learning, would deepen students’ understanding of their own subject in a way that education courses, taken out of context, could scarcely hope to achieve.

With subsequent funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, AAC&U created in 1992 a national network of institutions working to develop integrative curricular designs that connect liberal arts subject matter with pedagogical preparation appropriate to the subject. A recent issue of Liberal Education (Winter 1994) reports on the approaches these experimenting institutions are taking to the challenge of future teachers’ integrative learning.
Johnston and a network of national advisors have devised other approaches to integrative learning for engineering and business majors. Recognizing that engineering students typically take but a handful of quite unrelated courses in the humanities and social sciences, AAC&U worked with the Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) to explore ways of focusing and enriching engineering students’ liberal learning through humanities and social sciences offerings. The resulting 1988 study, Unfinished Design, offers a variety of strategies for broadening engineering students' understanding of the societal context in which they will practice their profession.\(^\text{11}\)

Unfinished Design describes a series of model liberal studies programs developed especially for engineering students that explore the effects of science and technology on societies past and present. But recognizing that not every institution has the resources to develop a comprehensive and integrative science and society curriculum, the report also recommended teaching engineering students themselves how to plan thematic liberal studies concentrations that are both individually meaningful and educationally coherent. Such topics as engineering and aesthetics; cognitive science; public policy or environment; energy, and resources, Unfinished Design suggests, would both focus engineering students’ general education and significantly enrich their professional consciousness. Whatever the particular curricular strategy, Unfinished Design argues, institutions should help engineering students experience the humanities and social sciences as resources with their own focus and coherence, not simply as a set of arbitrary requirements, unconnected and unconnectable to students’ most compelling interests.

Business, the most frequently selected college major in the country, has also been an important focus for AAC&U projects on the major. Over the past five years, AAC&U has worked in close and continuous cooperation with the American Assembly of Colleges and Schools of Business on opportunities for integrative learning presented by business’s new involvement in the global village. Four separate projects sponsored by KPMG Peat Marwick Foundation have supported faculty teams from both arts and sciences and business schools in collaborative efforts to plan international curricula. Some campuses in these AAC&U/AACSB projects have developed focused cultural immersions for their business students; others have worked on course clusters that connect business and international topics. Many are placing new importance on language study, with predictably positive effects on students' interest in that perennially neglected topic.\(^\text{12}\)

As all these examples suggest, AAC&U’s work on specific majors views students’ specialized interest as a potential matrix for integrating, extending, and generalizing knowledge. Disciplines are important, AAC&U’s approach suggests, but so too are connections and translations. Integrity’s legacy across these diverse initiatives is an emerging recognition that, to fulfill their role in liberal education, major programs must assume a new level of responsibility for fostering students' competence in integrating different aspects of their college learning.

Program coherence

In recommending a “minimum required curriculum,” Integrity’s authors tacitly assumed both that most students take their degrees in a single institution and that faculty attention to the curriculum as a whole would therefore increase the coherence and purposefulness of each student’s education.

The mobility of contemporary students challenges us to rethink this conceptual framework for educational coherence. Across the country, transfer has become a common rather than an exceptional dimension of college experience. With students increasingly likely to compose their baccalaureate degrees with courses and credits taken at multiple institutions, it seems clear we must think in new ways about educational purpose and intellectual progress.

In this context, Integrity’s focus on fundamental capacities—"methods and processes, modes of access to understanding and judgment"—provides an important framework for the next big challenge in higher education: an era of fresh interinstitutional attention to what students ought to achieve in college, wherever they matriculate and no matter the number of
AAC&U is currently seeking funding to develop such an interinstitutional framework for baccalaureate learning. The proposed initiative, intended as a successor to Integrity, is the logical next step in AAC&U’s continuing effort to define and create models for baccalaureate learning that reflect the best contemporary thinking about undergraduate education, the characteristics of the student body, patterns of college attendance, the diversity of institutions, and societal expectations about what college graduates should know and be able to do.

Like the recommendations in Integrity, this proposed new initiative will avoid prescriptions for specific content and coverage. AAC&U believes firmly that local faculty strengths and expertise must continue to guide campus judgments about curricular and course content. Rather, this new baccalaureate degree review will focus on the capacities students need for participation in a complex world, on curricular structures and relationships appropriate to contemporary educational goals, and on ways of demonstrating what students are learning across institutional boundaries.

As we undertake this new look at the meaning of the degree, Integrity’s list of capacities for a minimum required curriculum will need to be updated. Integrity makes no reference, for example, to technology or the visual and computer revolutions. Its multicultural text is both outdated and surprisingly silent on languages. Its recommendations for connecting theoretical and practical learning could be usefully extended.
Integrity is also notably inattentive to higher education’s role in the normative and practical questions confronting our pluralistic democracy.

These needed updatings aside, Integrity’s fundamental emphasis on capacities rather than “coverage” remains a compelling framework for fostering shared understandings of what students ought to achieve in college in this era of increasing student mobility on the road to a degree. With a decade of curricular restructuring to guide us, we can now apply this framework more deliberatively to the work of particular parts of the curriculum: to introductory general education, to the focused work of majors and internships, to advanced or integrative general education, and to the connections among all of these. Equally important, we can apply this framework to assessment, distinguishing among capacities that should be demonstrated before advanced work is undertaken, and capacities that can be best demonstrated in the context of a student’s particular interests and focused studies.

AAC&U, like higher education as a whole, remains at a very preliminary stage in its work on assessing learning. Most of our work has been done in the context of specific fields, arts and sciences majors, and an important pilot project on assessing learning in women’s studies programs. But as students become increasingly mobile across higher education, we will not be able to delay much longer in developing assessments that communicate across institutional boundaries as well as within programs. Indeed, we may need shortly to borrow for assessment an innovation that Secretary of Labor Robert Reich has urged for career planning. Reich argues that unemployment centers should now become reemployment centers, with programs to help workers in assessment, self-assessment, and planning. Something comparable needs to be established across higher education so that students dropping in, stopping out, taking multiple majors and/or frequently interrupted degrees can find useful periodic assistance in asking fundamental questions: What do I need to know now, personally, societally, and professionally? How much have I already learned, and how can I demonstrate it? How can I build on previous learning to move forward with my most important objectives?

Integrity’s emphasis on a minimum required curriculum for every student provided an important first step toward developing useful advice to learners asking such questions at transitional moments in their learning. AAC&U’s next decade of work on curriculum, teaching, and learning will help us learn better how to use assessment and students’ self-assessment as integral supports in the work of higher learning.

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

NOTES
2. Ibid., 9
3. Ibid., 15.
6. Integrity, 2.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
The Search for American Liberal Education

Liberal education and the American context
When Charles William Eliot launched his radical reforms at Harvard in the late 1870s, he was convinced that the fixed curriculum, based on English liberal education models, was ill-suited to the democratic spirit, the cultural diversity, and the rapidly changing circumstances in America. By introducing the free elective system, he hoped to develop in students the habits of self-reliance that he regarded as essential to the American democratic system. Seventy years later, in a post-World War II climate of concern about the “unifying purpose and idea” for American education, Harvard issued a new version of liberal education in its famous Redbook. To address the new American circumstances, these reforms reduced rather than increased choices for students. These benchmarks of American higher education notwithstanding, the final chapter of a widely respected study by Bruce Kimball, published in 1986, opens with the observation that there is no “distinctively American view of liberal education.”

This observation contains an irony that raises interesting and significant questions. After such high-profile efforts as those made at Harvard, why is there no clear model of American liberal education? And if there is no such model, do we need to develop one, especially in the context of the dramatic changes affecting American society today—changes that in many ways are more radical than those faced by Charles William Eliot? Why, in this latest round of debates about the core curriculum in our colleges and universities, has the issue been posed in terms of the primacy and purity of Western civilization rather than in terms of the adequacy of our educational models to address the realities of America in the late twentieth century?

These questions are even more striking when one considers the almost complete reversal of roles and the dramatic changes in orientation that have occurred in the relationship between the United States and its cultural ancestors in the Anglo-European world. While in the late nineteenth century Great Britain was extending its rule to much of the rest of the world, and other European nations were its chief competitors for imperial influence, in the late twentieth century the United States stands alone as the remaining superpower of the world. In that earlier period, cultural influences flowed primarily from the Anglo-European world to the United States, but now cultural influences flow primarily from the United States to other parts of the world. When Eliot was president of Harvard, the United States was almost entirely oriented toward the Atlantic community in terms of commerce and culture, but in our own time, Bill Clinton, the president of the United States, has declared that the economic future of the United States lies in Pacific Rim trade, and the influence of non-Western cultures on the United States is increasingly evident. Immigrants coming to the United States in the nineteenth century were overwhelmingly from the Anglo-European world. Immigrants coming to the United States in the late twentieth century are overwhelmingly from Asia and Latin America.

Limits of the traditional model
In examining the history of curricular reform in American higher education, we see clearly the reasons for the absence of an American

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model of liberal education. While the Harvard reforms were concerned with adapting traditional models of liberal education to American circumstances, the reforms did not challenge essential assumptions built into those models. Some of these assumptions seriously inhibited the possibility of even considering an American model of liberal education. The Oxford model of liberal education that flourished in America was best articulated by Matthew Arnold. He believed in a concept of high culture, mediated through great books, which contained the best that had been thought and written. In practice, this translated into the assumption that the best ideas contained in the texts of Western civilization were universal—they applied to any time and any place. If liberal education equaled universal truth, then there was no need to distinguish an American model of liberal education from an English model of liberal education. Arnold’s model of liberal education, like the Great Books program advocated by Robert Hutchins at the University of Chicago, was valid for all cultures. You could apply the model to different circumstances, but the model itself was timeless and not related to place. Even as Eliot grew determined to respond to changes in American society, he promoted publication of the Harvard Classics, which assumed a great books notion of liberal education.

Arnold’s emphasis on liberal education as high culture also discouraged consideration of a distinctive American model. In nineteenth-century England, liberal education as high culture
was suited to a class-conscious society in which gentlemen of the aristocracy were groomed for leadership responsibilities. But this high culture was self-contained, self-perpetuating, and comfortably insulated from the rapid changes occurring in other parts of the society. In fact, Arnold’s liberal education envisioned not only a self-contained but also a harmonious culture, and this concern for harmony and order easily translated into a fear of rapid change, which represented disorder. Although Eliot was concerned with responding to the many changes occurring in American society, the model of liberal education he used had its own built-in limitations that kept it from achieving that purpose. These limitations were to appear repeatedly in many, if not most, subsequent efforts to reform liberal education in America. The self-contained high culture became that of the American college professor rather than the English aristocrat, and efforts to create new forms of liberal education inevitably sparked internal arguments among professors rather than efforts to develop a new model appropriate to the changing realities of the larger society. Given that from the outset college teachers were largely oriented toward Anglo-European culture, the internal debate was not likely to emphasize distinctive American features or requirements.

Impact on curricular development

This unwitting and almost unconscious dependence on an Anglo-European model of liberal education has had pervasive impacts on how American higher education has approached those areas of the curriculum that we variously call liberal education, general education, or core education. One impact has been succinctly described by philosopher John Searle. According to Searle, our notion of liberal education has emphasized extreme universalism, on the one hand, and extreme individualism, on the other. Our objective has been to provide individual students with the intellectual skills to liberate themselves from their provincial origins so that they could identify with universal humanity. In this kind of liberal education, there is no place for particular cultural identities. To be concerned about what it means to be an American is to undercut the cosmopolitan aspirations implied by universal truths.

Another impact of this model is the almost blind assumption that liberal education must be monocultural because it is universal. This is unsurprising, since many efforts to establish liberal education began with Western civilization courses that virtually presumed that Western civilization was coterminous with universal truth. The notion that Western civilization might be one of many high civilizations that have struggled imperfectly to express their aspirations for universal truth was alien to this approach. The emergence of anthropology as an academic discipline, however, began to erode the traditional concept of Western civilization as the one universal civilization. This emergence has paralleled our growing awareness of the existence and integrity of cultures other than our own. That awareness, in turn, has reached a peak in our own time, because global interdependence and communications have forced on us the reality of multiple cultures in constant contact and interaction with each other. In addition, we have a newly acute sense of the pluralism that has always been a feature of American culture. Such developments have dramatized the discrepancies between these realities and our traditional approaches to liberal education.

Still another impact of the traditional model of liberal education is the failure to confront the contradictions between the aristocratic basis of Anglo-European approaches and the democratic, scientific, and technological realities of American life. When Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler launched the Great Books curriculum at the University of Chicago, John Dewey criticized it because of this contradiction. In Dewey’s vision, American education should reflect American society: it should be explicitly democratic and should give emphasis to the aspect of liberal education that Bruce Kimball identified as the Socratic, scientific method of open-ended truth-seeking, as opposed to the great books approach, which venerated established traditional values. Dewey’s approach did not just acknowledge and accommodate the cultural pluralism of American society; it also reflected the multiplying pluralism of the disciplines within the academy. This came from the explosion of new knowledge that was generated by the scientific method. Dewey’s insistence on

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connecting theory with practice and education with experience reflected the American tradition of philosophical pragmatism rather than the European tradition of Platonic idealism. Because of the Anglo-European orientation of the most visible advocates of traditional liberal education, Dewey's American approach has received little attention in the repeated efforts to restore or reform liberal education in the American academy.

Dewey's recognition of the growing dominance of the scientific method and the resulting growth in specialization within all the academic disciplines anticipated one more impact of the traditional model of liberal education. While it was possible for advocates of the traditional model to turn away from the rapid changes that led to increased pluralism in the larger society, it was not possible to ignore the increased academic pluralism within the academy. In fact, most debates about liberal education, general education, or core curricula in the past half century have essentially turned around the question of how to reconcile the traditional aspiration for a common, shared academic culture with the separating tendencies of specialized academic disciplines. Those disciplines were increasingly shaped by the different research interests of the faculty. The core curriculum adopted by Harvard in 1979, which helped set off the latest wave of reforms in general education across the academy, was acknowledged by insiders to be a compromise that tried to balance the faculty's research interests with their desire to impart to students a sense of a shared academic culture.

In terms of maintaining this kind of balance, the history of these kinds of reforms in the past several decades is not very promising. Because of the dominance of the research ethos in higher education today, most faculty members do not have a sense of a shared academic culture (much less a loyalty to such a culture), and their research priorities inevitably erode the effectiveness of core curriculum reforms. Significantly, the struggle between the ideal of a traditional liberal education and the pluralism of academic specialization has obscured the larger issue of whether liberal education needs to respond to the increasing cultural pluralism of the larger society.

Compartmentalization of liberal education
In another sense, however, academic specialization and the research ethos reinforced the tendency of the traditional liberal education model to separate itself from the larger society and from activities that were considered non-academic. This tendency is expressed in the comment, often heard among liberal education advocates, that the academy should honor and recognize only “learning for its own sake.” Normally, this belief translates into an attitude in which any applied learning, especially learning associated with vocational or professional education, is scorned and considered less than worthy. Needless to say, this attitude can become effective insulation from the changing winds in the larger society and easily exempts those in the academy from taking seriously the need to respond to such changes.

Ironically, while many in the academy regard liberal education as the opposite of academic specialization, in recent decades liberal education has tended to become a separate academic specialization in itself. This is revealed in different ways. Some scholars of higher education have voiced dismay that the number of pure liberal arts colleges is declining; they perceive this decline to be caused by the increase in professional programs in liberal arts institutions. This outlook implies that liberal education has a function totally separate from that of professional education. In many if not most universities, liberal education is either a segregated college or a segregated portion of the curriculum. This, again, separates liberal education from other aspects of education and implies a form of specialization.

Other trends in higher education have also encouraged the compartmentalization of liberal education. In the last decades, the increased specialization in the academic sector has been paralleled by an increased specialization in the administrative sector. As faculty members have turned more and more toward their specialized research, they have become less and less concerned with those aspects of students’ lives that are not focused on the purely academic. At the same time, student services and athletic programs at universities have expanded dramatically. Each has developed its own multiplying specialties such as career counseling, remedial study, recruiting, and so on. Personnel in these specialties sometimes become more involved than the academic faculty in those aspects of students’ character development and values formation that once were assumed to be part of traditional liberal education. This ironic outcome is another aspect of the failure of the
traditional model of liberal education to respond to the rapidly changing circumstances within the American environment.

**Search for a distinctively American liberal education**

Our analysis shows that the traditional model of liberal education—heavily oriented toward Anglo-European assumptions about the universality of high culture mediated through great books—has discouraged any serious efforts to develop a distinctively American approach to liberal education, despite repeated reforms aimed at helping the academy adjust to rapid changes in American society. This analysis contains a significant implication. As the inclusiveness of the American experience reaches beyond the Anglo-European experience in the late twentieth century, the need for an American view of liberal education has dramatically escalated. It is not too much to say that we are long overdue for a serious exploration of this issue. Where and how would such an exploration begin?

Debates that have emerged recently in the academy’s so-called “culture wars” have often implied that a traditional liberal education, based on a “Eurocentric” view of Western civilization, and the contemporary needs of a pluralistic America are mutually exclusive. However, framing the issue in this manner is both simplistic and misleading. Significant aspects of the traditional model of liberal education can and should be retained in any American view of liberal education. After all, our views about education and culture essentially evolved from Anglo-European roots, and some, if not all, of those views continue to be appropriate for the conditions we face today. At the same time, the limitations of the traditional views of liberal education, many of which were noted in the foregoing analysis, need to be recognized and replaced by ideas that more effectively address the changing realities of America and the educational requirements those realities dictate.

**Unity in pluralism**

We need not abandon the aspiration of traditional liberal education to find universal truths because we have discarded at least the conscious presumption that Western civilization alone possesses the universal truth. Although this distinction may seem subtle, its consequences are dramatic. A goal of finding universal truths acknowledges the need for some standard that transcends particular cultures so that we are not trapped in a meaningless cultural relativity, but it also recognizes that there must be open and equal transactions between cultures in order to determine what those broader standards might be. Bruce Kimball’s useful typology, in which he identifies the two main strands of the liberal education tradition, can be applied here. One of these strands is made up of the known cultural truths used to develop character and leadership; the other comprises the Socratic-scientific search for truths that are continually unfolding with new experience. In effect, an American model of liberal education would take the Socratic method and apply it to cultural truths, thus establishing universal truths as aspirational rather than presumptive.

Although some recent critics of traditional liberal education have dismissed any notion of universal truth as inherently contradictory to the requirements of cultural pluralism, the combination of the search for universal truths with the reality of many different cultures is deeply and distinctly American. As many observers of the American scene have noted, the Declaration of Independence appealed for the equality of all human beings, a universal claim that permitted American immigrants from many different European cultures to unite in opposition to the British crown. Gunnar Myrdal identified democratic ideas as a universal American creed that provided the unum in _e pluribus unum_—the unity in the pluralism that was the United States.

If we accept democratic ideas as one of the conceptual cornerstones for an American view of liberal education, revising the traditional model of liberal education has other significant ramifications as well. The Matthew Arnold view of a pure, high culture mediated by the great books of Western civilization for gentlemen of the aristocracy should be replaced by a view of culture that is less pure, less static, less removed from the larger democratic society. This view of culture would be more open-ended and more multicultural, and its development would be more dynamic. Great books from many different cultures and civilizations would provide the basis for a continuing dialogue about which aspects of these human cultures apply broadly to the general human condition and which are tied only to a particular culture. This view of culture would not repudiate the accumulated wisdom of
the past but would require its application to present and future issues, with the open possibility that it might be revised or revitalized. This approach to culture would be more anthropological than metaphysical, more comparative than culture-bound in its method.

**The integrating vision of liberal education**

In our search for an American view of liberal education, we do not need to abandon the traditional ideal that emphasized integrated learning aimed at the whole student. This integration included character development along with intellectual development, practical knowledge combined with academic knowledge, and education for who they are as well as for what they will do. Insofar as liberal education is a distinctive aspect of higher education, this integrating vision is the essence of its distinctiveness. In addition, we should remember that the roots of American higher education were planted by the early New England liberal arts colleges, which were dedicated to this vision of an integrated, whole-person education nourished in a residential community. Subsequently, of course, American higher education developed other kinds of institutions, such as land-grant universities and community colleges, both of which emphasized service to society rather than detachment from it.

Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, has suggested a “New American College” model that implies a distinctively American approach to liberal education. This approach applies the integrating vision of the early American liberal arts college to other distinctive aspects of American higher education so that they can be expressed in a single institution. The traditional model of liberal education had an aversion to involvement in the larger society and its needs. The New American College’s approach would extend the scope of liberal education to engage the needs of the larger society in a spirit akin to the distinctively American land-grant university. Colleges that have assisted local school districts in improving the quality of public education exemplify this broader scope of liberal education. Universities that provide local governments with studies and proposed solutions to environmental problems also illustrate the application of American pragmatism to liberal education.

In a similar way, the integrative priority would be applied to the relationship between what we call general education and the more specialized education of academic and professional disciplines. Rather than rigidly segregating the general education courses from the courses required for a major, whether in the arts and sciences or in applied professional areas, educators would make a conscious effort to provide a theoretical and practical connection between these sectors of the curriculum. This scheme would involve structured efforts to have the teachers of these different kinds of courses engage in conversations about how students can apply the knowledge and skills taught in general education courses to the more specialized courses in the field major. Such efforts would help reestablish liberal education as the intellectual foundation of all academic disciplines and reaffirm the importance of some shared vision of learning within the faculty.

In this New American College model, the traditional American liberal arts college vision that connects character development with academic learning would be restored. This connection has been significantly eroded in the past several decades by the withdrawal of faculty involvement with student behavior and the simultaneous emergence of professional student-life bureaucracies. While it is unlikely that faculty concern with student life can be restored to nineteenth-century levels, a different kind of connection can be established by asking faculty and student-life staff members to collaborate in building academic components into residential life programs. This living-learning focus would promote the integrative vision of the liberal arts in a new and more challenging context.

A New American College model is less a particular set of institutions than general ideas that can be applied to a variety of different kinds of colleges and universities. The model draws strength from the American experience, which, in higher education, is embodied in wide institutional diversity. In liberal arts colleges, the model would challenge the traditional ivory tower syndrome and open up new...
The initial challenge is to envision a practical way to reconnect the academic specializations so that liberal education’s integrating vision is given priority.

Primary-care education
An analogy from the health-care field may provide a useful comparison for addressing this issue in higher education. As many have observed, the dominance of the health-care system by medical specialists has created a situation in which the needs of the whole patient are lost or subordinated to the treatment of particular parts of the patient’s body. There is great advantage in being treated by a heart specialist, an eye specialist, or a bone specialist if those specialists have not lost sight of the fact that good health is the result of a whole human system working well in an integrated way. But the pressures of specialization too often result in a disconnection from these larger concerns. As a result, the medical field today, according to many expert observers, desperately needs more and better trained primary-care physicians whose priority concern is to appropriately connect specialized care to the needs of the whole person.

In a similar way, an American approach to liberal education that invokes the integrating vision of the early liberal arts colleges needs to develop a new model of faculty activity. This model could be appropriately called the “primary-care professor.” These primary-care professors would have an essential concern for the whole student. They would teach in ways that would have some influence on what students believe and how students behave. They would teach their subject matter in ways that relate to other academic disciplines, and they would not presume that their own discipline had exclusive claims to truth. They would be concerned not only with how knowledge is produced but also with how it is taught, integrated, and applied. They would be concerned about how the general skills and knowledge of liberal education connect with the professional or vocational skills that students will need in order to earn a living. They would be interested in determining how the wisdom and knowledge of the academy can be applied to the urgent problems of the larger society and the wider world.

This primary-care model of faculty activity would complement the academic specialist model that presently dominates the culture of our colleges and universities. Just as the primary-care physician relies on medical specialists to provide the appropriate expertise based on the needs of the patient, in a similar way the primary-care professor would outline the optimal ways for a particular student to use academic specialists to achieve the learning goals considered best for that student. In the ideal New American College model, all professors would have some of the attributes of the primary-care professor, and there would be a balanced distribution of traditional academic specialists to best serve the needs of the whole student.

Some people in the academy would argue that the integrating vision of liberal education
is obsolete or at best a nostalgic longing for a lost golden age. If one were to interpret integration as a unity of knowledge of the kind sought by medieval philosophers, such an argument would be valid. But the integration needed today is more modest. It is perhaps better described as a sense of continuity or connection across the borders of academic and administrative specializations. While this vision might appear to go against the grain of an era in which knowledge and information continue to expand at exponential rates, there are significant indications that larger imperatives may be driving us toward increased connections between fields of knowledge. Much of the cutting-edge research now taking place in the sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities is explicitly interdisciplinary—whether biochemistry, international studies, or cultural studies—and most of the urgent problems that cry out for the application of new wisdom and knowledge require an interdisciplinary approach, whether environmental studies, health care, or the new world order.

To facilitate this kind of American approach to liberal education, colleges and universities need to develop structures and incentives to encourage and reward continuous conversations at the intersections of the varied specialities in our institutions. These intersections must include not only those between academic disciplines but also those between arts and sciences disciplines and professional disciplines, between faculty and administration, between different cultural groups on our campuses, and between the academic community and the larger society. In our current structures and incentive systems, these kinds of conversations are inhibited or even discouraged. But unless such conversations come to be conducted on a continuous basis, the quest for an American model of liberal education will make little progress.

**Conclusion**

Although efforts to reform liberal education in America have frequently been concerned with adapting to the country’s changing circumstances, they have not been equally concerned with developing a more appropriate model to engage these changing circumstances. Our analysis suggests that as we approach the twenty-first century, the traditional liberal education model, which has its origins in Anglo-European culture, needs to be replaced by an American liberal education model that has its origins in American culture and experience. While this model need not discard all aspects of the traditional model, it should be more democratic, more multicultural, and more responsive to the needs of American society. At the same time, it should take the universal aspirations and the integrating vision of the traditional model and reinterpret them in the context of the cultural and academic pluralisms that constitute major influences in the country and the academy today. As a part of this search for an American liberal education, we might profitably explore a new model that accepts and affirms the cultural and academic diversity presently found in our colleges and universities. At the same time, this model would apply the priority of integration by promoting conversation and creative development at the intersections of the now-divided sectors of academic departments, general and specialized education, academic life and student life, and college and community. At the end of this search, we may find a truly new American college that reflects an American model of liberal education. This innovation could in turn give us a renewed sense of academic community and at the same time enrich our service to American society.

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

**NOTES**

CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER

Making Excellence Inclusive

Liberal Education and
to the values and practices of liberal education, and where do we need to go, within the academy as a whole and within AAC&U itself?

I am a historian at heart, and it is tempting to seize this anniversary moment to dwell on the rich history of this association, from its founding to its current focus on inclusive excellence. However, I will resist that temptation and restrict myself instead to just one pivotal marker: the decision our predecessors made in 1976, almost thirty years ago, to comprehensively reinvent this association’s focus and purpose.

Liberal education

AAC&U has always been committed to liberal education. In articulating the overarching aims of liberal education, our members also have worked constantly and conscientiously to ensure that liberal education both engages and responds to larger changes in the world around us. Liberal education is not a static tradition of learning. Rather, it is and always has been a form of education that is richly and generatively engaged with the life and needs of the larger society. The power and continuing appeal of liberal education come from the combination of enduring values with creatively adaptive forms and practices. While AAC&U can take great pride in the constancy of our commitment to excellence in education, it is also important that we acknowledge the limitations both of our founding vision and of our earlier history. For it is also true that, during the first sixty years of AAC history, this association had a decidedly restrictive—that is to say, non-inclusive—institutional and intellectual understanding of where and through what kinds of study liberal education occurs.

From 1915 through 1976, our bylaws limited membership in this association exclusively to liberal arts colleges or to colleges of arts and sciences in larger universities, public and private. Thus, AAC served not the academy as a whole but, rather, the colleges of arts and sciences within the academy. Within that institutional

If we stand back and look at the big picture, rather than at the individual components, we can see this new vision for liberal education coming into focus
context, it worked to advance the standing and influence of disciplines in the arts and sciences. Liberal education, in other words, was taken to be coterminous with study in specific disciplines and in specific institutional contexts.

By comparison with most other institutional membership associations, AAC was, assuredly, a bigger tent than many. Because we admitted colleges of arts and sciences within larger universities, the association has always included public members, even though private colleges were for many years the predominant constituency.

Nonetheless, the truth is that our institutional and intellectual conceptions of liberal education left out large segments of the higher education community and large segments of human endeavor. Moreover, as the twentieth century progressed, students’ actual experience of liberal or liberal arts education was crowded into an ever smaller part of the curriculum on many campuses. By mid-century, many institutions identified liberal education primarily with their general education requirements, while a growing percentage of students—60 percent by
the end of the century—chose preprofessional majors that were considered beyond the terrain of the liberal arts tradition. As a result, liberal education began to seem optional rather than essential, or, in the form of general education requirements, as a set of barriers students sought to "get out of the way" as early in college as possible.

In 1976, we began to face up to these challenges. In what was perceived at the time as a decidedly risky change of course, AAC ended its exclusive identification with colleges of arts and sciences and spun off (to a newly formed National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities) its role as the recognized lobbying unit for private colleges and universities. We opened our membership to all of the nation’s colleges and universities, large and small, public and private, two-year and four-year. And most importantly, we expanded our conception of liberal learning to address the subjects of the professional and technical schools through which ever-larger numbers of students were seeking college diplomas.

**Toward an inclusive academy**

And so, nearly thirty years ago, we began the work of repositioning this association as a voice and a force within the entire educational community for a new engagement with the overarching aims of college education. In making this change, this association’s board and members embraced a lofty ideal and aspiration. The association’s future goal, the board of directors asserted, would be to help liberal education “serve our entire nation as an instrument for shaping a future consistent with its highest ideals.” Pointedly, the board singled out AAC’s then-current initiative on Change in Liberal Education as representative of the work that now needed to be undertaken.

AAC&U’s current work on such far-reaching themes as Achieving Greater Expectations for All Students, Educating All Students for a World Lived in Common, and Making Excellence Inclusive shows how fully we have embraced this historic charge. But my larger point is that this expansion of focus responded to an extraordinarily fortuitous moment in the history of higher education. For in that same era, the 1970s, higher education was opening its doors wider than ever before. The academy had begun to admit—indeed, to seek out—whole new groups of students: adult students, students of color, first-generation students, international immigrant students, students from less advantaged families, students who were working full time and attending part time.

Today, what were then called “nontraditional students” are, collectively, the new majority in higher education. It is perhaps more useful to recognize them as our nation’s recently included students. They may have been new to higher education, but as we embarked in that expanded and more inclusive direction in 1976, they were of central interest to AAC&U. The pages of Liberal Education have been crowded ever since with issues both raised and illuminated by this far-reaching and democratic transformation of the college student community.

And so, starting in the 1970s, this association became a gathering place for everyone who believed that these recently included students needed and deserved the very best education we could provide—and for everyone who recognized that we would need to reexamine both the aims and the practices of liberal education if we wanted to meet that very high standard. We were guided by our commitment to liberal or liberating education. But we were also embarked on a search for new ways to make that kind of education available to an extraordinarily diverse generation of students.

This quest accounts for my own personal history with AAC&U. I was drawn to the association in the 1980s in the context of my own quest, as a young academic, for new practices to make liberal education a reality both for returning adult students and also for the many students—of all ages—who arrive on college campuses significantly unprepared for what liberal education would both offer and expect of them. But the creation of a new set of principles and practices for liberal education isn’t just my story; it’s the story of a generation. It is your story. Throughout the academy, tens of thousands of faculty and staff, and increasing numbers of quite disparate institutions, all experimented with new approaches to teaching and learning. Collectively, we set off not just one movement for reform in undergraduate education, but literally dozens of them.

Ultimately, virtually all these reform agendas were driven by an effort to fulfill the promise of an empowering education for all our recently included students. We wanted to enlarge their horizons, develop their talents, teach them the skills they needed, prepare them more powerfully for that wider world of challenge and change.
Today, as a result of your collective efforts, higher education is teeming with innovations: new academic fields, new programs, a new emphasis on interdisciplinarity, new pedagogies, new outreach to the wider community.

The New Academy vision for liberal education

The point I want to emphasize is that, collectively, all these efforts are resulting not only in more effective strategies for teaching and learning but also in a far-reaching reinvigoration of liberal education. This is one of the core messages of both our recent report on greater expectations for student learning and the ninetieth anniversary annual meeting. Drawing from the insights and work of philosopher Elizabeth Minnich, this association has begun to speak of these far-reaching innovations as framing a “New Academy” that is growing up around and within the contours of the established academy. Collectively, the innovations that form this New Academy have begun to create both a new ethos for liberal education and new forms of teaching, learning, and scholarship that, by design, are both more intentional and more powerful in the way they educate today’s new majority students—those who wouldn’t have been on our campuses at all in the early years of this association. And, the evidence suggests, these New Academy curricula and pedagogies are equally powerful for our traditional students as well.

Frequently, we don’t describe all these reform initiatives and innovations as liberal education. We tend to talk instead about specific curricular and pedagogical changes: first-year seminars, learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research, diversity courses, global studies, writing in the disciplines, capstone experiences, and the like. Or we may think of ourselves as working to advance new fields of scholarship or to advance interdisciplinary programs and teaching. Or, on many campuses, we describe our efforts as curriculum review or as new directions for general education. But if we stand back and look at the big picture, rather than at the individual components, we can see this new vision for liberal education coming into focus.

The new vitality in liberal education

The historian Bruce Kimball contends that there are two enduring commitments or traditions that have shaped the theory and practice of liberal education literally over the millennia. The first tradition, which Kimball terms “philosophical,” is concerned with the cultivation of reason, in all its forms and powers. In earlier eras, it focused on logic and the search for enduring truths; in the twentieth century, it was reconstituted as the methods and forms of the newly professionalized academic disciplines.

The second tradition encompasses study and practices that prepare students for their role in society and, especially, for leadership and service to society. Kimball calls this the oratorical tradition because rhetoric or the arts of persuasion have long been seen as essential to the education of leaders. I find it more illuminating, however, to think of this as the civic education tradition. Originally, this tradition was restricted to elites; increasingly, liberal education leaders in the United States and abroad recognize its profound importance to a democratic citizenry.

When I look at the sum total of the rapidly spreading innovations—in curriculum, cocurriculum, and pedagogy—what stands out for me is that each of these enduring themes in liberal education—the concern with intellectual powers and the concern with civic engagement and leadership—is taking on new life and new form in the contemporary academy.

I have tried to illuminate the connections between these most venerable aims of liberal education and the myriad reform initiatives now flourishing across the academy (see table 1). The first group of New Academy reforms represents a new intentionality about helping students develop empowering intellectual skills and about applying those skills to challenging problems. Together, we are finding more powerful ways to teach students how to make sense of complexity; how to find, evaluate, and use new evidence; and how to apply their knowledge to real problems. While traditionally we have thought of these analytical and inquiry capacities as “intellectual powers,” the reality is that, in today’s knowledge-fueled society, they are deeply practical skills as well.

The second group of New Academy reforms includes innovations that are remapping the way we prepare students for responsible citizenship. In the nineteenth century, the college addressed its responsibilities in this matter by emphasizing religious instruction, study of the classics, and the explicit teaching of moral philosophy. By the twentieth century, many of us began to assume that study of the liberal arts and sciences was in itself the essential key to knowledgeable citizenship.
In the last quarter of the twentieth century—and continuing with increasing vigor today—higher education began dramatically enlarging and enriching its role in the education of citizens. Everywhere we see a renewed interest in the connections between the liberal arts and society, with the result that many college and university campuses are beginning to present a very different model of engaged citizenship to today’s students. We have put Big Questions from our society directly into the college curriculum, and often into the first-year curriculum, so that students may find that their first-year experiences explore cross-cultural perspectives on individuals and society, or race and ethnicity in comparative perspective, or the formation of social ideals. Through far-reaching changes in general education requirements, and in the requirements of many majors as well, we have signaled our conviction that students need to study other cultures as well as the diversity of our own society.

Service learning is growing in popularity and so are other forms of field-based learning, including collaborative research done in partnership with community organizations. And many departments, preprofessional fields and liberal arts alike, now encourage students to include field-based learning and/or community-based research as integral elements in the undergraduate experience.

### Table 1. A Guide to New Academy Reforms

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<td><strong>Student Learning Outcomes:</strong> goals for learning articulated across the entire curriculum, guiding liberal arts and sciences disciplines and professional studies alike</td>
<td><strong>Big Questions:</strong> imaginative ways of teaching the arts and sciences that connect the content of these courses to important questions in the larger world</td>
<td><strong>Liberal/Professional:</strong> new connections between liberal and professional education</td>
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<td><strong>First-Year Experiences and Seminars:</strong> programs and seminars that help students learn what is expected of them educationally and work proactively to develop better analytical, research, communication, and problem-solving skills</td>
<td><strong>Field-Based Learning:</strong> a new emphasis on internships, service learning and other forms of practice that help students connect their academic learning with “real-world” experience</td>
<td><strong>Learning Communities:</strong> thematically linked courses in different disciplines that students take as a “set” with the expectation that they will examine important human, scientific, or societal questions from multiple points of view</td>
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<td><strong>Intellectual Skills Across the Curriculum:</strong> designs for practicing important skills recurrently “across the curriculum” in courses explicitly tagged for their emphasis on intensive writing, technology, quantitative reasoning, second language, and, sometimes, ethical reasoning</td>
<td><strong>Diversity, Global Learning, and Civic Engagement:</strong> a wealth of programs, both curricular and cocurricular, intended to foster civic engagement, diversity and global learning, and social responsibility</td>
<td><strong>Advanced Interdisciplinary General Education:</strong> courses that invite comparison and connection</td>
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<td><strong>Undergraduate Research:</strong> involving students in inquiry-based learning; teaching skills required for research; engaging students in independent and faculty-led research</td>
<td><strong>Community-Based Research:</strong> a growing emphasis on community-based research, often done collaboratively on problems defined with the community</td>
<td><strong>Portfolios and E-Portfolios:</strong> documenting, integrating, and assessing students’ intellectual progress over time</td>
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<td><strong>Capstone Expectations and Projects:</strong> demonstrate intellectual and practical learning, and also can provide evidence of social responsibility and integrative learning (60 percent of college students currently complete capstone work)</td>
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The great majority of these innovations were created to find better and more powerful ways of teaching the nation’s recently included students. But as table 1 reveals, in responding both to these students and to the needs of a changing world, we also have significantly reinvigorated the way we approach two of the most venerable and fundamental traditions of liberal education.

The third and final group of innovations highlights what I believe is emerging as a new dimension to our contemporary understanding of liberal education: a strong focus on topics, curricula, and practices that teach students how to integrate their learning from different courses, different disciplines, and different kinds of experiences. A focus on integrative learning was perhaps less necessary in the nineteenth century, when the entire curriculum was a unified and progressive course of study with culminating requirements for every student. But both in the contemporary academy and in the wider world, integrative learning—focused around big problems and new connections between the academy and society—is becoming a new liberal art.

Collectively, these three areas of innovation are beginning to change fundamentally the practices basic to liberal education. They also are reshaping the fundamental ethos and orientation of liberal education. In the past, liberal education was seen as the choice of elites—the very fortunate or the very talented. But today, through your efforts, we are redefining it as the best resource for our democracy, for our economy, and for all our students—especially those who have only recently been included.

I want to elaborate on this point by emphasizing the contrast with earlier conceptions of liberal education. In the past, following John Henry Cardinal Newman, proponents of liberal education have almost routinely described it as, by definition, nonutilitarian and nonvocational. You all know that gestalt; but perhaps even more importantly, the public and our students know it too. Think about Robert Maynard Hutchins, one of the most passionate and widely influential proponents of the liberal arts. He was insistent that the liberal arts had to be studied for their own sake, and not for any practical purpose. Hutchins and many who shared his views very successfully persuaded the public that the liberal arts were profoundly antagonistic to the practical, entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes our society—and the great majority of our students.

These arguments have shaped twentieth-century definitions of the liberal arts, but the public has certainly not found them persuasive. The public—and especially the policy makers now so influential in higher education—tend to assume that if liberal education is defined in opposition to the world of action, then liberal education is a luxury they cannot afford. What the New Academy offers in response to this critique is a different conception of liberal education, an ethic that deliberately weaves together understanding and practice, analysis and application. The ethos of this New Academy vision of liberal education, in short, is one of engagement.

At the broadest level, we have moved away from an ivory tower conception of the academy and of the liberal arts, and we have begun to invent a form of liberal education in which the world’s most significant challenges—contemporary as well as enduring—become a significant catalyst for new scholarship, new curricula, new sites for learning, and new applications of knowledge. So conceived, liberal education is a necessity, not a luxury. It becomes a form of learning that is intentionally designed to make a far-reaching difference in the world.

And from where I sit, it seems that the major driver in much, if not all, of your creativity has been all those recently included students who— we recognize—needed more intentional forms of teaching and more connected and public-spirited forms of learning if they were going to reap the full benefits of college. The New Academy we are inventing together, in short, is a responsive academy, one that still keeps in mind its core values for learning but that also recognizes it needs new practices in order to keep faith both with its ideals and with its students.

This New Academy vision is comprehensive, and that is another of its potential strengths. As table 1 demonstrates, the new innovations for liberal education begin in the first year of college and culminate in the final year. At least potentially, they have the power to frame the entire undergraduate experience, not according to
the old model of depth and breadth, but with a
new focus on intellectual practice, engagement,
and integration across the entire curriculum.

The liberal arts and sciences remain essential
to this emergent vision for liberal education;
there is no hope of preparing students for a com-
plex world without them. But the New Academy
design for liberal education holds that study in
arts and sciences disciplines is necessary but not
sufficient (see sidebar). The additional require-
ments for liberal education are (1) that students
develop strong intellectual and practical skills,
which they must use in any field and any context;
(2) that they develop a strong sense of individual
and social responsibility, which they will demon-
strate through the way they use their knowledge—
whether as citizens, as thoughtful people, or in
the workplace; and (3) that they demonstrate the
ability to gather, integrate, and appropriately
apply their learning from many different sources
and from many different fields of inquiry.

Defined in this way, as both core knowledge
and a set of capacities and responsibilities,
liberal education can and should be cultivated
in the professional fields just as much as in the
arts and sciences fields. These capacities take
different forms, but they matter in every field,
whether we’re talking about English, economics,
engineering, or education.

**The LEAP campaign**
If this is a promising picture for liberal education,
it is also an unfinished picture. So, in sum, what I
see when I look across the academy are five reali-
ties. First, we have invented a new ethos or a new
ethic for liberal education, which we can charac-
terize as an alliance between the traditional lib-
eral arts and purposeful engagement in the world.
Second, we have invented a host of new pro-
grams, curricula, and ways of learning that,
collectively, can help students develop empower-
ing intellectual skills, acquire a strong ethical
compass, contribute to their communities, and
develop the practical know-how to translate their
learning to new contexts and to rally to the chal-
lenges of new problems. Third, the research on
many of these new practices confirms their effect-
iveness and underlines their particular value for
students who, historically, have been underserved
by the academy. However, fourth, the more
powerful forms of learning remain available to
only a fraction of today’s students. Many col-
lege students are still sitting in large lecture
classes and getting, at best, a fragmented col-
lege education.

Moreover, the final reality is that we have done
almost nothing to help either our publics or our
students understand the New Academy vision for
liberal education. This year, AAC&U has been
interviewing college-bound students. And we are
finding that, while their support for higher educa-
tion is very strong, their actual understanding of
liberal education is virtually nonexistent. Simi-
larly, studies show that while business leaders
place a high value on the outcomes described in
the sidebar, only 6 percent of them think their
employees should have a liberal arts education.

As a community, we have been enormously
creative in developing new approaches to liberal
education that are keenly attuned to the needs of
today’s students. Those same new approaches also
are well-attuned to the demands of a knowledge-
intensive economy and to the complexities of our
global and domestic challenges. But almost no
one outside the academy knows what we are doing
or why it matters.

If this New Academy we’re creating together
is going to move from the margins to the center,
if liberal education and the practices that achieve
it are going to serve most of our students instead

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**Liberal Education & America’s Promise:
Preparing Students for an Era of Greater Expectations**

Collaborative Leadership and Educational
Programs That Foster Liberal Education
Outcomes in All Students, Including . . .

**Knowledge of Human Cultures**
and the Natural and Physical World
social sciences, sciences and mathematics,
humanities, histories, and the arts

**Intellectual and Practical Skills**
written and oral communication
inquiry, critical and creative thinking
quantitative literacy
information literacy
teamwork and problem solving

**Individual and Social Responsibilities**
civic knowledge and engagement
—local and global
intercultural knowledge and competence
ethical reasoning and action
foundation and skills for lifelong learning

**Integrative Learning**
the capacity to adapt knowledge, skills,
and responsibilities to new settings and questions
of only some, then we are going
to have to enlist the public as
an ally in this effort. And we
must do a much better job of
letting our students in on the
vision as well.

And so, on the occasion of its
ninetieth anniversary, AAC&U
has launched Liberal Education
and America’s Promise (LEAP), a
new initiative that will shape the
work of this association for the decade to come.

Through LEAP, AAC&U will champion the
value of a liberal education—for individual
students and for a nation dependent on eco-
nomic creativity and democratic vitality. This
campaign will shine a spotlight on what really
matters in college, on the kinds of learning that
truly empower today’s students to succeed and
make a difference in the twenty-first century.

Through the campus action component of
LEAP, AAC&U will work with colleges and
universities as they develop, improve, publicize,
and institutionalize innovations that
demonstrably help students achieve key liberal
education outcomes.

Organized in concert with policy and business
leaders, the media, colleges and universities, and
prospective and current college students and their
parents, the LEAP campaign will
• spark public debate about the kinds of knowl-
edge, skills, and values needed to prepare
today’s students—from school through col-
lege—for an era of greater expectations in
every sphere of life (see sidebar);
• challenge and change the widespread belief
that students must choose either a practical
education or a liberal education, by building
widespread support for educational changes
that already are producing a new synthesis
of liberal and practical education;
• make visible the inherent inequities in current
practices that steer low-income students to
college programs that teach narrow job skills
while more advantaged students reap the full
benefits of a first-rate liberal education;
• document national and state progress in
providing every student with access to a
high-quality education;
• work in selected states to create and imple-
ment action plans—organized in partner-
ship with both employers and public
schools—to help college and college-bound
students understand, prepare for, and
achieve a challenging, public-
spirited, and practical liberal
education.

AAC&U undertakes many
funded projects, and it would be
easy to see LEAP simply as one
more major project. But the
right way to understand LEAP is
that we are building new capac-
ity to make liberal education a
vital force in our society. We
have long described ourselves as a voice and a
force for liberal education within the academy.
We now want to significantly raise that voice
and intensify that force.

In 1976, when we took a dramatic new course
for the association, we didn’t entirely know what
it all would mean, and we could not have antici-
pated the new learning—on topics ranging from
writing to race—that would ultimately light the
way. This new direction for AAC&U similarly
commits us to a path whose ultimate contours
we cannot fully see. But, as a community, we
deeply believe that liberal education is the key
to America’s promise—for all our students and
our communities. And the learning we will do
together will ultimately be guided, as the path
we took thirty years ago was guided, by our
determination to fulfill that promise for all our
college students.

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

NOTES
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It is vital that academics start thinking about ways in which to promote academic research and teaching in the liberal arts outside the university.

Let’s pretend for a moment that the arguments of the so-called reformers are right: universities are about to face disruptive innovation from a disgruntled public, unhappy employers and policy makers, and new technologies. Let’s assume, moreover, that the many books that document the sad commercialization of higher education are also correct: universities are becoming more like businesses, students are becoming more like consumers, and research is becoming more like product development.

Now, these worries are most likely misplaced; the worst-case scenarios probably will not happen. Traditional undergraduate liberal arts education will survive. When the fads pass and the economy improves, students will continue to go to college campuses where they will spend several years of their lives in a residential learning community before going out to seek a job or professional training. Professors, not computers, will remain the primary mediators between knowledge and students.

Moreover, since much of the hostility to academics emerged as part of the broader post-1960s culture wars, it is possible that, with changing generations, support for academics and the liberal arts will revive. Already there are bipartisan efforts to articulate the value of the humanities and the liberal arts at a time when they are at risk in universities—and even high schools—across the nation.

Nonetheless, reformers have money and political support. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan believes that “we need some disruptive innovation in higher education,” and political leaders from both parties are questioning the value of the liberal arts. Unfortunately, many prominent reforms threaten academic life; some are downright hostile to it. In such a context, we academics ought to imagine ways to nurture academic life beyond the university.

The virtues and practices of academic life are oriented around its end: to cultivate a community of scholars committed to the production and sharing of knowledge. To achieve this end, universities protect academic freedom through tenure and shared governance. By ensuring that academics play a role in shaping university priorities and curricula, shared governance limits the intrusion of nonacademic values on scholarship and teaching. Critics have suggested that new technologies and economic necessity have made shared governance outdated. In reality, there is nothing new about the pressures scholars are facing from institutional managers, politicians, and business interests. Today, shared governance is more necessary than ever if the university is to maintain its academic purpose.

For the past century, the academy has found a home in the university—they have been co-constitutive. Rising prices, declining state support, neoliberal assumptions about the value of education and how to fund it, and the growing number of students seeking higher education for vocational purposes have placed pressure on the university as an academic institution. As David Hollinger has noted, universities are increasingly devoting more resources, and higher salaries, to “scholars whose careers are the least defined by the university’s original academic mission.”

According to Michael Meranze, “the basic infrastructure of humanistic knowledge is being dissected: libraries cannot buy enough new books, journals and university presses are under intense financial pressure . . . departments are being closed, fewer and fewer faculty are being hired on the
tenure track.” While the total number of Americans holding liberal arts degrees has been constant or even increasing, the percentage of American undergraduates who major in the liberal arts has been in steady decline.\(^6\)

The sustained demand for the liberal arts makes clear that there is no “crisis” for the liberal arts; the crisis is their marginalization within the university. With new technologies thrown into the mix, it is conceivable that in a couple decades, the university will no longer be an academic institution at all.

In such an environment, it is vital that academics start thinking about ways in which to promote academic research and teaching in the liberal arts outside the university. For-profit corporations are not an option since they would make knowledge a commodity and because they turn students into consumers, violating the core ethical commitments of academics. Instead, something else must be found. We have seen in journalism what happens when profit seeking trumps the professional autonomy of journalists.\(^7\)

Similarly, in medicine, commercial interests threaten the professional integrity and autonomy of doctors.\(^8\) The same threat exists for the academic profession, if we cannot resist managerial and political efforts to promote the bottom line over the public good. With this threat in mind, I offer here sketches of four potential ways forward.

**Four options for an academy outside the university**

Under what I call the “Adam Smith option,” academics could be authorized to teach by universities or disciplinary organizations but effectively would be independent operators—like many music teachers—in a market context. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith criticized universities for permitting academics to be lazy and ineffective. He argued that faculty should earn their keep through the quality of their lectures.\(^9\) This critique has limits; it does not, for example, account for the intrinsic motives that inspire teachers to work long hours and to do their best despite poor pay and external rewards.\(^10\) Nonetheless, Smith’s model is one way forward. For this model to work, local universities or local or state chapters of disciplines would need to determine which teachers are authorized to teach for credit. Universities, depending on their missions, could set standards for different kinds of degrees and allow students to seek out their own teachers. This would reduce administrative costs, as universities would no longer need large staffs.

A second option is for academics to rely more heavily on philanthropy in order to create teaching and research centers oriented around specific themes or goals. Again, disciplines may have to take the lead in seeking out philanthropy in order to establish endowed institutions that can and are willing to promote scholarly research. Potentially, tenure, peer review, and other academic practices could be preserved and scholarly institutions could offer “badges” and other forms of credentialing distinct from the bachelor’s degree. On the other hand, academics would have to accept more influence from philanthropy. Philanthropists would most likely endow institutions compatible with their own values and interests. Like the Brookings Institution, the Urban Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute, these would promote and sustain research. This is, however, nothing new: the modern research university also owes its emergence in part to elite philanthropists.\(^11\)

A third option is for faculty either to take back the university or to start new universities. This will be hard. Despite some efforts, faculty have never managed to achieve control over universities but, at most, shared governance, in which boards of trustees and their appointed administrators continue to dominate the overall coordination of universities. Unionization will help, since faculty can protect some of their values via collective bargaining. But a better alternative would be to imagine new, truly small liberal arts institutions that would educate small batches of students with about twenty-five faculty members. We live in a society that appreciates the craft production of everything from beer and coffee to clothing. There is no reason we cannot have micro-colleges that engage in “artisanal teaching” and promote “close learning.”\(^12\) Assuming these institutions could overcome the administrative burden of accreditation and be affordable (by focusing solely on academics and avoiding the various other services that drive up college administrative costs), they could be run like charter schools and win political support from policy makers on the right and left. The benefit would
be the creation of smaller, more intimate schools, perhaps closer to the original American colleges, whose origins can be found in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dissenting academies established in England as alternatives to Oxford and Cambridge.\textsuperscript{13}

A fourth option is the “yoga option.” In this scenario, academics become alternative practitioners who abandon entirely universities that have become too corrupt or vocational to promote the academic enterprise. Academics would have to earn their keep by taking on students or earning research grants from independent institutions or the government. This is not inconceivable, however. In communities across America, yoga teachers, masseuses, herbalists, and all kinds of alternative-knowledge teachers and producers earn a living. These teachers are certified, apprentice under local masters, have networks in which they engage in continuing professional development, and online and print media to which they contribute and from which they learn about their own fields. Moreover, they have found people who want their services.

Academics could do the same. Again, disciplines may have to take on new credentialing services and reimagine themselves to serve academic practitioners not housed in universities. Local communities of historians or political scientists or chemists could meet regularly as well as be connected intellectually and professionally through their disciplinary organizations. The existing disciplines may, in fact, become more interdisciplinary under the broader umbrella of the human and natural sciences. People would teach locally, but academics could join together to offer arts and sciences within a common practice, much as different alternative practitioners do today.\textsuperscript{14} Academics would also take on apprentices in the anticipation that they, too, would become credentialed—perhaps through writing peer-reviewed papers for journals or books—in order to teach as well. Academics and their students

*Adolescents, no less than young people, need access to the liberal arts*
would develop their own local and trans-local networks of knowledge outside universities.

There is significant historical precedent for the yoga approach. The natural sciences emerged in large part from amateur scientific societies in civil society well before the sciences gained the prestige and popularity to become part of the university curriculum. During the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, salons and coffeehouses served as nodes in a trans-Atlantic network of political, cultural, and scientific knowledge production and circulation. Thus two of the core pillars of the modern academy—the Enlightenment and science—emerged out of civil society.\(^\text{15}\)

Adult students, in particular, may seek out the service of independent academic practitioners. There is not only a long history of universities engaging adult students, but of adults pursuing their own education through voluntary associations, churches, and other institutions. Adults, no less than young people, need access to the liberal arts in order to reflect on the purpose and meaning of their personal, civic, and working lives.

**Challenges**

Each of the four possibilities sketched above is intended primarily to provoke thought. Each of them would face real challenges. The most important challenge from a teaching perspective would be to ensure that students still find themselves in “communities of learning” that replicate what residential campuses offer.\(^\text{16}\) The research challenge would be how to fund important scholarship in the arts and sciences. In the sciences, especially, the capital costs for cutting-edge research are substantial, and private and public funding sources would want to ensure accountability. Yet, just as the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities make public grants to artists and writers both within and beyond the university, public science funding could be offered to academics or communities of academics outside universities.

The biggest challenge would be one of prestige. Today, the authority of educational credentialing is owned by universities. If academics abandon the university, or if the university abandons academics, then academics—like doctors seeking legitimate authority in the nineteenth century, or practitioners of alternative medicine seeking legitimate authority over MDs today—would have to fight to re-establish the legitimacy of their knowledge and modes of research and teaching.

No matter how we proceed, we will need, like churches following disestablishment, to find a way to bring in people who do not know that they need to be converted. Colleges offer students a liberal arts education that many students neither want nor believe they need. But those who go to college and open themselves up to a liberal education often emerge on the other side with new dispositions and a recognition of how liberal education can transform a person’s relationship with the world. We academics will need to ensure that all people—younger and older, richer and poorer—are offered the time and opportunity to see their world anew and to take their new knowledge and skills with them into the workforce, their private lives, and the public life of our democracy.

These options may not work; certainly they are not ideal. On the other hand, as the university becomes more vocational and less academic in its orientation, we academics may need to find new ways to live out our calling. The academy is not the university; the university has simply been a home for academics. University education in our country is increasingly not academic: it is vocational; it is commercial; it is becoming anti-intellectual; and, more and more, it is offering standardized products that seek to train and certify rather than to educate people. In turn, an increasing proportion of academics, especially in the humanities, have become adjuncts, marginalized by the university’s growing emphasis on producing technical workers.

The ideas offered above all build on the core commitments of the academy, and the tradition of seeing the academy as a community of independent scholars joined together by their commitment to producing and sharing knowledge. Increasingly, however, universities claim to own the knowledge we produce, as do for-profit vendors who treat knowledge as proprietary. To academics, each teacher is an independent scholar working with her or his students and on her or his research, but also a citizen committed to sharing her or his insights with the world as part of a larger community of inquiry.

If the academy seeks to create spaces for academic life beyond the university, it will have to be creative. But academic knowledge matters too much to society for us to allow the changing
university to determine our fate. If and when we can no longer call the university a home, we will need to build new shelters in civil society. The academic commitment to liberal education may have to find new ways of expressing itself, but one way or another, it will.

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7. See, for example, Andrew Sullivan, “Journalism’s Surrender,” The Dish (blog), December 31, 2013, http://dish.andrewsullivan.com/2013/12/31/journalisms -surrender.
14. This would also require challenging the assumption that, among nonmedical academic disciplines, only psychology can help people think about how they orient their lives. Academics from other disciplines would have to demonstrate that the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences have much to teach people of all ages about their place in the world and what it means to live a meaningful life.
The liberal arts are in trouble, and have been for a long time—even before David Breneman first mapped the ongoing transition of liberal arts colleges to more vocationally oriented “professional colleges.” In 1990, Breneman identified a total of 212 “true liberal arts colleges”; by 2012, when Vicki Baker, Roger Baldwin, and Sumedha Makker revisited and updated Breneman’s survey, that number had dropped to 130—a 38 percent decline. 

Victor Ferrall’s recent book Liberal Arts at the Brink reinforces this narrative of decline, diagnosing a variety of sources and offering little hope for the future of the decidedly American institution of the liberal arts college. Moreover, the recent economic downturn has hit liberal arts colleges particularly hard, resulting in an ever-increasing catalog of schools closing, cutting staff, or failing to make enrollment targets. Predications about the demise of the liberal arts college are becoming almost commonplace.

Given this apocalyptic forecasting and the anemic condition of the liberal arts college sector, there is something perplexing about recent attacks from the political right—predictable though they may be. Of course, we should not confuse ideological attacks on a liberal arts education with the structural challenges faced by individual institutions. And, to be fair, some of the more brash attacks on the “liberal arts” are actually misplaced attacks on the arts and humanities. Nonetheless, these attacks might unwittingly reveal the durability of the liberal arts by helping bring into sharper relief the distinction between the liberal arts college, as an institution, and liberal or liberal arts education as a set of practices that shape curricula, inspire learning, and broaden intellectual horizons.

For some time, I counted myself among those who believe that there are ways for the liberal arts college to weather the storm through careful adaptation, perhaps even emerging in a stronger position. For instance, in a very short time, the notion of recasting liberal education to incorporate experiential learning has moved from a controversial proposal to common practice at many institutions. To be sure, the history of the liberal arts in the twentieth century can be read as a history of decline. Yet doing so might too closely associate the private residential liberal arts college as an institution with the more widespread practices of liberal education. For when it comes to liberal education, I am inclined to read its history, for better or worse, as one of adaptation and diffusion.

More recently, however, I have started to wonder whether the future may, in fact, be as bleak as many fear. To be clear, I am not talking about the cultural appetite for vocational and pre-professional education. Nor am I envisioning the collapse of the liberal arts coming from the Common Core, which threatens to erode the liberal arts by funneling students into instrumentalist learning regimes and perpetual assessment, thereby sending colleges and universities a new generation of students who will have had a less liberal education in high school than perhaps any previous generation in our nation’s recent history. These are real problems, but I am increasingly concerned that these and so many other challenges facing the liberal arts might be distracting us from another set of risks. That is, I have started wondering whether a future collapse might come, in part, by our own hands. As liberal arts colleges and liberal education advocates respond to higher education crises, we might be simultaneously

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acting in what seems to be our own best interest and endangering the future of liberal education even further.

The structure of higher education today, in conjunction with those actively trying to devalue a liberal arts degree in the public sphere, has set the table for what seems like a completely rational solution: finding a “niche.” One need only look to long-range planning documents where institution after institution attempts to determine and leverage their niche. Broadly speaking, colleges offering a liberal arts education identify their “niche market” in terms of the conditions of teaching and learning, presenting themselves as the colleges of choice for students who want close personal interaction with faculty, smaller courses, and a grassy quadrangle. For instance, conjuring images of the traditional liberal arts college became a commonsense response to the MOOC panic. If the MOOC threat is founded on the essential fungibility of the college degree as a commodity, then the advocates of the liberal arts college naturally focused on the uniqueness of its product. Perceiving the MOOC threat as one of scale, the liberal arts college’s niche is defined by the personal, residential nature of the experience it provides.

Adapting to conditions is understandable and necessary. But are we really comfortable with a “boutique” liberal arts experience? By swinging the pendulum of scale to the small, are we possibly undermining the full range of qualities associated with the liberal arts degree? And more importantly, do we risk diminishing the broader cultural and moral authority of a liberal arts education as the guiding compass for higher education in general? Putting aside just how queasy it makes me feel to call liberal arts education and the learning it makes possible a “product,” it is easy to see “boutiquification” as a rational choice made by those dedicated to preserving the liberal arts and their own institutions. However, the conditions under which an education is delivered, the circumstances of the demand for that education, and the population that receives it will no doubt affect the very frame of the liberal arts itself.

To be sure, there is not anything inherently wrong with boutique products. The emergence of the boutique hotel is a prominent example of how an industry can reimagine itself in profitable ways by creating a personalized experience tailored to a particular kind of customer. Yet, surprisingly, boutique products and niche markets are increasingly relevant for understanding the fate of liberal arts colleges and liberal education more generally.

**Boutique branding**

Boutique products and branding have had a successful track record over the last few decades. These small-scale approaches to marketing a product place particular emphasis on the circumstances surrounding the experience or consumption of the product. The most prominent example is the rise of boutique hotel. Personalized, uniquely designed spaces with an overriding design consciousness glazed with a patina of sophistication became the defining features for this new sector of the hospitality industry. Credit for the invention of the boutique hotel is often attributed to Ian Schrager, who established the Morgans Hotel in 1984 and subsequently the profitable Morgans Group chain of boutique hotels. It is no coincidence that Schrager was also a cofounder of Studio 54, and he attributes the invention of the boutique hotel to an attempt to bring elements of the nightclub experience into the pedestrian act of a hotel stay. The boutique hotel distinguishes itself by its design and service, both of which are cast in terms of producing a unique experience for its guests. The architecture enhances intimacy with an emphasis on signature elements that are intended to speak to the guest and differentiate the boutique hotel from other hotels.
The staff of a boutique hotel is often trained to ensure the guest’s experience is personalized, popularizing the intimacy and warmth most often associated with exclusive luxury lodging.

In their excellent study of the “cultural economy” of the boutique hotel, Donald McNeill and Kim McNamara underscore the transformation in consumption embodied by the boutique label. Rather than the familiar consistency of the traditional hotel, the boutique hotel allows consumers to demonstrate their discriminating tastes. The emphasis here is on difference—from many different kinds of room décor and themed rooms to claims that no boutique hotel is exactly like another. McNeill and McNamara chart the shift from the standardized hotel room, where “hygiene, accessibility, and privacy” were privileged, to boutique hotels that foreground difference and idiosyncrasy. They contend that “boutique hotels have tracked shifting consumer sentiment through their conscious expression of urbanity, appealing to consumers with avant-garde tastes, and rapidly diversifying into a wide range of significantly differing hotel offers.”

By cultivating the aura of difference and distinction, the boutique product capitalizes on a fantasy of difference, scarcity, and uniqueness. Yet the range of items within a particular category is vast enough to strike the fancy of a large population with discerning tastes, making the boutique product tantalizingly accessible while simultaneously gesturing to its inherent exclusivity. The boutique commodity depends on this luxury status—so much so that the question becomes, what happens when the boutique aura of the object withers or is no longer a fashionable symbol of status? (This should be familiar to anyone who has had the dubious luck of reserving a room at a boutique hotel on the decline). The boutique hotel becomes a vehicle that transports the guest with a desire for the unique and with a particular design sensibility into a realm of luxury where he or she can enjoy features and status that might ordinarily not be available to him or her.

The status of the boutique product depends especially on how the product is portrayed to the consumer and the symbolic universe it embodies. Yet unlike standard luxury products, the boutique product deploys a fantasy of uniqueness and personalization. That desire for a personal connection to the product is something visible in the rise of artisanal products of all kinds as well as marketplaces like Etsy and custom-made products that promise the consumer a connection with the artisan through the act of consumption. The desire to place a personal mark on the commodity is a driving force here. The boutique cultivates this desire for a connection with the product in a manner that can transcend the brand and the maker by pointing to the consumer as participant, even if that participation is merely the act of selecting the product.

**Market segmentation**

In many respects, the rise of boutique and artisanal products reflects a logical response on the part of the consumer and the producer to the essential fungibility or substitutability of the commodity, whether it is a kitchen table or a hotel room or a college degree. One result is a broad segmentation of the market into innumerable “niche” markets. Such segmentation can be seen in higher education’s reaction to various crises over the last decade. The most common form of adaptation of the liberal arts has operated under the sign of the niche, a term that has become increasingly popular in higher education planning documents and public discourse as colleges attempt to establish their brands in a turbulent market.

The attention to the niche signals a move away from a standardized approach to marketing and provides evidence of a society increasingly focused on what might be called the “end-user” experience. The niche perspective is so pervasive not only because this is how businesses are communicating with customers today, but also because this is how consumers increasingly expect to be addressed. Joseph Turow has studied this phenomenon and, in his book *Niche Envy*, he describes the transformation in twenty-first-century marketing and advertising. Facilitated by data mining and a splintered media landscape, marketers no longer make the same broad-based appeals to a large population of consumers. As consumers are increasingly profiled and categorized, companies customize their messages to different populations, carefully managing how different segments of the audience understand their brands. One consequence is a shift in expectations. People expect to be addressed as a member of a niche population and behave accordingly. When “people increasingly identify with niches rather than with the broad American middle or upper-middle
class,” as Turow suggests, they do so in response to transformations in how companies hail their customers. Thus, for Turow, the envy of another’s niche works in two directions—among customers who might imagine better “treatment” in their peers’ category and among companies vying for increasingly more finely defined portions of the market. In both cases, Turow points to a shift in “belonging in society,” as customers no longer regard themselves as part of a broad-based audience, but rather as members of increasingly specific subgroups.

The boutique liberal arts

This societal shift in belonging can be seen shaping how colleges market themselves and even how their curricula are designed. Does this boutique and niche-market reality have a negative impact on liberal education, or is this just a matter of the liberal arts college keeping pace with changing demands in higher education? Is there even a danger in how we brand and bring students into the culture of a liberal education? There are three primary reasons that I think those of us who value liberal education should be concerned about the liberal arts experience being branded as a boutique product.

First, a boutique liberal arts diminishes the transformative potential of a liberal education. Joseph Turow persuasively shows how niche marketing signals a restructuring of belonging in society, radically segmenting society around how individuals are hailed as particular kinds of consumers whose connections with each other and with society as a whole are filtered through a unique kaleidoscopic rendering of products designed just for them. Boutique products primarily depend on the consumer gazing inward. And when boutique consumers do look outward, it is for the purpose of distinguishing and elevating themselves above others. Yet the liberal arts have always employed a fairly consistent dialectic of inward and outward looking. The effect is not only the cultivation of better citizens for our democracy but also the transcendence of self. It is through the student’s engagement with ideas rooted in the past that a liberal education offers the possibility of connecting with a larger universe of intellectual production that has enduring relevance in the present.

This is, of course, at the heart of the traditionalist argument for the liberal arts, the purpose of which, in the words of Robert Maynard Hutchins, should be to “draw out the elements of our common human nature,” which he insists “are the same in any time or place.” You don’t need to be a traditionalist in the mold of Hutchins to appreciate the danger of an overly specific or individualized intellectual background, however. Even John Dewey identified the problems with a particularized and technological education when he insisted that the liberal arts were essential insofar as they cultivated the broad and capacious possibilities of the human imagination. Technology had narrowed the world in some frightening ways, leading Dewey to claim that the liberal arts allow “the technical subjects which are now socially necessary to acquire a humane direction.” Yet when conceived as a boutique product, the liberal arts experience becomes woefully narrow and ultimately works at cross-purposes with liberal education.

Second, the notion of a boutique liberal arts experience belies the real value of a liberal education. By depending so heavily on the aura surrounding its circumstances of delivery or consumption, the value of a boutique product becomes more wedded to its identity as a unique brand choice. In many ways, this resembles the fetish character of the commodity, and the boutique hyper-activates those “mystical” qualities of the product that transforms it into what Marx called “a social hieroglyphic.” Accordingly, a liberal education takes on the aura of luxury. While this does help rationalize the exorbitant costs associated with private liberal arts colleges, there is a negative aspect in terms of public perception. The danger is that people might come to look upon the liberal arts degree—not only an education at a prestigious, selective private liberal arts institution, but a liberal arts degree in general—as a luxury desired, but ultimately not available to them.

This view effectively underwrites the logic of proposals, like those in North Carolina and Florida, that students who major in liberal arts disciplines at public universities should pay higher tuition rates. It is revealing that, while backward when it comes to reckoning the actual cost of providing an education, such proposals appeal to the common sense of many. Indeed, the boutique quality of the liberal arts might be inherent in the governor of North Carolina’s
quip, “If you want to take gender studies that’s fine, go to a private school and take it.”12 Casting the liberal arts as a luxury is a politically convenient way to marginalize the potential public good or cultural critique that might emerge from these particular academic quarters.

Third, when the liberal arts experience is conceived as a luxury or boutique product, fewer institutions might embrace the kind of learning a liberal education makes possible. For if a liberal education becomes something that happens “over there” or “elsewhere,” merely one niche in the vast higher education ecosystem, then we might see a reversal of the spread of the liberal education ethos that we saw in the last century. Despite the narrative of decline, there remains a powerful aura around the notion of a liberal arts education, even at institutions that have diversified and become something other than “pure” liberal arts colleges. Yet could we be headed toward a future in which liberal education is only available at a handful of boutique colleges and has no role in shaping curricula at public institutions?

**Conclusion**

I hope I am wrong. I hope the boutique messaging and strategies surrounding the promotion of the liberal arts do not diminish the kind of learning liberal arts colleges have traditionally made possible. I hope we can convey a message of accessibility and necessity even as individual institutions adapt and distinguish themselves among the many alternatives available to students today. I hope we will enter a phase that embraces a new set of institutional and political dynamics that will make liberal education even more widespread. I hope we can find ways of underscoring the essential nature of this kind of education and the institutions that make it possible. However, if the liberal arts do not or cannot weather these headwinds, self-made or otherwise, then I know we will find ourselves in a diminished world, one where the boutique liberal arts is widely seen as artisanal—and irrelevant.

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4. Most notable, perhaps, are recent statements and proposals from the governors of North Carolina and Florida. In both cases, the argument is that state-funded intuitions should give priority to majors and disciplines perceived as vital to “job creation.” Governor Pat McCory of North Carolina wants to “change the basic formula in how education money” is distributed to public universities in the state, from measuring enrollment to valuing particular outcomes: “It’s not based on butts in seats but on how many of those butts can get jobs.” See Kevin Kiley, “Another Liberal Arts Critic,” Inside Higher Ed, January 30, 2013, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/01/30/north-carolina-governor-joins-chorus-republicans-critical-liberal-arts. A year earlier, Governor Rick Scott of Florida appealed to a similarly instrumentalist logic: “I want that money to go to degrees where people can get jobs in this state.” See Zac Anderson, “Rick Scott Wants to Shift University Funding Away from Some Degrees,” Sarasota Herald-Tribune, October 10, 2011, http://politics.heraldtribune.com/2011/10/10/rick-scott-wants-to-shift-university-funding-away-from-some-majors.


8. Ibid., 3.


Debates over online education versus old-school brick-and-mortar, face-to-face instruction generally go in one of several directions, often at the same time. Advocates for online instruction might point to the freedom it provides the learner who can advance at his or her own pace, retrieving and reviewing materials, attending “lectures,” solving problems at 3:00 a.m. as well as at noon. Such advocates also point to the increasing elasticity of online delivery, which is now not simply based on a bulky and impersonal interface in which students “post” papers and other materials into a web portal and wait to hear from the instructor. Today, of course, students have access to lectures, notes, live-streaming, real-time interaction with other students and instructors, instant feedback (or nearly so), and even platforms that allow professors to “see” students and vice versa. To be sure, many enthusiasts also argue for its increasingly cheaper cost.

Even advocates of the lecture hall or the seminar room have to be impressed by these developments, and one can foresee future refinements in platforms and technologies that will make the online experience even more seamless.

In a recent debate sponsored by Columbia University between online advocates and those who favor more traditional modes of learning—"More Clicks, Fewer Bricks: The Lecture Hall Is Obsolete"—the case for traditional classroom instruction was eloquently made by educational columnist and adjunct professor Rebecca Schuman, who noted that in her experience nothing can replace human contact in the classroom, those moments in which the instructor and the student achieve something together, something, one might say, that necessarily escapes the technological interface. She meant that no amount of fancy software or hardware can measure what it is like to be present for a student with a learning disability, or can walk a student through an oral presentation when he is frightened out of his wits. Direct personal contact, Schuman and other advocates of the classroom argue, cannot do these things because the mediation of technology necessarily disrupts such moments of human intimacy. In other words, there’s no accounting for the human element.

And while I tend to agree with Schuman and others who note that face-to-face contact is essential for learning (which isn’t the same thing as arguing that learning cannot or should not occur online), I do so for different reasons. Missing from the arguments of the pro-contact, pro-classroom advocates are the recent advances in learning and cognition coming out of the sciences. We are now beginning to understand that humans and other primates learn through mimicry and imitation, by seeing, sensing, and hearing what others do and say who are in close bodily proximity to ourselves. We need presence. I call this the power of contagion.

If our students are going to be “transported,” and if we are going to learn from our students, we are going to have to be present to each other...
and that the classroom is a kind of laboratory in which the potential for learning is already hard-wired through the sheer presence of human beings in close proximity with each other.

The discovery of mirror neurons in macaque monkeys by Italian researchers in the early 1990s has been a boon to scientists and philosophers interested in what has become known as theory of mind, whereby humans (and, apparently, some animals) come to understand the emotions and intentions of others. How do I know what another person might be feeling, regardless of whether she tells me or not? How might this knowledge become so real, so embedded in me, that I feel what she feels? Where does empathy come from?

Primatologists and neuroscientists such as Frans de Waal, Christian Keysers, Marco Iacoboni, and V. S. Ramachandran, among others, speculate that mirror neurons may be partially responsible for the ability to understand the behaviors and feelings of other people, their particular moods, even their actions—as if we (the observers) were experiencing the same thing without being consciously aware of what is happening. In other words, we can “know” another person without their having to disclose through language since our neurons have the capability to “read” the bodies of others. To put this another way, one might say that deep learning requires that our bodies need the bodies of others.

Much of primatologist Frans de Waal’s research, for example, points in the direction of physical and emotional interconnectedness whereby primates are biologically driven to
behave in ways similar to those nearby, thus the “contagion” of laughter or yawning. It makes little difference whether we consciously think about it (mostly we don’t); we cannot escape the biological imperative to imitate. In fact, for de Waal and others interested in primate learning, imitation is not simply a way to learn something; it is a means of survival, encoded deep within us.

For instance, it may well be that I “know”—in a corporeal way—what you are feeling even if I don’t “know” it at the level of conscious or linguistic articulation. My neurons may be reading your actions and facial expressions and encoding them, so to speak, within me. If you reach to grab a piece of paper, I reach to grab a piece of paper without literally doing so. While it ought to be kept in perspective that such research and its potential implications for understanding human behavior are in their early stages—mirror neuron enthusiasts certainly have their detractors in the scientific community—these advances provide a theory of what may be going on in the classroom when things go well and when they go awry.

If we remember that the classroom is one kind of social experience, then thinking about the classroom through the lens of mirroring and imitation at the neural level might help us understand more clearly classroom dynamics that frustrate or confuse, and help us focus our attention on what works and why. This cannot be done in an online environment where the proximity of body to body, human to human is lost, and where “metrics,” the educational equivalent of the bottom line, is the word of the hour. Just as irony is virtually impossible over e-mail, the technological interface is the receding horizon of empathic learning.

To take another example, we might posit that there is a sort of connection, perhaps even identification, when we lose ourselves in a literary work. We may or may not consciously see ourselves in the main characters, but mirroring presents the possibility that we become the story, at least at a subconscious level. Such neural and somatic interconnectedness demonstrates that the inability to recognize the difference between what is real and what is fiction is largely immaterial to learning. These connections explain, in part, the recent growth in the study of empathy, both in and out of the sciences. (I would point readers interested in the nexus of empathy and literature to the work of Suzanne Keen.)

Psychologist Paul Bloom argues that the pleasure we derive from works of the imagination and the pleasure of the real world are part of the same overall process; whether we know Breaking Bad to be fiction is often of no consequence to the way we experience it. That our minds are “indifferent” to whether an aesthetic experience is real or not perhaps explains the appeal of good storytelling. We are evolutionarily programmed to be in contact with other people, and they do not necessarily need to be present for us to become another, to connect. “The pleasures of the imagination,” Bloom says, “are parasitic on the pleasures of real life.” At a level that escapes conscious cognition (and certainly where some learning takes place), identification and perhaps imitation help explain why we feel pain or pleasure when we are not the subject of either one.

While we know that what is fictional is fictional and what is real is real (at least, most of us do), our neurons and our bodies—this other “we”—know something else entirely. Our response to storytelling, whether by getting “lost” or by “losing oneself” or by identifying with the characters, points to a transference between self and other in which the divisions between the two are increasingly arbitrary the smaller we go. I am what I read.

**Presence and the learning environment**

That being the case, why can’t online instruction offer the same neuronal “firing” that we might see in face-to-face interactions, especially given the difficulties in telling the difference between the “real” and the “false”? Looking at teaching as a form of embodied connection, we can begin to understand why so much pedagogical theory and practice looks awry at the traditional lecture format. Remembering, for instance, that mirror neurons are for sharing—transforming private action into “social experience to be shared with our fellow humans through language,” according to neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni—we might imagine the classroom as a system in which each student and instructor has the capacity to alter the whole at the neuronal level.
We might think of the classroom as a web of mirroring inputs in which the system is constantly seeking to reorganize itself. In other words, the classroom-as-web replicates our understanding of the brain-as-web in which it is constantly reorganizing itself and creating new pathways for learning. Our ability to learn from each other therefore creates an infinite number of pathways when we are present to each other. The infinitely more static online environment is just that—an online environment, entirely lacking the multiplicity, the cognitive give-and-take that is available when we are present to each other. Call this full-contact learning, if you will.

If Iacoboni and others are to be believed, this mirroring may have something to do with the success or failure of a class. Lucky enough to have a class that is firing on all levels, one in which the discussion is alive and the students seem to be nourishing each other? They may be experiencing this curious intersection of biology and learning. Everything going south in the classroom? Perhaps the instructor and the students are fostering their own negativity, a self-other neuronal spiral. What if we could use some of the insights of both neuroscience and literary history to heave-to this ship before it sails into the shoals?

To that end, we might look to the writer Alberto Manguel, whose *History of Reading* reminds us of the importance of reading as a social act.\(^1\) When only one or two people in the community could read, for instance, humans still desired the kind of communal gathering once reserved, I take it, for oral storytelling. According to Manguel, public and semi-public readings for the illiterate or for those who did not have access to books were widespread throughout Europe from the eleventh through the nineteenth centuries, in various manifestations. Much later in Cuba, public readings in the workplace were instituted in many cigar factories, and as immigration to the United States increased during the Cuban War of Independence, workers who migrated to the United States brought the lector, the reader, with them into the factories.

One might speculate that such performances helped foster and enact the intersubjectivity, the theory of mind, inherent in the connectivity posited by mirror neuron theorists. Looked at in this way, the reading self and other readers and listeners are always already connected through language and its potential relationship to empathy.

The point here is that reading and study have not always been the kind of private and solitary activity we erroneously associate with them today—an association that, to my mind, contributes to many of our students’ distaste for working and thinking alone, which is the essential mode of online education (even given current developments). If you will allow me a certain leap, I mean that if a class is outwardly failing, it may be failing inwardly, biologically, as well, and there’s no way to “read” such failure or success online. If our students are going to be “transported,” to borrow a term from Paul Bloom—and if we are going to learn from our students—we are going to have to be present to each other.

Our neurons may already know what to do.\(^2\)

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

NOTES
Our family always referred to my father as a man on a mission. His life mission is one that you are all perfectly familiar with. He sought to better the world through the education and development of the students he was responsible for—both as a teacher and as an administrator. He believed to his very core that liberal education is the key to addressing the challenges our society faces. He went into college administration because he wanted to shape an environment that pushes all young people to realize their own potential—potential that will help resolve the challenges of tomorrow. He wanted his students to be comfortable with people from all cultures, from different religions, from all walks of life. He lived for the success of those whose lives he touched, and worked tirelessly for the betterment of his college and his community.

What you all may not know is how fundamental “missions” were to every facet of his life. I can’t count the number of times that we would go shopping, and without a word he would just wander away. His head high, he would stride with unwavering steps through the mall, deaf to the confused protests of his family, only to reappear later triumphantly waving that one specific brand of socks he had seen in Consumer Reports, grinning from ear to ear and glowing with the knowledge that he had set a goal and accomplished it.

That expression of triumph was reserved for the completion of missions. I remember seeing it anytime we got his favorite “Wellfleet Mix” ice cream on Cape Cod, anytime he completed a home improvement project (those tended to be somewhat daunting for him), and certainly when he mapped out all the rides at Disney World and rode every single one in a single day. It was the look he would have had when he finally tracked down the seven cards he needed for a complete set of Topps baseball cards.

One thing that always struck me about my father was that he never got that triumphant expression when he spoke of his work. There is no question that he had an amazingly successful career and had a positive influence on thousands of lives. Your presence here today is evidence of that. Yet he never exuded the same sense of accomplishment when I spoke to him about his success at work as when I spoke to him about his new pair of socks.

When we had conversations about the direction of the college, he would assume an air of belief and contemplation, but not of triumph. Any comments I made on his success would be met with a look of quiet pride, but also a tinge of uncertainty. He had a vision for the world he wanted to create, for the person he wanted to be and for the community he wanted to be a part of, and he was forever seeking ways to make that vision a reality. The aftermath of every step forward was speculation toward what the next step should be. Because of this, his mission was never ending. He knew his life’s goal was something he could never achieve as an individual, and he would admit this openly when I spoke with him.

Instead of focusing on his own accomplishments, he would usually steer our conversation toward the factors that allowed him to be successful. Of all the lessons he taught his two sons, there is one in particular that I want to share with you. As an advocate of liberal education, he frequently emphasized the importance of critical thinking. However, the underlying foundation of his character...
was not scholarship and critical thought, but rather tolerance and compassion. Christianity provided the structure for this foundation in his life. His faith gave him the strength to always put the needs of others ahead of his own, and to strive ahead when times were uncertain.

However, he was not one to force his beliefs on others. He frequently spoke about his faith because that was the cornerstone from which he built his own life philosophy. Yet he realized that the spiritual road he traveled is not one that we can all follow. So the lesson that he pressed upon us most adamantly is this: regardless of what you believe, regardless of whether or not you adhere to a religion, your actions should always be shaped by the needs of others, and never by your own desires. This is the way he lived, and it is the way he wanted us to live.

My father recognized that in order to address another person's opinion, you must first understand it. And in order to understand that person's opinion, you must appreciate the circumstances that create their point of view. This is why tolerance, the acceptance of others, and compassion, the ability to empathize with others, are the cornerstone of critical thought, and thus a cornerstone of liberal education as well.

This is the message that I want to leave you all with today. The secret to his success is that he loved you all just as he loved his own family, and he lived to see you succeed. If we as a community—his students, his colleagues, his friends, and his family—if we strive each day to recognize the needs of those around us, to make ourselves available to those who need us, to inform the way we learn and the way we live with opinions and beliefs that we don’t agree with, we will create the culture of higher learning he fostered his entire life. As long as the decisions we make are based on tolerance and acceptance above all else, then I know that wherever my father is right now, he’ll get that grin on his face, and that glow of triumph knowing his mission is accomplished.

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