Liberal Education and the New Academy

Raising Expectations, Keeping Promises

2005 ANNUAL MEETING
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1818 R STREET NW

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The AAC&U ninetieth anniversary annual meeting, held in San Francisco, was sponsored in part by a generous grant from the James Irvine Foundation.
Celebrating Ninety Years of Leadership for Liberal Education

This association is ninety years old—but it is far from aged. Rather, it is rejuvenated by the wonderful, successive generations of its members: its institutional presidents, deans, and faculty members. It is guided by its strong board and now led by its current president, Carol Schneider, and her staff. Together, the association’s strong purpose and mission have bonded all of us through ninety years.

The history of these ninety years has not traced a smooth trajectory.

I myself have been involved with this association for thirty-one of those ninety years.

In 1974, I started as a dark-haired, brash new dean. (I point to my now white hair!) At my first annual meeting then, I sat near the back of the opening plenary session and gazed at the rows of elderly men, suited, gray-haired, and noted the mere sprinkling of women, lay and religious. But as the meeting continued through the days, I was amazed. I had entered a new world full of the wonder of rich intellectual exchanges, of expanding ideas, and all centered on undergraduate education—so different from my experience at my large public research university.

In 1976, I started a three-year term on the board—the first time that two or three deans could stand for election to join all the presidents. That was the tense period during which the association, then the Association of American Colleges (AAC), nearly went under. The old association had been split in two, with the part that became the National Association for Independent Colleges and Universities moving off with all the government and public relations responsibilities, and the “new” and apparently diminished AAC retaining curriculum issues. Many on the board felt that AAC was retaining too slender a portfolio and that we would lose membership precipitously. Membership did decline along with revenues. They were difficult years, but AAC survived the 1970s.

During the 1980s, AAC projects of value to member institutions burgeoned; Integrity in the College Curriculum was a landmark publication leading the way to previously undreamt of explorations. Partnerships with business education and engineering led to expanded thinking about general education and liberal learning. These years saw too the
groundbreaking growth of the Project on the Status and Education of Women. The successful Presidential Search and Consultation Service instituted by Fred Ness, former president of AAC, was spun off and continues to serve most effectively as Academic Search.

By 1990, AAC was ready to celebrate its seventy-fifth birthday. President John Chandler’s distinguished leadership and a strong board had brought some stability to the rocky finances of the early 1980s. Institutional memberships were six hundred. Young Carol Schneider was the executive vice president, and she was already brilliantly identifying the need to develop knowledge and practice on educating diverse students in our nation’s classrooms. American Commitments was launched on an ever-expanding course. In the early 1990s, the media trumpeted that “the culture wars” were “raging” while the code words “multiculturalism” and “political correctness” were used as weapons. However, at AAC we did not ask whether to address diverse cultures as part of liberal learning, but how and to what educational ends. The far-ranging results speak to the effectiveness of this work.

During the 1990s, many foundations were laid, including Preparing Future Faculty, a project involving hundreds of graduate students at research universities; dialogues with Japan and China for faculty and student international learning; and our early probing of the use of information technology in its beginning applications to student learning.

All of this is, I hope, interesting; but it is prelude only to the exciting work of today: AAC&U’s acting with courage and vision for the best learning of our future students.

I am so proud of today’s AAC&U. I left everyday involvement with AAC&U seven years ago, but I am prouder year by year of what you, our members, do in partnership in this association. To the president, Carol Schneider, and to all her colleagues and to our members: I salute your wonderful work and thank you from my heart.—PAULA P. BROWNLEE

PAULA P. BROWNLEE was president of AAC&U from 1990 to 1998.
Doing the right thing is frequently associated with sacrifice. Talk of environmental justice often seems to entail talk of “scarcity,” for instance; talk of racial justice often seems to entail talk of “privilege.” Yet in focusing on what some must give up, we may risk losing sight of what all stand to gain. All would benefit from the elimination of racism just as surely as all would benefit from a clean environment. The real constituency of justice is always inclusive.

That is the truth so cleverly represented by the metaphor of the “miner’s canary,” elaborated in this issue by Lani Guinier. The point, of course, is that a toxic atmosphere in the mine is a toxic atmosphere in the mine, whether for the canary or for the miner. If for the canary one substitutes people of color or women or gays and lesbians or virtually any other excluded or underrepresented group, then one begins to see the analytical power of the metaphor. If, as Guinier argues so persuasively, “the experience of people of color in higher education is the experience of the canary in the mines,” then that experience can be used as a diagnostic tool. It can inform an agenda to transform higher education in ways that would benefit people of color, yes, but everyone else as well. This lesson is borne out in the experience of the Texas “canary watchers,” whose story Guinier tells.

Carol Geary Schneider strikes a similar note in her rousing anniversary address, delivered at the annual meeting and published in this issue. She observes that it was the challenge of “fulfill[ing] the promise of an empowering education for all our recently included students” that gave impetus to the several reform agendas now reaching fruition in what she calls “a far-reaching reinvigoration of liberal education.” Whereas talk of liberal education once entailed talk of “elite” education, the hallmark of the reinvigorated liberal education Schneider describes, and AAC&U works to advance, is that it benefits all students—and, ultimately, the whole of society. This is the essential content of the message AAC&U will take, over the course of the next decade, to the several academic and public constituencies of the LEAP campaign.

In coordination with that effort, we introduce two new regular features to Liberal Education. The first is a series of articles, entitled “Liberal Education & America’s Promise,” that will present a broad array of perspectives on the contemporary value of a liberal education. The second, “LEAP Update,” is an addition to the News and Information section designed to keep readers informed of the progress of the campaign.—DAVID TRITELLI
News and Information

National HIV Prevention Conference
AAC&U’s Program for Health and Higher Education (PHHE) has awarded dissemination grants to support the participation of nine campuses in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s national HIV prevention conference. Supporting participation in the 2005 conference is part of the PHHE strategy to mobilize the resources of higher education—including the energy and expertise of students—in the global struggle to reduce the spread and improve the management of HIV/AIDS. Though all of the campus teams will actively participate in the national conference, PHHE is also sponsoring a conference-within-a-conference in Atlanta.

Wisconsin Pilot Effort
Wisconsin has become the first official pilot state for Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP), AAC&U’s ten-year campaign to champion the value of a liberal education. AAC&U is partnering with the University of Wisconsin System through its Currency of the Liberal Arts and Sciences: Rethinking Liberal Education in Wisconsin initiative, which seeks to increase the awareness of the value of liberal arts education for University of Wisconsin System students and Wisconsin citizens. LEAP pilot activities will include a series of campus-community dialogues; a statewide leadership council; workshops and publications on improving communication with students and prospective students; and the dissemination of stories from students about their achievement and success in putting their liberal educations to use in the work of their lives.

LEAP-inspired Resolution Passes
San Jose State University (SJSU) recently joined the LEAP campaign as a partner campus. As a first step in its involvement, the university’s faculty senate passed a resolution in support of liberal education. The resolution states that “SJSU has both the ability and responsibility to inform its students and its community of the importance of a liberal education.” It calls on the SJSU academic senate executive committee to “identify activities and projects to help expand understanding of the importance of a liberal education.”

New Assessment Publication
Early in the summer, AAC&U will publish a new monograph coauthored by Andrea Leskes and Barbara D. Wright. Designed as a practical guide, The Art and Science of Assessing General Education Outcomes is ideal for use in campus dialogues or efforts to engage faculty in campus-wide assessment initiatives.

Upcoming Meetings
Network for Academic Renewal
• October 20–22, 2005, Integrative Learning: Creating Opportunities to Connect, Denver, CO.
• November 10–12, 2005, The Civic Engagement Imperative: Student Learning and the Public Good, Providence, RI.

Annual Meeting

Wisconsin Pilot Effort
AAC&U Membership 2005

*Specialized schools, state systems and agencies, international affiliates, and organizational affiliates
ADDRESSING THE COLLEGE PRESIDENTS who had gathered, ninety years ago in Chicago, to form what was then called the Association of American Colleges (AAC), William Fraser McDowell introduced what would prove to be an enduring theme in the life and ethos of this community: “Your men and women who are teaching are not fundamentally teachers of subjects; they are fundamentally teachers of persons. And the great passion of the teacher should not be the passion of the language he teaches or the literature that he teaches, but the passion of the life that he is shaping, with language and with literature” (1915, 20).

I begin with this text because it is so clear to me that the great strength of this association, the focus that both brought us together and that still sustains our energy and commitment, is the investment we make in the lives of our students. Our commitment as an organization is to the passion and the possibilities of their lives, their hopes, and their dreams. Our mission is to make the “aims of liberal learning a vigorous and constant influence on institutional purpose and educational practice in higher education.” But this mission reflects our knowledge that liberal education is the best and most transformative resource for the lives students seek to lead, as human beings, as citizens, and as participants in a dramatically changing world.

The ninetieth anniversary of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) 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?

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 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 pre-professional 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” (1976, 289). 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 of 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 interdisciplinary, 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 (1995) 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, and 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.

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Table 1  A Guide to New Academy Reforms

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<td><strong>Student Learning Outcomes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Big Questions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Liberal/Professional</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>goals for learning articulated across the entire curriculum, guiding liberal arts and sciences disciplines and professional studies alike</td>
<td>imaginative ways of teaching the arts and sciences that connect the content of these courses to important questions in the larger world</td>
<td>new connections between liberal and professional education</td>
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<td><strong>First-Year Experiences and Seminars</strong></td>
<td><strong>Field-Based Learning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Learning Communities</strong></td>
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<td>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>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>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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<tr>
<td><strong>Intellectual Skills Across the Curriculum</strong></td>
<td><strong>Diversity, Global Learning, and Civic Engagement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Advanced Interdisciplinary General Education</strong></td>
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<td>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>a wealth of programs, both curricular and cocurricular, intended to foster civic engagement, diversity and global learning, and social responsibility</td>
<td>courses that invite comparison and connection</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Undergraduate Research</strong></td>
<td><strong>Community-Based Research</strong></td>
<td><strong>Portfolios and E-Portfolios</strong></td>
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<td>involving students in inquiry-based learning; teaching skills required for research; engaging students in independent and faculty-led research</td>
<td>a growing emphasis on community-based research, often done collaboratively on problems defined with the community</td>
<td>documenting, integrating, and assessing students’ intellectual progress over time</td>
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**Capstone Expectations and Projects**
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)
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.

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...
Toward Inclusion, and Excellence

Annual Meeting

Celebrating 90 years of Leadership for Liberal Education

Taking the Lead for Educational Change

1985

1990
Paula Browder, president of Hollins College, is appointed as AAC’s first woman president. Browder is also the first woman to head a major higher education association.

1989
AAC adopts a new Social Problems and Academic Program. The 1989 AAC conference also introduces the topic of social problems and academic programs.

1990
Liberal education for the new century prepares students for active participation in the private and public spheres, to be a diverse democracy, and for an even more diverse global community. It has the strongest impact when studies reach beyond the classroom to the larger community, asking students to apply their developing analytical skills and ethical judgment to serious problems in the world around them.

(From Desertions: A New Vision for Learning in a Nation Gone to College)
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 complex 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 requirements 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 demonstrate 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.

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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
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 realities. First, we have invented a new ethos or a new ethic for liberal education, which we can characterize as an alliance between the traditional liberal arts and purposeful engagement in the world. Second, we have invented a host of new programs, curricula, and ways of learning that, collectively, can help students develop empowering 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 challenges of new problems. Third, the research on many of these new practices confirms their effectiveness 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 college students are still sitting in large lecture classes and getting, at best, a fragmented college 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 education is very strong, their actual understanding of liberal education is virtually nonexistent. Similarly, 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 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 economic 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 knowledge, skills, and values needed to prepare today’s students—from school through college—for an era of greater expectations in every sphere of life (see sidebar on page 15);
- 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 implement action plans—organized in partnership 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 capacity 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 anticipated 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.

REFERENCES
THERE ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE that professional education is a corrupting influence that must be kept at bay in order to preserve the purity of the mission of liberal education. At the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, we disagree. We are engaged in a long-term program of research on how professionals are educated, even as we collaborate with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and with the Wabash Center for Inquiry in the Liberal Arts on studies in liberal education. We pursue these two efforts concurrently and interactively because we assert that each field has much to learn from the other. Professional education poses compelling pedagogical challenges that can and should inform all sectors of education, including undergraduate liberal education. Of course, studying professional education is not new to us. We began in 1910 with the Flexner Report, the first major study done by the foundation, which irreversibly changed this country’s education of physicians.

In professional education, it is insufficient to learn for the sake of knowledge and understanding alone; one learns in order to engage in practice. Professional education involves teaching ideas, facts, and principles so that they can contribute to skilled professional practice. Professional pedagogies are continuously attempting to forge connections between key ideas and effective practice. But a true professional does not merely practice: he or she performs with a sense of personal and social responsibility. In the work of a professional, the performances of practice must not only be skilled and theoretically grounded; they must be characterized by integrity, by a commitment to responsible, ethical service.

That said, it’s also insufficient to claim that a combination of theory, practice, and ethics defines a professional’s work; it is also characterized by conditions of inherent and unavoidable uncertainty. Professionals rarely can employ simple algorithms or protocols of practice in performing their services. How then does a professional adapt to new and uncertain conditions of practice? Without a certain amount of anxiety and risk, there’s a limit to how much learning occurs.
circumstances? She exercises judgment. One might therefore say that professional education is about developing pedagogies to link ideas, practices, and values under conditions of inherent uncertainty that necessitate not only judgment in order to act, but also cognizance of the consequences of one’s action. In the presence of uncertainty, one is obligated to learn from experience.

Are there connections between these ideas and the goals of liberal education? I would say that learning ideas, practices, and values, and developing the capacity to act with integrity on the basis of responsible judgments under uncertainty, and to learn from experience, is a reasonable description of what liberal learning should be about, as well.

**On rounds**

In January, I conducted a site visit to the teaching hospital of a major American medical school. These visits are an integral part of our ten-year program of research on how lawyers, engineers, clergy, school teachers, nurses, and physicians are taught and how they learn. At the teaching hospital, I joined a team of students and faculty in the daily ritual of clinical rounds. I use the term “ritual”
quite precisely: they follow the same pedagogical pattern daily as they move from patient to patient and review their status. The clinical rounds team included a chief resident, a third-year resident, two first-year residents, two third-year medical students beginning their internal medicine rotation, and a pharmacy student on internship. Each of seven patients comprised a “lesson” within a unit of instruction. We stopped outside every room. The resident or medical student responsible for that patient gave a report that followed a strict outline. We talked about what had changed from the previous day. Patients ranged from someone who had been in the intensive care unit for less than twenty-four hours to one who had been in a coma for thirty days. After thirty days of clinical investigation, they still didn’t know the causes of this patient’s condition. These were indeed pedagogies of uncertainty; students at all levels were learning how to act under conditions where knowledge is limited yet actions must be taken. Patient after patient, the same routine continued. At some bedsides, they only discussed; at others, they would listen to an interesting heart sound or palpate the abdomen. I had come to observe the learners and their processes of learning, but the longer I stayed the more it became unclear who the learners were. The people teaching were also learning, and roles reversed and shifted constantly.

Next, the chief resident discussed what had occurred during the rounds with the third-year resident in a preceptor interaction, essentially like a supervising teacher with a student teacher. They reviewed how rounds had gone pedagogically and talked about what other questions one might have asked, what other aspects of patients’ conditions one might have noted, and how well patients were managed and whether to do something different. We then moved to teaching rounds, in which the chief resident presented a didactic seminar on pulmonary function tests. Finally, we went to M&M, Morbidity and Mortality, otherwise known as, “Where Did We Screw Up and What Can We Learn from It.” Pretty much the same group from morning rounds reconvened, joined by other faculty. They reviewed at an institutional level one of their most persistent failures, namely the unacceptably high infection rate associated with running central lines into arteries. Data indicated that the infection rate is higher when lines are run from certain locations in the body, and lower when run from other locations. Everyone in the system was learning. In fact, an assistant professor ran the session, with full professors learning alongside third-year clerks.

This communal questioning and learning is compelling. Where in higher education do we find an institutional pressure to come together and ask why students are not learning mathematics or economics well, and what to do institutionally about that? What I watched at this medical school was an institution knowing, caring, and operating corporately to improve student learning.

But let’s focus on the pedagogy, one of active student participation. It began with students reporting and then becoming interactive, pushing one another to clarify, elaborate, extrapolate, and explain, finally concluding with plans for what to do next. The “doing” included not only medical interventions, but also strategies for how to relate to human beings affected by tragedy, for what to say to family members, and what to do if the plan doesn’t go well. The pedagogy is one of inherent contingency and uncertainty. The content of instruction is uncertain. Because the teacher doesn’t always know what the students will report until she hears them, she has to deal with substantive uncertainty even though the learning protocol itself is fixed in ritual. This is an important point: it’s routine, yet never the same; it’s habitual, but pervaded by uncertainty.

Law schools

Three years earlier, I had a parallel experience. We were studying legal education, which has the distinctive pedagogy of the case dialogue method. In 1875, Christopher Columbus Langdell, then dean of the Harvard Law School, decided that the lecture method of teaching black-letter law made no sense. And so he invented a new pedagogy that gave greater agency to students to engage with cases, analyze them, defend their explanations, and argue with one another, all under the control of a Socratic teacher. Across America today, from law school to law school, the pedagogy of a contract law class is the same at all institutions. They practice what we at the Carnegie Foundation have been calling a “signature pedagogy.” It pervades all courses in the first year and cuts across all institutions teaching
law. If you ask people what they are teaching, they'll answer that they're teaching folks “to think like a lawyer,” and, sure enough, a mode of thinking is being developed across the profession. The students catch on very quickly.

In addition to pervasiveness and routine, the level of engagement in first-year law classes stands out. At any moment the professor may say, “And Mr. Shulman, do you agree with Ms. Smith’s account of the case? If you do, I’d like you to repeat in your own words her account. If you don’t, begin by giving your account of Ms. Smith’s courageous attempt to summarize the facts of the case and then offer your own argument.” While impressed by the engagement level of students in medical rounds, one might counter that it’s not hard to keep six students engaged. Well, a contract law class might have 120 students in a semi-circular lecture hall—curved so that students can see one another, and with the faculty member typically at the bottom of the circle. The faculty member always makes eye contact with students when engaging in quasi-Socratic dialogue. The level of engagement with 120 students is the same qualitatively as with six students in clinical rounds. Another interesting commonality is that both pedagogies begin with the faculty member saying “tell me about your case.”
Signature pedagogies

Although distinctive, signature pedagogies share some general features. By studying the pedagogies of professions and their signatures, we gain insights into teaching that cross both professional lines and the divide between the liberal and the professional. Educators of lawyers can learn from educators of physicians. For example, lawyers are not taught to practice; law schools are nearly devoid of clinical instruction. Law schools do a brilliant job of teaching students to think like a lawyer, a marginal job of teaching students to practice like a lawyer, and a questionable job of teaching them to be professionals with a set of values and moral commitments. The pedagogies of medicine, however, put enormous emphasis on learning to practice the profession. Education is a seamless continuum in which each segment has consequences for all others, and the pedagogies of the professions also may yield insights into teaching in the liberal arts or even in K–12 settings.

Let’s return to my hypothesis about the distinctive features of signature pedagogies: they’re pervasive, routine, and habitual. These features are adaptive, because learning to do complex things habitually in routine ways liberates the mind to concentrate on other things. We all know the dangers of routine. There are great virtues to the routines of signature pedagogies, however, and these routines differ by purpose. Legal education routines develop habits of mind. Clergy education routines develop habits of the heart. Clinical rounds in medicine or studio design in architecture or engineering develop habits of the hand, of practice and performance. Moreover, routines permit students to spend far less time figuring out rules of engagement, which enables them to focus on increasingly complex subject matter. One persistent error teachers make is to get a bright idea for a different way of teaching and then to spring it on students without preparation. Suddenly, a teacher unleashes a combination of group collaborative learning with portfolios and technology and expects students to respond positively to this new game. The students don’t even know how to begin.

Another universal feature of signature pedagogies is that they make students feel deeply engaged. Students feel highly visible and even vulnerable. A persistent problem of most forms of education is that they permit student invisibility, which breeds disinterest and leads to zoning out and non-learning. Learning requires that students feel visible and accountable. Signature pedagogies make it hard to disappear and become anonymous. Furthermore, signature pedagogies tend to be interactive, meaning students are not only accountable to the teacher but also to fellow students: just because it’s your turn to talk doesn’t mean you can say whatever you want. In fact, “accountable talk” is one feature of signature pedagogies. The student must build on what somebody before has said; he or she must respond, must offer counterargument, new data, and cogent commentary. So signature pedagogies breed accountability of performance and interaction, as well as simply removing the cloak of invisibility.

This accountability leads to a much higher affective level in class—students feel more anxiety when participating in signature pedagogies. That anxiety derives from the risk involved in putting forward ideas and defending them, from knowing that one must be prepared for class, from the fear of making a fool of oneself. The anxiety is either adaptive or paralyzing. Managing levels of anxiety is a major responsibility of the teacher, but is also a responsibility of the collective. Because they all feel it, students must learn how to simultaneously challenge and support each other’s thinking. In these settings, the presence of emotion, even a modicum of passion, is quite striking—as is its absence in other settings. I would say that without a certain amount of anxiety and risk, there’s a limit to how much learning occurs. One must have something at stake. No emotional investment, no intellectual or formational yield.

The last thing I’ll say about signature pedagogies is a contradiction, for I’ll make the Darwinian claim that they survive because they succeed. At the same time, I’ll make the Newtonian claim that some things continue just because nothing deflects them in another direction—pedagogical inertia. Despite inertia, signature pedagogies survive because they succeed more often than they fail in producing student learning. However, almost all signature pedagogies need repair; there’s likely a price to be paid in achieving a signature pedagogy. Case dialogue is a powerful pedagogy, but law schools have to do something about the fact that, as effective as they are with
habits of the mind, they don’t teach habits of the hand or of the heart. Medicine also must do something, because medical training takes too long. Also, unlike in engineering, where students refer back to math and physics in designing mathematical models, clinical reasoning rarely references the basic sciences. Why? Moreover, the medical curriculum is disappearing. The essence of clinical rounds depends upon sick people going to the hospital and staying in bed. But how will anybody learn about gall bladder surgery if the patient is sent home after eight hours, which is standard these days? Even signature pedagogies must adapt to changes in the conditions of work and in society and to evolving norms of practice.

Ritualized patterns of all kinds—direct teaching, laboratory investigation, collaborative design, Socratic exchange, clinical rounds—model values and raise emotions. They make signature pedagogies, for better or worse, pedagogies not only of uncertainty but of formation, because students develop personal identities...
and values growing out of pedagogical interactions. I say for better or worse because sometimes signature pedagogies don’t model what we ultimately desire in professionals. For example, in law classes dealing with damages (torts), someone raises a hand and says, “I know that’s the law, but it doesn’t seem fair.” And all across the country the professor responds, “This class is not about fairness, it’s about the law.” As Karl Llewellyn notes in his lovely book *The Bramble Bush* (1981), law school’s first year requires you to check your conscience at the door and learn to think and reason like a lawyer. The challenge of legal education is to ensure students don’t forget to reactivate their consciences before they leave. Alas, that’s too often an example of the failure of a pedagogy of formation. Therefore, the Carnegie Foundation is studying the education of ministers, priests, and rabbis and trying to understand the pedagogies that characterize formation in those professions.

I could say so much about the education of clergy, but I’ll make one point only. A key signature pedagogy of the clergy is homiletics, learning to preach. Teaching someone to give a sermon is not a course in performance or rhetoric. As Evans Crawford, for many years dean of the chapel at Howard University Divinity School and professor of homiletics, described it to me, homiletics involves making a connection between interpretations of sacred text and critical analysis of social, political, and personal problems in a theologically authentic way—and giving a heck of a good sermon that moves people emotionally to engage in that connection. Note the importance of connection. One connects hermeneutics, the deep, interpretive understanding of sacred text, to constantly shifting political, personal, and societal problems, and further connects these two realms by acts of persuasion and inspiration, conducted by and large through the spoken word.

It’s no accident that the practical action attached to the Bible course I audited at Howard University Divinity School was called “prophetic ministry.” Students don’t just study Hosea and Jeremiah; they go out into the field and act in a Hoseac or Jeremiac way, whether lobbying on the Hill or working with the homeless. This is powerful stuff. It’s the essence of what is meant by moving ideas into practice and transforming practice into social responsibility and moral behavior. And all of this is done under conditions marked by the shifting sands of the uncertain world around us. That’s what these pedagogies of uncertainty seek to achieve.

**Raising expectations and keeping promises**

In translating AAC&U’s expressed mission for the next ten years regarding liberal education and what students can and should learn, I want to convey excitement about “raising our expectations and keeping our promises.” We all must get smarter and become much less sanguine about what we can and cannot do pedagogically. Part of what we have to learn we must learn from one another within the universities and colleges, broadly construed. One source of learning, I argue, is the study of successes and failures associated with signature pedagogies of the professions. Are there signature pedagogies in undergraduate liberal education? One could argue that such a signature pedagogy is, by default, the large lecture. But it lacks precisely the distinctive features of signatures that make them so powerful. Students are disengaged, invisible, unaccountable, and emotionally disconnected most of the time. Some of us would plead that liberal education’s signature pedagogy should really be the seminar, featuring kinds of interactions between students and teacher that more readily mirror signature pedagogies in the professions. And I believe we are learning that we can accomplish many of those features even within a large-group setting.

At AAC&U’s 2005 annual meeting, journalist and Carnegie Foundation Visiting Scholar John Merrow previewed his documentary “Declining by Degrees” and featured the case of Tom in his presentation. Tom teaches astrophysics (every undergraduate’s first love) to over one hundred highly engaged students, almost none of whom are majoring in the area. As I analyzed what Tom was doing—how he organized instruction, used wireless response devices distributed to the students (clickers), moved from large- to small-group interaction and back within a traditional lecture hall—I realized he was modeling features of signature pedagogies. Students had lost invisibility because they had to engage in an accountable click, and their names were on that clicker. When students vote for an option on the screen, everyone knows how
Are there signature pedagogies in undergraduate liberal education?

they voted; they’re not entitled to anonymity. Then students talk to one another and get to revote. Tom was, to me, a vision of the possible. He’s not some charismatic figure. He’s an ordinary teacher in a discipline that’s really tough to teach to people who aren’t majoring in it. But he feels it is his responsibility that those students learn astrophysics. And he’s not just meeting them halfway; he’s going all the way and bringing them along. That kind of teaching should be within the grasp of any faculty member. It is not magic, it’s pedagogy.

I shall conclude by returning to the medical Morbidity and Mortality conference that reported on infection rates of central lines. During the last half of the meeting, the facilitator noted that every major hospital has a problem with high infection rates for central lines, especially in the femoral artery. Unfortunately, it’s easiest for medical practitioners to run a line in the femoral artery. (Perhaps running femoral lines is analogous to running lecture courses; they’re not necessarily the most effective, but they deliver the goods to the largest number at the lowest cost.) In any case, the facilitator mentioned that Johns Hopkins had decided that the high infection rates were unacceptable. The medical school dean and the university president met with the teaching hospital staff and decided they knew enough to reach a zero percent rate of infection. The problem was not absence of knowledge of best practice, but absence of discipline and commitment to apply that knowledge. Therefore, they developed a protocol for running central lines.

The protocol involves things such as how carefully and frequently hands are washed, and not making things easier on oneself by using the same line to draw blood and to deliver medication, because the odds for an infection zoom up every time that happens. Nurses enforce the protocol and oversee each procedure, and nurses are empowered to abort a procedure as soon as they see protocol being violated, whether by an intern or by the department chair. Every nurse was handed two phone numbers—the home phones of the medical school dean and the university president—and was told that if a physician didn’t follow protocol and refused to abort the procedure, they were to phone one of these numbers, even at 3:00 a.m. It only happened once. The infection rate at Johns Hopkins for that procedure is now approaching zero.

Like infection rates, the failures of liberal education are often procedural. In the Morbidity and Mortality conference, the discussion of acceptable levels of infection sounded like arguments about acceptable levels of student failure. If one-third of students drop out in the first year, some may be ready to claim that those students simply shouldn’t have entered college. What if a hospital said that if it lost a third of patients, those patients never should have been admitted because they were too sick? Faculty and teaching institutions have lots of impediments, just like physicians. But what if at some universities the president was called every time a student failed? We can do so much better, and research in the cognitive sciences and other fields supports this. I know we lack the resources. I know we lack the administrative and policy support. I know some students we inherit are already deeply wounded. Nevertheless, we have to make the commitment. We need to respond to the pedagogical imperative. And if we do, then raising expectations and keeping promises will not be empty rhetoric but prophetic ministry. We can hardly afford to do less.

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REFERENCE
I WANT TO BUILD ON THE TITLE OF THE BOOK that I coauthored with Gerald Torres, The Miner's Canary, to try to present a challenging agenda for all of you who are here, as well as for the institutions that you represent. The metaphor of the "Miner's Canary" represents a challenge to rethink race and the role of those who have been excluded from, or underrepresented in, positions of authority or decision making in our society. Although Gerald and I start with race, we could apply the same metaphor to women, to the disabled, to gays and lesbians. The idea is that the miners used to take a canary into the mines as an early warning signal. The canary had a more fragile respiratory system, and when it started to gasp for breath that was a signal to the miners that there was a problem with the atmosphere in the mine.

The argument that we make in the book, and that I would like to present in capsule form here, is that the experience of people of color in higher education is the experience of the canary in the mines. The problem with the way we have been thinking about that experience is that we have tended to pathologize the canary. That is, we see problems that come to our attention because they are associated with a visible and vulnerable group. And then we assume that those are the problems of the canary, rather than heeding the warning that those canaries are giving to us that it is actually the atmosphere in the mine that is toxic—not just for the canary but for the miners as well.

Affirmative action, in my view, is the gas mask for the canary. It is a little pint-sized respirator that we use to try to enable the canary to survive in this toxic atmosphere. And the argument that I want to present to you is that we have to go beyond giving a pint-sized respirator to the canary and begin to use the experience of the canary not just as a lesson or a warning about what’s happening to the canary, not just so the canary can fit into our mines, but as a challenge to change the atmosphere in the mines to benefit the canary as well as the miners.

This is a transformative agenda that uses race not as a decoy, not as a diversion, but as a diagnostic tool. And, in my view, the experience

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of those who have been left out can help us to understand the ways in which we need to change our pedagogy, our curriculum, and our admission practices as well as our relationships to the larger society and the communities that are immediate to our institutions. So this is a very big challenge. But it is one that I have seen some schools take on, and their successes, although modest, can inspire the rest of us not to fear this risky but potentially very fulfilling agenda.

The university and the community
I want to start by talking a little bit about Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, which essentially looked at the experience of the canaries in Worcester and used that investigation to build a university-community partnership. They realized that Clark University was located amidst a community that was in trouble. The crime rates in the neighborhood were high; the number of people who were not graduating from high school was high. The infrastructure, in terms of the housing in that community, was crumbling. And the school was beginning to consider relocating its campus because it was afraid it would not be able to attract students or faculty. But instead of running away, the school began to explore ways that it could become more involved with its community—and not just by inviting students to engage in random charitable volunteer service activities, but by inviting members of the community to sit down and begin to imagine a new future in which the university and the community both would benefit.

One of the most interesting projects that this institution embarked upon was to begin...
its own high school. The school started in the seventh grade. It admitted students by lottery. That's a really important point: by lottery. It admitted students by lottery from the surrounding community. And I just want to give you a little bit of a sense of who these students were.

In the first group of seventh graders, only 1 percent of the students were reading at grade level. Thirty percent were reading three grades behind. Seventy-five percent of the students qualified for free lunch. About three-fifths of the students were students of color. They were admitted by lottery. By the time this first group that came in the seventh grade was in the tenth grade, they all passed the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exam. In 2003, when the first class graduated, they sent their graduates to Brown, Georgetown, Tufts, and Holy Cross. And five students were admitted and attended Clark University on full scholarships.

When Damian Ramsey, one of these graduates, enrolled as a seventh grader, he was reading at the fourth-grade level. He was unable to multiply. Six years later, he graduated and went to Brown University. He credits much of his success to the sheer belief and determination of his teachers. He said that if someone puts so much work into you, you don't want to let them down. You don't want to show them that their work is in vain.

A lot of the students didn't want to disappoint their teachers, but it wasn't just the teachers; it was also the fact that this high school was part of a collaboration with a university that was putting its resources and its goodwill behind the success of the high school. And indeed, the executive assistant to the president of Clark attributes the success of the high school to the university's commitment to broader transformation in the surrounding community. “What we found,” he said, “was having only one piece of the puzzle alone won't work. You can work in education all you want but if the housing is substandard, if the neighborhood is not safe, if people can't find jobs then the whole thing falls about. Bricks and mortar alone won't revitalize the neighborhood.”

Clark University's experiment demonstrates the value of looking beyond the SAT scores of current applicants or the citation index to measure productivity of faculty who are already part of its campus. Clark is an institution that is beginning to look to the future—not only the future of that university, but the future of the community. And that is the move that I think the Miner's Canary presses us to consider and, as a result, it presses us to contemplate a more transformative agenda.

Democratic merit
Consider the traditional admissions process at selective institutions. There has been too much attention focused on looking for predictors of student success based on past achievement. There has been too little attention devoted to looking for ways that our institutions can invest in students based on a commitment to future success. A transformative agenda would move from a reward-based system that rewards individual past achievement to an investment-based system that is investing in the broader democratic potential of our society. I call this investment-based system “democratic merit.” It is a system that encourages future action to promote the conditions of a thriving democracy. Democratic merit seeks to broaden our agenda. It challenges us to reconsider, when we hire faculty or when we admit students, whether it is enough to look for individuals who have already succeeded.

Instead, democratic merit pushes us to change or shift our gaze and to invest in communities and students whose very success means we can all succeed in the future together. Democratic merit is about moving away, for example, from a test-centric view of merit, what I call “testocracy,” in which we rank and sort individuals based on so-called objective criteria with the false promise that these criteria are going to predict academic success.

The testocracy offers a false promise because even though there is some modest correlation between SAT scores and first-year college grades, it is truly modest. And indeed, the economist Jesse Rothstein, a researcher at Princeton, did a study of 22,000 California students and found that the SAT is actually a good proxy for family background. If all you're interested in doing is predicting first-year success, academic success, then you should have affirmative action for upper-middle-class whites. You should give them a boost. They are the ones who are most likely to do well during the first year of college.

However, those who do well on multiple-choice, timed tests may not be the ones you
might admit if you are looking towards the future, if you are trying to invest your resources in those who are going to become leaders in their community, who are going to contribute to the larger society, who are going to give back to the communities that have invested in them. If future contribution to the collective good is one of your institution’s values, you may want to reconsider the current emphasis on predictors that attempt to rank and sort based on past performance.

Researchers at the University of Michigan Law School, for example, surveyed their graduates over a thirty-year period to determine who best fulfilled the mission of that law school. The mission of that school was to graduate students who did well financially, who enjoyed their careers, and who became leaders in their communities. Those with the highest entry-level credentials, the highest LSAT scores, were no more likely to do well financially than any of their peers. Everyone who went to the University of Michigan Law School basically did well financially. Those with the highest incoming academic credentials were no more likely to enjoy their careers than were their peers. In fact, in one particular age cohort, those with the highest credentials experienced greater career dissatisfaction.

One hypothesis was that these high-performing students did really well on timed, objective, multiple-choice tests of quick strategic guessing with less than perfect information. These students came to believe, based on their high test scores—and this is the hypothesis—that they were somehow entitled to what they were getting and that there was a right answer to every problem.

The most important finding in my view, however, was about the students who became leaders. Those with the highest entry-level credentials were among those least likely to become leaders in their communities. They were among those least likely to mentor younger attorneys, to serve on community boards, to do public service or take pro bono cases. And who were the students, and then the graduates, who were the most likely to fulfill all three elements of the law school’s mission? The black and Latino students who were admitted pursuant to affirmative action. The black and Latino students did well financially, enjoyed their careers, and were among those most likely to become leaders in their communities.

Now that’s part of what I call “confirmative action,” that’s part of the idea of the Miner’s Canary. We need to study whatever it was the institution was doing in admitting those “canaries” and use that insight to admit everybody, not just the black and Latino students. We should confirm the lessons of affirmative action and apply them more broadly to inform our judgments about all applicants. But the University of Michigan Law School findings also suggest that we may need to rethink what’s happening in the classroom. One of the research hypotheses is that the black and Latino students became leaders because they were so alienated from the law school classroom while they were there that they spent their time engaged in extracurricular activities. They functioned as leaders, and practice makes perfect.

My point is that we are not functioning as learning organizations that train leaders and citizens to function in a democracy. And to diagnose this challenge, we need to shift from pathologizing the canaries to learning from the canaries. We need to study the experience of those who have been left out or underrepresented. We need to study the canaries, because it is precisely what affects the canary first that also may be polluting the atmosphere in the mines themselves.

I could extend this point, as I said, to women. Women also function as canaries in the mines. I say this based on the study I did with my coauthors looking at women at the University of Pennsylvania Law School and based on even more recent data gathered by students about women at Harvard Law School. The most recent data from Harvard Law
School suggest that, even though men and women are coming in with virtually identical credentials, the men still manage to do better in terms of their grade-point averages and in terms of honors. But the most important finding of the students at Harvard concerns what’s happening in the classroom. Ten percent of the students in the classroom occupy 45 percent of the air time. And of that 10 percent, 80 percent are men. This is not the way to train future leaders, by having only 10 percent of the students doing all of the talking—especially because for the other 55 percent of the time the teacher is probably doing all of the talking.

There’s an article in today’s New York Times suggesting that high school students who have been tested by the New York State’s Regent Exam in five different ways still cannot perform basic tasks in the workforce because they haven’t developed communication skills. We are so preoccupied with ranking and sorting based on so-called objective measures that we are not investing in what it takes to become leaders, and what it takes to become passionate problem solvers. And that’s what I think we should be looking for when we are admitting students and when we are hiring faculties. Again, if we want to learn what it takes to become leaders or problem solvers, then we need to shift from using race (or gender) as a decoy to using race as a diagnostic tool.

Who is prepared to train the next generation of future leaders? Who is prepared to train passionate problem solvers who don’t think there is one right answer to every problem, who are open to the possibility of multiple answers and to the challenge of trying to figure out which of those possible answers works best in the context of a particular problem? These are the questions we should be asking as part of a transformative agenda. And to embark on such an agenda, we need to begin the conversation with a diverse group of problem solvers. We need people who can come to the table with many different experiences. Each of them is going to bring something valuable to that challenge of deciding among multiple potential right answers.

The challenge of learning what it takes to train future leaders and productive citizens in a multiracial democracy is a challenge that will not be decided by a single uniform test that was devised by bureaucrats and whose principle virtue is that it enables U.S. News and World Report to rank and sort all of your institutions against a single set of arbitrary numbers. This is about developing future leaders for a democratic society. It is not simply about giving business to a particular group of very good number crunchers.

From my perspective, the challenge is to rethink merit in conjunction with a rethinking of race and a rethinking of mission. By rethinking merit I mean we need to move away from the idea that merit is simply a reward system for individuals, a system that can accurately predict future performance based on past individual achievement. If you look at the research, the best predictor of future success in our society is socioeconomic status—and not just yours but that of your parents and that of your grandparents. Test scores, in fact, tell us more about your grandparents’ wealth than they tell us about your first-year college grades. You can more accurately estimate someone’s weight based on their height than you can predict someone’s first-year grades based on their SAT scores. Yet, we are preoccupied with the idea that we have to rank and score in order to measure excellence.

So if we are looking for objective measures, based on what individuals have done in the past, we are basically allowing ourselves to convert wealth into a proxy for merit. And although we are using the language of merit, what we are really doing is “credentializing” a social oligarchy.

For example, when he was vice president of the Educational Testing Service, Tony Carnavale found that at the 146 most selective colleges and universities in this country, 74 percent of the students come from the top 25 percent of the SES—socioeconomic status—data. Seventy-four percent of the students come from the top 25 percent of the socioeconomic indicators; that is, their parents made over $100,000 per year. Three percent—three—come from the bottom 25 percent. Ten percent come from the bottom half of the SES data.
Canary watching

In Texas, a group of canary watchers basically saw this happening in response to a lawsuit that was challenging the use of affirmative action. Again, this is why we have to use race to help us rethink merit and to connect our curriculum and our admission’s criteria to our democratic mission. A group of canary watchers investigated what was happening at the University of Texas. They found that in the 1990s, when that school was using the SAT and other so-called objective criteria to admit its students, 75 percent of the students at the University of Texas in Austin—one of the two flagship schools—came from just 10 percent of the high schools in that state.

There are more than 1,500 high schools in Texas; 150 of them were supplying 75 percent of the students. Those high schools were typically located in suburban Dallas, suburban Houston, and suburban Austin. The canary watchers said, well, if 10 percent of the high schools are providing 75 percent of the students—at a public institution that is subsidized by all of the taxpayers of Texas—then why don’t we change this so that 10 percent of the students at every high school are automatically eligible for admission to the University of Texas in Austin?

They drew up a bill. They got the support of then-governor George W. Bush. The bill passed by one vote in the legislature. That one vote came from a conservative Republican legislator who represented a district in rural West Texas. The canary watchers were able to show him that not a single one of his constituents had been admitted to the University of Texas in Austin during the preceding period. What was happening to the blacks and Latinos, who were being excluded based on the emphasis on SAT scores, was also happening to poor and working-class whites and, especially, to rural whites.

The canary watchers successfully challenged the conventional use of race. They challenged the idea that the problems that we see—in this case, that blacks and Latinos don’t have the same test scores as whites—are the exclusive problems of the canary. In fact, it is not just people of color with low scores on timed, multiple-choice tests. Indeed, within each racial and ethnic group, as parental income goes up, so do test scores.

Now, many people in the academy were worried. If those in the top 10 percent of any high school in Texas are automatically eligible for admission to the flagship schools, then that means the University of Texas is abandoning its commitment to high standards, right? Merit means that they have to admit the people who have demonstrated that they can succeed, who have earned the right to be there, who deserve to be there, and who are prepared to be there. And yet, those fears did not materialize. The 10 percent plan has been in effect for more than five years. Those students who have come in under the plan, meaning they got in simply based on their high school grade-point averages, have higher freshman college grade-point averages than do the students who still come in under twenty-five other criteria, including SAT scores.

People were worried. The black and Latino students go to these terrible high schools and won’t be prepared, even if they come. They set up all of these remedial programs. As it turned out, most of these students didn’t need remediation. They needed information. They needed mentoring. They needed to know what courses to take. They needed to know what courses not to take. They needed to know that they shouldn’t take all of the hardest courses the school offers in the first semester of their freshman year.

But the point is not just that they gave mentoring to the black and Latino students; they gave mentoring to all of the freshmen. They started creating smaller classes. All of the students at the University of Texas benefited from the experience of watching the canary. And that is my point. If we challenge ourselves to rethink race, we can move from the idea that race is a decoy or a diversion to the notion that what’s happening to people of color is a diagnostic tool, a tool that will enable us to better understand what’s happening in the atmosphere in our mines. And if we fix the problem, not just for the canary, but if we begin to examine the structure in which the canary is presently gasping for air, we can fix the atmosphere in the mine so that our democracy as a whole can not only survive, but thrive.

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the author’s name on the subject line.
Throughout most of the last century, the American system of higher education was revered both here and throughout the world. But the impact of expanding global competition, changes in American labor markets, the exploding growth of knowledge, innovations in technology, and the resulting increased demands for higher skills are creating significant new challenges for higher education. Further, the dramatic impacts of these forces on our economy, on our education system, and indeed, on our quality of life are projected to significantly accelerate in the near future. These changes will require ever more intimate connections between higher education and the larger society.

Higher education, business, and public policy makers will need to turn their attention to efforts of aligning higher education curricula and outcomes with the escalating demands of the surrounding environment. This should not be taken as a signal that broad support for liberal education has waned. To the contrary, the value and benefits of a liberal education will be more respected and in greater demand as the world becomes increasingly complex. But we will all need to work hard to support this case.

The primary question posed by this paradox is not whether the traditional framework of liberal education is effective, but whether it is calibrated to the demands of the changing world. Institutions will be increasingly pressured to ensure that, in addition to the traditional components of broad cultural, political, social, and scientific learning, liberal education also contains the specific skill sets that enable students to navigate the growing demands of the occupational world.

Neither the degree nor the institution nor even the reputation of the American system of higher education itself is any longer sufficient to ensure the successful transition of students into the workplaces of the twenty-first century. Upon leaving college and entering the workplace, students are increasingly facing tests and assessments of their basic knowledge and skills and their aptitude for continuous learning. Employers are less concerned with transcripts than the demonstration of achievement and competency across a variety of general and specialized skills.

**External pressures**

The rest of the world is catching up! Literacy rates are rising in Asia, Eastern Europe, and South America. Higher education investments and outcomes are exploding in India, China, and Chile. While it used to be first in terms of college attendance, the United States has now fallen to sixth. Research and development investments by other countries are increasing well above levels in the United States, and foreign direct investments in China have surpassed those in the United States. As a result, the United States’ percentage of the total world output of goods and services has fallen from 40 percent to 21 percent. The United States used to produce 61 percent of all published research, but, as other countries exercise new levels of research leadership, it...
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now produces only 29 percent. Finally, perhaps the most telling signal that the world is catching up, only 52 percent of the patents responsible for American industrial leadership are now owned by U.S. sources—the lowest percentage in our history.

Over the next five years, these numbers will increase exponentially as highly populated countries in Asia, South America, and Europe dramatically increase the percentage of their population in higher education, their investments in research and development, their productivity, and the overall growth in their Gross National Product/Gross Domestic Product. Added to this is the fact that most of these countries have significantly younger populations than the United States. Their ability to mobilize large, well-educated workforces will make them significant economic forces for years to come.

**Impact on American business and education**

Meanwhile, the United States is experiencing minimal population growth (1.1 percent) and even slower growth in its workforce (0.9 percent). The joint impact of low birth rates and an aging population is only minimally offset by immigration. Juxtaposed against this is a job growth rate in excess of 1.4 percent per year. The net result is projected skilled job shortages of seven million by 2010 and twenty-one million by 2020. The Bureau of Labor Statistics is currently reporting shortages in health care, engineering, teaching, technology, and a variety of technical occupations.

The combined pressures of increasing foreign competition, technological innovation, and the constrained labor market have required American business to engage in an endless cycle of productivity improvement. The continuous evolution of the workplace has had (and will continue to have) a direct impact on job content, application, and skill requirements. As productivity improvements influence occupational application, every occupation now requires that employees demonstrate greater responsibility, higher skills, broader application abilities, and continuous learning.

Institutions of higher education must respond to these trends by keeping the curriculum aligned with the constantly changing content and application of technical specialties in the workplace. At the same time, the number of enrollments in postsecondary education continues to grow, and both native-born and immigrant populations that are ill prepared to meet these escalating academic demands account for an increasing percentage of that growth. Consequently, more than 53 percent of current college students must take remedial classes in either mathematics or English.

Business, against this backdrop, reports finding weaknesses amongst recent graduate hires in the following basic academic areas: writing, math, science, information technology, and working knowledge of global integration. In addition to a lack of basic academic preparation, business reports a lack of knowledge of application and analysis. Finally, students often come to the workplace ill prepared in the areas of teamwork, diversity, ethics, and lifelong learning. As a result, employers spent more than $40 million for remedial programming last year.

This entire cycle is not a “periodic” phenomenon. The impacts of globalization, demographics, and productivity will continue to escalate. Much like business, colleges and universities are now, more than ever, required to establish permanent systems of continuous improvement.

**Liberal education**

It is in this very challenging environment that employers continue to believe in and support the traditional value of a liberal education. As Roger Smith (1987), the former chief executive officer of General Motors, points out, “Liberal Arts may ultimately prove to be the most relevant learning model. People trained
in the Liberal Arts learn to tolerate ambiguity and to bring order out of apparent confusion. They have the kind of sideways thinking and cross-classifying habit of mind that comes from learning, among other things, the many different ways of looking at literary works, social systems, chemical processes, or languages.”

In the future, the inherent constructs of liberal education will be more applicable and in higher demand than they are today. Employers do not want, and have not advocated for, students prepared for narrow workforce specialties. Rather, the application of specialized knowledge will be more and more integrated within a broader range of sociopolitical environments that place a premium on judgment, communication, collaboration, and analytical skills. Virtually all occupational endeavors require a working appreciation of the historical, cultural, ethical, and global environments that surround the application of skilled work. As knowledge, technology, and global impacts escalate at dizzying rates, so too will the value and significance of the liberal education framework increase.

Challenges for liberal education

The primary question then is not whether a liberal education but, rather, what constitutes a liberal education in the twenty-first century. First, colleges and universities must continue to respond to the highest principles of an intellectually challenging education that exposes students to the broadest view of the wider world. As that world continues to evolve, institutions, departments, and professors will face the daunting challenge of adapting new curricula to the traditional college time and experience model.

The second new challenge is to ensure that graduates have specific, demonstrated competencies in the academic, applied, and soft skill areas that are essential to successfully applying the benefits of liberal learning. Students must be prepared to enter either graduate school or the workplace with the ability to apply the skills developed through their broader learning experience. Thus, institutions are challenged to ensure that the curriculum is designed to foster student competency in the following areas: basic academics (writing, math, science, technology, and global integration); application skills (integrated and applied learning, critical thinking); and soft skills (teamwork, ethics, diversity, and lifelong learning preparation).

The definitions of liberal learning and of a liberal education for the twenty-first century include not only exposure to the breadth of civilized society in an increasingly complex world, but also the absolute assurance that students possess the requisite general education competencies to apply that learning in the constantly evolving world of work.

Educators, students, and employers will need to reinvigorate their age-old compact. Students need to know that attending a particular institution will, in fact, prepare them with the basic and specialized knowledge required for both their acceptance and their survival in an ever-changing workplace. Employers need to have greater clarity about and faith in the meaning of the degree from a particular institution. Educators need assurance that their curriculum and student learning standards are aligned with the expectations of the global marketplace. This compact is as old and as revered as higher education itself. What are changing are the substantive components that ensure relevance in a world with constantly shifting expectations.

Institutional challenges

Presumptions that course content, application, professorial pronouncements, or degree attainment reflect student competency are no longer adequate for the student, employer, or the academic institution. For liberal education to be effective and valued, institutions must clearly establish and give public visibility to the “quality achievements” required of every graduate of that institution. Establishing a clear system of standards, assessments, and remediation is the means through which...
employers and educators can communicate. Employers find it far more effective to reflect on specific institutional standards than to try to communicate specific and broad skill expectations from scratch. For students, the degree would then communicate clear competencies to potential employers and increase their own confidence in their abilities.

Having established the structures of the system, institutions must establish and utilize a formal system of ongoing dialogues with employers and graduates in order to continuously modify the standards. Following are the most obvious and essential components:

- **Clear visible standards.** Students, professors, administrators, policy makers, and parents must have clear understandings of the institution’s specific general education achievement standards in the areas of basic academics, applications skills, and soft skills.
- **Assessments and remediation.** Institutions must ensure that student achievement is being continually assessed against the standards and that appropriate remedial action is taken to address weaknesses in student performance, curriculum alignment, and professorial performance.
- **Continual updates.** A formal feedback system that ensures continual input from both employers and graduates in supporting the
The relevance of the standards and revitalizing them as expectations change.

The definition of both the content and the expected achievement levels of the standards is the sole prerogative of the individual institution. Indeed, this becomes a significant part of the institution's identity and reputation, and it is a visible reflection of its educational quality. Active public disclosure of the standards and visible demonstrations that all graduates of a specific institution meet them would significantly improve support for the institution from employers, policy makers, and the public.

On the other hand, this would create a higher degree of self-imposed accountability. Setting forth clear outcome standards requires that they are embedded in the curriculum and that both students and professors are clearly aware of, and culpable for, the content and the expected outcomes. Assessments must be aligned and reflective of the expected levels, and remedial programs must be readily available and effective. In the end, the institution itself becomes more publicly accountable to employers, students, and policy makers for the self-imposed assurances of relevant student achievement.

**America’s advantage**

David Kearns (2000), the highly successful former chief executive officer of Xerox, believes that the tradition of liberal education is one of America’s greatest advantages in the global marketplace. “We are reminded that the real challenge of today’s economy is not in making things but in producing creative ideas. Today, the race goes not just to the swift, but to the inventive, the resourceful, the curious. And that is what is what a liberal education is all about.”

Liberal education, with its mix of the full, rich breadth of intellectual inquiry, now enhanced with practical learning, is the essential foundation for success in every growing occupation. The challenge is to sustain that tradition while also ensuring that it both reflects the changing expectations of a global economy and provides the essential skills necessary for applying the benefits of that education.

The advent of globalization has brought enormous changes to American business, government policies, and the lives of individuals. As a result, more Americans than ever are finding their way into postsecondary education in hopes of making the connection to the high-demand marketplace. To meet these growing expectations, higher education will have to form new partnerships, create new communication vehicles, and commit to a public system of continuous improvement.

Yes, the world is catching up. The men, women, and families in other countries have the same desires for quality of life and high standards of living as do Americans. The growing impact of global expansion will not be stemmed by legislative or regulatory protections. The test of America’s commitment will be the degree to which we are willing to invest our policy and financial resources in an education system that ensures our citizens receive the practical and intellectual tools with which to successfully compete.

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With tongue in cheek and stiletto at the ready

If we citizens could set up some worthy customs on grounds as firmly established as the national meetings of professional societies, some of our troubles would be over. Conventions and conferences run a close second, but the deliberate gatherings that best display man’s eccentricities are the annual meetings of professional, usually also professorial, groups.

The annual meeting grows out of the Organizational Meeting. A small nucleus of profologists, having exchanged a few letters, gathers at a central point to form a Society of American Profologists. Automatically charter members and temporary officers, the handful of organizers makes plans for annual meetings. Meanwhile, there is much to be done.

One bold fellow I recall set up a First Annual Meeting single-handedly. I asked him how he could call it annual with no assurance of a second one, but he only smiled. He knew well the value of that slogan, the Annual Meeting. He staged his First Annual Meeting carefully, with the extraordinary financial, climatic, scenic, alcoholic, and theatrical inducements, one speech on an amusing subject and, scheduled around the cocktail hour, one short business meeting to assure continuance.

Once organized, the next order of business deals with membership. Good strategists set attractive dues and begin by inviting celebrities, or at least persons who, if called celebrities, will believe it. There is a difference. For years encyclopedia salesmen found that professors were their best customers. To convince professors that the publishers were making special concessions to them so that the names of distinguished persons and their comments could be used in advertising was no trouble. The set was free, in fact, save for a few minor mailing charges and a small fee for royalties, editing, printing, and binding. The salesmen apparently donated their time.

The first ones “invited” to join the new Society of American Profologists are offered the special prestige of charter memberships at reduced rates, to set up the augmented second annual meeting. The newcomers will inevitably look up to the originators who so wisely chose them as new members. Accordingly, the majority will make official the officers set up as temporary by the originators of the now existent Society, familiarly known as the S.A.P. Members can now join hands to expand the membership without further concessions to the common herd.

The next move is to establish an official publication for the Society. This journal will be free with membership. That is, the yearly dues are raised to include the cost of the journal and members cannot join without subscribing to it. A member is appointed as editor, one who will accept the considerable burden because it helps his ego and his promotion at home. With expenses guaranteed and a warranted list of subscribers, the editor is also assured of plenty of manuscripts, with no worries about paying the writers. Commercial editors dream of such Paradise, a periodical in which popular appeal to subscribers is no factor.

The journal of an organization to which I belonged in my youth seemed so useless that I sought membership, a virtual professional necessity, without the journal. The official excuses for denying my request were many and

MAX S. MARSHALL was professor emeritus of microbiology at the University of California Medical Center at San Francisco. This article first appeared in Liberal Education, Volume 54, Number 3, 1968.
varied. If the journal had to stand on its own merits to get subscribers, it would have to fold, an unfathomable consequence. The outcome was obvious. It was I that folded, of course. At the time, I resigned from the society with some regrets, but neither side ever felt the loss.

In due time, a “newsletter,” sent free, will keep members informed of the latest addresses and techniques in gamesmanship. After a fourth appearance, a questionnaire will ask if the newsletter is useful and if members would be willing to pay a nominal fee for its continuation.

By the third annual meeting a custom is firmly established. Having had its fun, the tribal elders give way to a new set of officers. This starts a process known as the Emergence of Leaders, a critical step. The election of officers may fall back on normal simplicity, with a popular and normal president put in as the chief. This prevents that favorite move, executive session, the trauma of the age-set ritual. Since the new leaders mean little to imper turbably normal officials, their ambitions are thwarted.

The leaders, certain to be in control eventually, are political activists. On their own campuses they are so fond of organization that they often push quite aside the functions of the groups that they organize. They are busy men on committees, perpetrators of journal clubs, promoters of special lectures, caterers to visiting VIPs, and general disturbers of normal functions. To those who follow the leaders, attendance at a special lecture is a noble duty, but teaching in the classroom is for the birds, the inconsequential sparrows and pigeons. In civil life we call these leaders politicians and we make them run for their offices. Unless some of their colleagues appoint them they are elected under open competition.

The leaders always attend annual meetings, especially the business sessions and special luncheons. Catering to the right persons, they see to it that they are known. They keep at hand a few pet objections to the status quo, along with some alleged progressive ideas for the future, so that appropriate points are available for all occasions. In due time the names of the leaders will appear regularly on the lists of officers. They will take over. On their home campuses such success insures expense money for annual meetings, and mention of the offices held will appear in their requests for budget money, applications for sabbaticals, annual reports, biographies, bibliographies, campus bulletins, and so on.

In the formative years of annual meetings the cities in which the much anticipated gatherings are to be held become a moot question. Soon the choice of a place for next year becomes so awkward that schedules of cities are set three or four years in advance. No one can be much concerned about reserving a place for his town five or six years away. Leaders know these things. Before anyone gets too ambitious, they will have seen to it that a few more cities have been added to the list.

Competition for home cities is one of the strange phenomena of annual meetings. Apart from busybodies the only genuine interest comes from chambers of commerce, hotels, and restaurants. Half the hotels and eating places in the country would go out of business were it not for expense accounts. Though they dislike to say so, in a region under discussion most of the profologists would much prefer that the meeting be held elsewhere, the farther away the better. An annual meeting held locally means not only hard labor on the part of local members, but it also robs them of the joys of carefree travel. The compensation found in the fact that everyone stops them to tell them how splendidly they are doing is secondary. Relatively few profologists really want to go to the annual meeting as such. They pretend to be interested. They like to make a preliminary and subsequent fuss about it and to be granted a leave for it. They are delighted to get away from their regular duties, especially when they can boast of the reason instead of apologizing. A skeleton crew of the department...
of profology has to struggle to hold classes together during the week of the annual meeting, especially when it is desirably distant.

There are people to see and new entertainments, and boasts are much easier away from home. With a little organization in advance, a special lecture as a VIP with an honorarium can be arranged en route. The trip becomes a pleasant defection from duty, a delightful socially oriented bit of travel, and even a moonlighting experience with a profit. These things are not possible in the home town, so at an annual meeting the attendance from a given campus may well include more delegates from distant towns than from the local area.

Rationalizing foibles into virtues, the leaders arrange the annual meeting accordingly. Hotels are selected by their offerings of free rooms for gatherings, help is asked from the local government, offers are demanded for entertainment for the ladies, and the availability of local golf courses is weighed. These factors and more enter into the selection of cities. I once arranged for a banquet. The maître d’hôtel took me aside and graciously asked me to come around for dinner sometime on the house, but I never went. Leaders will wonder about this.

Programs are necessary for the annual meeting of the S.A.P., since the gathering is supposed to be a scholarly endeavor. Programs include a banquet speech by the retiring president, a VIP speech read laboriously by someone with a thick accent, and a formidable battery of purportedly scholarly papers.

Everybody is eligible for the program, especially anyone who knows the program chairman, since the only requirement is membership. Those who attend need some official connection with the annual meeting in order to get their home campuses to pay their expenses or, an easier task, in order to justify the excursion when they make reports of their grants. Young members are impressed by the meeting and they need experience. Three or four profologists may ride in on the crest of some wave of paper. The one who has the greatest trouble in getting travel expenses appears on the program with an asterisk before his name, showing that he is the one who will read the paper. Large societies accumulate so many papers that they have to divide up into sections which meet all over town, baffling conscientious members whose home team will hold a special two-hour coffee break to hear a report of the annual meeting.

Even small societies have to limit talks to a few minutes.

The result is that batteries of papers remotely related are presented in rapid succession. The noisy turnover in the audience is no help, as members shuffle from one panel to the next, picking up a quotable phrase in each. Given usually by inexperienced speakers working under pressure, reports begin in the middle and end before speakers are finished. The inspiration is indeed limited. The presentation of papers is the presumed heart of the annual meeting, but the experienced old hands stay away from them. Having left their classes to attend the meeting, they leave the meeting to attend the bar, look at exhibits, talk to old friends, or go elsewhere.

The annual meeting becomes a routine. The leaders have taken over. Programs pack the available hours with titles sent in and then add ways to avoid listening to the papers. Pages are devoted to where to get mail, the banquet, directions around town, tours for wives or husbands of members, special accommodations for graduate students, places to eat, and the exhibits which parade as educational advertising for such commerce as may be related to profology. The advertising is free to the Society and to the exhibitors, at least until the company sees the expense accounts for the three or four men sent as representatives, and until it gets a letter of appreciation which suggests that supporting members are welcome.

Let us now attend the annual meeting as members. We have filled out blanks and have reservations at our hotel, where we sign in as would any tourist, putting down our institution with a bold flourish on the line that says: Representing ________. A few fellow profologists are standing or sitting around the lobby, but none of them looks familiar. Once settled in, we seek signs which lead to the registration desk, of the meeting, that is, not of the hotel. To register at the hotel is easy, though it starts a complicated chain of events. To register at the meeting is more complex, though the meeting is simple enough.
Members who have already registered mill around the registration desk, asking questions. Volunteers supposed to man the desks are leaving for coffee breaks and are talking to their puzzled successors. Prospective recruiting members hang around the edges, looking over the crop. Old-timers sit in the only seats available and watch indulgently. Friends and enemies greet one another effusively and indistinguishably, and lost young souls who do not know quite how to act stand in corners.

Eventually some ultrafriendly member of the local community thrusts a registration card your way and holds out his hand for a fee, but you took advantage of the special reduced rate and paid in advance. The registrar, after some search, is delighted to find your name on the list. He tries to sell you a twelve-dollar ticket to the banquet, entrance to a cold two-dollar meal with a boresome speech. An effusive lady moves in on you to pin a name card on your lapel. This will allow you to attend meetings of sections, most of which welcome any kind of attendance which makes them look busy.

The program shows that the only two papers you want to hear are scheduled two blocks apart at approximately the same time, so you shrug and choose the more distant one, provided it does not rain. The choice does not matter because you will miss both. Someone who wants to talk with you will buttonhole you and say that he heard that the paper you decided to hear is only going to be “read by title” anyway. The author’s institution failed to come through with expense money.

You look around and observe the varied groups talking and laughing around the halls. Somebody must be attending so-called scholarly talks. You give up and decide to visit the local brewery with your wife on the “special tour for wives and members” and to pick up theater tickets for the evening. With tickets you can at least avoid the banquet.

In the next two or three days you encounter the members: the job-hunters and recruiters, gregarious and effusive types, busy leaders and politicians, strutters impressed by the annual meeting, gleeful or bored escapers; the young, the braggarts, the naïve, and the close-mouthed who fear that someone will steal their ideas; bustling committeemen and officers of the S.A.P., harassed local committeemen, stiff chairman of section meetings stuck with engineering a whole morning or afternoon of programs, friendly advertisers, and self-conscious speakers who, despite the maelstrom about them, feel responsibilities for the spots assigned to them on the program. It becomes a little difficult to take profology seriously.

You wander into a section and listen to a paper or two out of curiosity, for want of a better occupation, and so you can say you did. The congestion of papers virtually precludes the boasted give and take of discussions. Restraint in risking one’s reputation among a lot of strangers further cuts down discussion which, with a crowd, is unmanageable anyway.

Like television and radio, the annual meeting gears itself to bustle and activity, with no breaks. Given a semblance of a gap in the program, for example, in comes a cautiously labeled session to protest some move of the Society. The protest is destined to failure because to jeopardize the Society’s splendid reputation would be unthinkable. Or perhaps Alumnus College will call its own together for a special jovial session. Graduate students eventually plant themselves around the country, so a gathering is part of a form of dynasty building.

As soon as diversion from home duties is accomplished and the meeting is reached, diversions from the meeting itself are in order. Evidently to tackle the task at hand, on campus or off, is an error. Another way to divert
attention at the annual meeting is for some group, perhaps an advertiser, to step in with an Annual Award. Managed with great secrecy, this carries with it the popular dramatic trick of announcing the winner. If the winner has to make a speech later, you discover with no surprise that the basis for the award was not performance on the lecture platform.

Eventually, as the Society of American Profologists attains impressive size, certain members are sure to decide that they are lost in the numbers. Membership in the S.A.P. has ceased to afford the distinction to which they are entitled. By a previous arrangement, which included the current president of the Society, these members meet in a private room at the annual meeting and quietly establish an Academy of Profologists. Carefully in mind but not mentioned, the keynote is distinction and exclusiveness. Having picked one another, they concede that they are the cream of the crop, though how many would qualify by standards later to appear might be questioned. It would be immodest not to enlarge the group somewhat, however, since it needs adequate power.

Accordingly, they plan to reach out to invite strategically selected brethren to participate with them, modestly indicating the honor of being a charter member. Feeling greatly flattered, those invited thus strengthen the numbers while maintaining exclusiveness as the keynote. Those not invited are allowed to feel envious.

One way to bolster the Academy without expansion is to call on the principle of accreditation. Accreditation protects insiders. Though rarely admitted, the beauty of its strategy is certainly not hidden. Those who accredit hold threats over those who are not accredited, forcing the latter to beg for approval. Every approval brings newcomers who add power to the accrediting group, thereby exerting still more force upon those on the outside. Accreditation is an unbeatable system as a strategic move for power, just what kind of power, with its possible uses, is not clearly foreseen. Easy to reject at first, later only those on the outside with enough authority, courage, quality, and judgment can afford to turn up their noses at accreditation, ignoring its existence.

The S.A.P. eventually becomes a functioning organization, with the annual meeting the center of its existence. The Academy of Profologists is under way, feeling more important every year, and declining to consider or mention profologists who have not sought its certification. Merit is secondary to recognition of one’s betters.

An equilibrium is reached. Programs become mechanized. Abstracts of papers are demanded so early that the work to be reported may not even be completed. Abstracts are published, in this way invalidating the primary excuse for the meeting, but no one mentions this. The total succinct accomplishments of the annual meeting might fill a nickel postal card, but the S.A.P. has increased its prestige. The attendance of many hundreds at the annual meeting means publicity, a pleasant interlude, and great good fellowship, not to mention new enmities. It means the needless expenditure of several hundred thousand dollars, of which a major share comes directly but unwittingly from the pockets of the taxpayers, with a less hidden share from the pockets of members from smaller institutions, members impelled by conscience or by demands of departmental bosses.

Mark April 16–22 on your calendars, profologists. The meeting will be in Las Vegas. Reservation blanks are at the end of this notice. “Are you going to the meeting this year, Jim?” “I’m not sure yet. I don’t get much out of them, but I suppose we ought to put in an appearance. I’ve got a bid to give a lecture along the route. That would give me a couple of extra days and some extra expense money. My graduate student has a little job that would do for a paper. My wife reminds me that we have relatives living only a couple of hundred miles from there. By the way, I hear that the meeting is here next year. Thank the Lord that is my sabbatical year and I won’t be around.”
TO ASK WHAT IT MEANS to be a world citizen is to ask a profound ethical question about how one should live with and for others whose worldviews are (sometimes radically) different from one’s own. It is a question that has been asked for many centuries, but perhaps never with such urgency as in our contemporary context, in which grappling with difference, directly or indirectly, has become a part of daily life for a great many people.

To the surprise of many secular scholars who predicted in the mid-twentieth century that the religious life of human beings was moving swiftly along a trajectory toward privatization, if not elimination, religion has reemerged as one of the most critical and threatening markers of difference, as the rise of religiously motivated conflict globally and the deep entrenchment of the “culture wars” in the U.S. amply attest.

Discussions of world citizenship (or even U.S. citizenship) that elide the challenge of grappling with religious worldviews expose a covert intolerance at the very core of secularism, calling into question the “liberality” of liberal education. Indeed, the ethical imperative of engaging with different worldviews not only demands that religions be taught, but also raises some trenchant and controversial questions regarding how religious worldviews should be taught.

As a secular teacher of religion at a sometimes fervently secular small liberal arts college, I have had occasion to consider such questions and their implications in concrete as well as abstract terms. The traditional approach to the academic study of religion has most frequently entailed approaching religious traditions as static and discrete entities, “isms” that could be studied objectively through a secular-rational lens. The traditional religious studies curriculum is a smorgasbord of these “isms,” perhaps with a few thematic courses thrown in for dessert. The “isms” examined are, for the most part, limited to those traditions deemed to be “world religions,” and their classroom contours are usually doctrinal, as dictated by the Christocentric model that shaped the field of religious studies. An alternative approach, often combined with the first, grows out of area studies and introduces religious traditions as components of cultural, geographical, and linguistic contexts; students study religions of the Middle East or East Asia—or, far less frequently, religions of Africa or South America.

Students can and do learn about religious traditions through such rubrics, of course, and they might come to comprehend, at least to some extent, the ways in which others view the world differently from themselves. But if we hold the teaching of world citizenship to be a central goal in our courses, the traditional curriculum has some notable weaknesses. First and foremost, the truth claims of religious worldviews are examined, but the truth claims of secular-rationalist worldviews are seldom challenged or even recognized as such. Religious traditions remain “other,” as do the people who view the world through various religious perspectives. Secular worldviews are implicitly privileged as truth; religious worldviews

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are implicitly treated as misapprehensions of reality. Such an approach might teach a degree of tolerance, but it does not challenge students or teachers to question their own perceptions and assumptions. And, in our contemporary global context, that questioning lies at the heart of the liberal education of ethical world citizens. The serious dialogue that world citizenship demands is impossible if the citizen enters discussion convinced of the truth—or even just the superiority—of his or her own perspective. That is why religious perspectives were excluded from the secular academy to begin with, after all. When secularism becomes an exclusivist worldview, it ceases to be liberal in the sense that “liberal education” implies. Perhaps it even ceases to be secular.

I am not questioning the validity or the value of a secular worldview; the separation of church and state that underlies the secular orientation of liberal education is both necessary and efficacious in our pluralistic society. Secular rationalism is, moreover, the very foundation of the method of inquiry that I am advocating. Rather, I am questioning those secularists who (implicitly or explicitly) claim to have determined the truth prior to inquiry and dialogue—secularists who set their own truth claims against those of religious traditions and thus become precisely what they oppose. Perhaps because secularism is increasingly felt to be under siege from the “religious right,” some secularists have dug in their heels, insisting on their privileged claim to truth rather than affirming and enacting the liberal commitment to inquiry and dialogue. The ethical challenge of world citizenship—that is, how we situate ourselves in a world where the overwhelming majority of others view the world through religious lenses—and the fundamental commitments of liberal education demand that religious worldviews be
recognized as having a legitimate voice in the ongoing exchange of ideas.

The disposition of unknowing

Studying religious worldviews can present a provocative and potentially illuminating challenge to secular worldviews—if religions are studied in such a way that students and teachers confront the existence and limitations of their own assumptions. But this kind of teaching is exceedingly difficult; once we question whether secular rationalism does in fact provide the clear lens through which the cloudy lenses of other worldviews can be understood, from what position do we begin? Frankly, I don’t know—and it is from that disposition that I try to teach.

To illustrate this disposition of uncertainty, let me explain how I teach Understanding Religious Traditions in a Global Context, the introductory course that replaced World Religions in our recent curricular revisions in the religious studies program at Beloit College. The students and I begin by exploring the ethics of studying others in our global context. As a starting point, I draw a simple distinction between “comprehension” and “understanding” that effectively introduces the disposition of questioning oneself as well as others. “Comprehension” implies a comprehensive grasp of the object of study, a complete and totalizing form of knowledge in which the limitations and assumptions of the knower are not acknowledged. By contrast, the etymology of “understanding” suggests a very different disposition in relation to the unknown: one stands beneath what one does not know. The unknown becomes our teacher.

Understanding entails recognizing one’s own very limited angle of vision and the ways in which it shapes what and how we come to know. It also entails engaging imaginatively with the perspectives of others, trying on, in a necessarily flawed and incomplete manner, different angles of vision. Understanding is a dialogical process of questioning oneself and the other that is guided by the (endless) search for truth. Understanding requires that we learn from, as well as about, the others that we study—others that seek to make sense of their lives and their worlds through the angles of vision they inherit and encounter, just as we ourselves do. At the same time, the ethical disposition of understanding also demands that we recognize both the necessity and the complexity of making ethical judgments and taking ethical action in the world, because it is founded on a responsibility to others that renders an easy “live and let live” form of cultural relativism inadequate.

For most students, the implications of this orientation toward the study of religion do not become evident until we begin to explore particular religious worldviews. Initially, we study the major religious traditions as represented in a “world religions” textbook; since these representations have taken on a life of their own, it is important that students be familiar with them even as we question how they came into being and what effects they have had on the lives of religious people. We start with Christianity so as to understand more deeply how our contemporary conceptions of both secularism and religion are deeply rooted in Christian worldviews, the European Enlightenment, and the legacy of colonialism, then shift to consider in turn Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam.

For each tradition, however, we not only examine the textbook account, but also read a novel or memoir and view a film. It is much more difficult to objectify, essentialize, or dismiss the worldviews of others when one is moved by personal narratives that make vivid the ways in which religious worldviews shape and are shaped by the lives of individuals and their communities. The narratives also present encounters among different worldviews, religious and secular, demonstrating both the possibility and the difficulty of the dialogical model of understanding that we ourselves are trying to cultivate. Finally, examining personal narratives also counteracts the tendencies we might have to fall into extremes of absolutism or relativism (both of which render different worldviews incommensurable and thus effectively shut down dialogue) by fostering some level of identification with the persons whose lives are represented.

Throughout our explorations, I try to resist our desire to come to a conclusion, to teach instead the questions themselves and the act of questioning. As a result of this approach, students frequently find themselves becoming uncertain of their prior assumptions about the world. One first-year student wrote of his experience in the course,

All of these new ideas and feelings left me not knowing what to think. I had always
felt sorry for religious people. It was almost as if I thought I knew better. Seeing people worship made me feel bad that they still had such primitive ideas in such a scientific world. As we progressed in our studies I saw how very wrong I was. . . . The beauty of many of these religions was astounding to me. For once I felt that I was the one that was left out, that they had something I didn’t understand (Robinson 2004).

These words provide a powerful indication of the kind of impoverished perspective that can accompany the belief that one’s own worldview—whatever it may be—is correct or superior to the worldviews of others. They also point to the ways in which the study of religious worldviews can enrich our perspectives on life, the world, and relationships with others. According to the same student, “the most important lesson I have learned in this class is how little I know. That seems like a simple statement, but really realizing that you do not know as much as you think you do is incredibly humbling. I have gone from thinking that I have it all figured out, to wanting to try to see how others have figured it out.”

**Acting without knowing**

In light of the ethical question that underlies the notion of world citizenship—how should we live with and for others who hold worldviews different from our own?—this increased propensity for self-doubt and for learning from others would appear to be a positive development. At the same time, world citizenship demands not only reflective thought, but also effective action. One of the undeniable dangers of teaching questions rather than answers is that students will be immobilized by doubt. How does one ground ethical actions in a disposition of unknowing?

Again, my only answer is to teach the question, both through concrete examples and abstract inquiry. We do not simply focus
on the “beauty” of different traditions in the course; we also grapple with the hatred and oppression that occurs within and among different worldviews. But we do so by inquiring into the circumstances that generated such hatred and oppression, as well as asking questions of ourselves about the assumptions that underlie our own interpretations. For instance, this past fall, when we discussed practices of veiling among some Muslim women, several students asserted that the veil was a symbol of the oppression of women by a patriarchal society. Another student objected: she had built a friendship with an exchange student from Egypt who freely chose to wear the veil as a symbol of her faith and as a means to diminish her sexual objectification by men, and who resented the ethnocentric interpretation of the practice by some Western feminists. How could we discount the voice of that woman? The ensuing conversation did not reach any clear resolution of the issue; rather, we explored some of our own assumptions about what constitutes freedom and oppression, and affirmed the need to examine carefully the particular circumstances under which veiling is practiced before deeming it to be oppressive—the need to understand as much as possible prior to making judgments and taking action.

On a more abstract level, we ask to what extent ethical action needs to be grounded in certain knowledge, and to what extent it stems from our relationship with and responsibility toward others. Again, we resist coming to a conclusion, but we do grapple with our human imperfection—our inability to know all we might need to know about any situation prior to acting, and our inability to feel fully our responsibility to all the others who seem distant from us or different from us. And we affirm the need to act in the midst of the endless process of questioning, of gaining understanding and reducing distance—to act given what we know and feel, with the humble recognition that we might not always be “right.”

The liberal propensity for questioning one’s own assumptions and hypotheses, while it is de rigueur in anthropology (and, indeed, can be said to lie at the heart of scholarly approaches from the scientific method to literary analysis), can be perceived as downright dangerous in the religious studies classroom—and not without reason, if teaching religion involves proselytizing. But there is a drastic and crucial difference between promulgating a particular religious worldview and teaching students to understand multiple religious worldviews. It is true that reflecting on the self in light of the worldviews of others can lead students to change the way they think about the world, sometimes dramatically. Such transformations, a mark of student learning and effective teaching in other fields of study, can, in the study of religion, appear to threaten secular rationalism itself. As I have suggested above, however, a position that rejects deep liberal inquiry into religious worldviews simply because they are “religious” is a much greater threat to liberal learning, especially in light of globalization.

There is indeed a danger in the disposition of unknowing that I have outlined here, one that I feel keenly every time I teach—not the danger of calling into question my secular assumptions, but the danger of turning unknowing itself into the “correct” worldview. My greatest challenge as a teacher and a student is to continue to learn from others who do not value questioning in the way that I do, be they secular or religious. And, while it may be impossible for me to enter into a dialogue about “truth” with such people, I might still be able to learn a great deal from them about how I should live, with and for others, as a world citizen.

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REFERENCE
The Civic Promise of Civic Engagement and Service Learning

By the mid-nineties, service-learning practitioners were faced with a new challenge, fueled in part by the accumulated data from numerous studies indicating that, even as they were increasingly involved in volunteer activity, students were increasingly disinterested in traditional political involvement. At the same time, there was increased awareness of what some defined as a “crisis of civic renewal” in America and deep questioning about higher education’s role in addressing this crisis. Higher education’s response to this shifting context, framed through efforts to consciously link civic renewal with education for democratic participation, coalesced into the concept of the “engaged campus.” Service learning, it has been observed, was “the leading edge of...
Service Learning
an academic ‘glasnost’ to create democratic, engaged, civic universities” (Benson, Harkavy, and Hartley 2005, 191). Civic engagement pursued through teaching and learning found kinship in the pedagogy of service learning. As the larger institutional agenda became better defined and more comprehensive, and as it took on a distinct civic renewal flavor, “civic engagement” gained widespread acceptance as the encompassing conceptual framework.

Support for service learning and other civic engagement activities in higher education is stronger now than at any other time in recent history. Civic engagement is featured in the strategic agenda of nearly every national higher education association, including the American Council on Education, Association of American Colleges and Universities, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the American Association of Community Colleges, the American Association for Higher Education, Campus Compact, the Council of Independent Colleges, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, and others, including an increasing number of disciplinary associations. The powerful attraction of civic engagement is in its broad appeal; there is room inside the civic engagement tent for the inclusion of issues of community development, student leadership, academic leadership, mission reclamation, pedagogical excellence, engaged scholarship, civics education, the renewal of liberal education, and more.

At the same time, this fragmentation of intention has resulted in a civic engagement agenda that does not have clear goals or outcomes. In a 2002 report, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities noted that while engagement has become “shorthand for describing a new era of two-way partnerships between America’s colleges and universities and the publics they serve . . . it also presents the risk that the term can say everything and nothing at the same time . . . [T]he lack of clear definition can leave some campuses and their leaders with the impression that they are ‘doing engagement,’ when in fact they are not” (8). A lack of clarity about what is meant by the term “civic engagement” is evident when, at almost any gathering convened for the purpose of furthering civic engagement in higher education, questions inevitably arise about what is meant by civic engagement and about how it relates to civic education, service learning, democratic education, political engagement, civics, education for citizenship, or moral education. Moreover, the lack of clarity fuels a latent confusion about how to operationalize a civic engagement agenda on campus. In particular, with the ascendency of civic engagement, there has been a diminished focus on the relationship between civic engagement and improved student civic learning. As a curricular outcome in courses across the disciplines, civic learning remains largely unaddressed.

**Civic learning**

In issuing a “call for a newly understood civic learning,” Caryn McTighe Musil (2003, 4–5) makes the case that civic learning must be academically based. On campus, she asserts, “responsibility for orchestrating such events is usually assigned to student affairs, or to students themselves, through freshmen orientation programs, student clubs, campus-based religious groups, or volunteer community centers on campus”; as a result, “civic engagement is not rooted in the very heart of the academy: its courses, its research, its faculty work.” If educating for democratic citizenship is understood “as a fundamental goal of a twenty-first century liberal education,” argues Musil, then it should be conveyed as fundamentally “what is learned through the curriculum.”

A civic learning framework is consistent with the concept of “civic professionalism,” which points to the public purposes and social responsibilities of professional education and practice. Civic professionalism “recognizes that there is finally no separation between the skills of problem solving and those of deliberation and judgment, no viable pursuit of technical excellence without participation in those civic enterprises through which expertise discovers its human meaning” (Sullivan 1995, xix). It draws attention to the civic dimensions of education, emphasizing the need not only for the development of disciplinary mastery and competence, but also for civic awareness and purpose. Civic learning illuminates...
the socially responsive aspects of disciplinary knowledge, those dimensions that expand the view of education to include learning and developing the knowledge, skills, and values of democratic citizenship.

Vital and dynamic, civic learning is rooted in respect for community-based knowledge, grounded in experiential and reflective modes of teaching and learning, aimed at active participation in American democracy, and aligned with institutional change efforts to improve student learning. It is important to recognize that civic learning will be defined differently depending upon disciplinary perspective, the identity and mission of the institution, the academic strengths on campus, and the unique social environment of the local communities. Civic learning outcomes need to be thoughtfully constructed and carefully assessed if there is a serious interest in knowing that students are learning the knowledge, skills, and values for active, engaged civic participation.

In this context, civic learning includes knowledge—historical, political, and civic knowledge that arises from both academic and community sources; skills—critical thinking, communication, public problem solving, civic judgment, civic imagination and creativity, collective action, coalition building, organizational analysis; and values—justice, inclusion, and participation.

Civic knowledge
The knowledge necessary for effective civic participation includes, but is not limited to, traditional notions of “civics”—including the study of structures and processes of government and the obligations of citizenship. It also includes, but is not limited to, the historical foundations of the country and the emergence of American democracy. This is knowledge that can be learned in the classroom through the study of texts, but it is richer and more vital when it is integrated into the life of a community. Emphasis on the community-based
aspect of civic knowledge is consistent with the formulation provided by the U.S. Department of Education (Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education 2003, 7):

A good understanding of the democratic principles and institutions embodied in our history, government, and law provide the foundation for civic engagement and commitment, but the classroom alone is not enough. Research shows that students are more likely to have a sense of social responsibility, more likely to commit to addressing community or social problems in their adult lives as workers and citizens, and more likely to demonstrate political efficacy when they engage in structured, conscious reflection on experience in the larger community.

A key element of civic knowledge is historical knowledge that contextualizes community-based experiences such that past events provide a context and a foundation for present community-based problem solving. Every community has a rich and unique history that fundamentally shapes the present social environment. This history also shapes current politics in the community, drawing upon a definition of politics, broadly conceived, as “the way a society as a whole negotiates, argues about, and understands its past and creates its present and future” (Boyte 2004, 1). As such, an understanding of the community’s history is essential to effectively participating in it as well as effectively shaping its future. Further, it is important to conceive of civic knowledge as knowledge that emerges from community settings. Civic knowledge, in this framework, emphasizes the role that the community, in all of its complexity, plays in shaping student learning. Additionally, every discipline and profession has a history that is unique to its particular intellectual community and social purpose. That history contextualizes the profession and allows for exploration of its public and social dimensions.

**Civic skills**

Richard Battistoni’s *Civic Engagement Across the Curriculum* (2002) is perhaps the best resource available for framing a civic skills component for curricula in a variety of disciplines. Battistoni draws on multiple disciplinary perspectives to explore a range of civic skills that can be incorporated into courses. In some ways, the skills he addresses are traditional liberal...
learning outcomes, but they are translated into a public context. For example, critical thinking skills are a widely expected outcome in liberal education. In Battistoni's framework, those skills are shaped by the challenges that community-based experiences place on student's cognitive assumptions; "students' ability to analyze critically is enhanced by confronting ideas and theories with the actual realities in the world surrounding them" (32). Similarly, Battistoni reframes communication skills, a foundational liberal learning outcome, as skills that are "essential to effective civic participation and to the values of civility and public deliberation" (33). He employs this "translation" of traditional liberal learning outcomes into learning outcomes with a civic dimension to suggest a range of civic skills that include public problem solving, civic judgment, civic imagination and creativity, collective action, community/coalition building, and organizational analysis.

The skills base that Battistoni argues for is precisely what Mary Kirlin (2002) identifies as a deficiency in many civic education programs. Her research suggests that many service and service-learning programs have weak impacts in the area of civic engagement because they have not sufficiently addressed the development of fundamental civic skills.

Civic values

Articulating civic values suggests that it is legitimate to frame a discussion of values around "democratic values." As presented here, key democratic values are participation, justice, and inclusion. The point is that faculty, based on their disciplinary contexts, and campuses, based on their unique social, historical, and community contexts, will frame the values of democracy somewhat differently. At the same time, a focus on democratic values suggests that there is, fundamentally, a set of values essential to a functioning democracy that can be widely agreed upon and shared.

The civic promise of service learning

Attention to civic learning reflects an effort to move beyond effective educational strategies like service learning to learning outcomes that have a civic dimension. An essential point made by Edgerton and Schulman in reflecting on the 2002 National Survey of Student Engagement results is relevant here: "students can be engaged in a range of effective practices and still not be learning with understanding; we know that students can be learning with understanding and still not be acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are related to effective citizenship" (National Survey of Student Engagement 2002, 3). A focus on civic learning will build upon effective teaching and learning practices by linking them more deliberately to civic learning outcomes. In this sense, service learning can be viewed as an effective engaged pedagogy; the next step is to employ service learning for the achievement of civic learning outcomes.

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Why Are Liberal Education’s Friends

Liberal education is in a battle for survival in the contemporary university and needs all the friends it can get. But if your friends show up to the broadsword battle carrying only toothpick clichés, what good are they? Liberal education needs fewer friends who are merely well meaning and more friends who train themselves to fight for liberal education’s distinctive goals—not to mention its very survival—the way they train themselves to be smart, savvy, and successful in their disciplines.

We can only be good at doing what we’re trained to be good at. The reason liberal education suffers today on all possible fronts—financial capital, conceptual capital, program coherence, curricular intelligibility, and persuasive rhetoric—is that no one inside universities receives any particular training in how to think critically, comprehensively, or philosophically about it. We are all trained to think well about our disciplines, and within our disciplines we all know how to nurture and protect a high level of talk. But we are not trained to think or talk at a high level about liberal education. Few faculty members in today’s universities would even know where to begin to bring themselves up to speed, as the saying goes, about liberal education in the way they know how to bring themselves up to speed within their disciplines.

A great irony is that this deficiency does not make anyone among the administrative and faculty ranks in higher education feel the least bit incompetent to talk extensively and aggressively about liberal education. No university or college teacher feels that s/he has the obligation to bone up on liberal education topics—its history, theory, or primary authors—the way s/he might if the discussion were disciplinary, which accounts for why so much liberal education talk has an insubstantial quality. Every core review committee since 1900 has circulated a few scraps of the same sacred texts with mantra-like repetitiveness but most of the time these scraps amount to little more than slogans, not arguments: that line from the *Apologetics* about the kind of life not worth living, Hutchins’s throw-away line about the best education for the few being the best education for all, Newman’s terse line about knowledge being its own end, and Mill’s great line that a person cannot claim even to know her own position unless she knows the best arguments against it.

Informed discourse

I don’t believe that educational talk, especially talk about the liberal arts, should be turned into another academic specialty. But I do believe that the failure of university and college folk to prepare themselves for discerning liberal education discourse explains in part why colleges and universities never make more progress in thinking through their liberal education programs and aims. Because few faculty or administrators take the time to learn new ideas and phrases, they keep circulating the same ideas and phrases. This kind of conduct runs against the grain of all faculty members’ disciplinary training so strongly that it cannot be glossed over merely as a trivial anomaly. It is an anomaly, sure enough, but it is not trivial. It is an anomaly that is threatening liberal education’s very survival.

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of So Little Help?
If liberal education is to flourish, it needs friends who can support it with language and ideas that go beyond Hallmark card geniality and sweet clichés.

A self-taught task
The truth remains that all of us in academe need to do better than we are now doing at both nourishing and protecting high-quality discourse about liberal education. I know we can do so if we let the issue really grab our attention because I see in our dedication to another task about which none of us ever received any rich or special training, another task that we have largely been left to figure out on our own—namely, our teaching—a model for how much we can accomplish when we really put our minds and wills to the solving of a particular problem or the achievement of a particular goal.

Since the mid-eighties, I have directed pedagogy seminars with hundreds of faculty from many different universities, and while I have encountered many faculty who struggle with their teaching, the overall percentage of the hard strugglers is encouragingly low compared to the overall percentage of strong achievers. I am always astonished wherever I go to find how many college teachers—who overwhelmingly have been left to figure out the art of good teaching entirely on their own—have become remarkably good teachers, sometimes supernaturally good teachers, just because they think it is important to give teaching their best shot. They put their personal integrity at stake in their teaching, and then they deliver the goods. They think hard, they read some books—some of them write teaching articles—and most of all they pay close attention.

This model is powerfully suggestive. If faculty members can bring themselves up to speed on their teaching, as a great many do—with no specialized training and with no special resources, relying mostly on their own initiative and their own sense of priorities—it cannot follow that bringing ourselves up to speed about liberal education is beyond us. In the first place, learning how to be a good teacher is a lot harder than learning about liberal education theory. In the second place, the resources for bringing ourselves up to speed on liberal education are a lot more obvious and easier to find than the resources for turning ourselves into good teachers. Knowledge of the best books on teaching is scanty, but knowledge of the great texts that have shaped the tradition of liberal education discourse is not. These texts are well known; they are just not widely or deeply read. The reason is not because they are too hard but because the specialization that dominates our profession has relegated these texts to specialized niches rather than held them out as resources for thinking broadly about educational issues.

The last time most of us faculty members read any of the primary texts that constitute the 2,500-year-old tradition of discourse about liberal education was when we were undergraduates in something like an honors course or a freshman writing seminar. We were only eighteen or twenty years old at the time and we read only pieces of these texts. Twenty-five years later, this reading becomes a thin and shaky foundation for those of us who want to express certitude about why a liberal arts major is better than a major in accounting or business. I refer to such texts as Isocrates's
Panegyricus; Plato’s Republic and his Socratic dialogues; Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, his Rhetoric, his Politics; and Cicero’s essays on old age, friendship, and duty. The only people who would read all of these texts today are philosophy majors. No, that’s too broad an audience. The only people who would read all of these texts today would be graduate students in philosophy who were also specializing in classical philosophy.

Having a large number of good ideas available becomes an irony, not a virtue, if the large number of ideas are not largely read. Since the study of at least some of the authors and texts I mention in the sidebar—and this is only a random sample of what is available—is essential for anyone who wants to think deeply about liberal education, is it any wonder that the academic discourse about liberal education that is not enriched by these ideas sounds all too often stale, thin, and hackneyed?

We could do better in our thinking about liberal education even if none of us read any of these books because we can accomplish much if we only pay better attention to liberal education the way we pay attention to our teaching—without doing much reading about teaching in general. To do this we need to do at least some of the following three things.

First, we need to make conversations with our students about the overall aims of their education a clear and distinct part of their education (so that we can help them learn how to think more comprehensively and less materialistically about the education into which they are pouring so much money and energy).

Second, we need to resist the pressure to conform to the utilitarian notions that currently dominate discourse about higher education. We need to resist this pressure by merely having objections to utilitarian discourse—mere objections never derail a dominant discourse—but by being able to offer an alternative vision of education that is more generous, humane, and conducive to human flourishing than that offered by utilitarian education. At its heart, the utilitarian vision of education views students not in terms of what they may become as moral, civic, and personal agents but in terms of how they may serve commercial, bureaucratic, or procedural aims that all too often have nothing to do with human flourishing at all.

Finally, we need to start thinking more comprehensively about liberal education as a program of personal development, not as indoctrination into the values of a particular curriculum. We need to think more about large developmental ends, that is, rather than concentrating on a hidebound set of narrow means. It matters less, in other words, whether every student graduates having read King Lear, Hamlet, and Richard III (or any other set of “required” texts) than whether every student who graduates knows how to think more productively, more deeply, and more analytically about the moral, social, political, existential, domestic, religious, and philosophical issues raised in these texts. The aim of liberal education was succinctly but accurately stated by Philip Sidney as “the aim of well-doing, not just well-knowing” (The Defense of Poesie, 1595).

If we can pay this kind of attention to liberal education issues, and fill out our own education about liberal education when we can and as we may, we can do better than we now do. This is a goal within our grasp. It is doable. In addition, and most important of all, reaching this goal means that when we show up for the education wars on the side of liberal education, our lances will not be made of toothpick clichés but will be formed of robust ideas and energetic thinking. This is all that is required for liberal education to fare better than it is now faring.

We owe it this much not primarily for our own sake but for the sake of our students who, without the enrichment of a liberal education, will have to make their way in life in a condition of professionally accomplished helplessness when it comes to dealing with the great ethical, moral, social, political, and existential conundrums that—much more than our professions or jobs—set the parameters for the quality of everyone’s existence.

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