

# Liberal Education

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

## Liberal Education and Military Leadership



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## LIBERAL EDUCATION AND MILITARY LEADERSHIP

**While we remain absolutely convinced of the need to provide cadets with a comprehensive, intentional, and developmental liberal education, we are also cognizant of the exploding complexity of the twenty-first century.**

—ROLF C. ENGER, STEVEN K. JONES, AND DANA H. BORN

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# The Impossible Takes a Little Longer

“The difficult we do immediately. The impossible takes a little longer.” This familiar slogan, used during World War II as a motto by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, took on a double resonance for me as I read—with admiration and pleasure—the articles on liberal education at the military academies featured in this issue.

It was a huge breakthrough in the struggle over affirmative action when the nation’s military leaders stepped forward to lend their ardent support to the University of Michigan’s Supreme Court defense of diversity as both a compelling public value and an educational necessity. The combined testimony from many quarters helped win Court agreement that ensuring our nation’s future requires diversity at all levels. I now wonder whether our military leaders will be the ones to help achieve a breakthrough public agreement that ensuring our nation’s future also requires liberal education—and, therefore, that liberal education ought to be the curriculum of choice for everyone.

Through the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative, the Association of American

## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has taken on the long-term task of winning broad societal

agreement that *all* college students, not just some of them, need and deserve the opportunity-expanding advantages of a liberal education. And many of you, our members, have joined forces around the shared commitment to help all students seek and achieve the LEAP essential learning outcomes, which establish hallmark reference points for the learning college students need. But we have yet to persuade either policy makers or higher education “thought leaders” to join in that same commitment to make excellence—meaning liberal education—inclusive.

It’s one of my current hobbies, actually, to keep track of the editorial blacklisting, as one respected educational leader after another—almost all of them benefitting from their own experience of liberal education—uses some other term to describe the intended purposes of contemporary college study. “Quality” seems to be the current euphemism of choice, despite its meaninglessness without contextual clarity. After all, while a Michigan B.A. and a Microsoft certificate training program might both be described as “high-quality programs,” their actual substance differs vastly. Nonetheless, the commitment to “high-quality programs” now covers a host of postsecondary options, from “stackable certificates” to the finest baccalaureate education.

“Liberal education,” by contrast, points to a clear set of empowering educational aims and outcomes. The term references a rich and highly successful educational tradition whose core elements—broad knowledge of science, culture, and society; a strong focus on developing the powers of the mind to a high level; persistent attention to ethical and civic responsibility—have helped win U.S. higher education standing and admiration the world over. The content of the curriculum has changed to keep pace with changes in the world, but the commitment to develop knowledgeable and responsible citizens is as central to liberal education today as it was in the age of Jefferson, Eliot, Dewey or W. E. B. Du Bois.

Traditionally and today, the core elements of liberal education have been intimately connected to the advancement of human freedom and to its responsible exercise. Liberal education involves a deliberate process of formation that prepares individuals to contribute to the larger good through the thoughtful integration of sound knowledge, reasoned judgments, and examined responsibilities to self and others. And yet, liberal education has become the tradition that dare not speak its name—at least when policy makers and national leaders are in the room. “I can’t use the term ‘liberal education,’” one prominent figure said

recently—and defensively—in a public forum. “I would be pilloried.” Well, maybe. But if everyone who actually believes in this tradition were to stand up together and declare liberal education to be an issue of civil rights or even national security, not all of us could be pilloried. Still, even getting higher education leaders themselves to rally to the cause of liberal education often seems like Mission Impossible.

Now, however, the cavalry has arrived. As you will see in this issue, the military academies are tackling liberal education with far more determination and seriousness than almost anyone else. Their shared commitments give me new hope that this Mission Impossible will take (only) a little longer. As you read these searching reports from West Point, the Air Force Academy, and the Naval Academy, you may well be surprised. I certainly was taken aback when, nearly a decade ago, one of my colleagues returned from a visit to the Air Force Academy and reported that its students have to take more than ninety hours of general education courses. Ninety hours! It’s more than that at all three academies, with engineering added to the more typical arts and sciences core.

That arts and sciences core is only a small part of what the military academies actually mean by liberal education. The academies know, as Bruce Keith observes, that “our graduates must be an essential part of the solution to the nation’s challenges.” Individually and together they have concluded that an integrative, transformative liberal education is the most powerful pathway to that goal.

The Air Force Academy and West Point have worked together—through AAC&U’s Core Commitments initiative and our summer institutes—to place special emphasis on the personal and social responsibility dimensions of liberal education and leadership development. I have been privileged to sit on the sidelines while large teams of faculty and staff from both institutions probed the differences between merely conforming to an ethical code and actually internalizing core values as standards for judgment and action under fire. These colleagues were talking about ethical responsibility as a life-or-death issue, not just something to explore in a single course.

The Air Force Academy’s efforts have been influenced by AAC&U’s delineation of personal and social responsibility as a necessary (rather than optional) component of liberal education. And the academy has made additional commitments of its own to “respect for human dignity” and “service to the nation.” These are, in truth, fundamental to the future of our democracy, as well as to global leadership on behalf of democracy around the world. Maybe it’s time to recognize them both in AAC&U’s framework of essential learning outcomes.

**Liberal education has become the tradition that dare not speak its name**

Similarly, the Naval Academy’s approach to global preparation is a case study in what it means to make an intended outcome primary and unavoidable. The Naval Academy has reworked its core courses and majors to make global themes pervasive; has connected language study to cultural content; has developed global forms that hold programs for students several times each week; and features a host of ways of providing direct experience with other cultures for its midshipmen.

Keith notes that “America admires West Point because West Point has delivered for America.” In fact, all the academies are delivering for America, on many levels and in far quarters of the world. Liberal education, too, has delivered for America. And through the work and accomplishment of all the colleges and universities that take this tradition seriously as the standard for educational excellence, it continues to do so.

Getting national leaders to acknowledge our nation’s fundamental dependence on the quality and inclusiveness of liberal education shouldn’t be Mission Impossible. As I invite you to read, ponder, and share this issue of *Liberal Education*, I dare to hope that—with help from the military—it may take only a little longer.—CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER

Paul Valéry once observed that, “in all great undertakings, tradition, in the true sense of the word, does not consist of doing again what others have done before, but in recapturing the spirit that went into what they did—and would have done differently in a different age.” This insight offers a useful way to understand what is now occurring in the great undertaking of American higher education, as colleges and universities of all types are “doing” liberal education very differently in order to meet the needs of a new, global century.

This issue of *Liberal Education* looks at how—and why—one particularly unique type of institution, the service academy, is engaging the American tradition of liberal education as it seeks to accommodate the changing demands of twenty-first-century military service. The three institutions represented here—the Military, Air Force, and Naval Academies—are all embarked on significant curricular change efforts, prompted in large part by changed requirements for military leadership. As West Point’s Bruce Keith observes, “today’s military operates in

## FROM THE EDITOR

contexts where uncertainty and ambiguity are commonplace.”

For this reason, Keith maintains,

“the army needs officers who have benefitted from a liberal education.”

In their article on curricular change at the United States Air Force Academy, Rolf Enger, Steven Jones, and Dana Born point out that, “although the academy’s commitment to liberal education has remained the same since the institution’s founding over fifty years ago, the approach we have taken to fulfill that commitment has changed markedly over the years.” Similarly, Maochun Miles Yu, Timothy Disher, and Andrew Phillips note that the Naval Academy continues to “provide a top liberal education to all midshipmen”; however, in response to fundamental strategic adjustments made by the Department of Defense after 9/11, the academy now emphasizes expanded opportunities for midshipmen to develop “a strong foundation in and understanding of global cultures and foreign languages.”

There are many obvious differences between the United States Service Academies and the rest of American higher education (as well as among the academies themselves). Yet, in focusing on curricular development and the learning students need to succeed in the twenty-first century, the articles in this issue point to fundamental and, perhaps, even surprising similarities. In a rapidly changing world, liberal education remains the best preparation for citizenship, work, life, and *military leadership*.—DAVID TRITELLI

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AAC&U invites manuscripts that promote liberal learning in a broad sense. For writer’s guidelines and other communications see [www.aacu.org/liberaleducation](http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation), write to the editor of *Liberal Education* at the above address, or send e-mail to [tritelli@aacu.org](mailto:tritelli@aacu.org).

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**New Statement on Common Core Standards**

In response to the release of common core standards by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider has issued a public statement describing the draft standards as an important first step and calling on states to embrace them. However, Schneider also urges a realistic view of where today’s students actually are in terms of achievement and cautions against underestimating the task ahead. “We shouldn’t mislead the public about the widening gap between what employers expect and students’ levels of accomplishment on a host of essential learning outcomes,” she says.

In her statement, Schneider makes four key points: (1) the nation must face up to the reality of the current achievement shortfall; (2) math and English are not enough; (3) new standards must be accompanied by new ways of organizing students’ learning and new approaches to assessment; (4) many sectors of society will need to come together to prepare students for success in college and life beyond college.

The full text of the statement is available online at [www.aacu.org/about/statements](http://www.aacu.org/about/statements).

**LEAP Public Forum Held in Utah**

From the state governor and the president of the Salt Lake Chamber to the commissioner of higher education and the state superintendent of schools, Utah’s leadership gathered in Salt Lake City recently for “Raising the Bar: Preparing Utah College Students for Life, Work, and Responsible Citizenship,” a public forum sponsored by AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative. These leaders came together with one hundred faculty members, teachers, regents, deans, provosts, and presidents to discuss the future of education in Utah and the importance of providing all Utah students a broad set of learning outcomes essential for success in the twenty-first century.

In October Utah became the fifth official state partner in the LEAP initiative, and this event was the first in a series of events and activities planned as part of LEAP Utah. More information about the LEAP initiative and the five state partnerships is available online at [www.aacu.org/leap](http://www.aacu.org/leap).

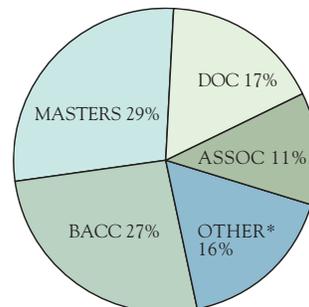
**Upcoming Meetings**

- October 21–23, 2010  
**Facing the Divides: Diversity, Learning, and Pathways to Inclusive Excellence**  
Houston, Texas
- November 11–13, 2010  
**Creativity, Inquiry, and Discovery: Undergraduate Research In and Across the Disciplines**  
Durham, North Carolina
- January 26–29, 2011  
AAC&U Annual Meeting  
**Global Positioning: Essential Learning, Student Success, and the Currency of U.S. Degrees**  
San Francisco, California
- March 3–5, 2011  
**General Education 3.0: Next-Level Practices Now**  
Chicago, Illinois

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BRUCE KEITH

# The Transformation of West Point as a Liberal Arts College

FEATURED TOPIC

THINK OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY and the typical images are of duty, character, leadership, and possibly even regimented conformity. Intellectual liberation, integrative innovation, and holistic development—hallmarks of a liberal education—are not always associated with the public’s perception of the West Point experience. Yet, consider this: today’s military operates in contexts where uncertainty and ambiguity are commonplace. Human security challenges exacerbated within regional trouble spots are frequently characterized by extreme poverty, a lack of infrastructure, an inability of people within these regions to plug into a globally connected world, and intrastate violence. Such challenges, when coupled with U.S. interests, demand an officer corps capable of responding promptly and effectively to a diverse set of issues in environments that require innovation, flexibility, and adaptability. The army needs officers who have benefitted from a liberal education.

**The army needs officers who have benefitted from a liberal education**

Thomas Friedman (2008) argues that the world is becoming increasingly hot, flat, and crowded. Global warming, the dramatic global rise of middle classes, and rapid population growth are converging in ways that may destabilize the world. Under such conditions, we can expect the world to encounter dramatic increases in health problems, changes in global weather patterns, destabilized food and energy sources, and increased conflict. Friedman contends that we and the rest of the world are not going to be able to regulate our way out of this dilemma. The only way to reverse course is to become more self-sufficient and less reliant on fossil fuels, tap into our insatiable appetite for innovation, and mobilize the U.S. marketplace. The goal is universal connectivity (flat issue), powered by abundant, clean, and cheap energy (energy issue), for a population projected to reach nine billion people by 2050 (crowded issue). Friedman’s premise is that the United States needs to take the lead in reinventing what living like us means.

Imagine the creation of a viable energy policy capable of harnessing the U.S. marketplace to deliver on the goal of universal connectivity and the presence of abundant, clean energy. Jeff Immelt, CEO of General Electric, is certainly imagining this possibility. When he spoke to students at West Point in December 2009, he appeared to take a page directly out of Friedman’s book in arguing for the invention of clean energy sources and the use of the marketplace to reduce our dependence on oil. The issue, he suggested, is really one of leadership—individuals and institutions with the ability to act as change agents. The questions are ones of preparation and purpose: who will accept

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responsibility for the education of these leaders, and what type of learning will maximize students' self-understanding, their responsibility to others, and their capacity to act?

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) contends that what really matter in college are the curricular connections that enable students to become informed, responsible, self-directed learners. Liberal education is, at its core, transformational; faculty intentionally develop curricular and cocurricular experiences that liberate the mind from ignorance (the informed piece), cultivate in students a sense of personal and social responsibility (the responsibility component), and empower students to be change agents (the self-directed piece). To prepare students for the unscripted challenges of an ill-defined world—the sort of world described by Friedman and encountered by army officers—AAC&U (2007) advocates for a connected focus on intellectual and practical skills that, when combined with personal and social responsibility, build students' capacities effectively to address the intersecting challenges associated with human cultures and the physical and natural worlds. Essentially, what we need from colleges are more integrated connections and fewer courses. Instead, as Derek Bok (2006) suggests, what is actually provided is a fragmented curriculum with lots of required courses or distributional areas and few connections capable of transforming students into change agents.

### **Student development**

Underlying the AAC&U framework are theories about how students, as humans, develop. While many theories explain how students develop in college or throughout life (see, for example, Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito 1998), their practical value appears to rest more with their similarities than with their differences. As Ken Bain (2004) acknowledges, insofar as not all people develop from the same set of experiences at the same time, we must consider the importance of human development in the design of our curricular frameworks. Human development is essentially the expansion of one's capacity to know oneself and to view the world through multiple

## **During the past fifty years, West Point has participated in a journey that has dramatically altered the structure of its curriculum**

lenses. Student development is, at its core, capacity building: the accumulation of knowledge and experience, its connection to intensive practice, and the broadened perspectives generated by intense reflection on the limitations of one's current perspective. To develop students' capacities, faculty must

intentionally structure and assess pathways through the connection of curricular and cocurricular activities that evince improvements in students' critical reasoning abilities.

To take one theory, Robert Kegan's (1982) model operates on the basis of what he calls a subject-object distinction. Students' capacities are directly linked to their self-identity where one can become more objective about former perceptions, feelings, or attitudes that had previously been subjective. Kegan suggests that identity progresses from a completely subjective perspective of self-interest through one of reciprocal exchange, then belonging, followed by a personal self-authored code of conduct, and finally the ability to see one's own perspective as an object; this transition maximizes the ability to manage one's self-identity adaptively. Of course, not all people progress through all of these stages. To illustrate, one longitudinal study (Lewis et al. 2005) showed that West Point students typically enter college as self-interested persons (e.g., "tell me what I need to do to get an A") and develop to a point that, by their senior year, they could, on average, demonstrate a sense of belonging and the ability to understand how others view and value them. Thus, the college experience represents a type of learning curve that, even when intentionally structured around desired outcomes, may have upper limits on its ability to assist students in the development of their self-identities.

An understanding of the developmental level of our students is critical if we, as faculty, desire to transform their capacity to be responsible, self-directed learners. If we relegate such issues to a single course or major, how can we ensure that our students cultivate a sense of the second- and third-order consequences of their actions or are empowered to manage the complexities of human and technological interactions? Therein lies the conundrum in higher education: we profess our commitment to liberal education, but then structure students'



experiences in ways that potentially minimize the development of new capacities and knowledge. Lacking in our discussions of curricular renewal is a learning model for student development, nested within the unique contexts of our individual institutions. Such models require an assessment of personal readiness, intentional developmental experiences, meaningful venues for student reflection, and the systematic assessment of students' outcomes that, over time, result in demonstrable growth of their capacity to learn.

### **Curricular renewal at West Point**

During the past fifty years, West Point has participated in a journey that has dramatically altered the structure of its curriculum (Forsythe and Keith 2004). From 1802 through 1960, West Point offered students a prescribed curriculum; all students completed the same set of courses. Beginning in 1960, electives were introduced into the curriculum. By 1970, students selected concentrations that, by 1980, became fields of study. Majors were first introduced with the class of 1985 and became a graduation requirement with the class of 2005. Although all students complete a common core

curriculum of twenty-six courses, West Point has sought to balance the completion of a breadth component (core curriculum) with the depth of study derived from a disciplinary major. External constraints necessitate that students complete all of the graduation requirements within forty-seven months (eight academic terms).

While such changes reflect evolutionary shifts in structure, they say nothing about student development. This point was underscored in a 1989 institutional accreditation evaluation, whereby the visiting regional accreditation team acknowledged that the institution lacked any discernible justification to describe why students were required to complete a particular set of courses. Furthermore, the school lacked any demonstrable evidence that students actually achieved that which had not yet been articulated. During the past twenty years, we have leveraged this accreditation concern to transform the West Point experience.

Beginning with the general education program (our core curriculum) and expanding outward to include all the curricular and cocurricular experiences of a leader development model, faculty at West Point defined the

educated graduate of the Military Academy, provided a rationale and justification for this definition, and designed corresponding learning models for student development (USMA 2007, 2009). I should note, however, that when we began this process of curricular renewal, we could not have conceived that it would reach the point where we are today; we were more focused on the trees than on the forest. We developed an assessment system, initially gathering evidence, largely indirect, from students, graduates, and our graduates' employers, whereby we focused on stakeholders' average and comparative levels of confidence in our graduates' ability to demonstrate achievements in each of the areas guided by the learning model. We then directed attention toward indicators embedded within the curriculum—formative assessments of students' actual work as it pertained to each of the targeted areas in the learning models. We gathered this evidence intentionally and systematically, reporting annually on our findings as a matter of institutional record. We also participated in many activities beyond West Point, including several AAC&U consortia, Project Kaleidoscope initiatives, and the National Survey of Student Engagement.



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These activities resulted in tremendous introspection on our learning models for student development, on the importance of participatory consensus building, and on the relative merits of the evidence we were gathering.

While we initially created a framework that justified the courses we offered—i.e., protected the status quo—our subsequent assessments revealed gaps that required intense discussion. We learned that our curriculum was compartmentalized, with courses largely disconnected from one another. We learned that we focused much more on content than on the process of learning and student development. We learned that many of our students are risk-averse and innovate largely within the parameters that we have structured for them. We also learned the critical importance of integrating the process of curricular renewal

within the standard operating procedures of the college. This finding has gradually led to a shift in the institution's approach to strategic planning, the alignment of planning with resource management, and the need for developing systematic assessments of institutional effectiveness.

Like any higher educational organization, West Point allocates resources to organizational units (i.e., colleges, departments, centers, etc.). This process of resource management forces units to take responsibility for aspects of the intended student learning outcomes (SLOs), which typically results in a compartmentalization of the outcomes. The connection of curricular components across units is necessary if the institution is to develop in students the capacities underscored by the learning model. Achieving a viable interface between organizational units and SLOs requires the presence of a set of checks and balances. The units report annually on how they expended resources provided to them by the institution and the extent to which those expenditures align with the SLOs. Independent assessment teams composed of faculty and staff representatives of the various organizational units concurrently assess and report annually on students' achievement of the SLOs reflected in the learning model. In principle, this process provides a healthy tension between how we resource units and what our students learn; however, the institution has not yet evolved to a point where this has become common practice.

We are beginning to recognize our need to identify curricular and cocurricular activities that sit at the intersection of several dimensions of the Military Academy's (2009) learning model for student development. For example, through conversations with students, I have discovered that they often believe the most integrative, meaningful connections occur in the summer immersion experiences. Not a single student has suggested to me that the most significant transformational experiences in their undergraduate program have occurred in a single course product (e.g., an exam or a paper). If our aim is to develop in students the capacity to synthesize information and draw connections across experiential domains, we are not going to achieve that goal with a central focus on individual, largely disconnected courses. Thus, our goal is to create intentional, hands-on cocurricular learning experiences

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that connect to aspects of the core curriculum and disciplinary majors.

Education in a world that is hot, flat, and crowded requires immersing students in meaningful educational experiences that are removed from the comfortable confines of a college campus. This point resonates particularly well for graduates of the Military Academy, who, within the first few years of their careers, will likely be deployed throughout the world. Accordingly, during the past five years, we have increased participation in our international summer immersion and semester study abroad programs from less than 2 percent of a graduating class to upward of 50 percent. During the summer of 2009, for example, approximately 450 students participated in cultural immersion experiences in over fifty countries. These experiences typically last for three to four weeks during the summer and represent an extension of in-depth learning that draws on the core curriculum and major programs. Similarly, during the current academic year, nearly 150 students spent one semester attending a college in one of sixteen countries where English is not the primary language. Students are placed with host families, enroll full time in a local university, and complete at least three of their five courses in a language other than English.

How do students actually benefit from educational experiences that transfer learning from one context to another? Let me illustrate with a couple of examples. Charles Nadd, a West Point social science major from the class of 2011, traveled alone on a three-week summer experience to Monrovia while working for a nongovernmental organization in Liberia (the Society for Women and AIDS in Africa). Within a short time after his arrival, Nadd realized that the organization lacked a Web site and any connection to the outside world; consequently, he volunteered to develop one for them based on his recollection of material gleaned from a combination of core and elective courses. He also employed knowledge from his two years of French language classes to create a parallel site for the local community ([www.swaliberia.org](http://www.swaliberia.org)). Similarly, Jonathan Turnbull and Stuart McFarlane, members of the class of 2010 who are majoring in geospatial information science and human geography, respectively, spent three weeks in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Although they are not engineers, their three-course engineering



sequence (a core curriculum requirement) prepared them to design and build two footbridges with the villagers of Kikongo. These bridges provided a critical link with neighboring villages and a hospital. Without knowledge of the local dialect, and with few Congolese who spoke English, Turnbull and McFarlane relied on the use of adaptive communication techniques to complete their work.

An additional educational experience, referred to as the “village scenario,” is intentionally structured within the summer military experience conducted at West Point. This exercise places Farsi and Dari speakers in native dress to act as locals within ongoing military maneuvers, which adds a realistic dose of civilian interaction similar to situations that have played out repeatedly in recent international conflicts. The scenario, which is intended to develop students’ leadership and ethical decision-making capabilities under stress, requires students to work with translators in order to understand the concerns and issues of a local population and act in a manner that minimizes the unintended second- and third-order consequences of their actions. Students work through several of these encounters and reflect on the experiences with one another, the native language speakers, and seasoned staff and faculty.

We are also discovering that student development requires meaningful venues for reflection that are connected to ill-defined challenges. Transformational learning is, after all, a social act that requires collaborative reflection involving students, peers, and mentors



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(Eyler 2009). While the problems themselves may represent intentionally structured challenges located at the intersection of several dimensions of an institution's learning model, mechanisms that allow for reflection must be present if students are to work through the friction and tension generated by their participation in these experiences. To capture venues for student reflection across curricular and cocurricular activities, we are beginning to assess the feasibility of a student-designed e-portfolio prototype. This e-portfolio operates much like a Facebook page that is linked to the military profession. Conceptually, the e-portfolio provides students with opportunities to post selected course products on their individual pages and network with fellow students and mentors, including faculty and active-duty army officers. In connecting students to professionals and mentors, the e-portfolio creates a venue for dialogue and meaningful feedback. Students also have opportunities to review "leader challenges," which feature short videos of actual unscripted leadership challenges experienced by current army officers, and participate in discussions of role-playing scenarios that enhance their situational awareness and capacity to manage competing perspectives.

Connecting disparate curricular and cocurricular experiences through a model for student development requires the presence of integrators—persons responsible for working directly with individual students to facilitate connections among experiences, reflection, and growth. West Point organizes its 4,500

students into thirty-two companies and assigns two full-time staff members to work with each unit. These two staff members consist of a tactical officer (TAC)—a captain or major with recent field experience—and a noncommissioned officer. Together, they are the glue that holds together the various components of West Point's learning model for student development. These staff members are essentially counselors on steroids. They work closely with their assigned units to monitor student development; students identified as struggling in one or more areas generally receive special attention. In principle, the TACs work with faculty and staff to develop in each student the capacity to reach his or her potential. Admittedly, the TACs are overworked and spend most of their time helping to remediate the bottom third of the class; West Point could benefit from an additional thirty-two TACs.

### **Conclusion**

America admires West Point because West Point has delivered for America. Jeff Immelt, during his visit to West Point, trotted out several executives who were West Point graduates. He noted that General Electric has upward of 250 senior executives who graduated from the Military Academy, implying that West Point underscores a commitment to service, discipline, and learning that is rather unique among colleges. The history department at West Point has a saying: "the history we teach was made by those we taught." On the surface, such a statement may seem arrogant, but in reality it

reflects the traits and outcomes highlighted by Immelt. West Point, the first engineering college established in the United States, populated those that followed for nearly a century. Its graduates took the lead in building for the United States its canals, transportation routes, and interstates, and participated in the development of the space program and its subsequent exploration. West Point is an institution that has produced two U.S. presidents and taken a leading role in every major armed conflict in the history of the United States.

These past achievements, while laudable, do not obstruct our ability to recognize that the environment in which we operate has changed and that those changes require adjustments in how we educate students. We must meet our students where they stand and transform their capacities through mechanisms for self-empowerment. Today, West Point is, first and foremost, a liberal arts college with a focus on transformational learning. Without question, our graduates' outcomes depend on our success in this endeavor. Our faculty are of one mind that our graduates must be an essential part of the solution to the nation's challenges, and not a part of the problem.

The continued success of higher education in the United States is contingent upon our individual and collective abilities to draw meaningful connections between education and global challenges that, if unresolved, will demonstrably affect our country and the world. If the purpose of the undergraduate experience is to develop in students the capacity to be informed, responsible, self-directed learners who are capable of addressing the unscripted challenges that will confront the next generation of Americans, then we in higher education appear to be well short of the mark. The breadth inherent in a general education program must be connected meaningfully to the depth of study associated with majors programs. A predominate focus on majors with limited connections to general education and cocurricular activities develops students who will have difficulty traversing disciplinary divides and who have acquired skills that quickly become outdated in this rapidly changing global environment.

**Today, West Point is,  
first and foremost,  
a liberal arts college  
with a focus on  
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learning**

Instead, we must educate undergraduate students broadly and deeply, assisting them in drawing connections between various experiences, so that they can anticipate and respond effectively to a changing contextual landscape. We in higher

education must collectively ensure that our students achieve the learning outcomes consistent with the goals of liberal education. Our nation and the world depend on our collective success in this endeavor. □

*To respond to this article, e-mail [liberaled@aacu.org](mailto:liberaled@aacu.org), with the author's name on the subject line.*

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ROLF C. ENGER, STEVEN K. JONES,  
AND DANA H. BORN

# Commitment to Liberal Education at the United States Air Force Academy

FEATURED TOPIC

**A comprehensive liberal education has been the cornerstone of the United States Air Force Academy's curriculum from its inception**

LOCATED JUST NORTH of Colorado Springs, Colorado, the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) is one of our nation's federally funded military service academies. With an enrollment of approximately 4,400 undergraduates, the academy offers an integrated four-year curriculum of academics, athletics, leadership and character development, military training, and airmanship programs. Our mission is "to educate, train, and inspire men and women to become officers of character motivated to lead the United States Air Force in service to our nation" (United States Air Force 2007).

The distinctive military mission of USAFA is clearly evident throughout the academy. For example, prior to the beginning of classes, our incoming cadets experience an intense six-week period of basic cadet training meant to introduce these new students to the military culture and the high standards of performance we expect. Once the academic year begins, cadets live in cadet squadrons that are modeled after the kinds of organizational units they will work in upon entrance to active duty. Even their academic classes reflect our military culture, as cadets wear uniforms, come to attention at the beginning of each session, and liberally sprinkle the words "sir" and "ma'am" into their discussions.

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The reasons for the overt military culture are fairly clear. With rare exception, all our cadets will be commissioned as air force second lieutenants when they graduate. They are required to serve on active duty for at least five years after graduation, and many of them serve substantially longer. In fact, Air Force Academy graduates currently make up a sizeable percentage of the air force senior leadership, both at the academy and in the air force as a whole. Graduates of the Air Force Academy play important roles in the future of the United States Air Force.

This description highlights some obviously distinct characteristics of Air Force Academy graduates. For the purposes of this article, the most salient of these is that 100 percent of our students are guaranteed full-time employment—not just in a job, but in a profession—upon graduation. Furthermore, we know their future employer. What this means is that it is relatively easy for us, as an institution, to receive feedback regarding the preparedness of our graduates from our graduates themselves and their supervisors. It is also common for us to receive guidance from the cadets' employer (i.e., the United States Air Force) about any new capabilities that our future graduates need to possess.

Despite these distinctive characteristics, however, the Air Force Academy faces many of the same challenges that confront more traditional colleges and universities. The demands placed on our twenty-first-century military are nothing short of extraordinary, and officers are being asked to do things now that would have once been considered unimaginable. As recently as twenty-five years ago, America



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was involved in the cold war, and the focus of the American military was on defending our country from the Soviet Union. Today, the Soviet Union no longer exists, and the American military is fighting a very different kind of war in the Middle East and throughout the world. Even our most junior air force officers are asked to succeed in the face of great complexity, to operate without senior leader oversight, to identify hurdles and ways to overcome them, to perceive and adapt to the perspectives of others, and to take on tasks for which they have not been trained (Thomas 2005). To succeed in these conditions, they need to prepare in many of the same ways as their civilian counterparts at colleges and universities across the country. In short, air force officers need the broad-based knowledge, the intellectual skills, and the personal and professional responsibilities that are hallmarks of a liberal education.

#### **A tradition of liberal education**

A comprehensive liberal education has been the cornerstone of the United States Air Force Academy's curriculum from its inception. The



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academy's initial curriculum grew from the recommendations of a wide range of distinguished educators, legislators, and officers of the army, navy, and air force. Three fundamental questions guided the curriculum development process: What should air force officers know? What skills should they possess? And what curriculum would best provide them with that knowledge and those skills? Beginning in 1948, several air force boards and committees studied these questions for the purpose of proposing initial curricula at the academy. Each study consistently concluded that the answer to these questions was a broad, comprehensive, liberal education curriculum balanced between the social sciences/humanities and basic sciences/engineering.

The Air Force Planning Board, directed by then Air Force Chief of Staff General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, developed the following guiding principles for the academy's curriculum: (1) provide "a broad, general education as well as a sound background in aeronautical science and tactics" and (2) "produce an officer . . . broadly and soundly educated in the humanities, sciences, and military studies" (Air Force Academy Planning Board 1949, 5, 7).

Ultimately, Congress commissioned the Lieutenant General Hubert R. Harmon Committee (1949–54) to construct the initial academy curriculum. Leading military and civilian educators served on the committee. Independent reviews by prestigious universities—Massachusetts Institute of Technology for "scientific" (to include engineering) courses, and Stanford and Columbia for humanities and social science courses—also guided curriculum construction. The graduation requirements approved on January 19, 1956, included 148  $\frac{2}{3}$  semester hours, of which 138  $\frac{2}{3}$  were academic requirements, about half in basic sciences and engineering and half in social sciences and humanities. The remaining semester hours were for airmanship courses. In those early days, every cadet took the same "core" courses, and there were no academic majors (Woodyard 1965). The curriculum objective to provide a broad, general education with a roughly equal balance between the basic sciences/engineering and the social sciences/humanities has remained the cornerstone of the academy's academic programs ever since.

Academic majors were first introduced in 1964, with a commensurate reduction in the size of the general education (or "core") curriculum. Today, cadets can choose from thirty-one divisional, disciplinary, and interdisciplinary majors. However, the intent and scope of the core curriculum (now 102 credit hours) remains unchanged—to provide a comprehensive liberal education, spanning a broad range of disciplines, that prepares our graduates for the unknown challenges of military service anywhere in the world.

#### **The evolution of our work**

Although the academy's commitment to liberal education has remained the same since the institution's founding over fifty years ago, the approach we have taken to fulfill that commitment has changed markedly over the



years. For example, early conversations about our curriculum were focused largely on the accumulation of credit hours: how many classes in each discipline should be included in our core curriculum? Over time, however, those campus conversations have slowly begun to change. Rather than focusing just on credit hours, the conversations have begun to focus much more on the achievement of agreed-upon outcomes or competencies for cadet learning and development.

Our institutional journey toward outcomes began in 1993, when our dean of faculty first established what we then called “educational outcomes” that bridged across each of our academic departments. Over time, those educational outcomes were followed by comparable lists of outcomes for the academy’s military training and athletic programs. The establishment of outcomes within each of these “mission elements” was a big step forward, helping each mission element promote a more intentional approach to cadet development within its own area. However, it also encouraged a certain level of “stove piping” that was undesirable. Because each mission element (e.g., dean of students, academic dean, athletic director) was working toward its own respective outcomes, they tended to work separately—often competing for scarce resources, such as funding or access to cadet time.

The next major step in the Air Force Academy’s evolution took place in 2003, with the creation of an integrated “Officer Development System.” This system established a common education and training philosophy across the academy, and it also introduced the first integrated set of institutional learning outcomes. The authors of the Officer Development System created this integrated list by combining the outcomes originally put forward by each distinct mission element (Price 2004). In hindsight, this “bottom-up” approach was a bit cumbersome, and the resulting set of institutional outcomes turned out to be lengthy and difficult to remember and implement. Still, this was an important milestone in our institutional development.

In 2006, a team from USAFA attended the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Greater Expectations Summer Institute. That was the first time we learned about the essential learning outcomes as described in the Liberal Education and America’s Promise initiative (AAC&U 2007). Those outcomes, combined with an emerging set of parallel air force “core competencies,” served as important “top-down” guidance to supplement the outcomes the academy had developed through its previous bottom-up processes. The result was a major revision of the institutional outcomes, with a focus on making the outcomes concise, memorable, and consistent with both

air force doctrine and best practices in higher education (see sidebar below). These outcomes embody the intent and spirit of the academy's mission and are, today, the focal point of everyone's efforts, whether they teach in our core curriculum, in a major course, in military training, in athletics, or in our signature airmanship programs. This has helped our institution work in a much more integrated way than in the past. Indeed, all the elements of the academy's curriculum (academic, military, athletic, and airmanship) now work together toward these shared goals.

Since 2006, our efforts, such as those described below, have centered on operationalizing and instilling the USAFA outcomes,

### USAFA Outcomes

#### *Commission leaders of character who embody the Air Force core values ...*

*... committed to Societal, Professional, and Individual Responsibilities*

- Ethical Reasoning and Action
- Respect for Human Dignity
- Service to the Nation
- Lifelong Development and Contributions
- Intercultural Competence and Involvement

*... empowered by integrated Intellectual and Warrior Skills*

- Quantitative and Information Literacy
- Oral and Written Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Decision Making
- Stamina
- Courage
- Discipline
- Teamwork

*... grounded in essential Knowledge of the Profession of Arms and the Human & Physical Worlds*

- Heritage and Application of Air, Space, and Cyberspace Power
- National Security and Full Spectrum of Joint and Coalition Warfare
- Civic, Cultural, and International Environments
- Ethics and the Foundations of Character
- Principles of Science and the Scientific Method
- Principles of Engineering and the Application of Technology

especially within our core curriculum and course of instruction.

- We require each of our core courses or programs to “sign up” to promote one or more of the USAFA outcomes in a substantive way. The resulting curriculum map is now published in our Curriculum Handbook as the “Curriculum and Outcome Alignment Plan” (COAP).
- We use the COAP to create interdisciplinary “outcome teams” made up of senior representatives from each of the academy's core courses or programs. Each interdisciplinary team is charged with overseeing the development of its outcome, the compilation of assessment data to inform the academy's future efforts, and to recommend improvements to the academy experience.
- We have bolstered our assessment efforts. This includes both the collection of direct assessment data (typically embedded within core courses and programs and scored with agreed-upon outcome rubrics) and indirect assessment data, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement, surveys of our graduates, and focus groups with our “customers” —supervisors in the active-duty air force.
- We have embedded structures that allow the outcome teams to report their findings to senior leaders, closing the loop on their assessment efforts. While still at a relatively early stage, these structures should allow us to continue to build upon excellence by moving closer to our strategic vision of assessment-based improvement of cadet education.

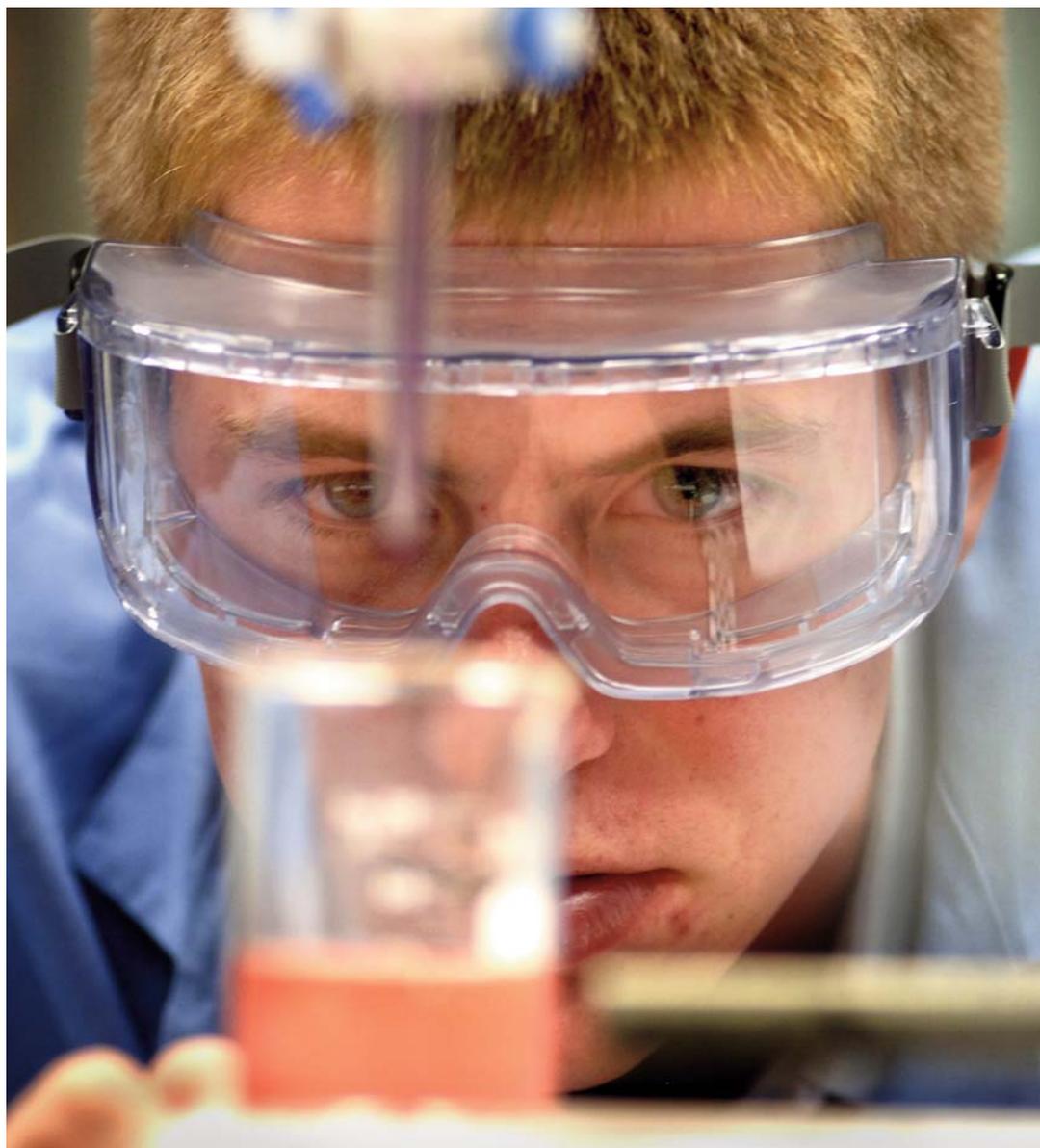
### The way ahead

As we look to the future, we expect our curriculum to continue to be informed by both our colleagues in the higher education community and by the evolving needs of the air force. However, we also realize that we have come to an important crossroads. While we remain absolutely convinced of the need to provide cadets with a comprehensive, intentional, and developmental liberal education, we are also cognizant of the exploding complexity of the twenty-first century. For example, modern military operations require that the air force be prepared to win battles not only in the air, but also in newer realms of space and cyberspace. The Department of Defense has urged us to provide greater preparation in languages

and intercultural knowledge and competence. The expanded use of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) and Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) by the air force has led to the introduction of a UAS-RPA program for cadets, much like we introduced powered flight and soaring decades ago. And recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have highlighted the need to introduce cadets to the principles of forward troop deployment, survival, escape, evasion, and resistance in hostage-like situations. In short, the qualities needed to be a successful air force officer continue to grow at a remarkable rate.

**The qualities needed to be a successful air force officer continue to grow at a remarkable rate**

In many ways, our challenge is similar to that described by Gordon Moore and commonly referred to as “Moore’s Law.” Moore, cofounder of the computer chip manufacturer Intel, predicted in 1965 that the transistor density on integrated circuits would double about every two years—a prediction that has been remarkably accurate over the last forty-plus years (Intel n.d.). The challenge to place increasingly more circuitry on the same-sized computer chip has forced Intel and its competitors to be increasingly innovative. Similarly, because of the exploding complexity of the twenty-first century and



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the fact that cadets at the Air Force Academy must graduate in four years, we, too, are called upon to look for innovative breakthroughs that we can use to more effectively and efficiently prepare our cadets for future military service. Does our traditional core curriculum

(with the same 102 semester hours required of all cadets) best meet the needs? Or, might it be better to require all cadets to engage in comparable (but perhaps not identical) learning experiences, as long as they develop the same USAFA outcomes? How can we leverage



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the “high-impact practices” (Kuh 2008) that we already have in place? How can we improve upon our current practices to make them even more effective? And how can we ensure that our high-impact practices are available to each and every one of our cadets? These are the challenging questions facing us at the academy today.

Acknowledging these challenges, the academy commissioned a team last summer to attend the AAC&U Greater Expectations Institute. What emerged from that effort was a new initiative, designed in part to explore ways to develop multiple, purposeful curricular pathways to outcome achievement (Leskes and Miller 2006). While the outcome of this initiative is not clear at this writing, what is clear is that the academy remains committed to a comprehensive, intentional, and developmental liberal education that enables student accomplishment of our learning outcomes. The stakes are simply too high to do anything less. Upon graduation and commissioning, all of our graduates take the oath of office by which they swear (or affirm) to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.” Who will be those adversaries during our graduates’ careers? From what cultures and what geographic regions will these adversaries emerge? What technologies and innovations will they bring to bear in support of their cause (especially new ones that have yet to be invented)? And what new military strategies and instruments of power will they employ? Will our graduates be called upon for war fighting, humanitarian relief, peacekeeping, nation stabilization, reconstruction, or disaster response? While we can speculate on the answers to these questions, in truth we have no way of knowing with certainty what our graduates will be asked to accomplish five, ten, or twenty years from now. The only thing that experience tells us is that our graduates must be leaders of character ready to meet the challenge.

The founders of the Air Force Academy acknowledged that the best way to build this capable air force officer was through a broad liberal education, spanning the basic sciences, engineering, social sciences, and humanities.

**We have no way of knowing with certainty what our graduates will be asked to accomplish five, ten, or twenty years from now**

In a similar vein, today’s air force officer needs a critical set of responsibilities, skills, and knowledge in order to succeed, regardless of the military, technological, political, or cultural challenges he or she may face. It is for that reason that the Air Force

Academy remains committed to the tenets of liberal education. Our nation depends on it! □

*To respond to this article, e-mail [liberaled@aacu.org](mailto:liberaled@aacu.org), with the authors’ names on the subject line.*

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MAOCHUN MILES YU, TIMOTHY DISHER,  
AND ANDREW T. PHILLIPS

# Educating Warriors

## Globally Engaged and Culturally Aware

FEATURED TOPIC

**It should come as no surprise that our military leaders need a strong foundation in and understanding of global cultures and foreign languages**

THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY in Annapolis, Maryland, has a clear and well-understood mission: to prepare leaders for service in the U.S. Navy or Marine Corps. As the navy's flagship undergraduate university, we graduate roughly one thousand students each year, and the time between graduation and commissioning as an officer in the navy or the Marine Corps (i.e., the moment of "getting hired" for their first job) is only about five minutes. Most people know something about "Navy," as we like to call it. They may know that we're an elite engineering school; in fact, 65 percent of our students—we refer to them as midshipmen—choose one of thirteen engineering and science major programs. They may know that midshipmen wear uniforms, march in parades, and "muster" daily for formation and meals. They may know that midshipmen have demanding academic course loads; the average is eighteen credit hours per semester for exactly eight semesters (it's a four-year program, by law). They may know that about ninety credit hours—the majority of which are in science and engineering—are in our common "core" curriculum that all midshipmen must take regardless of major. They may know that in addition to the academic demands, all midshipmen must be active in some athletic activity every day, including

sports at the varsity, club, or intramural level. And they may know that all midshipmen also must learn and demonstrate leadership skills, military discipline, and ethical and moral responsibility. But what most people don't know is that Navy also provides a top liberal education to all midshipmen, and that one of the central elements of that liberal education is an understanding of global and cross-cultural dynamics.

It should come as no surprise that our military leaders need a strong foundation in and understanding of global cultures and foreign languages. In the post-9/11 world, it became clear to the Department of Defense that a few fundamental adjustments in its overall strategies were necessary. Overwhelming our enemy with firepower and technology alone is no longer sufficient; we have to develop our abilities to collaborate and cooperate with international partners, to comprehend and communicate in different ways with peoples who think and behave very differently from ourselves, and to understand that complex human interactions occur daily on the "battlefield," either in face-to-face encounters or in military-facilitated humanitarian, disaster relief, and peacekeeping efforts. These adjustments made it imperative that the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps take action quickly to adjust our educational preparation for our nation's future military leaders. That imperative took the form of a major doctrinal policy, announced in October 2007, known as "A Cooperative Strategy for Twenty-First-Century Seapower," or "Maritime Strategy" for short.

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United States Naval Academy

**Curricular change****The Maritime Strategy**

integrates seapower with other elements of national power, as well as those of our friends and allies. It describes how seapower will be applied around the world to protect our way of life, as we join with other like-minded nations to protect and sustain the global, interconnected system through which we prosper. Our commitment to protecting the homeland and winning our nation's wars is matched by a corresponding commitment to preventing war.

An essential mechanism to reach this comprehensive goal is to develop an advanced set of skills in language, regional expertise, and cultural awareness (we'll refer to these elements as "global education" from here forward) in critical regions vital to the interests of the United States. As the primary undergraduate educational institution responsible for educating and training the future leaders of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, the Naval Academy plays a central role in providing this foundation.

And yet, the challenge of exposing our midshipmen to meaningful global experiences remains daunting. Chief among these challenges is time. A midshipman has many mandatory responsibilities each day, and the daily schedule and regimen is strict and unforgiving. It is obvious to any who visit the campus that a midshipman seems in a perpetual state of motion, moving from task to task beginning before the sun rises and ending well after the rest of us have gone to bed. The dilemma for our global education undertaking is that cultivating skills and knowledge in these areas requires time, both for the experience itself and for the reflection on that experience. Hence, the central problem facing the academy is this: how do you expand existing opportunities for global education in a situation where time is at a premium, and many educational and professional training needs are dictated to us by the Navy and Marine Corps? These constraints make it difficult to adopt traditional approaches to global education, such as study abroad programs. The answer would seem to be (1) adapt civilian models for the delivery of global education to the unique constraints faced by the academy; (2) find ways to add a global education element to things we were doing anyway; and (3) take advantage of unique opportunities available to us as a service academy that are

not available to civilian universities. How we have expanded such opportunities in the face of severe time constraints and external requirements is what makes the academy's experience unique.

Unlike most civilian universities, the Naval Academy must graduate a midshipman within four years, which makes the ninety-credit core curriculum—only part of the roughly 140-credit total program of study—extremely inflexible and very difficult to change, at least in the eyes of most academics. Nevertheless, while we may have been slower than other universities to adapt, we successfully infused many global-education elements into that core curriculum. One result was a change in the history requirement of the core curriculum,



which traditionally consisted of three required courses for every midshipman: U.S. Naval History, Western Civilization I, and Western Civilization II. To provide a more global exposure reinforcing the regional and cultural emphasis, the academy reshaped Western Civilization I into The West in a Global Context, and Western Civilization II into The West in the Modern World, both of which have greatly increased the exposure to global content in these more traditional courses. In addition, we have also added two new courses, Asia in a Global Context and The Middle East in a Global Context, as allowable alternatives to the first of these two

**The challenge of exposing our midshipmen to meaningful global experiences remains daunting**

core courses (i.e., The West in a Global Context). These two additions have proved to be greatly popular among midshipmen, and the sections always fill to capacity.

Outside of the core curriculum, we have expanded and enriched our elective and majors program curriculum as well, emphasizing greater internationalization. The language studies department provides not just foreign language training, but a foreign language education by offering language major and minor programs in both Chinese and Arabic and language minor programs in Russian, Japanese, French, German, and Spanish. Foreign language education



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focuses simultaneously on increased language capabilities and cultural competency through the study of specific topics in courses such as Window on Arabic Culture, Arabic Discourse in Society, Modern Arabic Literature, Chinese Culture through Films, Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature, and Intercultural Communication. The political science department has expanded its traditional offerings to include titles such as The Middle East International Politics, Asia International Politics, Islam and Politics in Southeast Asia, and National Security Policy of Japan. The English department has added courses entitled Topics in Continental Literature and Topics in Multiethnic Literature, and regional offerings in the history department have also experienced a dramatic increase. In Asian history, for example, the course offerings alone have increased in number from two just a few years ago to between eight and ten courses per year now, including Chinese Military History; Japanese Cultural History; Samurai; Islam and Cultural Changes in South Asia; and Asian Revolutionary Biographies.

It is equally significant to emphasize that the recently implemented curricular enhancements

in the humanities are closely attuned and coordinated with the study of global political and economic dynamics in the context of pertinent theoretical interpretations and empirical outcomes. Both the political science and economics departments offer a vibrant and topical mélange of courses that provide a comprehensive and systematic framework for the study of languages, cultural environments, and historical processes. These courses focus on political transformations and various models of economic development and include a mandatory core curriculum course, U.S. Government and Constitutional Development.

### **Extracurricular opportunities**

While the curricular revisions are important, we regard our challenge to support and implement the Maritime Strategy as much greater than a simple modification of academic course content. Meaningful global education requires a holistic approach that also demands an extracurricular component to expose our midshipmen continuously to global themes outside the classroom to complement and put into practice what is being taught inside the classroom. The task involves creating and maintaining a

## Meaningful global education requires a holistic approach

global awareness at the Naval Academy so that the midshipmen will be constantly involved in and exposed to current events, cultural changes and conflicts, policies, and plans affecting strategic regions of the world. To this end, we have adapted the concept of graduate-level interdisciplinary research centers that focus on different regions of the world to the unique needs of an undergraduate institution by creating five regional studies forums. These support weekly lectures, performances, and films focused on Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eurasia, and the Middle East (which, in particular, is sponsored by a generous philanthropic grant). Supported by faculty members from across the disciplines, the creation of these regional forums has changed the landscape regarding cultural awareness at the academy. At present, two or three regional-themed lectures or presentations every week are the norm, but it is not rare for there to be as many as four or five each week.

These regional forums have been enormously popular among the midshipmen and faculty. In a general sense, they have served us very well in providing exposure to regions and cultures previously not sufficiently known to or understood by our midshipmen. Our regional forums have played host to the presentation of cutting-edge research and knowledge and an abundance of fresh and exciting ideas by nationally and internationally known experts. For example, representing the Africa Forum, Thomas Woods, former deputy assistant secretary of state for Africa, spoke about African nationalism, and author Gerard Prunier spoke on warfare in Africa. Representing the Asia Forum, Washington-based pundit Robert Kagan spoke on managing the rise of China from a historical perspective, and author Jung Chang spoke about Chairman Mao and Chinese political culture. Representing the Eurasia Forum, Adeed Khalid of Carlton College spoke about Islam in Central Asia, and former Reagan and Bush State Department senior official Ambassador Paula Dobriansky provided her insights on environment, health, and human traffic in Russia and Eastern Europe. Representing the Latin American Forum, Mexican Senator Raul Mejia spoke on the Mexican economy and violence, while Dennis Jett, the former ambassador to Mozambique and Peru, spoke on fighting future wars in Africa and Latin

America. And the Naval Academy's Center for the Middle East and Islamic Studies, which represents the Middle East Forum, featured Rashid

Khalidi speaking on historical perspectives of democracy in the Middle East, and Ambassador John Limbert, one of the fifty-five American hostages held in Iran in 1979, provided his wisdom and insights into Middle Eastern culture and politics.

The forums also have provided an effective mechanism for a robust exchange of ideas between the invited speakers and the Naval Academy community. Every session contains a lively question-and-answer period that often becomes the highlight of the talk. Most speakers have expressed surprise at the high level of sophistication and intellectual acumen of our midshipmen, all of whom attend these talks voluntarily. Our faculty members are also heavily involved and often present their own research and new ideas. Our resident Russian language expert has provided her insights into Russia's social welfare problem; our Japanese language professor presented her recent study on cultural analysis of Japanese conversation; and our Southeast Asia historian shared his research with the midshipmen on the Thai-Cambodian military relationship.

### Study abroad

Another extracurricular component of our new efforts to immerse midshipmen in language and culture is a traditional study abroad program that has been modified to suit our specific circumstances. Our semester study abroad program began five years ago and, due to federal law, must be completed without delaying graduation beyond the four-year limit. We observe the greatest impact on midshipmen who attend semester-length student exchanges with foreign naval academies that immerse our midshipmen in foreign language development (i.e., all classes are taught in the host nation's language), that generate better understanding of how foreign militaries prepare their future leaders, and that create greater cultural awareness. Since most foreign countries have only one institution that educates their future naval military leaders, a Naval Academy midshipman (usually in the junior or senior year) who studies abroad for a semester in a host nation's military academy will likely become friends with the future senior

**United States  
Naval Academy**



navy and marine corps military leaders of that country. Such is how strong allies are created.

In cases where it is not possible to support an academy-to-academy exchange (e.g., in China), our midshipmen study at a civilian university, typically enrolling in content courses taught in English and language courses taught in the host language. Most recently, however, we have begun to engage in 100 percent language immersion programs in both China and

Egypt (for Arabic), where our midshipmen enroll in coursework taught exclusively in the host language in all courses. But whether the experience is an academy-to-academy exchange or a one-way civilian university study abroad experience, we are only able to support twenty-five to thirty midshipmen per year in such programs.

For larger groups of midshipmen, we offer a four- to six-week language immersion program

during the summer called the Language Study Abroad Program (LSAP) to support the seven foreign languages taught at the academy. Participating midshipmen typically have completed at least four semesters of formal language courses. As an example, the annual program in Spain incorporates elements of formal language classes, living with a host family, cultural excursions close to the home base of Salamanca, and a final week spent at the Spanish naval academy.

In contrast to civilian universities, the Naval Academy is unable to provide full-length summer semester study abroad experiences because, when the academic year ends in May of each year, the educational focus shifts to the professional development of the future leaders of our military. In Annapolis, this means the summer is divided into three consecutive four-week “blocks,” and each midshipman is required to select professional activities that occupy two of those blocks. While this eliminates traditional semester study abroad in the summer, it does provide several options for professional engagement opportunities with foreign navies. One such professional activity occurs aboard a tall training ship—an official foreign navy vessel that transports the senior (graduating) class of foreign students for a six- to eight-month cruise around large portions of the world. When possible, the Naval Academy will permit a midshipman to join the foreign navy for a four-week segment of that cruise and, thereby, become totally immersed in the language and military culture of that nation’s naval fleet. For example, midshipmen with sufficient Japanese language proficiency recently embarked on several Japanese training ships in Istanbul, and were integrated into a crew consisting of approximately two hundred Japanese officer candidates and another fifteen international midshipmen from other foreign naval academies around the world.

For the largest groups of midshipmen (over 150 or so per year), we offer several shorter-duration and faculty-led programs with a focus on cultural development, not on language proficiency. A recent example from the spring of 2009 involved two professors (from political

**It is one of  
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dynamics**

science) and eight midshipmen traveling to Malaysia and Cambodia for ten days to study regional poverty through interaction with local populations and community projects. Between the semester study abroad program, the LSAP program, and the faculty-led culture programs, we send almost four hundred midshipmen abroad each year to facilitate their international experiences.

**Conclusion**

At the Naval Academy, we know that we must prepare our future naval leaders for a very different world. It is one of our signature institutional goals to educate leaders who are *adaptable* and who appreciate global and cross-cultural dynamics. We must educate warriors and leaders who know how to communicate with peoples from different cultures, who speak different languages, who practice different customs and religions, and who exhibit patterns of behavior very different from our own. Our graduates can expect to be deployed overseas in the very near future. They can expect to be immersed in a culture vastly different from our own, and they should expect to adapt to that culture.

We face a rapidly globalizing world, over 70 percent of which is covered by water, with 90 percent of its population living within a few hundred miles of the ocean. It is in this context that our current and future leaders in the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps will encounter a much more integrated system of cultures and societies, and they will do so with an enhanced knowledge and understanding of those regions, cultures, and languages. The new Maritime Strategy “focuses on *opportunities*—not threats; on *optimism*—not fear; and on *confidence*—not doubt.” Only through robust language, regional expertise, and cultural awareness programs at places such as the United States Naval Academy can we embrace these opportunities with optimism and confidence. □

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LEO I. HIGDON JR.

# Building a Strong Future

## Strategies for Tough Economic Times

PERSPECTIVES

THIS IS NO ORDINARY RECESSION. And, for leaders in higher education, its impact will resonate long after it has passed. In the years ahead, I believe we will view the last thirty years as a kind of golden age of academic prosperity that was brought to a crashing end by this recession. Yet, the end of the golden age has also created a golden opportunity for us to implement the management philosophies, strategies, and actions that will shape a strong future for higher education.

Now in my third college presidency, I have experienced a wide range of institutions and economic environments, and learned a great deal from each. During that time, record philanthropic support bolstered colleges and universities, and consistently rising budgets financed new buildings, endless research opportunities, and new programs and initiatives. More students were going to college than ever before, and schools across the country competed for students in an arms race of lavish spending to produce increasingly dazzling new facilities.

That all ended in the fall of 2008, when the U.S. economy—indeed, the global economy—came to a crashing halt. Of course, we had all seen the early warning signs of the weakening economy before the bottom fell out of the market: slipping consumer confidence, difficulties in the housing markets, trouble in the financial sector that then spread to other industries, and states with swollen budgets facing diminishing resources and depleted coffers. As soon as the impact began to be felt broadly in the fall of 2008, people across the country began to retrench.

I actually believe that this belt-tightening will have significant long-term benefits—for higher education and for society as a whole. *College Learning for the New Global Century*, the report of the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise, calls on American society to commit to a vision for learning that today's students need for life,

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work, and citizenship (AAC&U 2007). This is our opportunity to support that commitment. Indeed, how we manage through this turbulent economic time will directly influence higher education for decades to come.

### Take stock of the economic environment and its lasting impact

Success won't come without some hardship and, unfortunately, hardship is what many are seeing right now. The financial markets have recovered but are still significantly below their 2007 highs. Despite the unprecedented liquidity created by the Federal Reserve, lending is still sluggish. Along with rising unemployment—most recently just under 10 percent—we are seeing significant “underemployment,” as workers who want full-time jobs make do with part-time work just to get by. Some workers are dropping out of the workforce altogether. The result is increasing wariness on the part of consumers—wariness that may affect their willingness to invest in higher education.

While public officials have jumped on the positive gross domestic product figures at the end of 2009 and, with this positive indicator, declared the recession “over,” there is currently no consensus on how strong the recovery will be. Some prognosticators are proclaiming that unemployment may not decline significantly until 2011; others are talking about a “jobless” recovery and an economy that will not be able to absorb the unemployed from this recession plus normal job growth as more than two million workers—most of them recent college graduates—enter the labor pool every year. The reality is that even as the economy recovers, the effects of this recession will linger long after economists have declared it to be officially over.

This is the most severe and direct impact the economy has had on higher education since the early 1970s, if not since the Great Depression. The fallout we have seen across the higher education landscape is significant.

- State appropriations for most public four- and two-year institutions are decreasing. While California has certainly been the

**We can come out of this difficult period stronger, but it will require focus and fundamental change**

# for Higher Education



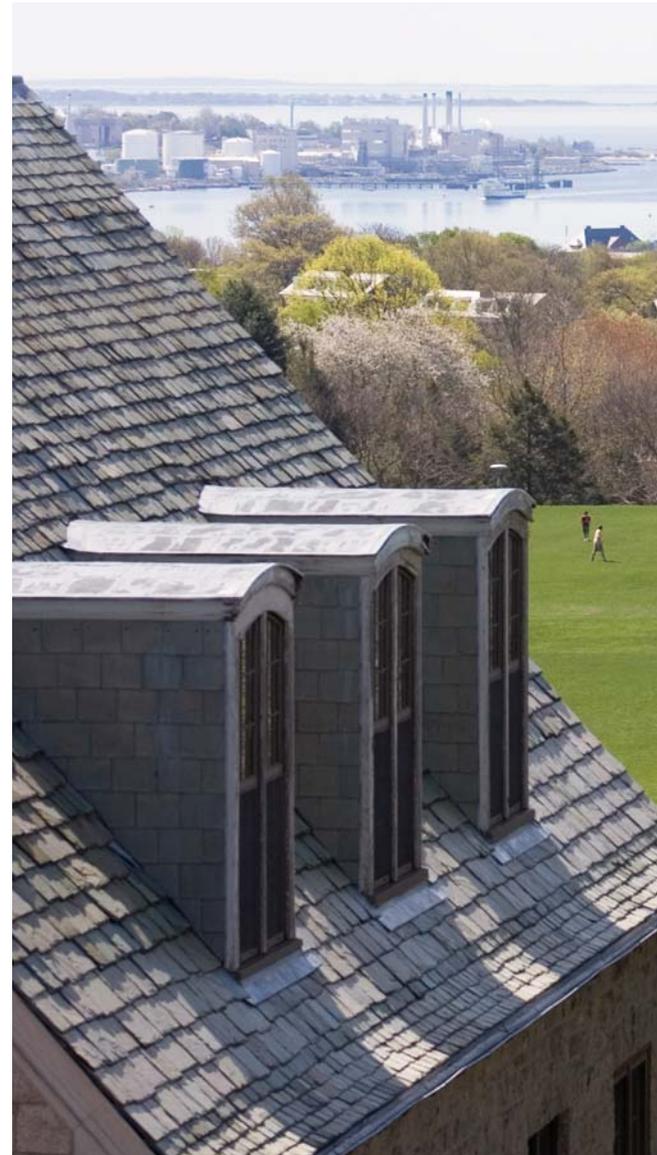
Connecticut College

hardest hit to date, other states could reach their own crisis points as well.

- Community colleges are overwhelmed with unfunded students, and many have been forced to restrict enrollments.
- Fundraising is negatively impacted due to the decreasing net worth of many alumni and other supporters. For all institutions, this is severely impacting campaigns and annual funds.
- While endowments have recovered from their March 2009 lows, they have been hit particularly hard over this period. Whether it is large institutions with endowments in the billions, or much smaller colleges with relatively small endowments, the 25 to 30-plus percent losses we saw in 2008 and early 2009 have hurt. With many colleges' spending rules based on averages over a three-year period, we are not yet experiencing the full impact. Meanwhile, even as we hope for some recovery, budgets have been affected considerably.
- Because of families' financial situations, institutions are forced to exercise restraint in deciding whether to raise tuition.
- Some parents of current or prospective students are unable or unwilling to borrow due to negative home equity or concern over their jobs.

While college and university responses have varied, we have seen some similar actions taking place across the country. To date, these have included pay or hiring freezes, furloughs, curtailment or termination of programs, restrictions on travel, new limitations on outside consultants, and even paring back workforces in some cases. Additionally, certain institutions are overenrolling students—a short-term decision that can certainly have long-lasting repercussions.

At Connecticut College, we have continued to increase our budget during this crisis, although more modestly than in the past. But one response strategy we share with many other institutions is to increase spending on financial aid in order to assist students whose families have been affected by the recession. Amidst growing demand for financial support, schools have substantially increased their investment in financial aid, in some cases setting aside reserves that, under better conditions, would have been used to fund other institutional initiatives. The question we all face is how



sustainable these financial aid increases will be, given the possibility of a weak recovery.

### **Reexamine mission and core values**

Over the last thirty years, higher education institutions have had the resources to fund grand ambitions. In fact, many educational institutions have taken on activities, programs, even new facilities (with the associated operating budget consequences) during the last ten to twenty years that are not central to their core mission. This is no longer possible.

At this point, institutions need to evaluate everything—both in the short and long term—and reunite efforts to focus more directly on our core educational missions. We need to take a good, hard look at where our colleges



and universities are headed, what central values we hold most dear, and then very purposefully connect all of the programs, practices, and initiatives back to the educational mission. This examination is critical before moving forward. We need to be bold, be honest and, most importantly, involve the entire institution—all stakeholders—in this analysis.

We can use the results as a filter against which to test all actions and responses to the economic downturn. In this environment, as always, continuous improvement should be both a goal and a reality. We should create on our campuses a culture of evidence in which decisions are informed by data. Connecticut College was an early participant in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education,

which investigates critical student outcomes. We rely on Wabash data, as well as results from the National Study of Student Engagement and our own focus groups and surveys, to make decisions that support the achievement of our stated educational outcomes. We believe this will help our institution thrive over the long term. That is our focus.

#### **Focus on critical financial and operating strategies**

Across higher education, leaders can also use their own unique data to employ new or revised strategies to sustain their missions and remain successful. Any reaffirmation of the core educational mission must go hand-in-hand with a comprehensive review of operating

budgets, because any changes in action plans will have budget implications. At the same time, we need to be constantly looking for additional liquidity in this increasingly uncertain climate. I have always followed the practice of submitting balanced budgets with ample contingencies.

In a well-run institution, the budget is based on strategic plans and priorities. But we must also be flexible and nimble enough to adapt our strategies to changes in the economic environment. We shouldn't be afraid to alter plans, if we can do so with essential outcomes firmly in place. On my own campus, the economic environment has led us to discuss and reconsider our approach to new science facilities. When we closely examined the program objectives through the lens of our core mission and the realities of available resources in this market, we concluded that we could achieve our academic goals by renovating and expanding a historic campus building rather than constructing a stand-alone new facility. We'll benefit further from our conservative construction policy: we don't put a shovel in the ground until we have full project

### The value of a liberal education will only grow over time

funding in place, including a construction contingency and an endowment for the building's continued operation and renewal.

In the process of evaluating data and even as the economy may dictate some cutting back, keep the institution's aspirations on track by setting aside funds for future investment. Your vision may be altered during tough economic times, but moving the institution forward is critical.

In this economy, it is also important that the key revenue drivers and expenses that provide the framework for annual budgets are monitored more carefully than ever. Are the budgets sustainable? Is the senior team reviewing data on applications, enrollments, financial aid requests, and other important areas that provide an early perspective on critical revenue and expense trends? It is essential for the institution to monitor this data to avoid negative "surprises."

As for the budget process itself, one strategy that has worked well at Connecticut College is to keep all department budgets flat on a year-to-year basis. All managers must submit



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and justify any requests for funding above current levels to a committee of administrators, faculty, staff, and students who collectively recommend budget priorities to me. The advantage of this approach is that our managers become used to prioritizing initiatives and growing through substitution, putting forth only proposals directly related to the strategic goals of the college.

Finally, partnering has been an important higher education strategy over the last several decades. It needs to be reimagined in light of the economic downturn to assess whether additional partnerships might better achieve our business and educational objectives while conserving resources.

### **Communication and outreach are essential, especially in difficult financial times**

As we make these decisions, it is important that we continue to communicate proactively inside and outside the institution. Communicating what we're doing is critical; communicating *why* we're doing it is even more important. In addition to building understanding of and consensus for decisions, we also can take advantage of these communications to build excitement and make the case for the support and continued involvement of current students, parents, faculty, staff, and the broader alumni body. This is the time to engage them, seek their input, and broaden their understanding of all issues that affect the institution.

With all that we do, we must be sure to keep the lines of communication open among our peer institutions and industry associations as well. In this more difficult economic period, greater demands are placed on all senior-level administrators. The institution can be isolated in the best of times, and especially so when daily demands seem daunting. We all need to reach out to colleagues, share our concerns, and discuss options. On a national and regional level, the Association of American Colleges and Universities plays an important role in bringing colleagues together.

As always, when we are with our peers, we need to engage in conversations about our model of educating students. Discuss new ideas, new concepts and how they might apply to our own colleges or universities. For example, how can technology provide greater support to achieve essential learning outcomes? Even in a challenging economy, there will continue

to be opportunities to position our institutions wisely. We must weigh quests for national recognition and prestige against the desired student outcomes—how can we provide the best education and move our institutions forward within the limits of our resources?

### **Looking forward**

We can come out of this difficult period stronger, but it will require focus and fundamental change. We need to look forward, past the current economic downturn. Can essential learning outcomes be achieved with different pedagogical approaches without impairing the educational mission? Does the approach need to change, and, if so, how will our institutions adapt while continuing to uphold our mission and pursue our vision? This is a good time to be innovative, to try new approaches—whether in the classroom or beyond.

From my perspective as the president of a highly selective residential liberal arts college, I believe the value of a liberal education will only grow over time. Liberal education opens the door to a life rich in intellectual engagement and provides the best possible preparation for successful and fulfilling lives. When we focus on our educational mission, and achieving the essential student outcomes to which we aspire, we foster an environment that supports students' exploration and self-discovery to the maximum degree. This kind of education requires significant, ongoing investment in people, programs, and infrastructure. And the returns on this investment last a lifetime. □

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### REFERENCE

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AARON M. BROWER AND KAREN KUROTSUCHI INKELAS

# Living-Learning

## One High-Impact Educational Practice

PERSPECTIVES

THE LIBERAL EDUCATION AND AMERICA'S PROMISE (LEAP) initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) provides substance and direction to President Obama's American Graduation Initiative, which seeks to encourage more students to obtain baccalaureate degrees. The LEAP initiative defines the practical and aspirational goals of an undergraduate degree, as well as the educational experiences that lead to the achievement of those goals. We need this definition; without it, the baccalaureate degree would be simply a credential, and the

success of higher education would be

measured by the least-common-denominator metric of throughput and efficiency—graduating the greatest number of students as cheaply as possible.

LEAP's combination of essential learning outcomes—learning how to learn, how to distinguish good information from bad, how to frame and solve complex problems, how to work with others, and learning about the world and one's place within it—and “high-impact” educational practices outlines straightforward experiences and opportunities that produce the kinds of skills and abilities needed by citizens of the world (AAC&U 2007). Moreover, the high-impact practices not only help all students learn, but they also have compensatory benefits for students from groups that, historically, have underachieved in higher education (Kuh 2008).

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We know more about some of these high-impact practices than others, and enough about a few to provide solid recommendations about how they should be offered. We summarize here what we know about residential learning communities, more broadly called living-learning programs (LLPs), based on results from the National Study of Living-Learning Programs. LLPs create comprehensive in- and out-of-class learning environments that engender the type of student engagement with faculty, peers, and curricula that we hope happens in college (Brower and Kettinger 1998).

### A brief history of living-learning programs

LLPs are residential housing programs that incorporate academically based themes and build community through common learning. LLPs range from a handful of students living together because they share common academic interests to a four-year, degree-granting, residential “college-within-a-college” (Shapiro and Levine 1999; Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, and Gabelnick 2004).

LLPs have historical roots in the “social clubs” of Oxford and Cambridge and their later incarnations at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton; but as intentional communities organized around specific learning objectives, LLPs had their beginning with Alexander Meiklejohn's experimental college, which existed at the University of Wisconsin from 1927 to 1932 (Nelson 2009). LLPs took hold during the expansion of higher education in the 1950s and 1960s, and a few of the early comprehensive programs still exist today, notably the University of Illinois's Allen Hall/Unit One and the University of Michigan's Residential College. With emphasis on the past twenty-five years of partnerships between student affairs and academic affairs (Keeling 2006), LLPs sprang up across the country, and for a period they became a cause célèbre, spawning conferences, directories, and special issues of journals

**Successful LLPs might be considered microcosms of what our colleges and universities can and should be**

# Programs

**We Now Know a Lot About**



University of Wisconsin–Madison

(Inkelas 2008). As is often the case with causes célèbres, however, LLPs were sometimes adopted without much evidence of their effectiveness.

Based upon our own professional experience with LLPs, as well as our scholarly training as social scientists, we sought to develop a national program of research on student outcomes associated with living-learning programs. In a recent essay, Brownell and Swaner (2009a) emphasized the need for studies that are multi-institutional, use longitudinal designs and mixed methods, and examine complex student outcomes. This is exactly the model we use to study living-learning programs through the National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP). Indeed, both Hurtado (2009) and Brownell and Swaner (2009b) cited the NSLLP as a recommended resource in studying collegiate interventions designed to facilitate students' educational outcomes.

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### The National Study of Living-Learning Programs

The NSLLP began in 2001 and has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the Association of College and University Housing Officers International, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and College Student Educators International. Following a review of the literature on LLPs, we developed a survey instrument and, in 2003, piloted it on four campuses to test its reliability and validity as well as to refine our sampling and data collection strategies. In the spring of 2004, we administered the survey to undergraduates at thirty-four postsecondary institutions in the United States, obtaining

### National Study of Living-Learning Programs

The National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP) assesses how participation in Living-Learning Programs (LLPs) influences academic, social, and developmental outcomes for college students. NSLLP is administered annually with both cross-sectional and longitudinal components. It is the only national outcome assessment of these programs. For more information, visit [www.livelearnstudy.net](http://www.livelearnstudy.net).

responses from nearly 24,000 students. On each campus, all or a random sample of LLP participants were surveyed, along with comparison samples of students who lived in traditional residence halls. The comparison students were matched as closely as possible to the LLP students by gender, race or ethnicity, and year in school. In the spring of 2007, we followed up with the respondents from 2004 to provide longitudinal data on the long-term effects of LLP participation, as well as administered a new baseline survey on forty-six campuses. In both 2004 and 2007, we also administered a survey to campus practitioners that queried them on the structural and programmatic components of their LLPs. Finally, in the spring of 2008, we produced case studies of four campuses with exemplary LLPs based on the results from the survey data.

The “inputs-environments-outcome” (I-E-O) model developed by Alexander Astin (1993) serves as the conceptual framework for the NSLLP. In the I-E-O model, student *outcomes* result from both student *inputs* (or precollege characteristics) and college *environments* (various classes, programs, policies, etc. with which students come into contact while in college). Astin asserts that studies of the impact of college environments on student outcomes will be biased unless they control for student inputs. Moreover, studies that only investigate the role of one college environment (for example, the major) on student outcomes will overestimate the impact of that one environmental element if the potential influence of other college environments is not studied simultaneously. Thus, the I-E-O model utilized for the NSLLP includes several inputs, environments, and outcomes (see fig. 1).

**Figure 1. NSLLP constructs**

## Inputs

- Demographics
- High school achievement
- Pre-college assessment of the importance of college involvement and perceptions of self-confidence

## Environments

- Academic major
- Peer interactions
- Faculty interactions
- Cocurricular involvement
- Study-group interactions
- Alcohol-related experiences
- Use of residence hall resources
- Perceptions of residence hall climate
- Diverse interactions
- Time spent on leisure activities

## Outcomes

- Academic and social transition to college
- Perceptions of intellectual abilities and growth
- Perceptions of self-confidence
- Appreciation of diversity
- Sense of civic engagement
- Alcohol use and behaviors
- Persistence/drop-out risk
- College GPA self-reports
- Overall satisfaction and sense of belonging

- Residential college
- Research
- Upper division (juniors or seniors only)
- Reserve Officers' Training Corps
- First-year transition
- Umbrella (many themes under one banner, such as foreign-language halls)
- Wellness or health
- Women

There were some interesting structural trends among the LLPs as well: the typical size was around fifty students, and programs were usually housed within one discrete portion of a residence hall. For nearly half of the LLPs in our study, oversight and affiliation of the LLP director were vested in offices of housing and residence life. Of the remaining programs, 21 percent were directed by someone in an academic department, 13 percent were codirected by an individual each in academic affairs and student affairs, and the rest were governed by boards or through some other arrangement.

Despite the aims of LLPs to foster better-integrated in- and out-of-class experiences for students, many did not provide any academic component. Slightly over half of the LLPs in the NSLLP did not include any form of academic coursework, and of the remaining programs 28 percent offered only one course. Similarly, faculty involvement was, overall, quite low among the LLPs in the study. Twenty-three percent included no faculty participation whatsoever, and 64 percent utilized somewhere between one and three faculty members. Teaching courses and offering academic advising were two of the most common forms of faculty involvement in the LLPs.

On the other hand, student affairs staff members were present in 85 percent of the LLPs in the study. The most common forms of participation included performing administrative duties, organizing social events, mentoring, and supervising live-in student staff. Most LLPs did not require students to participate in any cocurricular activities, although 11 to 23 percent required that students take part in community service, academic advising, team-building activities, group projects, and orientation. The most popular optional cocurricular activities in LLPs included cultural outings (79 percent), multicultural programming (77 percent), and study groups (75 percent).

**What do LLPs look like across the country?**

We learned that a wide variation exists among LLPs based on their structures and programming. Our 2007 data collection included participants in over six hundred different LLPs around the country. Absent a comprehensive typology of LLPs in the literature, we performed a content analysis of these programs in order to group them into similarly themed categories. This process resulted in seventeen program themes:

- Civic and social leadership
- Disciplinary
- Fine and creative arts
- General academic
- Honors
- Sophomores only
- Cultural
- Leisure
- Political interest

### Which essential learning outcomes do LLPs facilitate?

Results from the NSLLP demonstrate that LLP participation promotes the type of student learning outcomes identified as essential by AAC&U's LEAP initiative. Again, our comparisons were based on students from the same colleges and universities who either did or did not live in LLPs, and who were demographically similar by gender, race or ethnicity, and year in school. Further analyses revealed the LLP and non-LLP students in our study did not differ by high school grades, ACT or SAT scores, or type of financial aid received. Moreover, these results represent the effect of living in an LLP averaged across the entire spectrum of LLPs—from those that were comprehensively resourced with very strong programming, to those with few resources and programs. As we summarize below, recommendations can be offered by isolating effects from the strongest programs.

Students who lived in LLPs applied more critical-thinking skills (such as thinking critically about what they read and developing opinions by analyzing the pros and cons of an argument) and took advantage of opportunities to apply knowledge to new settings (such as applying what they learned in one class to their work in another class). They expressed more commitment to civic engagement, and they acted on their commitment by volunteering or taking service-learning courses more frequently. Finally, students in the LLPs felt they made a smoother transition to college, both academically and socially. LLP students did not show differences in their appreciation for racial and ethnic diversity on their campus, nor did they say that they grew more than their non-LLP peers in terms of cognitive complexity, liberal learning, and personal philosophies.

Participation in LLPs also promotes other positive outcomes—for example, better behaviors and consequences related to drinking



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alcohol (Brower 2008) and smoother college transitions for first-generation students (Inkelas et al. 2007). In addition, we found that the presence of LLPs in residence halls had positive “second-hand effects” on non-LLP students living in those same halls (Longerbeam, Inkelas, and Brower 2007).

### What LLP practices are associated with positive student outcomes?

Table 1 provides a summary of the LLP environmental elements that were statistically significant and positively associated with specific student outcomes: studying with peers, holding academic or sociocultural discussions with peers, interacting with faculty members on course-related matters, and students’ feelings that their residence hall climate is socially supportive and tolerant. Moreover, students’ perception of their residence hall climate as academically supportive was positively related to all of the student learning outcomes we examined.

Thus, consistent with Kuh’s (2008) explanation of why high-impact educational practices are effective, we found that the more often students interacted with peers and faculty, and the more strongly they felt supported academically and socially by their residence hall environment, the stronger was the likelihood that they achieved the learning outcomes.

Further, we found that LLP students planned to engage in other high-impact practices. They planned to do research with faculty, to study abroad, and to complete senior theses and capstone experiences. Thus, students’ potential to reap the benefits of high-impact practices only increases as a result of their LLP participation.

### What are the lasting benefits of living in an LLP?

From our longitudinal analyses, we found that even a one-year LLP experience generated lasting effects on students. Those students who had lived in an LLP during their first year in

**Table 1. LLP environmental elements that predict selected student learning outcomes**

LLP Environment	Critical Thinking	Application of Knowledge	Commitment to Civic Engagement	Smooth Academic Transition	Smooth Social Transition
In peer study group			✓	✓	✓
Academic/vocational discussions with peers		✓	✓	✓	✓
Social/cultural discussions with peers	✓	✓	✓		
Course-related faculty interaction	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Academically supportive residence hall climate	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Socially supportive residence hall climate		✓	✓	✓	✓

college had higher levels of academic self-confidence, were more likely to be a mentor for other students, and remained more committed to civic engagement *three years later*. Since the living-learning programs captured by the NSLLP ranged across the entire continuum from those that we would consider high-quality and comprehensive to those that we would not, these lasting impacts are even more remarkable.

### Recommendations for structuring LLPs

The strongest LLPs were those that produced the strongest learning outcomes in students. Strong LLPs demonstrated a clear presence for their student affairs–academic affairs partnership; had well-conceptualized, academically oriented learning objectives; and took full advantage of their community setting to promote learning whenever and wherever it occurred (see fig. 2).

## Comprehensive programs that incorporate high-impact practices are the antidote to the view of higher education as a degree mill

It may come as no surprise to see that strong outcomes are produced by comprehensive LLPs for which every programming detail has been thought through. Strong LLPs are those that anticipate, nurture, and value learning opportunities in and out of the classroom. It

may also come as no surprise that LLPs produce the strongest outcomes when rich opportunities exist for students to practice the skills required to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Positive outcomes are strongest when the LLP is rich with the kind of research, internship, and service-learning opportunities that allow students to practice integrative learning skills. Outcomes are also strongest when the LLP provides ample opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to collaborate in ways that allow for practice in working with others and when faculty, staff, and students are able to take on a variety of roles together. Indeed, our findings are consistent with the “components of success”

### Figure 2. Three characteristics of successful LLPs

LLPs with the strongest outcomes are most likely to

1. Have a strong student affairs–academic affairs presence and partnership:
  - Program objectives value vital, well-defined, multiple roles for faculty, staff, and graduate students.
  - Communication among all faculty and staff leaders is excellent and frequent.
  - Budget and program oversight are shared.
2. Identify clear learning objectives with strong academic focus throughout the program:
  - At least one credit-bearing course taught specifically for LLP participants is offered as part of the program.
  - Study space is provided as part of physical facilities.
  - A healthy dose of cocurricular activities is academically focused—internships, service learning, collaborative research, career-focused workshops.
3. Capitalize on community settings to create opportunities for learning wherever and whenever it occurs:
  - High engagement and intentionality are key, throughout all aspects of the program.
  - Learning by doing—through programming, staff training, budget decisions, student discipline, hall governance, etc.
  - Physical characteristics of the program mirror objectives.
  - Faculty, staff, and students can take on variety of roles—instructor, mentor, advisor, etc.
  - Faculty and teaching assistants are helped to make best use of the residence-hall environment, which can be an unfamiliar setting for them.

that Brownell and Swaner (2009a) outlined in their work on high-impact practices.

It takes continual work and self-examination to realize the potential of LLPs. In our site visits, we heard story after story from both staff and faculty members about the pressures of routine campus life crowding out continual discussion and planning, as well as faculty-staff differentials in the broader campus overshadowing the collaborations necessary to make LLPs function well. It takes vigilance for all involved to remain in active communication and to acknowledge the valuable roles played by others in the LLP. The rewards are worth it, of course, but we do not want to sugarcoat the effort involved.

### **LLPs as microcosms for the best of higher education**

LLPs exist within the culture of their institutions. Their budgets, staffing, and programming have to be sustainable within the budgets, staffing, and programming of the institution as a whole. Yet because they cut against institutional grain, key elements of successful LLPs can be described as the envy of the rest of the institution. Successful LLPs require collaboration among faculty and staff, which often rebalances typical faculty-staff power differentials. Successful LLPs require continual coordination and communication among all aspects of programming, which is not easy to achieve within typically decentralized modern institutions. And successful LLPs equally value, and are equally intentional about, learning that occurs both in and out of the classroom.

In short, successful LLPs—those that produce students who achieve the LEAP essential learning outcomes—might be considered microcosms of what our colleges and universities can and should be: intentionally designed learning environments that work doggedly to maximize student learning, and particularly student learning related to the high-order skills and abilities that allow students to become citizens and leaders of the world.

The accumulation of results from the NSLLP provides us with evidence that high-impact educational practices work, and can be programmed into learning environments in productive ways to produce students who achieve the essential learning outcomes. Comprehensive programs that incorporate high-impact practices are the antidote to the view of higher education as a degree mill. If we are

serious about student learning, these comprehensive programs should be the centerpiece of higher education. □

To respond to this article, e-mail [liberaled@aacu.org](mailto:liberaled@aacu.org), with the authors' names on the subject line.

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DEANDRA LITTLE, PETER FELTEN, AND CHAD BERRY

# Liberal Education in

PERSPECTIVES

THE PAST CENTURY'S technological revolution has returned images to a central place in our individual and collective lives. Photography became widely popular in the first half of the past century, creating new visual forms of high art, mass advertising, and amateur entertainment. During the latter half of the twentieth century, innovations in digital imaging and network technologies have made visuals a primary mode of global communication in print, on screens, and online—becoming at times both the means and the message. Not only do we see still and moving images on the screens that surround us daily, but new tools make it

simple for ordinary people to create, manipulate, and share images like never before.

The centrality of images is a fundamental shift, not a passing fad. More than a decade ago, the cultural theorist W. J. T. Mitchell identified a “pictorial turn” in contemporary culture; he predicted that images would reemerge alongside texts as the primary sources of knowledge and meaning in the world, asserting that “the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of the image” (1994, 2). The acceleration of technological and cultural change over the past decade bolsters Mitchell's analysis, as new tools allow millions of people to post pictures to Flickr and videos to YouTube.

Many of today's college students are on the leading edge of this wave of images, at least when they are not in our classes. Unlike changes in print technology, which occurred

incrementally over a period of several centuries, the ways images are displayed and produced digitally change at an apparently accelerating pace. Each change increases our students' access to images and their ability to construct them. What doesn't necessarily increase is their ability to make meaning from this flood of imagery. College and university classrooms rarely help them with this essential task. As Carmen Luke has argued, the classroom might be the only place where today's students are not “blending, mixing, and matching knowledge drawn from diverse textual sources and communication media” (2003, 398).

It would be foolish for faculty or colleges to dismiss this visual revolution as a pop culture event. Many academic disciplines have rich histories of using images to represent knowledge, ranging from chemistry, physics, and economics to cultural, composition, and communication studies. Emerging technologies have broadened the scholarly use of visual methodologies in new fields like bioinformatics and media studies and with new tools like geographic information systems and brain imaging.

Despite the writings of theorists like Mitchell, the flood of images saturating our culture, and the ascendancy of new visualization technologies in academic research, visual literacy continues to be marginalized in the national discourse about education, particularly liberal education. *Greater Expectations*, the 2002 report of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), for instance, contended that one of the core characteristics of an “empowered learner” was the capacity to “effectively communicate orally, visually, in writing, and in a second language” (xi). In AAC&U's follow-up report, *Liberal Education Outcomes* (2005), however, references to the visual disappeared. As art historian James Elkins recently argued, this kind of oversight needs to end; higher education must “take up the challenge of providing a visual culture ‘core curriculum’ for all students. Images are central

**Visual literacy is a critical skill for twenty-first-century students and ought to be a central component of a liberal education**

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# a Visual World



University of Virginia

to our lives, and it is time they become central in our universities” (2008, 8). Visual literacy, in short, is a critical skill for twenty-first-century students and ought to be a central component of a liberal education.

### **Visual literacy**

Our eyes are a powerful conduit of information, processing diverse stimuli rapidly and, for the most part, efficiently. At a young age, sighted individuals learn to “see” in ways that come to seem effortless and automatic. As teachers, we have a tendency to conflate this effortless seeing with visual literacy, assuming that students who possess the requisite baseline skills to “see” can, and therefore do, carefully observe and analyze each image before them. However, the often cursory attention students pay to the task of seeing a new image or reseeing a familiar image is not sufficient to produce a detailed observation of what is there, let alone a sophisticated interpretation of what it might mean. We do not expect students to master a complex written text quickly, so why do we let them get by so easily with a visual one?

The increasingly varied ways we visualize our world require students not just to see, but to look. Because looking is a practice much like speaking, writing, or singing, it requires guided, intentional, and repeated practice. If we want to help prepare our students now for the future they face, we must teach them how to interpret and negotiate the social, economic, political, scientific, and aesthetic relationships and meanings embedded within images. In short, we need to teach them how to look. As Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright point out, “reading and interpreting images is one way that we, as viewers, contribute to the process of assigning value to the culture in which we live. Practices of looking, then, are not passive acts of consumption. By looking at and engaging with images in the world, we influence the meanings and uses assigned to the images that fill our day-to-day lives” (2001, 42). Teaching students how to look—namely, to understand how images are constructed; what, how, and why they mean; and how to produce their own—improves their visual literacy and, as a result, their ability to make meaning of their cultures and their world.

This conversation isn’t necessarily a new one—the term “visual literacy” was first coined in 1969 (Debes)—but it is one that we can no

longer casually dismiss or relegate to a limited set of disciplines. The term “visual literacy” is also a contested one, though it best fits, if imprecisely, the set of skills and understandings under discussion. Scholars continue to debate the primacy of the visual, suggesting instead that ours is more accurately described as “the information age,” and that information or media literacy be promoted instead of visual literacy. Though also important, these terms are not equivalent to, or fully adequate umbrella terms for, what we are talking about. Advocates of information literacy, such as Diana Oblinger and Brian Hawkins (2006) of EDUCAUSE, typically nod to visuals, but they focus almost exclusively on the need to develop students’ capacities to acquire, interpret, and evaluate texts. Images are different from texts, and developing visual literacy will require deliberate and reiterative practice, not merely a glance at the occasional multimedia source.

We recognize, as well, that “literacy” only imperfectly describes the competencies and knowledge necessary for image consumption, interpretation, and production. Viewing the skills needed for visual literacy as analogous to those needed for literacy proper, however, helps us recognize that interpreting images is also an iterative process requiring instruction and practice in consuming, interpreting, and producing images—in effect, both “reading” and “writing” them on multiple occasions over extended periods of time. Calls for other kinds of literacy emphasize that this is an ongoing project. Just as we assume that college students who arrive knowing how to read and write proficiently still benefit from repeated practice across and throughout the curriculum, so too should we recognize that they will benefit from continued instruction in how to observe, use, and create images and visualizations.

### **Teaching visual literacy**

At its most basic, teaching visual literacy encourages the habits of mind we hope to inculcate in students—the ability to think critically, and even to think deeply and deliberately, about the images and information they receive from myriad sources. Teaching students how to look at an image, in other words, promotes deep rather than hyper attention. Careful, systematic interpretation or composition of an image teaches students how to sustain attention to complex problems, the opposite

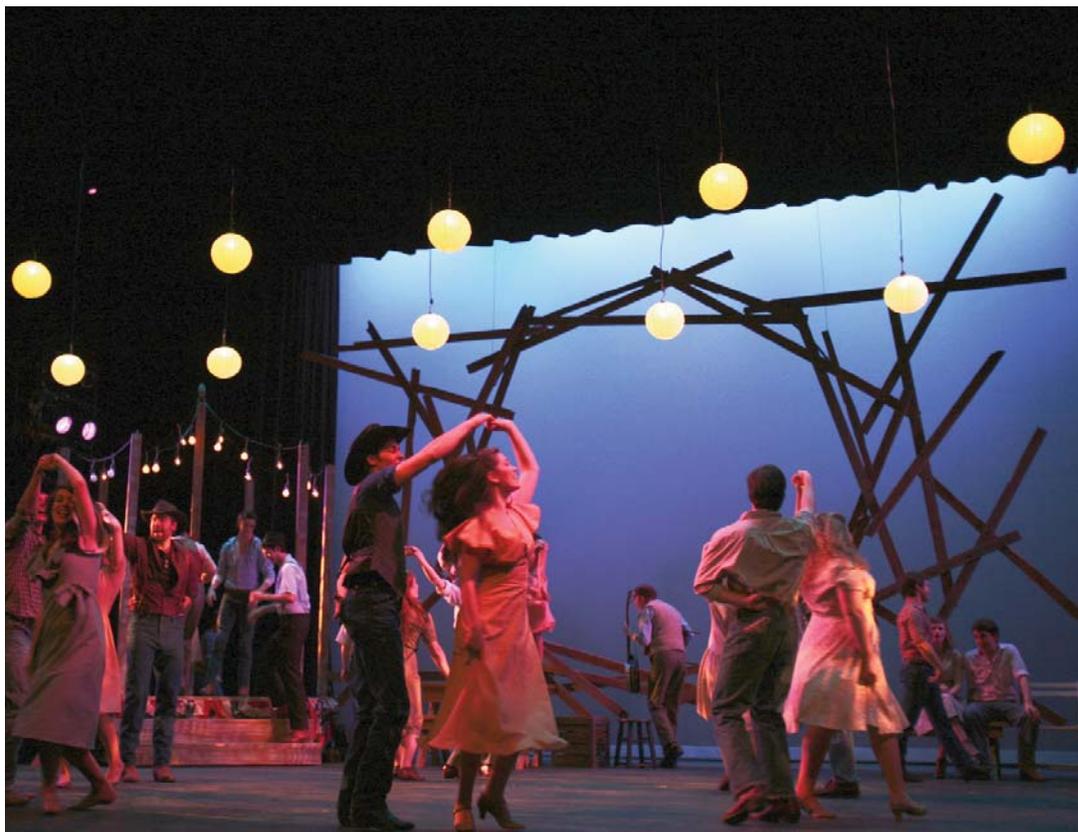


of the cognitive style often encouraged by digital technologies (Hayles 2007). At its best, helping students attain higher levels of visual literacy introduces them to disciplinary methodologies, ideologies, and interpretive practices and even prompts the kinds of interdisciplinary conversations that lead to integrative learning.

Elkins (2003) calls for academic disciplines outside the set of usual suspects—art history, cognitive science, media studies, and so on—to begin thinking about how we prepare our students to deal with images after they leave higher education. This move is an important one, because it acknowledges that teaching for visual literacy needs to happen in a variety of settings, from the first-year general education core to courses leading up to or capping

off a major. It also recognizes that visual literacy can serve different, but related, purposes. In a general education setting, students develop the transferable skills necessary for making meaning of a variety of images that they carry with them to other academic and nonacademic settings. Taught within departmental courses—from anatomy to zoology and everywhere in between—visual literacy skills function as disciplinary training, as an introduction to the ways experts within a field look at a particular image, graph, or photograph. In an interdisciplinary context, explicitly teaching students how to analyze and create images opens a space within which students can integrate ideas, concepts, and methodologies from multiple disciplines in order to discover how these do

## Elon University



and don't help them make meaning of the images they encounter or the ones they produce.

Take, as an example, the experience of Professor Tony Crider in an introductory astrophysics course at Elon University. Over the past several years, Crider used the rich visual resources created by the Sloan Digital Sky Survey (SDSS; [www.sdss.org](http://www.sdss.org)) to develop rigorous laboratory exercises for his students. These images made it possible for his students to interact with astronomical data in the same way that experts in the field do. After the laboratory success, Crider decided to integrate SDSS data into his exams. In his view, doing so significantly improved the nature of the exam because it required students to analyze real data, which in turn caused him to discard typical pre-SDSS exam questions, such as the following:

The parallax angle of Proxima Centauri is 0.77 archsecond.

- A. Find the distance to Proxima Centauri in (i) parsecs; (ii) cm.
- B. Determine the distance modulus for Proxima Centauri.

Instead, Crider gave his students authentic problems, providing them with two SDSS image-rich summary data sheets (just like the ones they had used in lab) and asked, "Which galaxy is farther? Calculate the distance to each." He was surprised to find that his students had extreme difficulty in extracting facts from the visuals in order to solve the problems. In

one instance, many students asked him how an answer could be derived without knowing a parameter  $z$ , even when they had a graph labeled " $z=0.046766$ " on the screen in front of them. In another problem, when students were asked to determine which galaxy was bluer, most students tried unsuccessfully to use complex and inappropriate formulas to solve the problem. Only one student out of a dozen noted that the image of the second galaxy had a slightly bluer tint. While this group of students had no difficulty solving much more difficult mathematical problems, they could only do so when provided with the necessary numbers in writing. The exam highlights the difficulty that today's students have in extracting relevant information from visuals. By revising his teaching to integrate SDSS data more thoroughly into the entire course and to help students practice reading the images found within them, Crider found that his students' exam performance improved. In this case, using visual data allowed him to deepen his students' disciplinary knowledge and skills.

Professor Chad Berry at Berea College also has disciplinary goals in his Appalachian Cultures course. In one exercise on understanding the relationship between coal mining, environmental degradation, and poverty, Berry's students examine a collection of visual resources, including color-coded maps displaying economic status superimposed on

**Liberal education in  
the twenty-first century  
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of knowing**

mountaintop removal coal mining locations, along with pre- and post-mining satellite images of Appalachian areas. This exercise not only prompts students to develop their knowledge and critical thinking skills, but it also encourages them to reflect on issues of social responsibility and to integrate their personal experiences (as people who grew up in Appalachia) with their academic learning.

### Conclusion

As these two examples illustrate, visual resources are one tool for helping students achieve the essential learning outcomes of liberal education. To best prepare students for life in the twenty-first century, we must more deliberately consider how we help them learn to make meaning of images. Research on learning suggests that the most effective way to promote long-term student learning would be to scaffold visual literacy in courses and curricula so that students develop progressively more sophisticated skills and abilities (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 1999). At least, we should follow art historian Barbara Stafford's suggestion that we teach and assess students' "visual competence" as a necessary baseline to literacy (Elkins 2008).

How best to approach this? We should be discussing—on our campuses, in our departments, in our general education committees, and within our national organizations—the following key questions regarding visual literacy and student learning:

- What kinds of student interpretations, projects, and understandings constitute appropriate levels of visual literacy in a disciplinary or a general education course?
- More broadly, what does visual literacy look like on a curricular level? How do we approach the development of visual literacy systematically and intentionally? Rigorously? Sequentially? Cumulatively?
- How will we assess visual literacy in courses, programs, or across the curriculum?
- What support do faculty, librarians, technologists, and administrators need to integrate visual literacy into the heart of liberal education?

As we argue above, these are not just rhetorical questions or ones limited to select

disciplines. These questions challenge all of us; they challenge our students, our teaching, our curricula, our institutions, and our future. Liberal education in the twenty-first century needs to take seriously the visual as a

fundamental way of knowing. As meaning is increasingly made through the combination of text and image, visual literacy is essential for understanding our disciplines as well as local and global cultures. We should be developing in our students a set of visual literacy skills and capacities to prepare them to know, to do, and to be ethical citizens in a rapidly changing world. To do that, we all must learn to look. □

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JEREMY HAEFNER AND DEBORAH L. FORD

# The Double Helix

## A Purposeful Pathway to an Intentional and Transformational Liberal Education

**A robust partnership between academic affairs and student affairs is essential to fostering transformational learning**

The disciplinary major has long served as the backbone of higher education. Every student has at least one major, and each major prescribes a program of study that is supported by a series of courses both within the field and from the general education curriculum. Yet relying solely on the formal academic curriculum to achieve the

outcomes of a liberal education shortchanges the total academic experience available to students. A truly transformational liberal education considers the totality of students' lives as the broad palette on which the learning experience is fully realized. The academic major plays a central role, but the learning that takes place outside the classroom is, and should be, a critical player in this experience as well. In *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience*, the landmark joint publication of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and the American College Personnel Association, the authors note that "a transformative education repeatedly exposes students to multiple opportunities for intentional learning through the formal academic curriculum, student life, collaborative cocurricular programming, community-based, and global experiences" (Keeling 2004, 3). Transformational learning centers on the notion that, with increasing emphasis on learner-centric pedagogies, the complete learning environment includes not just the

academic core but all learning experiences, especially those that happen outside the classroom. In essence, the entire campus is a learning environment that should be intentionally tapped for the total learning experience.

A robust partnership between academic affairs and student affairs is essential to fostering transformational learning. Faculty members and student affairs personnel should "work together to complete conceptual mapping of the student learning, collaboratively identifying activities inside and outside the classroom that focus upon and contribute to specifically defined learning objectives" (Keeling 2004, 24). Our premise in this article is that, in order to strengthen this partnership and serve students in a twenty-first-century environment, the best approach would be to provide each student with a compass, a map, and a route through the vast array of available out-of-the-classroom learning experiences. The final destination would be marked by the student's achievement of the essential learning outcomes of a liberal education.

### The co-major

The compass, map, and route would comprise an individualized student pathway, or "co-major." It would be the task of student affairs to provide a structure by which each student is mentored through the co-major and assessed for the desired learning outcomes. The totality of this effort would essentially be a compact between student affairs and each student, formalized as the co-major. While each co-major would be uniquely designed around the individual student's learning style and desired outcomes, student affairs personnel would

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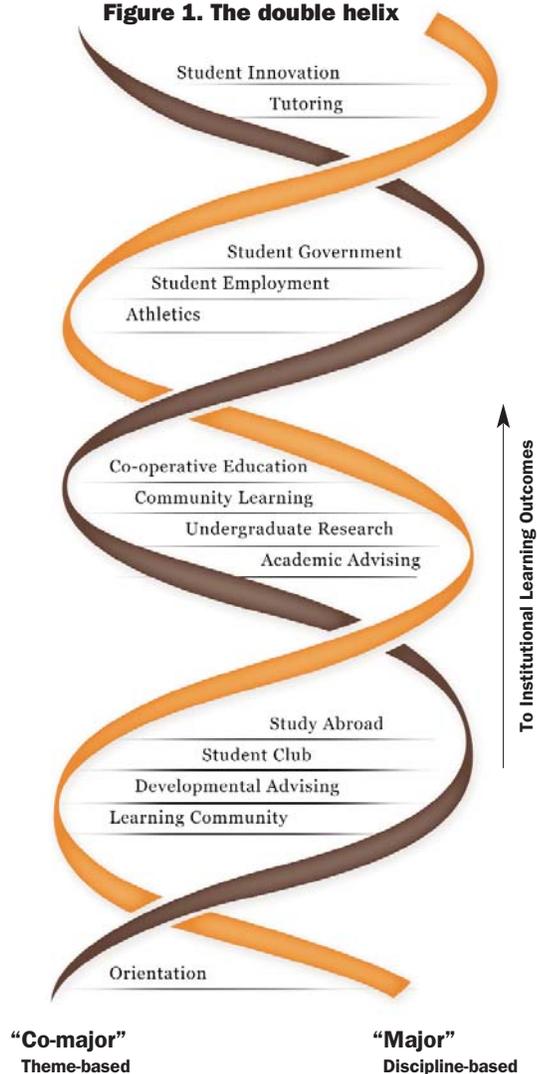
identify certain themes—or regions within the student learning map—to aggregate the co-majors. For example, student affairs might identify the themes of leadership, civic and social responsibility, global awareness, ethics, and sustainability as co-majors. Each student would then pick at least one theme and devise a co-major to achieve the desired learning outcomes through programs offered by student affairs.

Imagine, for example, that a student chooses the theme of leadership for his or her co-major. Working with this student, student affairs personnel would devise a plan (the route) that would guide him or her through specific student affairs programs to achieve the desired outcomes within the specific context of leadership. The student might start by getting involved in residence halls and student clubs during the freshman year. These experiences would expose him or her to the preliminary aspects of leadership. In the sophomore year, the student might add an intramural sport to the learning experience and be guided by the coach and the team in exploring the important role leadership plays in sports. The student might, in the junior year, become a student government representative and come to realize the nuances of leadership within this program. Finally, he or she might run for student body president, a consummate leadership experience. Throughout this co-major, student affairs personnel would interact, coach, mentor, and assess the student's progress.

### The double helix

The metaphor of the double helix enables us to visualize the proposed relationship between the major and the co-major; on one side of the helix is the traditional academic major, while the other strand represents the co-major (see fig. 1). Each student's helix would be unique to his or her own transformational learning experience. In a sense, one can think of the double helix as a ladder that the student ascends while progressing toward the desired learning outcomes. The "rungs" of the double helix ladder represent the programs shared by both the major and the co-major, and each rung is connected to the major and the co-major strands. An ascending spiral, the double helix also represents the expansion of experiences and an increasing level of cognitive complexity. At each turn of the spiral, students engage subjects in multiple ways (Leskes and Miller 2006).

**Figure 1. The double helix**



While the spiraling strands representing the academic major and the student co-major form the backbone to the transformational student learning totality, the rungs of the double helix critically represent the collaborative partnerships between academic affairs and student affairs. In essence, the rungs represent programs that both divisions support and utilize. Moreover, the rungs represent activities in which one division might take the lead in order to distribute the workload more efficiently. For example, one rung might represent internships as a learning opportunity for the student; academic affairs might be the locus of the internship program, with student affairs playing a supporting role. Other examples of these shared programs include freshman orientation, career placement, mentoring and

advising, student clubs, undergraduate research, and service learning.

To further demonstrate the potential for collaboration, we'll use the example of service learning. This program may serve as a key component of the academic major in, say, political science, and it may also be a key component in a co-major thematically focused on civic responsibility. Both academic affairs and student affairs would support this program of service learning. The political science department would identify the academic learning outcomes associated with the service-learning project and deploy appropriate assessment methods. Likewise, student affairs personnel would identify outcomes relevant to the co-major and conduct appropriate assessment activities. Academic affairs might provide a faculty mentor, while the student affairs personnel might work with the student to identify an appropriate service opportunity. Both the faculty mentor and student affairs personnel would work with the sponsor to provide a rich learning experience for the student.

By increasing cooperation between student affairs and academic affairs, the identification of such programmatic “rungs” could also lead to increased efficiency. The assessment of a program for which the use of student portfolios is appropriate, for example, could more efficiently be implemented by either academic affairs or student affairs, rather than by both divisions separately.

### Assessment and student learning outcomes

The entire double helix and co-major structure should be designed around assessment and student learning outcomes. The desired outcomes should determine the plan for the co-major, which, in turn, should determine the assessment methods used. Moreover, the student and his or her mentor should, together, develop and use a rubric to ensure intentionality in learning as well as to assess progress in achieving the desired learning outcomes.

Effective assessment tools for the co-major include student portfolios, capstone projects, project reviews conducted by other students, case-study exercises, and national tests. Portfolios can provide longitudinal evidence of

## The metaphor of the double helix enables us to visualize the proposed relationship between the major and the co-major

student learning and development, for example, and capstone projects can be effective in assessing how well a student integrates learning, concepts, and skills into a project. Faculty and student affairs mentors could play a central role in assessment by observing student

behavior in various settings throughout the major and co-major. Students themselves could be engaged in assessment by reviewing and critiquing peer projects and providing feedback.

Many student learning outcome models could be used to support the development of co-majors. In *Learning Reconsidered*, for example, the primary student learning outcomes identified are cognitive complexity; knowledge acquisition, integration, and application; humanitarianism; civic engagement; interpersonal and intrapersonal competence; practical competence; and persistence and academic achievement (Keeling 2004). *College Learning for the New Global Century* identified five essential learning outcomes: knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts; intellectual and practical skills, including inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, teamwork, and problem solving; personal and social responsibility; and integrative learning (AAC&U 2007). A model developed as part of the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education identifies seven student learning outcomes: integration of learning,

Rochester Institute of Technology



**Figure 2. Sample civic responsibility program plan**

Activities and experiences:	Student Learning Outcomes:			
	Knowledge/Content	Intellectual and Practical Skills	Integrative Learning	Intercultural Effectiveness
<b>First Year</b>				
Participate in a youth group Assessment: Journal	Focus: How is civic responsibility interwoven with the youth group?	Focus: Reflect on how this activity can serve to improve communication skills.		
Attend campus lectures about a nonprofit group Assessment: Journal				Focus: What connections did you observe between these lectures, civic responsibility, and cultures other than your own?
<b>Sophomore</b>				
Service learning project; Assessment: Supervisor observations; journal	Focus: How is your service learning project connected to civic responsibility and to your academic major?	Focus: How did the student use his or her communication skills in this project? Were they intentional learners about these communication skills?	Focus: What were the key project management strengths and weaknesses of the student in this project? Are any of these unique to service learning or to civic responsibility?	Focus: Did this project cross various cultures? If so, were there things you've learned at the university that could be applied in this setting? If not, why not?
Attend lectures with civic theme Assessment: Journal				Focus: What connections did you observe between these lectures, civic responsibility, and cultures other than your own?
<b>Junior</b>				
Connect academic major to civic responsibility through project with faculty member Assessment: Paper graded by faculty member	Focus: Identify the connections between the content of the major and this project. How did you apply what you learned as content to this real-life setting?	Focus: The writing of the paper is directly associated with the communication outcome.	Focus: Describe how project management skills are used in paper writing.	
Internship with civic theme Assessment: Supervisor observations	Focus: Connect the content of your major with this internship and civic responsibility.	Focus: Did communication skills play a key role in this internship?		Focus: Were there multicultural aspects of this internship? If so, what were the key things you learned about working in this environment?
<b>Senior</b>				
Enroll in leadership course Assessment: Course grade	Focus: Where did course content connect to the class project?	Focus: Explain how communication was a central theme of the course and the project you worked on.	Focus: What skills did you learn from the class project that pertain to civic responsibility?	Focus: Were there multicultural aspects of this project?

inclination to inquire and lifelong learning, effective reasoning and problem solving, moral character, intercultural effectiveness, leadership, and well-being (King et al. 2007).

A co-major designed around the theme of civic responsibility, for example, would allow a student to achieve the campus and student affairs learning outcomes through a program plan focused on civic responsibility. Several academic majors are particularly compatible with this co-major, including criminal justice, political science, religious studies, and visual and performing arts—to name but a few. The student's mentor might be a student affairs staff member, a faculty member, or a community member (e.g., from a nonprofit organization such as Habitat for Humanity). The mentor and the student would work together to devise a civic responsibility program plan, which would consist of out-of-the-classroom experiences, as well as an alignment matrix. The experiences could draw from a variety of programs and sources on and off campus. For example, the student may already be involved with a nonprofit organization, and his or her experience could count toward the achievement of the learning outcomes. The alignment matrix would explicitly connect the experience with the student learning outcomes in order to enable the student to be more intentional about his or her learning through the co-major. The matrix would also identify specific assessment methods, and the overall plan would include rubrics for measuring performance. Figure 2 shows a sample plan.

### Logistics

If every student is to have both an academic major and a student affairs co-major, the logistics for determining programs and pathways, assessing the achievement of learning outcomes, and providing a continuous improvement process are critical. Student affairs, working with appropriate student governance groups, should identify a small number of broad themes for the co-major that reflect the unique nature of the college or university.

The foundation of the co-major itself is an individualized plan or pathway developed jointly by the student and a specifically trained mentor—a student affairs staff member, a faculty member, an advanced undergraduate or graduate student, an alumnus, or a community member. Ideally, this mentoring relationship

would continue throughout the student's undergraduate experience. The plan itself should include a variety of learning experiences, and one of the designated student affairs themes should run through the co-major plan and the various experiences. These experiences need to be tied to the learning outcomes and assessed with regard to what the student has actually learned. An electronic portfolio should house the plan, the student-assessed work, and the documented interactions between the student and his or her mentor. The portfolio could also serve as a cocurricular "transcript," providing strong evidence to potential employers that the student has accomplished intentional learning far beyond the traditional major.

### Conclusion

Retention issues, a focus on learning outcomes, accountability, and other factors have created an acute need for new models for establishing closer partnerships between academic affairs and student affairs. Institutions that strive to build such partnerships will be well positioned to provide a twenty-first-century liberal education. We believe that the co-major proposed here—when connected intentionally to the traditional academic major—provides the second strand of a double helix that represents a purposeful pathway for achieving the essential learning outcomes of a liberal education. □

To respond to this article, e-mail [liberaled@aacu.org](mailto:liberaled@aacu.org), with the authors' names on the subject line.

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# Simple and Intelligible

BOB BLAISDELL

**Why should the erosion of forthrightness be inevitable with education?**

*It is impossible to write anything bad in completely simple and intelligible language.*  
—TOLSTOY

Well, is it? Does Tolstoy so daunt me that I cannot think my way around his statement? I do love and idolize him, but I don't always agree with him on God and sex, for example. Everyone who reads Tolstoy finds something to mock, and that's partly because he has the confidence to speak about anything that comes into his orbit—and because we understand everything he says. So maybe he's not the greatest philosopher or Christian thinker or moralizer (I trust Isaiah Berlin's critical assessments of Tolstoy's philosophizing, for instance), but who among us has the audacity to step between Tolstoy and any of his pronouncements on writing? I don't! Nonetheless, that statement asks to be responded to, assessed, judged; and so I try, I really try, to think of exceptions. *Anything* bad? Is it possible to say something *hateful* “in completely simple and intelligible language”? Of course. Threats are often made in such language. So what does Tolstoy mean by “bad”? Or should we move away from any possible utterance and onto an essay or story? If we do, then I think we may have something to discuss.

I fear that some of my colleagues in the teaching business would dispute Tolstoy's point. For one thing, academic writing is so rarely “completely simple and intelligible.” In a graduate seminar, I remember a student making some mild squawk of objection on this point of intelligibility about some faddish critic of the day. This student wondered whether the critic was using convoluted writing to disguise convoluted thinking. My fellow graduate students sneered at her; our patient professor shook his head and pitied her. Poor thing, didn't she know that the complexities of theory can't be expressed in anything but their own form?

Even though Tolstoy *isn't* saying that anything good has to be “in completely simple and intelligible language,” I usually feel that's the case. With this in mind, I am relieved by Karl Popper's claim about language and the Enlightenment. “What externally distinguishes the Enlightenment approach and the approach of self-declared prophets?” he asks. “It is language. The Enlightenment thinker speaks as simply as possible. He wants to be understood” (1999, 85). Popper hated prophets, and he was, or wanted to be, an Enlightenment thinker. Any objection to intelligibility, any defense of a lack of intelligibility as a sign of depth or sophistication, seems suspect to me. As Popper suggests, prophets know the truth. They must hammer it, or something like it, into

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# Language



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our skulls, and we must be forbearing and accept from them what we cannot understand. We must have faith that the nail of “truth” will eventually oxidize and be absorbed into our bloodstream. We must trust the “truth” of their unintelligible words.

## **The language of lying**

I love my developmental writing students and their lack of pretense, their lack of awareness that one could—or would want to—use *written* language to disguise thoughts or feelings. Their backgrounds are as diverse as New York City and its immigrant population. There in my classes of twenty-four sit Lu from South China and Lou from South Brooklyn. They

are foreign to each other but snagged by an identical categorizing exam. When they were admitted to the college, a month or six months or two years ago, they wrote for an hour in a big room with dozens of other dazed students, and they wrote poorly in almost all the ways one can write poorly. Some of the non-native English speakers admit that when they read the assessment exam topic, rather than feign an interest in a deliberately uninteresting scenario, they shrugged and wrote shruggishly. When I’m not worrying about their futures, I admire that! Why pretend to have feelings one doesn’t have?

On the other hand, at the end of the term, we spend some time talking about pretending

and how, for instance, in one of the books we read, Langston Hughes created the amazing Jesse B. Semple to say things that had an energy and language Hughes couldn't generate from his own point of view. (Not pretense but *creation*.) We try to see the joy in pretending to be somebody who cares! I encourage them on their next trip through the assessment exam to create a fictional self who cares enough about a socioeconomic issue to write a letter to a city council member that advocates for a recreation center over an expanded library—or vice versa. It doesn't matter which side they take, as long as the imaginary letter writers really care and give wings to their words.

Many of the developmental students sitting before me struggle with writing as an activity—moving a pen across paper and seeing their own thoughts and feelings tumbling out and being revealed in this clumsy, nonelectronic medium. Such revelations sometimes stop them in their tracks. But usually, on their own, or by my

**It's hard not to give in too far to the socializing aspect of higher education**

nosy nudging, they bravely proceed, baring something they hadn't thought was within them, until now, or available for writerly discussion, analysis, and contemplation.

What a joy it is, albeit a sometimes troubling one to them and to me, when they write so faithfully what they think. So in spite of their faults of grammar or their lack of command of idiom, they use the English language *as well as they can*. And it seems they use it always in a positive direction: forward, not sideways. My students from China and South India are particularly good about this. For them, there is nothing that is not to be said, and everything said is meant. Some of my honors and literature students have perfect English and write in sophisticated, conventionally academic ways, which usually means they know how to hide and cover what they tell me. There are things to be thought, and there are things to be written—good manners, the bane of art! My Albanian



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and Haitian students, on the other hand, are God's gift to developmental-writing literature. No matter their struggles with the language, they take writing deadly seriously and value it as testimony. This reminds me of another passage in Tolstoy's letters, where he discusses lying:

However trite it is to say so, there is only one negative quality needed for everything in life, particularly in art—not to lie.

In life, lying is nasty, but it doesn't destroy life, it smears it over with its nastiness, but the truth of life is still there underneath, because somebody is always wanting something, something is always giving pain or pleasure; but in art, lying destroys the whole chain which links phenomena, and everything crumbles to dust. (Tolstoy 1978, 303)

Some of my students are, to their own surprise, brilliant storytellers. They simply trust the tale, not the teller. If they tell a ghost story, they don't pretend, for instance, to believe in ghosts or zombies or duppies; they actually do! And so when they write faithfully, I see what they see. They are not trying to impress me with their superiority to their subject. Defeated (they think) by their language, they go for the best truth they can. Even when (to their and my distress) their language is, as far as the grammar goes, poor, it's always intelligible. They don't lie. They spin tales, but they are scrupulous about the truth. Yet when I attend meetings with my colleagues, we tend to discuss our students' pitiful skills. When I am true to my students and resist this teacherly impulse to bemoan their deficiencies, I keep this in mind: "It is impossible to write anything bad in completely simple and intelligible language."

Still, it's hard not to give in too far to the socializing aspect of higher education. I don't like it when, a semester or two later, I discover

that a once plainspoken student's language has become guarded, inflated by rhetoric but sinking with deadweight jargon. I wonder, who's teaching Elinor to fake it? Who told her it wasn't good to write exactly what she thinks? Dear Elinor, who broke my heart with her extremely personal anecdotal responses to our readings! This semester, more than a year after we got to know each other in developmental English, she proudly shows me a bad paper for which she was rewarded with an A. As I glance over the essay, typical and rigorously thoughtless, I congratulate her (a lie!) and feel disgusted. Where did this "There is a tendency in American culture to ascribe meaning to . . ." and this "The entities by which an individual utilizes the manifested . . ." come from? Where? Yes, from books and other similarly rewarded essays. I sigh and grumble to myself, how could Professor X not have valued Elinor's unique and weird and truthful voice? Worse, I wonder how *Elinor* could have given it up.

Why should the erosion of forthrightness be inevitable with education? Is this why I love artists and prefer them to myself and other academics—because they, with talent and experience, continue struggling toward truths within their chosen medium? Such brave struggles are possible for us academics, too, if we encourage our students and discipline ourselves to write in simple and intelligible language. □

To respond to this article, e-mail [liberaled@aacu.org](mailto:liberaled@aacu.org), with the author's name on the subject line.

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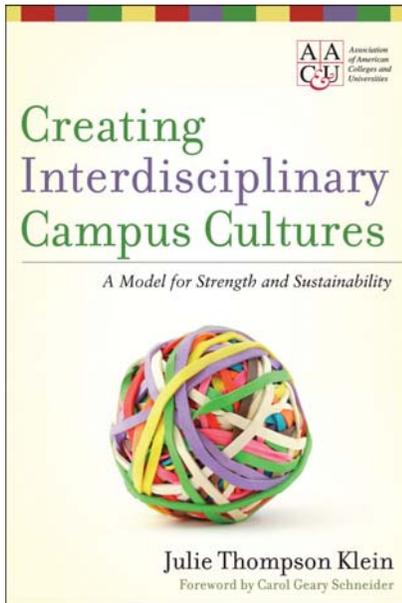
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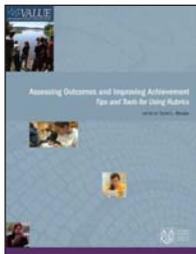


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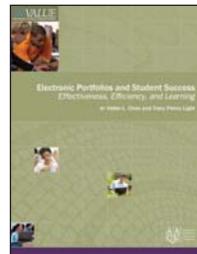


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