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Accountability

From Weak Choices to Best Work

Sometime soon, the Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education will make its recommendations to the nation about ways to strengthen access, affordability, and accountability. AAC&U leaders are following the accountability debates with particular attention, because they dovetail with our own continuing focus on the aims and outcomes of a twenty-first-century liberal education.

In our view, intentionality and accountability are two sides of the same coin. In order to ensure the quality of students’ actual learning, we—the academy in partnership with the community—must identify the learning outcomes all students need and make these outcomes a shared framework for both intentionality and accountability.

Through the Greater Expectations initiative, we have done just that. In dialogue with the academy, accreditors, and employers, AAC&U has identified a widely endorsed set of learning outcomes that mark the defining difference between readiness for success, on the one hand, and underachievement in college, on the other. As we wrote in a public letter to the Spellings Commission, these are the aims and outcomes for which we should hold ourselves accountable.

Through Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP), we now are working to both build public understanding of these essential outcomes and reinforce campus efforts to foster them across the curriculum.

For your convenience, we print a summary of the essential learning outcomes here (see sidebar). These broad purposes are a template, not a curriculum; they need to be translated within different institutional missions and the many different academic fields. Nonetheless, these outcomes are today’s sine qua non. Students who do not acquire them will be underprepared for work, citizenship, and daily life.

Reading the tea leaves, we worry that, in response to the accountability issue, the Spellings Commission seems to be considering one or more weak choices. The first is to say little or nothing about the key aims and outcomes of a twenty-first-century education, while calling for campuses and states to experiment with tests in order to measure and compare student learning.

Self-evidently, every test is organized around key decisions about what students need to know and be able to do. To say nothing about purposes while embracing tests is to leave fundamental decisions about the important outcomes of a college education to the testing industry. The truth is that we’ve been experimenting with just this strategy in the schools for over half a century, first through the reign of the SAT and more recently through the myriad tests of high school learning that are now required in the states. To say the least, this has not been a formula for world-class accomplishment.

The second weak choice the commission seems to be considering is to fall back on that hardy perennial, general education. Commission Chair Charles Miller produced a paper in his own name that endorses standardized tests designed to assess general education outcomes. The problem with
using these as the “accountability” measure is that they only address a fraction of the curriculum. Tests of general education were not designed to assess learning in the major, and findings from them can have no influence on the areas of work where both students and faculty are most invested.

AAC&U’s work on learning outcomes and our proposed framework for accountability were addressed in commission hearings and in background papers. But the discussants seemed to think our recommendations apply to the general education curriculum alone, or, as Chair Miller described it, “the core learning and skills that anyone with a liberal arts degree should have.”

This is a fundamental misreading of the AAC&U recommendations. The outcomes we recommend are essential not only to general education or to arts and sciences degrees, but also to business, accounting, engineering, health professionals, technology, and every other sphere of endeavor. These liberal education outcomes are not the responsibility of selected disciplines alone!

The essential outcomes will be achieved only if students work on them across the curriculum, in their majors—all majors—as well as in general education. To put it differently, if the majors do not take responsibility for the essential outcomes of a twenty-first-century college education, those outcomes will not be achieved.

The essential learning outcomes take different forms depending on the individual student’s choice of major. An editor and an engineer, for example, should both achieve all the essential outcomes, but they will apply their knowledge and skills in quite different ways. For this reason, curriculum-embedded assessments are the most powerful and reliable way both of focusing student and faculty attention on the intended outcomes and of demonstrating students’ highest levels of achievement.

The foundations for this “best work” strategy have already been laid. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement, 60 percent of today’s seniors complete some sort of capstone work. Some colleges, including community colleges, have also built milestone projects, portfolios, and qualifying performances into the sophomore or junior year as well. The right course for American higher education is to build from these examples to bring both intentionality and accountability centrally into the college curriculum—not just for a statistically significant sample of students, but for all students!

Let’s be honest with ourselves. We’re talking about accountability because we know that many students are leaving college half-educated. There’s little to be gained from five more years of “testing” that proposition and arguing about the adequacy of the tests to their intended purposes.

There is no quick fix for the broad problem of underachievement. But there is a huge body of tested innovation that tells us where we need to go. We need a “best work” approach that tells all students what will be expected, translates broad outcomes to specific contexts, sets high standards, and helps each student prepare to meet those standards in the context of his or her most advanced work and chosen major.

This—and only this—will achieve the long-term purpose of our “accountability” debates: new intentionality and new effectiveness in preparing all students for a very demanding world.

—Carol Geary Schneider

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<th>Essential Learning Outcomes</th>
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<td>• Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Natural World (science, social sciences, mathematics, humanities, arts)</td>
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<td>• Intellectual and Practical Skills (written and oral communication; inquiry, critical and creative thinking; quantitative literacy; information literacy; teamwork; problem solving)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Individual and Social Responsibility (civic responsibility and engagement; ethical reasoning; intercultural knowledge and actions; propensity for lifelong learning)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Integrative and Applied Learning (the capacity to adapt knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and questions)</td>
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In 1915, the year the Association of American Colleges was founded, The Bulletin was established as a journal of record; for many years afterward, this predecessor of Liberal Education carried the full proceedings of the annual meetings of the association. Indeed, through the 1970s, long after the journal had been expanded to include articles submitted by members and its name had been changed, one entire issue was reserved each year for coverage of the annual meeting.

Then, at the beginning of the 1980s, the customary practice of publishing proceedings was discontinued—although only temporarily, as it turned out. In 1986, when the current practice of publishing a small selection was instituted, the historical relationship between Liberal Education and the annual meeting was restored. And every year since then, the editor of Liberal Education has had to face the unhappy task of selecting for publication a mere handful from among a superabundance of presentations deserving of a wider audience.

As the size of the meeting continues to grow—the 2006 annual meeting was the largest ever held—the inverse relationship between the number of presentations made and the number published may be inevitable. Yet, through the adoption of a new technology, it may finally be possible to begin to reverse the trend.

Now, for the first time, the handful of presentations published in the annual meeting issue of Liberal Education is supplemented by a dozen annual meeting podcasts (see www.aacu.org/podcast/AM06_podcasts.cfm). Podcasting makes an audio file—in this case recorded presentations—available online. Once downloaded, a podcast can be listened to anytime using a computer or a portable media player.

Even if it were not impossible for the annual meeting issue of Liberal Education to carry the full proceedings, missing still would be the atmosphere of the meeting—the interaction during the intervals, the receptions, and all of the unofficial aspects that help make any meeting enjoyable and rewarding. Not even the most extravagant technological developments imaginable could ever enable us to recreate the actual experience of the annual meeting. And that is as it should be.

In all, this is a milestone year for the AAC&U annual meeting: it is now possible to both read and listen to presentations—and, I should add, to view color photographs of the meeting. While it is true that Liberal Education cannot reproduce the annual meeting, it can represent it. And that, I hope you will agree, is something this issue does very well.—DAVID TRITELLI
Terrel Rhodes
Appointed AAC&U Vice President
AAC&U has announced the appointment of Terrel (Terry) Rhodes as its new vice president for quality, curriculum, and assessment. Rhodes, who succeeds Andrea Leskes, comes to AAC&U from Portland State University (PSU), which he served as vice provost for curriculum, dean of undergraduate studies, and professor of public administration.

Rhodes has been the liaison from PSU to AAC&U’s Greater Expectations initiative and to the more recent project on integrative learning that AAC&U cosponsors with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He also is a faculty member in the AAC&U Institute on General Education, which, together with initiatives emerging from Greater Expectations, will continue to be coordinated by the Office of Quality, Curriculum, and Assessment that Rhodes will now lead.

Terry Rhodes will assume the AAC&U vice presidency in August.

In Memoriam: Edgar F. Beckham
AAC&U notes with deep sadness and regret the death on May 24, 2006, of Edgar F. Beckham, senior fellow and former member of the association’s board of directors. Over the course of his long and distinguished career, Beckham was a committed and outstanding leader of national efforts to promote racial and cultural diversity on college campuses.

Beginning in 1961, Beckham spent twenty-eight years at Wesleyan University, where he held various teaching and administrative positions. In 1973, he became the first African American dean of the college at Wesleyan—position he held until 1990.

In the 1990s, Beckham headed the Ford Foundation’s Campus Diversity Initiative and, from 1992 to 1995, served as chairman of the Connecticut Board of Education. He joined AAC&U as a senior fellow in 1998.

A beloved adviser and mentor to countless faculty members, administrators, and students, Beckham will be sorely missed.

The AAC&U community will celebrate the leadership and lasting legacy of Edgar F. Beckham on the evening of October 20 at the Diversity and Learning conference in Philadelphia.

New “Core Commitments” Initiative Announced
The John Templeton Foundation has awarded AAC&U a $2 million grant to support Core Commitments: Fostering Personal and Social Responsibility on College and University Campuses, a new national initiative designed to help colleges and universities more purposefully develop students’ personal and social responsibility.

Building on AAC&U’s Greater Expectations initiative, Core Commitments will be focused on several major dimensions of personal and social responsibility as well as on those aspects of campus culture that positively or negatively affect their development.

The initial phase of Core Commitments will entail the development and testing of an assessment template that examines attitudes toward the dimensions of personal and social responsibility. A call for participation will be issued in fall 2006.

Upcoming Meetings
November 9–11, 2006, Faculty Work in the New Academy: Emerging Challenges and Evolving Roles, Network for Academic Renewal Meeting, Chicago, IL
March 1–3, 2007, General Education and Assessment, Network for Academic Renewal Meeting, Miami, FL

AAC&U MEMBERSHIP 2006
more than 1,000 members

- DOC 17%
- ASSOC 12%
- OTHER* 17%
- MASTERS 28%
- BACC 26%

*Specialized schools, state systems and agencies, international affiliates, and organizational affiliates
Some assume that the only way academics can engage the politics of the day is by coming out of their ivory tower and protesting in front of the White House. But in conveying knowledge, the academy has a far more important and subversive way of dealing with political issues. Knowledge provides us with a way to perceive the world. Imaginative knowledge provides us with a way to see ourselves in the world, to relate to the world, and thereby, to act in the world. The way we perceive ourselves is reflected in the way we interact, the way we take our positions, and the way we interpret politics.

Curiosity, the desire to know what one does not know, is essential to genuine knowledge. Especially in terms of literature, it is a sensual longing to know through experiencing others—not only the others in the world, but also the others within oneself. That is why, in almost every talk I give, I repeat what Vladimir Nabokov used to tell his students: curiosity is insubordination in its purest form. If we manage to teach our students to be curious—not to take up our political positions, but just to be curious—we will have managed to do a great deal.

Cultural relativism

No amount of political correctness can make us empathize with a woman who is taken to a football stadium in Kabul, has a gun put to her head, and is executed because she does not look the way the state wants her to look. No amount of political correctness can make us empathize with a child who is starving in Darfur. Unless we evoke the ability to imagine, unless we can find the connection between that woman or that child and ourselves, we cannot empathize with either of them. Although we cannot be in different parts of the world all of the time, we can experience the world through fiction, poetry, film, painting, music, through imaginative knowledge.

Cultural relativism was supposed to be a progressive idea. It was supposed to make us celebrate and learn from cultures that are different from our own. It was supposed to make us more tolerant of those with whom we disagree. But because we did not treat it as a focus for gaining knowledge, because it became immediately politicized even on college campuses, cultural relativism became a way to divide ourselves among little boxes. It made us worry about any form of critical exchange with others for the fear of imposing ourselves upon them.

To fear that you might impose yourself upon others by merely criticizing them is just as bad as the colonials actually imposing themselves on others. It derives from a condescending view of other people. When Ayatollah Khomeini said that all Western women are whores because of the way they look, for example, we did not get so insulted that we wanted to shut him up. Instead, we had so much confidence in ourselves that we did not think he could impose himself upon us. But if we say that Islam does not mean marrying girls at the age of nine, and a Saudi princess tell us, “do not dare criticize our culture, we like it this way,” then we are cowed. We become silent. Where does this crude political correctness, this particular form of cultural relativism, come from? If this is allowed in colleges and universities, how does it affect our policy makers, our businesspeople, and the American public in general?

One of the things cultural relativists miss is the connection. One cannot appreciate any form of difference without connecting. They also fail to recognize the availability of universal spaces that are not partisan. When people read Shakespeare, it is irrelevant whether they are Republicans or Democrats. When people go to the theater, they are not asked whether they are for or against the war. Republicans, Democrats, independents, radicals, conservatives, even neoconservatives all might love and benefit from *The Great Gatsby*.

This nonpartisan space where people can meet is created through the shock of recognition, through recognizing not how different we are but, rather, how alike we are. To paraphrase Shakespeare himself, if you prick us, we all bleed. If you kill somebody’s son, whether it is in Baghdad or in New Orleans, his mother bleeds. We all fall in love; we all are jealous. Moreover, neither democracy and human rights nor terror and fascism are confined or determined geographically or culturally. After all, two of the twentieth century’s worst expressions of totalitarianism—fascism and Stalinism—grew from the very heart of European civilization. None of us is exempt, and none of us is completely guilty.

I learned when I was very young that the only thing I can rely upon is my memory, and the best safeguard for memory is literature. When I left Iran at the age of thirteen, I took three books with me by three Persian poets: Rumi, Hafez, and Forugh Farrokhzad. I tried to regain my home through reading these poets; I tried to connect with my lost home through the best it had to offer. Similarly, the way I made peace with my new home in England, and later in America, was through Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Mark Twain, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Ellison, and Richard Wright—through great literature.

During all the years I spent living in the United States and England, I thought of home. Yet as soon as I went back to Iran, I discovered that home was not home. I am very thankful to the Islamic Republic for this, for we should never feel too comfortable. The reason knowledge is so important is that it makes us pose ourselves as question marks. The essential role of the academy is not to give our students certainties, but to make them both cherish and doubt both the world and themselves.

There was one aspect of the Islamic Republic that I did not appreciate, however. A group of people had come to my country and, in the name of that country and its traditions and its religion, claimed that thousands of people like me were irrelevant. They regarded us as alien because of the way we believed, the way we felt, the way we expressed ourselves, and the way we looked. Suddenly, the religion into which I had been born and the traditions I had always cherished were becoming alien too. When I returned to the United States and Europe, I was shocked to find that the fundamentalists’ image of my country and my
religion and my traditions was the image that was accepted by people in the West.

To talk of “the Muslim world” is to reduce countries, cultures, and histories as vastly different as Malaysia, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Morocco to a single aspect, namely religion, and then to reduce that religion to a single aspect, namely fundamentalism. Yet, although Germany, France, England, Sweden, and the United States have far more in common than Malaysia, Tunisia, Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey, we do not talk of “the Christian world.” Even as you hear every day on the airwaves that the United States was founded on Christianity, you are fighting against the fundamentalist interpretation of Christianity that someone like Pat Robertson might wish to give it. You do not reduce the United States, because of its Christian background to, say, the Southern Baptists. But we do it with Iran; we do it with Turkey.

In my country, the age of marriage for girls has been reduced from eighteen to nine. Over a hundred years ago, it had been raised first to thirteen and then to eighteen. Now it has been reduced again to nine. The Saudi princess tells Karen Hughes, the U.S. undersecretary of state for public affairs, not to intervene in our culture. She tells her that nine-year-old girls like to be married to polygamous men three times their age who can also rent as many women as they want for five minutes or for ninety-nine years. This is like Americans in seventeenth-century Salem saying that burning witches is a part of their culture, or Southern confederates saying that slavery is a part of theirs.
From a biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe, I learned that many preachers in her day said that slavery was approved by the Bible. I also discovered how many preachers—as well as politicians and even women—claimed that the Bible says a woman's place is at home. In fact, when the best-selling author Harriet Beecher Stowe went to England, she could not talk publicly. Her husband had to talk and to read her writing for her.

If you believe there are things you do not know—things that, once you know them, will change you—then even if there are in Saudi Arabia today only two women (and there are many more than that) who do not want to be flogged every day because of the way they look, you must take the side of those two women. There were not many women in eighteenth-century England or in eighteenth-century America who wanted to look and act and be where women are in those countries today.

**Women in Iran**

In Iran, the issue of the veil created the most controversy. My grandmother never removed her veil. When the father of the former Shah of Iran made it mandatory for three months that women appear in public without their veils, my grandmother refused to leave her home for those three months. She was a devout, meek woman who never took off her veil but who also tolerated her grandchildren and her daughters-in-law looking the way we did.
When the Islamic Republic made the veil mandatory, hundreds of thousands of Iranian women went into the streets to protest. My grandmother took their side. She did this because she believed in the veil as a symbol of her faith. She believed that if the state were to take over that symbol and turn it into a political symbol of uniformity, then the veil would lose its meaning. In fact, many Muslim women in my country were against the imposition of the veil, not because they did not believe in it but because they believe in choice. My mother, who believed in Islam and who went on pilgrimage during the Shah’s time, never wore the veil. Who is to say she was not a Muslim?

You cannot argue with people’s religion. You cannot argue with the way people choose to show their faith, as long as it does not interfere with the freedoms of others. But you can argue against any state—that be it the United States of America or the Islamic Republic of Iran—that imposes religious values on its citizens. Indeed, it is your duty to argue in such cases. We are not fighting against the veil; we are fighting against the lack of freedom of choice. If they genuinely believe in their religion, then the women who wear the veil have as much at stake in this fight as the women who do not.

That is the situation in my country after more than a hundred years of struggle by Iranian women, Iranian intellectuals, and progressive clerics to create an open society. Before the 1979 revolution, Iranian women participated in all spheres of public life. Because Iranian women had won that full participation for themselves, the laws and the flogging and the jail and the repression did not work on them. That is why, after thirty years and despite the crazy president now in power, their skirts are getting shorter and shorter; their scarves are becoming much more colorful; their lipstick is becoming much more brilliant. In Iran, the way women look has become a semiotic sign of their position on the state.

The triumph of art

There are no private spaces in a totalitarian society. The situation in Iran should remind you of the Soviet Union, where Hemingway and Faulkner and Sartre and Camus were banned because they represented decadent Western literature; where love was not to be shown in movies because love for the party and for the leader came first. In Iran, Othello’s suicide was cut from the movie because it might depress the masses. The masses do not get depressed when they are stoned to death. That, they say, is our culture and cannot be helped. But the masses might get depressed when a British actor commits suicide on screen. This should also remind you of the Soviet Union, where the death of the swan in Swan Lake was cut because the masses might get depressed watching anything that is not optimistic. Remember those Soviet paintings that depicted everybody smiling as they did harrowing work in the fields? You should smile at all costs; you should be complicit in your oppression.

Iran has had its own past confiscated. If you want to know the truth about Iran, you do not go to Ayatollah Khomeini. You go instead to Firdusi who, a thousand years ago and in opposition to the orthodox Islam that was forced upon his culture, wrote about the 2,500-year-old mythical history of Iran. He wrote in the pure Persian language in order to remind Iranians that, although they had lost their land, they had not lost their language. You go to Hafez whose poetry explicitly criticizes hypocritical clerics who flogged people in public and drank wine in private seven hundred years ago. You go to Rumi, who says the place of prayer does not matter: it can be a mosque; it can be a synagogue; it can be a church. In Persian mystical poetry, the figure of the beloved is the metaphor for God. If you have not seen a Persian dancing, I recommend you find someone to do it for you properly. I promise you, no style of Western dancing is as erotic or as sensual.

The Iranian people do not resist their government through violence, by killing the officials or asking for a violent overthrow. The Iranian people resist by being themselves. The fight is existential, not political. It is about refusing to become what others want to shape you into.

Novels celebrate the integrity of the individual. Lolita is not about the celebration of a pedophile’s life, as some critics would like to think. On the very first page of the novel, Humbert says that Lolita had a precedent. In his childhood, he fell in love with Annabel.
Lee, and that love was never consummated. Humbert is frozen in time, as most dictatorial mindsets are frozen in time, and he imposes his image of his dead love upon every living little girl that he sees. His crime, as he mentions at the end of the novel, is that he deprives Lolita of her childhood. He tries, he says, to keep Lolita in an island of frozen time. He imposes his image of what he wants her to be upon her and deprives her of her potential. We can never know what Lolita could have become.

Like the Ayatollahs, Humbert vulgarizes Lolita’s small childish aspirations. Because he looked like a movie star, he says she tried to seduce him—as if the fact that she tried to seduce him would give him the license to rape her every single night, even when she has a high fever. He gleefully reminds us that, on the first night he rapes her, she runs out of the room crying but then comes back to cry on his shoulder. She has nowhere else to go. This is one of the most poignant condemnations of solipsism, of trying to confiscate another human being’s life and shape it according to one’s own distorted dreams and desires.

If my students, even those who wore the veil and who came from traditional families, do not react to Lolita the way some critics or some of my feminist friends react to Lolita, it is because they immediately understand the structure. It is not about finding parallels (“ah, Lolita is me”). A work of art should not be used in that way. The way to get something out of a work of art is not by finding messages but by going inside of it and defending it, by enjoying it for the sensual pleasures of the writing. When a Nabokov or a Flaubert writes of the worst tragedies, we read on even as we cry. We celebrate the triumph of that imagination over the shabby reality that kills people like Lolita or Emma Bovary. That is the triumph of art. My students immediately understand what many high-minded critics in this country do not. Lolita reminded us of the men who try to impose an image upon us, turning us into figments of their own imaginations.

This is the worst crime of totalitarianism. It is not just committed against people who oppose it and are now in jails. It is committed against a whole population. Literature enables us to celebrate the courage of ordinary people who want to live with dignity. That is why a Primo Levi at death’s door in a Nazi concentration camp, or an Osip Mandelstam at death’s door in a Soviet concentration camp, remembers Flaubert or Dante and goes to death bravely.

At times when brutality is so hideous that people’s gold teeth are removed before they are sent to ovens, we all lose our faith—not just in our executioners, but in ourselves also. We lose hope in human beings when we see pictures from Abu Ghraib or when we hear about hostages being beheaded. We are all stained. The only way to retrieve our dignity or to retain our pride as human beings is to celebrate the highest achievement of humanity: individual dignity. Every great novel, from Stearns and Smollett and Fielding to Bellow and Roth and Morrison, celebrates individual human dignity. The individual is at the heart of all great literature.

American values

What about America? We need Lolita in Iran and in the Soviet Union and in Nazi Germany, but here? Many people say that Lolita needs to be forbidden in order for it to be celebrated. If you can find it in most universities, then you stop thinking about it.

Every democracy was built by those who could imagine what did not exist, and that is especially true of this country. The most poetic of all declarations is the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address was highly political; people were dying every day when he gave that address. But it is the poetry of Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, and even the slave-owning Jefferson that breaks our hearts. These people had to make something out of nothing. They had to imagine the impossible the way a
writer looks at a blank page and imagines that he or she can create the impossible.

In More Die of Heart Break, Bellarosa Connection, and Deans’ December, Saul Bellow brings out the two worlds, the totalitarian world and the democratic world. He worries about his Chicago and about the America he loves so much. With totalitarian societies like Iran or Sudan or Cuba, some of us immediately see the brutality and condemn it. But, as Bellow knew, there is a different kind of problem in a country like the United States. We survived the ordeal of the Holocaust, but will we survive the ordeal of freedom? The sufferings of freedom have to be counted, he said; more die of heartbreak than of Chernobyl.

What Bellow meant was that, in the West, we are threatened with atrophy of feeling. A country that has lost its love for its poetry and for its soul is a country that faces death. That is what we face today in our culture of sleeping consciousness, where religion and American values are discussed through sound bites.

I want to end with one image from one great book. During the 2004 presidential election, both parties talked about American values. It really broke my heart the way each was vying to become more like the other just to win the election. At the time, a scene came to my mind and I have been talking and writing about it ever since. It is the scene from Huckleberry Finn where Huck contemplates whether or not to give Jim up.

Huck had been told in Sunday school that if you do not give up a runaway slave, you go straight to hell. And he is genuinely worried; he thinks he will go to hell. So he writes a letter saying that Jim had escaped. But then he imagines Jim in the morning, and he imagines Jim in the evening, and he imagines Jim as Jim was with him. When he remembers his experiences with Jim, Huck and Jim become one. Huck realizes that his true ally is Jim—not the horrible brat Tom Sawyer, who imposes his dream of romance upon Jim’s reality. Huck says, “I don’t care if I go to hell.” He tears up the letter and never thinks about it again. When we talk about American values, we should go to F. Scott Fitzgerald or Zora Neal Hurston. We should go to Huck and say with him, “I don’t care if I go to hell.”

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

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K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award

The K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award recognizes graduate students who are committed to developing academic and civic responsibility in themselves and others, and who show exemplary promise as future leaders of higher education. The awards are sponsored by K. Patricia Cross, professor emerita of higher education at the University of California–Berkeley, and are administered by AAC&U. Following are the recipients of the 2006 award:

**Derek Cabrera**, education, Cornell University

**Michael Coyle**, justice studies, Arizona State University

**Emily Fairchild**, sociology, Indiana University

**Molly Beth Kerby**, educational administration, educational leadership, and organizational development, University of Louisville

**Diane Nutbrown**, inorganic chemistry, University of Wisconsin–Madison

**Regina Praetorius**, human resource education, Louisiana State University

**Victor Raymond**, sociology, Iowa State University

**Joan Shin**, language, literacy, and culture, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

**Ian Stewart**, chemistry, University of California–Berkeley

Nominations for the 2007 awards are due September 15, 2006. (For more information, see www.aacu.org.) Recipients of the award will be introduced to the AAC&U membership at the 2007 annual meeting and will deliver a presentation on “Faculty of the Future: Voices from the Next Generation.”
A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, I developed a metaphor for describing my personal and professional development. I called it spiraling. My initial consciousness of this metaphor can be traced to the years between the end of college and the beginning of graduate school, a time of transition for anyone considering a career in academe.

During my senior year at Miami University in Ohio, I prepared an essay about my personal and professional aspirations for several national fellowship applications. In my essay, I reflected upon the fact that although I had accomplished most of my goals—indeed, I had exceeded my expectations—I did not feel any more confident as a senior than I had felt as a first-year student. That feeling followed me to my first days at Yale, where I was a Woodrow Wilson and Ford Foundation fellow and suddenly found myself no longer a big fish in a little pond. I was, in fact, a little fish, or a fish among many big fish. To my great surprise, however, I began building relationships and negotiating interactions with those in my new community with veteran aplomb. The confidence I thought had eluded me was there after all. It was then that I first realized that I was going through a process I had experienced before, a process I likened to climbing a spiral staircase.

When climbing a spiral staircase, you inevitably return to the same point on a vertical line but at a higher level. And so it is with life’s experiences. Every now and then you return to a situation that appears familiar to you but, through your own progression, you now have the resources, the memory, and the confidence to propel yourself upward. This notion holds true even if that past experience was negative: the point is that you survived it.

This metaphor of spiraling or climbing a spiral staircase has served me well for the past thirty-five years. I have used it to navigate the many transitions in my career as a musician, a teacher, and a leader in higher education and the arts. Concomitantly, I have developed and relied upon several basic principles that have shaped and guided me during my career. These seven critical lessons for navigating a leadership position in higher education have been adapted from the penultimate chapter of *Breaking Through: The Making of Minority Executives in Corporate America* (Thomas and Gabarro 1999), a book based on twenty case studies of minority executives at three different corporations.

**Lesson number one**

Develop a personal means of remaining focused or centered, as the Quakers would call it, regardless of circumstances or situations. For some, remaining centered will mean meditating, for others it will mean prayer or some other form of contemplation. Exercise such as running, biking, working out, or yoga also can serve as an excellent means of centering. To use my own life as an example, I begin most days at 4:30 a.m. by meditating. Afterwards, I practice the cello and then, at 6:00, my wife and I...
go together to the gym. This routine, which I have practiced for a number of years, helps to ensure that I remain focused throughout the day and that I have the mental power to regain my inner equilibrium when something out of the ordinary happens.

As the Latin scribe Publilius Syrus wrote back in first century BC, “anyone can hold a helm when the sea is calm.” The challenge, of course, is to hold your grip firm when the storm comes. The ability to remain centered, to hold a firm grip, is essential for any assistant professor in the early years when you must manage all the people and forces competing for your time and attention. It will shore you up when you must think about and do several things at once, including preparing for your first class or classes and meeting a publication deadline. You may also find it particularly useful in committee meetings or other situations in which discussions become acrimonious.

The capacity to remain calm and perform consistently under stress is also imperative for anyone in a leadership position in higher education. During my five-year tenure as provost at Miami University, I invented an imaginary implement that I called the “S” shield. (You can imagine what “S” stands for.) I could access it at a moment’s notice, and I always had it available to me, figuratively speaking, particularly at university senate meetings. Lifting the shield in front of my face was a reminder to remain centered if I found myself becoming agitated by the tenor of the discussion. It could also deflect the acrimonious words being hurled at me. Thus, I had sufficient time to listen closely, contemplate precisely the nature of the statement, and respond appropriately.

**Lesson number two**

*Build an ethical foundation for the work you do.* It cannot be about the money. In fact, if it’s about the money then you probably entered the wrong field of endeavor. Teaching and engaging in scholarly pursuits at a college or university is, in my opinion, a privilege that carries with it a very special mission: to transform the lives of students. It is important to remember this fact on a daily basis—whether you are an assistant professor, an associate professor, a dean, a provost, or a president—particularly when your schedule appears to be overwhelming and you find yourself asking, Why am I doing this? Why am I attending this committee meeting? Why am I spending so much time with this student or this staff member when he or she should know better?

It will be even more important if you begin to think they do not pay you enough to do these things. In *Life Work*, the poet and former University of Michigan professor Donald Hall describes the inseparable nature of his own life and work. “There are days, there are days,” he writes. “The best day begins with waking early because I want so much to get out of bed and start working. Usually something particular beckons so joyously, like a poem that I have good hope for that seems to go well. Would it look as happy today as it looked yesterday?” (2003, 41).

I, too, have had those best days when I could not wait to get up and play a particular piece or continue researching a subject that had captured my fascination or teach Gershwin’s marvelous opera *Porgy and Bess* to a group of eager students in my African American music class. My life’s work, your life’s work, cannot solely be about the money.

In addition to being the president of Wheaton College, I am also a professional cellist. I have performed in Carnegie Hall and currently play with the Klemperer Piano Trio based in London, England. I am telling you this not to brag but to begin the tale that has led me to this point. While I did not begin to play the cello until I was thirteen, within a year of taking up the instrument I was performing in a cello competition. There, Elizabeth Potteiger, the cellist in the Oxford String Quartet at Miami University who had invited me to attend a summer music workshop at the university, heard me perform. At the conclusion of the one-week workshop, she made an extraordinary offer: she would teach me free of charge if my parents would transport me from Cincinnati to Oxford, a distance of about thirty-five miles.

This offer had a profound impact on my life. Liz Potteiger was, by all rights, a renaissance woman. One of the founders of the Oxford quartet, she was also widely read and a world
traveler. She became the most influential mentor in my life, other than my parents. Every Saturday morning at 7:20 a.m.—yes, the early morning has always been my friend—I would board a bus in Cincinnati for the ninety-minute journey to Oxford and would not return home until 6:00 p.m.

I was a natural, a self-taught musician, but Liz Potteiger taught me how to play the cello as a thinking performer. She taught me how to execute goal-oriented movements, how to be certain that what was in my mind’s ear was ultimately produced by the cello. She also taught me that the type of practice routine necessary to perform consistently well in public is analogous to the training of the athlete preparing for world-class competition. Every practice has to be intentional and goal directed. Liz Potteiger’s teaching, guidance, encouragement, and advice have informed much of my life ever since.

My passion for transforming the lives of students, then, is a result of my own experience; it is the primary motivation for the work I do. It is not necessary for you to have the same passion or motivation, but you should be able to answer the question “why do I do what I do?” with a response other than “for the money” or “for the prestige.” Now, this is not to say that money is not important. It is. But the point is there has to be a greater good.

Lesson number three
Build a network of developmental relationships. One of the keys to spiraling through the glass ceiling in higher education, or in any profession for that matter, is mentoring. Mentors not only serve to provide advice and support, but they
also can play a significant role in your professional and personal development, particularly early in your career. A mentor can help you understand the formal and informal policies, procedures, and agendas at your institution.

In my opinion, it is best to have several mentoring relationships to support the many aspects of your development. Also, it is important to assess these relationships periodically, because you will need different mentors at various stages of your career. For instance, it is likely that as a faculty member your post-tenure mentors will be different from your pre-tenure mentors. How can you find a mentor? Certainly not by waiting to be invited. Mentors, by and large, do not go hunting for mentees. You must seek them out. You must be proactive. And most importantly, you must present yourself in such a manner that potential mentors will be attracted to you.

Another of my mentors, Bryce Jordan, former president of Pennsylvania State University, encouraged me years ago—in fact, exactly ten years before I accepted the job as president of Wheaton—to start thinking about becoming a college president. He helped me to articulate my goals and values and to envision the type of place where I thought I could be most effective. With his encouragement, I decided that a small residential liberal arts college was the best place for me, a decision that I have been able to realize splendidly at Wheaton College.

**Lesson number four**

*Do not underestimate the importance of institutional culture.* America is barely one generation beyond legal separation by race; hence, the majority of organizations, corporations, and higher education institutions in this country are, by definition, monocultural.

“Fit” is a term that one often hears these days in higher education. For example, is he or she the right fit for our department, college, or university? Well, it works both ways. Higher education institutions have to be the right fit for you, too. When you are considering whether an institution is indeed the right fit for you, you will need to ask yourself several questions: What is the climate like for women and people of color at the institution?

If you find that you do not like certain aspects of your institutional culture, then you have an obligation to effect change.

What is the overall nature of intergroup relations on the campus? Is the institution interested in diversity for the right reasons? In other words, is diversity viewed as an educational asset or is social justice the sole basis for the institution’s desire to increase the numbers of women and persons of color?

These are the kinds of questions you need to consider at all stages of your career, even if you spend your entire career at the same institution. What is more, if you find that you do not like certain aspects of your institutional culture, especially with respect to intergroup relations, then you have an obligation to effect change.

**Lesson five**

*Take responsibility for your own career.* No matter how supportive and effective your mentoring network is, you have to take responsibility for your own career advances. No one else can do that for you, especially if you are a woman or a person of color. Be assertive. Keep your network and allies active. Approach those whom you admire for advice. The worst thing that can happen to you is that they will say no. This is particularly true with respect to promotion and tenure, when your awareness of the informal agenda becomes critically important.

The promotion and tenure process is daunting. And it is overwhelming to almost everyone. The key to negotiating it without feeling overwhelmed is to have accurate information, and the way to get that information is to ask, to be proactive. Do not expect people to bring you the information, whether you are a faculty member or a member of the administration. And remember, any official guide or printed material will outline only the formal process for promotion and tenure or advancement.

You must become aware of the informal process by speaking with older colleagues who have already been through it.

**Lesson six**

*Race and gender matter, but they alone do not determine your fate.* The authors of *The Making of Minority Executives* found that, despite the existence of extra challenges and scrutiny, the executives in their study never took race to be a determining factor in their professional
My dad always taught my brothers and me that, even though others might not appreciate our beauty and brilliance, we should always walk with our heads held high and be proud black men. He also taught us that, in addition to being black, we too are Americans entitled to all the same rights, privileges, and opportunities as the majority and we should not hesitate to take advantage of them. For those of us working in institutions of higher education, this means we should never be afraid to assert our perspective in discussions. We should always believe in the great value of that perspective.
Lesson number seven

Do not forget to take time for yourself and for your family. This may seem like a simplistic matter, but as one who has been married for more than twenty-six years, I can tell you that you really have to work on this aspect of your life. Advancing your career should not come at the expense of your family.

Family is fundamental to me because I come from a family that has celebrated its history for almost a hundred years. I lived in Germany for five years. Early on, I thought I wanted to stay there forever. Then, one day I realized that if I were to remain in Germany the rest of my life, I and any progeny that I might have would be disconnected from our family history. To me, that was more important. And so, while my heart wanted to remain in Germany, my head said I needed to be back here at home. Family is essential to me, and so too is acknowledging the vital contributions my family has made to my success.

Every time I walk into Park Hall, the administration building at Wheaton, I am cognizant of the fact that I am standing on the shoulders of my foremothers and forefathers. That really gives me a great deal of energy every day and every time I think about it. It is very important. My father was the first black manager at the Cincinnati Milacron, which at the time was the world’s largest machine tool company. He accomplished this goal without a college degree. In fact, he did not even finish high school. He went to the tenth grade, and then he went to New York Tech for an industrial degree. I, his son, hold a doctorate from Yale University, and I am the first black president of Wheaton College.

That notion is a source of both pride and inner strength to me every single day. You must also remember the relationship with your family or your partner. I find the best solution is simply to schedule time for lunch or dinner with your spouse or significant other—or frankly, if you do not have a partner, just for yourself for important activities on your calendar.

Conclusion

It is very obvious to me that the existence of the glass ceiling, for persons of color and for women, is a reality in American society today. Institutions of higher education are no exception. I have no doubt that this reality will remain a factor in the career development of women and persons of color well into the twenty-first century. I maintain, however, that rather than feeling victimized by it, we should embrace it as an opportunity to assert ourselves by doing everything within our power, individually and collectively, to be competent, credible, and confident in our endeavors. And, I might add, to give back by one day taking our place as mentors for those in the next generation of scholars and administrators.

I hope these seven lessons give you some ideas to reflect on and strategies to contemplate, and that the metaphor of the spiral staircase is useful to you. They have been immensely useful to me in shaping a balanced and productive life and career. My challenge to you is to be cognizant of the glass ceiling, but with the implicit knowledge and understanding that it does not represent an insurmountable barrier in your life. In those well-known words of the poet Langston Hughes (1995, 30), “Don’t you turn back. / Don’t you set down on the steps / ’Cause you find it’s kinder hard. / Don’t you fall now— / For I’se still goin’ honey, / I’se still climbin’, / And life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.”

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REFERENCES
The United States is currently undergoing a dramatic economic transformation, more dramatic even than the previous transformation from a farm-based economy to an industrial economy. This has been variously described as a transformation to an “information economy,” an “internet economy,” a “technology economy,” a “high-tech economy,” a “knowledge economy,” or even a “post-industrial society.” Those are all wonderful terms, but I prefer the term “creative economy” because, intuitively or emotionally, I find it more inclusive. Every single human being is creative. The great challenge of our age is to tap and harness all of that creativity.

We are shifting from an economy based on physical inputs—land, capital, and labor—to an economy based on intellectual inputs, or human creativity. Although economic transformations are always difficult and require great sacrifice, this shift is cause for tremendous optimism. If we can emerge from the current transformation in the right way, then for the first time in human history our economic future will depend upon the further development of human beings. We will not grow our economy, we will not become more prosperous, unless we further develop all of our human creative capabilities.

Two economies
At the turn of the last century, most Americans worked on farms. Less than 5 percent worked in what I have come to call the creative sector of the economy—science, technology, innovation, art, culture, music, design, entertainment, and the knowledge-based professions. By 1950, a growing number of Americans, approximately 50 percent, worked in manufacturing. Fewer worked on farms, and less than 10 percent worked in the creative sector of the economy. The real explosion occurred between 1980 and 2005. In that twenty-five-year period alone, twenty million new jobs were added in the creative sector of the economy. Now, over the course of the next decade—according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics—ten million new jobs will be added in the creative sector of the economy.

But our conception of the creative economy must be expanded beyond science, technology, and design to include all applications of creativity. The United States will lose half a million manufacturing jobs, but it will add another five million jobs in the service economy. The economic futures of those of us who are fortunate enough to participate in the creative sector, compared to those of us who toil in the service economy, are bifurcating.

Seven-hundred-fifty-thousand new retail sales jobs will be created. Many of the companies now operating in the retail sector are taking
Creative Class
The New Global Competition for Talent
a strategy very different from Wal-Mart’s. Companies like Best Buy, Whole Foods, Wegmans, IKEA, and the Container Store are paying better and providing better benefits. They are recognized by Fortune magazine as being among the best places to work, along with all sorts of high-technology companies. But most importantly, they are harnessing the creativity of their workforce. The real challenge of our time is not to use design and innovation to create new products, but to upgrade creative work across the board—not just in the creative economy, where 30 percent of us now work, but in the service sector as well.

**Our conception of the creative economy must be expanded beyond science, technology, and design to include all applications of creativity**

All of us are creative, and we are moving into a creative economy. There are a lot of hurdles, but there is great potential.

**Globalization**

New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman (2005) has argued recently that the world is flat. Friedman has come to believe that the single biggest threat of our time is the leveling of the playing field around the world. He argues that bringing in three billion new capitalists from India and China has made the world more homogenous, has created more competition, and threatens American jobs and livelihood. He cautions his own daughters
to study hard and do well because, somewhere in India or China, there is a student who is studying hard and who will compete with them directly for a job. In order to innovate in this flat new world, he says, one no longer has to emigrate.

Working with Tim Gulden of the University of Maryland, I decided to take a look at the data. We plotted where people in the world live, where light emission maps show significant energy use, where economic activity takes place, and we did some fancy analytics with patenting data to show where innovation occurs. We also looked at rates of scientific and technological publishing in universities. We found that Friedman has got half of the story absolutely right. Advances in technology and communications, as well as trade and transport, certainly have made the world flatter in a sense. Many more places are now open for business. But really, the world is not flat at all. In fact, from population to production to innovation to science, the world is increasingly mountainous or spiky. We wrote a piece for the Atlantic Monthly called “The World Is Spiky” (2005), in fact.

Here’s what we saw. The world is built around a dozen or two mega-regions. Sure, if you look at it from New York to Washington, DC, to Bangalore to Shanghai to Zurich to Paris to London, then everything from the top of the peak looks completely flat. But in order to make it in the world today, you had better scramble to get yourself onto one of those peaks, because the distance between the peaks and the valleys is growing wider every day. The motor force that is driving the world economy is not a tendency toward decentralization. Rather, it is a simultaneous decentralizing and centralizing tendency. It is not a one-way street, it is a dialectic. The world is becoming flatter and spikier at the same time.

The reason people concentrate is very simple. It does not have to do with jobs and economic opportunity. It does not really have to do with amenities and lifestyle. When people concentrate in one place, they gain enormous economic leverage or productivity advantage. When they cluster together—people, not just companies—they make each other more productive, they make each other more inventive, and they complement each other’s skills and talents. And all of this leads to robust economic growth.

**The role of colleges and universities**

Colleges and universities are the hubs for this new microeconomics of regional growth. The conventional view among economists is that the university is an engine of innovation: research leads to new ideas, which lead to new inventions, which lead either to an increase in the productivity of existing companies or, better yet, to the creation of spin-off companies. But, as discussed in a new report called “The University in the Creative Economy”—which my colleagues Gary Gates, Kevin Stolarick, and Brian Knudsen wrote with me—the university is far more important to the creative economy than that simple-minded view allows. That conventional view oversells the role of the university because it oversells what we do least well.

My theory of economic growth is simple. I call it the “three Ts”: technology, talent, and tolerance. All growing, exciting, talent-magnet regions do all three things well. They invest in, exploit, and utilize technology. They also attract, utilize, and retain talent. But talent does not just happen to come to a particular region. It is not just born in the region, and it does not necessarily stay there. People are
highly mobile. Talent is not a stock, it is flow. The most important thing is either to attract talented and creative people or to “grow” them, and that takes what I call tolerance. It takes an open system. To create a growth region, you need the kind of place that people want to come to and can easily get to, where they can lead the lives they want and express themselves freely.

What, then, is the role of colleges and universities in the creative age? The university plays a big role in technology, of course. Particularly in large metropolitan areas, research in technology adds to regional earnings and employment. Yet while technology is important, the more critical way colleges and universities affect the regions in which they’re situated is through the other two “Ts.” Colleges and universities are talent machines; their most basic functions are to create talent, to connect people to one another, and to add to their pool of talent.

Colleges and universities not only do this directly, they also do it indirectly. If a college or a university has a great faculty, then it attracts great graduate students; if it has great graduate students and faculty, then it also attracts great undergraduates. But more importantly, if a town has a great college or university, or if it has several of them, it attracts people and, often, companies. Boston and Austin are two perfect examples of that—places
where companies have located in large part because universities have produced large pools of talent for them to tap. And a college or university adds to the ambience of a region and allows it to attract people.

If you take the number of people in a particular college or university in any region in the United States and compare it to the number of people in that same region who have a college degree, as my colleague Kevin Stolarick at Carnegie Mellon has done, you can create a “brain gain” index. Of the more than three hundred metropolitan regions in the country, only 10 percent have a positive score on Stolarick’s index. In other words, 90 percent of all metropolitan regions in the United States are net exporters of talent—they lose their creative young people. That is precisely the kind of migration we are experiencing in this country. It is not enough simply to have a strong college or university. It is the relationship between the colleges and universities and the regions that creates maximal impact.

Tolerance, the third “T,” is the key variable. The regions that are most open to different lifestyles and to people who think differently or who express their creativity differently have the kind of ecosystem that attracts talented and entrepreneurial people across the board. Colleges and universities have an enormous effect on tolerance because they help to create environments that are open to different lifestyles. They have become the new Ellis Islands of our country, attracting talented and skilled immigrants. Immigrants are powerful spurs to growth, and colleges and universities are focal points for attracting those immigrants to a particular region. Moreover, they are the kinds of places where talented people of all stripes interact. A stimulating intellectual environment creates the capacity to innovate and, in turn, to create regional success.

Colleges and universities have to contribute to the regional absorptive capacity of a creative ecosystem. They need not only to generate innovations but also to absorb them. In other words, although a college or university may be sending out the right signals—and the signal may be strong—the receiver in the region may be switched off. Getting that match between signal and receiver, between the college or university and the community, and creating a seamless web of connections between them is very important.

By comparing measures of creativity to measures of the universities and colleges present in a region, you get what I’ve called a “creativity index.” The large metropolitan regions are obvious: Silicon Valley and the Bay Area, San Diego, Austin, Boston, Seattle, Chicago, Denver, and Los Angeles. The mid-side regions are interesting: Lansing, Madison, Albany, New York, and Ann Arbor. And the
small regions are very interesting: Gainesville, Bryan (Texas), Bloomington, Corvallis, Iowa City, Lafayette, and Charlottesville. The creativity index suggests that although there are many places where the signal is not being received, there are many places of various sizes where it is.

Another thing the index suggests is that certain big regions remain unaware of this. When people ask me about the future of Detroit, for example, I respond by telling them that the future of Detroit has little to do with rebuilding the renaissance center. The future of Detroit instead depends upon building a strong and fundamental connection to Ann Arbor. When people ask me about the future of Indianapolis, I point out that there are two fabulous college towns filled with students within a half-hour’s drive. Indianapolis needs to build an integrated super-region. The point is there’s considerable leverage in smaller and medium regions as well as in the big ones.

Life satisfaction

I’m involved with the Gallup Organization in an ongoing study of subjective well-being, human happiness, and life satisfaction. I’ve worked with David Wilson and Darby Miller-Steiger and a cracker-jack team of Gallup’s polling people to survey three thousand people so far, and our group will survey tens of thousands of people before the study is completed. This is the first time that the role of place and community in people’s lives has been examined, and the preliminary findings are surprising.

We’re finding that people’s perceptions of colleges and universities have a significant effect on their satisfaction with their communities. When asked to describe their ideal city, people tend to identify quality of life issues, aesthetics, openness to diversity, and the presence of great colleges and universities. All of these characteristics are important factors in determining people’s willingness to stay in their communities. The way people perceive colleges and universities has a lot to do with whether they want to stay in their city, and it has a great deal to do with whether or not they would recommend it to their friends or relatives. In this regard, people’s views of colleges and universities are far more important than the more traditional “pocketbook” issues.

Colleges and universities tend to affect people’s life satisfaction not necessarily through their own direct educational experiences but through their perceptions of their cities. When we looked at this by level of education—people who did not go to college or university, people who went to college or university, and people who went to graduate school—we found that positive perceptions of colleges and universities actually decrease with the level of education. It’s almost linear: people with no college or university education are the people who value it the most. This is a very interesting finding, and it may suggest a need to more actively build connections not only to community leadership but also to the community more broadly—not just our constituents, not just highly educated people like us, but all those people who view the colleges and universities in their towns as pathways to a better life.

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REFERENCES


IN JANUARY 2006, the New York Times headlined a new $3.75 billion federal initiative that would give $750 grants to low-income college students who successfully completed a “rigorous secondary school program of study” (Dillon 2006). These grants would increase for juniors and seniors with particular declared majors. We couldn’t ask for higher-level acknowledgment that we’re on the right track with Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) but, from my perspective as a top official in Wisconsin’s executive branch, I argue that this quiet addition to the budget bill could well hobble our ability to meet and sustain the goals of the LEAP campaign in our state—and in yours.

As the vast majority of family-supporting jobs now require postsecondary training and education, children’s aspirations for college are nearly universal. Low-income and minority students are likely, though, to fall into yawning achievement gaps, or stumble over tuition costs, or bump up against parents’ anachronistic attitudes toward college and confusing protocols that keep them from matriculating—or convert them into attrition statistics.

That happens at no small expense to all of us. A 2000 Educational Testing Service study claims that if we were to increase the level of minority student participation in college to that of white students, we would create an additional $231 billion in gross domestic product and at least $80 billion in new tax revenues (Carnevale 2000). We have front row seats for a seismic shift from an industrial to a knowledge economy; we must find more ways to articulate the return on education, to assert the public value of a liberal education in an era of global competition.

A liberal education is quickly becoming the price of admission to a twenty-first century knowledge economy. A liberal education prepares students for the reality they will encounter and meets the needs of employers, and with its grounding in ethics and social responsibility, it prepares students to build a better world and deepens the nation’s talent pool for innovation.

But more precise definitions of the essential outcomes of a liberal education for a student, state, and nation requires empowering the entire community to enter the debate. With broad commitment and bold leadership, this campaign can help inform how government and educational institutions evolve to support citizens’ success in this time of flux, drive development of appropriate metrics to measure their effectiveness and assign responsibility for meeting those goals, and invite unprecedented partnerships to sustain them.

LEAP is a brilliant intervention at this critical moment. We talk a lot about affordability, access, graduation rates, and accountability; LEAP forces that conversation to merge with an examination of the kinds of learning today’s college graduates need.

• It sidelines partisan rhetoric to focus public policy on the real engine for smart growth and development—an intellectually agile workforce functioning as an ethical, engaged citizenry.
• It responds to prevailing wisdom that business performance and national prosperity today depend on the creation and application of new knowledge, on our ability to innovate.

Barbara Lawton is lieutenant governor of Wisconsin.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

On the occasion of its ninetieth anniversary in 2005, the Association of American Colleges and Universities launched Liberal Education and America’s Promise: Excellence for Everyone as a Nation Goes to College (LEAP), a ten-year national campaign to champion the value of a liberal education.

In coordination with the LEAP campaign, and in an effort to encourage public dialogue and debate about what really matters in college, this series of articles presents a broad array of perspectives on the value of liberal education.

For additional information about the LEAP campaign and how to get involved, see www.aacu.org/advocacy.
at Home and Abroad

Liberal Education’s New Premium

BARBARA LAWTON

Annual Meeting
• It reestablishes the value of the work of the academy in mining, maintaining, and building knowledge.
• It calls on the archetypal attributes of our nation’s founders: creativity, innovation, risk taking, and entrepreneurship.
• It should trigger better understanding of how education policy from pre-kindergarten through grade twelve must be aligned in a continuum to support these goals, resulting in more cost-effective public investments. Think of LEAP as a powerful centrifugal force for necessary change.
• Finally, it builds on the strength of democracy and, with its implicit demand for unprecedented partnerships, reinforces our democratic system.

The challenges we face
Challenges lay ahead, notably the surprising lack of familiarity with the idea of a liberal education among so many students and their families. Added to this is a generalized distrust of all that is modified by the word “liberal.” Too many students think of their college education as a private rather than public good, ignorant of the fact that the public and private sectors already underwrite a significant portion of the cost.

Other obstacles to hurdle are within the academy, where the self-referential language used often confounds would-be consumers and holds them at a distance. We can’t build public confidence in higher education without giving the public a sense of fluency when speaking about it, without giving them a way to think about it and the words to support it. Many academics’ strong sense of responsibility for, and their comfort in, the tradition of liberal education translates into apprehension about “watering it down”—and is read by the public as persistent elitism. Academics are, reliably and responsibly, skeptical about confusing the pursuit of truth with the pursuit of profit. And in my experience, academic administrators and faculty too often struggle to articulate their own case for a liberal education, and are utterly naive about the political context in which they work.

Added to these challenges is the fact that alumni have been better developed as donors than as advocates. And the business community does not fully understand how the financial picture of too many educational institutions breeds a fragility that has an impact far beyond the reach of their campuses.

The University of Wisconsin System
So what will LEAP look like? Let’s talk about the University of Wisconsin (UW), an ideal selection to pilot LEAP for many reasons that play to our state’s strengths and weaknesses. Wisconsin boasts twenty liberal arts colleges, and a network of forty-seven technical colleges and twenty-six UW campuses, with recently improved articulation between the latter two, for a total of well over half a million students pursuing postsecondary studies at some level.

But for all our capacity, we have not done well at enrolling and graduating low-income and minority students. In fact, we have seen a decline in recent years. And Wisconsin is becoming an immigrant state, much as we were in the early part of the twentieth century. Only this time, the immigrants are the Hmong, Somalis, Sudanese, and Latinos, not the Poles, Belgians, Norwegians, and Germans.

At the same time, Wisconsin is facing a workforce crisis that is coming at us like a steaming train. We have a higher than average percentage of baby boomers, smaller young generation, a declining birth rate, and a disturbingly high net out-migration of bright college graduates.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison was recently named the nation’s number-one research university, but it is the flagship for a state that ranks thirty-fifth out of fifty in terms of the percentage of workers aged twenty-five and older who carry the credential of a baccalaureate. We are a low-wage state; we know we need to
increase the number of citizens carrying a baccalaureate degree. You would think it an easy job to convince our lawmakers to maintain a strong and accessible university system, but the numbers tell a different story.

General purpose state revenue (GPR) to the UW System has fallen precipitously over the past ten years. Our contribution per FTE is 14 percent below the national average, lodging us solidly in the bottom at number forty-six. GPR as a percentage of the university system budget has followed national trends; at 24 percent, it is only half of what it was thirty years ago. If we slice the numbers to show
GPR to the UW system as a percentage of overall state spending, it is just one third of what it was thirty years ago—4 percent in the 2004–5 academic year. And tuition has increased by 40 percent in just three years.

Other signs of legislative hostility include bills to criminalize stem-cell research and prohibit dispersing of emergency contraception at UW student clinics. It is only fair to mention at this point that UW administrators themselves generated what seemed like an endless series of public relations gaffes this past year.

None of that is insurmountable in a state that built a magnificent infrastructure for higher education. We issue from citizens who valued education and made genuine sacrifices to ensure that children everywhere in the state lived within reach of a university campus. We hail from a state that claims the nation’s first kindergarten, where the idea for Social Security was hatched, and disability insurance premiered. We speak with nostalgic pride of the Wisconsin Idea, that notion that the university should serve as a laboratory of ideas to inform public policy, that the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state.

I am confident we will recapture the public’s imagination and re-center liberal education in our plans for Wisconsin’s future. Campus–community dialogues on this very topic are happening across the state. The faculty has been engaged to anchor their courses in the context of a liberal education right in the class syllabus. President Kevin Reilly will soon announce his Council on Diversity, and our state’s PK–16 Leadership Council is a natural vehicle through which we could set up a seamless way of thinking about what constitutes adequate preparation to contribute in a knowledge economy.

The LEAP campaign in Wisconsin
LEAP gives us a powerful controlling metaphor to turn all public discourse related to the university into a conversation about how our investment in education connects to our economic outlook. What would success look like?

• PK–12 education will drive more, and more diverse, well-prepared students to pursue a liberal education.
• There will be integrity to our campaign: even as we aspire to determined inclusion to ensure access for a diverse student body, each institution of higher learning must...
examine its own practices related to equal opportunity for women and minorities in its employ, and bring them into alignment with its goals for students.

• Undergraduate programs will follow the lead of top business schools, and introduce more interdisciplinary work to foster more creative problem solving in an increasingly complex world.

• Expanded undergraduate research opportunities will underscore and strengthen the relationship between scholarly work, creativity, multiple disciplines, and the community.

• The state will create a visible matrix of opportunity to help students connect the dots between a liberal arts degree and their career aspirations.

• Institutions of higher education will collaborate with the state to define and collect the data necessary to drive effective advocacy with vivid, convincing narratives.

I am confident we will recapture the public’s imagination and re-center liberal education in our plans for Wisconsin’s future.
LEAP gives us a powerful controlling metaphor to turn all public discourse related to the university into a conversation about how our investment in education connects to our economic outlook.
The argument for public investment to make a liberal education broadly accessible and affordable will be data-driven and advanced in economic terms. And the metrics to gauge return on that investment will measure progress of both students and of the community and state, and will be checked annually to ensure that we stay on course.

That argument for investment in a liberal education will emphasize the importance of preserving the independence of our great universities if they are to both rise above and serve the competing interests of those in the private sector.

There will be a statewide echo of public testimony as to the value of a liberal education, led by the business community, recorded by the media, and repeated in a wide variety of settings by unexpected voices.

The media will provide ongoing coverage of the campaign as a project of civic journalism.

We will be strategic: instead of just lobbying legislative leaders, we will create for them a constituency for reinvestment in liberal education, one characterized by a sense of joint ownership, across sectors, for success.

Lawmakers will respond by committing to maintaining a system of higher education that balances the twin demands of excellence and mass access.

LEAP will require and foster bold, collaborative leadership, with participation from the academy, the state house, and the private sector.

Our task is to ensure that our nation builds the workforce necessary to stay in front in an era of global competition. From Green Bay to New York to Austin to San Diego, the promise of opportunity—for women, for minorities and children of immigrants, for young professionals, for established and upstart businesses—depends on the possibility in each place of upward mobility beginning on the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder.

We can guarantee that mobility—and, therefore, a robust and productive workforce, increased earnings, and a more desirable climate for investment—if we build confidence in and access to a great liberal education.

Back to that budget provision. I truly believe that the commitment our states and our nation must make to higher education can only proceed from a common and clear understanding of its enduring public value. We must engage all citizens to own the outcome of public debate that sets our priorities. A system of grants administered by the federal government will merely add another layer of bureaucracy and create greater distance between citizens and education issues.

LEAP’s premise that intellectual rigor and virtue in multiple disciplines are practical survival tools for twenty-first-century life, if broadly accepted, will inevitably drive government and educational institutions to evolve, to innovate in response. It will indeed, then, become the framework by which we write our nation’s future.

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

REFERENCES
Senior academic leaders are in consensus that, for purposes of tenure, a candidate’s significant contributions to collaborative scholarship should be valued highly. That consensus, however, may be as fragile as it is shallow. At an operational level, we do not agree about what counts as potentially significant contributions to collaborative scholarship. At a conceptual level, we appear to conflate three different notions: “independent scholarship,” “solo-authored publications,” and “significant scholarly work.”

The fundamental issue is how to give due weight and proper consideration for purposes of tenure to the intellectual work and scholarly worth of various kinds of contributions. As a group, we are not sure how to value such work as designing and assuring the integrity of a collaborative research project, serving as the content expert on a research team, developing and validating the research instruments used in the project, writing the first solid draft of a scholarly manuscript for publication, being an invited coauthor of a scholarly manuscript, providing the statistical and analytical expertise needed to undertake the project, being the principal investigator of the grant that funds the collaborative project, being the person who had the initial idea for the collaboration, or being the leader of a collaborative research project or team.

If we who are experienced in making tenure evaluations and tenure decisions year in and year out on candidates from a wide range of disciplines are not in accord, how can we meaningfully discuss tenure expectations in an informed and detailed way with colleagues? How can we supply sound academic leadership or helpful collegial guidance about this to department chairs, tenure-eligible faculty, their mentors, or the faculty who serve on departmental, school-level, or university-level tenure review committees?

Three false starts, three lessons learned
I recall one particularly vexing conversation early in my years as a department chair. Tenured faculty in my department worked by themselves on their individual research projects, but some assistant professors were beginning to collaborate and to publish as coauthors. This was a new thing, believe it or not, to those of us on the departmental evaluation committee. As the department guidelines did not cover this situation, we tried to figure out how to count these coauthored publications using the dreadful point system with which we had saddled ourselves. One senior colleague glibly suggested that however many points we might assign a publication should simply be divided equally among its coauthors. The message he intended to send to his not-yet-tenured colleagues was obvious: every one of his solo-authored articles was automatically at least twice as valuable as any of their coauthored work. How convenient. Many years later at a different institution, a colleague in physics got quite a kick out of the “divide-by-the-number-of-authors” suggestion. He was one of several hundred authors on a couple of...
groundbreaking big-science publications. Lesson learned.

Sad to say, but the second approach, “always-trust-the-department,” can backfire too. On more than one occasion, I recall working as a dean with serious-minded groups of faculty leaders to clarify school-level tenure standards. Naturally, we always began by attending to the well-rehearsed differences between the disciplines in our college or school. But, candidly, we knew that some departments were less than fully able or willing to articulate the various ways candidates in their fields could potentially contribute significantly as individuals to collaborative projects. Unfortunately, in some departments influential people expressed serious difficulties with the evolving character and broadening range of what their own larger disciplinary community counted as acceptable forms of scholarly work. Some would not accept certain methodologies, or they did not consider certain kinds of questions as worthy, or they were vaguely suspicious of any work that was interdisciplinary, or they assumed collaboration meant people were getting credit for work not truly their own. In moments of candor, some might confide that they were a bit embarrassed themselves because they simply did not know how to judge the scholarly quality of these different kinds of things.

Departments occasionally suffer internal turmoil because of vested interests, misunderstandings, interpersonal strife, fractious politics, poor processes, or weak management. Some department chairs are better than others at explaining their discipline’s research modalities to those of us from other fields. Not all the tenured faculty of a department contribute useful evaluations of a candidate’s research. External reviews can be compromised by questions about the reviewer’s selection, competence, impartiality, or appreciation of a unique institutional context. Thus, tenure recommendations at the departmental level may not always reflect a broad, informed, unified, objective, and impartial analysis of the quality or the significance of a tenure candidate’s scholarly work.

Every provost or president responsible for the final decision knows that some cases are neither a clear yes nor a clear no. At times, a president or chief academic officer must make a final decision that turns on the central issue of this article: how to evaluate in a fair-minded and informed way the quality and merit of scholarly contributions made to collaborative research projects.

Faced with this problem, and wanting not to tenure unworthy candidates, some chief academic officers adopt a third approach: demand independent scholarship. For them, the candidate who produces solo-authored publications is the only surely worthy candidate. Thinking they are being rigorous, rather than simply confused, these good colleagues then mistakenly narrow their demand for “independent scholarship” until operationally it equates to “solo-authored publications.” At least with divide-by-the-number-of-authors, a candidate whose only contributions are coauthored would accumulate some points toward tenure. But if solo-authorship is a sine qua non, then we really have taken a step backward toward an outmoded, incomplete, and stifling notion of scholarly work.

The lesson learned? If we who have been making tenure decisions cannot untangle the different meanings of “independent scholarship,” “solo-authored publications,” and “significant scholarly work,” then how should we meaningfully discuss these things with colleagues? Again, how should we give well-informed and helpful guidance to deans, chairs, tenure candidates, and faculty on departmental, school-level, or university-level review committees?

Gathering insights from experience

To learn what senior-level academic administrators understand about the nature and significance of individual contributions to collaborative scholarship, I invited many of my colleagues to respond by e-mail to some questions. Do not, however, confuse my opinion gathering with rigorous research. This was merely a convenience sample designed to give friends and colleagues an organized way to participate in an exploratory conversation.

We limited our conversation to collaborative scholarship in applied behavioral science-oriented professional disciplines, such as education, journalism, communication, health and human services, counseling, applied psychology, criminal justice, nursing, and social work. There is no reason, however, to limit the conversations on campuses to these fields. Research paradigms are expanding in almost every discipline, and opportunities as well as demands for collaboration grow. Professional
journals expect more and more in order to accept submissions for publication, resulting in increasing numbers of coauthored and multi-authored works. Funding agencies increasingly target multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary questions that require building collaborative research teams. The demand from employers, students, and parents for effective workplace collaboration skills as learning outcomes begs the question whether the academy’s historical penchant for solo-scholarship really does best equip faculty to respond knowledgeably to this demand.

Tenure recommendations at the departmental level may not always reflect a broad, informed, unified, objective, and impartial analysis of the quality or the significance of a tenure candidate’s scholarly work

As academic leaders, our understanding of scholarly work and its place in the life of the teaching scholar must continue to expand and evolve with these kinds of changes. The problem of sorting out the potentially more significant from the potentially less significant contributions to collaborative scholarship must be raised periodically in every area, from the performing and studio arts to the physical and behavioral sciences, from mathematics and the humanities to the professional schools.
Fifty-six senior academic administrators responded to my invitation to join the conversation. Adding my own responses, a total of fifty-seven participated. This ad hoc group included forty-six from top-ranked private Master’s-level regional comprehensive universities and eleven from nationally ranked private research universities. In all, we were five presidents, twenty-eight academic vice presidents, and twenty-four academic deans.

How we rated the tenure candidate
To anchor our potential responses, we first considered a hypothetical case. Each of us indicated how that case would likely be viewed at our own institution by estimating the chances of such a candidate being granted tenure using percentages. The fictional case was designed to make the candidate strong in all areas so that no weaknesses would distract from the issue of independent scholarship. Every one of us picked a percentage based on the limited information given and without caveat regarding reading an actual file, set of publications, or external reviewer’s comments.

All fifty-seven of us saw the candidate as a good faculty member, someplace in the top 40 percent. In all, fifty-three rated the candidate in the top 20 percent; thirty-three put the candidate in the top 5 percent. Eight of the eleven respondents from doctoral institutions and forty-five of the forty-six respondents from Master’s institutions put the candidate in the top 20 percent. All but one of the deans and all but three of the chief academic officers put the candidate in the top 20 percent. Given this level of consensus, we respondents could be regarded—at least at that point—as more or less equal when it comes to rating the prospects of tenure candidates.

The universally positive judgments expressed about the anticipated success of this case were tempered by caveats regarding institutional mission. One chief academic officer said, “The only issue that might derail this candidate would be a lack of ‘fit’ with the mission. Otherwise this candidate seems very strong.” Some respondents made the connection between institutional mission and the explicitly faith-based or values-based character of their institution. For example, while allowing for “an impressive ecumenical kaleidoscope in terms of faith traditions, theological understandings, and social orientation,” one dean reported that at his institution “all faculty members must be serious about their Christian faith and practice.”

The case was then tweaked by adding the information that none of the candidate’s publications were solo-authored. Our responses then split down the middle: twenty-eight said that it made no difference, or perhaps even helped the candidate’s case, and twenty-six said this new information hurt the case for tenure.

Those with diminished enthusiasm worried that free-riding as a marginal contributor on the publications of others would be insufficient. While they valued substantial contributions to multi-authored work highly, they now wanted to know more about what the candidate had actually done or not done as part of the collaboration. All three of the fundamentally flawed approaches characterized earlier emerged. Using versions of the divide-by-the-number-of-authors strategy, some proposed giving lesser weight if the other coauthors were already well-established senior scholars or giving greater weight if the candidate were the “first author.” Several respondents said they would defer to the “expectations of the discipline,” although none went all the way to always-trust-the-department. One took the third approach, “I would like to see some evidence of independent, creative scholarship.”

“Independent” gets fuzzy
To close in on the issue at hand, I asked whether a university or a professional school ought explicitly to state a requirement that either “collaborative scholarship leading to coauthored publications” or “independent scholarship leading to solo-authored publications” be demanded of all candidates for tenure in applied professional fields. The terms “independent” and “collaborative” were intentionally left undefined to mirror the way conversations about this complex topic often unfold. At first, people think they are talking about the same thing only to discover through conversation that their conceptualizations are close but not identical.

Written comments on this item revealed some worrisome misunderstandings. For example, at least one person linked collaborative research with “empirical” as contrasted...
with “theoretical.” Others associated collaborative work with “interdisciplinary,” as contrasted with research conducted solely within one’s own discipline. One chief academic officer reported having heard it argued that qualitative research cannot be conducted unless it is collaborative. The fuzziness of the concept of “independent” scholarly work was beginning to reveal itself.

Regarding requirements limiting the kind of scholarly work a candidate could present, one chief academic officer summed up the situation for regional comprehensive universities this way: “I think it would be unnecessary and unproductive to dictate the type of publication required at a place . . . where we do not prepare doctoral students, but only undergraduate and master’s-level students.” One dean expressed the majority view succinctly: “Both are acceptable, neither should be required.” Forty-two (74 percent of us) said that both were acceptable modes of scholarly work and that neither should be explicitly demanded as a necessary condition.

Two respondents argued for making tenure candidates demonstrate competence working as independent scholars and as collaborative scholars. They argued that the complexity of the research paradigms that the next generation of senior faculty will have to master in order to be effective as scholars and teachers requires that faculty demonstrate a broad range of research abilities. While thought provoking, these kinds of suggestions were the exceptions, not the norm.

So what really does “independent scholar” mean?

One question asked whether it is possible to be an “independent scholar” without having a solo-authored publication. Forty-two of the senior academic administrators affirmed that these are different things; eleven indicated, however, that it would be highly unlikely that one could be considered an independent scholar without at least one solo-authored publication. But it was the comments that told the tale. Many urged that we needed a more
complete and probing analysis of the ways candidates might make significant independent contributions to collaborative research projects. The final question supplied a list of several different ways individuals could potentially make a significant contribution to a collaborative scholarly project. Respondents were welcome to endorse as many items from the list as they believed apply. (The results are shown in table 1 below.)

This was a challenging question. “This is tough,” one respondent reported. “Essentially, for me, it boils down to how much knowledge and skill this person brought to the scholarship/research and how much this person shaped the significance of the scholarship. Sort of leader/director versus follower/worker bee.” One chief academic officer wrote, “this is hard: in a given case, any of those could be tenure-relevant; but any of them (except, I think, ‘lead author’) could be the sign of a marginal role not influencing a decision.” Another respondent said, “it’s difficult to make distinctions in this generalized list.”

The challenge posed by this question further exposed the inadequacies of the “independent vs. collaborative” distinction. It is unclear and unhelpful. As the responses reveal, we are not in accord about where to draw the line between those contributions that are potentially of greater significance and those that are potentially of lesser significance.

<table>
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<th>Significant Contributions</th>
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<tr>
<td>50 (87.7%) Lead author (journal article, book chapter, monograph)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 (63.2%) Person who designed and assured the integrity of the research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 (61.4%) Content expert on the research team for the project being reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 (59.6%) Lead developer of the research instrument(s) created for the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 (57.6%) Leader of the research project team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 (54.4%) Person who wrote the first good draft of the manuscript for publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 (50.9%) Person invited to coauthor a journal article, chapter, or monograph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 (45.6%) Person who provided data and statistical analysis expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 (40.4%) Person who had the initial idea for the collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 (35.1%) Lead presenter of a paper reporting on the research findings of the study</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 (33.4%) Person coordinating the work of the research team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 (29.8%) Person whose externally funded grant supported the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 (21.1%) Person who refined data-gathering tools</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 (21.1%) Person whose previously existing dataset was used in the study</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 (17.5%) Statistician who analyzed some portion of the data in the research study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (15.8%) Person who rewrote the manuscript to respond to reviewers’ comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (10.6%) Research staff who facilitated data gathering from subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (7.0%) Person who identified literature review sources for study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (5.3%) Person who rewrote manuscript to fit publisher’s editorial specifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (3.5%) Research staff person who coded or entered respondent data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (1.8%) Person who read and edited the manuscript</td>
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An especially telling observation came from a chief academic officer who, after working through the list, said, “I don’t find the meaning of the independent/not independent distinction to be intuitively as clear or as relevant as the significant/not significant distinction.”

Final thoughts:
What advice should we give?
The notion of independent scholarship turned out not to be helpful. We did not agree on its meaning or its value at the conceptual level. We were unclear about what it includes and what it excludes at the operational level. Although we all appear ready to endorse the idea that significant scholarly contributions must be demanded of tenure candidates, our list offers no sharp limit separating scholarship of greater potential significance from that of lesser potential significance.

That list can serve as a starting point for campus discussions from which analyses and clarifications of the sorts of contributions listed—appropriate to institutional context and sensitive to disciplinary differences—can emerge. With greater knowledge of the real intellectual work of making different kinds of individual contributions to scholarly collaborations, many of our outmoded ideas and misleading ways of talking about this would, one hopes, fall by the wayside.

In closing, I offer two recommendations. First, we senior academic leaders should inform ourselves more fully about the intellectual or artistic work required for successful scholarly collaborations in a very wide range of fields and disciplines. We are mistaken if we believe lead authorship is the only collaborative contribution of potential scholarly significance.

Second, we should engage the academic leadership of our institution in explicating operationally the types of contributions to collaborative scholarship that shall be regarded as potentially of greater or lesser value for purposes of achieving tenure at the institution. Clarity regarding the operational meaning of “potentially significant contributions to collaborative scholarship” is critical for candidates and for those charged with reviewing candidate files.

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

NOTES
1. I wish to acknowledge and to thank Noreen C. Facione, my wife and frequent research collaborator, for her assistance with the development of the questionnaire, the coding and entering of the data into SPSS, and her insightful advice about the shape and content of this essay. Noreen was the founding director of the Center for Faculty Professional Development at Loyola University Chicago. In that administrative leadership role she worked extensively with faculty mentors, chairs, deans, assistant professors, tenured faculty, and emeriti. The sensitivities gathered from that work informed this project.
2. In sending the e-mail invitations only to academic administrators, I assumed faculty who review tenure cases have benefit of group conversations in their tenure committees when considering and voting on tenure cases. In contrast, academic administrators are more likely to review cases and render their written recommendations working alone. Thus, administrators have less of an opportunity to test any presumptions they might be making about the way research is conducted in a given field or the significance in that field of the various independent contributions of different scholars to a collaborative project.
3. I focused on private institutions believing that, because of traditions of confidentiality and campus cultures of more centralized decision making at private institutions, the chief academic officers, presidents, and academic deans there tend to exercise significantly greater leverage on tenure decision outcomes than do their counterparts at public institutions.
4. The fictional case was described this way: “Consistently excellent teaching and curricular development at the undergraduate and graduate levels, a heavy advising load, exceptional faculty service, positive collegiality, and good leadership skills; and eight or more solid publications in blind peer-reviewed, professional journals relevant to the discipline (education, in this case), some of which are first- or second-tier venues, numerous additional publications including lesser papers, book chapters, and presentations at national professional meetings, at least one substantial competitively awarded external grant, and evidence of the beginnings of national and international recognition through citations, invited presentations, and adoptions of the person’s materials by others for their scholarly uses in the U.S. and abroad.”
5. This is characteristic of experience-based expertise, namely a readiness to make holistic judgments grounded in widely shared cultural understandings—in this case, understandings of what generally to expect of a successful candidate for tenure at a particular institution.
6. Fourteen said, “yes, require collaborative scholarship leading to coauthorship.” Ten said, “Yes, require independent scholarship leading to solo-authorship.” And forty-two said, “no, make neither of these ‘required’.”
Shooting the Gap

Engaging Today’s Faculty in the Liberal Arts

DENNIS DAMON MOORE

In “What Really Matters in College: How Students View and Value Liberal Education” (2005), Debra Humphreys and Abigail Davenport present the findings of a study that asked high school and college students about their impressions of liberal education. Humphreys and Davenport found that, on the whole, these students—including those already in college—did not have a working definition of a liberal education and did not spontaneously value the outcomes of such an education. In the course of the study, students were asked to consider a definition familiar to virtually everyone connected with liberal arts colleges (42):

Liberal education is a philosophy of education that empowers individuals, liberates the mind from ignorance, and cultivates social responsibility. A liberal education comprises a curriculum that includes general education that provides students broad exposure to multiple disciplines and more in-depth study in at least one field or area of concentration.

Students responded positively to this definition, but it was evident that developing associated writing and other communication skills, information literacy, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and global perspective were not high on their list.

This result is not surprising. Faculty and administrators at many liberal arts colleges know that students tend to focus on specific course-oriented outcomes; and there is a gap between that focus and the larger consideration of more general skills and capacities that liberal education purports to foster. However, as everyone would agree, the gap is unfortunate—not least because professional and corporate employers have been increasingly emphatic about the value of those very skills and capacities in adapting to life after college. Understanding that in “today’s knowledge-fueled world, the quality of student learning is our key to the future” (43), Humphreys and Davenport conclude by calling upon the colleges to find ways to shoot this gap.

In the fall of 2005, interaction among representatives from the fourteen institutional members of the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) meeting at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, suggested that at least some colleges are finding those ways. They had come together for the third and final conference in a series funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation as part of a project entitled Engaging Today’s Students with the Liberal Arts. Two previous conferences in the spring of 2003 and the spring of 2005 had focused on first-year education and interdisciplinary, collaborative, and experiential learning; the consortium had also sponsored research related to institutional mission statements, distribution requirements, and student views of the education they were experiencing; and individual campuses had undertaken specific projects related to new initiatives in teaching and learning. The conference at Coe provided an opportunity for participants to share their findings and to deliberate together on the future of liberal education in institutions like theirs. The conference concluded

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with small-group discussion sessions, free from campus politics or financial constraints, which produced a collection of mission statements for the twenty-first-century American college. These statements reinforced an outcome that should be of interest to readers of Liberal Education.

In typical fashion, the conference series, with approximately a hundred attendees in each instance, had featured plenary speakers of note, including Richard J. Light, author of Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds (2001), and John Bransford, author of How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School (2000). They had provided opportunities for collegial cross-pollination in a number of breakout sessions dealing with such topics as the culture of today’s students, first-year student orientation, off-campus study, and academic advising.

Campus projects were varied. Beloit assembled and published an institutional gathering of reflections on liberal education. Carleton and Cornell focused on writing across the curriculum. In diverse projects, St. Olaf, Knox, Monmouth, and Ripon looked at the first and/or second year. Coe reconsidered its program of general education.

Although many faculty members from the individual colleges learned a great deal, most of the interchange did not represent original educational thought. In their remarks, Light and Bransford offered syntheses of and comments on well-known studies; and from one
point of view, most of the campus projects simply helped some colleges catch up to other colleges in their areas of focus. The fact that faculty mentoring is important to undergraduate students, that first-year students experience college in widely disparate ways, or that second-year students do not automatically synthesize and apply what they learn from one course to another is hardly front-page news. But considered in other ways, this three-year ACM project brought news of a different kind.

**Toward a collaborative curriculum**

When all is said and done, figuring out how to engage today’s students in liberal arts study does not require advanced degrees in higher education. It simply requires that a college give this process very high priority in its rhetoric, its programming, and its attention to students early and late. The real news in this consortial project was that at least some colleges are beginning to take hold in this line. To formulate more ways to engage students, faculty members themselves needed to be engaged beyond their departmental and divisional interests and think deliberately about undergraduate education across the curriculum and throughout the college career. On the individual campuses and in consortial consultation, ACM faculty members representing colleges with shared traditions and distinct personalities from Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and Colorado demonstrated that crucial engagement at the turn of a new century.

At one level, this is a trend like any other, succeeding the expansive curricula of the 1960s and 1970s, the area studies of the 1980s, or the rise of technology in the 1990s. At another level, it marks a sea change in how small-college faculty members view the liberal arts curriculum. In the old days, colleges were all about courses and majors; engaging in them, as the colleges announced and their alumni regularly testified, you also learned how to read, think, and write. But full-bodied institutional intentionality was lacking. As Ernest Pascarella (2005) has remarked, it was largely a faith-based operation with a very simplistic message: *come study here; you will learn and grow in our college, and as a result you will succeed in your later life.* Faculty members were believers, students were converts, and colleges were cathedrals, the hallowed halls. With few exceptions, colleges tended to look hard at their curricula and their teaching and learning across the board only in times of crisis such as financial exigency.

Not surprisingly, when regional accrediting agencies began to press for more objective, accountable assessment of academic achievement in the early 1990s, there was much resistance in liberal arts colleges. In a 1993 letter to the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the chairs of the deans’ councils of ACM and the Great Lakes Colleges Association declared, “we understand the contribution that institutional assessment will make to our capacity to sustain our quality. Yet it must be our own mission and philosophy of education that shape the means by which we assess our work.” For a full decade thereafter, the colleges and the regional accrediting agencies were engaged in academic dialogue...
somewhat reminiscent of the Mideast peace process. Faculty members resented the external pressure to comply and dreaded the pro forma busywork that assessment seemed to entail. In the main, they simply did not want to put their minds to this matter; they wanted to teach and write. The question of educational accountability continued to be an active issue for the regional agencies and at all levels of government. They persisted in pressuring the colleges to respond. As is often the case, deans were repeatedly caught in the middle.

Little by little, however, there developed remarkably productive convergent movement. Some of this movement was made through faculty concession and agency compromise. Everyone wants students to learn, and no one wants to put colleges out of business. But at least as important have been changes initiated by faculty members themselves. Interest in writing across the curriculum has brought faculty together for lively discussions about learning; instructional technologists and librarians have combined forces with faculty members to highlight the importance of information literacy; interdisciplinary programs have grown apace; the notion of experiential learning has created a conceptual umbrella for everything from hands-on science and internships to service learning and study abroad; and partly as a result of research like that undertaken in the engagement project, quantitative reasoning is now on the table.

None of these categories is entirely new in liberal arts colleges, but their combined prominence marks a real shift. Finding a place for these undertakings in a crowded curriculum has forced faculty members to rethink curricular priorities and developmental implications in student learning, which in turn has made it more plausible to talk about assessment—and about the value of all those skills and capacities in later life. Turning the old definition of liberal arts learning on its head, the courses and majors in the catalogue have increasingly become the vehicles and pathways for new emphases on process-oriented learning, providing a wealth of subject-matter knowledge on the side. Along the way, distribution requirements as we once knew them are gradually becoming a phenomenon of the past. The result is a new holistic vision of undergraduate education whose implementation makes wonderfully concrete an abstract ideal as old as the founding of our earliest colleges—that of sending graduates into the world as beneficiaries and practitioners of the liberal arts.

**Conversation, community, and the liberal arts**

Where are the students in all this? They are at the center, as always, learning what they need to know; and while the best faculty members have regularly taught their students how to learn, because more faculty members are more actively engaged in affirming the learning process their students are better aware of its value here and now. The challenge posed by Humphreys and Davenport is, in effect, being met: faculty and students are shooting the gap together.

Moreover, the ACM engagement project suggests that this is neither a fad nor the same old liberal arts education conveyed in new catchphrases. It is a shift like global warming, but with more positive implications for the place of this education in our larger cultural life. The fact of the project undoubtedly occasioned and facilitated some of the consideration of interdisciplinary, across-the-curriculum initiatives that ACM has recently experienced, but the project was also timely. It clearly spoke to current interests and needs. Faculty members involved in these discussions have come from every working generation and every discipline, and in an industry where faculty professionalization and campus disengagement have appeared to some to threaten the old community of learning, those discussions have induced a new academic interchange, reinforcing academic community of another kind. Appropriately, consortial projects like Engaging Today’s Students with the Liberal Arts have both broadened the circle and enriched the discussion.

This was evident in the final ACM engagement conference’s concluding activity, the breakout group formulation of putative twenty-first-century mission statements for the small liberal arts college. The rather traditional definition of liberal education that Humphreys and Davenport had presented to the students in their focus groups emphasized empowerment, liberation, and cultivation through a curriculum providing broad exposure and in-depth study. The nine statements provisionally presented at Coe—both playful and deeply serious—emphasized community and collaboration as well as active exploration
Swell College educates students to become critical and creative thinkers and productive, informed, and ethical citizens. We inculcate in our students an appreciation for the significance of diverse views, values, cultures, and bodies of knowledge. We engage students in collaborative processes of discovery and invention that provide a basis for a prosperous and meaningful life in a changing world.

No mention of courses or majors, just aims, attitudes, processes, and outcomes. Afterwards, all those ACM faculty members looked at one another and realized that they were describing the colleges that their institutions had, in fact, largely become.

The dialogue will, of course, continue in many quarters. One of the Mellon Foundation’s aims in supporting this project was to encourage and enable collaboration across the consortium. This collaboration occurred and will recur as the cross-curricular trends here described gain momentum. Since the Coe conference, ACM has sponsored a consortial workshop on academic advising that sent attendees back to their home campuses with much food for thought. For a second round of campus projects, building in part on the experience of sister institutions, Macalester will develop a Liberal Arts Learning Project, designed to deepen and broaden first-year students’ understanding of the purposes, values, and questions integral to a liberal arts education, and Grinnell will design a second-year retreat. In larger and smaller ways, members of ACM are joining with colleges across the nation to affirm and enact the goals of the Association of American Colleges and Universities in both the Greater Expectations initiative and the Liberal Education and America’s Promise campaign.

However, collaboration within individual campuses may be the most important element in the new liberal arts interchange. Disciplinary courses, traditional departments, and academic divisions have historically defined and sometimes circumscribed academic culture in small colleges, and they will undoubtedly play significant and substantial roles in liberal-oriented offerings and programs have brought faculty members together in new conversations that have benefited those faculty members, the students they teach, and the institutions they serve. Moreover, as faculty members increasingly consider the developmental aspects of student learning, they will inevitably find themselves in more frequent dialogue with administrative staff members from offices of student life. In settings where other trends have tended to dilute the sense of community that has always distinguished small liberal arts colleges, this new tilt toward collaboration is welcome indeed.

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

NOTE
1. Dennis Damon Moore is one of the coordinators of the ACM/Mellon engagement project. Also coordinating are David Burrows, provost and dean of the faculty at Lawrence University, and Marc Roy, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty at Coe College, with support from ACM program officer Daniel E. Sack and Carol Trosset, director of institutional research at Hampshire College. Consortial members of the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, founded in 1958, include Beloit College, Carleton College, Coe College, Colorado College, Cornell College, Grinnell College, Knox College, Lake Forest College, Lawrence University, Macalester College, Monmouth College, Ripon College, St. Olaf College, and the College of the University of Chicago.

REFERENCES
A Success Story

Recruiting & Retaining

Underrepresented Minority Doctoral Students in Biomedical Engineering

WILLIAM M. REICHERT

In the early 1990s, there were only a handful of African American doctoral students in all of the math, science, and engineering graduate programs at Duke University. Prior to 1995, the school of engineering had granted only one PhD to an African American. My own department of biomedical engineering (BME), which has a nationally top-ranked graduate program, had never granted a PhD to an African American in its thirty years of existence. All African American students recruited into the BME doctoral program had either left with a Master’s degree or dropped out altogether.

Now, fast-forward. In 2000, the Duke BME program awarded its third PhD to a Hispanic; in 2004, it awarded its first PhD to an African American. By 2005, the underrepresented minority (URM) cohort of thirteen BME doctoral students comprised the highest number of URM doctoral students in all the math, science, and engineering departments at Duke, including the social sciences; more than a quarter of the total URM doctoral students in all the math, science, and engineering departments at Duke, including the social sciences; more than a quarter of the total URM doctoral students in all of Duke’s thirty-two graduate programs in math and natural, physical, biological, and biomedical science; and nearly one-tenth of the total URM students enrolled in all fifty PhD-granting programs at Duke University.

What follows is the story of Duke BME’s success in solving one of the most persistent (and touchy) problems in math, science, and engineering graduate education: the recruitment and retention of URM doctoral students.

When building a URM student presence, nurturing a nucleus of strong students is critical

WILLIAM M. REICHERT is a professor of biomedical engineering and chemistry at Duke University, where he also serves as director of the Center for Biomolecular and Tissue Engineering.

Change at Duke

In 1996, I took sabbatical leave at North Carolina Central University, a historically black university in Durham, and immersed myself in the study of minority education in math, science, and engineering. I used this experience to develop a game plan for venturing outside of established recruitment norms. Upon my return to Duke, I was selected to direct a biotechnology training grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that supports predoctoral fellows during their first years of graduate training. Soon thereafter, I was appointed director of graduate studies in BME. This combination gave me the mandate, the authority, and the resources to make a difference.

The central resource was, of course, the graduate school itself. Each graduate program at Duke, based on its size, receives a budget from the graduate school to support student tuition, stipends, and fees, all of which are supplemented by research funds, fellowships, and training grants. Funds from the graduate school are both substantial and largely discretionary because the BME graduate program is one of the largest at Duke University, the BME faculty is well funded, BME graduate students are highly successful in garnering substantial external fellowships, and BME has two NIH training grants to support graduate students. The graduate school also offers two-year fellowships from the Duke endowment to the most highly qualified URM applicants.

Now, the hard part. Graduate students in the sciences are prime vehicles by which faculty accomplish their research agendas. This has led to a “risk-averse” dependence of faculty on student success that does not exist in medicine, law, or business. Nor does it exist in
the humanities, summer research programs, or undergraduate education. This unique student–faculty relationship, when it works, can be a great strength of science education; but, when it fails, it can be a great barrier to success. For URM, it can impose a highly personal burden that is as much about attitude and culture as it is about talent and resources.

I realized that the faculty and departmental “comfort zone” had to be relaxed so that “URM” was no longer a defining characteristic but, rather, a nuance within a larger context. Although the support from the administration was vital, this cultural transition could not have been accomplished by an administrator or a staff person alone. It had instead to be advocated at the departmental level by a faculty member with (1) successful and productive URM students in his or her own lab, (2) a vigorous research profile, (3) the respect of the other BME faculty, and (4) control over resources for supporting URM students. Proceeding with anything less would have made the effort unsustainable in the long run.

Through a combination of graduate school, Duke endowment, and NIH training grant funds, I was able to recruit a crucial nucleus of two URM graduate students in 1998 and 1999. I mentored one student directly in my lab and the other indirectly through my training grant. Next, I broadened the effort by recruiting a second wave of students and began encouraging other BME faculty to take URM into their research groups. By the end of my term as director of graduate studies in 2003, ten URM graduate students were working in the research groups of seven different BME faculty members. By 2005, thirteen URM graduate students were spread across the BME department, working for ten different mentors. Half of these students received NIH support in the form of a predoctoral traineeship and/or as minority research supplements to NIH grants. The rest received graduate fellowships from either the National Science Foundation or the Duke endowment. Between 2000 and 2005, only one URM student left the BME doctoral program.

**Recruiting URM students**

The Pratt School of Engineering at Duke has an award-winning outreach program that brings minority and disabled undergraduates to campus for summer research experiences (see www.pratt.duke.edu/about/outreach.php). The majority of URM students come to the program from minority-serving colleges and universities, and roughly 80 percent of these students go on to either graduate or medical school. Yet, even an outstanding outreach program like Pratt’s does not necessarily lead to increased URM enrollment—although it clearly has a positive effect on the campus climate. While BME faculty participation in this program is very high, no URM student participant has matriculated into the Duke BME graduate program.
All graduate training eventually boils down to individual faculty members committing to individual students, and vice versa. It is an absolute certainty that the faculty who recruit students will make decisions that are in their own interests, and so too will the top students they attempt to recruit. Consequently, a faculty member may decide that it is not worth the cost in time and productivity to mentor a student who is seen as a “project.” The lack of URM recruitment success fostered by this attitude is often expressed as a self-fulfilling prophesy: “we can find only a few minority students worth recruiting,” or “we can recruit them but they won’t come anyway.” In fact, the best and brightest minority students will enroll in top programs where their presence is viewed as a positive contribution. Addressing this interplay honestly and directly within the resource-limited world of academic research is central to ameliorating stigmas attached to URM students. When building a URM student presence, nurturing a nucleus of strong students is critical.

This, I suppose, is the point at which I may be expected to offer the “silver bullet.” But I don’t have one, and neither does anyone else. The best I can do is to recommend focusing your recruitment efforts on those things over which you have immediate influence. Addressing this interplay honestly and directly within the resource-limited world of academic research is central to ameliorating stigmas attached to URM students. When building a URM student presence, nurturing a nucleus of strong students is critical.

Recommendations

If you are a faculty member who wants things to change, then recruit a minority student directly into your own group and give the student a home from the day he or she walks onto campus. Don’t expect an admissions committee or someone else to solve the problem for you. If you are a graduate program director who wants to make a difference, then make personal and selective appeals for open-minded faculty members to recruit specific URM students. Many people will step forward if asked directly. If you are an administrator who wants to help, then provide the willing with the resources and independence to successfully recruit and retain URM students. The availability of supplemental funding opportunities is particularly important.

There are various ways to succeed in recruiting and retaining URM doctoral students; but key to them all is the creation of real student–faculty relationships, which demonstrate by example that diversity and excellence can and should coexist. This cannot be delegated or done indirectly, and no amount of outreach, campus visits, or diversity awareness activities—however well-intentioned—can achieve the effect of positive examples. Ultimately, seeing is believing.

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the author’s name on the subject line.
FOR FOUR YEARS I was the English department learning community coordinator in one of the larger learning community (LC) programs in the country. During my tenure, the number of composition sections linked with courses in other departments grew from a handful to sixty-four. Over this same period, the retention rates for students involved in LCs proved significantly higher than those for their peers. Our president was sufficiently impressed to invest $1.5 million in the initiative; and this largess engendered increased engagement, continued innovation, and exceptional levels of student satisfaction, all of which earned us a place among the nation’s top five LC programs.

The rising tide of institutional prestige did much to buoy up the fortunes of the composition program. At Iowa State, half of all LCs link courses across the curriculum with a section of first-year composition. English teachers consequently have found themselves in the role of gracious colleagues willing to accommodate the interests of students in horticulture and business, agronomy and design, engineering and biology. Indeed, English teachers consistently took the lead in generating continuity between linked courses and, in the process, garnered an impressive number of awards for their contributions to the LC initiative.

In the midst of such success, my own tenure as LC coordinator was the administrative equivalent of a Caribbean cruise: a sunny excursion beyond business as usual, where most passengers anticipated blue skies, where unexpected financial support was the equivalent of hors d’oeuvres on deck, and where interdisciplinary collaborations offered new ports of call for teachers and new horizons for students. Professionally, I count myself lucky to have been involved. And yet, privately, as I reflect on my experience, I find myself troubled by a gap between the official success of the initiative and my own lingering disappointment.

Confessions of a Learning Community Coordinator

Perhaps by confessing my misgivings about learning communities I can call attention to a set of problems that, admittedly, I could not solve myself.

Learning communities in theory and practice

First, let me say that the administrators in charge of the LC initiative at Iowa State were fully capable of keeping our cruise and crew on course. My problems began elsewhere, with the pedagogical promise of LC theory. As I read it, this theory proposes an elegant combination of strategies in which the stable orientation conferred on individual students as members of a supportive community is enlisted as an enabling context for collaborative learning. In turn, the collaborative experience of a purposefully designed program of interdisciplinary study creates unprecedented opportunities for student cohorts to consider distinctions among academic disciplines, contemplate connections across typically dissociated parts of the curriculum, and, with some encouragement, reflect on the contextual nature of knowledge itself. Or so it is argued.

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At first acquaintance, this argument seemed both pragmatic and inspiring: the collaborative experience of an integrated, multidisciplinary curriculum would not only provide the intellectual coherence the undergraduate experience too often lacks, it also would offer a concrete approach to core values of liberal education. That is, linked courses present a practical means for freeing students from the monocular vision of a single discipline by providing them with a vantage point from which they can survey the big picture and identify for themselves a critical framework that puts learning in context. Consequently, as I took up my duties as English LC coordinator, I thought it my responsibility to trumpet the epistemic potential of learning communities as widely as I could. Which I did, without noticeable effect, to any audience willing to listen.

Granted, some teachers were willing to contemplate the convergence of LCs and critical thinking. But, in fact, course objectives and learning outcomes for even the best-planned sections remained stubbornly conventional, intent on content and competencies rather than the connections among disciplines—connections that could transcend the additive approach to undergraduate study and actually integrate the academic experience. As a result, I could not validate in practice the potential that seemed so appealing in theory. The problem, of course, may have been my own inability to translate a credible body of education scholarship into goals that inspired commitment. But it was not for want of effort.

Along with routine exhortations on the pedagogical value of purposeful links, I adopted administrative strategies for enhancing interest in the learning potential of LCs. For example, I asked teachers involved in links with English to attend an on-campus institute where English teachers and their collaborative partners could plan the practicalities of course linkage and consider new opportunities for reflective learning. Having insinuated these ambitions into the planning process, I next scheduled “linked lunches” at which teaching partners could continue course planning and contemplate prospects for deep learning.

And yet, as the LC initiative grew, the learning part of the LC experience remained more or less the same as what went on in traditional courses. Good teachers continued to do good work, sometimes collaboration with other teachers spawned interesting assignments, but mostly, linked courses ran parallel to each other and the prospect of integrated courses as a context for reflective thinking remained unrealized. My own inadequacies aside, the question remains: what inhibits committed teachers in a well-funded, effectively organized program from taking up the promise of LCs and developing learning environments that enable the higher-order thinking I tried to promote? In analyzing the problem, I acknowledge that curricular issues exist in local context; however, there are now more than five hundred LC initiatives in this country, and I suspect that in more than a few the learning component is lagging behind efforts to create supportive communities. Why?

**Risks and rewards for faculty**

Let me begin with the obvious. The collaborative effort required to coordinate LCs takes time; to coordinate syllabi as well as organize extracurricular activities takes lots of time; to create the conditions for student reflection on interdisciplinary connections takes perhaps too much time. In a survey of 655 teachers at Iowa State, 59 percent endorsed the learning strategies associated with LCs, but only 14 percent of respondents had actually participated in a LC. When asked about the limitations of LCs, “too much time on task” was at the top of
the list. "They require involvement after hours," said one respondent. "How do I manage an LC and have a life?" complained another.

This concern is real, but not necessarily disabling. We all know teachers who are willing to go above and beyond if they think an investment in time will enhance their professional lives. Time spent in LCs is an investment I suspect many teachers would be willing to make if they thought potential benefits outweighed perceived risks. At present, the benefits of participation are measured in terms of personal satisfaction, while the risks often involve issues of professional status.

To place the topic of professional risk in context, let me say that the promotion and tenure policy at my school is fully Boyeristic and thoroughly intent on accommodating what goes on in classrooms. Two years after its inception, I conducted a survey of department chairs regarding LC participation and its effect on promotion and tenure. When asked if they would support LC participation by full and associate professors, 84 percent agreed. When asked the same question about untenured assistant professors, 42 percent agreed; as many disagreed, with comments to the effect that "this takes too much time away from research" and "such efforts are not recognized by upper administration." Given this discrepancy between explicit policy and latent assumptions, junior faculty who might find LC commitments personally rewarding can hardly consider them professionally prudent.

Let me add one more scruple related to faculty preoccupation with risks and rewards. That is, while learning community collaborations offer opportunities to think broadly and discover new ideas, most faculty members have no notion how they would pursue and publish ideas outside their own disciplines. So, if your chair tells you that vita lines are what have value, it would make sense for you to stay home and do the work you know rather than explore terrain you do not.

In sum, good teachers have not pursued the epistemic potential made possible by interdisciplinary links because, despite its promise, an LC commitment requires more time than a traditional class and the rewards for time spent remain uncertain, as do the means for converting such work into scholarship. These inhibitors are essentially institutional, related primarily to how the academy construes professional performance rather than what individuals perceive as valuable. My own experience tells me that given a change in the reward structure, LC coordinators could more easily enlist committed teachers not just to teach in LCs but also to promote the kind of critical reflection envisioned in LC theory.

By way of response, let me suggest several options for enhancing the attractions of LC participation. First, if we make LC commitments a part of official job descriptions, then related scholarship would be central rather than tangential to job performance. Second, if we do a better job of providing peer review for classroom scholarship, we can document the distribution of knowledge to student audiences. And finally, if we connect interdisciplinary teaching with interdisciplinary trends in research and program development, we could partner with colleagues across the curriculum in pedagogy-related grant proposals that transcend disciplinary boundaries.

These tenuous prospects aside, I confess to an unfounded faith in the long-range benefits to all students—whether or not they are part of a LC cohort—who learn that knowledge comes in different forms and always requires critical reflection. My faith is unfounded because, in my experience as a LC coordinator, such outcomes were primarily a matter of aspiration.

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the author’s name on the subject line.
WINGSPEAK DECLARATION ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE: ENGAGING HIGHER EDUCATION

How should colleges and universities educate students for citizenship in a religiously diverse society?
How do we talk about religion on campus?
How do we balance religious and academic freedoms?

These and other questions were the subject of a three-day conference at the historic Wingspread conference center in July 2005, sponsored by the Society for Values in Higher Education and the Johnson Foundation. As a result of this gathering, which was followed by months of online exchanges, the participants produced a declaration entitled Religion and Public Life: Engaging Higher Education.

The declaration calls on the academy to address three key challenges: addressing widespread religious illiteracy; maintaining academic standards and freedom while welcoming a broader understanding of reason; and responding to students’ search for purpose and spiritual meaning. In doing so, the declaration recommends, colleges and universities must model exemplary practices in deliberative democracy by creating inclusive and respectful spaces for discourse and dissent.

AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,000 accredited public and private colleges and universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education at both the national and local levels and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at www.aacu.org.