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The Twin Elements of Learning: Knowledge and Judgment
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LEAP at the Five-Year Mark

The 2010 annual meeting brought us to the halfway point in our intended ten-year campaign to advance Liberal Education and America’s Promise, or LEAP. (Launched at the 2005 annual meeting, the LEAP initiative will continue at least through AAC&U’s centennial in 2015.) This milestone invites reflection on what we’ve accomplished to date, and our priorities for the next phase of work.

First, I want to underscore the point that LEAP emerged directly from AAC&U’s mission, which is to keep the aims of liberal learning a vigorous and constant influence on institutional purpose and educational practice in higher education. The overarching goal of our association has been to work with our members and the broader community to provide a contemporary and compelling articulation of the “aims and outcomes of liberal learning,” and to advance institutional and curricular practices that help all students—especially those historically underserved in higher education—achieve the intended aims and outcomes. As part of the LEAP initiative, AAC&U has also launched a coordinated effort to engage the broader public—including civic, policy, and business leaders—with the importance of liberal education outcomes in today’s world. In doing so, we seek to create a more supportive environment within which our members can advance efforts to ensure that their students achieve a rich set of liberal learning outcomes essential for life, work, and citizenship in the twenty-first century.

I take pride and pleasure in the extent to which the LEAP vision has given a strong sense of direction to all of AAC&U’s work, becoming a significant reference point for all our members and for our myriad projects, meetings, web resources, and publications. I also am deeply grateful to those who helped us frame this initiative and find ways to support it. While we are keenly aware that a great deal remains to be accomplished, we also have much to celebrate.

In particular, scores of member institutions have adapted, adopted, or co-opted the LEAP essential learning outcomes—and with good reason. After all, they emerged from extensive interaction and dialogue with our members: they came from you; they were designed to serve broad educational purposes calibrated to new and enduring institutional challenges; they are yours. The essential learning outcomes are truly at the core of our efforts to articulate what a liberal education really means in the twenty-first century, just as the high-impact practices highlighted and promoted through the LEAP initiative are increasingly at the heart of institutional and programmatic efforts to help students achieve key learning outcomes.

In a paper released at the 2005 annual meeting, I wrote about the “conspiracy of voluntary silence” that seemed to surround liberal education. Today, in contrast, state systems of higher education in California, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah, and Wisconsin are in partnership with AAC&U, and we are currently in active dialogue with leaders in a number of other states. In addition, some three hundred institutions, private and public, are currently part of the LEAP Campus Action Network, while more than ninety college and university presidents have joined the LEAP Presidents’ Trust, a special leadership group committed to providing advocacy for the vision, values, and practices that connect higher education with the needs of the twenty-first century. As I wrote in the last issue of
Liberal Education, many leaders still shy away from actually using the term “liberal education,” so I am particularly grateful that the Trust is providing this much-needed leadership.

In the context of this momentum, we look forward to the next five years with much anticipation. One of our goals for the next phase of the LEAP initiative is to build institutional capacity to make liberal education and inclusive excellence pervasive commitments—embraced, promoted, and achieved. While many AAC&U members have endorsed the LEAP outcomes in their own articulations of institutional goals and student learning outcomes, not enough have made them central to faculty socialization and rewards, student guidance and orientation, or public outreach. Further, we recognize that disciplinary priorities strongly influence faculty commitments and that departments play a crucial role in helping students develop higher-level capabilities and a grounded sense of personal and social responsibility. Accordingly, we intend to focus in the next phase of LEAP on deepening partnerships with disciplinary and professional associations, with the goals of gaining scholarly endorsement of the LEAP vision for liberal learning and building disciplinary capacity to help faculty connect the vision with their teaching.

It continues to be our goal that more and more institutions develop campus cultures where all students—no matter their majors or their backgrounds—are routinely involved in active, high-effort, inquiry-based learning (including community-based learning). We need to develop greater clarity about what it takes to make active, high-effort learning standard, rather than optional. And we need to take shared responsibility for helping all students, including those from groups traditionally underserved by higher education, achieve the outcomes of a twenty-first-century liberal education—including, in particular, the outcomes related to personal and social responsibility, civic engagement, ethics, and intercultural and global learning.

When we launched LEAP five years ago, we could not have anticipated that President Obama would shine a spotlight on higher education by making it a national goal to increase college completion levels significantly by 2020, or that this effort would be supported by major initiatives of leading philanthropies and now the National Governors Association. AAC&U members—through our LEAP efforts locally, regionally, and nationally—have an even more important role to play in this environment. As a community, we must speak forcefully about broadening national goals beyond just increasing the numbers of college graduates: our nation must rise to the even tougher and more ambitious challenge of ensuring that those graduates achieve key liberal education outcomes at high levels.

Notwithstanding all the progress toward reinvigorating liberal education, at least within our colleges and universities and in some state systems and policy arenas, I cannot claim that we have expanded public understanding of what the outcomes of college really must be for the degree to have lasting value. And we also still have a long way to go in reconciling the world to the term “liberal education.” But through the LEAP initiative, and the Greater Expectations work that preceded it, AAC&U clearly has found a way to help the higher education community both embrace and advance the core purposes of its own most powerful tradition for college learning.

And, as we observe the five-year anniversary of LEAP, that is an accomplishment in which we can take pride.—CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER

While we are keenly aware that a great deal remains to be accomplished, we also have much to celebrate
Each summer, we dedicate the Featured Topic section of *Liberal Education* to coverage of the annual meeting of the association. And each year, we struggle to select from a conference program that looks, from this vantage point, like an embarrassment of riches. Happily, over the past few years, technology has relieved some of the pressure on *Liberal Education* by creating new ways to preserve and share more material. In 2006, for the first time, presentations from the annual meeting were recorded and made available as a podcast; seventeen presentations from the 2010 meeting are now available in this format (see www.aacu.org/podcast). And this year, for the first time, several attendees served as guest bloggers, providing real-time commentary on the meeting for AAC&U’s *Liberal Education Nation* blog (http://blog.aacu.org). In addition, the online conference program includes hyperlinks to PowerPoint presentations and session handouts provided by several of the speakers.

Here, our coverage of the 2010 annual meeting begins where the meeting itself ended, with Edward Ayers’s clever and thought-provoking look at the enthusiasm within higher education for anything that can be termed an “experience”—as well as for the term itself. And Peter Stearns looks at the rise of new forms of global education and considers its relationship to liberal education. The third article in the Featured Topic section was adapted from a presentation given at a one-day conference sponsored by the Bringing Theory to Practice project and held in Washington, DC, on January 20—only coincidentally the first day of the AAC&U annual meeting. Yet, given the subject of the presentation—the ongoing reinvention of liberal education—and given that its author, William Sullivan, also participated in the annual meeting, it seemed fitting to include a version here nonetheless.

The 2011 annual meeting, titled “Global Positioning: Essential Learning, Student Success, and the Currency of U.S. Degrees,” will be held in San Francisco from January 26 to 29. Additional information about next year’s meeting is available online at www.aacu.org/meetings/annualmeeting.—DAVID TRITELLI
AAC&U Announces Twelve Community Colleges to Lead New Roadmap Project

Twelve community colleges have been selected to lead Developing a Community College Student Roadmap, a new project of AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise initiative. Funded by the MetLife Foundation, the project is designed to assist community colleges in creating robust and proactive programs of academic support—tied to expected learning outcomes—that engage students at entrance and teach them, from the outset, how to become active partners in their own quest for educational success. The twelve leadership institutions are: Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College, Gainesville State College, Georgia Perimeter College, Lane Community College, Miami Dade College, Middlesex Community College, Mt. San Antonio College, Northern Virginia Community College, Prince George’s Community College, Queensborough Community College, Salt Lake Community College, and Tidewater Community College.

The Roadmap project will seek to “connect the dots” among the varied student support programs on community college campuses and create roadmaps for success applicable at multiple institutions. These roadmaps will be anchored in a set of expected learning outcomes essential for all students to succeed in life beyond college. Additional information about the project is available online at www.aacu.org/roadmap.

AAC&U Staffing Changes

Alma Clayton-Pedersen has retired as vice president for education and institutional renewal, a position she held since 2001. Upon her retirement, Clayton-Pedersen was appointed senior scholar in the Office of the President. In her ten years at AAC&U, beginning in the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Global Initiatives and as special assistant to the president, Clayton-Pedersen ran several major initiatives on diversity as a resource for learning in higher education, and on managing institutional change efforts to ensure excellence and success for all college students, regardless of their background or level of college readiness. In addition to leading campus-based projects, she also served as codirector of AAC&U’s Network for Academic Renewal.

After serving for more than two years as senior director for LEAP state initiatives, Susan Albertine has been appointed vice president of the AAC&U Office of Engagement, Inclusion, and Success. In this new role, Albertine will oversee programs that emphasize engaged, high-impact teaching and learning for all students along pathways from school to and through college. The office will house the Network for Academic Renewal as well as ongoing efforts to “make excellence inclusive” by ensuring that “new majority” students fully benefit from a liberal education. Albertine will also continue to direct LEAP state initiatives and the Give Students a Compass project.

Upcoming Meetings

- October 21–23, 2010 Facing the Divides: Diversity, Learning, and Pathways to Inclusive Excellence, Houston, Texas
- November 11–13, 2010 Creativity, Inquiry, and Discovery: Undergraduate Research In and Across the Disciplines, Durham, North Carolina

AAC&U MEMBERSHIP 2010

1,240 members

- Masters 29%
- Assoc 11%
- Bacc 27%
- Doc 17%
- Other* 16%

*Specialized schools, state systems and agencies, international affiliates, and organizational affiliates

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Some words have kept coming up in the conversations we’ve had over the last several days at this meeting. We have talked of outcomes, competencies, and partnerships, developed through undergraduate research, service learning, and global citizenship, bringing about community-based, student-centered, and high-impact learning, fostering the values of engagement, responsibility, leadership, and accountability. It’s certainly clear what we’ve been up to here: building the structures for constructive and forward-looking higher education.

There is one word I did not mention in that list, though we have perhaps used it more than any other and in more ways. That word appears in the descriptions of twenty-nine of our sessions. It appears in eight of the ten “high-impact educational practices” (Kuh 2008). And it is a fundamental building block for the National Survey of Student Engagement, which has proved so valuable in thinking about our work in broader ways.

What is that word? “Experience.” That is another healthy-sounding word, but what do we mean when we invoke experience in so many descriptions of what we’re doing and what we want to do? A dictionary tells us that experience means “practical knowledge, skill, or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events or in a particular activity.” Our students, and many of their parents, like the sound of that: direct participation, involvement, practicality. Equally appealing is another variant of the definition: “something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through.” “Personally”—that’s very appealing, since our students value the personal so highly.

Some favorite American phrases, around for generations, embody just this sort of pragmatic, hands-on sense: Learn by doing. Don’t just read about it, experience it. Gain valuable experience (and, for some reason, “valuable” is the adjective that always seems to go with “experience,” and “gain” is the verb). Don’t take someone else’s word for it: experience it yourself, personally. Lately, we say, get out of the classroom and into the field, city, office, jungle, hospital, or wherever else real experience lives.

Despite education’s active promotion of the language of practical experience, we have to admit that these are probably not the first associations most people have with higher education. In general understanding, school is what you do before you experience the so-called real world, or even what you do instead of gaining valuable hands-on experience. Classrooms seem built precisely to suppress experience, to deprive students of as many stimuli as possible. The chairs are hard, the walls are bare, the windows are scarce. The only two senses allowed are hearing and looking.

So how do educators persuade people that we love experience, that we foster it, that it’s an integral part of any vital liberal learning? We might begin by getting Why do we, rather suddenly, like the word and practice of “experience” so much?

EDWARD L. AYERS is president of the University of Richmond.
FEATURED TOPIC

clearer in our own minds just what we mean by the word. After all, we use “experience” in a rather promiscuous way. Our colleagues in admissions and advancement (and the president’s office) talk with energy and conviction of the unique experience you can have at our university—and only at our university. Our athletics programs offer a thrilling game-day experience, and our libraries offer a good research experience. Our multicultural offices demonstrate that people best understand diversity by experiencing it. Chaplaincies sustain a rich spiritual experience, while our residence halls provide an experience of community or personal freedom or comfort or group learning.

We have spent large amounts of money to enrich that experience. If we look across the expanse of higher education, at all kinds of schools, facilities and organizations that foster a fuller student experience account for much of our investment over recent decades. Student centers, dining centers, fitness centers, recreation centers, career development centers, multicultural centers, and centers for civic engagement have become, well, the centers of student life. I have worked to raise money for such spaces myself—spaces for a better student experience—and I believe in the work these centers do.

Our students certainly think the investments are worthwhile. They come to college, they tell us, for a rich experience. Rebekah Nathan, the pseudonym of the anthropologist who lived among freshmen in a dorm, under cover at “Any U,” has written an empathetic, if not always encouraging, account of what the world of college looks like from a first-year student’s point of view. She asked students what percentage of their college learning comes from “classes, or from the readings, films, group work, and papers related to classes,” and they told her that 65 percent of learning occurs outside of classes and class-related activities. So, Nathan asked them, “if college is not primarily about either intellectual ideas and issues or classes, then what is college for?”

By now you know the answer: “By far the most compelling reason given for staying in college was ‘the college experience’—the joys and benefits of living within the college culture rather than in the real world” (Nathan 2005, 101–2).

College students, Nathan tells us, value what they call “fun” over everything else. And “fun” for them is unregulated experience, immoderate experience, often transgressive.

Should we worry that a cult of experience plays into a narcissistic culture in which college is simply one more experience to be consumed, like an exotic vacation?

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experience. Despite every warning, a considerable number feel they have to experience, for themselves, the risks of unprotected sex and binge drinking and new drugs. They dare each other to try something new, to take it to the limit—and then tell and show everyone about it with pictures and words and abbreviations on Facebook and Twitter. Students seek out those experiences using the same rationale of hands-on, multisensory experience we use for better purposes. Colleges fight back by combating the youthful thirst for experience with the antibodies of other, healthier experiences. We counter episodes of tragic, stupid, or mean experience with countervailing experiences—group discussions or teach-ins—that give students personified, embodied, experiential ways to understand complex issues.

We need to remember that the same students who are experimenting with “fun” are also experimenting with every other facet of their lives as well—spirituality, profession, taste, friendship, love, art, music, intellectual perspective. By investing a greater amount of the university in experience as experiment, we make the most of it. We align it with what our young people are actually in college for. This strategy of modulated experience and counterexperience may do just what we hope. A detailed study by the College Board revealed that “higher levels of education are correlated with higher levels of civic participation, including volunteer work, voting, and blood donation, as well as with greater levels of openness to the opinions of others” (Baum and Ma 2007, 2). The same study also found that college graduates are less likely to smoke and more likely to exercise daily. A separate study by the Pew Research Center found that college graduates are more likely to be happy—42 percent, as compared with 30 percent of others with lower levels of educational attainment (2006, 31). We believe, and see, that our students are broader in outlook and more empathetic in understanding after being with us. Seniors, in many ways, are better people than first-year students.

So, it seems, we are on to something. These experiences do teach valuable things, essential things. And families understand that. They seek colleges out for the overall experience they offer. There is a reason we have such a wonderful diversity of colleges and universities—small and large, public and private, religious and secular. Though each of these institutions has its own kind of advantages and disadvantages, each prides itself on offering a particular kind of experience. Each school intentionally sustains, fosters, and continually recreates what it truly believes to be its own unique experience.

Critiques of experience
As academics, we know we should be skeptical of everything, especially things we ourselves are doing. Why do we, rather suddenly, like the word and practice of “experience” so much? We can easily imagine the critiques from various political positions. Should we worry that a cult of experience plays into a narcissistic culture in which college is simply one more experience to be consumed, like an exotic vacation? Does it indulge students too much, at the expense of well-earned authority? Does it shift the focus too much away from the classroom and into every other space on campus? Is it simply jargon, a fad, a sales pitch, an evasion?

We have to acknowledge that many faculty members in many fields do not buy into the emphasis on experience. From their point of view, catering to experience can tempt us to neglect and trivialize the foundations of learning, whether liberal or professional. Moreover, many excellent teachers may feel disenfranchised by the growing assumption of students, and the implied point in our experiential focus, that traditional teaching is somehow inadequate. And there is something to this critique. “Experiential learning” implies that what goes on in the classroom—reading a book or having a discussion—is not an experience. Yet I imagine that we’ve all read novels—and books in our field—that are vivid and enduring experiences. More senses don’t necessarily make it better; I remember a Faulkner novel more deeply than I do virtually any movie I’ve ever seen. And recorded music is often more powerful than a video or even a concert. More senses are not necessarily better. Moreover, faculty and students who pride themselves on learning for its own sake, as the saying goes, are experiencing very real pleasures from that work: a sense of mastery, of connection with a tradition, of a broad vision. They are learning for the joy of learning, which is the opposite of a disembodied exercise. The brain, no less than the skin or the tongue or the eyes, feels pleasure, seeks experience. We must not lose sight of the utility of the pure passion of learning.
In teaching, too, traditional means can provide a profound experience. Education comes between the lines of a lecture, in an ineffable tone and sense of purpose. A lecturer, a “sage on the stage,” can be an experience all by herself. She can offer a coherent and intentional embodiment of the reason behind the subject, a projection of why this subject matters. A student can be just as stimulated in a large lecture class as in smaller settings, as bored in a class of twelve in an oak-paneled seminar room as in front of a computer screen—and vice versa. Good teaching cannot be typecast, cannot be forced into a new box of experience. Gifted teachers will use every means they can imagine to touch students, and sometimes words alone are enough.

In my own time in college, in a large public Southern university with virtually open enrollment, I discovered many things through experience. I learned that some young people actually read a newspaper, that the library was something more than a warehouse, that having dinner at an actual professor’s house with actual wine drunk in actual moderation could actually be fun. But the professor who changed my life, by embodying what a professor could be, spoke with me just once outside of class. His teaching and writing inspired me by example, and that was enough.

I raise these critiques not to devalue experience but to broaden our understanding of it so that we can better represent, and promote, all that higher education is. Now, if we are going to do that, there are things we can do inside our own institutions that will make a difference.

**Imagination, institutional determination, and funding**

Most calls for efficiency—greater class size, greater reliance on adjuncts, and greater reliance on technology—rather obviously degrade the educational experience. In contrast, by connecting the various kinds of experience within our colleges and universities, we can amplify them all. We can take advantage of all our institutional resources in a time of scarcity and be smarter about our work, even as we protect liberal education. We can do so by getting rid of some of the dead air space in our institutions, the places where air does not circulate, light does not penetrate, and heat does not conduct. Some of those spaces divide liberal arts education and professional training, some separate the structures we have built to foster richer experiences for our students, some separate us from audiences all around us.

Every college and university has built new capacity to deliver new experiences for students through study abroad, community service, career development, health and fitness, cultural understanding, or spiritual growth. These capacities have arisen, though, without much attempt to coordinate them with one another or to connect them to the traditional learning that remains the reason colleges exist. One way to gain efficiency during hard times, therefore, is to make sure we are getting the most from these substantial investments and that new investments enhance rather than merely compete with the classroom and the laboratory.

For example, at my own institution, with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, we have developed what we call Tocqueville Seminars. As you may imagine from the title, the goal is to take advantage of the greatly increased amount of study abroad experience and students from other countries on our campus. Students tell us that studying abroad is transformational, and we know it is. But we have not done much to capture that transformation for others or for the curriculum. In Tocqueville Seminars, students who have studied abroad come together in classes across the university to explore what they have learned about the United States from their experiences, how they see their own culture and nation and power differently. The faculty members who teach these seminars, in everything from economics and politics to literature and history, come together in their own seminars to imagine a new kind of transnational American studies. We are, in short, channeling experience back into the curriculum, into the classroom, helping students see themselves more broadly and more deeply, translating experience into education and vice versa—and taking advantage of considerable investment in, and accomplishments of, our office of international studies. And, with the encouragement of the Mellon Foundation, we are serving as a hub in a consortium established to spread and develop those innovations.
The issues foregrounded by the title of this meeting, “The Wit, the Will... and the Wallet,” are issues of imagination, institutional determination, and funding. We need to combine these elements with a clear sense of purpose to protect and create—which are often the same thing—educational experiences of depth, breadth, intensity, and lasting meaning. We need an integrated vision, a broader understanding of how experiences either connect and strengthen or undercut one another. Students are not as cynical as we worry they are and as they often imagine themselves to be. They want useful and marketable skills, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But they also want a purpose for those skills. They come to college to broaden their experience, and colleges and universities are the only places where people of all backgrounds, religions, ethnicities, classes, and politics come together to explore who they are and who they might become. Going to college is a defining time in their lives, and there is much more we can do to make it a liberating and transformative, you guessed it, experience.

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

REFERENCES

NOTES
1 This article was adapted from the closing plenary address at the 2010 annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities.
We are currently in the midst of a vital movement to reinvent liberal education. It is difficult to give a fully accurate description of the agenda of this movement, however, because it is being advanced by a number of disparate groups and organizations. I will begin, therefore, by stipulating what liberal education means: the aim of liberal education is to enable students to make sense of the world and their place in it, to prepare them to use knowledge and skills as means toward responsible engagement with the life of their times. As I discuss specific developments below, I will clarify and qualify this definition.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities’ Bringing Theory to Practice project, conceived and led by Don Harward, articulates a vision of liberal education that can reclaim the practice of teaching and learning in the academy. This vision is focused on the faculty, which makes it a noteworthy exception to the usual abstractions in which higher education policy is routinely discussed. Bringing Theory to Practice specifies the general aim of enabling students to make sense of the world and take up a responsible place in it by singling out three interrelated purposes that need new emphasis. The first is the epistemic, the concern with knowledge; the second is eudemonic, students’ development as persons as well as minds; and the third, civic purpose, addresses the dimension of engagement with larger values and responsible participation in the life of our times.

Why doesn’t everyone just do it?
The need to unite the three Bringing Theory to Practice goals—knowledge, student development, and moral and civic engagement—might seem (as they do to me) such a compelling conception of college education that it becomes hard to grasp how it could be neglected by so many institutions. More must be at work than simply myopia, sloth, or bad will. Rather, our universities and colleges appear to be in the grip of some other conception of their educational mission that makes this unified conception of liberal education difficult to grasp and even calls out resistance to it. The ascendancy of the research ideal as the source of authority and prestige in the academy points to one obvious candidate. In the course of the past century, this has worked to the detriment of the collegiate ideal of educating for cultural participation and civic leadership.

Why has the ascendant research ideal been able to eclipse liberal education and the college ideal within American higher education? Could it be the unintended consequence of a larger, mostly positive development, namely, the remarkable global expansion of university education over the past half century? This represents a remarkable diffusion of an institutional model, along with a powerful ideal of knowledge and conception of free personhood, derived from European and American prototypes. While it is common to claim that this vast expansion of higher education worldwide is about training personnel for more intellectually demanding occupations, there is little evidence to show that universities do a particularly good job of preparing people for specialized occupational functions. On the contrary, if proof be needed, it is telling that every professional field does most of that preparation in the work setting itself, or in hybrid teaching contexts such as teaching hospitals and clinics in the health professions.

What universities mostly do, according to the research of institutional sociologists John Meyer and his colleagues at Stanford University,
of Learning
is to certify individuals without actually preparing them to meet the specific demands of occupational roles (Frank and Gabler 2006). This view points away from a functional explanation of the rising prominence of universities. Instead, what comes into view is their extraordinary role in propagating a distinctive culture. In its turn, this culture shapes the outlook of increasing portions of the populations of modern societies. Universities teach respect for, and at least basic understanding of, a mode of thinking that has come to be identified with “rationality” and modern culture itself. This is analytical thought: the capacity to understand and manipulate symbolic discourses. These discourses are made up of symbols that translate particular objects or events into general concepts plus rules for combining and manipulating such symbols. It is this culture of analytical thinking that links higher education to the occupational demands of the modern economy. Meyer and his colleagues argue that it is not primarily through the direct training of certain capacities so much as by cultivating a temper of mind that higher education has achieved its current function as a near-universal gatekeeper for the more prestigious and remunerative positions.

The culture spread by the university, then, puts a premium on formal knowledge, abstracted from context and narrative particularity. Such thinking is held to be a superior kind of knowledge, ultimately “applicable” to practice through formal techniques for deducing results according to general formulas. Over time, that model of knowledge has become an unquestioned canon according to which intellectual disciplines are defined and criticized. This model has allowed the university to distinguish itself from more “primitive” claims to knowledge, like those derived from mere craft or experience. According to the institutionalist sociologists, the deeper function of higher education is induction into this culture of criticism and evidence, a culture that is universal in its claims and that understands itself as the cutting edge of humanity’s forward progress.

Within this perspective, the liberal arts ideals and practices that emphasize transmitting heritage, including analytical disciplines but focused on making sense of the world and one’s possible place in it, do not measure up to the standards of such “modern” knowledge. The hidden constraint, perhaps, is just this prejudice about what knowledge is and therefore what “higher” education must concern itself with, namely, induction into the culture of “critical thinking.” What is missing in this now-regnant knowledge culture is any recognition that the detached, analytical stance is, as John Dewey among other philosophers argued intensely, only one phase within the larger process of human experience. This larger process, which Dewey called “inquiry,” is guided by ends that are eudemonic and civic as much as epistemic. Or, rather, we could say that the formation of human identity is the long-term goal and one that encompasses the moral and practical as well as theoretical dimensions of inquiry and understanding.

The failure of the university knowledge culture to be self-reflective about its own limits is surely linked to its apparent inability to avoid communicating to many a weakening of meaning and, at its extreme, a kind of nihilism, even as it expands scientific knowledge and technological capacities. And it is to address these “blind spots,” or unintended consequences of the modern knowledge regime’s taken-for-granted assumptions, that Bringing Theory to Practice articulates its own richer and deeper vision of college education.

The educational practices of today’s universities and colleges typically direct students’ attention to mastering procedures for describing particular events and objects in terms of general concepts. The relation of this training to students’ struggles for meaning and orientation in the world, let alone ethical judgment, is all too rarely given curricular attention or pedagogical emphasis. A recast liberal education, however, must go beyond the purely analytical to provide students with experience and guidance in using such analytical tools to engage in deliberation about action. That emerging model of liberal learning will, I believe, become centered upon teaching a wider conception of thinking, one that includes “knowing how” as well as the “knowing that” of the analytical disciplines.

Knowing how: the key role of practical reasoning

To appreciate the contrast between the typical agenda of analytical or critical thinking and this richer conception of “practical reasoning,” consider some examples. These are drawn from a research seminar convened by the Carnegie
Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching that intentionally brought together educators from professional fields as well as liberal arts disciplines. The intent was to examine the ways in which a common focus on teaching students to reason in context might provide a means for bridging the often deep campus divides between the arts and sciences and the professional programs. Titled “A Life of the Mind for Practice,” the seminar included teachers of the liberal arts side by side with faculty from medicine, law, education, and engineering.

Consider first an engineer at the beginning of her career. A recent graduate, she is skilled in the analytical techniques she learned in her engineering program. But she finds herself working on an international project for the first time, collaborating with engineers from other nations who define their work differently than she does. How can these engineers work together, in a way that meets the various needs of the client, the employer, and the engineers themselves? In an engineering course profiled in *A New Agenda for Higher Education* (Sullivan and Rosin 2007), students supplement the analytical skills learned in their engineering courses with knowledge drawn from the humanities and social sciences about how the engineering profession and its history differ across nations. Through assignments that require students to imagine the work of engineers in other societies and its ramifications for their own conduct, and vice versa, the course introduces students to important knowledge and skills—drawn from both the liberal arts and the engineering profession—for an increasingly global professional world and workplace.

Or consider Human Biology, another course highlighted in the book. This course provides students with an introduction to some of the key findings of contemporary biology. But the course gets its significance from questions about the human import of these scientific discoveries. Rapidly advancing biological knowledge—think of genomics, for instance—is increasingly important to the ability to act well as voter and citizen, and even as a member of one’s family. Think of the expanding range of decisions that have sprung up in the face of serious or terminal illness and end-of-life care.

As advances in biological science and medical technology have extended life, they have also increased the burden of judgment and decision upon both health care professionals—which some of the students in the course will become—and families. How, then, to think about these matters so as to be able to act well in a context where there is real disagreement about the basis for judgment?

These questions arise from the students’ actual or anticipated practical involvements and commitments as responsible participants in society. In that sense, they have an intrinsic civic dimension. Finally, though, they are questions that stimulate the practical imagination. Among the several dimensions of personal identity, it is the practical imagination that proposes what we can make of our lives and the things we may hope for, individually and together. The scope of the practical imagination either expands or contracts students’ capacities to engage with their lives in resourceful, reflective ways. It was Aristotle, one of history’s great educators, who said that the institutions of a city need to be aligned in order to shape citizens’ acquisition of knowledge, skill, and character so that they would care about their community and have the ability to contribute to its welfare. Schools, like Aristotle’s Lyceum, were to be organized to concentrate this formative process. The Bringing Theory to Practice project stands in this vital tradition of forming the practical imagination as well as inculcating formal knowledge.

The faculty members gathered in the “Life of the Mind for Practice” seminar found surprising resonance across the professional–liberal arts divide. That is, they found common ground and common cause around a specific pedagogical intention. All wanted to provide students with more than formal knowledge and analytical skill, important as these are in college education. They also aimed to provide students with opportunities to bring this knowledge and skill together in pursuit of important practical purposes that contribute to the life of the world. On this theme, the professional school faculty found they had a good deal to teach. That is because professional education must provide space for aspiring professionals to learn how to think like professionals in making
judgments of importance amid the uncertain conditions of practical experience. (This often goes against the academic grain of professional schools, so that clinical teaching often acquires a certain stigma of an “impure” activity as compared to the exposition of theoretical knowledge.)

In courses such as those described in A New Agenda for Higher Education, in both the liberal arts and sciences and in professional fields, students learn to frame their thinking through the interplay of theoretical knowledge drawn from the academic disciplines and their particular loyalties as citizens, as possible future engineers—or future nurses, physicians, pharmacists—and as persons with responsibilities for others. Through experiences such as these courses provide, students can explicitly learn how to move fluidly between the distanced, external stance of analytical thinking—the third-person point of view typical of most academic thinking—and the first- and second-person points of view that are internal to acting with others in a situation.

This is practical reasoning: the back-and-forth between general knowledge and the challenges and responsibilities that come with particular situations, an ongoing process of reflection whose end is the formation of habits of critical judgment for action. The pedagogical vehicles for teaching this movement between viewpoints span the professional and arts and sciences disciplines: the case study; literary and historical exploration of character and response to challenge; the simulation; participation and reflection upon actual involvements in the world. But their common feature is recognition that in practical reasoning it is always the involved stance, the point of view internal to purposeful human activity, that provides the ground and the goal for critical, analytical reasoning.

Knowing why and knowing when: fostering practical wisdom

The professional teaching practices that are of value to liberal education, however, are principally those that are organized to develop just this kind of engaged, or practical, reasoning. The pedagogical vehicles professional education employs in the development of such practical reasoning are varied. They range from case studies, through simulations of practice, to guided responsibility in actual practice. But through all these methods, the challenge for students is to bring together knowledge, skill, and the dispositions appropriate to the profession in flexible, integrated ways. The thinking embodied in such judgment and action is practical reasoning. This kind of reasoning involves “knowing how” to make knowledge relevant to actual persons in uncertain situations. But it also necessitates engaging with questions of purpose and value: “knowing why” some decision is right and, indeed, “knowing when” such-and-such an intervention is appropriate.

Unlike purely technical judgment, which employs methods to achieve pre-given ends, practical judgment involves the blending of formal knowledge with the concrete and value-laden dimensions of the situations of professional work. The pedagogies of professional education, then, necessarily involve a directly moral dimension: they must teach students what the profession stands for; they must seek to be persuasive advocates for the profession’s highest standards of practice. By necessity, this is unapologetically formative education with public responsibility in view.

This provides a useful analogy to the kind of educational experience that all students need in order to give structure and point to their learning. The pursuit of practical wisdom is the deeper point of liberal learning. Students need not only to learn a good deal about the world and their place in it. They also must learn how to use knowledge and reflection to inform their judgment in complex situations. And they need educational experiences that can spur them to shape their own lives for critical engagement with their future careers and responsibilities. To achieve these aims, however, liberal learning must also be concerned with developing students’ practical judgment.

The kind of integrated education we are seeking is an effort to resolve a paradox that perplexes many modern individuals and institutions. On the one hand, progress in academic disciplines is like the division of labor that underlies economic growth: by focusing
on a single criterion, it is possible to do progressively better at attaining it. On the other hand, where what matters is integration among several goals—as in professional practice and in civic life—decisions often cannot be broken down into single-goal issues; the several goals must be blended, and compromised, with other goals. In such situations—and most of life, especially civic life with others, consists of such situations—the premium is on holistic practical judgment.

Implications for faculty roles and identities

For much of the past century, college and university faculty have aspired to the identity of the disciplinary specialist within an intellectual regime of ever more specialized research programs. But if the foregoing is true, this is not the proper self-understanding for educators in their role as guides in the realm of liberal education. An interesting analogy from another profession may help illuminate the shift in understanding that is required. Medicine has long appealed to the canons of physical science as a model, and many physicians have presented themselves to the public, and often to themselves in their education and training, essentially as embodiments of applied science. However, in a recent study of physicians’ ways of reasoning, Katherine Montgomery argues that, “faced with a patient, physicians do not proceed as they and their textbooks often describe it: top-down, deductively, ‘scientifically’” (2005, 46). Instead, they reason from cases.

The starting point for all case-based reasoning, Montgomery’s study shows, is neither deduction from general principles nor induction from the particulars to a universal concept. Instead, doctors form hypotheses about the possible causes of a particular patient’s situation, and then test those possibilities against details revealed by closer examination of the patient. This is a “circular, interpretive procedure” that moves between “generalities in the taxonomy of disease and the particular signs and symptoms of the individual case.” This intellectual movement proceeds “until a workable conclusion is reached” (Montgomery 2005, 47). The reasoning process at the center of this activity is the interpretive circle, which is recognizable as a form of practical reasoning. The case narratives that physicians construct are not mere conjecture or poetic flights of speculation. Case narratives put conjectures to the test. They employ analytical knowledge through the interpretive work of isolating probable causes of illness by eliminating alternative possibilities—that is, differential diagnosis. Thus, Montgomery concludes that analytical modes of explanation alone simply cannot achieve the integrated forms of understanding that medical professionals produce through this kind of practical reasoning. The crucial point, insists Montgomery, is that case reasoning is not a holdover from the prescientific past. Rather, it is “the best means of representing the exercise of clinical judgment” (46). As such, case reasoning is the indispensable foundation of all medical skill. Montgomery concludes that we must recognize that medicine is more than a science. It is a complex practice of healing in which “diagnosis and treatment are intensively science-using activities,” though not “in and of themselves, science” (52).

In an analogous way, liberal-arts teaching is not the “application” of disciplinary knowledge. Nor is it identical to induction into particular arts and sciences disciplines, as is typical of introductory courses in many fields. These are all versions of the educator as disciplinary specialist. Rather, liberal education requires a different understanding of the liberal arts teacher as an “intensively discipline-using” educator whose aim is practical wisdom, rather than specialized knowledge in itself.

Such a self-understanding is, I suspect, already widespread within the ranks of liberal arts faculties, among those who feel a “calling” to this kind of work. But it goes against the grain of the academy’s more fashionable model of the disciplinary specialist. If a genuine reinvention of liberal education is to succeed, it will require that this alternative faculty identity become public, recognized, supported, and advanced.

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REFERENCES


NEW TYPES and levels of global education are developing within American higher education for several reasons, none of them particularly obscure. American students will almost certainly be involved in rising levels of global interaction—often in their work, at least sometimes in their leisure, and always in their citizenship. Moreover, expanding global connections, combined with obvious shifts in the global balance of power, make it clear that China, India, Brazil, and other regions, in addition to Europe, will strongly shape our national future. Contemporary American students will have to develop a greater awareness of diverse parts of the globe than was expected of their counterparts of a generation ago, and they will probably have to adjust to some modifications to the idea of the United States as the sole superpower.

At the same time, many American students—amid great variety—are rather parochial in their experience and education, which creates a very real gap between the world taking shape around them and their own intellectual comfort zone. Lack of facility in a foreign language is the most glaring sign of the limitations of student preparation, but there are others. It is not possible to rely on students to bring a great deal to college in the way of relevant global training, such as knowledge of geography or comparative politics, which is the second main reason global education gains, or should gain, increasing attention. Better preparation for a global future can and should embrace real discussion of the drawbacks and challenges of current global trends. There need be no blanket endorsement, and indeed a balanced assessment provides one of the links between global and liberal education. Assumptions of all sorts, both hostile and enthusiastic, need to be critically assessed.

Global education embraces, of course, a multitude of facets. Study abroad experiences, for example, can make important contributions to global awareness, particularly as these experiences reorient from an excessively European focus. Even with further encouragement, however, there are limits to how many students study abroad can attract, so too much reliance on this outlet will not get the job done. Enhanced recruitment of international students, when combined with careful mixing with Americans in classes and student life alike, can be a real help. New uses of technology, to link to classes at international universities, should play a growing role. And there is increasing interest in dual degrees and other collaborations with international students that can have direct educational benefits for American undergraduates.

But no effort to provide a global education can possibly succeed without a solid curricular base, which must be the focus of any discussion of the relationship between global and liberal education. Considerable attention must go to programs that serve students for whom global issues constitute a major focus, and there are clearly liberal-educational opportunities here. Because globalization itself is a multifaceted process, embracing contacts ranging from trade to culture and from the environment to health, a state-of-the-art global affairs major becomes a significantly interdisciplinary endeavor, always remembering that language training and discussion of international relations continue to have strong roles to play. A dozen or more disciplines can be (actively and) usefully engaged in shaping and staffing concentrations.

PETER N. STEARNS

Some reorientation of the most familiar definitions of liberal education is essential if the goals of global education are to be met.
of this sort, which, happily, at least for the moment, also draw in sizeable numbers of interested students.

Global education, like its liberal counterpart, also seeks contact with students for whom global interests do not leap to the fore. Through changes in general education to permit an explicit global component, and through proposals for “global across the curriculum” experiments that would return students to explorations of global issues later in their undergraduate careers, proponents of global education urge the importance of bringing all students into some contact with global components. Like proponents of liberal education, they seek to have an extensive impact on the undergraduate curriculum, ideally at several junctures. Here, then, is where some friction can emerge between proponents of the two visions of undergraduate education.

**Tensions**

George Mason University’s current general education program, adopted in 2001, includes a global affairs category. According to the guidelines, courses in the category should deal with “causes and consequences of change in significant global issues.” They may deal with a specific topic, or with cultures “outside the contemporary Western world” by “incorporating comparisons of several cultures.” Presumably any course in the category will convey the “interconnectedness, difference, and diversity that are central to understanding and operating in a global society.”

This new global affairs category was introduced as part of a program that was resoundingly justified, overall, in terms of liberal education. It essentially replaced earlier requirements in areas like philosophy. The faculty accepted the changes surprisingly readily, but it turns out that this was partly because some of them sincerely imagined that they could pour old curricular wine into the new bottle. Not surprisingly in retrospect, the category was soon flooded with course proposals on virtually any non-American humanities or social science topic that could be imagined. Entries included topics such as Platonic philosophy and the history of the Roman republic. Most of these courses, in turn, had been listed under the prior general education scheme, and of course it was not hard to defend them in the classic terms of liberal education. But they
simply did not qualify as global education. However worthy they may have been in other respects, they did not address significant global issues; they did not seriously embrace comparison; they had little if anything to do with conveying interconnectedness or diversity. Obviously, the courses were put forward for several reasons, including sincere faculty devotion to the topics and a desire to capture enrollments. Nonetheless, the proposals indicated some real confusion about what global education entails, and how it requires some readjustments from standard liberal education fare.

A good bit of liberal education in the United States, particularly on the humanities side of the house, has been devoted to exposing students to the special beauties and intricacies of a Western canon. Some liberal education exemplars, particularly in certain small-college settings, continue to tout this goal, seeking to define the educated student in terms of the fullest possible exposure to Western history and culture. But again, however desirable it may be, this is simply not a global goal. It does not explicitly emphasize either the data or the habits of mind that serve a global vision.

In principle, liberal education staples that highlight purely Western classics might still be offered along with a global program. Yet apart from a certain degree of tension in principle, the real issue here concerns the amount of time available in a general education program. Is there space for an engineering or business student to fulfill the global goals and still take a classic course in Western civilization or philosophy? It is not often going to be possible to resolve the Western-global conundrum by simply insisting that students do both. Some genuine reorientation is essential.

Other curricular issues are less stark. Global education places a new premium on language training, with important non-Western offerings added to the mix and, ideally, with renewed attention to precollegiate foreign language exposure. As was true even with Western languages, questions remain about how much to require and how basic language courses can serve the purposes of both training and liberal education. The cultural concomitants of, say, an introductory sequence in Chinese or Arabic might moderate this familiar tension to some extent.

In principle, global education demands attention from both the social sciences and the humanities. The most common response to the global invocation emphasizes training in cultural diversity—exposure to at least one culture different from one’s own. But there is also an urgent need for work on global systems—the development and operation of contemporary political and economic contacts that powerfully shape the world. This dual focus on the cultural and the systemic is not at all incompatible with the goals of liberal education, which are also multidisciplinary. But it does make additional claims on course time and, therefore, raises the question of how much conventional general education material must be cleared away or restructured.

Obviously, the basic point is that some reorientation of the most familiar definitions of liberal education is essential if the goals of global education are to be met. There are conflicts over the time available for necessary courses as well as, to some extent, over basic purposes. Global education is not simply liberal education business as usual, and for some faculty members the choices will not be easy.

Habits of Mind
In the most fundamental sense, however, a fuller turn to global education amply fulfills classic goals of liberal education. The necessary
innovations do not strike at the liberal core. The key to reconciliation involves asking proponents of global education to define their own basic learning outcomes.

Global education, even at an introductory general education level, desirably exposes students to a considerable range of data. One hopes that the educated American student will know something about Islam, something about the globalization of science, something about global disease threats and responses, something about the economic relationship between the United States and China, something about the complex relationship between the European Union and globalization—and this list can easily be expanded. The coverage list is where the tensions with a Western-centered definition of what every educated person should know emerge most strongly. But beneath such lists, and ultimately demanding far more concerted attention, the global education agenda pushes for two fundamental habits of mind that are readily compatible with any but the most hidebound understanding of the desired outcomes of a liberal education.

First, the globally educated student should gain experience and skill in comparing different cultures and systems. This is, after all, the approach that ultimately undergirds the common insistence on exposure to international cultural diversity. Teaching students to expect to need to compare (rather than to assume a universality for their own experiences and values), helping them learn how to do it, and encouraging a comparative openness and orientation that can last beyond the classroom—all of this is fundamental to the kind of analysis living in a global environment requires. It involves the need to encounter diversity, but it also encourages recognition of unexpected, sometimes beneath-the-surface similarities; comparison cuts two ways, and undue emphasis simply on differences can miss the mark.

Second, the globally educated student should gain experience and skill in dealing with relationships between the local and the global. The phrase, of course, is familiar enough, but the category needs further attention pedagogically; it has been less thoroughly probed than the injunction to learn to compare. With comparison we have some experience not just in presenting relevant materials, but in actually accelerating the process by which students move from an initial temptation simply to juxtapose two cases, to genuine and active comparative analysis; we are not so far along in identifying the learning processes associated with an evaluation of local-global causations. But it is obviously true that human lives are powerfully shaped by interactions between local and global forces, and that both humanities and social science disciplines can promote the necessary analysis by generating some range of historical and contemporary case studies. Again, the ultimate goal is to prepare students to apply classroom experience to local-global combinations, whose existence we can confidently predict but whose specifics await the future.

Neither of these global habits of mind emerges predictably from a typical liberal education outcomes list, but both are fully compatible with such lists. Both, after all, promote the capacity to identify and evaluate student assumptions; both encourage critical thinking. One of the strengths of the global approach, in fact, is that it offers new vantage points for students’ exploration of their own values and their own society, as part of the broader global understanding. Though in fact it can be a demanding exercise, helping students see how others view American behaviors and institutions—to understand, not necessarily to accept the contrasts with homegrown assessments—
can be one of the most interesting applications of a comparative, local-global approach.

**Conclusion**

In sum, it is both possible and desirable to define liberal education in “global” terms. Defining a global liberal education extends the purposes of liberal education itself, and provides additional rationale at a time of some real uncertainty about commitments to the enterprise. It changes the learning outcomes list, but it reinforces the most essential basics. It offers a shared agenda for further pedagogical work and best-practice reports, as we work on to help students develop fundamental cognitive skills. The liberal-global combination does require real, if bounded, readjustments, however, and this means some additional debate and challenge. But it is well worth the effort to prepare students to think more constructively about global issues, and simply to think better in the process. Proponents of global education will benefit from a focus on the core learning outcomes they should be working toward, and their essentially liberal qualities, while proponents of liberal education will benefit from a fuller recognition of the global framework within which our students need to operate.

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the author’s name on the subject line.
The single most important step colleges and universities—especially public colleges and universities—can take to lower the student and family cost of college attendance is to improve retention, thereby increasing the four-year graduation rate. Indeed, if I had to pick one, and only one, statistic with which to measure the performance of a college or university in undergraduate education—independent or public—it would be retention: What percentage of first-year students return for their sophomore year? What percentage of an incoming cohort of first-year students graduate in four, five, or six years?

I would pick retention as my measure because in my over thirty years of engagement with institutional assessments of retention at three liberal arts colleges, looking at both the general literature and our own data, I have come to believe that institutions with high rates of retention to graduation have those high rates for three main reasons. First, they use multiple criteria—not just scores on high-stakes college entrance tests—to select for admission students who have demonstrated that they have the ability, academic preparation, and motivation to do college-level work, and they provide robust student support services to help students keep moving forward. In other words, very few students “flunk out,” even among the disadvantaged students whom these institutions seek out and enroll. Second, they communicate who they are clearly and honestly to prospective students and their families, and they give honest feedback to otherwise attractive applicants who should probably choose a different institution to ensure the right “fit.” And third, they meet the reasonable expectations of students and their families—the very expectations they lead students and families to have of them—to a high degree, and they work hard to fix things when they do not.

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Low Four-Year Graduation Rates
In addition to the obvious benefits for students and institutions, high retention rates also reduce what economists call the “opportunity costs” associated with the choice of a particular college. The choice to attend college is not just a decision to invest the necessary tuition, time, and effort to get a degree. It is also a decision to forego the earnings one might obtain from a job that does not require a college degree. Students and families understand that this particular opportunity cost is a necessary additional cost of college attendance. What they don’t think enough about, however, are the opportunity costs incurred if students do not complete college on time, or if they decide to transfer to another institution. Transfer students may be required to retake courses already begun (and fully or partially paid for) but not completed at the previous institution. Or they may take courses they thought would be available at their initial institution but were not, so other courses were taken and paid for instead.

These “in principle” unnecessary opportunity costs can add up to the point where they equal or exceed the anticipated tuition savings of attending a lower-tuition public or independent college or university. Savings from lower tuition accrue to students and their families, as I show here, only if they complete their studies at a lower-cost institution on time. In this discussion of opportunity costs I consider only tuition and fees, because housing and food costs must be paid whether someone is in college or not. And I look not just at the full tuition and fees, but at average net tuition and fees—the average amount students pay after any scholarship grants they receive that they do not have to pay back—and the average net tuition and fees paid by students from the lowest quartile of family income in America.

In the average case, looking at net tuition and fees and without taking into account opportunity costs, it is approximately $10,250 more expensive for a student to attend an independent (private) college or university per year (excluding room and board, remember) than it is for a student to attend an in-state public institution (see table 1). Very surprisingly, for the average student, it is almost as expensive to attend a public institution as an out-of-state student as it is to attend an independent institution.

Let’s look now at ACT’s summary retention statistics for 2009 (see table 2). The first thing

| Table 1. Average published tuition and fees, and net tuition and fees for full-time students at U.S. public and private not-for-profit four-year colleges, 2009–10 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                  | Published Tuition and Fees | Average Net Tuition and Fees | Average Net Tuition and Fees Lowest Income Quartile |
| Public Four-Year In-State | $7,020 | $1,620 | $0 |
| Public Four-Year Out-of-State | $18,548 | $11,110* | $4,989* |
| Private Four-Year | $26,270 | $11,870 | $6,140† |

| Estimate not included in Trends in College Pricing 2009, but was calculated using the same database by Sandy Baum, one of the authors of the report. |
| I believe it unfortunate that the average net tuition and fees for the lowest income quartile of students attending private four-year institutions is so high. At St. Lawrence, where over 20 percent of students receive federal Pell grants (students receiving Pell grants are almost entirely from the bottom family income quartile), average net tuition and fees for incoming first-year students receiving Pell grants in 2009–10 was $239. I am very proud of that. |
to see in these data is that, when comparing public and private institutions, first-to-second-year retention rates do not differ. And after controlling for institutional selectivity, public and private institutions do not differ appreciably, although more selective institutions have much higher first-to-second-year retention (90.2 percent for highly selective publics, and 92.3 percent for highly selective privates; 65.1 percent for open-admissions publics, and 66.6 percent for open-admissions privates).¹ With regard to four-year graduation rates, on the other hand, students who attended public institutions graduated in four years 21.5 percentage points less often, and this rough magnitude of difference exists at all levels of institutional selectivity. The overall four-year graduation rate from public institutions is an astonishingly low 27 percent.² Even more striking is the contrast between the four-year graduation rates of highly selective public or private institutions and those of public and private institutions overall: a 33.6 percentage point difference between the public average (27 percent) and the highly selective public average (60.6 percent), and a 29.2 percentage point difference between the private average (48.5 percent) and the highly selective private average (77.7 percent).

So how does one compare differences in opportunity costs between public and private institutions? In figure 1, I present several estimates based on different assumptions regarding what students do in their fifth years. In Scenario 1, all students who did not graduate in four years, but who ultimately graduated in five years from the institution in which they enrolled as freshmen, are assumed to be in col-

Table 2. First-to-second-year retention and four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates: Four-year public and private colleges and universities, 2009

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1st to 2nd Year</th>
<th>4-Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
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Figure 1. Cost of graduating at public institutions after five years versus cost of four years at private institutions

Non-Aided Students

Cost of One-Year Delay
Four-Year Cost

Average Aided Students

Student from Lowest 25 Percent of Family Income
lege full time during their fifth year, paying college tuition and fees, and not in the workforce. In Scenario 2, fifth-year students are assumed to be in the workforce half time and to be paying half-time college tuition and fees. In Scenario 3, it is assumed that somehow students graduating after five years pay no additional tuition and fees in their fifth year but still are able only to work half time. I then compare the total cost, for in-state and out-of-state students, of graduating from a public institution after five years—out-of-pocket tuition and fee costs plus lost income—to the four-year cost of attending a private college using the three scenarios just outlined.

Non-aided students in private institutions would still be ahead financially if they chose to attend an in-state public institution instead, even if it took them five years to graduate instead of four—and the chance is high that they would not finish in four years; only 26.7 percent of students attending public institutions do so. However, the cost savings would be considerably less ($23,980 as opposed to $77,000). On the other hand, non-aided students in out-of-state public institutions—with the same high probability of not finishing in four years—would save money in Scenarios 1 and 2 if they chose instead to attend a private institution and finished in four years.

In Scenario 1, the total cost for out-of-state students who attend public institutions and graduate in five years instead of four is $138,740, as compared to $105,080 for four years in a private institution (a difference of $33,660). If the comparison is with in-state public tuition and fees, average-net-cost students would save money in Scenario 1 if they graduate in four years from a private as opposed to five years from a public, but not in Scenarios 2 and 3. If, on the other hand, the comparison is with out-of-state tuition, these students would save money in all three scenarios if they graduate in four years from a private as opposed to five years from a public. Students from the lowest quartile of family income would save money in all three scenarios if they graduate in four years from a private institution as opposed to five years from a public, whether the institution is in or out of state.

Discussion
In this time of special financial stress for so many American families, the cost of college attendance may seem especially daunting. Prospective students and their families should, therefore, consider the implications of this analysis as they weigh the differences between public and private higher education options—and between high-four-year-graduation-rate and low-four-year-graduation-rate options, whether public or private. It is clear from all the scenarios presented in figure 1 that if a student manages to graduate in four years from a public institution, the total cost of attendance will be lower than at a private institution. On the other hand, the risk of not graduating in four years is much higher at a public institution. In the event that a student attending a public institution does not graduate in four years, but could have done so by attending a private institution, the cost savings of the public choice remain only if the student is non-aided and attending an in-state public institution.

To return to where I began, the single most important step colleges and universities—especially public colleges and universities—can take to lower the student and family cost of college attendance is to improve retention, thereby increasing the four-year graduation rate. With the exception of the rates for highly selective institutions (and these can be higher, with work, as well), the four-year graduation rates of both public and private colleges and universities in America are embarrassingly low.

I know from long experience that improvements in retention and graduation rates do not happen overnight. It took most of my thirteen-year term as president of St. Lawrence University to see the first-to-second-year retention rate increase from 82.4 percent to 91.7 percent, to see the four-year graduation rate increase from 65.5 percent to 76.2 percent (in 2009), and to see the six-year graduation rate increase from 70.9 percent to 80.9 percent. But while yearly progress is slow, the cumulative changes that can be accomplished over a decade are significant: students and their families benefit financially from improvements in first-to-second-year retention and in the four-year graduation rate, and the institution itself benefits financially in several ways. Most significantly, it benefits from enrollment growth in the upper division and from additional tuition in students’ fifth and sixth years when they stay to the finish—even if that takes six years—rather than dropping out.

Student preparation, motivation, and ability to finance college are all critical to graduating
on time. But so, too, is the level of commitment by the institution to meet the reasonable expectations of students and their families in the area of institutional performance, including the provision of student support services that have been shown by research to improve retention and degree attainment. In a study of the levels and patterns of spending at twenty highly effective institutions involved in Indiana University’s Documenting Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) project, for example, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems found that these highly effective institutions “spent a noticeably higher proportion of their available dollars on ‘academic support,’ a category in [the Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System] under which most institutions report resources dedicated to such things as faculty development, teaching and learning centers, and academic support staff such as tutors and counselors. These were precisely the activities that the DEEP research team noted as key contributors to a campus ethos devoted to student success when they visited these institutions” (Ewell 2008, 11). Similarly, researchers at the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute found that “student service expenditures influence graduation and persistence rates, and their marginal effects are higher for students at
institutions with lower entrance test scores and higher Pell Grant expenditures per student. Put another way, their effects are largest at institutions that have lower current graduation and first-year-persistence rates. Simulations suggest that reallocating some funding from instruction to student services may enhance persistence and graduation rates at those institutions whose rates are currently below the medians in the sample” (Webber and Ehrenberg 2009, 1).

Pursuing improvements in on-time degree attainment with focus and commitment, using well-understood strategies that are strongly supported by assessment research, is one of those cases where doing right by students educationally also does right for them and for institutions financially.

An inescapable conclusion from the analysis presented in this article is that, when one looks at the whole picture, American colleges and universities are underperforming with regard to on-time degree attainment, and that hurts students, families, colleges and universities, and the total well-being of our communities and nation. It is hard to find a good excuse for our underperformance in this area, and so it is not surprising that the din of public criticism has been rising!

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REFERENCES

NOTES
1 ACT has five categories of selectivity: highly selective, selective, traditional, liberal, and open.
2 Further support that the graduation rate differences between public and private institutions are not due to differences in average student preparation for college may be found in Jaschik (2010), which summarizes a new study from the National Bureau of Economic Research: “One theory—frequently advanced by those who question the goals of having more Americans earn college degrees—is that those coming into higher education outside of competitive colleges are less well prepared, and so are unable to move ahead in college at expected rates. But the authors find no evidence for this (based either on the courses students have taken before college or on their performance in college), and reject this theory.”
3 Salary foregone is estimated to be $46,000, the average starting salary for a college graduate as of March 30, 2010, according to simplyhired.com.
4 According to EarnMyDegree.com, the average annual salary earned by workers of all ages with some college was $36,800 per year in 2009. In Scenarios 2 and 3, then, foregone salary is $46,000 minus half of $36,800, or $27,600.
5 For a very good review of recent research on how to improve degree attainment, see Wellman (2010).
THE BEGINNING OF THE END, it is generally agreed, was in 1962. Someone burned trash in the pit of an abandoned strip mine in Centralia, Pennsylvania. It was illegal; it was unethical; but people do this kind of thing all the time. An exposed vein of coal caught fire. The fire was doused with water, and town officials thought the fire was extinguished. But it wasn’t, and the fire erupted again, unexpectedly, in the same pit just a few days later. More water was applied, and town officials thought that was the end of it. But again, it wasn’t.

The fire spread underground. People debated long and hard as to what to do about it. As they debated, life went on. People attended to the problems that confronted them in their daily lives—making ends meet, raising their kids, marrying and divorcing—meanwhile relegating the fire to the backs of their minds. Every once in a while, though, the fire or its byproducts would emerge from the ground. Toxic gases would start to come up out of the ground. A basement would become very hot, and eventually people would realize that the fire had reached under their basement. Roads would start to buckle from the heat. Half-hearted efforts would be made to extinguish the fire, but the longer people waited, the more the fire spread, and the more expensive it would be to extinguish it. The government started to pay people to relocate. They had little other choice.

Today, Centralia, Pennsylvania, is a ghost town. All but the steadfast few have abandoned it. The town no longer appears on some maps.

Relatively few people even remember the fire that still burns under the ruins of Centralia. Among those who do are the residents of Ashland, Pennsylvania, because the fire is making its way in their direction. They fear they may be next.*

The need to teach ethical reasoning
The story of Centralia is a precautionary tale for our society at large. The whole thing started with one clearly unethical act. Local, state, and government officials had a chance to do something about it, but they failed adequately to recognize the looming crisis. And so the crisis spread underground, erupting here and there, until it became unmanageable. The financial costs were staggering. But what about the ethics of making only a half-hearted attempt to control a fire that eventually would destroy the entire town, including the homes both of innocent victims and of those who did nothing?

One can argue that lapses such as occurred in Centralia are exceptions, scarcely the rule. The financial collapse of 2008 appears to have been partly a result of pure greed on the part of certain banks and bankers. At the time this article is being written, at least one well-known investment bank is under criminal as well as civil investigation. In 2010, coal miners died in a mine shaft that had been cited numerous times for inadequate ventilation, and a record-breaking oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico occurred at least in part because of improper safeguards against such spills. The Deepwater Horizon fiasco has become one of the great ethical scandals of our time because the evidence suggests that BP, the oil company involved, knowingly cut corners to save time and money.

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Teaching for Ethical Reasoning in Liberal Education
Such problems are nothing new. A. H. Robins went bankrupt in 1985. The company could not afford settlements for the more than three hundred thousand lawsuits filed against it as a result of its production and marketing of an unsafe intrauterine device for birth control, the Dalkon Shield. In 2001, Enron collapsed after Fortune magazine had named it America’s most innovative company for six years in a row; it was a house of cards, built on phony books and fraudulent shell companies. Worldcom’s bankruptcy came a year later, in 2002. It had incorrectly accounted for $3.8 billion in operating expenses. More recently, we have seen the end of Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, and numerous other financial enterprises. Few people reached the depths of Bernard Madoff, the epitome of unethical behavior on Wall Street, who now sits in a prison cell.

As a former dean of arts and sciences, I, like other deans, have discovered that students’ ethical skills often are not up to the level of their SATs. The unethical behavior of college students runs the full gamut: drunken rampages, cheating on tests, lying about reasons for turning papers in late, attacks on other students, questionable behavior on the athletic field. Faculty members, of course, are not immune from ethical lapses either; few deans probably leave their jobs without having had to deal with at least some cases of academic or other misconduct on the part of faculty members.

**Ethical Reasoning can be taught**

Schools should teach ethical reasoning; they should not necessarily teach ethics. There is a difference. Ethics is a set of principles for what constitutes right and wrong behavior. These principles are generally taught in the home or through religious training in a special school, or they are developed through other forms of learning over the course of one’s life. It would be challenging to teach ethics in a secular school, because different religious and other groups have somewhat different ideas about what is right and wrong. There are, however, core values that are common to almost all religious and ethical systems that schools do teach and reinforce—for example, reciprocity (the Golden Rule), honesty, sincerity, and compassion in the face of human suffering.

Ethical reasoning, by contrast, is a way of thinking about issues of right and wrong. Processes of reasoning can be taught, and school is an appropriate place to teach them. The reason is that, although parents and religious schools may teach ethics, they do not always teach ethical reasoning—or at least, they do not always do so with great success. They may
see their job as teaching right and wrong, but not how to reason with ethical principles. Is there any evidence that ethical reasoning can be taught with success? There have been successful endeavors with students of various ages. Paul and Elder (2005) have shown how principles of critical thinking can be applied specifically to ethical reasoning in young people. DeHaan and Narayan (2007) have shown that it is possible successfully to teach ethical reasoning to high school students. Myser, Kerridge, and Mitchell (1995) have shown ways of teaching ethics to medical students. Weber (1993) found that the teaching of ethical awareness and reasoning to business students can be improved through the provision of courses specifically focused on addressing these topics, although the improvements are often short-term. However, Jordan (2007) found that, as leaders ascend the hierarchies in their businesses, their tendency to define situations in ethical terms actually seems to decrease.

How does one teach ethical reasoning? In my view, the way to teach ethical reasoning is through the case-study method, which is the principal method I now use in my own course on leadership. Ideally, ethics is taught not just in courses focused specifically on ethics but in any course to which ethics might potentially apply. Otherwise, there is the risk that what students learn will be inert, that students will not see how to apply it outside the one course on ethics. Students need to learn how to reason about and apply ethical principles by being confronted with ethical problems in a variety of domains. They also need to be inoculated against the pressures to behave unethically, such as occur when there is retaliation for whistle-blowing.

Problems for teaching ethical reasoning
The following is a famous, perhaps now classic, problem for teaching ethical reasoning: A train is going out of control and hurtling down the tracks toward four people who are strangers to you. You are unable to call out to the people or get them off the tracks. However, it is in your power to press a button that will divert the train. But there is a problem, namely, that there is a person, also a stranger, on the tracks onto which you would divert the train. This person will be killed if you divert the train. Thus, you can touch the controls and divert the train, resulting in the death of one person, or you can not touch the controls, and four people will die. What should you do?

Consider also the following, more realistic problems:
1. A university in New York City has run out of room. It is confined on all sides in a crowded city and cannot fulfill its expanding academic mission with the real estate currently available to it. Its solution in the past was to buy up as much neighboring land as it could. But it has run out of willing sellers. The university now is attempting to use the law of eminent domain to take over land by having the city kick out landowners. In order to do so, it has claimed that some of the areas into which it wishes to move are blighted. Landowners of these adjacent properties point out that the university has no right to their land and that if the adjacent areas are blighted, it is because the university itself has failed to maintain properties it has bought and, thus, has itself been a major contributor to the blight. What should be done?

2. Your friend is the CEO of a powerful company in your town. You follow the local news and know that there have been some rumblings about his performance because, as CEO, he has just awarded a large no-bid contract to manage the construction of a new research center owned by the company. In other words, the winning contractor did not have to compete against any other companies for the contract. At a dinner party, you ask your friend the CEO how his vacation was, and he mentions that it was really nice. He and his family went on a week-long free skiing vacation at the mountain house of Mr. X. You realize that Mr. X is none other than the owner of the company that received the contract to manage construction of the new building. What should you do?

3. Doctors sometimes write notes on pads furnished by pharmaceutical companies with pens also furnished by such companies. Some doctors may also accept free meals, club memberships, subsidized travel, and research funds from such companies. With regard to gifts and subsidies from pharmaceutical companies to doctors, what kinds of guidelines do you think ought to be in place, and why? Is there an ethical failure here, and if so, does the fault lie with the pharmaceutical companies, the doctors, or both?
4. Mr. Smith, a close friend of yours with whom you have worked closely in your company for forty years, is clearly dying. There is no hope. On his deathbed, he tells you that he has been burdened for many years by the fact that, between the ages of thirty-five and forty-two, he had a mistress whom he saw frequently and subsidized financially. He asks you to tell his wife what he has told you and to tell her that he begs her forgiveness. Mr. Smith has now died. What should you do about his request?

If students are not explicitly given chances to confront ethical dilemmas, how are they going to learn to solve them? In my own instruction, I care less about the conclusions students reach than about the reasoning processes that lead to them.

There are no easy answers to any of the problems presented above, but that is the point. Teaching ethical reasoning is not about teaching what one should do in particular circumstances—that is, perhaps, the role of religious training. Teaching ethical reasoning is about teaching students how to make very difficult decisions wisely when ethical considerations are involved and when the answers are anything but clear cut.

Teaching ethical reasoning is not about teaching what one should do in particular circumstances

A model of ethical reasoning and its translation into behavior

Not all ethical problems are as difficult as the examples above. Yet people act unethically in many situations. Why? Sometimes, it is because ethics mean little or nothing to them. But more often, it is because it is hard to translate theory into practice. Consider the following example.

In 1970, Bibb Latané and John Darley opened up a new field of research on bystander intervention. They showed that, contrary to expectations, bystanders intervene when someone is in trouble only in very limited circumstances. For instance, if they think that someone else might intervene, the bystanders tend to stay out of the situation. Latané and Darley even showed that divinity students about to lecture on the parable of the good Samaritan were no more likely than other bystanders to help a person in distress who was in need of—a good Samaritan! Drawing in part upon their model of bystander intervention, I have constructed a model of ethical behavior that would seem to apply to a variety of ethical problems. The model identifies the specific skills students need to reason and then behave ethically. The skills are taught by active learning—by having students solve ethical-reasoning problems, employing the skills they need.

The basic premise of the model is that ethical behavior is far harder to display than one would expect simply on the basis of what we learn from our parents, from school, and from our religious training (Sternberg 2009a, 2009b). To intervene, individuals must go through a series of steps, and unless all the steps are completed, they are not likely to behave in an ethical way—regardless of the amount of training they have received in ethics, and regardless of their levels of other types of skills. Consider the skills in the model and how they apply to the specific ethical dilemma of whether a student, John, should turn in a fellow student, Bill, whom he saw cheating on an examination:

1. Recognize that there is an event to which to react. John has to observe the cheating and decide that it is a situation in which he potentially can do something.

2. Define the event as having an ethical dimension. John has to define the cheating as unethical. Many students do so; but some others see it as a utilitarian matter—it’s okay if Bill gets away with it.

3. Decide that the ethical dimension is significant. John has to decide that Bill’s cheating on the
examination is a big enough deal that it is worth paying attention to. Some students may see it as an ethical issue, but not as a significant one.

4. Take personal responsibility for generating an ethical solution to the problem. There are ethical problems that are serious but that are not necessarily your ethical problems. John may decide that there is an ethical problem here, even a big one, but that it is none of his business. For example, John may look at it as the teacher’s responsibility, not his, to turn Bill in.

5. Figure out what abstract ethical rule(s) might apply to the problem. What rule applies? If there is no honor code, is there a rule by which John should turn Bill in? Perhaps John believes, on the contrary, that the rule is to mind his own business, or to avoid cheating himself, but not to turn Bill in.

6. Decide how these abstract ethical rules actually apply to the problem so as to suggest a concrete solution. Perhaps John believes that one should turn cheaters in, but cannot apply the rule in this situation, realizing that he could not prove that Bill cheated.

7. Prepare to counteract contextual forces that might lead one not to act in an ethical manner. John may be reluctant to turn Bill in because he believes that other students, including but not limited to Bill, will shun him or retaliate against him for being a “snitch.”

8. Act. In the end, the question becomes one not of how one thinks, but of what one does. It can be very difficult to go from thought to action. But the ultimate test of ethical reasoning is not just in how one thinks, but also in how one acts. John may believe he should turn Bill in, but he may not have the guts actually to do so.

The model sketched above applies not only to judging others but also to evaluating one’s own ethical reasoning. When confronted with a situation that has a potential ethical dimension, students can learn literally to go through the steps of the model and ask how they apply to a given situation.

The effective teaching of ethical reasoning involves the presentation of case studies. But it is important that students also generate their own case studies from their own experience, and then apply the steps of the model to their own problems. They need to be actively involved in seeing how the steps of the model apply to their own individual problems.

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**Conclusion**

Figuratively speaking, we are all living in Centralia. But should we do anything to stop the fire? And if so, what? Is it worth the cost? Or should we just deal with the consequences of the fire as they erupt, as we have been doing? Deciding what to do is one of the most challenging ethical problems of all. And if we do nothing, what will happen to our metaphorical Ashland, the next generation for which we bear as much responsibility as we do for our own? We need to take responsibility for teaching students to reason ethically. Otherwise, the fire will burn further out of control, with catastrophic results for our nation and the world.

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

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**REFERENCES**


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**NOTE**

* Information about the Centralia mine fire can be found online at www.offroaders.com/album/centralia/centralia.htm.
Is there a way to bring interfaith cooperation more into the arena of academic discussion, without doing violence to the precepts of truth-seeking and open inquiry so valued in a secular liberal learning environment?

**Model one: Interfaith cooperation as participation in a zero-sum game**

The question can be understood to assume that interfaith cooperation is a social movement, like the racial equality–based civil rights movements in the United States in the 1960s and the feminist, gay rights, and disability rights movements of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. As interfaith cooperation comes on the academic scene in the twenty-first century, it must compete with institutional norms and practices established by these predecessor social movements. In an environment where other social movements have significantly affected university curricula, programming, and priorities, the question goes, what is the highest aspiration for proponents of interfaith cooperation? Here, “highest aspiration” means something like “maximum effect.”

In the highly occupied social terrain of our day, this model presents a kind of zero-sum game, where interfaith cooperation achieves its impact by displacing the effects of other social movements. Those effects are highly secular but, say some, they conduce to the common good in a way faith-based effects do not. Secular practices admit of no special pleading by religious adherents, who are perceived to be seeking to smuggle in private or parochial agendas that are unrelated to the public good. Thus, on this model, if one creates a place for interfaith cooperation in a college or university, one does so against competing agendas and philosophies and by displacing them to some extent. Those (secular) competitors are styled as rational, while faith of any kind is positioned as irrational; or, as objectively valued discourses versus subjectively espoused faith statements; or, as truth claims subject to public warrants and criteria of verification versus truth claims subject to verification by so-called “religious feelings,” or dogmas and doctrines based on supposed divine revelations.

In this zero-sum strategic vision of interfaith dialogue on campuses, if different religious faiths cooperate, it is in part due to a common enemy or enemies—rationalism, reductionist explanations of religion, perhaps materialism. At the level of tactics, public display of differences between faiths may be suppressed for strategic reasons or emphasized, depending on whether it is helpful or hurtful to signal the specificity of one’s religious tradition. Also within this model are overtly faith-based colleges or universities, enclaves of quite particular religious missions, that go about their work in a wholly different episteme or master frame than that utilized by nonreligious colleges and universities. Assuming, however, that we are talking about the penetration of interfaith activities onto a so-called secular campus, what is the most one may hope for? In such a situation, the highest aspiration is to acquire strategic space within the curriculum, within student
organizations and other platforms, and within
the administration in order to advance the
cause of interfaith dialogue.

We have seen this model of religious
“strangers” in a secular “strange land” played
out time and again in the post-Enlightenment
history of liberal education, but perhaps never
with the intensity and polarization of the last
forty years. Departments of religious studies,
if they exist and their content is not dispersed
to other departments in the humanities and
social sciences, are problematic creatures,
viewed with suspicion if not derision by their
more “scientific” peers. Academic departments
of theology would be a contradiction in terms.
Support for student cocurriculum and activities,
and administrators charged with overseeing
student life, are viewed skeptically if their
content or mission includes faith-based orga-
nizations.

Why is this so? The civil rights movement
of Dr. King, Rabbi Heschel, Elmhurst College’s
own alumni Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr,
and countless others was informed and drew
strength from the words of the Christian and
Hebrew scriptures. The work of Dorothy Day,
founder of the Catholic Worker movement,
and Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk who
inspired millions through a life of “contempla-
tion in a world of action,” vividly embodied
Catholic social justice teaching and the author-
itative statements of Vatican Council II.

Yet through ethnic studies, women’s stud-
ies, gay and lesbian studies, intercultural stud-
ies, indigenous persons studies, critical race
theory—all marvelous additions to American
university life, in my view—the social move-
ments of the last forty years have left their
mark on the academy in a profoundly secular
way. It is as though the rejection of religious
belief as a relevant frame for truth-seeking is
the price of admission to the academy and of
acceptance as an interdisciplinary exploration
or a free-standing department. Thus is inter-
faith cooperation mooted as a legitimate re-
source for the core work of academic life.

An example of this model in action is my
own graduate school alma mater, Harvard
University. In 2006, Harvard flirted with the
idea of requiring its undergraduates to take a
course in a category called Faith and Reason.
The Preliminary Report of the Task Force on
General Education (2006) contained the rec-
ommendation, but it was ultimately not
adopted. I view this as unfortunate, since the
major faith traditions are conspicuously play-
ing an increasingly pivotal role in world and
domestic affairs. Rarely if ever has faith been
less “private” and more a legitimate part of the
public discourse—even, indeed especially, on
university campuses. Yet, interfaith cooperation
remains marginal to the intellectual enterprise
of this most famous of research universities,
even as the university itself acknowledges re-
ligion’s importance to the lives of the vast ma-
jority of Harvard’s students. As the Report of
the Task Force on General Education states,
“Religion has historically been, and continues
to be, a force shaping identity and behavior
throughout the world. Harvard is a secular
institution, but religion is an important part
of our students’ lives” (2007, 11). Harvard’s
Pluralism Project, under the extraordinary leadership of Professor Diana Eck, has long served as an example of vibrant interreligious dialogue and learning. However, because the university as a “secular institution” functions within the model of interreligious dialogue as a zero-sum game, speech and conduct denominated as religious will inevitably yield pride of place (and funds and prestige) to ostensibly nonreligious discourse and practices, thus refracting religious studies among the disciplines and marginalizing or inadequately integrating statements by religious adherents about themselves or the world.

To appreciate the frustrating effects that cabining off discussion of religious issues qua religious can have, one need only read a recent story in the Harvard Crimson, the university’s award-winning student newspaper, entitled, “Religious Discussion Desired”:

“Challenges to Faith at Harvard,” a panel discussion moderated by the Harvard Political Union last night, examined the social and intellectual pressures that influence undergraduates’ religious lives.

The panelists and audience were in agreement that more religious discourse should occur on campus in order to incorporate the diversity of religious viewpoints. Many of the panelists said that Harvard’s climate helped to ground their religious beliefs.

“At Harvard, I am forced to think about what I believe, and to explain why I believe X, Y, or Z,” said Aneesh V. Kulkarni ’10, a member of Dharma, Harvard’s Hindu organization . . .

However, some panelists said that Harvard’s attitude towards religion is at times problematic. “At Harvard, we are told to think critically about every aspect of our lives, except for faith and religion,” said Stephanie M. Cole ’11, a member of the Harvard-Radcliffe Christian Fellowship . . .

The panelists in turn said that pluralism is included in each religious tradition.

“You don’t have to agree to a certain political opinion in order to be a member of the Catholic Student Association,” said Katherine J. Calle ’10. “The expression two Jews, four opinions is a good one, I think,” said Jason W. Schnier ’11, a member of Hillel. (Dibella 2009)

The “challenges to faith” described above are not limited to Harvard, but arise on most campuses where interfaith dialogue is seen as a competitor to nonreligious discourse and practices. Is there a way to bring interfaith cooperation more into the arena of academic discussion, without doing violence to the precepts of truth-seeking and open inquiry so valued in a secular liberal learning environment?

To move toward an answer, I think one must leave the first model, sketched above, which conceives of the academy as strategically organized zones of competing worldviews and social practices. Rather, on a second model, Eboo Patel’s question—to what can interfaith cooperation aspire in the academy?—can mean that interfaith cooperation as a social movement inherits a campus cultural environment that has been shaped by decades of specific social movements and their philosophies (of equal rights, due process, tolerance, and other institutional values derived from the Enlightenment). Within this matrix we ask, what is the highest aspiration that proponents of interfaith cooperation can hold and seek to advance?

Model Two: Interfaith cooperation as critical reappropriation of tradition

This second model eschews stereotypes of the secular and religious, and it recognizes that all faiths, including secularism, are living realities conditioned by multiple cultural currents—currents that affect religious, nonreligious, and even antireligious philosophies alike. The abstractions of theologies and of Enlightenment-based philosophies of the person and world are replaced by living individuals and concrete communities, like the Harvard students quoted above, whose members experience a complex world in similar ways. Strategic rationality and gamesmanship are replaced by communicative rationality and dialogue, and by the identification of common problems and threats in the environment. Religious traditions and nonreligious traditions are mined for rhetorical and performative resources—ways to say and do things—that stimulate mutual allegiances across religious boundaries and religious-nonreligious boundaries. Public displays of differences are not suppressed for strategic ends, but rather are subordinated to achieving common objectives through collective action. This is followed by reflection back within one’s tradition (secular or religious) on the meaning of this collective action for adherents of the tradition and, in-
indeed, for the claims of the tradition itself. The critical reappropriation of tradition through reflection on collective action becomes a legitimate academic move, in fact a way of life and self-formation for students as well as for administrators and faculty.

There are four moments in this dialectical model. The first is marked by the creation of robust intrafaith occasions for learning about and interpreting one’s own religious tradition—liturgical, educational, communal, and individual—and inviting alienated or disaffected nominal members to join the conversation. I call this moment charging the batteries. The second moment in the dialectic involves naming issues of concern to the college or university community that are shared among faiths and persons and groups of no faith tradition, and then offering religiously based interpretations of these issues, listening to interpretations offered by those who reject religion or a particular tradition, and doing so on and off campus—indeed potentially around the world. Such issues include, for example, environmental and economic justice, poverty, racism, sexism, and homophobia as well as issues related to getting a meaningful job and starting life as a young adult. This second moment, which focuses on engaging in issues-based discussions with all college stakeholders and stakeholders worldwide, can be called issues-based dialogue. Working together to address the issues with all stakeholders and engaging in critically informed social reform—in short, taking collective action—is the third moment. The fourth moment is marked by each stakeholder’s critical exploration of the meaning of this collective action either for one’s own religious tradition and its theologies of self and world, or for one’s own secular tradition and its philosophies of rights and ethical systems. The objective is to educate and to open oneself to the possibility of deep change and thus incipiently to reform those theologies and philosophies themselves. In this final moment, one engages in dialogue aimed at personal change through reflection on collective action—or, in a phrase, self-formation.

Note the model presented above does not strive for a consensus of philosophies or theologies. It begins in the specificity of traditions and returns there, but invites tradition transformation through issues-based dialogue, working together on common problems, and reflection on shared experiences. In short, I believe that our highest aspiration for interfaith cooperation on campus is to create tradition-based opportunities for radical change of self and world, which include the possible transformation of one’s own tradition.

**Interfaith dialogue at Elmhurst College**

I would like to sketch what my campus has been doing recently to try to achieve that aspiration. But first, a word of framing. Elmhurst College is an affiliate of the United Church of Christ (UCC). In 2008–9, the year I began my presidency, we initiated and completed a broad-based strategic planning process. We named for the first time five core values: intellectual excellence; community; social responsibility; stewardship; and faith, meaning, and values. With regard to the last of these—faith, meaning, and values—we state that “we value the development of the human spirit in its many forms and the exploration of life’s ultimate questions through dialogue and service. We value religious freedom and its expressions on campus. Grounded in our own commitments and traditions as well as those of the UCC, we cherish values that create lives of intellectual excellence, strong community, social responsibility, and committed stewardship” (Elmhurst 2010).

Regarding the first moment of the aspiration to interfaith cooperation, “charging the batteries,” I note that Elmhurst students voluntarily engage in religious services appropriate to their needs and responsive to their religious calendars. These services are coordinated by the college chaplain and numerous cochaplains representing the major faith traditions. For example, recent work has gone into enhancing liturgical and social opportunities for Catholics, who make up 40 percent of the student body. At this UCC-affiliated college we now have monthly Masses, a start-of-the-year Mass, and inclusion of Catholic priests and lay leaders in ceremonial roles at college events such as graduation and baccalaureate. Last year, we reviewed the adequacy of prayer spaces on campus for our Muslim students. We are currently looking for a Buddhist cochaplain. To “charge the batteries” and educate the community, we host annual public lectures focused on major religious traditions: the Al-Ghazali (Muslim), Bernardin (Catholic), Heschel (Jewish), Niebuhr (Protestant) Lectures and
an Evangelical Lecture. We honor religious figures whose lives and work align with our mission, such as our award in September 2009 of our highest honor, the Niebuhr Medal, to Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, founder of Latin American liberation theology. And for those students who wish to explore questions of ultimate meaning through intentionally nonreligious frames of thought, we also support a strong and visible secular student association.

As to the second moment of interfaith cooperation, issues-based dialogue, we offer a number of forums for naming and exploring issues of concern to the educational community. Because “where” is often crucial to successful discussions, we moved the office of the chaplain to its own house on campus in order to increase its visibility and to facilitate the creation of sacred space and interfaith conversations. We support a spiritual life council, an interfaith group consisting of and led by students and our chaplain that engages in dialogue on traditional religious questions and issues of social justice. We also administer the Niebuhr Center. Named for our two alumni and funded in part by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, the Niebuhr Center offers students from all faiths the opportunity to explore careers of service, whether as ordained religious leaders or as laypersons. Through the Niebuhr

Center and outside it, we offer numerous study abroad opportunities through which students come face to face with world issues and alternate points of view, and we host an increasing number of students from outside the United States who eagerly engage in issues-based dialogue with their American counterparts.

For the past two years, the Niebuhr Center has sponsored events entitled “Sacred Conversations on Race.” Held on campus and at Bethel Green Church, a largely African American congregation in Chicago’s west side, these events bring together members of the Elmhurst College community, church members, and national leaders on race relations to discuss this important topic from Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim perspectives. In the fall of 2010, we will launch the Niebuhr Forum on Religion in Public Life, which will bring prominent writers on religion together with panels of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim scholars and movement leaders to discuss the contemporary salience of Reinhold Niebuhr’s thought. In addition, a large and growing number of academic courses—such as our campuswide first-year seminars—and cocurricular student groups focused on world peace, hunger, disease, gender justice, and sexual orientation provide concrete opportunities for students, faculty, and administrators to identify shared
issues of concern and to engage in dialogue from their various religious and nonreligious perspectives. Our faculty, chaplain, administrators, and I are also very active in interreligious dialogue throughout the Chicago area and beyond, and we frequently collaborate with Chicago Theological Seminary, a leading progressive Christian voice that shares our affiliation with the UCC.

For the third moment, collective action, the Niebuhr Center is again an example of critically informed work toward social justice. Last fall, we co-organized a rally with Bethel Green Church against gun violence in Chicago’s Austin neighborhood. Our students went into the neighborhood to urge residents to attend the service, which featured an impassioned speech by social activist and local pastor Rev. Michael Pfleger.

Liturgy and ceremony can also be moments of collective action. After all, “liturgy” means “the work of the people.” As a Native American and a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, I have tried to create occasions for ceremonial engagement by our non-Native community members with members of Chicago’s Anawim Center (a traditional Native American spirituality and service organization), the American Indian Center of Chicago, and other indigenous peoples’ groups including the Cherokee Nation.

As part of a week-long Native American Awareness Week, we brought together students, faculty, prominent scholars, and representatives of indigenous peoples’ communities to educate ourselves about the history of colonization in America and, with members of traditional Native American communities, to celebrate their—by which I mean our—religious, political,
and cultural self-determination today. A highlight of the week included a traditional smudging ceremony, which was held in our chaplain’s office, conducted by members of the Anawim Center, and attended by students from a variety of traditions—religious and secular.

More than a hundred of our students travel annually to multiple sites around the country to work with Habitat for Humanity, an experience that brings religious and nonreligious students together in the service of the homeless and communities lacking adequate facilities. Finally, the college has embarked on an annual theme-based set of service and education projects. For 2009–10, our focus was on poverty, both worldwide and close to home in DuPage County, and we gave service and educated both the college and the general public in myriad ways throughout the year.

Finally, in the fourth moment of interfaith cooperation, self-formation, our students engage in personal transformation through reflection on their collective action. Back in their spiritual “homes”—whether through the Spiritual Life Council, faith-based groups, or the Secular Students Association; through other meetings of affinity groups; or informally and alone—our students ask themselves what they have learned about their faith and value systems through their many experiences of collective action. For all students, every year, the college will provide what we call the Elmhurst Experience, a model of intentional liberal learning that has student self-formation as one of its two focuses. We are doing this even now through the Big Questions Orientation, an intensive, multiday, small-cohort, new student orientation that asks first-year students to act cooperatively; to reflect on themselves, their world, and their values; and to engage in off-campus service learning, which is followed immediately by their first formal academic experience, the credit-bearing first-year seminar. The first-year seminar brings together the same cohort and the same set of instructors—one faculty member and one staff member—who led the orientation, and the seminar pedagogy, focused on an interesting, interdisciplinary topic, encourages students to take intellectual and social risks and, hopefully, to begin a lifelong love of learning. The college is also focusing on residential campus communities as sites for student self-formation.

Or, at least, constructive conflict resolution—few experiences compare to living in residence halls!

Through our recently adopted new program of general education, the Elmhurst Experience will be extended beyond the first year. The new program requires each undergraduate to complete a course in the category Religious Studies in Context, which has replaced a narrower requirement in Judeo-Christian Heritage and Religious Faith. In all these ways and others, Elmhurst College is aspiring to generate opportunities for genuine interfaith dialogue and student self-formation.

The opportunities for changing student lives through changing the world, and changing the world through changing student lives, are immense. The challenges to this work are inherent in a model of higher education that pits religious against secular faiths, thereby marginalizing religion and impoverishing liberal education. An alternative model, which I have sketched here, grounds action in communities of faith and commitment, religious and nonreligious, and transforms both communities and their members through collective action and reflection on shared experiences. In such a radically transformative dialogue, anyone and anything may be changed. But a commitment to such deep change, I believe, is a principle that unites rather than divides most religious and secular communities and is, therefore, a cause for optimism.

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IFYC. Interfaith Youth Core, www.ifyc.org/about_core.
Avoiding Mixed Metaphor

The Pedagogy of the Debate over Evolution and Intelligent Design

KENNETH L. CARTER AND JENI WELSH

For more than a century, the debate over evolution and creationism has affected academia at nearly every level. Although it distracts from core issues in many academic contexts, the debate can sometimes be pedagogically useful. For example, although personal and political sensitivities can create a classroom environment within which it is difficult to conduct an open discussion of evolution or intelligent design—or to avoid tangents that are irrelevant to the course material—many instructors have successfully leveraged the controversy to discuss the differences between science and pseudoscience. Moreover, the challenges inherent to academic discussion of the debate do not preclude addressing the psychology of science, while maintaining a focus on applying the scientific method directly to both sides.

Notwithstanding the range of past and present ideological viewpoints on both intelligent design and evolutionary theory, the fundamental debate continues in very similar forms, ranging from quiet, subtle student protests in individual classrooms to large-scale battles waged on school boards and in courtrooms across the country. The challenge for the instructor is to respect individual belief systems while still presenting the best of current scientific methodology, theory, knowledge, and tradition to a diverse population of students. The simple imagery, allegories, and catch phrases that underlie common sense and social tradition help shape mental processes, and countering an allegory with a scientific theory is often akin to using a hammer to drive in a screw. Popular commonsense notions are best answered with common sense. Similarly, arguments rooted in social tradition should be recognized and addressed as such.

Communicating scientific findings to the general public

The travails of Galileo are widely regarded to be emblematic of the turmoil that surrounds scientific revolution. In attempting to convince the world of the need for a paradigm shift, Galileo faced opposition from several sources. Aside from the obvious religious, scientific, and political forces of the era, common intuition—a powerful force that is often overlooked—also presented a formidable challenge. According to the belief system that was dominant in Galileo’s time, the earth was the static center of the universe around which all other celestial objects rotated. Conceptually, this earth-centric belief was essentially egocentric as human perspective had for generations been oriented from the self outward. This egocentric perspective was readily coupled with social and religious traditions that tied an earth-centric view of the universe to the special nature of humanity and, by extension, humanity’s place in the universe (Bolles 1993).

Imagine, then, the challenge that Galileo faced in trying to upend the perceptions of individuals whose intuitive, experiential selves were borne from an egocentric perspective of
humanity looking out from a central point onto the boundless universe. Moreover, people had experienced movement only in a very real, visceral sense—by, for example, walking, horseback riding, or falling. Galileo was arguing not only that humanity should be unseated from the center of the universe, but also that the earth moves through space at thousands of miles per hour.

Lifelong experience and perceptions can be as deeply seated in the human psyche as phobias. Consequently, no matter how easily a person in Galileo’s time might have been able to conceptualize a sun-centric universe with an earth whizzing through space at thousands of miles per hour, most would still have rejected it at a visceral level. Consider this alongside the fact that Galileo’s paradigm ran contrary to contemporary social and religious traditions, and you can readily understand why many would have responded to his assertions in the same way as an arachnophobe would respond to a spider. Although someone with a phobia of spiders may well know that an ordinary garden spider is innocuous, and may fully understand the spider’s role in the ecosystem, he or she will nonetheless be rendered helpless by the hidden inner forces that drive human phobias. Similarly, common knowledge, common intuition, social tradition, and common sense all worked in tandem to undermine Galileo’s scientific description of reality. Reframing knowledge through scientific description is a conscious exercise, but overcoming the inner, intuitive self is an act of will—especially when there is no compelling personal reason for doing so. Galileo found out too late that the dissemination of science is as much a public relations campaign as it is a pursuit of knowledge.

Science is often conducted in a sort of social vacuum. Scientists spend countless hours reviewing previous research and generating and testing their own hypotheses before finally reaching conclusions. In the scientific literature, the history and logic are clearly spelled out and vetted by a community of peers. The problem of the social vacuum arises when the findings are disseminated beyond this relatively small community of peers and presented in final form to the population at large—especially when the ramifications of the scientific discoveries affect those outside the scientific community on a very personal level. Even though the scientific method is more systematic than common intuition and social tradition, it still remains open to error, oversimplification, and misinterpretation.

Highly publicized failures of science have laid the foundation for a generalized anxiety and some degree of mistrust in the general population. Consequently, communicating scientific findings to other scientists is an endeavor far different from communicating findings to a diverse general public.

Although individuals sometimes reject social traditions, they usually do so from an insider’s perspective. Fully educated about a tradition within which one has been raised, for example, one may, as a result of personal evaluation and introspection, choose an alternative. When scientific findings run contrary to social traditions, however, they usually seem to confront the traditions from the position of an outsider. Typically, a relationship of trust is required in order for an individual to accept scientific findings that contradict a deeply ingrained social tradition. Most often, the general public, which tends already to be skeptical of voices from the ivory towers of academia, is asked simply to trust pronouncements that appear to be tenuous, at best, or to defy common sense, at worst. In the absence of a common ground of understanding, it is reasonable to expect friction.

The public reception of evolutionary theory

The same public relations nightmare that Galileo faced has also haunted the dissemination of the science of evolution. The science, as science, does not assuage perceived incompatibilities with common sense or social tradition. The creationist and intelligent-design movements are social phenomena fueled almost exclusively by nonscientists in reaction to a scholarly declaration that runs contrary to social and religious sensibilities. The movements generally seek to manufacture gaps in the scientific theory to the benefit of an alternative understanding of human origins. Although some attacks are ideologically based, even those with a scientific design feed into
the social argument more than any truly scientific debate.

The debate over evolution and intelligent design operates at several levels. Any pedagogy used to explore the debate in a college classroom should clearly communicate that there is more to science than the scientific method. The social images of evolution can be very powerful. The well-known caricature of Charles Darwin as an ape is a perfect example (see fig. 1). To many, being displaced from a privileged position at the center of the universe is far less offensive than accepting an image of themselves as the offspring of chimps. The science of evolution itself is ill-equipped to assuage the psychological power of such an image.

If common intuition seems to point to a gap in a scientific theory, then the theory must be communicated in a way that explicitly addresses that gap—even if it is purely perceptual and without scientific merit. Such a gap in Galileo’s theory, for example, derived from the clear lack of any perception of motion on a planet supposedly whizzing through space at almost unthinkable speed. Galileo realized that the perceived absence of motion was a societal/perceptual problem, rather than a theoretical problem, and he sought vigorously to counter it by providing a variety of conceptual examples.

Today, antievolutionists commonly point out that, when you view a photograph of the Mount Rushmore National Monument, you realize that it is not a natural phenomenon and that it must have had an intelligent designer. The universe, the earth, and humans, they argue, have characteristics that likewise indicate the existence of an intelligent designer. The basic argument here is well known; it was used with a timepiece as the metaphor during the early 1800s (Paley and Paxton 2003). For many, it holds the same visceral power as the Darwin-as-ape image. Although evolution addresses how and why species evolved to their current forms, it does so from a scientific approach and using a specialized, scientific language that is ill-suited to counter this highly effective conceptual expression of common intuition.

Undoubtedly, Mount Rushmore was carved by an intelligent designer; however, the question is not whether an intelligent designer can make something, but rather whether something natural can have the appearances of something designed. Until May 3, 2003, a rock formation known as the “Old Man of the Mountain” stood on the side of a mountain in New Hampshire; the formation bore a remarkable resemblance to the visage of a withered old man. The state was so taken by this remarkable formation that, in 1945, it adopted the Old Man of the Mountain as its official emblem. Resemblance is key here because, despite the obvious likeness to a human face, anyone could readily discern a number of imperfections. Yet this is a fundamental tenet of evolutionary theory. The process of natural selection is
simple and elegant, but, on closer scrutiny, the product of natural selection is riddled with any number of imperfections. When you really study nature—when you closely examine the structures, the systems, and their interplay—you find that, mixed in with all the grace, elegance, and sophistication, there are numerous hiccups, imperfections, and examples of frightfully bad design that are better explained as results of natural evolutionary processes.

The pedagogical lesson here is that a conceptual argument is best answered by a conceptual response. The argument that evolution is “just a theory” should not be met with long-drawn-out explanations pointing out that, in science, theory has special meaning. Instead, the better response would be to say that, yes, evolution is a theory—just as the germ theory of disease is just a theory, and keep in mind that doctors are only practicing medicine.

The scientific method
Even a brief description of the history of the science of evolution clearly demonstrates that Darwinian evolution is a dynamic process of inquiry, and not the scientific dogma some claim it is. And indeed, Darwin was not the only proponent of evolutionary theory in the heady days before On the Origin of Species was published. Numerous individuals had begun to think in terms of evolutionary mechanisms, including Alfred Russell Wallace and, more
importantly, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. Sadly, Lamarckian evolution has largely disappeared from textbooks because of inherent theoretical problems. Nonetheless, the contrast between Darwinian and Lamarckian theories offers a pedagogical tool for addressing modern problems related to the debate over evolution and intelligent design.

The idea of evolution was not unheard of within the scientific community of Darwin and Lamarck’s time, but it lacked a systematic approach and a unifying theory. Both Darwin and Lamarck formally proposed evolutionary theories, but it was Darwin who established natural selection as the driving mechanism for how evolution occurred. In contrast, Lamarck had reasoned that the changes that occur within the context of an individual lifetime were passed on to the next generation through “inner striving” (Larson 2001). So, for example, if over the course of its lifetime a short-necked giraffe reached out a great deal to obtain food from high branches, then it likely would end up with a stretched neck; the offspring of this giraffe would then have the same lengthened neck through their inheritance of the “inner striving.” For obvious reasons, Lamarckian evolution is largely forgotten. But there is more to the story.

Darwin’s original theory had not yet integrated Mendelian genetics, the laws of inheritance that govern the transmission of hereditary characteristics. Without Mendelian genetics, which was not widely known in Darwin’s time, natural selection was a viable mechanism but still lacked a means of transmission from generation to generation. Whereas Lamarck had “inner striving,” Darwin had nothing. Because it did not offer a satisfactory explanation for how advantageous traits were maintained from one generation to the next, Darwin’s original theory ultimately could not withstand scientific scrutiny. Thus, Darwin was forced to make several revisions to his theory in response to reasoned scientific criticism.

This example can be used pedagogically to demonstrate the effectiveness of the scientific method. If the predictions based on scientific theory are not upheld, or if identified gaps cannot be accounted for, then the theory itself must be either modified or abandoned. Despite Darwin’s extensive research and careful articulation, his evolutionary theory underwent a number of forced revisions. However, once the relationship between Mendelian genetics and evolution was understood, the forced revisions to the theory were dropped, and the original theory, coupled with Mendelian genetics, was dusted off and “modern” evolutionary theory—sans the Lamarckian accretions—was established (Larson 2001). Subsequent scientific debate has focused on how evolution happens, not whether it happens. The classroom lesson here is that some gaps threaten the entire theoretical concept, while others only threaten specific details defined within the theoretical concept.

Applying the method
The scientific method can be applied to both sides of the debate. First, fundamental predictions can be made, and then evidence can be collected and related back to the initial predictions. Take, for example, a basic prediction that can be generated from the theory of evolution. If species evolved from common ancestral origins over deep evolutionary time, then we would expect to find both increasing diversity and increasing complexity in the fossil record. And indeed, this prediction is largely borne out—but with an added twist. After thorough examination, it became clear that the pattern of increasing complexity was not strictly linear, as expected. In fact, a cycle emerged revealing an increase in complexity followed by a massive and rapid decrease, which, in turn, was followed by another increase in complexity.

While unexpected, the cyclical pattern—which appears in the fossil record at least seven times—does not violate the basic prediction that diversity and complexity will generally increase over time (Van Valkenburgh 1999). In fact, the pattern substantiates expectations, but it does so multiple times in response to the occurrence of mass extinction events. Furthermore, we find an increase over time in the complexity of both organisms and behaviors, like the building of birds’ nests. Earlier in the fossil record, we find evidence that eggs were laid in small depressions in the sand. Over time, we find more diversity in the types and complexity of the nests (see, for example, Dial 2003, 2006). Thus, we have two
examples of numerous predictions based on evolutionary theory that have been borne out. The result of such converging evidence is the nearly universal acceptance of Darwinian evolution within the scientific community. When discussing scientific theory, it is important to distinguish between local anomalies—or gaps—that are not adequately accounted for by the theory, and more global problems that threaten the overall validity of the theory itself. The cyclical anomaly discussed above, though unexpected, did not constitute a threat to the overall theory. However, the initial inability of Darwin’s theory of natural selection to explain how traits were passed on to future generations did pose a serious threat to his theory—though not to evolutionary theory more broadly.

The same basic process of establishing and testing predictions can be applied to a variety of theories that are rooted in social traditions. Take, for example, the biblical story of Noah’s Ark. If one works on the basic assumption (i.e., theory) that the entire earth was flooded, and the last remaining members of the species had to repopulate the earth from Mount Ararat, then several basic predictions would follow. The story leads to the prediction of an unbroken layer of sediment distributed across the entire planet. Yet the best current geological information does not provide evidence of such a consistent sedimentary layer. This in and of itself does not invalidate the global-flood theory, however, as various forms of geological upheaval are known to reshape various strata extensively. But the story would require
that gaps in the strata could eventually be explained by various geological upheavals that have occurred since the flood. Such evidence could still be pieced together.

Similarly, the Noah’s Ark scenario would predict that the fossil record would show a radiation of species from a central location over geological time. Specifically, we would expect to find evidence of a point of greatest diversity followed by lesser diversity over time, as the collection of species migrated to their eventual destinations from the final resting place of the Ark. We would also need to establish viable natural explanations for why all marsupials went to Australia, rather than finding their way into various niches across the planet. Furthermore, we would need to satisfy questions related to the post-release availability of both fauna for the vegetarian species to eat and prey for the meat eaters. Whereas gaps in the geological record could potentially be explained, the threats to the global-flood theory posed by the need to explain migration and feeding from the initial point of dispersion are more serious. They may, in fact, constitute global problems that threaten the overall validity of the theory itself.

Some proponents of intelligent design seek to redefine science to permit both natural and supernatural, or nonmaterialistic, explanations for natural events (see, for example, Dembski and Wells 2007; Mackenzie 2005). “God commanded it” would, then, serve as an acceptable explanation of why marsupials migrated to Australia. However, such an explanation would still fail to explain the lack of the predicted physical evidence of either a marsupial migration or a general pattern of dispersal from a central point.

**Conclusion**

The pedagogical framework described above enables instructors to avoid tangents that are irrelevant to the course material, even as they respond respectfully and offer appropriate counterexamples as “food for thought.” The strategy of meeting social imagery with social imagery allows the instructor to segue back to the scientific content. Similarly, the inherent value of social traditions can be celebrated, even as they are separated from issues they are ill equipped to address.

Teaching the debate over evolution and intelligent design gives instructors an opportunity to educate their students about the underlying psychology of the social unrest. The confusion and frustration can be expressed explicitly in terms of the mismatch between arguments. After demonstrating that various aspects of the debate are rooted in scientific reasoning, social tradition, or common sense, the instructor can then show students that attempts to resolve a scientific issue from the perspective of either common sense or a social tradition (or vice versa) are generally counterproductive.

The pedagogical framework proposed here can, of course, be used to teach students how to evaluate various other arguments as well as to help students build critical-thinking skills that apply more broadly to scientific research, common sense, and social traditions. It also can provide a starting point for helping students understand how to develop predictions from an initial starting point, while simultaneously delimiting and illuminating the range of issues generated by scientific inquiry.

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Our Purposes:
Personal Reflections on Character Development
ARTHUR W. CHICKERING

During the 1950s and 1960s, when I entered the profession, higher education was dominated by a meritocratic orientation; it was directed toward educating the best and brightest. With major help from the Educational Testing Service's achievement and aptitude tests, and formulas taking into account grade point averages and other high school performance indicators, selectivity, along with resources and reputation, defined institutional status and prestige. “Value added” was not part of the vocabulary. “Cultivating the intellect” was the controlling purpose. Higher education aimed to achieve this purpose through information transfer, with almost total reliance on lectures, texts, and midterm and final exams. True, there were a few institutions that used internships, co-op programs and other forms of experiential learning, narrative evaluations, collaborative learning, and individualized majors. But they hardly appeared on the still nonexistent computer screens of higher education. There was no language to describe what we now call “critical thinking.” The affective domain was totally beyond the pale.

When I conducted workshops and gave professional presentations about the seven vectors of college student development set forth in Education and Identity (Chickering 1969), I spent most of the response time dodging the slings and arrows of sharply worded criticism. The single exception was when I was invited to speak at the 1966 annual conference of the National Association for Women Deans and Counselors (NAWDAC). In a presentation titled “The Young Adult: A New Course for the College Personnel Curriculum,” I shared my seven vectors and, for the first time, experienced a warm and interested response. My speech was even published in NAWDAC’s journal. In 1970, after Education and Identity won the American Council on Education’s book award, I was invited to speak at the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators’ national convention and to discuss the implications for student personnel services. My major point, as in my speech to NAWDAC, was that graduate programs for student services professionals needed to include courses sharing information about student development so that professionals could address those outcomes more intentionally. The applause was embarrassingly polite. (But my spirits were substantially improved afterward by the copious booze, food, and hearty company.)

That less-than-enthusiastic response was understandable. Few student personnel administrators saw themselves as educators. More importantly, when I was invited to speak I didn’t know that such a profession existed or that there were associated graduate preparation programs. Goddard College, where I first conducted my research, had 180 students and approximately thirty administrators, faculty members, and staff. The Project on Student Development, which, together with my Goddard evaluative research, was the basis for Education and Identity, involved thirteen diverse colleges, all with enrollments of fewer than one thousand students. So I didn’t know enough to frame my comments in a way that would connect with those experienced professionals. And, as I looked out over that audience, I did not see a single woman. So I could later see why I had bombed.

Decades of reform
In the late 1960s, the teach-ins, sit-ins, and other forms of student activism triggered by the Vietnam War, along with the horrendous North Carolina and Kent State shootings, helped us recognize that higher education needed to be about more than “cultivating the intellect.” That student activism, at least in my experience, was the first serious form of what we now call civic engagement. Even though it only occurred at a minority of four-year institutions, and at those it involved only 5–15 percent of the students, it demonstrated the impact that small, dedicated, organized groups can have—not only on their own institutions but on the national consciousness.

It strikes me that right- and left-wing extremists, using television and the Internet,
and Social Responsibility in Higher Education
are doing the same thing in today’s new communication technology age: influencing policy debates and public opinion in ways that far outweigh their numbers. But there is a key difference. Today’s extremists often intentionally use misinformation and disinformation to bolster their positions. Vietnam War protesters did not do that; the facts were powerful enough to speak for themselves.

In the early 1970s, federal policy makers decided to support higher education by funding students through grants and loans, instead of funding institutions. The basic idea was that with financial support, students would seek high-quality education and become a force for change. Open admissions replaced selectivity, but institutions anchored in a meritocratic orientation were not prepared to deal with wide-ranging variability in academic preparation, social class, race, and ethnicity. Adult learners, mainly women, also began enrolling in large numbers. This “massification” of
higher education accelerated the community college movement and drove an increasing emphasis on professional and vocational preparation. It also created revolving doors, as large numbers of open-admissions students flunked out at the end of their first or second years. The heavy attrition rates raised serious questions about teaching and learning, and they triggered a spate of reports and long laundry lists of recommendations from major professional organizations.

In 1983, the eighteen high-level representatives from government, education, and the private sector who had been appointed to President Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education presented *A Nation at Risk*. This influential report focused exclusively on content, on information transfer. It basically proposed bolstering the educational practices that already were not working. Then, in 1984, came *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education*, the final report of the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education. Like the other reports released during those years, *Involvement in Learning* focused almost exclusively on policies and practices, rather than outcomes. I note, too, that “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” which Zee Gamson and I put together with help from other researchers (1987), examined how college affects student development but was silent on outcomes.

So, even as late as 1987, outcomes concerning moral and ethical development, other dimensions of personal development, and civic engagement were not part of the general conversation about higher education. Even as late as 1987, outcomes concerning moral and ethical development, other dimensions of personal development, and civic engagement were not part of the general conversation about higher education. True, student personnel professionals—with a few notable exceptions—had been talking about, and arguing for, greater attention to student development. A few centers for student development were popping up across the country. Some professionals were also taking seriously Jane Loevinger’s ego development theory (1976), Laurence Kohlberg’s stages of moral and cognitive development (1984), William Perry’s scheme of ethical and intellectual development (1970), Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* (1982), and Mary Belenky and her colleagues’ *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (1986). In *The Modern American College* (1981), I argued for taking human development as the organizing purpose of higher education, and I included chapters addressing various areas of content and educational practices. But all of this was on the margins. Higher education was increasingly focused on professional and vocational training and the skills and information associated with it.

“Although we argued that institutions needed to focus more on student outcomes,” Alexander Astin reflected in a stocktaking essay published at the end of the 1990s, we avoided specifying what any of these outcomes should be, arguing instead that this task should be left largely to the individual institution. In retrospect, I think this was a mistake. If we had been more forthcoming about our own values with respect to some of the most important student outcomes, we certainly would have generated more controversy, but I think the controversy would have been healthy. More specifically, I wish we had spoken more directly about the importance of so-called affective outcomes such as self-understanding, tolerance, honesty, citizenship, and social responsibility. (1999, 592)

**The civic failure of higher education**

In the quarter century since the release of *Involvement in Learning*, have colleges and universities succeeded or failed in encouraging character development and social responsibility? In my judgment, they—I probably should say we—have failed. I believe that colleges and universities are the most important social institutions for sustaining our pluralistic, globally interdependent democracy. Yet, they have so far failed to graduate citizens who have attained the levels of cognitive, moral, intellectual, and ethical development required to address complex national and global problems.

To be effective, all our citizens must be able to function at the levels of intellectual, emotional, and social complexity required to meet our beleaguered globe’s economic, environmental, human, and political challenges. We need to identify and support policies, practices, and
resource allocations that anticipate the dislocations and disruptions that will accompany global warming and the steady depletion of oil reserves. We need to contain and help ameliorate recurrent intertribal, interethnic, and inter-religious conflicts. We need to address basic issues concerning public education, health care, and an aging population. We need to create a globally recognized example of participatory government where all persons—regardless of socioeconomic status, race, national origin, or religious and spiritual orientation—are actively involved.

As I read newspapers and magazines, track political decision making, listen to talk shows, and experience the general culture, I see that our citizens are far from the levels of complex functioning required to meet the global challenges of the twenty-first century. From my personal perspective, our political, economic, and social systems—as well as the policies, practices, and resource allocation decisions associated with them—are functioning at the most basic levels articulated by human development theorists. Consider, for example, the language and behaviors that characterized the community meetings held across the country in August of 2009 to discuss issues related to health care reform as well as subsequent activities associated with the Tea Party movement. These do not indicate a citizenry that is functioning at the levels of cognitive and affective complexity required to address the problems we face.

One reason for this shortfall, I believe, is that during the last thirty years or so, higher education has come to be seen as a private benefit rather than as a public good. Some of us remember when education at state colleges and universities was basically free, state supported, with inexpensive residences and low student fees. State support has now dropped to the 25–35 percent range. As state support has been cut, tuition has been increased. This dynamic has driven more and more students to community colleges for their first two years and pushed institutions inexorably toward a market mentality. To make matters worse, we are currently experiencing the worst economic recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Heavy budget cuts, a 30 percent drop in endowments, and reduced giving and philanthropic support have created severe financial shortages throughout higher education. Students are now being turned away from the community colleges to which they had turned in increasing numbers in order to cope with significant tuition increases in public and private four-year institutions. Jobs are scarce for our graduates. These pressures create powerful challenges for institutional priorities, policies, and practices.

Responding to students’ and parents’ limited conceptions of what is necessary for a successful career and a good life has become paramount. Concern for cognitive and moral development, character development, and social responsibility has dropped away. The larger issues of interdependence, identity, purpose, meaning, and integrity have been eclipsed by short-term goals oriented toward securing a well-paying job upon graduation. If students and parents are going to pay high tuitions and accrue substantial debt, they have no time for more long-range goals or more fundamental outcomes.

Of course, there have been several strong initiatives designed to react to this trend, most notably those focused on civic engagement and spirituality. In addition, the Association of American Colleges and Universities has been leading several efforts focused on “personal and social responsibility,” one of the “essential learning outcomes” identified through the association’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise initiative. Yet, these positive developments operate on the margins of higher education.

Increasing urgency
In my now fifty-two years of work in higher education—spent arguing for greater attention to the affective domain and for helping students address issues of purpose and meaning, integrity and identity, and spiritual growth—I have never felt as strong a sense of urgency as I do right now.

My international experiences traveling and consulting in Canada, Great Britain and Ireland, Latin America, Europe, South Africa, Australia, Russia, and the Far East during the past forty years suggest that things are getting
worse, not better. Many around the globe are experiencing life as more stressful and less meaningful—more so than during the cold war of the 1950s and 1960s even. Certainly that is very much the case here in the United States. The ability of multinational corporations to move jobs to sources of cheap labor create employment problems in countries that lose the jobs, and it creates social disruption and dislocation in the countries that gain the jobs. Our global communication systems let hackers in one location cause widespread havoc across national boundaries. Outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, in China and swine flu in Mexico have become an international threat. Starvation and disease increase despite dramatic increases in food production capacity. Politically driven disinformation and misinformation renders informed decision making and well-considered political activism almost impossible.

Moreover, we have a two-tier society in which the gap between rich and poor has grown dramatically. In 1980, the average CEO made forty-two times what the average hourly worker made. By 2005, that ratio was 262 to 1. Barack Obama, in his book The Audacity of Hope, says that “between 1971 and 2001, while the median wage and salary income of the average worker showed little or no gain, the income of the top hundredth of a percent went up almost 500 percent” (2007, 192). We have recurrent violence and crime, some driven by drugs, some apparently random expressions of rage and frustration. We have recurrent political, corporate, and financial corruption. We face strong tensions between civil liberties and homeland security. In response to these critical conditions, we have self-interested, self-serving divides that, as Thomas Friedman (2009) says, drive compromises that result in “sub-optimal solutions,” whether concerning health care and the economy at home, or global warming and international conflicts abroad.

These are all problems of character development and social responsibility. Certainly higher-order cognitive skills are needed to see through the misinformation and disinformation and to examine complex issues with critical judgment. But they are not sufficient. Those skills, and the resulting judgment, must be anchored in clear recognition of the fundamental moral implications concerning human dignity and well-being. If not so anchored, they become cold-blooded, heartless, intellectual exercises, balancing trade-offs for narrowly defined political, economic, or personal ends. We must attack that narrow-minded, self-interested dynamic with the most powerful means we can muster.

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We can turn the current crisis around, and we must do so

“ONCE UPON A TIME, you dressed so fine.” So begins one of the most important rock-and-roll songs ever written, Bob Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone.” First recorded in 1965—“once upon a time”—it roughly coincided with the launch of the California Master Plan for Higher Education, an optimistic statement about the future of the state as enabled through a confident and attractive system of public higher education—“you dressed so fine.” Reaffirmed in 1987, and again in 2004 with the Governor’s Compact for Higher Education, the Master Plan offered a vision of access, affordability, and quality that was bold, inspiring, and attainable. It was predicated on the understanding that an educational system with such characteristics “is essential to the cultural, political, and economic health of a nation and state” (Commission 1987, 1). It assumed that public policy would support such a vision because it was the right thing to do.

The authors of the Master Plan recognized that as California had invented and reinvented itself over a century and a half—after the Gold Rush and through the emergence of a distinctive regional culture in the late nineteenth century, through the Great Depression and the Second World War, into the post-industrial age and beyond the dot-com revolution—higher education has provided the key to hope and recovery, to high expectations and needed corrections. Thomas Friedman (2009) summarized this particularly well in a New York Times column on our country’s current economic challenges: “The country [or state] that uses this crisis to make its population smarter and more innovative—and endows its people with more tools and basic research to invent new goods and services—is the one that will not just survive, but thrive down the road. We might be able to stimulate our way back to stability, but we can only invent our way back to prosperity. We need everyone at every level to get smarter.”

Notwithstanding the recent survey by California’s nonpartisan Public Policy Institute (Baldassare et al. 2009), which reaffirmed the public’s broad recognition of the quality of the state’s universities and the ongoing need for them, the state’s political leaders seem unable and unwilling to comprehend or appreciate what the state has accomplished through its robust system of public higher education.

The evidence of neglect is in the numbers. While total enrollments at the California State University have increased by 29 percent since 2000, the university’s percentage of general fund revenues has declined by 27 percent.

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In real dollars, the university’s allocation has decreased from $2.25 billion to $1.6 billion—despite a 25 percent growth in state revenues over the same period, which includes the current economic downturn. Conversely, over the same decade—and drawing from the same small discretionary portion of the general fund budget—the allocation to prisons has more than doubled, from $5 billion to $11 billion. This amount roughly equals the combined total general fund allocation to all of public higher education in California—that is, the allocation to all twenty-three campuses of the California State University, the eleven campuses of the University of California, and the 110 units of the state’s community college system. In even starker terms, California spends almost $50,000 per year to support a prisoner in the state’s correctional system, and less than one-tenth of that per year to support a student at the California State University.

The message is clear: the lawmakers who determine California’s budget—and a general public that acquiesces to political leadership devoid of vision and any sense of long-term obligation—have decided that public higher education is depreciable, and that our high-quality system of public higher education is expendable. The effects of this lack of public commitment to higher education in the state are broadly consequential. Access is denied: the California State University is currently
reducing its enrollments by over forty thousand full-time-equivalent students in order to better align enrollments with state support. Affordability is decreased: since 2000, student fees have been raised by 100 percent in order to compensate for the erosion of state support. Diversity is threatened—a particularly disturbing situation given the changing socioeconomic demographics of the state. And quality is eroded: academic budgets have been slashed, and hiring freezes are discouraging new faculty from coming to our campuses.

It should surprise no one, then, that articles on the fiftieth anniversary of the Master Plan are more funereal than celebratory in tone.

The direction home

Now, back to Dylan. Do we face “no direction home” to the vision of the Master Plan, or can we turn this crisis around? For public higher education everywhere, the answer is the same: we can turn the current crisis around, and we must do so.

We need to achieve a deep, functional, guiding understanding that advocacy without awareness has no meaning, and that awareness without action has no consequence. We need to educate public policy makers and shapers—especially those in our own state capitals—as well as alumni, students and their parents, advisory boards, donors, partners, and the press about what a healthy system of public higher education means and accomplishes. In other words, we need to communicate why public higher education is vital. We need to press our case more urgently and more strategically. For too long we have sat meekly by as governors, legislatures, the press, and other critics have blasted higher education for being bloated, wasteful, unaccountable, and even irrelevant. We are long since past the days when we can expect resources to flow to us because education is intrinsically worthy—if, indeed, there ever were such days. Resources flow to us because we earn them, every day.

Yet, we still hear it said that a university education is a privilege, not a right, and that access should be reserved for the truly worthy or the very wealthy. We’re told that our public universities should move toward greater privatization through higher student fees, and thus allow state dollars to be spent on other priorities, like prisons. We’re told that higher education should concentrate on workforce development and downsize, if not eliminate, “non-essential” programs that, allegedly, do not contribute directly to meeting critical workforce needs. We’re told that there is an inherent conflict between liberal and professional education, that in an economic crisis as deep as the current one the focus should be on immediate recovery and utilitarian measures, not the abstract potential and benefits of a liberal education.

There are two powerful answers to these criticisms. One is called the future, where, as Yogi Berra once reminded us, “you’ll spend the rest of your life.” The other is Friedman’s advice: get smarter for that future.

A strong liberal education is the key both to answering the most vociferous critics of the purpose and performance of public higher education, and to fulfilling our obligations to the society in which our students will take their place. For education conceived as only job preparation, or as a rite of entry to the ranks of the privileged, is inadequate by so many measures. Time and again, we have seen that the
most narrowly educated are the first to hit the unemployment lines—and the most likely to stay there the longest. We have seen the risk to our planet when we place our fate in the hands of a highly, but narrowly, educated techno-political elite who lack humanistic perspective and understanding of cultural contexts.

Unless we acquaint and engage our students with a balance between breadth and depth in their studies, career training will be fleeting in application and spurious in worth. We can no more afford a society in which values are casual, vague, and relative than we can one in which our citizens and workforce lack imagination, inventiveness, and a moral compass. A solid liberal education reflects this understanding insofar as it recognizes the tight bond between developing the potential of the individual and fostering the progress of society as a whole.

Clearly, we have to be more confident and aggressive in telling that story.

“When you ain’t got nothing, you got nothing to lose,” wrote Dylan in the final stanza of his stirring anthem. Well, we have something, and we have a lot to lose. For in addition to providing the foundation for the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century and strengthening the social fabric, our public colleges and universities foster democratic engagement, encourage altruism and community service, promote environmental stewardship, enable a healthier population, build a more sustainable planet, champion social justice, and solve real problems. This is our argument, and it must be our future.

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