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The Dangerous Assault on Disciplines Basic to Democracy

This summer began with a riveting crisis at the University of Virginia. On June 10, the board of visitors, prompted by a small group working offstage and independently of any formal meetings or motions, dismissed the widely admired president of the university, Teresa Sullivan, after barely two years of service, “largely because of,” according to the Washington Post, “her unwillingness to consider dramatic program cuts in the face of dwindling resources and for her perceived reluctance to approach the school with the bottom-line mentality of a corporate chief executive.” While the “dramatic” cuts under discussion were never officially described by any of the principals, President Sullivan hinted at her own perception of at least one of the issues at stake when she responded publicly to the board of visitors’ actions. “A university that does not teach the full range of arts and sciences will no longer be a university,” she wrote in mid-June. “Certainly it will no longer be respected as such by its former peers.”

P R E S I D E N T ’ S  M E S S A G E

The board of visitors’ actions provoked an unprecedented backlash—on the campus and beyond—and, fortunately for the University of Virginia, President Sullivan was quickly reinstated. But the assault on what Sullivan described as “the full range of arts and sciences” continues without cessation in American public discourse and across virtually all sectors of American higher education. That assault certainly did not begin with the visitors of the University of Virginia. Rather, their disputes with President Sullivan show only that the steady drumbeat of denigration now threatens to shape self-destructive choices and actions, even at one of the nation’s most distinguished research universities.

Of course, the assault is not really on the sciences or STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) at all, although even STEM fields now are suffering from the economic drought that affects the entire educational sector. Rather, it is the humanities and several of the social sciences that many public leaders have come to see as irrelevant (or worse) to America’s future.

The ongoing assault began on the right, as conservatives took issue with the fierce light that “diversity” and multicultural studies had cast on the less than admirable aspects of this nation’s ongoing struggle toward recognition, dignity, and equal opportunity for people of all races, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, and abilities. It gained ground in policy circles as leaders of all kinds began to focus with new anxiety on the US competitive stance in the global economy. Somehow, these policy and economic leaders seem to have persuaded themselves that Americans could lead in a global economy without learning much of anything at all about global histories, cultures, religions, values, or social systems—the very subjects that the humanities and social sciences help us explore.

As AAC&U (and I) observed in a series of public dissents, the 2006 Spellings Commission report on the “future of higher education” simply dismissed the humanities and social sciences entirely, apart from a nod to the need for foreign languages. Ethics, civic learning, intercultural learning (and the related disciplines) were left off the table and out of the report. The national effort to create Common Core Standards for the schools continued in much the same vein, focusing on language arts, mathematics, and science, but deliberately sidestepping any attention to Americans’ need for a thorough grounding in history, cultures, the humanities, and social systems—US and global.

Last year, the National Governors Association issued a report that called for investment in college studies plainly tied to labor market demand, while noting that the United States would need...
to cut back on its traditional embrace of the liberal arts. The governor of Florida spoke out publicly against anthropology as an academic field, and the US House of Representatives went on record with its judgment that political science should no longer be eligible for funding from the National Science Foundation. The Republican leadership is once again promising to eliminate the tiny fragment of funding that remains for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

My colleagues and I have been thinking hard about AAC&U’s own responsibility to engage this trend as we move toward completion of a new strategic plan for the years 2013–2017. Our board of directors devoted parts of its last two meetings to this topic, and, through a series of vigorous round-table discussions at the “business meeting” session within the annual meeting in January, our members were forthright in urging us to make the future standing of the liberal arts a central theme in the next phase of our work on Liberal Education and America’s Promise, or LEAP. And this is exactly what we intend to do.

In that spirit, I want to describe briefly our views on the role of the liberal arts and sciences, with special attention to the humanities and social sciences, in the larger project of providing a liberal and liberating higher education. Since the founding era—witness Jefferson’s vision for the University of Virginia—the liberal arts and sciences have rightly been seen as absolutely essential to America’s future. The sciences have helped us create unprecedented power and material wealth, among other benefits, while the humanities, arts, and social sciences have taught us to ask probing questions about the very meanings of “progress” and “value” and about what it takes to create generative human relationships and communities. The humanities especially are the envisioning disciplines; they invite us to ask not only what is, but what might be, and even, as we probe fundamental principles, what ought to be.

Together, the arts and sciences continue to provide foundational knowledge that Americans need for civic and societal responsibility and for creative leadership, at home and abroad. Although the arts and sciences necessarily evolve as knowledge itself expands, our need for the broad explorations they enable remains a constant. The liberal arts and sciences are basic to participatory democracy because only these studies build the “big picture” understanding of our social and physical environment that everyone needs in order to make judgments that are fundamental to our future.

AAC&U has long taken the position that the aims of liberal education—broad knowledge, high-level intellectual skills, an examined sense of civic and ethical responsibility, and the capacity to adapt learning to new challenges—should be addressed across the entire curriculum, in professional and career fields as well as in arts and sciences disciplines. Liberal education across the curriculum will continue to be the central focus of our LEAP endeavors. But we also intend to assert—far more forcefully—our corollary view that no student can be well, or even minimally, prepared for twenty-first-century challenges absent a strong grounding in the liberal arts and sciences, across both school and college.

It is time for all American educational leaders to say plainly that the current policy assault on the liberal arts and sciences is dangerous—dangerous to the quality of higher education, and dangerous for America’s future. The liberal arts tradition helped make American higher education the envy of the world. American society needs to own that tradition and to reinvest in its future vitality and generativity across all colleges, universities, and community colleges. Anything less will cede this nation’s educational leadership to others—and put this democracy’s future gravely at risk.

—CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER
Americans’ expectations of higher education, especially as framed by the lingering aftereffects of the recent “Great Recession,” have narrowed considerably to focus on the private, individual, economic benefit of college. The result has been an overemphasis on market priorities and an underemphasis on longstanding civic commitments and the public good. To call attention to the dangers of this imbalance—for educational quality and for our democracy—the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement issued A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future, a report that calls on the nation to reclaim the civic mission of higher education.

The release of the Crucible report at a White House event on January 10 was, in a sense, a prelude to AAC&U’s annual meeting, which began with a symposium titled “Reversing a Civic Recession: What Higher Education Can Do.” The Featured Topic section of this issue of Liberal Education presents highlights of the annual meeting program, which was designed to foster constructive discussion of the consequential issues raised in the Crucible report, as well as to showcase examples from institutions that are successfully building on democratic visions and practices.

In the lead article, Don Randel addresses several mistaken assumptions about what drives the cost of higher education, very helpfully clearing the ground for sober discussion of access and affordability, and of the right relation of value and values. Cheered by the release of the Crucible report, and heartened by the serious attention it received at the annual meeting, Adrianna Kezar, Matthew Hartley, and Daniel Maxey draw attention to the need for greater democracy in campus governance—a neglected but nonetheless essential ingredient if we are to promote civic learning and, ultimately, recover from the “civic recession.” This is followed by strong encouragement from US Under Secretary of Education Martha Kanter, who expresses the Obama administration’s commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement, and lays out the many concrete steps the Department of Education is taking in support of efforts to advance both within higher education. Finally, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend calls for the reinvigoration of the notion of the common good and provides an inspiring vision of the role colleges and universities can play in this urgent national mission.

Additional highlights of the 2012 annual meeting are available as podcasts at www.aacu.org/podcast.—DAVID TRITELLI
New Director of Project Kaleidoscope

AAC&U has announced the appointment of Dr. Kelly Mack, professor of biology at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, as executive director of Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL). She will assume the position in September. In addition to developing new initiatives to advance PKAL’s strategic goals, Mack will continue the work begun by her predecessor, Susan Elrod, to fully integrate the work of PKAL and its many networks of science faculty and academic leaders into the heart of AAC&U’s strategic priorities and continuing programs.

Mack received her bachelor of science degree in biology from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and her PhD in physiology from Howard University. She is currently a member of the National Institutes of Health Review Subcommittee for the Training and Workforce Development Division of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences. Previously, Mack served as program director for the National Science Foundation’s ADVANCE program, as director of research training at the Howard University Graduate School, as a member of the Board of Governors for the National Conferences on Undergraduate Research, and as senior scholar at AAC&U.

AAC&U Receives Grant for New Integrative Learning Project

A new $200,000 grant from the Teagle Foundation will support Faculty Leadership for Integrative Liberal Learning, a new thirty-month AAC&U project through which nine liberal arts colleges and small universities will work on developing a set of principles and practices to guide and sustain integrative liberal learning. The nine participating institutions are Babson College, Bard College, Clark University, Colgate University, Mount Holyoke College, Skidmore College, Wellesley College, Wagner College, and Wheaton College.

New LEAP Partnership Focused on Undergraduate Research

The Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) has formally joined AAC&U’s signature national initiative, Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP), as a partner organization. Through this new LEAP partnership, COPLAC seeks to deepen its own collaborative efforts to improve and expand high-impact undergraduate research experiences and the quality of undergraduate learning across its twenty-six member institutions.

As part of the initiative, COPLAC will create an intentional, integrated approach to undergraduate research and articulate shared goals with students, internal, and external audiences. COPLAC will collect and share institutional practices, resources, and expertise through face-to-face meetings and through a web-based portal on the COPLAC website; explore the potential to share faculty expertise in mentoring undergraduate research students across the consortium using distance technology; and share best practices in the assessment of undergraduate research, both in terms of student learning and the application of new knowledge.

Upcoming Meetings

• October 18–20, 2012
  Modeling Equity, Engaging Difference: New Frameworks for Diversity and Learning
  Baltimore, Maryland

• November 8–10, 2012
  Next-Generation STEM Learning: Investigate, Innovate, Inspire
  Kansas City, Missouri

• January 23–26, 2013
  AAC&U Annual Meeting
  The Quality of US Degrees: Innovations, Efficiencies, and Disruptions—To What Ends?
  Atlanta, Georgia
WE HEAR A LOT about markets these days. In some quarters they are the solution to all possible problems and should be freed from any kind of regulation. In some other quarters the dominant theme is their historical inability to provide equitably for much of society. The case of higher education in the midst of this often cacophonous public discourse rarely calls forth a nuanced understanding of the issues. On the one hand, the public most often fails to understand what a relentlessly competitive business higher education is—competitive for talented faculty and students alike in ways that drive costs and put one too much in mind of the National Football League or the National Basketball Association. On the other hand, it is in the nature of these, let’s call them “businesses,” to claim to know more than their customers do about what their customers ought to want to purchase.

The principal attention to higher education at the moment, aside from the many state governments intent on reducing resources for it, seems to come from a horde of prolific critics eager to point out its many failures and to assign blame. It would not be possible here to take up individually any significant number of the books of this type that have recently appeared. But several themes run in and out of them. Two features of the dominant themes appearing in various combinations are simple-mindedness with respect to the nature of higher education as an enterprise and nostalgia with respect to some imagined golden age of higher education in the past (often a golden age coterminous with the period in which the author was him- or herself an undergraduate at one of the nation’s elite institutions). Both make it easy to assign blame to one or a few parties for current “failures.” The “failures” tend to be of two types: higher education costs too much, and the students aren’t learning anything. The blame is placed primarily on the faculty and secondarily on craven college and university administrators who capitulate to the faculty and grow their own numbers, all the while demanding higher and higher compensation.

All of this makes good newspaper copy in an age of increasing discontent. But a more nuanced understanding will be required if the long-term future is to be addressed. And the stakes are very high. Higher education, as an issue, has many of the features of health care. Unfortunately, the character of our current debate about health care does not inspire confidence in our ability to have a productive discussion of higher education. But the price of failure cannot be borne in the long term in either case.

The cost of higher education
Does higher education cost too much? Is this cost rising too fast? Who is bearing this cost, and who ought to? The answers to these questions require in the first instance a refined analysis of what higher education does in fact cost and what are the components of that cost in the rather different types of the 4,500 institutions that attempt to provide it.
The averages that are often cited obscure much more than they reveal. The simplest and most obvious example of this mixes together the increased rate at which tuition in public institutions has risen in response to reductions in state budgets and on a rather low base with the slower rate at which tuition in private institutions has risen on a much higher base. Even this distinction, however, does not ultimately clarify the issue, for the very notion of tuition itself requires clarification. Tuition certainly does not begin to represent the full cost to the institutions. It is more nearly the advertised price to the consumer. But in most institutions, the price actually paid by consumers varies substantially because of both internal and external subsidies or “discounts.” It is probably safe to say that there is no nonprofit institution in which the consumer is paying the full cost of operating the institution, even if the consumer pays full tuition. This leads directly to the fundamental question to society—what should the consumer pay, and who should make up the difference between that amount and the full cost?

This, in turn, brings us back to the question of the actual full cost of higher education and its principal drivers. The components of this cost vary widely across the different types of institutions. This fact, however, does not prevent the critics from making blanket statements blaming the problem of cost on the faculty. Specious calculations are made showing that the faculty hardly works at all, devotes too much time to research rather than teaching, and has tenure and therefore cannot be obliged to change its wasteful habits.

Whatever one believes about the institution of tenure as a protector of academic freedom, tenure is clearly not a driver of costs in higher education because tenure is steadily being eroded. Recent studies show that only about 50 percent of the faculty in higher education hold tenured or tenure-track positions. And of the total amount of instruction being carried on, only about 20 percent is given by such people. This is the result of the increasing use of contingent faculty—-instructors with short-term or part-time appointments, often at very low wages with no benefits. Whether this substitution of cheap labor for more expensive labor is the best way of reducing costs is a serious question. In any case, tenure is not preventing it in many institutions.

Research is a favorite subject of complaint, hyperbolically represented on occasion as the snake in the educational Garden of Eden. Here it is absolutely essential to distinguish among the types of educational institutions and among the types of research, if any, that are carried on in them. The easiest type of research to identify is research in the physical and biological sciences that is sponsored by the federal government or by the corporate world, though the latter has declined significantly in recent decades. The simple fact, of course, is that the vast majority of our 4,500 institutions of higher education conduct no such research at all. Even less well understood is that the federal government does not pay the full cost of the research that it sponsors in universities and that the universities themselves make up the greatest share of the difference. Some of these costs, especially the cost of major new buildings, are borne in part by generous donors, often alumni. Nor does the federal government pay the full cost of administrative and other infrastructure or the cost of compliance with federal regulations. In most fields outside of the biomedical sciences, the federal government pays none of the academic-year salaries of the faculty members who carry out the research. A thorough account of all the costs and sources of support for this research would reveal a substantial contribution from undergraduate tuition, especially in the private research universities.
but increasingly in the public universities as well. That is to say that the cost of federally sponsored research is indeed one of the drivers of the cost of higher education that is recovered in part through tuition in research universities. It is thus disingenuous of the architects of the federal government’s budget to reduce steadily the degree to which the government pays the full cost of research while complaining about increases in tuition.

None of this is to say that the nation does not need more and better scientific research or that universities are not the places in which to conduct it. The arguments for both are powerful. It is to say only that the nation must confront directly the cost of the scientific research that it should carry on and not expect that research to be covertly subsidized by undergraduate education, about the cost of which it wishes to complain. It must also be said that the private sector cannot be counted on to play a significant role. Not only has the corporate support for research in universities declined; the corporate world has systematically dismantled its own capacity for basic research, despite its storied history.

There are, of course, other kinds of research, and there are very many institutions for which research of any kind, as usually understood, is not a core mission. A fuller account of the place of research in higher education must begin by doing away with a too simple opposition of teaching and research. This requires first of all a much broader understanding of the term research, one that would make clear its essential relationship to teaching of the kind that matters.

To say that the principal problem with undergraduate education is research is to consign undergraduates to the mere memorization of what earlier generations have thought and said. This cannot be the basis for educating a citizenry that will prosper economically, politically, intellectually, or—one might dare even to say—spiritually. The research instinct should be a part of the life of everyone, whatever their occupation. Human beings are born with this instinct, and it should be nourished at every stage of their lives. It is easily associated with explorations of the physical world, as when a child turns over a rock or speculates about what might happen if this color is mixed with that. But society does a great deal to suffocate this instinct, and it often entirely neglects that instinct in relation to matters that lie beyond the physical world. Many of the methods that purport to gauge “learning outcomes” fail utterly to capture what might best be meant by learning, which is what lies at the heart of research broadly conceived.

Productivity and efficiency
If we grant that research is not the problem but, properly defined, is instead crucial to the solution, we must still confront the appropriate combination of ingredients in the lives of faculty members and students alike. This leads quite straightforwardly to the ratio that lies at the heart of the economy of all institutions of higher education. How many students per faculty member can an institution support while responsibly meeting its obligations to both parties? This is to ask the productivity question.

The answer to this question will depend on what the product is thought to be. The product is surely more than some target number of undergraduate degrees per unit of time. The product of higher education across all institutions, though it differs across types of institutions, must include not just certificates and degrees but genuinely thoughtful undergraduates as well as advanced and professional graduates, research in the national interest and for its own sake, and service to society of many kinds. Holding the means of production (that is, the faculty and staff) constant, we could of course increase the productivity of some product lines by decreasing production in others. But let us say that we could come to agreement on the right “product mix” for higher education. Are there methods by which we could increase the productivity of the enterprise as a whole and in the process constrain the growth of costs to a rate at or below that of the economy in general? Could higher education be more efficient?

The short answer is “yes.” In leading universities in the 1960s, the typical assistant professor in the humanities taught three courses per semester. Today such a person might teach two courses per semester, with periodic opportunities to teach fewer for the sake of devoting more time to research. Teaching duties in the natural sciences and in some of the social sciences started lower and were reduced faster. This implies that we could increase the efficiency or productivity of higher education
simply by returning to the practices of fifty years ago. Of course, this reduces costs only if we reduce the number of faculty or increase the number of students. Similar things might be said about nonacademic staff, though it would simply not be possible to reduce the number of staff in information technology to what it was in the 1960s, and the same would need to be said about some other staff, such as those that attend to compliance with government regulation and to the needs of students with disabilities and so forth, all of which have grown substantially.

Then what? Sooner or later, increases in productivity will begin to decline and reach a limit—if we believe that in an education worthy of the name there must always remain some core of direct human interaction. There is no disruptive technology that will take the place of a grownup asking a young person to write about something of substance and then sitting with that young person, challenging him or her to observe more acutely and to frame a stronger argument in support of an original idea. This is an activity that must be undertaken thousands of times every day all across the country if we are to develop the minds that will ensure the nation’s welfare in every sense. It has not been a feature of the educational systems of some countries with whom we now begin to compete. Some of these countries are now beginning to recognize this difference and are attempting to incorporate the US style of education even as we begin to see it weaken.

This kind of education is expensive on a per student basis because it requires attention to students one at a time, and after a certain point it is not subject to productivity gains. Higher education is not alone in confronting such a fact. For example, the cost of dentistry has gone up at essentially the same rate as the cost of higher education. The simple fact is that there is a limit to how many mouths a dentist can put his or her hands in on any given day. The cost of lawyers has often risen even faster, perhaps, one might say, with rather less justification, and yet Congress has not been heard to call for hearings on the rising cost of legal advice.

Affordability and access
How then can higher education be afforded? This will require thinking about the entire system of higher education and the variety of kinds of education that it provides. Let us imagine some total number of seats for students in the system. Elements of liberal arts education—the research instinct properly defined—should be present for every one of those seats. But for reasons of talent and inclination, only some fraction of those seats will be needed for the deepest and most expensive kind of education. There will also need to be seats for many other kinds of education in the professions and the trades, many of which will be much less expensive. This begins to sound like rationing, and this may remind us of the debate about health care. But the only solution to the problem of the cost of higher education will entail coming to conclusions about how many students get what kinds of education, and how to achieve the right balance among the most and least expensive forms of it—all the while ensuring that every student has access to the highest educational attainment of which he or she is capable. De facto, there will be rationing and cross-subsidies, but this need not impede access. Any educational system that is to provide the whole range of the types of education that are needed and that aims simultaneously to enable every student of whatever socioeconomic background to reach his or her full potential and not be prematurely consigned to an education that will foreclose on their reaching that potential will require income redistribution. “Income redistribution,” however, is a toxic phrase in the United States at the moment. In a country with a tradition of the most generous philanthropy anywhere in the world, there is still a strong Calvinist streak that asserts that the poor are poor...
because they deserve to be. But there is no way around taking money from people and businesses that have it in order to provide for people who do not have it and to provide those essential services for which not everyone can afford to pay a strictly equal share.

The question is not whether it will be necessary to engage in income redistribution, but rather how it will be done. The most obvious method, of course, is through the tax code. For higher education, the limiting case on one extreme would be to fund fully the system of higher education through an appropriately progressive tax structure and then impose no charges on students. This has traditionally been the system in most other developed countries. On the other extreme, one might provide little or no government funding and let individual institutions charge students whatever they need to charge in order to cover their costs as well as to provide for students unable to pay the “full” cost. That is, each institution would redistribute income in its own way, charging the well-to-do enough to be able to accommodate those students who can only afford to pay much less. A system in which 4,500 institutions are left to do this, each in its own way, each with its own degree of commitment to access, and each with its own abundant or very limited resources for financial aid, is at a minimum an incoherent and inefficient system. It certainly leaves no one charged with thinking about what is in society’s collective interest.

Yet this is precisely the sort of system toward which the United States has long been tending, and the tendency is now quite advanced. A few truly wealthy institutions, of which there are not really more than four, can afford generous financial aid for less well-to-do students that comes from gifts and endowment income rather than directly from some fraction of the tuition of their wealthier classmates. But virtually all other institutions, including some of the most prestigious that are sometimes accused of being rich, redistribute some fraction of their tuition revenue from the more well-to-do to the less well-to-do in the form of financial aid. That is, they charge those who can afford to pay it an amount large enough to enable them to charge others much less or even nothing. This is sometimes described as discounting, and every institution undoubtedly worries constantly about how large a discount rate it can afford. Public institutions are more and more engaged in the same practice as support from their states has declined—witness, for example, the practice of charging out-of-state students more than in-state students. The full price of an education at Berkeley or Michigan for a student from out of state is now within about $2,000 of the price at Harvard, Yale, or Princeton. And Michigan, for example, now has a student body in which 30–40 percent of the students come from out of state. The logical conclusion of this trend in the solution of the financial problems of public universities—problems brought on by their own states—is that in the future all state universities will accept only students from other states.

This trend is simply not sustainable for many institutions in the system, public or private. At some point they run out of enough wealthy students from whom they can do the redistribution. They then become more and more institutions primarily for the wealthy, or they go out of business. There will always be enough wealthy families to support some number of the best institutions, though since academic ability is not uniformly distributed across such families, the average quality of the student body of an institution accepting only the rich will in some ways decline. But a system in which only the rich have access to institutions of the highest quality, which can maintain their quality because they have the tuition payments and the philanthropic support of the rich, while everyone else is forced to attend institutions with declining resource bases is a system that will drive further income inequality, with all of its attendant ills. One might even say that such a system is immoral.

**The value(s) question**

Higher education is, of course, not only about money. At whatever appropriate cost as borne by whomever, it is supposed to provide lifelong value to the students and to society. Yet some critics now complain that in the current system, with its rising costs, students are not in general learning much if anything, and there is a good deal of data to suggest that
many college students work rather little and are guided in the main by social rather than academic concerns. Whose fault is that? Once again, the faculty is often assigned the blame. If only the faculty cared more about their students and less about their research, all would be well, say the critics.

Here we encounter the curious view that higher education needs to be subjected to more market discipline if it is to survive and improve, as if the market for higher education had not made higher education what it is. Higher education exists in a very competitive market for the talent of both faculty and students. Yet a familiar complaint about colleges and universities is that they do not know their customers and respond to their wishes. Colleges and universities have changed steadily in response to the wishes and inclinations of students and their parents, often in ways that are then lamented by the critics who claim that higher education costs too much and that students are not learning anything. The institutions that have built elaborate recreational facilities and food courts and other amenities so often complained about by the critics have built them not because the faculty or even most administrators thought them essential to an education of high quality. They have built these things because the market has demanded them and has been willing to pay for them to some degree. The faculty, meanwhile, faced with a good many students (and some of their parents) who complain about their grades and who relentlessly choose courses with little assigned reading and no assigned writing, may very well come to feel that the rewards (not monetary, to be sure) for doing research and debating it with their colleagues are somewhat greater than for teaching undergraduates.

If we wish to know what is wrong with higher education in the United States, we will need to recognize that its current state reflects many things about our culture of which we cannot be proud. It means recognizing that the consumers, aided and abetted by U.S. News & World Report and its foolish rankings, are a significant part of the problem. All of the incentives in these rankings are for institutions to spend more rather than less and for students to choose a wealthy institution over one that is less wealthy, quite independent of what might be the educational quality of the experience. It plays, as so many things do, to the national enthusiasm for professional sports, where teams and individuals can be ranked in some true and immutable way. These rankings are valuable only for the purpose of selling magazines to a gullible public. If we care about the quality of higher education, we shall need to spend some time thinking about how young people (and their parents) come to have the values that they have and how certain values might be strengthened as opposed to others. This is work that must begin in the cradle.

What we must absolutely do is break out of the kind of marketplace and sports-like competition into which we too often allow ourselves to be forced, for the terms of the competition are overwhelmingly corrosive of what ought to be our values. The first responsibility of higher education is to the improvement of the lives of all our fellow citizens. This means, to be sure, the improvement of the economic circumstances of individuals broadly. But it also means the improvement of their intellectual and creative lives. All citizens have the fundamental human right to realize to the fullest extent possible their capacity for a rich intellectual life and for the exercise of their creative gifts. Meeting that responsibility in any given institution has absolutely nothing to do with where that institution stands in the rankings of federally sponsored research or the ratio of applicants to available places or the yield on the applicant pool, to say nothing of any ranking remotely associated with the NCAA. It makes absolutely no sense for each of fifty or more presidents or chancellors of state universities to assert that his or her institution will climb into the top ten research universities in the nation or the world or the galaxy by 2020. It makes even less sense for hundreds of liberal arts colleges to aspire to climb in the national rankings based on the criteria that are generally applied. For example, an institution that says it wishes to have higher average SAT scores so as to climb in the rankings says principally that it wants students with higher family incomes. And when it spends...
scarce resources for the purpose of recruiting those students, it makes a meaningful contribution to rising income inequality.

Each institution needs to think about and act not on its value proposition, as they say in business, but on its values proposition. How will it do right by the people it exists to serve? For some institutions it may well mean succeeding in the competition for NIH or NSF funding on a national basis, but only if that does not mean failing to do right by every student who comes with the desire to learn and grow intellectually. Indeed, those two goals must always be seen to be of a piece. Above all, the allocation of resources must be based first and foremost on an institution’s own values and not on the values of an imagined marketplace or of magazine and newspaper editors in faraway cities and countries or even, in many respects, on the preferences of eighteen-year-olds and their parents.

In this respect, so-called responsibility centered management—in which each academic or nonacademic unit of the institution is thought of as a profit (or loss) center, and resources are allocated to the most “profitable” based on student demand or the ability to generate resources from outside the institution—leaves values, properly so called, and educational principle entirely on the margins. It will not always be easy to resist certain political and economic pressures or the pressures of popular culture that one ought to resist. But when it is not possible to resist them, it should not be because nobody knows that they ought to be resisted in light of one’s values. This will require individual and institutional courage of a kind that the nation desperately needs. Our national life is at stake.

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

K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Awards

The K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award recognizes graduate students who show exemplary promise as future leaders of higher education, who demonstrate a commitment to developing academic and civic responsibility in themselves and others, and whose work reflects a strong emphasis on teaching and learning. The awards honor the work of K. Patricia Cross, professor emerita of higher education at the University of California–Berkeley, and are administered by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Following are the recipients of the 2012 awards:

Benjamin L. Castleman, quantitative policy analysis, Harvard University Graduate School of Education
Sarah L. Eddy, zoology, Oregon State University
Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz, communication studies, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill
Alexander Igor Olson, American culture, University of Michigan
Ashley E. Palmer, sociology, Baylor University
Ghanashyam Sharma, rhetoric and composition, University of Louisville
Martha Althea Webber, English (writing studies), University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign
Timothy Wong, comparative literature, University of California, Irvine

Nominations for the 2013 awards are due October 1, 2012. (For more information, see www.aacu.org.) The recipients will be introduced at the 2013 annual meeting, where they will deliver a presentation on “Faculty of the Future: Voices of the Next Generation.”
Practicing What We Preach
Cultivating Democratic

ADRIANNA KEZAR, MATTHEW HARTLEY, AND DANIEL MAXEY

As a nation, we are experiencing a troubling civic recession. This is a central theme of A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future, the report of the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, which was released in January by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Yet, at the AAC&U annual meeting, the discussions about how to reverse this civic recession were heartening. We are at a moment of convergence; there is a widespread awareness of public consternation over our nation’s polarized political discourse, a surge in grassroots activities such as the “Occupy” movement, and a recognition among many scholars and practitioners that the academy must play a role in reclaiming and reenergizing the participatory democracy our founders intended. We believe the strategies recommended in A Crucible Moment will be a major part of the way forward. However, the curricular and pedagogical solutions that comprise the core of the report’s “call to action” cannot succeed unless we also critically examine our institutions’ governance practices.

A Crucible Moment points to numerous structural and cultural refinements that are required in order to create a civic-minded campus, but the report devotes too little attention to how colleges and universities are governed. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis (1928) once observed, “Our government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or ill, it teaches the whole people by its example.” Extolling the virtues of democratic practice, on the one hand, while practicing exclusion from the decision-making process, on the other, will not produce civic agency in our students. Furthermore, in the phrase attributed to Lotte E. Scharfman, a refugee from Hitler’s Germany and a voting rights activist, democracy is not a spectator sport. If our colleges and universities are not designed to enable students to practice democracy, then our efforts to promote civic engagement are doomed to failure. It is incumbent upon our institutions of higher learning not only to make governance processes more transparent, but also to devise ways to draw students into important decision-making processes on campus, especially those that have an impact on them.

In this article, we explain why examining the way institutions model democracy on campus is an important, but often overlooked, step in advancing students’ democratic learning. First, we note how a decline in shared governance produces an educational environment that adversely affects students’ civic inclinations and agency. Next, we discuss ways that modeling democratic practices through governance can enhance students’ civic learning. We conclude with suggestions for action. We can succeed in supporting our nation’s emergence from the civic recession, but first we must look inward to examine and alter our own institutional processes in order to counter the current civic malaise.

Why are students disengaged, and what is our role?
A theme touched on by a number of speakers at AAC&U’s annual meeting was the troubling degree of civic disaffection among students (and society in general). What are the conditions that produce this disengagement on campus?

Extensive surveys by the Higher Education Research Institute demonstrate that students
Practice in Governance
are interested in being involved in their communities but disinterested in political engagement (Sax 2000). In 1966, well over half (approximately 60 percent) of incoming college students indicated it was important to keep up to date with political affairs; today, this is important to just one-third of students. This decline has occurred during a time when student involvement in community service and institutional support for service learning (linking community-based activities with the curriculum) has dramatically expanded. When students are asked why they favor one over the other, they explain that they want to make a difference and to see results from their efforts. Service learning provides this opportunity, whereas political engagement does not. Few have access to examples where political engagement made a difference.

Regrettably, students are not likely to find encouragement on campus. Many civic engagement efforts on campuses are anxious to avoid encouraging any activity seen as being activist or political. Nor are students offered many examples where debate and discourse on campus have produced change in institutional life. The purview of student government is most often limited to the organization of social activities. Further, students encounter faculty and staff who are increasingly disengaged from governance, either by choice or by overt exclusion. Limiting opportunities for faculty, staff, and student participation in decision making creates fertile ground for cynicism and disengagement. These messages pervade our campuses, rationalizing students’ belief that engagement is neither important nor viable. We know from learning theory that students learn as much from what they see modeled as from what they are told. If we model behavior that is at odds with our civic ideals—if we are attentive to some voices, while marginalizing others—we undermine the learning in our classrooms and within community partnerships. But what if we could alter this hidden curriculum and expose students to a campus where they, along with faculty and staff, could make a difference by participating in decision making and influencing a broader system? Civic education may, in fact, sell itself.

Shared governance as a mechanism for modeling democracy

Colleges and universities are not democracies. Nevertheless, our decision-making practices can model approaches that are more or less democratic. Robert Birnbaum (1989), a long-time researcher of governance, noted that while decision making is a main objective of governance practices on campuses, many latent functions served by governance are just as important as decision making itself. Governance, Birnbaum suggested, helps campuses articulate values, develops relationships and collegiality, and creates social capital and cohesion. One of the key values reinforced by governance is a leadership philosophy that is either inclusive and democratic or exclusive and hierarchical.

Higher education institutions have not always had a history of shared governance. During the last sixty to seventy years, as universities have gained ascendency as central societal institutions, shared governance has emerged as an essential principle of practice contributing to institutional excellence. The American Association of University Professors’ 1966 “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities” notes an “inescapable interdependence among governing board,
administration, faculty, students and others” (AAUP 2006, 136). To some extent, campuses mirrored the larger political changes of the progressive era and populist movements by engaging in more democratic and collaborative approaches to decision making. However, changes were also the result of growing influence among certain campus constituencies. The twentieth century saw a significant strengthening of faculty voices, which followed the emergence of funded research as a key concern on many campuses. The resulting “academic revolution” enabled faculty to garner greater influence and to emerge as significant decision makers at their institutions (Jenks and Reisman 1968). Similarly, student activism led the way for a greater student voice.

During the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s, campus leaders and stakeholders began to accept the efficacy of shared governance as a means for producing better decisions, and as an expression of democratic ideals that were the basis of fundamental societal change occurring at that time. Lisa Wolf-Wendell and others (2004) have documented how student affairs administrators supported student involvement in campus decision making in the 1960s and 1970s, believing that this was part of an important learning process about democratic engagement. A proclivity toward collective decision making not only was evident in the greater interaction between formal bodies (boards, academic senates, and committees), but it also created an environment that was hospitable toward informal actions like campus protests, letter-writing campaigns, and petitions—undertakings that drew students into campus decision-making processes.

However, the 1980s brought some significant shifts in societal values related to higher education that shaped student views of the purpose of college as well as approaches to governance. A college education came to be seen less as a formational experience than as a ticket to a well-paying job (Bloom, Hartley, and Rosovsky 2006). The shifting attitudes of students underscore this: In 1969, 80 percent of incoming freshmen said that developing a meaningful philosophy of life (the ideal of a well-rounded, formative education) was an important goal. By 1996, that value had dropped by nearly half to 42 percent. During that same time period, the proportion of students who said they were attending college “in order to be very well-off financially” increased from half to three-quarters (Astin 1998).

Also in the late 1980s, management practices from the corporate sector were being introduced into higher education. Decision making around larger strategic issues tended to reduce or mitigate the involvement of faculty, staff, and students. Researchers including Gary Rhoades (1996) and Mary Burgan (2006) have argued that the corporate management practices adopted over two decades have concentrated decision making among a few administrators at the top of the institutional hierarchy. Rhoades reviewed hundreds of employment contracts to show how, from 1980 to the mid-1990s, faculty autonomy and rights in governance diminished substantially. Burgan, using information and trends on governance collected by the American Association of University Professors, described the increased incidence of censure on campuses as a response to governance violations and an increase in reports of the elimination of shared governance from faculty across the country.

Increasingly, as these changes occur, decisions are made without advice or consultation. Faculty on many campuses have gone from being viewed as having authority over the curriculum, admissions, and student life to serving in an advisory capacity on these issues (Kezar and Eckel 2004). Today, most faculty have only token input on budgets, strategic plans, and major decisions. While many campuses maintain senates and other accoutrements of traditional academic
governance, such groups are involved in fewer campus-wide decisions and rarely provide significant checks on administrative power.

Another symptom of the breakdown of governance is a rise in the proportion of non-tenure-track faculty. Although over two-thirds of all faculty members nationwide currently hold non-tenure-track positions, these faculty are typically excluded from governance and many aspects of campus life (Hollenshead et al. 2007). Also, since non-tenure-track faculty have no academic freedom protections and limited job security, their ability to speak out is compromised (Kezar, Lester, and Anderson 2006). As a result, a majority of faculty members have no input into campus operations, and their ability to engage the larger campus community is limited. Few campuses have actively considered ways to better protect these faculty or to engage them in governance, much as other problems have been ignored. Some argue that campuses have become too complex for shared governance. However, numerous studies demonstrate that as decisions get more complex, more input is needed to weigh various options (Pearce and Conger 2008). None of the research on decision making supports the use of more centralized models. Ironically, while higher education increasingly adopts hierarchical management models, many corporations that once practiced centralized forms of management are now moving toward broader, more collaborative approaches.

Potential directions from A Crucible Moment
While A Crucible Moment does not offer detailed recommendations for governance, several components of the report reinforce the importance of governance and could be used to support the logic behind reexamining governance processes. The report speaks to a civic ethos, advocating that democratic values should be infused into the custom and habit of everyday practice, structures, and interactions. The report also points to a public-mindedness that ought to influence the goals of institutions and lead to engagement with local and global communities. The practices that stand to contribute most to a civic ethos are the formal and informal facets of governance addressed above. The report promotes processes defined by civility, concern for the well-being of others, and ethical behaviors. We agree with this approach. But we are concerned by the multitude of examples on campuses where top-down decisions have had a negative impact on constituencies or where students have become witnesses to rancor and division between faculty and the administration. These occurrences do not serve a civic ethos, and they demand that we attend to our own civic discourse—for our own good, but also for the good of our students.

A Crucible Moment also describes collective civic problem solving as a civic pedagogy that can advance democratic engagement. Building on the work of John Saltmarsh and Matthew Hartley (2011), the report notes how students learn to cooperate and engage in creative problem solving when faculty, students, and individuals from the community work and celebrate together. While the report emphasizes partnerships between the university and the community, the same cooperation and approach to problem solving should also be reflected in shared governance. Students need to see and be part of efforts on and off campus to address challenges faced by our campus communities, as well as the broader communities we support. This makes civic problem solving something greater than just part of the curriculum, engaging students and campus leaders in solving real-world problems within their own campuses, not just outside them. This is an important lesson from the civic engagement of the 1960s: meaningful opportunities for collaboration, student leadership, and democratic learning can be created on campus through shared governance.

Promising Examples
A number of campuses have made what we believe are promising efforts to create opportunities for students to practice civic agency. We provide a few examples here to show that it is possible to make changes without reinventing governance and decision-making processes. We also review ways that campuses can rethink their approach to governance in order to model civic engagement.
Wracked by a series of difficult issues in the late 1990s, faculty, staff, and students at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) embarked on a series of initiatives aimed at promoting greater democratic dialogue on campus (Mallory 2008). At the heart of this effort was a desire to cultivate a more capacious form of shared governance. In relating the experience, UNH Provost Bruce Mallory explained that “shared governance is about learning, developing, and enhancing the lives of the members of our community, which in turn leads to a strengthening of the community itself” (Mallory 2008, 94). This entailed cultivating a culture of deliberation in which faculty, staff, and students came together to discuss and debate important matters facing the institution. New structures were created to provide opportunities to be involved in governance, and leaders made it a priority to discuss the value of shared governance. Ongoing discussions, which have influenced institutional policy, have focused on promoting a more tolerant and inclusive campus. Discussions about alcohol use included members of the local community and law enforcement officials.

Of course, creating such venues for discussion and debate is not without risk. There are times when constituent groups clash. Further, there is the great danger of creating a kind of democratic theater that approximates real decision making but fails to influence policy decisions. Both of these risks underscore the importance of clarity when it comes to defining roles in decision-making processes—who has a say in various matters—as well as the importance of clarity in distinguishing between those discussions that are consultative and those that are determinative.

While broad, shared governance models democratic practice, campuses should also ensure opportunities for students to engage in substantive self-governance, particularly around issues that directly affect student life. One area in which students can meaningfully participate in decision making is in the cocurriculum. Some institutions have begun to reimagine their residential life and student activities programs in order to place more control in the hands of students. While dean of the college at Colgate University, Adam Weinberg worked with student leaders to empower students to self-organize. Weinberg explained, “We have redefined the role of our residence advisors, or RAs, (student staff who live on each hall). Rather than being police officers who enforce rules or professionalized staff who solve problems, we want them to think of themselves as coaches and mentors who organize teams of students to tackle problems and/or take advantage of opportunities” (2008, 105). Student leaders promoted the idea of allocating student activities dollars so that groups can only access them if they collaborate with another student group with whom they rarely interact—such as a collaboration between Colgate’s College Republicans and the Muslim Student Association.

Another example of the value and potential of engaging students in campus decision making is provided by a study conducted by Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista (2005). The study examined and compared two processes aimed at creating student interventions...
in order to ameliorate high attrition rates—one was led by students and involved input from many stakeholders, and the other was led predominantly by campus administrators with little input from other groups. Not surprisingly, the initiative that deeply involved students and stakeholders had greater success in retaining students. There are many ways to include students, but through these kinds of efforts we teach them the value of democratic decision making and that their input matters. We allow them to learn firsthand that collaboration creates solutions to complex problems. Imagine if we seriously engaged students in some of the pressing challenges facing our campuses, such as increasing completion rates or increasing capacity with reduced funding.

Of course, we also need to think more broadly about partnering in the community to make a difference in civic affairs beyond the campus. If students were routinely part of community-based problem-solving work with faculty, staff, and community members to address key issues such as local development, water or air quality, or human services, we could share the experience and create a template for how to get involved. Also, what if campus leaders were more vocal in civic affairs? It was once common for presidents to speak out on a range of civic issues, from foreign affairs to domestic policy. Today’s leaders are often worried about consequences for fundraising and, rather than risk alienating donors, choose not to speak up. Such silence sends a poor message to our students. How can campus leaders regain their voice and model civic commitments?

A Crucible Moment points to the need to create civic-minded institutions. We believe governance can be an effective vehicle for achieving this goal. Leaders need to prioritize and provide incentives for involvement in governance. Promotion to full professor, for example, should include as one criterion greater institutional service and leadership. Administrators need to resist the temptation to centralize decision making or to maintain processes that are merely symbolic. If governance processes are not quick or nimble enough, why not restructure them rather than sidestepping them? This is hard work, but leaders who care will spend time creating meaningful structures for input, rather than shaking their fists with frustration because current structures do not work. Faculty also need to be willing to help change these structures, many of which are based more on tradition than on functional, effective approaches to decision making.

We need to come together as a community, rethink our forms of civic engagement and our governance structures, and develop processes that work for all stakeholders and that both mirror and model our civic values. Campuses—particularly those with hierarchical, tiered faculties—need to undertake efforts to include all faculty in governance and to address their academic freedom protections in faculty handbooks or collective bargaining agreements. Campuses should also consider multiyear contracts for non-tenure-track faculty as another way to protect academic freedom. Since staff are often left out of discussions of shared governance, particularly at elite institutions, efforts should also be made to ensure that staff input is included in key institutional decision making.

Conclusion: Being the change we want
A Crucible Moment and the ongoing efforts of our partners at AAC&U are helping reinvigorate a dialogue about the academy’s role in reversing the civic recession. However, widespread success in achieving our civic learning
goals requires expanding the blueprint provided in the report and developing clearer strategies for modeling and rewarding engagement practices on our own campuses. At each institution, these efforts should begin by changing institutional governance processes in order to model the ideals we wish to create, and then expanding beyond the core to encourage broader democratic engagement.

We are hopeful that campus communities will come together—faculty, students, staff, and administrators—to envision and implement new, collaborative decision-making standards that revitalize broader efforts to address the national civic malaise. New governance models and changes in local practice may serve to promote much broader changes to practices globally. Existing and emerging democracies around the world still look to the United States for leadership on democratic practices, and the growing numbers of international students studying on our campuses will export the behavior we model. Working together, we can restore our institutions’ potential to produce strong examples of civic engagement. US institutions of higher education were once strong models of civic engagement through shared governance, and we believe we can inspire countries once again with our democratic practices.

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

REFERENCES

We have made great strides in our efforts to reverse the US “civic recession”

In the 2012 State of the Union address, President Obama spoke of education as a national mission. The president believes we are at a “make-or-break moment” for the middle class. What’s at stake is the very survival of the basic American promise that if you work hard, you can do well enough to raise and educate a family, own a home, avoid bankruptcy or worse from a health care crisis, and retire with security. He said that education is essential to help middle-class Americans become full contributors to our nation’s economy.

Today, the unemployment rate for Americans with a baccalaureate degree is about half the national average. Their incomes are twice as high as those who don’t have a high school diploma and nearly two-thirds more than students who did not graduate from high school. But as the American Association of Community Colleges has expressed in many venues over the past few years, we’re not talking only about the economy; we’re talking about what American means to us, about our values, and about the future of our democracy. For many of us who are worried about our future, this is a déjà vu moment: a nation at risk once again, here at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

President Obama has called upon us to keep college affordable, to enable unemployed workers to enter or return to college in order to prepare for new careers, and to put highly effective teachers into every classroom—not only to help today’s youth and adults, but also to prepare the next generation of students to succeed in the knowledge economy as lifelong learners and citizens who are engaged in working and contributing to our global society. In the State of the Union address, President Obama underscored the point that a college education is more essential now than ever before. But he also underscored that it’s more expensive than ever. “In the United States of America,” he said, “no one should go broke because they chose to go to college.”

In the past two and a half years, the Obama administration has made the biggest investment in student aid since the G.I. Bill through Pell Grants, direct loans, income-based loan repayments, and public service loan forgiveness. Going forward, the president is asking everyone to take responsibility, to do their part, so that Americans today and tomorrow will have the opportunity—and will be able to afford—to go to college, earn their degrees and certificates, and contribute to our social, civic, and economic prosperity.

We will continue to work as hard as we can to protect the Pell Grant program, to stop the interest rates from doubling, to extend the American Opportunity Tax Credit, to double work-study jobs for students, and to seek additional support for higher education. But we ask that states, colleges, and universities do their part to keep college costs down.

Furthermore, over the past three years, the Obama administration has made unprecedented investments in reforming the education pipeline. And we are beginning to see these investments yield results. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have adopted a set of common core standards designed substantially to increase student proficiency in English and mathematics, demonstrating that our high school graduates are ready for college-level work. Our goal is for high school graduates to be “college and career ready” upon earning their diplomas.

The work ahead is for postsecondary institutions to affirm that high school graduates really are ready! Additionally, funding from
At the beginning of 2012, we made great strides in our effort to reverse the US “civic recession” and to redefine civic learning and democratic engagement for the twenty-first century. On January 10, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan joined a host of administration and educational leaders at a White House–sponsored event held to launch a national conversation on the importance of educating students for informed, productive citizenship. As part of that event, over seventy-five organizations and individuals announced commitments to help advance civic learning in America. It was an inspiring day. The challenge now is to define our goals for the next decade and to work boldly in order to achieve them.

To that end, on that day, we released two important reports. The first is *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future*, the final report of the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement that was commissioned by the Department of Education. The second report, written and published by the department itself, is titled *Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy: A Road Map and Call to Action*. This second, federally focused report identifies nine steps the Department of Education
will take to advance civic learning and engagement—from adding civic indicators to student surveys, to promoting public service internships and careers, to more effectively leveraging federal programs and public-private partnerships.

**Ensuring all students are ready for college, career, and citizenship**

Civic learning, and education’s vital purpose to cultivate engaged and effective citizens, is a national imperative. And by *civic learning* we certainly mean civic knowledge and skills as instructional content, but we also mean opportunities for increased social engagement as applied learning—as a strategy to deliver more effective instruction, across a broad range of disciplines.

At the federal level, President Obama, Secretary Duncan, and all of us in the administration believe that offering all students a world-class education is a moral obligation and an economic necessity. We also see this as a civic call to action. President Obama has challenged us to reclaim the world’s highest proportion of college graduates by 2020. He calls this the drive to “win the future” by out-innovating, out-educating, and out-building the rest of the world. But the president has made it clear that winning the future also means preserving this country’s treasured democratic values, and instilling and passing them on to each new generation.

We must fulfill the public mission of higher education, in order to help students fulfill their civic and social responsibilities and to prepare them to succeed in a world of unprecedented complexity and interconnectedness. In fact, many skills acquired through civic engagement are the same twenty-first-century skills that employers want. Civic education is consistent with President Obama’s goal of regaining our competitiveness in the global marketplace, and it is consistent with the goal of increasing student achievement and closing achievement gaps.

**Diverse students on the value of civic learning**

This was a theme throughout the January event at the White House, but it was particularly clear during a session that involved several student speakers and youth advocates. Dantrell Cotton, a graduate of Chicago’s High School of Agricultural Sciences and now a student at the University of Wisconsin, spoke of the benefits of the hands-on education he’d received, which engaged diverse students in problem solving in school and community settings. He emphasized the importance of valuing students’ opinions, giving them a voice in decision making, and offering them opportunities to serve as role models for their peers. He suggested that for our democracy to be sustainable, students need the experience of collaborating successfully, of seeing democracy in action, and of being empowered to effect change as part of the learning process.

Nikki Cooley, now a program coordinator at Northern Arizona State University, spoke about civic learning’s power to engage students from diverse backgrounds in culturally relevant ways. She sketched her background as a Navajo student from a region where 80 percent of residents lack electricity and running water. Her parents’ home was just wired for electricity last year, and they still haul their water—a fifty-mile round trip. She asked, “How did I go from hating math and science to having a master’s degree in forestry? How did I end up working with scientists to design a curriculum that incorporates climate change models?” Nikki’s answer? It was because she had been given the chance to work on projects that moved math and science from theory to practice, through issues that mattered to her as a Navajo woman. One such project included hands-on work with the Cherokee Nation in North Carolina, and combined qualitative and quantitative methods in fire science. She called it her “light-bulb moment.” She realized that by mastering math and science, she could help overcome obstacles faced by her tribe and other native communities. Her message was that by democratizing education, by empowering students through relevant educational and cultural opportunities, we can close the achievement gap, energize diverse learners, and strengthen our democracy.

Secretary Duncan expanded on this theme in his closing remarks. He talked about his experience in the Chicago public schools, as they moved to institute a public-service requirement. He said that many students ended up exceeding the forty-hour requirement and, instead, completing five hundred, seven hundred, even one thousand service hours. For the first time, students from every
background had structured opportunities to make a difference in their communities, and they were hungry to engage and contribute. He spoke of the similar impact of the Mikva Challenge, which trains high school juniors and seniors to serve as election judges in Chicago. These students help strengthen the democratic process before they themselves can vote! And he spoke of his experience with the Chicago public schools’ student advisory council, which informed the work of his management team and helped him, as the school superintendent, incorporate student perspectives in his policies for reform.

Secretary Duncan noted that service learning is too often seen as the purview of privileged students, with their less-privileged peers being the recipients of these services. He called on all of us to democratize service learning and democratic engagement so that all students can discover the impact they can have in changing the world around them. That’s a challenge I reiterate here. And it’s in this context that I’d like to address Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy: A Road Map and Call to Action, which outlines the Department of Education’s role in civic learning and the nine steps we will take to serve as a constructive catalyst for change.

Many of our efforts already support civic learning and democratic engagement. For example, the Federal Work-Study program currently mandates that institutions of higher education use at least 7 percent of their total awards to provide community-service jobs for students. In 2009–10, $222 million went to fund community-service jobs, along with a much larger pot of nonfederal matching funds. And President Obama called for doubling work-study funding for fiscal year 2013 in his State of the Union address.

To cite another example, our Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships is working with the White House and the Corporation for National and Community Service to oversee the President’s Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge. To date, more than 270 colleges and universities have committed to a year of interfaith and community-service programming on their campuses. For their interfaith initiative, participating college students select one service priority in areas like poverty and education, health services, or support for veterans and military families. But there’s more we can do; we have 6,700 community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities throughout our nation. We invite more institutions to get involved.

In our increasingly diverse world, being educated in a diverse environment prepares young people to compete in the global economy and to participate fully in our democracy. Our agency joined the Department of Justice in releasing national legal guidance on how schools, colleges, and universities may voluntarily promote diversity in higher education. Diverse learning environments strengthen the civic and political life of our nation, break down stereotypes, promote racial understanding and tolerance, and enhance the quality of education. The Obama administration is committed to helping education officials understand how legally to pursue diversity in ways that foster equity and excellence.

The nine steps in the federal road map

Still, beyond those three examples, there’s much more that the US Department of Education can do to create a climate that promotes the efforts of colleges and universities to advance civic learning and democratic engagement. The nine steps presented in Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy are a great start.

The first step is to convene and catalyze schools and postsecondary institutions in order to increase and enhance the quality of civic learning and engagement. In the years ahead, we’ll redouble our efforts to promote institutional commitments to provide strong civic learning opportunities, from grade school to graduate school, and to increase public awareness of education’s role in developing informed citizens. For example, we’ll encourage states, schools, and postsecondary institutions to conduct civic audits, develop plans, and publish progress reports about their efforts to equip students to lead engaged civic lives. We’ll also encourage postsecondary education leaders to join civic-learning partnerships and to implement recommendations from leading national efforts.

The second step is to identify additional civic indicators. As part of our department-wide
emphasis on evidence-based decision making, we’ll support the development of improved indicators to identify students’ civic strengths and weaknesses, and we’ll support the field in crafting appropriate responses. To amplify tools like the National Assessment of Education Progress civics exam, we’ll work through the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance to add to the upcoming National Longitudinal Transition Study questions about high school students’ transitions to postsecondary experiences. And we’ll disseminate these and other civic data to educators and the public.

The third step is to identify promising practices in civic learning and democratic engagement, and encourage further research to learn what works. For example, the department’s National Center for Education Research will include language in forthcoming requests for applications to emphasize that approaches to civic learning and democratic engagement are appropriate targets of intervention for improving academic outcomes. We’ll solicit promising civic learning and democratic engagement practices as part of an upcoming request for information on strategies to increase college completion. And we’ll encourage schools and higher education institutions to assess the impact of civic learning initiatives on the civic and economic health of the school or campus and the community.

As the fourth step, we’ll look for ways to leverage federal investments and public-private partnerships in support of civic learning. The department will encourage grantees and grant applicants to include civic learning and democratic engagement initiatives in federally funded educational programs, where possible. Where appropriate, we’ll emphasize these activities as allowable uses of program funds, and consider adjusting program criteria and reporting outcomes to give them a stronger focus. We’ll also encourage grantees to pursue public-private partnerships with businesses, foundations, and community-based organizations in order to advance their civic learning and democratic engagement goals.

Our fifth step is to encourage community-based work-study placements under the Federal Work-Study (FWS) program. The department will encourage expanded efforts to place FWS students in assignments tailored to their interests in federal, state, or local public agencies or in private nonprofits. And we’ll encourage postsecondary institutions and organizations to track civic outcomes for students and the community, and to share promising practices.

On a related note, step six is to encourage public service careers among college students and graduates. We must attract top talent to public service careers in teaching, public safety, and other fields. The Obama administration is taking steps to make it easier for many borrowers, including those who devote their time and talent to public service, to repay their federal student loans through the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program and the Income-Based Repayment plan. Beginning this year, the department will release an Employment Certification Form for borrowers interested in the PSLF program, making it easier to track qualifying federal student loan payments toward the PSLF benefit. We’ll also continue publicizing the program so that many more students learn of it. And President Obama has announced a proposal to cap federal student loan payments at 10 percent of income and to forgive remaining balances after twenty years. Those entering public service careers could be eligible for loan forgiveness after ten years. We look forward to working with higher education stakeholders to realize these changes through negotiated rule making processes.

The seventh step is to support civic learning for a well-rounded K-12 curriculum. The department’s blueprint for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) proposes a new competitive program called Effective Teaching and Learning for a Well-Rounded Education. This program would assist states, local education agencies, and nonprofits in developing, implementing, evaluating, and replicating evidence-based programs that contribute to a well-rounded education—including civics, government, economics, and history. Other disciplines could also incorporate evidence-based civic learning, service learning, and other engagement initiatives. As we continue to call on Congress to reauthorize the ESEA, we stand ready to implement this new program.

Our eighth step is to engage historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and Asian American/Pacific
Islander-serving Institutions in a national dialogue to identify best practices in civic learning and engagement. These institutions have a proud record that includes preparing students to be national and community leaders in civil rights, the sciences, engineering, and medicine—to name just a few of the fields in which students historically underrepresented in American higher education have gone on to become national and state civic leaders. The department will encourage these institutions to maintain their focus on developing civic leadership and will encourage minority-serving institutions to identify best practices that might benefit all of America’s institutions of higher education.

Finally, the ninth step is to highlight and promote student and family participation in educational programs and policies at the federal and local levels. President Obama’s first executive order was a memorandum to federal agencies about making government more transparent, participatory, and collaborative. Consistent with that call, the Department of Education will identify and promote opportunities for students and families to participate as collaborators and problem solvers in education. Many initiatives, such as our K-12 School Improvement or Promise Neighborhoods grants, include opportunities for students, families, and community leaders to help shape solutions to challenges at the local level. In addition, we regularly invite public input on federal education policy making—from draft regulations, to reauthorization proposals, to new grant priorities. We will identify and highlight additional opportunities to involve students and families in the department’s public comment process.

We want to engage diverse learners, institutions, and organizations directly in our work at the Department of Education, and ultimately to provide all students with deliberate, rich, structured opportunities to explore the benefits and obligations of civic life by tackling challenges and designing solutions in their own schools, campuses, and communities.

**Conclusion**

In 1947, a student at Morehouse College wrote a piece about the purpose of education for his campus newspaper. A junior pursuing a bachelor’s degree in sociology, he said, “We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.” This young man was determined to translate the character gained through an excellent education into the type of conduct that uplifts the community in the struggle for justice, for freedom, for human dignity, and for basic human rights. And indeed, he did go on to adjust the balance for civil rights in America, leaving an incalculable record of leadership and inspiration.

Of course, that young man was the future Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose life and legacy we now celebrate in a national day of service. Dr. King and his colleagues in the civil rights movement—many of them students, from grade school to graduate school—exemplified civic agency. They showed America, and the world, what it takes to act cooperatively and collectively to address society’s problems and build better communities.

The students who spoke at the White House in January—and the countless others like them—are Dr. King’s successors. They are America’s future public servants, problem solvers, entrepreneurs, inventors, artists, scientists, and leaders. They’ll be the heartbeat of our common culture, the stewards of our shared civic life, and the trustees of our values. If we give them the knowledge, skills, tools and experiences they need today, they will rise to meet and master tomorrow’s challenges, in our nation and around the globe. This our call to action!

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**REFERENCES**


OUR UNDERSTANDING OF OURSELVES as Americans has always been rooted in a fundamental tension between the individual and the community. Is America a “We the People” kind of country, or is the American dream really about me doing as well as I can, period? Over the past three decades, the American allegory—the story we tell ourselves about ourselves—has become increasingly individualistic. Certainly, the current of individual liberty, individual progress, and individual achievement, along with the extraordinary openness of American life, has invited the talented and the hard working from all over the world. It has been our faith that free individuals, operating in open markets and with careers open to their talents, would bring progress on a scale never before known on earth.

And so it has proven. Think of Dewitt Clinton and the Erie Canal, Alexander Graham Bell and the telegraph, Edison and the light bulb, Carnegie and the Bessemer process, Rockefeller and oil. Americans have excelled in science—think of Jonas Salk and the polio vaccine or Craig Ventor and the human genome discoveries. We set the bar for entertainment—think of Jack Warner and Hollywood, David Sarnoff and television, or Walt Disney. Even just in the last two decades, Americans have once again launched amazing breakthroughs: Bill Gates with the personal computer; Steve Jobs with the iPod, the iPhone, and the iPad; Jeff Bezos with Amazon and Kindle. It is a thrill just to mention these names and to consider how much has already been accomplished.

They dreamed, they created, they built, they produced. The freedom to make their dreams come true gave a great deal of satisfaction and happiness not only to them, but also to their fellow Americans—to all of us who shine in the reflected glory.

But there is a darker side to that glory. Individualism unchecked can sometimes seem like an infection run wild. The captain of commerce is a robber baron to his competitors and an exploiter to his workers. The business that gives life to a community is later discovered to have poisoned it. The liberty of expression that shelters the artist also shields the most virulent pornographers. Commerce creates wealth, raises living standards, and supports the advance of civilization. Yet for whole periods of our history, commerce has also immersed the whole nation in greed, rapaciousness, and dishonesty; it has encouraged the exaltation of money and the decline of virtue.

By around 1980, when Ayn Rand’s philosophy started to become dominant, our hero was the person who was not tied down by family or friends or by connections to a neighbor or the larger society. Freed from the other, the individual’s talents could shine. Rather than asking who his or her neighbor is, the Ayn Rand hero thinks only of his or her own self. Create your own life. How are you doing? And, if you aren’t doing well, then you have only yourself to blame.

Those who preach the value of the free market and unfettered individualism tell us to start our own businesses, to be entrepreneurs. At a time when one out of four Californians is searching for full-time work, one presidential candidate claimed, “If you don’t have a job, it’s your own fault.” During one presidential primary debate, the audience cheered the idea that a person could be left to die because he

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had no insurance. During another, the audience jeered at a gay soldier who is risking his life for our country. Texas Governor Rick Perry lost his front-runner status in the presidential primary because he defended the Dream Act, legislation that would provide a college education for children of undocumented immigrants.

Our current political dialogue focuses on the right of individuals to remain indifferent and to pick and choose at will among their own models of happiness, rather than on how we can work together to build a better society for all. The very idea of improving society through legislative action is under attack today.

Undermining the common good
As the influence of the “greed is good” philosophy has grown, four additional developments have further undermined the common good and weakened the ties that bind us to one another: crony capitalism, globalization, what Christopher Lasch called the “revolt of the elites,” and an increase of anti-institutional animus. The result has been an overwhelming and increasingly exclusive focus on “me, myself, and I” that threatens to devastate our democratic institutions and values.

Crony capitalism exists wherever the wealthy use their power to ensure that government policy favors them. Examples abound of companies that spend money on politics, rather than investing in their businesses. For many decades, it was illegal for coal companies to dump the debris from the destruction of mountains in Appalachia into streams and waterways. The coal companies went to court to argue against the law. They lost. Then, rather than investing in new technologies that would protect the streams and waterways in West Virginia, they “invested” in lobbyists, who, in turn, succeeded in getting the definition of fill changed. With the new definition, the coal companies can now proceed with their leveling of the mountains and filling of the streams and waterways with debris.

Or consider the financial industry. The US Chamber of Commerce said that it was prepared to spend whatever it takes to defeat the creation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. From 2009 through the beginning of 2010, the Chamber was one of the biggest spenders among the more than 850 businesses and trade groups that, combined, paid lobbyists $1.3 billion to fight financial reform. And
even after the bill creating the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau was passed, the industry kept up its attacks. Last year alone, the financial industry flooded Congress with 2,565 lobbyists. JPMorgan Chase, which received a $25 billion taxpayer-funded bailout through the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), spent nearly $14 million on lobbying during the 2009–10 election cycle; Goldman Sachs, which received more than $10 billion in TARP funds, spent $7.4 million; and Citigroup, which was teetering on the brink of insolvency before it received a $45 billion infusion from TARP, has paid more than $14 million to lobbyists since 2009.

Globalization, too, has helped erode the notion of common welfare to which our country was once dedicated. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, American business leaders saw that it was in their best interest for their fellow Americans to be well skilled and well educated. They also wanted river boats that operated smoothly, railroads that were reliable, and a highway system that ran east, west, north, and south. They built sewage systems. They insisted that the air and water be clean and that wilderness, forests, and parks be set aside for the common good. The availability of healthy and productive workers improved businesses’ bottom lines. And the union movement fought for higher wages and better pensions, which meant that the workers had enough money to buy the cars, radios, dishwashers, and cornflakes that Ford, General Electric, Whirlpool, and Kellogg’s wanted to sell. Moreover, all were taxed—but, particularly, the wealthy—to pay for shared benefits. When I was growing up, my family gladly paid a marginal tax rate of 90 percent. My grandfather used to say that he wanted a country in which all could do well, not just the few. And for a while, Republicans agreed. Hoover raised the tax rate from 25 percent to 63 percent for those earning more than $100,000 per year. But today, when corporations can shift their production and customer bases overseas, why do they need good schools in the United States—or good roads or sewage systems that work?

Globalization is great for corporations, but it is less good for countries. The top priorities of corporate leaders are limited to management compensation, shareholder value, and customer satisfaction. Those who would once also have been our community leaders now no longer have to burden themselves with the cumbersome task of building civil society. They no longer need all the people to live in safe and orderly neighborhoods here in their home country.
This brings me to Christopher Lasch’s notion of the “revolt of the elites.” People today are more like nomads than rooted people. We travel, move, flee. We are not settled. So, of course, we are captured by commerce not country. Accordingly, as the elite of our times are not tied to a single country, why should they be loyal to their fellow countrymen? They don’t need to educate them, or provide good public transportation, or decent health care—or even jobs. Today, power derives not from running the local Lions Club or the local church group; it derives not from territory, but from the ability to move quickly. Traveling light rather than holding tightly onto things is now the asset of power. Rockefeller liked his railroads and oil rigs here in America. In contrast, Bill Gates moves around the world. The same is true of Apple, which, at one point last summer, had more cash on hand than the federal government.

Since the Vietnam War, critics have pointed out how few Ivy Leaguers fight our wars. The contemporary global elite seldom put their lives on the line. Nor do they burden themselves with chores of administration, management, welfare concerns, or morally uplifting and civilizing cultural crusades. Active engagement in the life of the middle class is no longer needed. On the contrary, it is actively avoided as unnecessary, costly, and ineffective. Upward mobility, or concern for the poor, is merely a quaint notion.

A final factor undermining the notion of the common good is the mistrust of government that grew up in the last century—a century that, for good reason, feared the heavy hand of the state. Governments in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, as well as horrendous dictators in South America and Africa, surely deserve criticism. Totalitarian governments gave rise to eloquent critiques, such as George Orwell’s 1984 and Aldus Huxley’s Brave New World. For much of the twentieth century, social critics feared government power. And because they feared that the state would control us, they focused on personal liberty and human rights.

Government can be problematic, but those critics gave little thought to what would replace it. What happens if the public space is emptied, or at least narrowed significantly? The answer is clear: you get “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous” and People magazine; you get gossip and discussion of hairstyles and dress, rather than discussion of what is needed for the public good. As people fled the public square, it filled not with power but with a focus on personal drama. Government, once the venue where we could make our most solemn common decisions, is now derided. Now, it is acceptable to deregulate and privatize our tasks and duties—schools, health care, even water. The individual pursuit of money is the only thing we have in common. As de Tocqueville said, setting people free makes them indifferent. The individual is the citizen’s worst enemy.

The virtues and values of democracy

In the final analysis, all nations depend on virtues that have nothing to do with money. Courage, self-sacrifice, honor, duty, stoicism, and truth—these are the essential virtues of a democracy, and none of them can be bought. Those values have been lost as we have entered a world where “greed is good.” In order to survive, a nation needs to instill the selfless virtues and values of democracy.

Our soldiers risk their lives. They know courage, loyalty, hard work, self-sacrifice. But it is not only in war that societies must turn to qualities not found in commerce. Societies at peace also require fire fighters, police officers, rescue workers, and teachers. No one goes into a burning building merely for money. Values not found in commerce need nurturing if we are to fight our wars, police our streets, teach our children, and care for the dying. Yet, in a nation that values only money, it is difficult to get people to honor those virtues that would help the soldiers. The suicide rate of returning veterans is way too high. Recall how much shame it took for our government to fully fund the health needs of the first responders of 9/11.

How, then, can we best nurture the values of responsibility, hard work, courage, and loyalty? And how can we construct a government that merits trust?

At one time, religion provided a counterweight to the rapacious tendencies unleashed by capitalism. But now, even religion is divided. As it focuses narrowly on three issues—abortion, same-sex marriage, and stem-cell research—the
Right has effectively shrunk God. Those three are critical issues, to be sure. But they do not represent the full range of God's interest, I'll wager. In fact, there is little discussion on the Right of Jeremiah's warning (6:13), “From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.” And on the Left? Some have abandoned organized religion, seeing in it either hypocrisy or a flagrant misuse of power—or both. Others think that the First Amendment prohibits faith from entering the public square. It was not always thus. My father, for instance, once wrote a front-page article for LOOK magazine. It was titled, “Suppose God Is Black.” Then, God was a big God, not created in the image of His followers but, rather, demanding that we see His face in the hungry, in the immigrant, in the prisons—and yes, even in our enemy, as pointed out in Matthew 25. We were called to love our neighbor.

The service movement could provide another restraint on greed. Campus Compact and other such organizations have grown dramatically over the last two decades. The number of young people now engaged in service is stunning—far beyond anything ever experienced in our nation's history. The retired, too, are making their contribution to our communities by helping schools, hospitals, childcare centers, nursing homes. The free voluntary association is, as de Tocqueville rightly saw, one of the fine distinguishing marks of the United States. Clearly, we still believe that caring about others is a value to be honored.

Yet, although many do care about community, that concern seldom translates into a respect for politics or a recognition of the importance of a government devoted to prosperity for all, rather than just the few. Sadly, many of those who happily serve their fellow human beings in Habitat for Humanity, the Boys and Girls Clubs, the Sierra Club, or any number of equally worthy associations do not like to see themselves as citizens. Instead, they prefer the word volunteer because it sounds selfless, whereas citizen sounds too political.

When I was on a mission to make Maryland the first (and still only) state to require service as a condition of high school graduation, I talked with thousands of high school students. One class in particular sticks in my mind. All the students had performed service, and the teacher had asked them to describe what they did—clean up a stream, plant trees, tutor younger children, raise money for the Red Cross, and so forth. One young man told how he delivered “meals on wheels” to an elderly couple, but that he had to stop at one point because they had a problem with Social Security. So naturally I asked why he didn’t help them with the Social Security issue. He answered, “Well that would be politics.” “Oh,” I said, “that is rather solipsistic of you.” And since the class had not yet studied for the SATs, they didn’t know what I was talking about. “You are willing to help if it’s community service,” I explained, “if it feels good. But you’re not willing to help the couple if that means getting involved in politics.” Well, that started a lively discussion. The teacher, who was a friend, called me three months later to say that the students were still debating the relationship between politics and community service.

The role of the university

This brings us at last to the role of the university. One path is to simply accede to what one might describe as the bulldozer of history, and to focus your efforts on helping each individual student hone those skills that will make her or him most marketable. Or, you can be the change that is needed. Adam Michnik, the intellectual force in the Solidarity movement in Poland, famously counseled his compatriots that it would be better for them to build an alternative society, rather than to fight the Communists head on. He argued that when the fall comes—as they all believed it inevitably would, given the rottenness of the system—the men and
women of Solidarity would be able to step into the breach, which indeed they did.

I propose that we reintroduce the notion of America as the “shining city on a hill,” that abiding image from American history. John Winthrop first wrote about it on the Arabella as his little band of Pilgrims braved stormy seas to establish a new kind of city in what was for them a new world. The night before the D-Day invasion, Dwight Eisenhower quoted the passage to the troops. On the day before he was inaugurated, John Kennedy spoke about that shining city before a session of the Massachusetts legislature. Ronald Reagan used it as the image of an America whose admirable actions at home would set a standard for what could be achieved across the globe. Let me quote a portion of Winthrop’s 1630 speech on the Arabella:

We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others’ necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others’ conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together… For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us… And to shut this discourse with that exhortation of Moses, that faithful servant of the Lord, in his last farewell to Israel, Deut. 30. “Beloved, there is now set before us life and death, good and evil,” in that we are commanded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love one another….

The image of the shining city on a hill captures our imagination because it reflects the abiding truth that we become fully human in society, not outside of it. We need one another to become happy, healthy, and whole.

What better place to instill those values than at our colleges and universities? Campuses have traffic, jobs, utilities, labor unions, questions about sustainability—in short, college campuses face many of the same challenges that our country as a whole faces. There is a broad range of jobs; talents are not evenly distributed. Yet the way to ensure a stronger campus and a better college or university is to make sure that all do well. The prologue to the Constitution speaks of creating a more perfect union. The constant devotion to improvement, to leaving a better life for the next generation, is the central virtue of a college or university.

The task of colleges and universities is twofold. The first is to make sure that students develop their talents. Notice that I did not say, “provide opportunities” for students to succeed. Some students don’t know how to take advantage of opportunities. Some students have too much static in their lives—poor preparation, a learning disability, a jobless father, a sick mother, an addicted brother, no car and no public transportation, no mentors or models of success. Second, by your actions as members of the campus community, you can show that opportunity need not be an empty promise, but can instead be a genuine commitment to the success of all. Those who have done well have been lifted by a network of relationships and institutions. We are connected to one another, we need one another, and we have a responsibility for one another. By making sure that all do well, you can show by example that it is in the good society that people have the best chance to use their talents.

Rather than accede to Ayn Rand’s philosophy that each person makes it on his or her own, you can take a different tack. We are free when we are economically secure; we are happy when we are using the full range of our talents. We can’t be satisfied if we do well while others suffer. America is an idea. That idea isn’t perfect now, but we can always improve it. Each college or university can help refine this idea. You can take Winthrop’s vision and make it your own. You can see your campus as a shining city on a hill, where all members of the campus community are cared for and where all do well. And in so doing, you can create a model for a nation that can indeed govern itself.

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Facilitating Innovation in Science Education through Assessment Reform

DAVID I. HANAUER AND CYNTHIA BAUERLE

For over two decades, two pervasive themes have informed the discourse on undergraduate science education in the United States. The first emphasizes the role of the nation’s science and technology enterprise in meeting critical economic and societal challenges in the twenty-first century. Science is better positioned than ever before to address important societal issues such as food security, environmental health, and sustainable energy (National Research Council 2009). However, realizing this potential to address pressing societal problems requires attracting and retaining new generations of creative and versatile scientists who are well prepared to participate in fast-paced, information-rich, collaborative forms of science that are increasingly pursued on the cusps between disciplines. The foundation of the “sci-tech” enterprise is its well-trained workforce, which is sustained by tapping the broad and diverse talent pool of students who are interested in science (National Research Council 2011). Addressing twenty-first-century challenges also requires a citizenry that is equipped to understand the science that informs controversial issues—such as climate change and alternative energy development—that directly affect their lives and communities.

The role of science education in this regard is clear, yet seemingly contradicted by the second pervasive theme: undergraduate science education in the United States is not as effective as it needs to be in translating student interest in science into optimal preparation either to enter the science workforce or to participate as literate citizens in an increasingly global society. Given the potential for science to address important problems, undergraduate programs ought to be functioning as busy portals for engaging students’ innate fascination and developing their understanding of the nature and practice of science. Instead, recent studies suggest, the opposite is true: over half of the students who enter college with an interest in science do not persist in their training beyond the first year or two of introductory coursework (National Research Council 2011). Further, while underrepresented minority (URM) students aspire to major in science at rates similar those of white and Asian students, their completion rates are even lower than their non-URM counterparts. Students who transfer out of science programs report reasons ranging from lack of preparation to perceptions that science courses are unengaging, impersonal, or irrelevant to their interests (Aronson 2002; Felder, Felder, and Dietz 1998; Sevo 2009). Whatever the reason, the implications are clear: negative experiences in undergraduate science courses may have the effect of either eroding student motivation or turning students away from science altogether.

In recent years, multiple efforts within the academic, federal, and private sectors have focused attention on the state of undergraduate science education with respect to success in
developing science literacy and preparing students to pursue advanced careers in science fields. The need to engage the “minds and talents” of all Americans in order to improve science literacy and to support scientific research and innovation in the twenty-first century is well documented (AAAS 2011). Most recently, the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) concluded that, in order to meet US science workforce needs, one million additional STEM-capable graduates will be needed in the next decade (PCAST 2012).

The question remains how to improve science education in order to increase student persistence and success. An emerging convergence of purpose and strategy among concerned scientists and educators is evident in several published reports. A decade ago, the landmark Bio2010 report called for more active learning approaches, greater emphasis on quantitative skills, and improved connections among biology, chemistry, and physics (National Research Council 2003). The 2011 Vision and Change report called on higher education institutions and scientific communities to support reforms that lead to the broad adoption of student-centered learning approaches, and that organize biology education around core concepts, competencies, and skills (AAAS 2011). In 2009, a joint committee of the Association of American Medical Colleges and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute was convened to define specific scientific competencies for medical education. The committee recommended that undergraduate science curricula support the development of scientific competencies for premedical students (AAMC-HHMI 2009). The recent PCAST report (2012) proposes broad changes to undergraduate science education, including specific
improvements in science instruction and the integration of research experiences for all science students. The recommendations made by these reports converge on three key points:

• Align what is taught with the leading edges of disciplinary knowledge and research.
• Develop learning objectives focused on conceptual understanding instead of content, and provide context for learners to develop skills and habits of mind that are required for disciplinary practice.
• Practice pedagogies and empirically tested instructional strategies that are based on research on how learners learn.

Improving teaching and learning in undergraduate science classrooms

So, what about undergraduate science instruction needs to change? The central critique is that lecture-based instruction, which is by far the most common mode of science instruction in our colleges and universities, does not effectively engage student interest or help students develop the conceptual understanding and skills they need. Current standards that inform instructional practice privilege the retention of content over the development of skills. Standard teaching practices in undergraduate classrooms emphasize didactic lectures delivered by faculty experts, often in large lecture halls that present challenges to implementing interactive engagement. The instructor’s role is to present large amounts of information in a way that is efficient for the presenter, but not necessarily effective for the learner. Since conceptual organization is performed by the instructor, students may not get the chance to practice this skill themselves, and they may not have many opportunities to develop additional skills beyond memorization.

This “teacher-centered” approach to science instruction emphasizes tasks in which learner success is based primarily on the instructor’s ability to organize and present information in ways that enable students to learn it. Students demonstrate their ability to access the content they have retained and to apply it in context-appropriate ways. Typical learning assessments rely on summative examinations that are heavy on the testing of content knowledge and light on the evaluation of analytical skills and higher-order activities, such as evaluation or synthesis. Effective formative assessments that could provide ongoing feedback about student progress are used infrequently or not at all. Yet, if students are to develop the skills and habits of mind appropriate to science, they must have opportunities to practice them, and they need to get feedback on their progress. How might standards for undergraduate science instruction be changed in order to help students develop the concepts and competencies needed for twenty-first-century science practice?

In contrast to the traditional teacher-centered classroom, a “learner-centered” context challenges students to organize knowledge and develop skills through forms of active engagement. A variety of active learning strategies have been shown to be effective in engaging students in both knowledge construction and skill development (AAAS 2011). Problem-based learning and case studies challenge students to apply their knowledge in order to solve problems or analyze data in the context of authentic scientific, environmental, or societal situations. Active learning approaches are optimally supported by the studio-style classroom. However, various strategies have been developed to incorporate active forms of learning into the traditional lecture-based classroom as well. Instructional and information technologies can be used to support “learning before lecture” approaches, which free up class time for students to engage in interactive exercises with instructor...
feedback (Moravec et al. 2010). Learner-centered teaching methods are now more commonly practiced by undergraduate science instructors, thanks, in part, to faculty development opportunities—such as those provided by the National Academies of Science Summer Institute, the American Society for Microbiology’s Biology Scholars Program, the National Science Foundation-sponsored Faculty Institutes for Reforming Science Education, and the American Association of Physics Teachers’ New Faculty Workshop. Yet, these research-validated approaches do not yet inform widespread institutional approaches to undergraduate science instruction. Thus, attention is now shifting to focus on the identification of barriers to the broad adoption of research-validated teaching approaches in undergraduate science education. Here, we focus on the assessment of student learning as a key lever for overcoming the stagnation in science learning and student success.

A brief history of assessment in science education

Over the last fifty years, the prevalent approach to assessment in science education has had a very particular form. The emphasis has been on tests designed to elicit brief, exact answers that focus on factual information in a format that requires the student to choose an answer from a set of options within a specified time frame (Klassen 2005). These tests are usually situated at the end of an educational time period (such as a semester) as final evaluations of knowledge acquisition. This approach to assessment reflects a definition of knowledge as comprised of small, static, and explicit pieces of information that can be acquired through memorization as discrete, decontextualized items organized in series and accumulated progressively. Learning is defined as the ability of the student to recall specific items of information at a given time. Historically, this understanding of learning is associated with behaviorist models that posit that knowledge should be divided into small pieces to be mastered individually and organized into a logical order of acquisition (Resnick and Resnick 1992).

Critiques of these concepts of knowledge and learning assessment have paralleled and informed the discourse on science education reform over the past two decades. The critiques focus on the limitations of traditional approaches in measuring conceptual understanding, higher-order thinking, the ability to perform novel tasks and solve problems, the ability to reason, the applicability of acquired knowledge, and the integration of information (Gardner 1992; O’Neill 1992; Reeves and Okey 1996; Resnick and Resnick 1992). The actual form of the test, with its emphasis on what are termed selected-response questions (e.g., multiple-choice questions) or short written answers to specific questions, dictates the types of knowledge that construct the test. But learning in science is not best understood as a decontextualized activity focused on the memorization of factual information organized in a linear progression; rather, like the generation of scientific knowledge itself, it is a creative, constructive process that builds upon the student’s prior understanding and evolves beyond what is explicitly taught (Glasersfeld 1990). This cognitive and constructivist approach characterizes the progression of learning in terms of an active, dynamic interaction between the student and the knowledge that is being taught. Students are not seen as passive recipients of established knowledge, but rather as active agents in the construction of their own knowledge.

With this shift in the characterization of learning, new approaches to assessment have emerged that aim to find ways of collecting data on the higher-order-thinking aspects of science activity. Authentic approaches to assessment allow science educators to capture the complexities of thinking and action that are inherent to science. Within these contexts, learning is defined as the ability to think and act like a science professional as demonstrated through actual science activity. These approaches encompass diverse knowledge types, such as those defined by Bloom et al. (1956) as a hierarchical taxonomy of levels of learning objectives (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation), by Miller (1990) as a pyramid of competence (knows, knows how, shows how, and does), and by Hanauer, Hatfull, and Jacobs-Sera (2009) as types of scientific knowledge (physical knowledge, representational knowledge, cognitive knowledge, and presentational knowledge).

A much broader range of potential learning objectives for science education can be addressed once the form of assessment is...
Changing. For instance, approaches such as performance assessment (the collection of data on the student’s ability to conduct various specified scientific tasks under test conditions) and portfolio assessment (the collection of a series of student products and documents from within the educational context over a period time) take a far more contextualized and naturalistic approach to the collection of data on student learning in science. These approaches provide evidence on how students actually conduct, apply, reason, and understand different aspects of scientific activity (Berenson and Carter 1995; Ruiz-Primo and Shavelson 1996). The basic principle of these forms of assessment is that they are closely related to the actual activities of science and try to model authentic, real-life aspects of being a scientist. This is a very different basis from which to consider evidence of learning outcomes from that produced by multiple-choice tests of factual knowledge recall.

Educational assessment attempts to gather information concerning student learning in terms of the acquisition of knowledge within a defined educational setting. At its core is a decision concerning the choice of assessment tools and the ability of those tools to collect data that is relevant to the types of knowledge and learning that the educational program aims to develop. Thus, the choice of assessment tools is not an educationally neutral choice to be based on historical or pragmatic reasons, but rather it must be informed by inherent understanding of the nature of knowledge and learning. It is this aspect of assessment that is ultimately crucial for deciding how assessment should be conducted in science education.

Reforming learning assessment in undergraduate science education

When learning objectives are refocused on the development of skills and conceptual understanding, a different instructional context supports student learning. In contrast to the traditional lecture in which the student’s role is limited to knowledge acquisition through listening, students are actively engaged in using information and practicing defined skills in a context that provides feedback to guide their progress. The role of the instructor shifts from lecturer to facilitator of student participation in activities that enable them to make progress toward defined learning objectives. Just as faculty must develop new instructional skills to support active learning in the science classroom, so too must they develop new capacity when it comes to the active assessment of student learning. In a “scientific teaching” approach, instructional practice both draws on evidence-based teaching methods and is informed by ongoing assessment of student learning.
progress. The instructor’s role in active learning assessment becomes central.

The direction of innovation and reform in science education is moving toward a student-centered learning paradigm that is organized around core concepts and competencies, and engaged through empirically supported instructional practices. What forms of assessment would support these educational aims? Several characteristics of a compatible assessment program may be considered:

- **Constructively Aligned Assessment.** A very basic requirement of any form of assessment is a close relationship between the choice of assessment tools and the desired learning outcomes of the educational program. The assessment program needs to yield systematic data that provide evidence that can be used to assess whether specific learning outcomes have been achieved.

- **Summative and Formative Assessment.** Any educational program geared toward student-centered learning must have both summative and formative assessment components so as to allow statements concerning final outcomes and an informed feedback loop for the student and instructor to emerge. While summative assessment necessarily defines the final status of student learning, ongoing formative assessment is also crucial, though often underutilized in science classrooms. Formative assessment provides feedback that enables individual students to improve their learning outcomes, as well as information that enables teachers to modify their instruction to affect student learning.

- **Assessment of a Range of Knowledge Types.** An educational program designed to develop understanding of core concepts and competencies in science will need to be able to assess a range of different knowledge types. By definition, competencies integrate knowledge of different types through their emphasis on the application of scientific knowledge within problem-solving settings. Accordingly, the assessment program needs to enable the collection of evidence on the different types of knowledge that are being developed through the educational program and on the integration of these knowledge types.

- **A Range of Assessment Tools.** In order systematically to assess the different types of knowledge involved in the teaching of core concepts and competencies, a range of assessment tools will be needed. Rather than thinking of assessment based on a single tool (such as a test), assessment should be thought of as a collection of different tools, each serving a specific purpose in the collection of evidence concerning student learning.

- **Ability to Address Higher-Order Thinking.** A central aspect of the revision of many science education programs is the aim to teach and facilitate those higher-order thinking skills that are crucial to the working life of the science professional. Accordingly, the most appropriate forms of assessment are those that capture evidence relating to the student’s ability to use higher-order thinking skills.

- **Ability to Address Real-World Contexts.** Science education ultimately aims to produce students who not only know science, but more importantly students who will go on to use this knowledge within real-world, professional settings. Accordingly, meaningful and authentic assessment should be able to make statements about the ability of a student to function in the real world while conducting professional tasks.

Forms of assessment determine the types of inferences that can be made concerning student learning and, more importantly, inform the design of the educational program itself. Both students and faculty are familiar with the notion that assessment parameters define the boundaries of what is to be learned. “Will this be on the test?” is a common refrain in undergraduate courses, and it reflects a succinct (and aggravating) student understanding of how knowledge is valued in a course. Furthermore, washback effects—the reverse engineering of an educational program to match the boundaries of a standardized, high-stakes test—mean that educational programs ultimately tend to transform themselves in order to model the type of learning and knowledge inherent in the test itself (Alderson and Wall 1993; Hamp-Lyons 1997). Thus, curricular reform is dependent on transitions in relation to assessment as well as instructional practice.

**Assessment development as a lever for reform**

There is broad consensus among stakeholders that undergraduate science education needs to be reformed in order to address student persistence and to help students develop the skills...
needed for twenty-first-century science practice. Improved instructional practices should enhance student-centered teaching, which is focused on the development of higher-order thinking skills through scientific inquiry, utilizes scientifically informed educational methods, and is organized around core concepts and competencies. Reforming undergraduate science education in this way involves the alignment of effective instructional practices with assessment methods that are appropriate to the objectives for student learning.

Several experiments in active assessment design are currently underway. For example, through the National Experiment in Undergraduate Science Education (NEXUS), a project of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, teams of university faculty are developing instructional approaches for interdisciplinary, competency-based curricula for premedical students. Through a collaborative approach, NEXUS teams are building capacity to develop learning assessments that are aligned with the goals of competency-based instruction. NEXUS faculty are also developing assessment programs that move beyond testing students’ knowledge of facts to formal assessments of their ability to analyze data, integrate information in interdisciplinary contexts, and design experimental approaches. The Pittsburgh Phage Hunters Integrating Research and Education (PHIRE) program is an innovative model in which students learn the process of scientific inquiry through participation in research in order to discover and characterize novel mycobacteriophages (Hanauer et al. 2006). Active assessment strategies are employed to evaluate the impact of this authentic science environment on student learning. Both NEXUS and PHIRE have integrated faculty development in assessment in order to support curricular reform.

Effective science teaching at the undergraduate level requires that faculty learn and adopt effective instructional practices as well as methods for the active assessment of student learning. Yet, formal training in learner-centered instruction and assessment is seldom part of the preparation science faculty receive prior to entering the undergraduate classroom. Faculty development in learning assessment can enhance the effectiveness of efforts to reform science education, and it is a crucial component of institutional capacity for science education reform.

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About Project Kaleidoscope

Since its founding in 1989, Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL) has been a leading advocate for building and sustaining strong undergraduate programs in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). With an extensive network of over seven thousand faculty members and administrators at over one thousand colleges, universities, and organizations, PKAL has developed far-reaching influence in shaping undergraduate STEM learning environments that attract and retain undergraduate students. PKAL accomplishes its work by engaging campus faculty and leaders in funded projects, national and regional meetings, community-building activities, leadership development programs, and publications that are focused on advancing what works in STEM education.

In 2008, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and PKAL announced a partnership to align and advance the work of both organizations in fostering meaningful twenty-first-century liberal education experiences for all undergraduate students, across all disciplines. This new partnership represents a natural progression, as nearly 75 percent of campuses with PKAL community members are also AAC&U members. Together, AAC&U and PKAL apply their collective expertise in undergraduate learning, assessment, leadership, and institutional change to accelerate the pace and reach of STEM transformation.

For more information, visit www.aacu.org/pkal.


WITH THE US UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AT 9 percent, it’s rational for college students to lose confidence in the liberal arts and to opt for a vocational major.

Or is it? There is a compelling economic case for the liberal arts. Against those who call for more professional training, liberal educators should concede nothing. However, we do have a responsibility to move the debate beyond narrow economic terms. Every argument for liberal education should be an illustration of liberal thinking.

Focusing on how liberal education is a pathway to success, we can also examine the very meaning of “success” and of the “liberal arts” themselves.

**Individual success stories**

When discussing with students the potential economic value of liberal education, spotlighting CEOs who majored in the liberal arts is a good icebreaker. Examples include Michael Dell, founder and CEO of Dell (biology); Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase (psychology and economics); Michael Eisner, CEO of the Walt Disney Company (English and theater); Carly Fiorina, former CEO of Hewlett-Packard (philosophy and medieval history); Sue Kronick, group president of Federated Department Stores (Asian history); Sam Palmisano, CEO of IBM (history), and Frederick W. Smith, founder and CEO of FedEx (economics). For students who think they need a business degree to be a CEO, the list can be an eye-opener. Of course, it’s also a flagrant instance of cherry-picking. It would be strange if crossing CEOs with liberal arts graduates did not yield a common subset. So we will find our best arguments by moving away from a list of all-stars and considering things from an aggregate viewpoint.

**What’s it worth?**

The most thorough study of majors in relation to earnings is *What's It Worth? The Economic Value of College Majors*, a report of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (Carnevale, Strohl, and Melton 2011). At first glance, it doesn’t look good for the liberal arts. The report puts them below most other groupings of majors. However, the rankings are based on the earnings of those with a terminal bachelor’s degree. Fortunately, the report also includes data on the percentage of graduates in each major who continue to an advanced degree, as well as calculations of the average earnings boost provided by graduate study for students within each major. With this information, one can create an alternative ranking of majors.

Consider my own discipline, history, in relation to marketing. The median income for those with a terminal bachelor’s degree in marketing is $58,000; terminal history majors rank lower, at $50,000. Yet, among the 171 majors compiled in the report, marketing is near the bottom in terms of the likelihood of graduate study (14 percent). This means that about half of history majors (the 46 percent who pursued graduate education) have a median income of $80,000, and are thus earning 60 percent more than the vast majority of marketing graduates (the 86 percent who did not pursue graduate education). It also means that the median income of all history majors (those who attended graduate school plus those who did not) is higher than that of all marketing majors, by about 5 percent.

The economic case for the liberal arts rests on the belief that while they don’t
in Liberal Education
necessarily track students directly into high-paying jobs, they do encourage lifelong learning and career versatility—qualities that pay off in the long run. In another recent study, Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses, Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa (2011a) suggest that many college students make little cumulative progress in developing their basic skills. Summarizing their own work in a symposium published in the journal Society, the authors underscore that liberal arts students were an exception to their findings: “We note that students majoring in traditional liberal-arts fields, including social science, humanities, natural science, and mathematics, demonstrated significantly higher gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills over time… Greater gains in liberal-arts fields are at least in part related to faculty requiring higher levels of reading and writing and students spending more time studying in these programs” (Arum and Roska 2011b, 205). If liberal arts students are more likely to improve while in college, and more likely than business and other professionally oriented students to pursue advanced study, then they are well equipped to adjust to ever-fluctuating economic circumstances. They are ideal candidates for any job that involves continuous learning.

Innovation versus vocation

In a presentation to the National Governors Association, Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates (2011) spoke of the need to support state university programs that are “well-correlated to areas that actually create jobs.” He suggested that government should reduce funding for programs that do not measure well by this vocational standard. Two days after Gates’s presentation, in which he made no reference to liberal education, Steve Jobs (2011) unveiled the iPad 2: “It’s in Apple’s DNA that technology alone is not enough—it’s technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the result that makes our heart sing, and nowhere is that more true than in these post-PC devices.”

Both Gates and Jobs are college dropouts, but they offer varying attitudes toward their college experiences. Gates took a variety of challenging courses in math and computer science at Harvard University but has not credited any of them with shaping his worldview. In contrast, Jobs, in his 2005 Stanford University commencement speech, reflected on how dropping out of Reid College allowed him to “drop in” to courses that changed his life. About a calligraphy course he audited at Reid, Jobs says that it was beautiful, historical, artistically subtle in a way that science can’t capture, and I found it fascinating. None of this had even a hope of any practical application in my life. But ten years later, when we were designing the first Macintosh computer, it all came back to me… It was the first computer with beautiful typography. If I had never dropped in on that single course in college, the Mac would have never had multiple typefaces or proportionally spaced fonts. And since Windows just copied the Mac, it’s likely that no personal computer would have them… You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future.

Connecting “backwards” contradicts the theory that one should choose a major as a component of financial planning. It puts intellectual absorption ahead of career selection, giving the pursuit of knowledge a more adventurous and ultimately more valuable edge. As Jobs says, there is an element of “trust” here: a faith that no social-scientific study can turn into a certainty. The situation can be likened to Pascal’s wager. What do we stand to lose in the future if we do not bet on the student’s versatility? Mounting pessimism toward liberal education could exacerbate our economic woes. There is a glaring risk that vocational education will not prepare young people to lift the country out of recession. If we lose confidence in liberal education while our global competitors, such as China, take increased pride in it, we stand to lose everything.

Rising Asian confidence

In Hong Kong, all universities are now converting from a three-year British model to a four-year American model. Instead of filling the extra year with additional specialized courses, they are emphasizing liberal and general education. Scott Jaschik of Inside Higher Ed recently elucidated the irony: “While many observers in the United States are calling for American higher education to become more vocational in orientation, the changes here
There is a glaring risk that vocational education will not prepare young people to lift the country out of recession.

[In Hong Kong] are motivated by a sense that students need more general education.

“Chinese University Scraps Exams to Boost Teaching of Classic Books” was a headline in the South China Morning Post (Yau 2011). It is uncanny and unsettling to see Asian leaders surpass us in their enthusiasm for liberal education, which they believe we created in America. In 2011, I visited Lingnan University in Hong Kong. Lingnan boasts that it is the only university in southern China entirely based on American liberal educational principles. The Lingnan curriculum requires students to take four specific courses: Logic and Critical Thinking, The Making of Hong Kong, Understanding Morality, and World History and Civilization. Students must also take seven general education electives in five areas (at least one in each area): Creativity and Innovation; Humanities and the Arts; Management and Society; Science, Technology, and Society; and Values, Cultures, and Societies.

The primary lesson from my Hong Kong trips was this: The replication of American liberal education is beginning to surpass, in the quality of curriculum and tone of assurance, the American model it copies. Witness former Lingnan President Edward Chen’s (2007a, 2007b) address on the aims of liberal education, which he delivered to incoming freshmen. Chen, a distinguished economic historian, is adept at explaining the relevance of liberal education for economic innovation. The challenge today is to achieve “economies of scope” versus “economies of scale.” The old economy is based on the “Ford model.” The new economy is the “GE model.” Liberal education is even more pertinent today than in the past because it encourages “intellectual flexibility,” “adaptability,” “continuous innovation,” and “multicultural knowledge.” Reviewing the principles underlying Lingnan’s liberal system, Chen declares, “We are the best!” And he concludes, “Be a confident person!”

The address is also exemplary because Chen does not stake his defense of liberal education entirely on economic outcomes. He speaks of the importance of “responsibility,” “insight,”
and “wisdom.” It is both stirring and disconcerting to observe Chen defend what he understands to be American values, with more grace and assurance than we generally find in our own universities.

The advent of liberal education in Hong Kong has fundamental implications for the United States. The first is that it could have an impact on China as a whole and threaten our reign as the quintessentially innovative nation. The official slogan to describe Hong Kong’s relationship to the mainland is “one country, two systems.” Yet, just as mainland China has created free economic zones, it could also begin to implement liberal education, if it perceives that the Hong Kong model is working well. Imagine the United States facing an economic competitor with a population of 1.3 billion, one that benefits from both a disciplined and inexpensive workforce and a momentous pool of college graduates with a liberal education and a confident and imaginative mindset.

**What are the liberal arts, after all?**
A second implication has to do with the very meaning of the liberal arts. Lingnan University integrates business and technology into its general education requirements for all students. In the United States, however, we have largely frozen the distinction between liberal and professional education. The Center for Education and the Workforce’s study of college majors does not even include the sciences in its definition of the liberal arts. It restricts the meaning of liberal arts to the humanities—history, English, philosophy, and so forth.

In antiquity, the liberal arts were oriented toward the “free” professions of politics and law, whereas productive labor was associated with slavery. With the abolition of slavery and the amplification of civil society in modern times, “liberty” now encompasses “commerce,” as Benjamin Constant (1988) brilliantly underscored in his 1819 speech “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns.” Yet, we still tend to segregate the liberal arts from the entrepreneurial arts, treating the former as the humanities, as aristocratically separated from practical activity—an ill-advised segregation.

It could well be argued that business and engineering have much in common with studio art and theater because both involve imagining, designing, and prototyping new creations. “By businesses, I mean any organization where people work, including startups,
small businesses, big businesses, government offices and agencies, hospitals, theaters, museums, temples, and churches,” writes Alex Hiam near the beginning of Business Innovation for Dummies (2010, 1). Hiam, who has a bachelor’s degree in anthropology from Harvard and an MBA from the University of California–Berkeley, uses the concept of innovation to build bridges between the liberal and business arts in his writings. Our university disciplines should do the same.

The liberal arts are the disciplines that memorialize and foster inventive action, both through their subject matter and their teaching methods. It is absurd to exclude engineering and business, which are imaginative and decision-making activities. Conversely, it may be time to question whether some of the methodologies in the humanities and sciences are truly liberal. When a methodology focuses on what the mass of people are conditioned to do and not what creative people can do, it is not liberal. The opposite of liberal is not professional but deterministic. Academic claims that humans are shaped by gender, race, class, discourse, power, neurochemistry, genetics, sibling birth order, etc. are illiberal—unless the epistemology of causality yields to the epistemology of creativity. This is to say that the knowledge of how we are constrained must morph into a consciousness of how we can use that knowledge to transform ourselves and positively influence the world.

Liberal education is the whole educational arena in which knowledge is manifest for the transformation, not merely the description, of our nature. The philosopher Richard McKeon (1998) stated that the liberal arts highlight the interaction of humans as “self-perfecting intelligences.” Human nature is continuously affected by our decisions about how to study it. As McKeon observed, liberal education is not a one-way process in which we look at a formed subject matter, the human species. It is a “reflexive” process in which the nature of humanity is formed by the study of humanity.

The liberal arts seek to engender persons who are inspired by past achievements and are confident of their creative potential. These are persons who will be successful, who will fashion value of different kinds—commercial, political, artistic, spiritual—up and down the income ladder. The liberal disciplines are not vocational, and they are not the humanities narrowly defined. They are the arts that remind us of the deeds of free human beings and the arts that make us free.

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In 1990, David Breneman asked the provocative question, are we losing our liberal arts colleges? More than twenty years later, it is time to ask Breneman’s question again: in 2012, what is the position of liberal arts colleges in the landscape of American higher education?

The liberal arts college, a distinctively American institution, has been a core element of the US higher education system since the colonial era. Historically, its defining attributes have included a curriculum based primarily in arts and science fields; small classes and close student-faculty relationships; full-time study and student residence on campus; and little emphasis on vocational preparation or study in professional fields. At its best, the liberal arts college has provided a distinct and highly valued model of undergraduate education. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 596), for example, noted that the “supportive social-psychological context” that promotes institutional impact on students is characteristic of many liberal arts colleges. These attributes include “a strong emphasis on teaching and student development, a common valuing of the life of the mind, small size, a shared intellectual experience, high academic expectations, and frequent interactions inside and outside the classroom between students and faculty” (Pascarella et al. 2005, 12).

Other researchers have identified valuable attributes of liberal arts colleges. Astin (2000) reported that liberal arts college students, as compared to peers in other types of colleges and universities, reported higher satisfaction with teaching and general education programs. Hu and Kuh (2002) learned that students in liberal arts colleges tend to be more engaged in their college experience, as compared to their counterparts in research universities and larger, more comprehensive colleges. Collectively, this research evidence supports the belief that liberal arts colleges provide a distinctive and highly beneficial form of undergraduate education.

However, Breneman’s (1990) research showed that many liberal arts colleges were gradually evolving into career-oriented “professional colleges” where a large percentage of students major in professional fields (e.g., business, nursing, allied health) rather than arts and science disciplines (e.g., English, history, chemistry). The consequences of this academic evolution for the mission and intellectual coherence of the liberal arts college were among Breneman’s chief concerns.

The challenges for liberal arts colleges
Many powerful threats to the liberal arts college have been active in recent years. These include the cost of residential education; competition from new education providers, including online and for-profit educational programs; and a job market in transition to a knowledge and service-based economy. Another threat is posed by vocationally oriented students who are more concerned about being well off financially than with such common liberal arts goals as developing a meaningful philosophy of life or helping promote tolerance and understanding among diverse groups (Liu, Sharkness, and Pryor 2008). Many of these challenges are at work throughout higher education, and responding effectively to them is a concern across all types of colleges and universities. However, Breneman’s (1990) research indicated that liberal arts colleges may be disproportionately affected by the changing educational environment, and indeed that the
very existence of this educational model may be at stake.

The diversity of US higher education is widely regarded as one of its strengths. At the same time, the hierarchy of institutional prestige and the dominance of the research university model plus growing competitive pressures push higher education institutions to emulate the practices of more prestigious and more vocationally oriented institutions. If liberal arts colleges move more closely to the career-focused mission of comprehensive universities and community colleges or closer to the research mission of elite universities, then the system may lose an important educational option that historically has served many students and the larger society very well. As a consequence, US higher education may become less flexible and less able to meet the educational needs of an increasingly pluralistic society.

Many liberal arts colleges (e.g., Antioch, Reed, Colorado, St. John’s) have been sources of innovation in undergraduate education. Due to their small size, emphasis on undergraduate education, and private control, they have been free to experiment with alternative curricula and pedagogies, unencumbered by the influence of powerful practitioner groups or the fixed requirements of professional licensure. If the liberal arts college as an educational alternative dies out or morphs into another type of higher education institution, an influential “test kitchen” for innovation in undergraduate education will disappear or, perhaps, become too peripheral to play a leadership role.

In recent years, many liberal arts colleges have worked to update their educational strategies in order to remain competitive in an aggressive market for new students. While continuing to value the traditional goals of a liberal arts education, such as “breadth of awareness and appreciation, clarity and precision of thought and communication, critical
analysis, honing of moral and ethical sensibilities” (Shoenberg 2009, 56), many liberal arts colleges have experimented with ways to adapt their educational model and to connect it more directly with the world beyond campus and with career opportunities. Freeland (2009) described a challenge to the version of liberal education that is based predominantly in arts and sciences fields, which has been the defining version for many educators and college students since the early years of the twentieth century. More recently, many liberal arts colleges have chosen to supplement traditional classroom learning strategies and exclusively arts and sciences–based curricula with more vocationally oriented fields and associated experiential learning opportunities. Examples of these activities include off-campus work placements related to students’ career interests, service learning, undergraduate research, and study abroad aimed to broaden the educational experience (Freeland 2009) and connect it more explicitly to life beyond campus.

Our review of relevant literature has revealed a historical trend toward more professional education and less study of traditional liberal arts fields throughout American higher education. Delucchi (1997, 414) reported that “the curricular trend in higher education since about 1970 has been toward studies related to work… Enrollment concerns in recent years have compelled many liberal arts colleges to abandon or sharply scale back their arts and sciences curriculum in order to accommodate student preoccupation with the immediate job market.” As Breneman (1990) documented, many traditional liberal arts colleges have added programs in professional fields in order to attract vocationally oriented students. Delucchi argued that many of these colleges may have passed the tipping point at which they relinquish their liberal arts college roots and become a different type of institution. While these transformed colleges may work to maintain the “liberal arts” college myth, Delucchi contends, “the retention of a liberal arts claim in the academic mission statement of these colleges becomes inconsistent with their professional curriculum” (1997, 414–15). Consistent with the findings of Brint et al. (2005) and Morphew and Hartley (2006), many colleges may seek to maintain legitimacy with key constituents by emphasizing traditional liberal arts education in their mission statements and some curricular offerings. In reality, however, they may gradually be altering their curricular emphasis and institutional purpose.

In a time of transition, it is important to determine whether liberal arts institutions have adapted their academic programs and pedagogies while preserving their core educational mission. Alternatively, are they becoming a different type of higher education institution altogether? Are we witnessing the gradual demise of the liberal arts college? Or, are we merely seeing a normal evolutionary response that may lead to new or perhaps alternative (e.g., hybrid) models of a liberal arts college education?

**Are we losing our liberal arts colleges? (2.0)**

In order to understand the current state of the liberal arts college and the role it now plays in American higher education, we replicated Breneman’s 1990 study. We employed Breneman’s methodology for classifying liberal arts colleges. We included Liberal Arts I (now Baccalaureate Arts and Sciences, as defined by the Carnegie Foundation) and Liberal Arts II (now Baccalaureate Diverse Fields, as defined by Carnegie) institutions. Liberal Arts I institutions award more than half their undergraduate degrees in the arts and sciences. Liberal Arts II institutions are less selective and award less than half of their degrees in arts and sciences, but are too small to be categorized as comprehensive colleges as defined by the Carnegie classification system that Breneman used. When categorizing institutions as Liberal Arts I institutions, we removed any liberal arts college that was a mini-university or a “liberal arts plus,” as described by Breneman (1990). These institutions offer an array of graduate programs, sometimes including law and even doctoral programs. When classifying Liberal Arts II institutions, we used Breneman’s 60 percent rule, meaning that any institution that awarded 60 percent or more of its degrees in professional fields was removed from the list of liberal arts colleges entirely.

We used data from the Integrated Post-Secondary Educational Survey to calculate the percentage of professional degrees awarded. We used Breneman’s (1990) published results as a baseline to assess changes among liberal arts colleges over the past twenty years. We collected figures from the
Our findings confirm a continuing drift away from the traditional arts and sciences-based model of a liberal arts college education.

The answer to the second question is less clear. Our research revealed that, while many colleges still meet Breneman’s classification criteria, many others are no longer categorized as liberal arts colleges. Moreover, within the latter group of institutions, we saw three patterns that indicate continuing evolution. As expected, we saw a number of institutions increase the number of degrees awarded in professional fields. We also saw a smaller number of institutions experience no change in the percentage of professional degrees awarded. However, our research also revealed that, for a subset of institutions, the percentage of professional degrees awarded actually decreased, which was unexpected.

Of the eighty-two institutions that are no longer classified as liberal arts colleges today, we saw some noteworthy trends. We identified a handful of institutions that were subsumed by other, larger institutions. Hawaii Loa College is now part of Hawaii Pacific University, for example. Michigan State University

What is the current status of the liberal arts college?

Our study focused on two primary questions: Have liberal arts colleges continued the trend away from their historical emphasis on arts and science disciplines? Are liberal arts colleges disappearing from the higher education landscape, or are they redefining what it means to be a liberal arts college in the twenty-first century? Our findings enabled us to answer the first question quite definitively. However, the answer to the second key question is less certain.

Based on the classification criteria that Breneman described over twenty years ago, the answer to the first question is yes. As stated previously, Breneman (1990, 1994) found that 212 institutions met the criteria for classification as true liberal arts colleges. Our current findings show that only 130 institutions meet Breneman’s classification criteria. Although many one-time liberal arts colleges
example, and Barat College is now part of DePaul University. This type of change was largely due to fiscal challenges and the threat of closure. We also saw thirty-six institutions change their mission dramatically, a phenomenon referred to as mission creep or upward drift, which is defined as “the tendency of institutions to introduce higher-level programs” (Aldersley 1995, 51). For example, Goddard College in Vermont and Mary Baldwin College in Virginia are now classified as Master’s Universities. While the reasons for these changes are not easily identified (e.g., via institutional websites), some former liberal arts colleges obviously consider it desirable to move toward the model of a more comprehensive institution offering a broader range of academic programs.

Research on curricular changes among liberal arts colleges has revealed “a significant increase in [curricular] heterogeneity” (Kraatz and Zajac 1996, 83) resulting in adjustments that compete with the “traditional” mission of the liberal arts college. Our research confirms that these changes are still occurring. The challenging conditions that are buffetting liberal arts colleges are leading to varied responses, depending on each institution’s context and resource base (Kraatz and Zajac 2001). Although we documented a strong general trend toward more professional program offerings, there is also evidence that colleges are developing ad hoc responses consistent with their unique circumstances.

Many liberal arts institutions are gradually transforming their mission and programs but continue to define themselves as liberal arts colleges. They do this in spite of the fact that the liberal arts label, as Mophew and Hartley (2006) found, is less precise and meaningful than it once was. Given our research findings and the questions concerning the status of liberal arts colleges that remain unanswered, we hypothesize that there may no longer be one dominant model of liberal arts college education. Instead, we may be seeing the emergence of multiple ways to achieve a liberal arts college education that are driven by a variety of factors, both external and internal to this sector of higher education. As this evolution continues, an obscured liberal arts college identity may become problematic for prospective students, recruiters, and educators.

**Conclusion**

The question of the current condition and future prospects of the liberal arts college is complex and engenders vigorous debate among stakeholders who represent different perspectives. Writing in an issue of Daedalus devoted exclusively to the liberal arts college, Neely (1999) painted a worrisome scenario according to which second-tier liberal arts colleges become more like small comprehensive colleges and universities as they continue to add vocational programs. In contrast, he envisioned the well-endowed elite liberal arts colleges as potentially becoming an educational anachronism, centers of economic privilege too few in number and too isolated to influence higher education in general. Neely’s picture may be the worst-case scenario, but nonetheless it describes a phenomenon that is well underway. On the other hand, Spellman argues that liberal arts colleges have always adapted to the demands of their time and continue to do so today. In his view, the essence of the liberal arts college “is about small class size, close faculty-student interaction, an innovative and interdisciplinary common core in the arts and sciences, undergraduate research experiences, senior capstone projects, service learning and community engagement, and a rich and diverse co-curricular life” (2009, 1). Spellman, who has little concern about the growth of professional programs at liberal arts colleges, may be describing a new paradigm of liberal arts college education that is broader and more flexible than the old standard.

Throughout the history of American higher education, liberal arts colleges have played an influential role. Breneman’s research alerted the higher education community to a major transformation that is underway in the liberal arts college sector. For quite some time, a competitive market, students’ growing vocational orientation, and precarious finances have been eroding the clear purpose of liberal arts colleges (Neely 1999). Some liberal arts colleges have transformed themselves into “research colleges” in order to attract students and faculty who value the mission of the
research university. Other colleges have become “professional colleges,” implementing more academic programs in professional fields in order to compete for students who see higher education primarily as a path to a career and financial success. Some appear to have integrated liberal and professional education intentionally and crafted a new model of liberal arts college education. As this process has unfolded, the focused mission of the liberal arts college has expanded and become more diffuse, which has led to less consensus on what a liberal arts college is or what type of education it delivers.

The trend Breneman first pointed out more than twenty years ago is continuing. Some liberal arts colleges are disappearing, while others are changing their curricular focus and approach to undergraduate education. An increasingly smaller number of these institutions have been able to maintain a dominant arts and sciences emphasis in their curricula. Liberal arts colleges have played an important role in US higher education in spite of their small size and the percentage of students they enroll. The influence of this sector may be diminishing, however, as their numbers decrease and their educational focus becomes less clear.

American higher education will be diminished if the number of liberal arts colleges continues to decline. We urge academic leaders, foundations officials, and public policy makers to take note of the trend David Breneman brought to our attention two decades ago. We encourage these leaders to take steps to renew and reinvigorate these valuable institutions before liberal arts colleges disappear from the higher education landscape or shrink to the status of a minor educational enclave that serves only the academic and socioeconomic elite.

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Despite research showing the broad impact that the study of foreign languages has on the cognitive development of young people (Armstrong and Rogers 1997), and despite the importance of language expertise for America’s economic and geopolitical interests in the twenty-first century, the teaching of world languages has been marginalized within the American educational system at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. The evidence for the marginalization of world language instruction is abundant, from the exclusion of world languages from learning outcomes assessment in the context of No Child Left Behind to the removal of foreign language requirements from general education programs and the elimination of world language programs from college and university curricula in response to the budgetary challenges of the past few years.

It is possible that the marginalization of world language instruction is a product of the pervasive advertising of products that promise to deliver fluency in a box, suggesting that the purchaser of one or another CD series will be able to “speak Spanish like a diplomat” or “woo an Italian model” with only minimal effort. The success of such advertising—in in-flight magazines, for example—lends support to the notion that one can simply “pick up” a language, despite the fact that we generally don’t expect people to “pick up” other performative skills, such as playing basketball or playing the piano, without substantial practice and coaching. The impact of the marketing may be reflected in the decisions of some school boards to replace live world language teachers with site licenses for commercially produced foreign language software (see, for example, Rundquist 2010). A similarly pernicious trend obtains in the postsecondary context, where world language programs are simply eliminated (without the benefit of site licenses), as has been observed at institutions such as the University of Albany or Louisiana State University. Although some universities believe they (and their students) can do without language expertise, our economy and our national government clearly cannot do without it.

The trend to eliminate or outsource world language instruction comes at a time when the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has established, through its Proficiency Guidelines and Standards for Foreign Language Learning, both performance benchmarks for the assessment of learning outcomes and guidelines for curricula development—achievements not observed in some other academic disciplines that are considered more “mission central” by many institutions. In Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, the National Standards for Foreign Language Education Project (2006) presents a set of standards that constitute a remarkably accurate reflection of the Essential Learning Outcomes established through the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2007). The ACTFL standards identify the following five content areas for foreign language study, called “the five Cs”: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. Each of these areas of focus for the world languages curriculum correlates with the LEAP goals, as described below.

The five Cs and the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes

With regard to second-language communication skills, students in the world languages classroom must develop interactive and presentational speaking skills, interpretative skills in listening and reading, as well as...
writing skills in the target language (i.e., the language students are studying). The development of these skills has a significant impact on the improvement of communication skills in the students’ native language, as described by Cunningham and Graham (2000), for example. Indeed, research on the effect of advanced foreign language instruction shows students’ awareness of a direct correlation between their study of rhetoric in a foreign language and their use of rhetoric in speech and writing in English (Rifkin 2000). Thus, world language instruction that is focused on communication skills also directly relates to the development of students’ written and oral communication skills, one of the “Intellectual and Practical Skills” included among the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes.

Students’ communication skills cannot be developed in a vacuum within the foreign language curriculum. Indeed, students must develop cultural competence in order to use language sensitively and to understand the practices, perspectives, and products of the people whose language they are studying. This, of course, is a near paraphrase of the LEAP focus on “Personal and Social Responsibility,” which calls for the development of intercultural knowledge and competence. Study abroad, preferably for a semester or an academic year, would certainly constitute the culmination of this kind of work. It is not surprising that study abroad is identified as one of the most transformative experiences of undergraduate education and is, therefore, identified by Kuh (2008) as a “high-impact” educational practice. Indeed, a study published by the American Psychological Association (Maddux and Galinsky 2009) suggests that students who participate in study abroad demonstrate remarkably strong performances on tests of creative thinking, yet another of the LEAP “Intellectual and Practical Skills.”

The National Standards for Foreign Language Education Project uses the term “Connections” to refer to the student’s use of the target language “to reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines.” Students should “acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints . . . available [only] through the foreign language and its cultures” (2006, 9). This is a critically important approach to the teaching of world languages because it establishes the value of using the language to enhance inquiry and to exercise critical and creative thinking, goals also identified in the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes. The category of “Connections” also seeks to foster integrative learning, yet another LEAP outcome, by combining work in the humanities with work in other disciplines—most commonly in the social sciences and the arts, although the
potential for work in mathematics and the sciences through foreign languages is just as important, if not as frequently realized. One of the best examples of just such a powerful combination is the International Engineering Program at the University of Rhode Island (see www.uri.edu/iep), which combines the study of engineering and language with study abroad. For most students, the exploration of these other disciplines through the target language is achieved through the use of the Internet, requiring nuanced information literacy skills for the assessment of the quality of information accessed.

The category of “Comparisons” provides students with opportunities to learn about the nature of language itself by comparing their native or base language with the target language, and by comparing their own culture with the cultures where the target language is spoken. Work in this area enhances both communication skills and intercultural knowledge, and it provides students with a foundation for practices associated with the area of civic responsibility and engagement on a global scale, as I will explain in the next category.

In the “Communities” category, students are required to use the target language not only in educational settings, but also beyond them. A mere thirty years ago, foreign language communities existed largely in physical spaces beyond the political borders of our country. Today, students connect with target-language communities in their own cities here in North America, with thriving neighborhoods where the lingua franca may be Chinese, Creole, Hindi, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian, Urdu, or Vietnamese. Indeed, some institutions are creating service-learning opportunities, sometimes embedded in courses for academic credit, for students to visit target-native speakers in ethnic communities, sometimes newly arrived immigrants. The students help with important tasks—tutoring for citizenship testing, opening a bank account, getting a library card—or they interview target-native speakers in elder care communities and listen to their life stories. For students for whom such communities are not conveniently located, there are communities of target-language speakers as nearby as the closest Internet connection: students can access target-language media, social media, and gaming communities at the click of a mouse.

Study abroad remains the most important instantiation, sine qua non, of community engagement. But these other opportunities constitute an important bridge for students planning a study abroad experience in the future and for students looking to maintain language and cultural skills (and relationships) after their return from study abroad. In connecting with native speakers in both physical and virtual communities, students experience integrative learning, develop intercultural competence, and become lifelong learners who use the language to learn about the world around them. Moreover, more and more study abroad providers are developing service-learning opportunities for their students, such as helping build homes in China or working to clean up national parks in Costa Rica.

Integrating world language curricula
Given the close relationship between the Standards for Foreign Language Learning and the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes, it may be surprising to some that many world language programs represent endangered species in both K-12 and postsecondary education. An underlying cause of the lack of support for world language instruction may well be the fact that most graduate programs in foreign languages and literatures focus on the training of graduate students in the area of literature, rather than in a more broadly defined cultural studies paradigm. As documented in the report from the Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages (2007), postsecondary foreign language programs tend to have two classes of “citizens”: tenure-stream faculty with power and status who teach upper-level courses in literature, and part-time faculty without power and status who teach lower-division language courses. In many universities, the disconnect between these two classes of
instructors and between the two parts of the curriculum they teach creates a situation in which world language programs may have few majors, few alumni supporters, few faculty colleagues in other departments, and few employers interested in hiring graduates whose foreign-language expertise is narrowly literary. Indeed, in some institutions, nonmajors choose to study a foreign language and to participate in study abroad in order to attain language skills and to use them in a context other than the interpretation of literary texts.

On the other hand, world language faculty who conceptualize their courses as a curriculum, and build into that curriculum projects that engage students in the study of the world through the target language, will undoubtedly attract the support of students interested in the major. They will also attract the support of colleagues in other departments who are happy to participate in a foreign language across the curriculum project, as well as the support of employers who seek to hire students with language expertise. For example, students in a first-year foreign language class could work together in teams to develop a Wiki, in English, on a topic of interest, such as the economy or environmental problems in the culture they are studying. In the following year, to demonstrate the development of their foreign language skills, they could create a new bilingual Wiki, with some text in English and some in the target language. In the third year, the students could create yet another Wiki, this time entirely in the target language, flexing their linguistic muscles as they work together to integrate their reading and writing, using the target language to learn about the cultural perspectives, practices, and products of native speakers, and comparing those perspectives, practices, and products to those they observe in the United States. In the fourth year, they could again create a Wiki and connect with native speakers of the target language through social media (e.g., target-culture versions of Facebook) or through gaming environments (such as SecondLife or World of Warcraft).

Such an approach to world language instruction reflects LEAP’s focus on providing increasingly more sophisticated learning challenges, while integrating the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes and the Standards for Foreign Language Learning. The redesign of world language curricula in accordance with the vision for postsecondary education reflected in both the Standards and LEAP can only strengthen the place of world language instruction in America’s colleges and universities, enhance the lives and postgraduate livelihood of our students, and support our nation’s economic and geopolitical interests.

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Ethical Drift

ROBERT J. STERNBERG

What can one do to discourage ethical drift in colleagues, students, or even oneself?

In *Lifeboat*, the film by Alfred Hitchcock, several marooned individuals who have survived the wrecks of their two ships find themselves adrift in the middle of the ocean. Their meager supplies soon begin to run out, and as they do, the drifting of their lifeboat becomes a metaphor for the drifting of their ethical standards. Within less time than one might have imagined, the survivors are acting in ways none of them ever would have thought possible.

Ethical drift is the gradual ebbing of standards that can occur in an individual, a group, or an organization as a result of environmental pressures. It often occurs insidiously, and even without conscious awareness. Just as a boat adrift in the midst of the ocean can travel long distances without any visible change in its location, so too can ethical drift occur without people realizing that they have changed (usually for the worse) their ethical standards.

One who is adrift at sea will eventually become aware that he or she has drifted, because the constellations, which are fixed in positions, will appear to have moved. But it can take a while to realize that the constellations seem to be in different places, and by that time, one may have forgotten where they originally had seemed to be. Similarly, when ethical drift occurs, one typically realizes it only after a great while, and by then one may have lost one’s original bearings.

The biggest challenge of ethical drift is that, because it typically is insidious, people are not even aware it is happening. They may believe that they are adhering to the same ethical standards they had before. Or, by the time they realize that their standards have changed, it may be too late. We often assume that people who act unethically simply decide to behave in a way that they or anyone else can see is clearly wrong. Frequently, however, such people have experienced ethical drift; their frame of reference has changed so gradually that they are not even aware that they are behaving unethically. Others may be appalled by their actions—except those who have drifted along with them.

Students, for example, may begin by lifting a few words from materials gathered from the Internet, and gradually progress to sentences, paragraphs, and then major parts of, or even whole papers. The process is much more insidious than when students merely decide to “buy” a paper from a paper-writing mill. The students may not even be aware the process has taken place—although, of course, they should be.

I once talked to an individual who had gone from working in one organization (a university) to another (a consulting company). He described to me in some detail the unethical practices of the firm. I asked him why he did not leave. He replied that the down-drift in ethics had occurred over a long period of time, or at least he had become aware of it only over an extended period of time. Had he realized it at once, he would have left, but the process had been so slow that he had not even been aware it was taking place. At that point, he felt he would have

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trouble finding another job, and had himself become somewhat ethically compromised.

Such drift can happen in many contexts, of course. The quality of intimate relationships can decline, as can the quality of life in a particular home or town. What is potentially different about ethical drift is how it eats away at one’s humanity and leaves one caught in a situation that can be not only ethically compromising, but also potentially legally dangerous.

Environmental forces
Ethical drift is provoked by at least four environmental forces. First, it typically occurs when there is intense competition for resources, as on the lifeboat. Second, people start to feel that they are in a zero-sum game, often with relatively meager rewards—again, as characterized by the lifeboat scenario. Third, people perceive, or think they perceive, others acting in ways that are ethically compromised, as Hitchcock’s characters saw each other acting in more and more ethically challenged ways. Sometimes, when individuals or organizations compete, team members actually may encourage an individual to act in ethically compromised ways. Finally, people may see no other viable way out of the quandary; they feel they cannot just leave the situation—as in the lifeboat scenario, where exit from the boat meant almost certain death.

When we teach students ethical reasoning and behavior, we need to make them aware of the challenges of ethical drift. People who experience it had often started out acting according to ethical principles and may not realize that they have drifted into behavior that no longer upholds the ethical standards they originally set for themselves. For example, students may start off by setting high standards for themselves in writing papers but, after observing others lift material from the Internet without attribution, may start doing so themselves, with the amounts of material lifted increasing from one assignment to the next. Or a scientist may start “cleaning” data and proceed to “massaging” and then to “falsifying” it. Or a college administrator may exchange a home renovation for a vendor contract at his college, thinking that’s what others do, so why shouldn’t he?

If one looks at people who have committed serious transgressions, one often finds that they started out just like anyone else. Consider, for example, two notorious bank employees. Jerome Kerviel at the Societe General and Kweku Adoboli at UBS, from what the records show, started off as honest but aggressive traders. They made bets that went wrong. They tried to recoup the money they lost, at first, through legal activity, then through activity that went beyond the bounds of legality and ethicality. In the end their behavior became egregious, and they were caught. They experienced an intense competition for resources as a zero-sum game: they were either making money or losing it. They were acting in banking cultures that encouraged aggressive risk taking and even going beyond the bounds so long as the actors did not get caught. In the end, they saw no way out of their quandary.
except to recoup their losses illegally, although of course they could have turned themselves in, possibly losing their jobs but not exposing themselves to the possibility of prison terms. Perhaps the most critical element was the organizational culture of ethical drift, one that held it is all right to shave a little here, a little there, so long as appearances are maintained and the ends are alleged (falsely) to justify the means.

People who experience ethical drift usually do not tell themselves and others, “How unethical am I!” Rather, in order to maintain an ethical image of themselves (false though that image may be) they tend to resort to rationalizations: “It was God’s will.” “I was forced to do it; I had no choice.” “It was either me or him/her.” “They got what they deserved.” “He/she was not really human in any case.” “I did it for the good of the organization.” “It was the right thing to do under the circumstances.” “It was strictly a business decision.” “I did it for his/her own good.” “No one’s perfect; God has forgiven me, and you should too.” “It felt like the right thing at the time.”

It might seem easy to avoid ethical drift; you have simply to be true to your original ethical standards. But that is easier said than done—first, because one often is not aware of one’s own drifting and, second, because there often is a cost to acting in an ethical way. For example, if a student observes his roommate copying text verbatim from the Internet without attribution, he may know at some level that he should say or do something. But what? And even if he does something in response, he risks losing not only the friendship of his roommate, but the friendships of others in his social circle. Indeed, he risks being ostracized completely. How much easier it is to drift into a “live and let live” attitude toward others, and then to demand that others take that attitude toward oneself as one’s ethics drift downward.

**Discouraging ethical drift**

What can one do to discourage ethical drift in colleagues, students, or even oneself? First, an organization needs to recognize and warn its members of the phenomenon of ethical drift. Second, there needs to be a culture of no tolerance for ethical drift. Third, actors need to be warned to be vigilant for ethical drift in themselves and others. Fourth, mechanisms must be available to identify ethical drift when it occurs—such as curbs on illegal trading, in the case of banks, or services such as Turnitin, which detects plagiarism, in the case of colleges and universities. Finally, those who are caught drifting beyond permissible bounds must be quickly, visibly, and appropriately punished. At Oklahoma State University, for example, students are taught from day one that ethical practice and leadership are the core of our land-grant mission. For those who take another path, we use a grade of “F!” to indicate dishonesty, as distinguished from a grade merely of “F” for a failure.

Ultimately, the greatest protection against ethical drift is wisdom—recognizing that, in the end, people benefit most when they act for the common good. Wisdom is the ultimate lifeboat.

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