

# Liberal Education

VOL. 99, NO. 3 ♦ SUMMER 2013

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



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# Liberal Education

VOL. 99, NO. 3 • SUMMER 2013

## THE ANNUAL MEETING

***Engaged diversity for worldly wisdom is the first liberal art, because engaged diversity is the wellspring of worldly wisdom***

—JOHNNELLA E. BUTLER

♦ ♦ ♦

FROM 1818 R STREET, NW

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# Defunding Disciplines Basic to Democracy

CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER AND DAVID TOWNSEND

THERE WOULD BE NO AMERICA if Thomas Jefferson cared more about beans and viticulture than the truth that all men are created equal, if John Adams cared more about the legality of contracts for debt than liberty, if Benjamin Franklin cared more about inventing and marketing new technologies than the pursuit of happiness. America arose on a foundation of ideas, dialogue, values, and aspirations that still stand today at the heart of a strong liberal—and liberating—education.

America is an idea, not just a land or an institution. America is not based, as many countries are, on territory, language, religious sectarianism, class, ethnic history, tribal dominance, blood, or culture. Our founders read carefully and thought deeply about ideas of freedom, equality, justice, and democracy. And so should all Americans, through studies in the humanities and arts.

Yet many Americans seem not to be thinking at all about the need for dedicated liberal

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

education in order to preserve, protect, and advance America's courageous experiment. Too

many leaders—on all parts of the political spectrum—think technical training and job skills are the way to prosperity and security. They are dismissive of the potential power of engaging diverse ideas and thinking through deep immersion in the arts and humanities. Their theory seems to be that we can be successful in the pursuit of happiness, economic justice, and entrepreneurial prosperity without the necessity of thinking and imagining—that we no longer need to examine ideas and values, but only economic results and graduates' financial “return on investment.”

And so we see everywhere the present relentless dismissal and marginalization of the humanities and arts—fundamental fields of study that, by any thoughtful reckoning, provide indispensable resources for enduring prosperity and strong, democratic republics.

These developments are crippling. As Thomas Jefferson warned, “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.” He knew—and we need to recognize—that studies in the arts and humanities, across both school and college, help secure the future of freedom by fostering capacities essential to self-governance.

Read *The Federalist Papers* and you will understand that politics is the resolution of legitimate conflicting interests, and that the goal of governing is to mitigate the violence of factions formed against the common good and the rights of individuals. Questions about these topics abound in our society (and every society). The leaking of the National Security Agency's glut of information about Americans invites a deep discussion of liberty and security in a democratic republic that knows itself to be at risk from enemies. The fevered questions surrounding the death of Trayvon Martin and the prosecution of George Zimmerman take us back to core questions of justice, liberty, and community. Yet when we lack the preparation to talk about serious problems and events as our founders could, the deliberations necessary to self-governance too readily devolve into rants and factions.

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A new proposal to further deplete the humanities and arts has arrived with fresh and startling evidence that studies our founders saw as fundamental now are considered expendable. The US House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations recommends that federal funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities be reduced by 49 percent in fiscal year 2014. The committee recommends a comparable slashing for the National Endowment for the Arts. In its report to accompany the budget resolution for fiscal year 2014, the House Committee on the Budget states that federal subsidies for NEH and NEA (and other public programs) “can no longer be justified” because “the activities and content they fund are generally enjoyed by people of higher income levels, making them a wealth transfer from poorer to wealthier citizens.”

This conclusion that the arts and humanities are luxuries for those with disposable income misunderstands fundamentally the life of a democratic republic that derives its strength from ideas and values more powerful than factions based on differences in wealth and class. Democracy requires the muscle of ideas and values that we learn to flex in grappling with core texts in the humanities and arts—our greatest ally in the pursuit of economic and social justice. A liberal education rich in such studies empowers citizens to lead change and solve problems collaboratively and imaginatively with people whose perspectives, histories, and worldviews may be very different from their own. Democracy and a creative economy depend on these capabilities and falter when they are lacking.

The contemporary dismissal of the humanities and arts weakens America domestically and also undermines brave people globally seeking to build effective self-governing republics based on the consent of the people. Those serious about these goals understand that the ideas of democracy and liberty are stronger than militaries or disbursals of cash. Free societies will not be achieved by technocratic means without a foundation in ideas and values. The humanities and arts are disciplines “basic to democracy” because, while all learning is important to civic inquiry and vitality, the humanities and arts play a distinctive role in developing knowledge and a temper of mind and heart that are indispensable to a free society.

Through the study of history we come to understand the roots, contexts, and complexities of issues we face as citizens. Studies in our democratic heritage confront us directly with fundamental questions about justice, freedom, obligation, equality, and democracy itself. Through philosophy and religion, we explore questions of meaning and value and come to understand the sources of our own and other peoples’ most profound commitments and concerns. Through literature, we develop empathy, imagination, and insight about the varieties of human experience and about shared hopes and frailties.

The combined study of history, literature, arts, and languages empowers us to engage cultures and communities different from our own, while regional and comparative studies hone the dialogue of democracy and economic opportunity at home and abroad. The study of the creative, visual, and performing arts brings us into direct contact with powerful expressions of the human spirit and develops our capacities for creativity, communication, and self-expression.

Together, the humanities and arts take us beyond the known to the realms of the possible. The night Martin Luther King was assassinated, Robert Kennedy quoted Aeschylus to an angry crowd gathered in Indianapolis. He respected the mostly poor and black Americans who came to hear him with a text and ideas revealing the human condition in ways that the House committee does not understand. Although two hundred cities erupted into flames that night, Indianapolis did not. Arts and humanities inspire us to dream of things that never were, and ask: Why not? They cultivate, in sum, the kinds of imagination, creativity, and inventiveness that give life and hope to a vigorous, flourishing entrepreneurial economy and a vibrant democracy.

The capacity of all Americans to thrive and succeed should be a national and patriotic priority. Far better to expand all students' engagement with the humanities and arts than to deceive less advantaged students with overwrought and shortsighted promises that narrow vocational training is their best choice in a fast-changing economy and all they really need.

But it is not enough just to ensure equitable access to study the arts and humanities. We also need to think deeply about how students engage these disciplines and especially about pedagogies that will most effectively develop their strengths for economic foresight, political empowerment, and the security of our country.

In recent months, there have been intense media and academic controversies over contested textbooks, both the Texas history text and Howard Zinn's history of the American people. We believe that these debates help focus the question of whether any single text or textbook, whatever its merits, ought to serve as the dominant or exclusive lens through which students explore humanistic questions and topics. For democratic communities, no single story can ever be adequate. Our ability to say "we" legitimately comes only when we explore the many in the one, whether domestically or globally. *E pluribus unum*.

Students reap the full benefits of study in the arts and humanities only when they move beyond repeating a single voice or limiting their ideas to a single text or textbook. Students

gain when they courageously engage with multiple voices and artifacts, classic and contemporary, Western and global. When the humanities and arts are studied in this way—exploring significant questions, both contemporary and enduring, through respectful engagement with differing insights, perspectives, and creative works—they build capacities that enable us to

secure and enlarge the future of freedom and increase the wealth of America and the world.

Over several decades, our two organizations have enacted together the value of studying diverse primary texts and contested questions. Every summer, the Wye Seminars, cosponsored by the Aspen Institute and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, provide rich opportunities for faculty and other academic leaders to explore fundamental questions about liberty, justice, equity, prosperity, and effective citizenship through a collaborative study of often conflicting texts, classic and contemporary. Both organizations have made this commitment to support faculty and academic leaders' dialogue about citizens' responsibilities in the American and global polity because we believe that democracy requires deep, thoughtful, and respectful engagement with legitimate difference. Faculty who have experienced this kind of liberal learning reenact it with their students, to democracy's benefit.

Our founders gave us a self-governing republic and challenged us to nurture and sustain it. It will be impossible to meet this responsibility if the humanities and arts continue to be marginalized in our society or if these essential forms of learning are taught reductively, through the lens of a single text, a single view, or a single faction. These methods diminish the power of ideas and dialogue.

To abandon this common, foundational wisdom is to weaken America and democratic republics across the globe. Leaders who undervalue ideas, arts, and humanities open the door to plutocrats, despots, factions, violence, and chaos—all the ancient enemies of prosperity, freedom, and democracy. □

**Far better to expand all students' engagement with the humanities and arts than to deceive less advantaged students with overwrought and shortsighted promises that narrow vocational training is their best choice in a fast-changing economy and all they really need**

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Excellence

A Statement of the Board of Directors of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Adopted June 2013, in support of the association's expanded mission)<sup>1</sup>

*A great democracy cannot be content to provide a horizon-expanding education for some and work skills, taught in isolation from the larger societal context, for everyone else.... It should not be liberal education for some and narrow or illiberal education for others.*—AAC&U BOARD OF DIRECTORS, *THE QUALITY IMPERATIVE*<sup>2</sup>

The Association of American Colleges and Universities' commitment to equity begins with the conviction that all students who have completed high school deserve the opportunity to attend college and to obtain an education that will prepare them well for work, life, and citizenship. The learning needed for full participation in the life of this diverse American democracy has long been what AAC&U means by a liberal education.

As AAC&U's board of directors affirmed in 1998, liberal education is "global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility."<sup>3</sup> In embracing a diversity of ideas and experiences, liberal education likewise embraces a diversity of people, for the opportunity to learn with and from diverse peers is also a critical element of educational excellence. This commitment to diversity and equity in all their forms is what we mean by inclusive excellence.

To make excellence inclusive, our society must break free of earlier views that an excellent liberal education should be reserved for the few. Instead we insist that liberal education should be an expectation for all college students. Increasing college access and degree completion for all is necessary but insufficient to foster the growth of an educated citizenry for our globally engaged democracy. We need to define student success not exclusively as degree attainment, but also as the achievement of the primary goals of liberal education: broad and in-depth knowledge, the capacity to integrate and apply learning to new situations, and the intellectual creativity and resilience to face challenges.

We must be vigilant to ensure not only that all students have access to such an education, but also that they have an equitable opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned. A high-quality education must be documented by robust assessment. At the institutional level, we need to provide effective evidence-based pedagogies and inclusive program designs. We must build on students' talents and capacities—focusing on the assets that all students bring to college rather than on perceived deficits.

Making excellence inclusive means attending both to the demographic diversity of the student body and also to the need for nurturing climates and cultures so that all students have a chance to succeed. Commitment to student success in these terms requires broad-based, compassionate leadership and equity-minded practice<sup>4</sup>—not only within individual institutions, but also across states and systems and in policy circles that make decisions affecting the nation. Seeking inclusive excellence requires reversing the current stratification of higher education and ensuring that all students develop capacities to prosper economically, contribute civically, and flourish personally.

Making excellence inclusive is a fundamentally democratic ideal. It expresses our confidence in the liberating power of education. Without inclusion, there is no true excellence.

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### NOTES

1. The mission of AAC&U, adopted by the board of directors in 2012, is to make liberal education and inclusive excellence the foundation for institutional purpose and educational practice in higher education.
2. AAC&U Board of Directors, *The Quality Imperative: Match Ambitious Goals for College Attainment with an Ambitious Vision for Learning* (Washington, DC: AAC&U, 2010), 3–6.
3. AAC&U Board of Directors, "Statement on Liberal Learning" (Washington, DC: AAC&U, 1998), [http://www.aacu.org/about/statements/liberal\\_learning.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/about/statements/liberal_learning.cfm).
4. Estela Mara Bensimon, "The Underestimated Significance of Practitioner Knowledge in the Scholarship on Student Success," *Review of Higher Education* 30, no. 4 (2007): 441–69. "Equity-mindedness" means that educational leaders, faculty, and staff demonstrate awareness of and proactive willingness to address their institution's equity and inequity issues.

The 2013 annual meeting, titled “The Quality of US Degrees: Innovations, Efficiencies, and Disruptions—To What Ends?,” was held in Atlanta, Georgia, from January 23 to 26. At first glance, it may seem that the talks published here in the Featured Topic section address the quality of the degree only indirectly, at best. But especially when considered in light of the AAC&U board of directors’ recent statement on inclusive excellence, issued in August and also published here, it is clear that equity and diversity are, in fact, at the very heart of educational quality in our time.

This issue’s lead article was adapted from Johnnella Butler’s address to the Networking Luncheon for Faculty and Administrators of Color, which was, by all accounts, a highlight of this year’s annual meeting. Taking stock of the progress that’s been made with regard to the hydra-headed problem of diversity in higher education, Johnnella offers sage advice to a new generation of faculty and administrators as they engage with this “wicked problem.” In the second article, adapted from her address to the Women’s Networking Breakfast, Caryn McTighe Musil reflects on the publication of the final issue of *On Campus with Women*, on her past leadership of AAC&U’s Program on the Status

## FROM THE EDITOR

and Education of Women, and on her new role as senior scholar and director of civic learning and democ-

racy initiatives at AAC&U. Then, after surveying ongoing and horizon issues for women and girls, Caryn draws on her extensive experience to offer specific suggestions for continuing to promote gender equity in higher education.

In an important sense, the quality of the degree depends on the quality of the institution, which, in turn, depends on the quality of institutional governance. The recent crises at Penn State and the University of Virginia have shone a spotlight on the fiduciary responsibilities of governing boards, in particular. In this context, John Casteen, the former president of the University of Virginia who oversaw a major restructuring of the university’s administrative and governance structures, addressed the opening plenary session of the annual meeting. An adaptation of his remarks on responsible governance and the appropriate role of trustees in institutional transformation is featured here.

As wonderful as they are, these three articles barely scratch the surface of the rich and varied program of this year’s meeting. But taken together, they do indicate the range—and, yes, the quality—of the conversation had by the AAC&U community that came together in Atlanta.—DAVID TRITELLI

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*Liberal Education* (ISSN 0024-1822) is published quarterly by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Annual rates are \$50 for individual subscribers and \$60 for libraries. Subscription information can be found online at [www.aacu.org/liberaleducation](http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation).

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

*Liberal Education* is indexed in the fall issue and is available on microfilm from NA Publishing, Inc.

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Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send address changes to *Liberal Education*; 1818 R Street, NW; Washington, DC 20009.

**AAC&U Outlines Renewed Support for the Liberal Arts and Sciences**

In a memo sent to members in August, AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider provides an overview of the association's current and future work in behalf of the liberal arts and sciences. Building on the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, whose aim is to make the purposes and practices that characterize a twenty-first-century liberal education a guiding compass for all students and all major fields, Schneider explains why the liberal arts and sciences are an indispensable component of any high-quality undergraduate degree program. Moreover, she describes AAC&U's plans to make the case for the liberal arts and sciences and to support the efforts of member institutions seeking to ensure that all students achieve the important learning outcomes associated with study in the arts and sciences. The full text of President Schneider's memo is available online at [www.aacu.org/about/cgs\\_perspectives/liberalartsandsciences.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/about/cgs_perspectives/liberalartsandsciences.cfm).

**AAC&U Holds LEAP States Summit on Student Success**

At the end of June, teams from seventeen states or state systems and two multistate consortia (public and private, two-year and four-year institutions) convened in Broomfield, Colorado, for a summit sponsored by AAC&U's LEAP States initiative. Designed to promote large-scale

collaboration for liberal education and student success, the summit focused on such topics as communication, curricular reform, and educational policy. Participants explored issues related to student transfer, general education at the system level, leadership development, and the development of frameworks for assessment and educational quality. For more information about the LEAP States initiative, see [www.aacu.org/leap/states.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/leap/states.cfm).

**AAC&U Board Issues Statement on Inclusive Excellence**

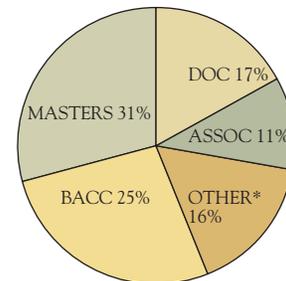
In August, AAC&U's board of directors issued an official statement on diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence. Intended to explain AAC&U's vision for inclusive excellence in light of the association's recently expanded mission "to make liberal education and inclusive excellence the foundation for institutional purpose and educational practice in higher education," this new statement serves as a companion to the board's 1998 statement on liberal education. The new board statement on inclusive excellence is published in this issue of *Liberal Education*; both statements are available online at [www.aacu.org/about/statements](http://www.aacu.org/about/statements).

**Upcoming Meetings**

- October 3–5, 2013  
**Global Learning in College: Asking Big Questions, Engaging Urgent Challenges**  
Providence, Rhode Island
- October 31–November 2, 2013  
**Transforming STEM Education: Inquiry, Innovation, Inclusion, and Evidence**  
San Diego, California
- January 22–25, 2014  
**AAC&U Annual Meeting: Quality, E-Quality, and Opportunity: How Educational Innovations Will Make—Or Break—America's Global Future**  
Washington, DC
- February 27–March 1, 2014  
**General Education and Assessment: Disruptions, Innovations, and Opportunities**  
Portland, Oregon
- March 27–29, 2014  
**Diversity, Learning, and Student Success: Policy, Practice, Privilege**  
Chicago, Illinois

**AAC&U MEMBERSHIP 2013**

1,310 members



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

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# Two Steps Forward, One Step Backward

## Must This Be the Future of Diversity?

JOHNNELLA E. BUTLER

FEATURED TOPIC

**Diversity is a wicked problem that spawns other wicked problems**

MY TITLE, “Two Steps Forward, One Step Backward,” expresses the “wicked problem” of diversity writ large as a concrete goal in higher education. At the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Network for Academic Renewal conference in November, as I listened to the exceptionally inspiring and on-target keynote address given by Dean Herb Childress of the Boston Architectural College, I was reminded of the concept of the “wicked problem,” a term coined in the late 1960s by social planners. As Dean Childress discussed the kinds of learning students need in order to address “wicked problems,” I thought, “That’s it! That’s why we have research today that repeats findings from twenty to thirty years ago on the experience of faculty of color in higher education! It’s not only that diversity presents protracted problems that will not be solved in our lifetimes or, as I frequently have said, that diversity work requires an ‘eager patience’; rather, diversity is a wicked problem!”

Consulting *Wikipedia*, as so many of our students do, we find from the entry for “wicked problem” that “wicked” does not connote “evil” in this instance, but refers to problems that resist resolution. “Moreover, because of complex interdependencies, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create other problems.” Defining a wicked problem is itself a wicked problem. “Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem. . . . The problem is not understood until after the formulation of a solution.” Yet, “wicked problems have no given alternative solutions.” As I listened to Dean Childress, I thought, “How depressing! A *wicked* problem is worse than a *vexed* problem!”

### **The wicked problem of diversity**

It could be said that we in the United States are still solving wicked problems spawned by the solving of the problem of being ruled by England without also outlawing slavery. That solution led to the wicked problem of maintaining the Union and to the Civil War, which led in turn to the problems of Jim Crow, the denial of women’s rights, jingoism, racism, ethnocentrism, classism, ageism, and heterosexism—each of which has spawned other wicked problems. Today, we have an African American president in his second term of office. However, it could be argued that the push for state’s rights and the recent surreptitious gerrymandering by the legislature of my home state of Virginia are wicked problems spawned by the solving of the wicked problem of never having elected an African American—or a white woman, a woman of color, a gay man or lesbian, or another man of color—as president of the United States. The notion that diversity is a wicked problem that spawns other wicked problems is familiar to anyone who has been actively involved in advancing diversity

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JOHNNELLA E. BUTLER is provost and vice president for academic affairs at Spelman College. This article was adapted from the author’s address to the networking luncheon for faculty and administrators of color at the 2013 annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities.



Annual Meeting

Johnnella E. Butler,  
Annual Meeting



in higher education over the years and has attempted to solve the problems this noble cause has spawned.

Faculty diversity, a wicked problem spawned by efforts to address the problem of minority access to higher education, has in its turn spawned several wicked problems for faculty of color. In her 2012 dissertation, Tamara Stevenson explored the “extent to which full-time male and female African-American faculty at public community colleges experience Racial Battle Fatigue because of racial microaggressions.” Stevenson defines “microaggression” as “the exchange and response to race-related mental, emotional, and physical tensions.” Microaggression, she explains, acts in concert with the “racialized stressors associated with their faculty role.” Stevenson notes that “African Americans remain disproportionately underrepresented in the faculty ranks at institutions of higher education in the United States” and observes that “the extant literature documents how ‘chilly’ campus climates and racially charged encounters can be harmful to African-American faculty. Moreover, along with the traditional responsibilities and demands of the faculty role, African-American faculty members contend with racism, discrimination, and an anti-Black sentiment in academia as a microcosm of society, likely resulting in race-related role strain” (Stevenson 2012, ii).

Stevenson’s study of full-time African American faculty, male and female, at two-year institutions is complemented by the personal narratives and qualitative studies presented in

*Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (Gutiérrez y Muhs, et al. 2012), which detail the microaggressive, oblique, and directly racist, ethnocentric, discipline-based forms of prejudice and discrimination experienced by women of color in the academy. Fourteen years ago, similar forms of aggression were detailed in *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe: Strangers in the Tower?* (Lim, Herrera-Sobek, and Padilla 2000), a collection of essays that argued variously for, as Sandra Gunning put it in her contribution, “programmatic attention to the recontextualization of department life that we all have to face in the wake of [hiring for diversity]” (172). In that same volume, I observed that

the environment of careerism and racist backlash and the specter of militias portend the academic shutdown of teaching and learning that explain our world and allow students time to think about how to live well with one another. We have no blueprints, no memoirs, no institutional stories to guide us now, for we all are in situations that we, as a nation, as a people, have never experienced. We have crossed borders, and we don’t know how to work with one another, how to speak with or listen to, really hear, one another honestly—and the color line persists (in the borderlands). Stereotypes, ostensibly denied and cast away have been reformulated to maintain the status quo. In addition to the lazy, laughing, and dangerous darky or the model minority Asian, we have a contrived master stereotype of the white liberal, a stereotype that many people of color are accused of employing when they attempt a critical assessment of the race problem that remains. (Butler 2000, 28)

But now, *Presumed Incompetent* provides the memoirs and the data that had been lacking. In the final chapter, Yolanda Flores Niemann extracts lessons from the narratives and offers recommendations for women of color and their allies and for administrators. These recommendations are organized according to several categories: general campus climate; faculty-student relations; social class, tokenism, and the search process; tenure and promotion; and network of allies and mentors. The recommendations are concrete and clearly explained. Together, these two books—*Presumed Incompetent* and *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe*—along with Daryl Smith’s *Diversity’s Promise for Higher Education* (2009)

provide a blueprint and the tools needed to significantly weaken and, in some cases, dismantle the power of truly wicked problems at the departmental and institutional levels.

Every faculty member and administrator of color can attest to the expected, and sometimes exhilarating, components of her or his own academic journey: the first publication; tenure and promotion; the joy of guiding students as they learn, achieve, and grow; the pride and hope in graduate students; the opportunities to lead; the grants, the awards, the recognitions of the hard work of teaching, research, and service. And then there are the unheralded achievements, such as the pride taken in often vilified and certainly unrecognized advocacy and work for a program that created the space for the first African American student to become the student government president at a mostly white, elite institution. Then, too, there are the courses you cannot find the time to teach, the articles and books you do not have time to write, the committee

**Faculty diversity, a wicked problem spawned by efforts to address the problem of minority access to higher education, has in its turn spawned several wicked problems for faculty of color**

you appointed that disappointed you, the class that just did not click.

These achievements, aspirations, struggles, and shortcomings are all part of the experience of being a professor or administrator. What should not be part of the experience, however, is the stress that

results from or is exacerbated by the presumption of incompetence, the sense of not belonging, or the stereotypical exceptionalism and all that follows from it for a person of color as she or he engages with everyday departmental and institutional concerns and the politics of higher education.

In 2010 and 2011, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) of the University of California–Los Angeles conducted the eighth in its series of triennial surveys of undergraduate teaching faculty. The resulting report provides valuable data on the top sources of stress for faculty members. The survey found, for example, that budget cuts are among the top sources of stress for all faculty members at public



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universities and four-year colleges. But the results also reveal significant differences in the levels of stress experienced by men and women. Women reported more stress than men on twenty-two of the twenty-five survey items. More women (66.3 percent) than men (56.8 percent) identified students as a source of stress, for example, and more women (65.3 percent) than men (52.8 percent) identified the review and promotion process as a source of stress. More women (58.4 percent) than men (43.8 percent) also identified change in work responsibilities as a source of stress (Hurtado et al. 2012, 4).

For female faculty of color, these already higher levels of stress are further compounded by the higher levels of stress experienced by faculty of color as compared to their white peers. Among those surveyed, 72.5 percent of black teachers and 69.2 percent of Latino/a teachers reported stress associated with personal finances, compared to 64.7 percent of white faculty. This mirrors the national norm for low-income populations. Subtle discrimination (e.g., prejudice, racism, sexism) was identified as a source of stress by 63.6 percent of black faculty, which was more than twenty percentage points higher than for any other racial or ethnic group. “The next most prominent group to report subtle discrimination as a source of stress is Latina/o faculty (42.6 percent) followed by more than one-third of American Indian, Asian, and multiracial/multiethnic faculty” (Hurtado et al. 2012, 5–6).

What does all this mean for faculty and administrators of color and for efforts to advance diversity within higher education? It would be redundant for me to list recommendations for institutions and individuals. Daryl Smith has already provided such a list, and the contributors to *Presumed Incompetent* have provided rich contextualization for it. And, of course, both build on work done over many years and on decades of shared experience. However, I do have one overarching recommendation and one philosophical suggestion.

**Networking**

Most of the data over the years have shown that the effects of the harsh realities of negative departmental and institutional experiences lessen when there exists a critical mass of faculty of

color within an institution—and the personal experiences of many support these data. As faculty and administrators of color, whatever our rank or position, we can find ways to assist the process of net-

working, whether by meeting for coffee, planning dinners together, or establishing a formal organization. Diversity officers need to be particularly attuned not only to the student experience of diversity, which spawns its own wicked problems, but also to the faculty experience. I would not have become the first black woman to be tenured at Smith College were it not for the support and mentoring I received from a few white male faculty members who knew the institutional minefields awaiting me and, just as important, the critical mass of black faculty at Bowdoin College, Brown University, the University of Rhode Island, Salem State College, and Wellesley College that was brought together by John Walter, who was then at Bowdoin (and who had the good sense to marry me). Together, we made sense of what was happening to us as first-generation black scholars on predominately white campuses. We identified the few senior black scholars in our fields who could comment on our work, and we neutralized the often confused but negatively effective black faculty who had become institutional icons and “sat by the door,” so to speak.

Networking can occur across racialized ethnic groups, but in many settings the institutional history makes this difficult. Diversity officers can help here by knowing the institutional history of each racialized ethnic group, identifying their allies, and taking into consideration the complexities within each group—complexities related to factors such as class, regional difference, and gender identity. In *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America*, Eugene Robinson (2010) describes the fragmentation of African Americans into four more or less distinct groups: a small transcendent elite (the Colin Powells, Condelezza Rices, and Oprahs of the world), the mainstream middle-class majority, the newly emergent (recent black immigrants and those of mixed-race heritage), and the abandoned (those trapped by poverty and dysfunction). I disagree with Robinson in that I don’t believe this fragmentation is new or that it is particular to African Americans or that it means African Americans have had less in common since desegregation. His is basically an economic



analysis. Asian Americans have long espoused the differences among those placed under that umbrella—class and cultural differences arising from different national origins.

However, I do think that recognition of such fragmentation within racialized groups speaks to the mirroring of class divisions and the difficulties of assimilation and racism in America at large. It also implies the replication of such fragmentation in higher education, along with thick overlays of discipline-centrism and racial, gender, and cultural divides within disciplines and fields. These divides can affect what is accepted as scholarship and what is not, and they are strongly felt by minority and female scholars whose work counters mainstream scholarship or when white faculty and administrators fail to distinguish between, say, being Mexican American and being a Chicano/a studies scholar.

Taken together, networking, engaging allies, and taking the initiative to address—*as a group*, when appropriate, and *as individuals*, when necessary—instances of prejudice or racism in scholarship, committee work, and the everyday institutional encounters all comprise the unasked-for job that solving the wicked problem

of faculty diversity demands of faculty and administrators of color. Untenured faculty can provide support for one another and can connect with tenured faculty and administrators in order to learn the terrain or simply to get periodic boosts in confidence.

#### **Engaged diversity, the first liberal art**

When I began teaching in 1970, armed only with a master's degree, I was among the first people of color to teach in predominantly white institutions. Over the years, I insisted on leading from within as much as possible—promoting institutional change through grant-funded projects, facilitating workshops, and creating positions for myself and others in order to bring about change. I continued in that environment, and within that reality, until I chose to move to Spelman College. Inspired by my own experiences and those of my colleagues, and consistent with the recommendation, made by Daryl Smith and others, that we treat diversity in higher education as we treat technology—that is, as something that must be all pervasive, something that is a top priority—I suggest that diversity is best understood as the first liberal art.

This suggestion is inspired by Robert Hagstrom's book *Investing, the Last Liberal Art* and his discussion there of Charles Munger's concept of "stock picking as a subdivision of the art of worldly wisdom" (2013, 2). Rooted in Benjamin Franklin's concept of liberal education, this notion of "worldly wisdom" mirrors the AAC&U definition of liberal learning as a form of education that "empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of values, ethics, and civic engagement." As for the need to engage diversity, the notion of "worldly wisdom" is also entirely compatible with the AAC&U claim that "by its nature ... liberal learning is global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility, for nothing less will equip us to understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives" (AAC&U 1998).

According to Munger, worldly wisdom is constantly evolving, but is gained by connecting the latticework of models of knowledge within the context of the history of human affairs (broadly speaking economics, literature, history, physics, mathematics, the arts, and humanities) and then arraying one's own experience on that latticework. This is not unlike the learning process we try to create for our students, as we encourage them to make connections among

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the different aspects of what they're learning—in the disciplines, through interdisciplinary forms of engagement, from experiential learning activities, and as a result of other features of a contemporary undergraduate liberal education.

Arguing against the exclusion of breadth in college education, and asserting that understanding context is an art, Hagstrom expands Munger's model of "worldly wisdom" and speaks of diversity in terms of bringing different experiences and a range of intellects to the table. The broad view informs in-depth decision making. Therefore, Hagstrom makes the case that investing is "the last liberal art" because it requires of the investor an understanding of context and the ability to connect knowledge; that is, it requires "worldly wisdom."

I, on the other hand, propose that *engaged diversity for worldly wisdom* is the *first* liberal art, because engaged diversity is the wellspring of worldly wisdom. Such diversity has as its goal the understanding of context in order to solve problems, seize opportunities, and bring together knowledge and experience in the creation of new knowledge. Therefore, it is through a deliberate and engaged diversity that we understand context—globally, pluralistically, and intellectually. I define "engaged diversity" in the context of liberal education as the process of studying, analyzing, and exploring through scholarship and active engagement the varied experiences, practices, and cultures of people over time in order to extract the best lessons and traditions for the purposes of promoting and fostering a humane, civilized society. Engaged diversity is both compositional and intellectual, and it builds on the synergy among individuals and communities. It connotes embracing the creative tensions inherent in the complexity of human life, experience, and culture. Engaged diversity incorporates sameness, difference, contradiction, similarity, conflict, and agreement, as well as assimilation and pluralism.

I have suggested that diversity is a wicked problem that spawns other wicked problems. Engaged diversity is its own wicked problem, spawned by advancing diversity. And it, too, begets many other wicked problems, such as how to support economically the changing financial model that compositional diversity demands; how to meet the diverse pedagogical needs that result from diverse student demographics; how to structure and compensate interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship;

how to achieve both compositional diversity and scholarly, intellectual diversity in an essentially white, Western-oriented, homogeneous intellectual environment that merely dabbles in engaged diversity but makes no substantive change.

Most important, engaged diversity presents the wicked problem of ensuring that all students in higher education—whether they enroll at liberal arts colleges, for-profit institutions, public research universities, or community colleges—have access to a liberal arts curriculum of engaged diversity. And to break this particular wicked problem down: How can we achieve and maintain compositional diversity across higher education, while also ensuring that all students are provided with an education that connects knowledge with the diversity of human experience?

### Conclusion

I urge faculty and administrators of color, in particular, to come together around the qualitative and quantitative data that tell us that, unfortunately, the experiences of forty years ago still hold true for us today. I urge us to assess our positionalities on our own campuses and to decide, in concert with others, which pieces of the problem—and the possibility—each of us can tackle in order to advance engaged diversity as compositional, intellectual, philosophical, social, cultural—and as an *imperative*.

To paraphrase a key question asked by the African American author John A. Williams in his contribution to *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe: Strangers in the Tower?*, why should a college or university hire a minority teacher, send her or him before a class to educate all our students, and otherwise treat him or her with contempt? We have moved from being “strangers in the tower” to being “presumed incompetent.” Two steps forward, one step backward? My generation has to continue moving forward as long as we can, in true baby boomer fashion. However, the torch has been passed to the generations that follow us. We all must continue to work together so that diversity—that is, *engaged diversity*—will no longer be a wicked *problem*, but a wicked *possibility*. □

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

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# Gender Equity

## Who Needs It?

CARYN MCTIGHE MUSIL

FEATURED TOPIC

**We are still in the midst of a long historical and global struggle to ensure that women and girls across colors and nations have full equality, agency, and opportunity**

AFTER FORTY-ONE YEARS IN PRINT, *On Campus with Women*, the periodical publication of the Association of American Colleges and Universities' Program on the Status and Education of Women (PSEW), has come to the end of its run. Over the summer, I have been preparing

copies of all the issues published

during my tenure as director of the PSEW (1991–2012) for shipment to the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Harvard University, where they will be archived alongside the issues from 1971 to 1990, which were sent by my predecessor, Bunny Sandler. In addition to *On Campus with Women*, I have also been gathering materials from the many projects conducted under the aegis of the PSEW while I was directing it. This accumulation of twenty-one years of work will probably fit into a box no bigger than the one into which I put my Christmas ornaments before I stash them each year under the eaves in my attic.

Does this mean gender equity is at the end of its run? Have we completed our work? Who really needs gender equity anymore, anyway?

While the PSEW archives to which my box will be added represent more than four decades of work on gender equity, I want to argue—using a refrain from President Obama's second

inaugural address—that “our journey is not complete.” We are still in the midst of a long historical and global struggle to ensure that women and girls across colors and nations have full equality, agency, and opportunity. As the president rightly said, it may be self-evident that all people are created equal, but that equality must be secured by people working together to make it a reality. To make it so, he reminded us, “We must act.”

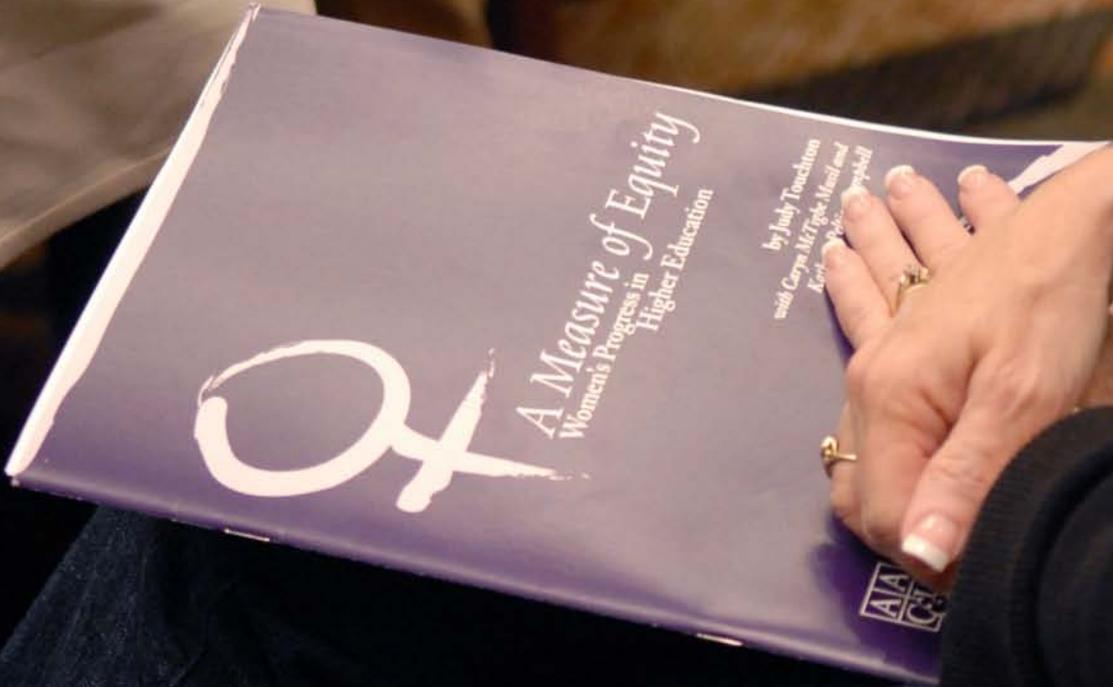
### Three cautionary notes

What is our role—as faculty members, administrators, student affairs professionals, students, presidents, and leaders of nonprofit organizations—in continuing to advance gender equity? To my own reflections on this challenge, I bring the perspective I have gained over a lifetime of commitment—as a graduate student who wrote a women's studies dissertation before the field had fully come into its own; as a young professor at an institution that had first admitted women the year before I was hired; as a feminist scholar who taught her first women's studies course in 1973; as the working mother who struggled without a guidebook to perform both roles with integrity and love; and as executive director of the National Women's Studies Association who came to the Association of American Colleges in 1991 to pick up Bunny Sandler's mantle. Here, then, are three cautionary notes from a seasoned feminist.

**1. Skeptics and opponents—or people who are merely uninformed—are quick to proclaim prematurely the end of political movements for social change and social justice.** Feminism has been declared passé, dead, and of no interest to

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Caryn McTighe Musil,  
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younger generations perhaps once every seven years of my professional life. Newspaper headlines, magazine articles, and other media periodically proclaim that the feminist movement has run its course, that we live in a postfeminist age, that young people don't identify with the women's movement. But as Gloria Steinem (2012) recently observed, more young women agree with feminist values and aspirations today than during the first wave of women's liberation. Certainly recent voting patterns continue to reflect a significant gender gap on issues and on candidates. In a recent poll, just under 50 percent of independents identified themselves as feminists (Baker 2012, 31–2).

**2. Half measures toward equity are just that: half measures; they do not ensure full equality.** Many of us take heart that, following the November 2012 elections, we can now count nine states that have passed some form of marriage equality laws and that if one serves in the military and is gay, he or she can now openly say so without being “dishonorably” discharged. But until the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was declared unconstitutional in a Supreme Court ruling on June 26, 2013, people in those state-recognized same-sex marriages were unable to secure hundreds of federal benefits—including tax, estate, and pension benefits—available to other married couples. Even the defeat of the democracy-limiting DOMA could not prevent a heart-wrenching story like the

one in the *New York Times* about a military veteran who, after returning from her year's tour of duty in Afghanistan, was experiencing strains in her marriage as a consequence of her deployment. When she showed up for a military retreat intended to help soldiers and their spouses cope with such strains—having cleared ahead of time her intention to participate—the chaplain greeted her with the news that she and her partner would not be permitted to participate because their presence made others feel uncomfortable (Swarns 2013). She could fight in a foxhole in war next to a comrade, but she could not sit in a circle back home. And this news came to her from a chaplain who is paid with our tax dollars and whose charge is to help veterans.

If we look at women's progress in higher education, we can see that we are a quarter of the way there, or perhaps halfway there, or maybe in some instances three-quarters of the way there. The percentage of women presidents has jumped from 3 percent when the PSEW was founded to 26 percent today, but it still has not reached 50 percent. The percentage of women faculty has increased significantly, but it, too, has not reached 50 percent. Nor are women advancing through the ranks at the same rate as their male peers. With the help of Title IX and many lawsuits, women athletes are playing all kinds of sports at the highest levels, though often without the full privileges accorded to male athletes. And every year, opponents of Title IX seek to undermine the legislation.

**3. Be vigilant, continue to organize, always keep counting, and never assume that because you have won a victory that it will last.** Ida B. Wells, the courageous journalist, civil rights leader, champion of the anti-lynching movement, and stirring organizer in the Negro Women's Club movement, said that “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.” She knew full well that the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery did not lead anywhere close to full racial equality. The brief history of Reconstruction soon gave way, through state-sponsored violence and Jim Crow laws, to the recreation of white supremacy in the South that lasted another hundred years after Appomattox. The North and West and Midwest were complicit in this arrangement throughout that period. Be vigilant. Organize.

Similarly, *Roe vs. Wade* seemed on the face of it to protect permanently a woman's right to decide whether to bear a child or not. The

## What are the big issues on the horizon for women and girls in the twenty-first century?

reasonableness of that assumption seemed to be confirmed on January 22, 2013, by a Gallup poll that found that significantly more Americans (53 percent) want the landmark decision kept in place than want it to be overturned (29 percent) (Saad 2013). But today, access to abortion and reproductive counseling has been severely limited—and, in some states, all but cut off. In the early part of 2012, some 944 provisions related to reproductive rights were put forth in state legislatures. Not all of these passed, but one that aroused the wrath of many—a requirement that a woman undergo a vaginal probe before she can opt for an abortion—was nonetheless reaffirmed in Virginia. Be vigilant. Organize.

One of the most depressing setbacks I have lived long enough to have the displeasure of witnessing is the recreation of the powerful and limiting scripts for girls and boys that reveal themselves through the omnipresence of pink and princesses for girls and superheroes for boys. Toys today, as they were in the 1960s and early 1970s, are utterly color coded right down to the stands for T-ball. I had thought that my generation had tamped this down when our children were born in the 1970s. For a while, it had seemed that we had ushered in a period of gender-neutral or gender-inclusive toys—an accomplishment so vividly captured by Marlo Thomas's famous "Free to Be You and Me" book and record. But gender neutrality evaporated quickly. Kids today are encouraged to segregate and limit themselves at an early age.

### Issues on the horizon

What are the big issues on the horizon for women and girls in the twenty-first century? In *Half the Sky*, Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn point to the need to consider this question in a fully global context. "In the nineteenth century," they observe, "the central moral challenge was slavery. In the twentieth century, it was the battle against totalitarianism. We believe that in this century the paramount moral challenge will be the struggle for gender equality around the world" (2009, xvii). Let's take a look, then, at gender equity and just who needs it in relation to four big conundrums most countries are facing.

**1. Economic inequality.** In the United States, women now graduate from high school and college at a higher rate than men, which represents a sea change since I was in college. A million

more women than men graduate from college each year (Hayes 2012). But the troubling news is that this educational advantage has not led

to a closing of the economic gap between women and men. As a group, women in the United States earn seventy-seven cents for every dollar a man earns. African American women earn sixty-two cents, and Latina women earn fifty-four cents. A Latina would need to work for two weeks in order to make what a man makes in one week. In the United States, two-thirds of those who are paid the minimum wage are women (Baker 2012, 27). A woman working full time at the minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour earns \$15,080 annually, which puts her at or below the federal poverty level. Among the thirty-four "peer countries" of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United States has the highest rate of poverty (17 percent) and one of the lowest levels of social expenditure (Hardisty 2012, 2).

### OCWW AND AAC&U'S ONGOING COVERAGE OF GENDER ISSUES

Founded in 1971 and sponsored by AAC&U's Program on the Status and Education of Women, *On Campus with Women* (OCWW) was originally designed to cover important issues related to women in higher education. Since 2002, it has been an online journal focusing on women's leadership, the campus climate, curricula and pedagogy, and new research and data on women. In 2013, as part of a broader strategic planning process, AAC&U adopted an infusion approach to the coverage of gender equity topics, initiatives, and research in its three print and online journals. Accordingly, publication of OCWW as a separate online periodical ended, and its editor, Kathryn Peltier Campbell, assumed added responsibilities for coordinating coverage of gender issues across all AAC&U publications. AAC&U also expanded the size and frequency of publication of *Diversity and Democracy*, which periodically includes coverage of gender issues. Longtime readers of *Liberal Education* may recall that, from 1987 to 1993, OCWW was incorporated into *Liberal Education* as a distinct section of the journal.

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Economic inequality is one of the greatest threats to political stability. In the United States, 39 percent of the wealth is concentrated among 1 percent of households (Frank 2013). The global picture mirrors this figure, with the added destabilizing statistic that 50 percent of the world's adult population owns barely 1 percent of global wealth" (Randerson 2006). As United Nations humanitarian relief coordinator Jan Egeland put it, "a few billionaires are richer than the poorest two billion people" (quoted in National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement 2012, 20).

**2. Educational inequality.** Worldwide, approximately 17 percent of adults, or 796 million people, cannot read or write; almost two-thirds of these adults are women (Education for All Global Monitoring Report Team 2011, 1). Only 30 percent of the world's girls are enrolled in secondary school, and 35 million girls have no access to education at all (Day of the Girl 2012). Less than 1 percent of the money spent on deadly weapons would be enough to educate all the children in the world.

In the United States, one in three boys and one in four girls do not finish high school in four years. The percentages are even higher for underrepresented racial minorities. For example, the numbers climb to 37 percent for Hispanic girls, 40 percent of African Americans, and 50 percent for Native American and Alaska Native girls (National Women's Law Center 2007, 6). The long-term economic consequences wreak havoc both on the students who drop out and on the society that will pay the economic and social

consequences of not doing everything possible to graduate young people from high school. The poorer the young person, the less likely it is that he or she will go to college, and disturbingly the rich-poor attendance gap between Baby Boomer and Millennial generations grew from 39 percentage points to 51 percentage points (Weissmann 2013). Of every one hundred Latinos who go to elementary school, only forty-seven will graduate from high school; of those forty-seven, twenty-six will go to college, and eight will graduate (Gutiérrez 2011, xvi). What does this profile of the fastest growing racial minority group in the United States portend for our nation's future?

**3. Violence against women.** Speaking at a luncheon marking the fortieth anniversary of Ms. magazine, Gloria Steinem (2012) cited a chilling statistic. She said that the number of women killed in the United States by husbands or boyfriends since 9/11 exceeds the number of people killed in the Twin Towers, the number of American soldiers killed in Afghanistan, and the number of soldiers killed in Iraq—combined. We know there are women and girls in other countries who are stoned for adultery under Sharia law, axed by their brothers in "honor" killings in Afghanistan, shot for wanting to go to school in Pakistan, and gang raped under the most brutal conditions in India. Yet in our own country, the Republicans in Congress attempted to prevent the renewal of the Violence Against Women Act.

**4. Political inequality.** There was appropriate celebration in November 2012, when so many women candidates won their Congressional races. We now have twenty women serving in the US Senate. I can remember when having two women senators was groundbreaking, and a ladies room had to be installed on the Senate side of the US Capitol. We also saw seventy-eight women elected to the US House of Representatives in November. These are truly victories worth celebrating. But even with these magnificent victories, women remain underrepresented in both houses of Congress and in all fifty state legislatures. For every woman speaking or voting in the US Senate, five men have the power to quell her influence. The proportion is only slightly lower in the House. Compared with 189 other countries, the United States ranks an embarrassing seventy-seven in the number of women in national parliaments (Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2013).

**As a category  
of analysis, gender also  
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several key issues  
affecting higher  
education today**

**What can we do as educators?**

Given all these pressing issues—and these represent a mere handful—what can you and I do, sitting where we sit, at the heart of educational institutions?

**1. Be sure women and girls get an education.** There has been progress in this area, both globally and in the United States, but not enough. Education has an amazing influence on so many other factors, as social scientists have demonstrated through convincing scholarship. Educating women and girls can improve harvests, lead to better nutrition, reduce the size of families, improve the health of families, influence family decisions, contribute to the overall economic advance of countries, reduce violence, and decrease unwanted pregnancies. The list goes on and on. Nobelist Amartya Sen (2004) says these empirical studies underscore the “crucial role of basic education for all—and of women’s education, in particular—in facilitating radical social and economic changes that are so badly needed in our problem-ridden world.” He goes on to stress a very important point: “The reach of people’s democratic voice can be much steadier, firmer, and more extensive when political opportunities are supplemented by social empowerment through education.”

What are you doing, or what might you do, at your institution to raise this issue to a higher level, to introduce this issue to students, to initiate a program, locally or globally, that might contribute to expanding educational access to women and girls?

**2. Ensure that every student, whether male or female, graduates from college with the ability to use gender as a category of analysis, as a lens through which to interpret the world.** This is not a skill just for women or for students who take women’s studies courses, but for everyone. This is the most lasting legacy of the contemporary women’s movement. In the best of contemporary feminist theory, the concept of gender has been developed to enable an inclusive analysis of multiple differences among women. An analysis of gender is not divorced from an analysis of race or class or sexuality or other particularities of identity and culture.

Where in your institutions are those concepts being taught? Have you done an inventory? Have you asked your faculty? Have you reviewed your curriculum? Have you examined the student affairs programming or the training of

resident hall advisors and teaching assistants? As educators, we should openly advocate for the understanding of gender analysis as an essential building block for almost all other areas of knowledge and for critical thinking.

As a category of analysis, gender also provides a means of examining several key issues affecting higher education today. For example, how does the high cost of college affect women overall as well as different groups of women at your institution? Who has access to online courses? Do women who are at home with children have the uninterrupted time at their computers that such courses require—if they even have a computer? What do your institution’s statistics, broken down by gender and race and socioeconomic status, reveal about which students are faring well in online courses? In terms of completion rates, which groups of women are being left behind? Which groups are succeeding? Why? How can the identification of factors influencing the success of these students contribute to the success of other women and men? Why are contingent faculty disproportionately women?

**3. Work together as women on campuses—across domains and levels, across identity and political differences—to address issues of common concern.** When my colleagues at the Association of American Colleges and Universities and I are invited to lead workshops for women on campuses around the country, we



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are often surprised to discover that the women who participate are coming together in the same room for the first time. The consequences of the prevailing isolation of women on campuses become clear as the workshops progress and participants begin slowly to share their experiences across different departments and divisions. We routinely hear stories of humiliation and self-doubt, even from those in the highest positions on a campus.

How many of you reading this article have some formal network for women or groups of women on your campuses? How many have informal networks? Is there any one gathering of all the groups for any reason? If you have no organized groups or networks at your institution, you could consider creating one with a specific focus on, say, the slow advancement of women across all faculty ranks, but especially from associate to full professor; the underrepresentation of women—students and faculty members—in physics, chemistry, and engineering; the declining number of women in computer science; or the stubborn pay gaps between men and women who are doing the same work. The issues need not center on women. A campus group might focus on the inadequate number of faculty of color and the chilly climate that results in a “revolving door” for these faculty members; the rampant inequalities in pay, recognition, and respect between full-time and part-time faculty and between faculty, administrators, clerical workers, and facilities personnel; or the challenge of developing and sustaining campus-community partnerships.

**4. Create educational opportunities for all students, male and female, to cultivate the democratic knowledge, skills, values, and practice in collective action they need to shape the world they live in.** Just as higher education has

the potential to transform women’s lives, so too does civic education carry great potential for democratic cultures. And that brings us almost full circle, back to President Obama’s evocation of the principle of equality embedded in the Declaration of Independence. We need to teach students how to analyze systems and identify structures that produce inequalities.

### A final challenge

While bundling the products of my few decades as director of the PSEW into a box, it occurred to me that it is critically important to have such boxes. After all, they represent how so many were a democratic force for historical and intellectual change. It is equally important to have a higher education infrastructure that can archive these materials and a curriculum that can send students off to consult them as part of research projects. The PSEW archives contain a wealth of articles and monographs that represent women’s voices, opinions, research, concerns, strategies for change, innovative programs, and organized efforts to influence the world. They tell our collective story.

With this in mind, I conclude with a final challenge. I will tape that archival PSEW box shut with a smile of satisfaction and pride, if you who are reading this article will, in turn, commit to create even more materials that will one day take their rightful place in an archival box alongside mine. Begin to make that history today. Use your power and location within higher education to change the world so it is fairer for women and girls, for men and boys, and for the planet. I will count on you to write, invent, organize, act, envision, take risks, collaborate, teach, learn, laugh, play, and protest. That way I can be sure that although this moment marks the end of the run of *On Campus with Women*, it does not mark the end of the struggle for gender equity. As the slogan for the Wellesley Centers for Women, puts it, “A world that is good for women is good for everyone.” Let’s act to make it so. □

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

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## 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 administered by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Following are the recipients of the 2013 awards:

**Atnreahn Alleyne**, political science, University of Delaware

**Fiona Barnett**, literature, Duke University

**Milagros Castillo-Montoya**, education, Teachers College, Columbia University

**Sarah Lang**, human development and family science, The Ohio State University

**Justin Lomont**, chemistry, University of California–Berkeley

**Laurie A. Pinkert**, English, Purdue University

**Gina Spitz**, sociology, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Nominations for the 2014 awards are due October 1, 2013. (For more information, see [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org).) The recipients will be introduced at the 2014 annual meeting, where they will deliver a presentation on "Faculty of the Future: Voices of the Next Generation."



The recipients of the 2013 K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders awards

# Governance and Institutional Transformation

## Some Lessons Yet to Be Learned

JOHN T. CASTEEN III

**Good governance seems suddenly to be something that everyone knows on sight and that no one had imagined before**

THIS HAS BEEN a jarring year for governance and, more generally, for the concept of personal responsibility in US colleges and universities, with two starkly visible cases that trustees and others everywhere would like to understand.

From the ongoing crisis at the Pennsylvania State University,<sup>1</sup> trustees everywhere are learning that they really are responsible for what goes on in athletics, and that *good* governance has come to be more demanding—on trustees; on administrators, faculty, and staff; and, perhaps, on external constituents—more vulnerable to internal and external pressures, and more intrusive or even invasive than anyone had cause to imagine in the past. Good governance seems suddenly to be something that everyone knows on sight and that no one had imagined before.

The crisis at the University of Virginia (UVA) last summer and over the subsequent months involves, among other things, issues that I cannot properly discuss because of my former role there.<sup>2</sup> In truth, I know no more than anyone else knows, and that is part of the problem. You and I can read media speculations and angry letters to editors, but we have

no explanation from board members of the public interest in, or the reasons for, the actions they took in their roles as fiduciaries of a public trust. From the president's initial resignation to the present day, UVA's crisis is an unexplained mystery, one that has damaged the university and continues to do so.

In the case of Penn State, brutally public battles continue over the university's future, with apparently one yet to come as the governor and some legislators try to overrule the National Collegiate Athletic Association. In the UVA instance, the public has access to little detail or color as to what happened. And the two instances together have contributed little to public understanding of best or worst practices in fiduciary governance or in the management or administration of colleges and universities. The two cases are double black eyes for the public interest.

### Governance

What, in fact, is governance? Who practices it? How is it empowered or undercut, and who shares in it? It is remarkable how much and how little we know about a system of control that is all but ubiquitous in the United States—and unique to the United States. Most of us are familiar with the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities (AGB), whose publications, meetings, and training services are available generally to colleges and universities. Centers for the study of governance exist in

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John T. Casteen III,  
Annual Meeting



various places, some distinguished, and quite a lot gets published. Yet, in truth, after AGB's training programs and trustees' conferences, the art has not advanced much since the eighteenth century.

In this peculiar system, trustees are fiduciaries—legally responsible for assets, financial and other. As a condition of office, they accept obligations to sustain assets that do not belong to them, and to serve the interests of others. The most common summary (at the level of introductory training materials) of trustees' functions goes something like this:

- Trustees carry out the purposes expressed by founders or legislatures or whatever benign entity has created an institution (college, museum, foundation) with some traits of corporations for the good of others, and generally for posterity. They accept and live within the limits of the charter or the law or will or whatever.
- They pledge to defend the trust or the asset—to pass it on intact and, generally, to enhance it.
- Therefore, they are obligated to invest assets competently and dispassionately.
- They have accepted the obligation to provide or dispense benefits commonly, and not to benefit themselves or their friends and allies. They owe others their fairness and impartiality.
- A hard point relevant to recent history: they are accountable to the trust's or the

entity's beneficiaries—in education, to those who teach, who study, who benefit by the research enterprise. In this respect, they seem to me to be unlike corporate directors, whose responsibility is to equity shareholders, to the owners who elect them.

- Trustees must report their actions (hence, annual reports, etc.) to these beneficiaries, a principle perhaps trampled in recent times at both Penn State and UVA.
- Trustees accept specific duties, most notably the legal duty of loyalty: they cannot act against their trust, whose interest comes before their own.
- They cannot hand on these duties to others; they are themselves obligated to carry out their duties.

In this system, trustees and boards of trust accept constraints. These necessarily include obligations as to the processes (open or transparent, selfless, protective) by which they carry out their obligations. Some constraints are legal; others are matters of custom and tradition.

To be a trustee or a visitor, or whatever the term may be, is an honor. That, ultimately, is the motive to serve. To be named a trustee of a charitable entity is to be recognized as a person of integrity and stature. Trustees cannot aggrandize themselves or use their positions for their own profit. They cannot self-deal, a principle that explains why the American system finds secrecy in board dealings repulsive. They cannot engage in conflicts of interest. They must oversee assets in the best interest of the persons who benefit directly from them. Trustees assume conservative duties: because the assets they control are not their own, they must protect them assiduously. In this configuration, their process obligations are essential. The late Adam Yarmolinski, who in a prior time trained many of our boards with regard to their duties, made the legal point in this way: when convened as a board after giving due notice and with the required quorum, boards of trust can do everything that their charters allow; but members have no separate, individual, or single powers outside the board room.

So these are people with obligations, not people with powers—a status they share with elected legislators and others who swear to benefit persons who depend on them. For that reason, perhaps, well-ordered American boards are not likely sponsors of transformation or (to borrow the phrase of the hour in American education) *disruption*. It may well be that talk about trustees'

personal agendas is a signal that governance is in trouble.

Corporate boards of directors are different. They are accountable to owners, to holders of shares of equity. The test of their success is near-term profitability. Corporate governance may thrive on disruption—unless, of course, the disruption blows up the enterprise, and the shareholders lose their equity, a hazard that turns up regularly when companies founder.

### **Institutional transformation**

Effective trustees foster institutional transformation whenever they appoint capable deans or presidents, hold officers or administrators and their faculties to institutional and legal account, and disclose openly what they are doing and why. The forces for change that are characteristic of successful US colleges and universities bubble from the bottom up, from the beneficiaries to whom trustees owe accountability. Students and staff and faculty members stand in the place of shareholders, thus the historic importance of great academic leaders and committed alumni.

Process integrity during times of transformation inevitably challenges governance,

## **The forces for change that are characteristic of successful US colleges and universities bubble from the bottom up**

management, imagination, and stamina in colleges and universities. Harvard College's deliberations during Henry Rosovsky's tenure as dean make this point as well as anything. The debate over Harvard's core curriculum took place over the course of almost three years, and it caught the attention of virtually everyone in American higher education.

If one wants a renewed American academy, a reinvigorated liberal tradition in American colleges and universities, then one necessarily wants and takes part in the vigorous debate by which propositions are advanced, tested, reformulated, won, or lost. Transformation necessarily demands the processes of collaborative planning, consolidation, and elimination by which entities of limited means control their own destinies. That's the price.

Last year, I worked with Rick Legon, Rich Novak, and Merrill Schwartz and others at AGB and some twenty-five leaders from higher education on a Knight Commission grant. Our assignment was to examine the proper role of boards in Division I intercollegiate athletics, and to recommend best practices. Our report, *Trust, Accountability, and Integrity: Board Responsibilities*



Annual Meeting

## Annual Meeting



for *Intercollegiate Athletics* (Casteen and Legon 2012), appeared in October 2012. We began our work in October 2011. The Penn State crises began in November 2011.

We did not set out to study Penn State, and, in fact, we did not do so. But much of what we learned resonates with related work at AGB and elsewhere on board responsibilities for academic programs. All of us grew up understanding that presidential control means that presidents are accountable. That's still true, but it doesn't mean (as Penn State has acknowledged) that trustees can walk away from trouble. Adam Yarmolinski taught a rule that defines board obligations in both areas: *noses in, fingers out*.

People with power, particularly the power to disrupt the lives and learning of beneficiaries, need to know what they are doing. The system is ripe with prospects for misfeasance and malfeasance. That we tolerate the practice by which governors reward political donations by appointments to college and university boards—a not-so-ancient practice that is, I am convinced, the Achilles heel of America's public colleges and universities—defines a fundamental risk. That universal, ongoing training for board members is all but unheard of points to another risk. Neither public nor private appointment processes pay proper attention to trustees' fiduciary obligations.

I admire Penn State's board for realizing that it had to know a great deal more than any board has ever known in order to carry out its obligations—for acknowledging that the honor of serving carries with it heavy obligations. Penn State's internal research, use of expert outsiders, ongoing training, and commitments to reform and transparency define new best practices.

We talk at meeting sessions about unprecedented challenges, the accumulating stress of a diseased economy, the cost to students of systems (educational and others) that lag behind the national interest. That talk is legitimate. So is our engagement with transformations, with inventing anew our commitments to the varieties of learning, of knowledge, that make people free. We should talk and engage, and indeed we must; that's our job as faculty members and deans and others inside colleges and universities.

And yet this dialogue has to go elsewhere—to boardrooms, to news broadcasts, to legislative hearings—where thoughtful people have their own parts to perform. In our young country, we talk quite a lot about founding fathers and national tradition—more, I suspect, than happens in any of Europe's republics. Learning—actually, classical learning of the kind that modern utilitarians sometimes seem to want out of the common schools—has everything to do with America's anomalous revolution, as it had also to do with Newtonian and Darwinian science and, indeed, with the consensus about curricula, about what learning's progress through schooling ought to be for most students, that still informs our best schools and colleges.

Institutional transformation in response to the issues raised during this annual meeting may come suddenly, as perhaps it has with MOOCs. Provocative disasters like the Penn State and UVA crises are rare. And, for now at least, only Penn State appears to be engaged in successful, accountable reform. My own guess is that widespread reform will come slowly, over decades rather than years, as we sort out our terms and as we challenge or engage others—the trustees, governors, and business people who also make decisions about their own lives and the lives of their children and their communities. The stakes are too high for us to do anything else. □

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



#### REFERENCE

Casteen, J. T., III, and R. D. Legon. 2012. *Trust, Accountability, and Integrity: Board Responsibilities for Intercollegiate Athletics*. Washington, DC: Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities.

#### NOTES

1. In 2011, it was alleged that officials of the Pennsylvania State University had enabled and subsequently sought to cover up the sexual assault of several underage boys by longtime assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky. The ensuing scandal had far-reaching consequences for the university, including the imposition of sweeping penalties by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.
2. In June 2012, the University of Virginia Board of Visitors announced that Teresa M. Sullivan, president of the University of Virginia (UVA), would resign just two years into her five-year term of office. After it emerged that the resignation was the result of a dispute between Sullivan and members of the board concerning the future direction of the university, UVA faculty, students, and alumni, along with members of the broader academic community nationwide, rallied in support of Sullivan. Ultimately, the episode led to the removal of both the rector and vice rector of the board of visitors and the reinstatement of Sullivan as president of the university. The author, John T. Casteen III, preceded Sullivan as president of UVA, serving from 1990 to 2010.

## Unpacking Teachers' Invisible Knapsacks

# Social Identity and Privilege in Higher Education

PAMELA E. BARNETT

**What socially determined privileges and disadvantages have an impact on faculty as teachers and colleagues?**

A FEMALE GRADUATE STUDENT I know was harassed by a male student—who may have been mentally ill—during one of her first semesters as a teaching assistant (TA).

The student dominated class time with manic talking and borderline inappropriate comments, and he challenged her in class using a hostile, derisive tone. She communicated clear boundaries and expectations, but the disruptive and inappropriate behavior culminated one day when he came in late (again), scanned the room briefly, and then sat in her lap, rather than in the one available chair in the back row. Certain that this problem demanded more than classroom management skills, she reached out to a teaching mentor who intoned, “The camel does not stick his nose into the tent if the flap is not open.”

Being both new to the profession and self-reflective, the TA asked herself whether her behavior had contributed to her problem. Was she communicating accessibility inappropriately? Was she failing to exercise her authority? Was she vulnerable to this situation because she lacked some crucial set of teaching tools? She also started to wonder whether the student’s behavior, as well as the mentor’s response, was affected by her social identity as a young woman. Would the student have crossed the line so

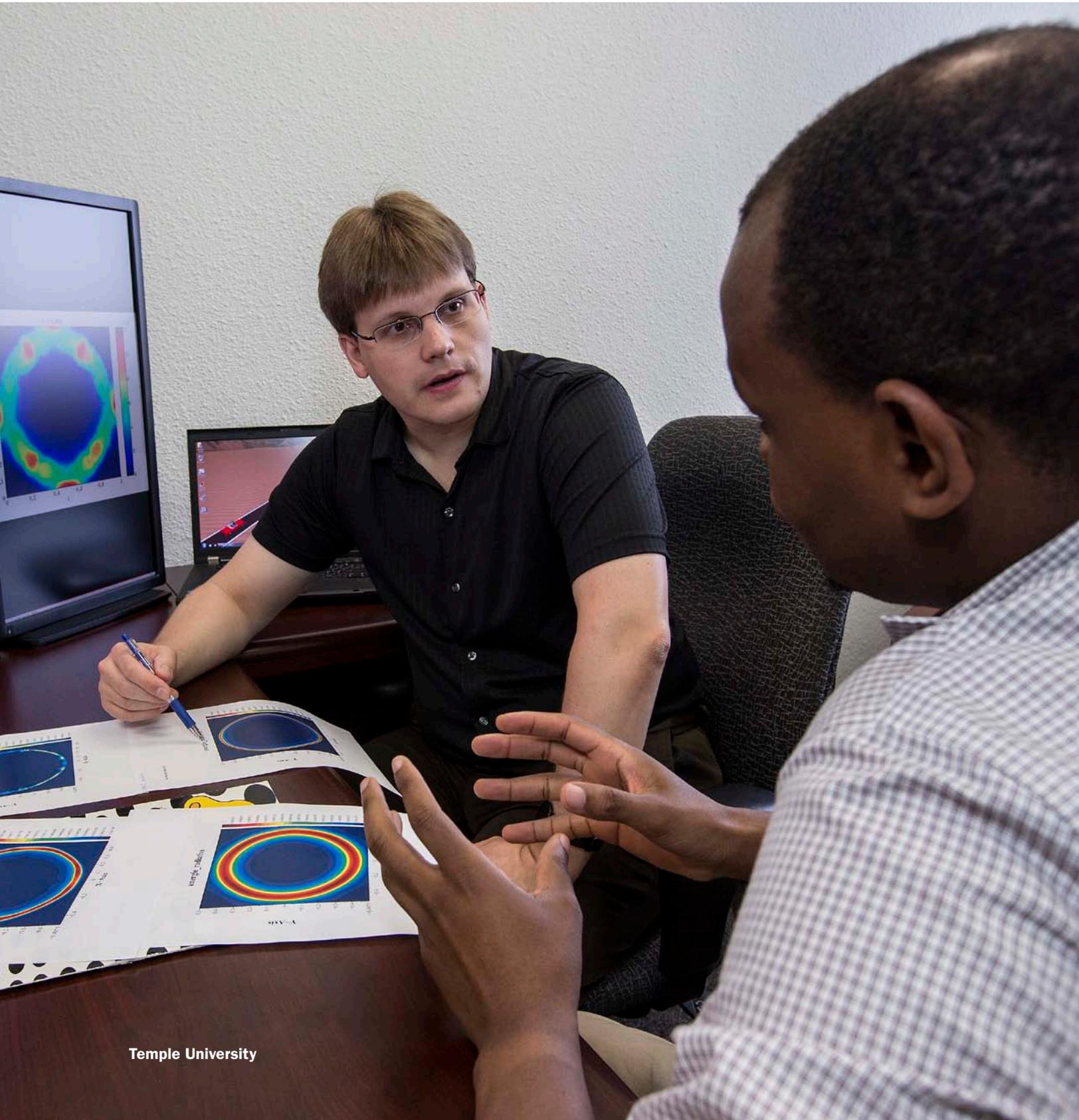
dramatically with a male TA? Would the mentor have suspected a male TA of inviting a male student to breach his boundaries? As I have reflected over the years, I’ve concluded that not only was she at a disadvantage as a woman, but male TAs have an automatic, often unacknowledged, advantage.

Peggy McIntosh (1988) famously unpacked what she called an “invisible knapsack” of privileges socially conferred upon whites, men, and heterosexuals (1988). She argued that not only are women and minorities at a disadvantage, but those with social power enjoy benefits that are both unearned and unjustified. We often accept those privileges unconsciously, viewing our own experience as the norm or solely the result of our hard work. This denial, as McIntosh pointed out, keeps privilege “from being fully recognized, acknowledged, lessened, or ended” (1).

To counteract this unconsciousness, McIntosh made a thorough list of the privileges she enjoys as a white and heterosexual person, “conditions of daily experience which I once took for granted, as neutral, normal, and universally available to everybody” (10). For example, she can arrange to be in the company of people of her race most of the time. She can pay with checks, credit cards, or cash, never considering that her skin color will work against the appearance of financial reliability. When she is successful, she is not called a “credit to her race,” and when she swears or dresses shabbily, no one attributes her choices to the bad morals or poverty of her race. As a heterosexual, she can talk about her life partner

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in any social context without fearing rebuff. Her children are given texts that implicitly support her kind of family unit. McIntosh's list of privileges demonstrates the way some can "count on" social reactions and cultural systems that meet our needs or confirm our legitimacy or existence, while others cannot.

#### **Social privilege and higher education**

For the past few years, within the context of higher education, I've been leading dialogues about McIntosh's foundational work. What socially determined privileges and disadvantages have an impact on faculty as teachers and colleagues? Not all our social identities are obvious, but students and colleagues attribute various identities to us—including identities based on gender, race, class, nationality, ability, and sexual orientation. How they perceive us shapes their expectations of us, their interactions with us, and our experience of academic community.

I routinely mentor faculty of color, women in STEM fields, those who speak English as a second language, and physically disabled educators who must make sense of, and respond to, aspects of the professorial role that do not come automatically—classroom authority and legitimacy, supportive academic community, mentoring. I've also had conversations with faculty who wish their students would question them more, rather than defer to the socially conferred authority of maleness or whiteness.

For faculty from groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education, an awareness of the effects of socially conferred privilege—and, with it, the knowledge that their experiences are likely not unique to them or caused by them—can be especially helpful. Such awareness is also a call to those of us who enjoy social privileges to recognize the contingent nature of such privileges, and to be more informed colleagues and supportive mentors to those

who face different challenges working in the university. Institutional leaders should consider designing faculty development or mentoring programs that explicitly address social privilege.

So what exactly are the privileges? Over the years, several colleagues and I have read McIntosh's work together, and then we've rewritten her lists from our own perspectives as university educators. I share the collective insights here, using McIntosh's template, which states privileges in the first person.<sup>1</sup> To introduce the issues efficiently, I organize the lists below according to single identity categories (e.g., maleness, whiteness). It is worth noting, however, that black and feminist theorists especially have elucidated how social identities interact with each other in complex ways that can compound advantage or disadvantage (Weber 1989; Collins 1991; Crenshaw 1989). Individual experience depends on the particular confluence of social identities as well as the context of action. Not every white teacher can count on every white privilege on my list, and neither can every male teacher count on every male privilege listed. The experience of the male instructor who speaks English as second language or who is disabled may be determined more by his nationality and physical status than by his gender. And context matters. The male instructor's gender identity may be more salient when he's teaching a gender studies course, and speaking English as a second language may matter more when he's delivering a lecture to a large audience. Even as we consider the privileges that accrue to a particular identity, we should be mindful that other intersecting identities may either compound or counteract them.

### **The able-bodied instructor**

My colleague Tiffenia Archie always begins with the "able-bodied" category when teaching the concept of privilege, because the items on this list may be more immediately obvious. Brainstorming about the different ways mobility, speech, or sensory apprehension is constrained or unconstrained prepares students to consider the less physical, more socially constituted manifestations of privilege, such as those enjoyed by males and whites. With a firmer cognitive grasp of the concept, students are less likely to feel guilty or defensive. They can

**Even as we consider the privileges that accrue to a particular identity, we should be mindful that other intersecting identities may either compound or counteract them**

comprehend the broader social argument and their individual responsibility for understanding and responding to social systems without feeling individually liable for social inequality. This approach recognizes that students can be distressed by the idea that they personally benefit from

structures of inequality and that they can be uncomfortable with the argument that social identity can be an asset, contributing to success as surely as personality, skill, or experience.

In the case of the disabled professor, students might have respect for what they perceive as obstacles overcome. My colleague Carol Marfisi, who teaches from a wheelchair, read the list presented below and said she didn't recognize herself in it. She experiences her life as a norm and, like any good teacher, intentionally decides when her identity can be an asset for learning. Necessity can be the mother of invention; in a recent class, she asked students for their bodies in order to help demonstrate a point, enabling them to learn from kinesthetic engagement with an idea. She also argued that disability is a fluid social identity: most people will experience it in some form, at some point. Though not insurmountable, there are still unique challenges for the disabled academic.

Following is a list of privileges enjoyed by the able-bodied teacher:

- I can get to any classroom that is assigned to me.
- I can schedule classes or meetings back to back, because I can get across campus easily.
- I can reach and move all the equipment in all lab spaces.
- I can reach, see, and use the podiums, as well as instructional technology, in all classrooms.
- All documents, websites, and classroom management software are accessible to me, without accommodation.
- Students can submit their assignments to me in any paper or electronic format.
- I can stand up or move about the room in order to capture my students' attention, convey emphasis, or assert my authority.
- I can project my voice in order to capture my students' attention, convey emphasis, or assert my authority.
- I can circulate about the room when my students are doing group or lab work.

- My mental ability is never questioned because of my physical appearance or qualities.
- I am never asked to define or explain my “able-bodiedness.”
- I do not rely primarily on online forums to discuss the particular challenges I face; many colleagues are similarly situated and can reflect on institutional experience with me.
- I never wonder whether my positive student evaluations could reflect pity.
- I get honest feedback; there is no association between my physical vulnerability and my emotional vulnerability.
- I am not considered or called “an inspiration” for doing my job.

### **The native English-speaking instructor**

National identity and native language also affect the academic experience. There can be advantages to international identity. Students may assume that an international faculty member has sophisticated knowledge of global issues and is more qualified to teach international topics or foreign languages. International instructors are often highly valued members of diverse academic communities. Yet, there is a variety of advantages that come with speaking English as a first language in a US college or university. A telling series of experiments conducted by Donald L. Rubin (1992) arguably demonstrates that undergraduates “tune out” foreign-born instructors. His research team gathered American undergraduates inside a classroom and then played a taped lecture that was delivered in the voice of a man from central Ohio. While the undergraduates listened, they faced a projected image. Half the students viewed a white American man at a chalkboard; the other half viewed an Asian male teacher. When asked to fill in missing words from a printed transcript of the taped speech, students made 20 percent more errors when viewing the Asian man’s image. Being heard is just the first of many advantages for the native speaker of English.

Following is a list of privileges enjoyed by teachers whose first language is English:

- Students do not assume that I am unintelligible and give up on comprehension.
- If students don’t understand a concept, they won’t blame it on my accent.
- My student evaluations do not mention my accent or verbal fluency.
- I can ask probing or clarifying questions without students assuming I lack comprehension.
- Students and colleagues speak to me at an authentic pace, and do not exaggerate their pronunciation of long or complex words.
- Students do not question my expertise as a teacher of North American or English history, culture, or linguistics.
- Students assume that I am qualified to assess their written work in English.
- People correlate my fluency in English with my mental acuity.
- I am likely to “get” my students’ cultural references, humor, and slang.
- I can read most academic documents and student work quickly and easily in my native language.

### **The male instructor**

While a male faculty member often has the benefit of the host of privileges listed below, there may be pedagogical costs to this social identity. As I mentioned above, some male faculty would like their students to question them more, and some regret that students seem less likely to seek help from them. These considerations, along with those below, give a window into how gendered identity can matter for teachers in higher education.

Following is a list of privileges enjoyed by male instructors:

- Students almost always address me as “doctor” or “professor,” rather than “mister” or by my first name.
- Students tend not to question my expertise in my field or challenge my authority.
- I can impose class policies or grade rigorously without students feeling I am insufficiently nurturing.
- If I am passionate about an issue in class or in departmental or university meetings, I will not be judged “emotional” or “irrational.”
- I assume that my voice will be heard in meetings; I may repeat comments made by women colleagues and get credit for their ideas.
- I can dress informally, or even sloppily, for work and be taken seriously.
- I never consider whether any of my work clothing might be perceived as sexy or frivolous.
- If my work schedule adjusts around childcare duties, people will admire me for my priorities.
- If I work around the clock, I am unlikely to be judged negatively for putting my family second.
- Curricula in my discipline have always testified to the contributions of my gender.
- Colleagues and students assume I was hired



because of my merit, not because of affirmative action.

- My male colleagues and I are paid competitive salaries (AAUP 2010).

### **The white instructor**

Over the years, I and others have found that white Americans are more likely to resist the idea of white privilege than the other types of privileges addressed thus far. As I noted, it can be disorienting, even painful, to recognize the unearned asset of whiteness as a “bonus” that compounds the impact of our intelligence, skill, or hard work. We may also feel guilty about these

advantages we never asked for, yet nevertheless enjoy. Those from ethnic groups that have experienced historical discrimination and devaluation (e.g., Jews or Italians) or who have a working-class background may argue that they are “less white.” This argument has some basis; whiteness is not a simple matter of skin tone, but is a social construction whose content is, by and large, about the privileges that define it. Historians have written about how the Irish, Jews, Italians, and even Asians and Latinos have “become white” (Ignatiev 1996; Brodtkin 1998; Roediger 2005; Yancey 2003). But more often than not, we cannot opt out of the white identity conferred upon us.

As a Jewish and Italian woman, I know that my grandparents' experience was different from mine. Yet, after two generations of upward social mobility for Jews and Italians, as well as an influx of "new" immigrant groups with lower social status, I now experience most or all the privileges on the list below. It is also possible, in many cases, for ethnic, working-class, or gay whites to pass as middle-class, white, or heterosexual, if they so choose. An individual may identify more strongly with an ethnic or sexual identity than with whiteness, but the critical factor here is how *others* perceive us—and this is socially overdetermined.

I believe that one can more easily recognize and work against white privilege by finding a way past personal guilt. Years ago, when I was working as the sole white professor in an African American studies program, I had a conversation about white guilt with a black colleague. While she appreciated it when whites recognized white privilege, she noted that guilt did not help solve the problem. Instead of feeling guilty, she suggested, whites should align with her by being "outraged and resistant." We could use awareness in productive ways; for example, if we were in a faculty meeting together and her comment was ignored, but then somehow heard when it was articulated by me or another white colleague, I could speak up. Arguably, writing this article is a use of my compounded privilege. As a white, middle-class, able-bodied, straight woman, I can write this argument without most of you, my readers, thinking that I am oversensitive about racial issues, self-interested, or radical.

Following is a list of privileges enjoyed by white instructors:

- Students are not surprised that I am their instructor; I am what they expect for most classes.
- Students do not question my expertise in fields that are not race studies.
- I can speak passionately about racial inequality or injustice without being perceived as "angry," "oversensitive," or "radical."
- I can teach courses in African American, Latino, or Asian American studies without students or colleagues viewing me as self-interested rather than scholarly.
- Curricula in my discipline have always testified to the contributions of my race.
- I never question whether my student evaluations are affected by my race.<sup>2</sup>
- Students and colleagues assume I was hired on the basis of merit, not because of affirmative action.
- I am not repeatedly photographed for university publications because I diversify the public face of the institution.
- I will not be overwhelmed with service requests because I am one of the few faculty members who can diversify committees.
- I will not be in danger of being denied tenure because of the service burden I carry.<sup>3</sup>
- I can count on having departmental colleagues of my racial identity.<sup>4</sup>
- When searching for positions, I don't have to consider whether I would be one of few people of my race in my new town, if hired.
- It is easy to find mentors who share my social identity and understand the particular challenges I face.
- My tenure file will most likely be reviewed by colleagues having the same racial identity as mine.
- If someone says I'm articulate, it is an uncomplicated compliment.
- I assume that my voice will be heard in meetings; I may even repeat comments made by colleagues of color and get credit for their ideas.
- My accomplishments are not perceived as representing the potential or the successes of my race.
- I have never been mistaken for housekeeping, physical plant, or secretarial staff.
- I have never been questioned by campus security while moving electronics or books out of my office.
- I can often choose whether to reveal my social identities that come with disadvantages or less status.

### Conclusion

Liberal education promises to expand students' worldviews; to help them develop the ability to engage issues, questions, and problems from diverse perspectives; and to provide opportunities for students to learn from and work with people from a variety of social and global locations. Through its Liberal Education and America's Promise initiative, the Association of American Colleges and Universities calls on institutions to help students develop personal and social responsibility, a complex outcome that includes "civic knowledge and engagement—local and global" and "intercultural knowledge and competence" (2007, 12). We are preparing students for both responsible citizenship and a global economy. To this end, many US colleges and universities seek to diversify student bodies as

well as faculties. But as we know, recruitment is not enough. Retention and success initiatives for first-generation and underrepresented students are a priority in many colleges and universities; foundations are expressing this priority in countless calls for proposals.

We must be similarly intentional about nurturing and retaining our diverse faculties. Ideally, more faculty members from groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education will enter the profession aware of and prepared for some of the differences and disadvantages they will have to negotiate. It would also help to have colleagues, and especially leaders, who “get it,” who are conscious of the network of privileges and disadvantages attendant to social identity, and who can then provide informed support and mentoring. Awareness of these differences could also inform policies for the hiring, retention, and promotion of diverse faculties. These steps would help create a more richly inclusive intellectual and educational environment. □

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## NOTES

1. I thank the colleagues who have discussed their experiences with me and helped generate items for the lists presented in this article: Donna Marie Peters, Stephanie Fiore, Adalet Baris Gunersel, as well as members of the Provost’s Teaching Academy, the Diversity Teaching Circle, and participants in a session I led at a Lilly Conference on College and University Teaching in June 2012. Mary Etienne provided ideas and invaluable research assistance.
2. An analysis of almost seventeen thousand evaluations found that minority faculty members are rated significantly lower than white professors, even after controlling for tenure status and course type (Hamer-mesh and Parker 2005). An experiment asking students to evaluate professors based on curricula vitae found that students evaluated black professors as significantly less competent and legitimate than their white and Asian counterparts (Bavishi, Madera, and Hebl 2010).
3. Turner, González, and Wood (2008) found that “service can be detrimental to faculty of color as they progress toward tenure and promotion.”
4. In 2005–6, approximately 5.4 percent of all tenure-eligible and contingent faculty members were African American, 4.5 percent were Hispanic, and 0.04 percent were Native American, even though these groups represented 12 percent, 14 percent, and 0.8 percent, respectively, of the total US population (AFT 2010). Underrepresented minority faculty members from minority groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education are also less likely to be retained (Moreno et al. 2006).

# Cultivating Critique

## A (Humanoid) Response to the Online Teaching of Critical Thinking

MATT WAGGONER

P E R S P E C T I V E S

**Are we adjusting our concept of a liberal arts degree to make it amenable to software delivery and assessment systems?**

THE TURING ERA, defined by British mathematician and computer science pioneer Alan Turing's question about whether or not computers can think, is not over. Philosophers and scientists will continue to haggle over whether thought

necessitates intentionality, and

whether computation can rise to that level. Meanwhile, another frontier is emerging in one small but expanding corner of the universe: the introductory-level, undergraduate courses that colleges and universities require students to take for general education credit in the area of critical thinking. On this frontier, similar questions arise, but with an added conundrum twist: Can we program computers to teach humans how to think? Can we program computers to think critically? Can we program computers to teach humans how to think critically? In the artificial intelligence debates of the past, everything hinged on the meaning of thinking; in the present debate, everything hinges on the meaning of critique.

### Critical thinking 2.0

Critical thinking textbooks the size of department store catalogs have been used in the past to teach readers how to identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments, and how to craft arguments. These books tend to operate in the tradition of Robert M. Ennis' 1962 *Harvard Educational Review* article that defined critical thinking as "the correct assessment of statements." The

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science of assessing statements and of analyzing how conclusions can be reached through logical reasoning is called argumentation theory, or argumentation (also informal logic, when applied to everyday language). Ennis paved the way for defining "critical thinking" as the skill of logical argumentation.

Assessing premises, reasoning, and claims demands a body of knowledge and a skill set that critical thinking textbooks can provide, along with opportunities to practice and improve those skills. Promising broad application across the arts and sciences, and responding to pressures to verify student learning outcomes, critical thinking defined as argumentation has emerged as a core component of many college and university liberal arts curricula.

The *New York Times* reported that the college textbook industry earned about \$4.5 billion in profits in 2010, with the average student paying \$900 per year for books on top of tuition (Scheutze 2011). In recent years, more and more textbooks, including critical thinking textbooks, offer online versions, which accounted for over 23 percent of the industry's profits in 2010, nearly doubling the profits of the year before. When Mark Majurey of Taylor and Francis publishers said that "textbooks as e-books ought to be seen as a stepping stone to the future" (quoted in Scheutze 2011), he was not kidding, but he also did not elaborate on what that future will look like. What Mr. Majurey did not say is this: it is not only likely that higher education will more fully acquiesce to online delivery of courses (and e-book usage) in order to meet its bottom line;



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it may also become routine for mainframe servers in Arizona to administer online teaching to students in Alabama, all the way down to the form responses students get when they fail to recognize the difference between induction and deduction.

### **Computers and argumentation**

Many professors believe that there are things that make up a liberal arts education that software programs cannot compute the way humanoids can. They ask, can you computerize a composition or literary interpretation course the way you can computerize a math or statistics course? They may also believe that critical thinking has to do with more than logical argumentation, and be led to ask, are we adjusting our concept of a liberal arts degree to make it amenable to software delivery and assessment systems? Did we change the job description to fit the candidate's qualities?

Maybe those who ask such questions are clinging to exactly the kind of vague, indefinable characteristics that an arguments-based approach to critical thinking is intended to correct. Presumably, one of the reasons that colleges and universities are mandating a critical thinking curriculum (and working hand in glove with large textbook publishers to provide standardized approaches to teaching critical thinking) is because too many of us have been unclear about what critical thinking entails, and have therefore been unable to provide meaningful evidence that our students are doing it.

Many of us have been vague about what it means to think critically, about what it means to teach critical thinking, about how students can demonstrate it, and about how we can assess it. The arguments-based approach to critical thinking is, in my view, a necessary correction to an otherwise hoary domain of higher education pedagogy that has been used to justify everything from a simplistic approach to workplace problem solving, to anything that looks like effort on the part of students to analyze a poem or a play, to a biased pedagogy aimed at getting students to adopt various cultural and political views without fully understanding or being able to explain why they should hold those views.

Whatever else critical thinking is, it includes the ability to engage and make arguments, and we can teach this. For decades it has been happening in philosophy and composition courses. The notion that all students should take a class

that devotes a good chunk of its time to teaching these skills more effectively hardly seems debatable to me.

The choice to limit critical thinking to the correct assessment of statements is another matter, and those professors may be right who wonder about the extent to which this choice is the result of lobbying by publishers rather than by teachers or the universities and colleges they work for. The push to digitize instruction, demonstration, and assessment of critical thinking favors the argumentation approach precisely because it is more similar in structure to math and logic, and therefore to the indigenously language of a robot.

I see no conspiracy to water down the meaning of critical thinking. I see only a set of systemic factors colluding with each other—for example, online instruction, commercial interests, heavy teaching loads for those who teach the bulk of the courses in question, and assessment needs. However, the lack of conspiracy or intent on the part of individual actors in the university teaching machine does not mean that a diminishment of the concept of critical thinking is not happening.

The question that needs to be asked is whether or not there is anything missing from this approach. Is there a supplemental *je ne sais quoi* of critical thinking that logical argumentation alone cannot account for, and that robot co-professor has a hard time computing? This is by no means a novel question. Literature on the subject has long been split between “critical thinking” as the logical assessment of statements and “critical pedagogy,” which largely analyzes power relations (Burbules and Berk 1999). Critical pedagogists accuse critical thinking experts of upholding a traditional (modernist and/or positivist) model of universality, impartiality, and individualism, as though critique relies on a solitary act of logical analysis of inert facts. Critical thinking experts accuse critical pedagogists of politicizing critique, passing off political conviction as “critical,” and downplaying the process of justifying the conclusions at which one arrives.

I suggest that the arguments-based approach insufficiently cultivates one crucial aspect of critical thinking, and it is an aspect that computers cannot compute. Critical thinking is not only an act of following the rules of logic; it is also both an act and an attitude of rebellion. Rebellion lies at the root of all criticism. It is,

and historically was, the basis of the great revolution in thinking that resulted in the turn from tradition and authority to logic and reason. It has also been the cornerstone of every analysis of, and confrontation with, relations of power and ideology.

Rebellion is not party to the blackmail of choosing either logic or protest as the lingua franca of critical thinking. It is instead a particular bent of the self toward all claims, in all the many forms they take (e.g., propositional, discursive, structural, ideological, scientific, religious, political, economic, and cultural). Rebellion by itself does not make one critical, but without rebellion there can be no critique. Moreover, rebellion necessitates another kind of pedagogy than the one that computers have the capacity to facilitate. It requires contexts that encourage dialogue, that incite response, that challenge views, and that model the courage to “think otherwise” (Burbules and Berk 1999).

#### **Courage to think**

I can recall a formative moment during my own days as an undergraduate philosophy major. Another student presented a paper in an ethics seminar outlining reasons for opposing the death penalty. As an eighteen-year-old from Texas, where the death penalty is as much a part of the culture as hunting and high school football, I remember experiencing an internal conflict between the sound logic of the student’s arguments and the anxiety they provoked for me, because they challenged my worldview. I

### **Rebellion lies at the root of all criticism**

also remember that the ensuing discussion, moderated by the professor, created a climate in which I was not able to skirt the issue of my cultural and emotional inhibitions. I was challenged to respond to both the student’s presentation and to my upbringing in a way that demanded intellectual rigor and courage.

What often inhibits us from arriving at logical conclusions is timidity, fear, habit, training, and what one writer called the “overwhelming objectivity” of the world around us. Critical thinkers are those who apply the rules of reason, but who also learn to follow good reasoning into places that they have not felt comfortable going, places that forbid entry. We can program computers to teach us the rules of logical reasoning, but we cannot program computers to teach us how to muster what it takes to challenge the self-evidence and/or security of deeply held convictions, acculturated world views, habituated beliefs, and discursive regimes of truth.

In one historically well-founded sense, critique is about thinking negatively, because it is about doubting, fault finding, questioning bias, and questioning authority. In another historically well-founded sense, critique is about thinking positively, because it involves acquiring some degree of certainty about the correctness of the claims that we and others make, the rules of debate, proper form, and what warrants assent to belief.

The direction of high-level humanities since the 1960s (i.e., its nebulosity and political



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commitment) often solicits the complaint that students are only taught that critical thinking means the skill of debunking any claim put before them. On the other hand, the critical thinking textbook industry explicitly favors a positive interpretation of critique. They sometimes assert at the outset that critical thinking does not mean negative thinking (see, for example, Facione and Gittens 2010).

It is not just the textbook industry that promotes positive critical thinking. Michael Roth (2010), president of Wesleyan University, delivered a speech at the fiftieth anniversary of Wesleyan's Center for the Humanities in which he appealed to faculty to move "beyond critical thinking" (by which he seems to have been referring to critical pedagogies that aim to criticize ideologies of power) by declining to teach a negative, debunking-style approach. This fault-finding tendency is usually associated with critical theory and/or deconstruction, despite the fact that prime suspects in those traditions such as Theodor Adorno (1983), Raymond Williams (1976), and Judith Butler (2002) all criticized the notion of critique as fault finding and demythologizing.

In my own teaching experiences, the discrepancy between positive and negative cultures of critique has had less to do with adherence to theoretical orientations and more to do with class. Upper-middle-class students ready to rebel from the stable environments of their well-off parents and with little skin in the game seem ready and eager to debunk everything, including the systems they knowingly benefit from. Poor and working-class students hoping to break into an increasingly elusive middle class with all of its expectations about literacy, articulateness, and job skills often show a tendency not to question the systems they are working so diligently to get a fix on.

The problem is not with either the negative or the positive approach to critical thinking, but with the choice to emphasize one at the expense of the other. The tendency to choose a side reflects student backgrounds, technological limitations, institutional pressures, political bias, philosophical allegiance, commercial interests, and other factors. But I would submit that it does not reflect a well-reasoned approach to what critical thinking means and has meant. Rather than choosing sides, we should take this impasse as an opportunity to revisit the historical legacy of the critical tradition, paying attention to the

complex and intriguing relationship at its core between obedience and rebellion.

### **Obedience and rebellion**

There is no better place to turn for an appreciation of the fascinating promiscuity between obedience and rebellion in critical thinking than the late-eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant. The story is often told of how townsfolk in the place where he lived used to set their clocks by the obsessively regular walks he took every day. He lived and died a bachelor, he never ventured more than ten miles from the town of Königsberg where he lived, and he wrote in a way that reflected his personality, which is to say, with an almost neurotic attention to precision and detail. He was, in a manner of speaking, a robot.

Kant defined enlightenment as thinking for yourself, which, he made a point of insisting, does not happen merely because you have been taught how and given the freedom to do so: "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* 'Have courage to use your own reason!'"—that is the motto of enlightenment."

Critique is an attitude of rebellion, and what people often lack when it comes to critical thinking is not the know-how of rational deliberation, but courage. Who is to blame for our lack of courage to think out on the limb? For one thing, Kant thought that we have to blame ourselves for finding it too painful or tedious. We often practically beg others to do our thinking for us.

Kant also blamed guardians of knowledge (priests, politicians, professors) who warn that if we venture out too far on our own we will fall, and who ensure us that we need their safety nets of social, scientific, religious, and cosmological stability. Kant was certain that, more than anything, fear is the thing that keeps us unenlightened and uncritical, adding that even if the revolution came and righted the world's wrongs, our minds would still be paralyzed by the inertia of habit and by the treachery of what it is like to have a thought that we could call our own.

In the face of personal, social, cultural, political, and habitual inhibitions, how are we ever

**The problem is not with either the negative or the positive approach to critical thinking, but with the choice to emphasize one at the expense of the other**

to become critical thinkers? In the remainder of his essay, Kant suggested that the way forward is through gradual, trial-and-error movement toward free thinking in the public sphere. Our leaders should call off the guardian watchdogs and create a more permissive environment for critical inquiry. We should be given the freedom to think, talk, believe, and question as we wish. Sometimes we will fall, but we will learn from it, and those of us who are reluctant to take the plunge will find inspiration and motivation in the others among us who, for whatever reason, take to critical thinking more easily. The net effect over time will be something like what Adam Smith, earlier in Kant's century, proposed in the economic sphere: the rising tide of enlightenment will lift all boats.

For Kant, there can be no critique without rebellion against internal and external forces exerted against the free use of our minds. Such rebellion takes courage, and it has to be fostered by open dialogue and modeled by other courageous thinkers. The use of reason (or logical argumentation) is a necessary but insufficient feature of critical thinking. In order to become critical thinkers, we must learn to obey the rules of reason, which is an act of freedom, but this cannot happen in Cartesian solitude. Obeying reason requires more than computation; it requires cultivation.

### Conclusion

Some of what we teach in liberal arts settings is not only a skill but a habit, and requires not just didacticism and problem sets but the establishment of environments that provide occasions for ruthless questioning, exposure to different viewpoints, opportunities to go out on limbs, and models of the courage to rethink and unthink everything that has presented itself to us as self-evident. We cannot create these environments with software and hardware alone. We create them with dialogue and conversation between students and professors, between students and other students, between students and contemporary voices, and between students and voices from the past. These are the conversations that cultivate both the skills and the attitude of critique.

I do not see the danger of plug-in professors as one having primarily to do with commercial interests co-opting the meaning of critical

thinking, although that is something to keep an eye on. I also do not see critical thinking threatened by increased expectations to generate measurable assessments of student learning outcomes, which a

computer-delivered, arguments-based approach to critical thinking can certainly streamline. The question is instead whether or not we will know where the appropriate limits of computation lie, and what its appropriate uses are, as we venture into the future of an increasingly artificial intelligence-style higher education.

If we see the capacity for enlightened critical inquiry diminish in the years to come, it will not be because of computers, which, after all, do what we tell them to do. It will be because we lacked the courage to tell computers at what point they must let humanoids do humanoid things. Had Kant had any experience with them, he would have included computers on the list of things that we are too eager to let do our thinking for us—and, we might add, let do the teaching for us. □

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# Cultivating Student Learning

MARION LARSON AND SARA SHADY

P E R S P E C T I V E S

**As educators, we have an opportunity to build bridges between different faith communities in order to promote the common good**

AS EDUCATORS, we face the important challenge of preparing students to live constructively in a religiously diverse world. At some institutions, a reluctance to allow issues of faith into the classroom creates an obstacle to cultivating the skills students need to understand, process, and engage a religiously pluralistic society. At faith-based institutions, by contrast, students are encouraged to see how what they believe connects with their academic learning and their social experiences, but students may not have many

opportunities on campus to interact

directly with persons who practice a religious or spiritual tradition different from their own. Reading about another religion in a book or hearing a guest speaker is no substitute for talking with, getting to know, and working alongside people with whom students might not initially think they have much in common.

This is a problem, particularly since immigration during the last third of the twentieth century has greatly increased religious diversity in the United States (Wuthnow 2005). As a result, notes Arthur Chickering (2006, 1), “issues of religious diversity and spiritual orientations have moved front and center in public forums and political decision making.” Concurring with this observation, Eboo Patel echoes W. E. B. Dubois’s famous statement that “the problem of the twentieth-century is the problem of the color line,” suggesting that “the twenty-first century will be shaped by the question of the faith line” (2007, xv). And, as Miroslav Volf argues, in a world of seemingly intractable disagreements and staggering needs, people of all faiths need to “learn how to work vigorously for the limited change that is possible, to mourn

over persistent and seemingly ineradicable evils, and to celebrate the good wherever it happens and whoever its agents are” (2011, 83).

To address this increasingly relevant issue, we have encouraged students from our university to participate in interfaith dialogues and engage in acts of interfaith service in order to form community partnerships with those who don’t necessarily share worldviews. We believe that these encounters are crucial if we are to nourish an attitude of mutual respect amid difference and prepare students to navigate a diverse world constructively upon graduation. In this article, we argue for the importance of interfaith dialogue and service as means to cultivate students who will promote “human flourishing and the common good” (Volf 2011, xvi). Part of this work requires that we reflect as educators upon the kind of people we all need to become if we hope to interact graciously across often divisive faith lines.

Virtue ethicist Martha Nussbaum’s work, particularly her book *Cultivating Humanity*, has been instructive for us in this regard. Nussbaum describes three interrelated capacities that those of us in higher education need to help our students develop: the capacity to examine one’s own beliefs critically, the capacity to see oneself as part of a larger human community, and the imaginative capacity necessary to see and feel as another person might.

In *Cultivating Humanity*, Nussbaum does not specifically address the topic of educating for interfaith partnerships. She advocates a broader model of education that allows students to learn about and see themselves within different traditions, while at the same time recognizing what is common to all persons and what unites us as human beings. She affirms education that “allows a variety of different views about what our priorities should be but says that, however we order our varied loyalties, we should still be sure

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# Across Faith Lines



**Bethel University**

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that we recognize the worth of human life wherever it occurs and see ourselves as bound by common human abilities and problems to people who lie at a great distance from us” (1997, 9). We believe this model can appropriately be applied to issues of religious diversity on college campuses in a manner that seeks to affirm students’ own religious traditions, while simultaneously engaging them in constructive interaction with different views. In what follows, we describe Nussbaum’s three capacities more fully and illustrate ways in which these capacities can be further developed through interfaith dialogue and service.

#### **Capacity one: Critical self-examination**

The first capacity Nussbaum outlines in *Cultivating Humanity* is what she calls “Socratic scrutiny.” According to Nussbaum, a democracy needs citizens who can *think*, “who can reason together about their choices rather than just trading claims and counterclaims” (1997, 10). The need for this capacity is clearly relevant to our current social and political climate, where claims made by political opponents seem to be increasingly divisive and, at times, amazingly disconnected from rational thought. Even

though the stakes are so high, some claims that are made are even humorous (and, in fact, fuel wildly popular shows such as *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report*). This is true not just at the level of elected officials, but increasingly the general public is losing its ability to engage in healthy civil discourse.

What does Socratic scrutiny look like? It is well described by Catherine Cornille as “cognitive vigilance,” a willingness to be “open to constant correction” (2008, 10). Miriam McCormick calls this mindset “responsible believing,” the ability to “think deeply and critically about fundamental questions in general, as well as about [one’s] own fundamental beliefs, attachments, and presuppositions” (2008, 32). Responsible believers, says McCormick, reflect on “their grounds for holding the beliefs they do as well as the grounds for doubting them” (10). Through such reflection—and through interaction with others—responsible believers come to see that a person doesn’t need to “abandon those beliefs which [she] is still investigating or allowing others to question” (McCormick 2008, 38). We just need to learn to “approach our beliefs with humility, aware of the limits of our own understanding and experience” Cornille 2008, 9).

Socratic scrutiny doesn't mean that "there are no cross-cultural moral standards," says Nussbaum (1997, 33). Nor does it "require that we suspend criticism toward other individuals and cultures" (65). Rather, it involves educating students to develop a more reflective understanding of their own position in light of an increasingly more accurate understanding of another's position. As Nussbaum remarks, "All too often, people's choices and statements are not their own. Words come out of their mouths, and actions are performed by their bodies, but what those words and actions express may be the voice of tradition or convention, the voice of the parent, of friends, of fashion" (28). To foster this Socratic capacity, Nussbaum says that educators must "challenge the mind to take charge of its own thought" (28). Deeper reflection on one's own views and the reason one holds them helps students learn to talk about their own values and beliefs in ways that can make sense to others.

In our own attempts to foster Socratic scrutiny among our students, we have developed a project titled "Learning to Listen" that engages students in researching and evaluating a belief, tradition, or practice very different from their own. The objectives of the project include learning from another tradition before critiquing it, applying what one has learned to a reflective critique of one's own tradition, and drawing conclusions about one's responsibility as a Christian in a diverse world. As part of this project, students produce a paper in which they must answer three questions: How might a believer from your own religious tradition relate to and learn productively from the beliefs and/or practices of the religious tradition you learned about in this project? How are the views or practices of your own religious tradition different from the religious tradition you learned about in this project? What general conclusions do you draw from this project about the opportunities, challenges, and responsibilities of living as a Christian in a diverse world? Although students can complete this assignment entirely through library research, we encourage them to supplement their reading with participation in interfaith dialogues or service activities.

We have found this assignment to be incredibly effective at helping students learn the important capacity of critical self-examination. "By gaining

### **The general public is losing its ability to engage in healthy civil discourse**

exposure to a variety of foreign and conflicting worldviews," wrote one of our students, "we are forced to consider other religious traditions and reexamine our own faiths. Even though some discussions can feel uncomfortable or even threatening, it is that very feeling of discomfort that leads us to truly discover the reasons behind our beliefs" (quoted in Larson and Wilson 2010, 8).

One such conversation occurred at an off-campus interfaith dialogue in which each member of a panel of local religious leaders made a brief presentation on conversion—a particularly sensitive topic—followed by a question-and-answer session and then small-group discussions facilitated by a team of religiously diverse volunteers. The Christian representative on the panel advocated a contextual view of missions that acknowledges the many ways in which God reveals himself, including in religions other than Christianity. This speaker said that a person can come to be a faithful follower of Christ without leaving behind all that she has known and valued in her home culture and her home religion. Just hearing this position challenged many of our students who attended the dialogue, students who worry that they may have compromised too much of the Gospel in their efforts to respect other cultures and religions.

The representatives from other faith traditions began to express in strong terms that they were deeply offended by this Christian panelist, because he made it clear that, ultimately, Christ is the Way and Truth. Several of our students were shocked and confused. They weren't sure whether to feel angry and defensive or guilty and ashamed. This instance drew us into some serious reflection. Should the presenter have censored his views out of respect for those in attendance—even if they were truly what he believed? Is it possible to talk about an issue like contextual missions without incurring deep offense? How do we genuinely listen to and respect those who have different religious beliefs while retaining commitment to our own? How would I feel if a Muslim told me that anyone who loves God actually is, in her heart, a Muslim?

If we had stayed on campus amongst our religiously homogenous student and faculty population, we absolutely could not have had a conversation prompting the kind of Socratic scrutiny and reflection that this event made possible!

**Capacity two: Seeing self as connected with others**

It is necessary to cultivate the practice of Socratic scrutiny, but alone it isn't sufficient. We also need to develop the ability to see ourselves as "human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern" (Nussbaum 1997, 10). Without such recognition and concern, we will not be able to overcome the fear that characterizes our world—a fear that creates a division between "the vulnerable yet all-important Us and the dark, besieging Them" (Nussbaum 2004, 42). We each need to come to see ourselves as "not only a member of a particular

community of belonging" but also as people who have obligations to others "beyond our kith and kin," inextricably connected to each other, says Robert Nash (2008, 70). Part of what's needed in developing this capacity, says Nussbaum, is learning to become a "sensitive and empathic interpreter" of others' beliefs, values, and practices (1997, 63).

Catherine Cornille notes that empathy "has both affective and cognitive dimensions" (2008, 144). It involves a desire to learn intellectually about another religion and the people of faith who follow it, but also a "willingness and ability to penetrate into the religious mindset of the other



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and understand him or her from within” (138). For this to occur, says Cornille, one must have sympathy for the religious other, which includes not only “personal warmth and affection toward the other person” but also openness to the “meaningfulness and worth of his or her religious life. It thus includes respect for and interest in the beliefs and practices of the other” (153). In other words, it is a process of humanizing the other, seeking to get to know members of other religious communities so that

**Engaging our students in interfaith dialogue and service has helped foster the capacity to recognize one’s connection to the larger world in many ways**

“they become real people and not simply representatives of certain other religious traditions” (Takim 2004, 348).

Engaging our students in interfaith dialogue and service has helped foster the capacity to recognize one’s connection to the larger world in many ways.

At a very basic level, it’s an accomplishment when students learn that the Baha’i faith exists or when they realize that not all Muslims are terrorists. These moments of recognition then allow for the cultivation of deeper awareness about issues of religious privilege; the intersections of race, class, gender, and religion; and the complexity of the role of religion in contemporary democracies.

One of the vital objectives of engaging students in actual dialogue and service with diverse groups of people is that it helps them learn how to speak in diverse contexts. As Nussbaum explains, in order to cultivate connectedness, we must learn to pay attention to the “imagery and speech one uses when speaking about people who are different” (1997, 63). Additionally, we must learn to develop what Diana Eck calls “bridging speech,” which she describes as “the speech that enables communication with people whose religious presuppositions may be quite different” (2003, 253). Just as one might read about giving a well-crafted speech, the skill hasn’t been developed until it is actually put into practice. Similarly, we believe that we are doing our students a disservice if we never take them beyond the walls of the classroom and the words of a text in order to engage with real persons.

As a recent interfaith service event, we took students from our institution to work in the community gardens of a neighborhood marked by significant cultural, economic, and religious diversity. Digging, planting, and weeding alongside members of that community offered our students the opportunity to reflect on both the similarities and the differences of their lives in comparison to the lives of others. They were able to connect with others about shared values of service, providing for one’s family and neighbors, and caring for the environment. At the same time, they discovered the variety of reasons one might have for holding these values. During a time of fellowship and dialogue with community elders, our students expressed the



importance of leaving the comfort of their own community in order to learn about and engage with the world beyond, a world that many of them had never before encountered. Our students develop empathy for these different views, because they have developed the capacity for seeing connections with other persons and communities.

### **Capacity three: Narrative imagination**

The first two capacities, Socratic scrutiny and awareness of human interconnection, both rely on a third capacity, which Nussbaum calls “narrative imagination.” According to Nussbaum, “This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and desires that someone so placed might have” (1997, 11). Narrative imagination could be described as the flip side of Socratic scrutiny. When cultivating narrative imagination, we are developing the skill to understand difference or, as Nussbaum describes it, “to comprehend the motives and choices of people different from ourselves, seeing them not as forbiddingly alien and other, but as sharing many problems and possibilities with us” (85). This requires us to be welcoming and charitable to other beliefs and values, even ones with which we disagree. Nussbaum explains that, even though we seek to understand—cognitively and affectively—through taking time to listen and empathize, entering in to another person’s story imaginatively, “this does not entail a hands-off attitude to criticism of what one encounters” (259). At the same time, we do seek to think respectfully about various ways of life.

For Nussbaum, the cultivation of narrative imagination is largely done by engaging students in the study of literature and philosophy. While this is an effective way to engage students in attempting to understand different perspectives, Miroslav Volf provides a helpful expansion of this idea when it comes to encountering religious difference. Being able to place oneself in the shoes of another person—what Volf describes as the view “from there”—involves “listening to how others perceive us as well as how they perceive themselves.” It requires a mindset that entails in part “step[ping] outside ourselves... distanc[ing] ourselves for a moment,” an

## **People of faith can and do—and should—bring their religiously motivated acts of service to the public square**

inversion of perspectives in which we “enter sympathetically into others’ efforts to interpret their scripture” and make sense of their world (Volf 1996, 251; 2004b, 43). In addition, says Volf, we pay “receptive attention

to their own story about who they see themselves to be” (2002, 19). This attitude is necessary if we are to “see the meaning of an action as the person intends it” and then come to see this person as “sharing many problems and possibilities with us” (Nussbaum 1997, 85).

Last fall, we took a group of students to a mosque attended primarily by Somali Muslims. Although only a few miles separate our campus from the mosque, the two locations can seem worlds apart in terms of class, culture, and religion. Most of the students had never visited a mosque before, nor had they had much opportunity for interaction with Somalis or with Muslims. At the entrance to the mosque, we split into groups of male and female, removed our shoes, donned headscarves, and embarked on a new experience. Two hours later, we left having experienced many new things. We had toured the mosque, learning about Islamic religious practices as well as the community services that take place each day through the Da’wah Institute. During a time of tea and cookies, students were able to converse informally with each other about many topics, including the experience of being Muslim in the United States, gender roles and relationships, and views of prayer and religious practice.

Through a period of intense discussion about similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity, our students came to understand the sincerity of devotion and commitment held by people of other faith traditions, the importance of dialogue as a way of overcoming misperceptions and stereotypes, and the need for interfaith dialogue and service as a means of fostering healthy civic partnerships in the twenty-first century. One of our students remarked, “I learned that people are so much more than the labels I paint them with. Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Jews—they all have hopes, fears, and dreams, just as I do. People are people. They need to be loved by me, and I need to be loved by them no matter what color their skin is, what culture they have grown up in, or what ideas they hold as true.” This student had begun to have an imaginative capacity for understanding another’s life.

## Conclusion

It is important to recognize that the three capacities described by Nussbaum in *Cultivating Humanity* are interrelated. The development of one supports and requires the development of the others. Educating students for productive engagement with the world must involve fostering the growth of these traits. “It is up to us, as educators,” Nussbaum says, “to show our students the beauty and interest of a life that is open to the whole world, to show them that there is after all more joy in the kind of citizenship that questions than in the kind that simply applauds, more fascination in the study of human beings in all their real variety and complexity than in the zealous pursuit of superficial stereotypes, more genuine love and friendship in the life of questioning and self-government than in submission to authority. We had better show them this, or the future of democracy in this nation and in the world is bleak” (1997, 84).

This idea is echoed in *Public Faith*, where Volf references President Obama’s famous Cairo speech to remind us that individuals, communities, and nations are comprised of “complex social identities.” Because of this complexity, we shouldn’t simply focus on “religious and cultural ‘differences’” but also need to consider “‘overlaps’ and ‘common principles’ as well” (2004a, 140). Interfaith dialogue and joint acts of service can help make these overlaps and common principles evident both to those who participate and to those who watch us learn to cooperate with each other in promoting the common good. We can also help to demonstrate that people of faith can and do—and should—bring their religiously motivated acts of service to the public square.

As educators, we have an opportunity to build bridges between different faith communities in order to promote the common good. By actively encouraging an ongoing dialogue between citizens from various religious and secular perspectives, we foster the possibility of shared understanding and open the potential for social and political solidarity. This requires active partnership, and a refusal to reduce all beliefs to a lowest common denominator. □

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# The Value of Community Building

## One Center's Story of How the VALUE Rubrics Provided Common Ground

SARAH JARDELEZA, APRIL COGNATO, MICHAEL GOTTFRIED, RYAN KIMBIRAUSKAS, JULIE LIBARKIN, RACHEL OLSON, GABRIEL ORDING, JENNIFER OWEN, PAMELA RASMUSSEN, JON STOLTZFUS, AND STEPHEN THOMAS

**The integration of institution-specific goals for student learning with those specified by the VALUE rubric for global learning won broad support**

IN AN ENVIRONMENT focused on research and overhead dollars, it is easy to lose sight of the main purpose of a university, which is to educate students—both as scholars within the disciplines and as citizens within a larger global community. The latter half of that mission has prompted Michigan State University (MSU) to bring attention to the importance of liberal education at Research I institutions. Although their structures and funding sources differ, Research I institutions and small liberal arts colleges share the same goal of helping students master the knowledge and skills that will enable them to become informed citizens who are able to contribute effectively to our democratic society. But how can this transformation be achieved, and what metrics can we use to define success?

To answer these questions, institutions must first identify what students are expected to gain

from taking coursework and participating in academic life. These student learning outcomes may represent changes in how students think, feel, perceive, or even act as they learn and undergo various experiences during their college years. Institutions vary in how clearly they articulate expected student learning outcomes, ranging from completely implicit, and therefore unarticulated, expectations to completely explicit lists of the ways in which students should show improvement by the end of their undergraduate tenure. Once learning outcomes have been established, however, the institution must evaluate the extent to which students are making progress in achieving them.

### **Backward design**

According to Keeling and Hersh (2011), the next step after reaching institutional consensus on student learning goals is to link those goals to the general education curriculum. But this

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University



sequencing obscures one of the trickiest issues in higher education: how to assess student learning. One way of evaluating learning outcomes at the institutional level is by applying the backward design method, which is more commonly used in instructional development (Wiggins and McTighe 1998). The first step in backward design is to identify desired results—in this case, student learning outcomes. The second step is to determine what constitutes acceptable evidence that the learning outcomes have been achieved by students. This step is accomplished by using newly created or preexisting assessment methods that align directly with the student learning outcomes. For example, if the desired outcome is the ability to evaluate and justify whether an article is scientific or not, then, as part of the assessment, the student should be asked to evaluate and justify whether or not an article is scientific. This example may seem obvious, but it illustrates the optimal level of alignment between an assessment method and the related outcome.

The third step in the backward design process is to ensure proper alignment between instruction and curricula, a step that should result in improved student performance on the assessments. To continue with the example used above, this may include an activity where the students practice examining various types of articles with the goal of discerning the characteristics of scientific articles as compared to

nonscientific articles. Students should also be given opportunities to argue with others and be required to provide supportive reasoning to justify their decisions. At the end of these three steps, an evaluation of student learning should commence. This evaluation should then be followed by the refinement of any of the steps, as needed to improve alignment and student learning outcomes for future iterations. Just as this process can be followed in an individual class, so too can it be applied at the institutional level.

The alignment of institutional goals and curricula should also involve the alignment of course-level goals and the assessment of student learning, both within individual classrooms and across curricula. The gap between student learning goals and curricula can be bridged using the rubrics that the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) developed through its Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) project (see [www.aacu.org/value/rubrics](http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics)). Institution-wide learning outcomes, as well as those at the level of the individual course, can be readily aligned with some or all of the outcomes that the VALUE rubrics were designed to assess (Rhodes 2010). These are consensus liberal learning outcomes that have emerged at institutions of all sizes and types nationwide. Some are associated with fundamental skills, such as reading, writing, and mathematics (or quantitative literacy). Others are more nuanced and may not be targeted across all levels of education, and yet graduates entering the workforce are generally expected to have developed them (e.g., creative thinking, ethical reasoning, problem solving, and teamwork). The full set of student learning outcomes should be addressed within and across curricula, rather than isolated within any single course, discipline, or program.

#### Liberal learning at MSU

Michigan State University (MSU) recently adopted a set of five liberal learning goals: analytical thinking, cultural understanding, effective citizenship, effective communication, and integrated reasoning. Over the past year, MSU faculty and staff have developed rubrics to assess student progress on each of these outcomes. The rubrics are currently being evaluated by focus groups composed of faculty and staff from all colleges and instructional resource areas on campus in order to determine

how they can be operationalized within and across units. The five liberal learning goals have also been aligned with a previously adopted set of global competencies.

In its approach to general education, MSU is unique among Research I institutions. In 1992, MSU created centers for integrative studies in three areas: arts and humanities, general science, and social science. Because these three centers share primary responsibility for general education and undergraduate liberal learning, and therefore face close scrutiny by institutional accreditors, the associate provost for undergraduate education has requested that they pay particular attention to the assessment of the university's new liberal learning goals. Accordingly, the goals have been embedded into the syllabi, course materials, and curricula of all three centers. The centers have also begun to evaluate the effectiveness of their curricula and of general education, more broadly. The assessments implemented as part of these efforts are aligned with the particular goals of each center and with the university's liberal learning goals, with implicit consideration of the global competencies.

Over the past two years, due to an influx of resources and expertise from the College of Natural Science, the Center for Integrative Studies in General Science has emerged a trailblazer with regard to the large-scale programmatic assessment of the liberal learning goals. An important element of the center's success has been the collaborative work of an affiliated faculty learning community. While the center has several of its own full-time faculty and staff members, most of the faculty and graduate assistants who teach the courses offered by the center come from departments in either the College of Natural Science or the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. The lecture and laboratory courses are led by graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, and faculty—including non-tenure-track, tenure-track, and tenured members.

The center offers both online and campus-based courses, as well as international study abroad and United States-based study away experiences. In addition to location, several other factors can account for wide variation among the sections of a similar course. These

**An important element of the center's success has been the collaborative work of an affiliated faculty learning community**

include the varying integration of sciences, the level of student-centeredness represented by an individual instructor's teaching approach, the length of the term, and the instructor's level of experience. This variety of experiences and diversity of expertise

has proven to be a boon for discussions of student learning assessment.

Because the center's instructors are not required to meet regularly, there is a spatial and temporal disconnect between instructors of courses offered for non-science majors. This challenge has been addressed through the creation of a faculty learning community, a professional development venue through which like-minded faculty convene to discuss common interests (Cox and Richlin 2004). Generally, such learning communities are led by one or more faculty facilitators, but all members have equal say in choosing the topics to be discussed and the training to be pursued. Cosponsored by the College of Natural Science and the Office of Faculty and Organizational Development, the center's faculty learning community convenes monthly throughout the academic year to discuss programmatic evaluation efforts, goals related to the desired student outcomes for general education, challenges and solutions to teaching and learning, and new initiatives to improve teaching and learning within the courses offered by the center. The meetings have helped provide the framework and common ground needed for a diverse group of faculty to engage as active learners and participants in shared dialogue.

**One center's road to assessment and community**

The Center for Integrative Studies in General Science's faculty learning community was primed to respond when AAC&U contacted MSU in the spring of 2012 and invited its scientists to help evaluate the rubric for global learning that was then being developed as part of the association's VALUE project. That spring, participants reviewed the VALUE rubric for global learning individually, using an online survey, and as a group, during a face-to-face meeting of the faculty learning community. Prior to the meeting, the center's assessment team conducted a thematic content analysis of participant responses to the online survey. This analysis was then used to focus the group discussion. During

the meeting, the common themes identified by the content analysis proved useful for stimulating further discussion and generating questions. The meeting also provided an opportunity for faculty to discuss the types of student assignments they had used to evaluate the VALUE rubric.

As a professional development opportunity, the process of evaluating the VALUE rubric provided training in how to use rubrics and, at least potentially, how to incorporate them into current teaching and assessment practices. Faculty participants focused on providing collaborative, iterative feedback for assessment and improvement, including active discussion of the rubric's strengths and weaknesses, and explored ways to align individual course goals with the rubric—and ways to communicate these goals to students. They also shared effective, innovative instructional activities directly related to the goals of the rubric for use across courses.

In addition to providing AAC&U with feedback that was used to inform the subsequent revision of the VALUE rubric for global learning,

### Evaluating the VALUE rubric was particularly useful for faculty teaching study away or study abroad courses

the evaluation process provided an opportunity for the center's faculty to share ideas and resources across their own community of practice—and, therefore, across disciplinary boundaries. The group discussed

the center's next steps in adopting the global learning rubric, or other rubrics, for use in classes. Before participating in the rubric review process, many of the center's faculty were unfamiliar with rubrics. These faculty in particular gained valuable training in the creation and use of rubrics for their own courses, and all participants came to a better understanding of the use of rubrics as a way to measure and improve instructional efficacy. Engagement as a community, rather than as individual faculty members, ultimately resulted in deeper understanding.

#### Reflection on rubrics

By engaging with the VALUE rubric, members of the faculty learning community were able to consider the metacognitive aspects of their own teaching, including consideration of where instruction fits into the broader context of general



Michigan State University

education science training at MSU. Specifically, they addressed whether or not the student learning goals included as part of the VALUE rubric for global learning aligned with their courses and with the center's curriculum. Faculty were able to recognize both unarticulated alignment with broad institutional goals and disconnects between practices and expectations. Evaluating the VALUE rubric was particularly useful for faculty teaching study away or study abroad courses, since these courses inherently seek to expand students' global perspectives. Those faculty were particularly interested to see how their students would perform on assessments using the global learning rubric and how they could align their course goals more closely with those included as part of the rubric. When participants identified aspects of the VALUE rubric that aligned with goals of their courses, they were able to discuss curricular interventions that they currently use and that could be implemented across courses. The group was also able to generate instructional innovations that would advance the shared goals.

One assignment developed by a member of the faculty learning community asks each student to identify and describe an environmental problem within their region and then to search for a comparable issue in a different county. The students are then asked to compare and contrast the likely efficacy of potential solutions in both locations. Following their completion of this assignment, the students are given the VALUE rubric for global learning and asked to highlight the learning goals of the assignment and to identify their own individual levels of competency within each of the goals. This assignment addresses issues related to global citizenship and forces students to think about how they view the world and their role in it. The students' self-assessments commonly overestimate their scores on the VALUE rubric, as compared to the instructors' evaluations of their written responses. But such misalignments can be easily identified and then remediated through a feedback loop.

In a related development, the faculty learning community asked technology and assessment specialists to develop online versions of the rubric using the MSU-specific course management software. This online rubric will be made available to all center faculty who wish to use it in their courses. Results from these online assessments could be used in conjunction with

programmatic survey data and course-specific student data to evaluate learning outcomes more holistically, either at the course, center, or institutional level.

### **A model for success**

The integration of institution-specific goals for student learning with those specified by the VALUE rubric for global learning won broad support at MSU. The importance of evaluating student learning has been communicated across all levels of the institution, and assessment is fundamentally aligned with a core set of learning outcomes that have broad support across the university. The development of MSU's liberal learning goals and global competencies, along with their respective rubrics, and the adaptation of the VALUE rubrics have set the stage for the institution-wide evaluation of curricula and student learning outcomes.

The success of the effort is due in large part to buy-in from the faculty who volunteered to participate in the faculty learning community as well as the financial and other support, such as letters of recognition and participation, provided by the dean of the College of Natural Science and the associate provost of undergraduate education. These administrators have also provided resources to support the assessment of student learning outcomes campus-wide, which has led subsequently to further growth in the community of practice. Through its intentional efforts to maintain institutional focus on the goal of providing undergraduate students with a liberal education, MSU can serve as a model for other Research I institutions. □

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# College Should Be an

JONATHAN MALESIC

PROFESSIONAL TENNIS PLAYER Serena Williams trains like a hockey player (Crouse 2011). The University of Notre Dame's legendary football coach Knute Rockne made his team practice somersaults and cartwheels (Langmack 1926). Competitive swimmer Ryan Lochte hoists and flips over 650-pound truck tires (Salter 2012). Their training may seem unorthodox, but consider the results: sixteen Grand Slam singles titles, five undefeated seasons, eleven Olympic medals. They're doing something right.

Thinking about how athletes train for competition raises questions central to college and university curricula: How does someone become excellent at a complex activity? Is it by practicing only that one activity, or by practicing many different disciplines? The line that connects tire-flipping to the four-hundred-meter individual medley is crooked, at best. Would Lochte be a better, faster swimmer if he ignored the tires and spent more time swimming, practicing the one discipline that matters most to him?

Probably not. For one thing, he already spends several hours a day in the water. But more important, to swim excellently, he needs to engage many different abilities at once, both consciously and unconsciously. And he can strengthen these abilities on dry land—in fact, he can probably

strengthen some of them, such as the power of an obscure back muscle, only in a gym or on a field. The cumulative effect of supplementing his

swimming practice with other disciplines is that he is physically fit in ways that someone who only swam would not be.

We take for granted that training in one physical discipline helps an athlete perform another discipline: martial artists run, runners lift weights, weightlifters practice martial arts. In the tight web of these disciplines, one competitor's end is another's means. If each discipline hones part of the body or develops a few discrete skills, then many different disciplines hone the body as a whole, making the athlete better not just at his primary sport but at any sport. Serena is a great tennis player, but I'd want her on my basketball team, too.

## Intellectual fitness in curricula and professions

The physical fitness required to perform complex athletic feats has a parallel in the intellectual fitness it takes to perform complex mental tasks. At the heart of liberal education sits the idea that moderate training in several disciplines is better than intensive training in just one. Through exercising students' abilities in interpreting cultural artifacts; gathering and analyzing evidence; communicating; reasoning logically, historically, and morally; and so on, liberal education promises an intellectual fitness that exceeds the sum of its parts.

This model of education is faltering under heavy pressure, however, as colleges and universities adapt their undergraduate curricula to accommodate students being trained ever more intensively in ever-narrower degree programs in business, education, and health fields. Many universities continue to tout their comprehensive core curricula despite having a relatively small set of liberal education requirements for majors in business and other professional fields.

With accrediting agencies demanding that students in these fields learn a growing list of professional competencies, universities are responding by adding courses to those major programs. Space in the curriculum for these new requirements has to come from somewhere. As a glance through the catalogs of many comprehensive universities will reveal, the space usually comes from exempting professional program majors from some liberal arts requirement—natural science, language, fine arts. It's equivalent to

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## MY VIEW

**Liberal education promises an intellectual fitness that exceeds the sum of its parts**

# Intellectual Workout

telling Serena to spend more time on the court and less in the gym.

In crafting a curriculum, the choice can come down to deciding whether finance students are better off taking a seventeenth business course or a second literature course. The law of diminishing returns seems relevant here. That extra business course will exercise parts of the student's mind that have already been bulked up. An extra literature course will develop other parts, giving the student better balance and flexibility as a thinker.

Paradoxically, promoting highly specialized professional training at the expense of overall intellectual fitness may even harm students' performance as professionals. Just as Lochte would be a weaker swimmer without his dry-land training, cutting back an accounting student's training in history could make her a weaker accountant—not to mention a weaker citizen. That is because in her career, she is likely to confront disparate documents and data, and she will have to deduce the connections among them. She may have to use these documents to develop a plausible narrative of what happened in the past. She might then need to write a report on how that narrative bears on what her client or company is doing now. An intellectually fit accountant will think like a historian, a scientist, or a sociologist tacitly, in a hundred small ways throughout her work day. Habits of mind she practiced in an otherwise forgotten anthropology course will guide her thinking as she deals with unpredictable situations.

What I'm describing resembles critical thinking, which typically entails an ability to decode hidden meanings and evaluate arguments. But I think that "intellectual fitness" is the better term; it more readily captures the way that good thinking is the indirect, cumulative result of training in multiple complementary disciplines. Every academic discipline develops students' intellectual fitness, but none does it alone. To acquire all the disciplinary



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modes of thinking that comprise intellectual fitness, modes traditionally associated with the liberal arts, students must learn from people who can perform each one excellently: the faculty in arts and sciences departments.

## Implementing intellectual fitness

What does this model of liberal education as intellectual fitness mean in the most practical sense, in the meetings where curricula are designed and votes are taken?

First, when accreditors present new competencies for accredited programs to teach, curriculum committees, deans, and faculty should insist that reducing the number of required liberal arts courses in order to accommodate the new standards be an absolute last resort. The burden of fulfilling accreditors' demands must fall upon the accredited programs. If they cannot find a creative way to please accreditors while preserving the diversified intellectual fitness that universities must offer, then they should reconsider whether accreditation really benefits their students.

Second, faculty and deans across the university should be called upon to demonstrate student learning in common skill areas, with assessment

results widely shared. The whole assessment process should be inclusive, taking place not just within departments but across them, so that finance and theatre faculty can hold history faculty accountable for how they train students. Professional students and arts and sciences students should be assessed according to common rubrics. The Association of American Colleges and Universities' VALUE rubrics, for example, are highly portable across academic units (see [www.aacu.org/value/rubrics](http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics)). Programs hosting students whose learning gains lag should adjust their curricula accordingly, recognizing that the training their students need may have to come from a different department.

Third, faculty in the arts and sciences should argue strongly in favor of not only critical thinking but disciplinary thinking—thinking philosophically, historically, social scientifically, artistically, etc.—as a primary goal of liberal education. By emphasizing disciplinary thinking, we acknowledge the distinctive elements of intellectual fitness that our particular expertise imparts.

Fourth, faculty should make the case to students about why liberal education matters. Many of us do. But we must not think that the terms we use when addressing regional accrediting bodies will convince many students. We need to make our case in a way that students will find compelling—even viscerally so.

### **A gym for the mind**

I tell new college students that their tuition buys them a gym membership for the mind. (As a bonus, the college throws in a regular gym membership, too.) Extending the metaphor, I say that it isn't enough just to pay the dues, to have the membership as a credential. That alone does not purchase intellectual fitness. Only hard work does. And after a tough mental workout, their brains might hurt, but that hurt just means that they are getting intellectually stronger. If they

learn to do the exercises properly and work at them diligently, then they will begin to see improvement in their core intellectual fitness.

As a theology professor, I teach what amounts to tire-flipping, mostly to swimmers and runners. Years of graduate training taught me to flip tires well. My teachers were world champions. I've seen them flip half-ton tires uphill, one-handed. I learned from others, too: experts in jumping, in throwing, in disciplines that helped me to flip tires better. By the end of my training, I could flip tires in my own way, with my own techniques. I've never drawn a bow or run a steeplechase, but when it comes to tire-flipping, I know what I'm doing.

Before taking my class, some of my students never even imagined that tires could be flipped—and certainly not for fun or profit. I start them out on ordinary Goodyears, and we work up from there. I don't expect many students will decide that they were put on earth to flip tires. But that doesn't mean that learning how is a waste of their time. Ryan Lochte knows: you don't win the race only in the pool. □

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

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