Reflections from AAC&U’s New President, Lynn Pasquerella
Strengths Hidden in Plain Sight
Confronting the Myths Surrounding Women’s Advancement
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Celebrating the Legacy of Carol Geary Schneider
In Praise of Undocumented Education
Reconsidering Our Definition of the “Whole Student”
It is clear that it will take an educational community—supported by a vigorous, smart, and creative AAC&U—to help overcome the reality that deep inequities stand in the way of underserved students successfully gaining access to the most empowering forms of college learning.

—Carol Geary Schneider
From 1818 R Street NW

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“Light the Danger Up”:
Reflections of AAC&U’s New President

The week I had the honor of being selected as AAC&U’s fourteenth president, I also had the
privilege of introducing Harvard historian Jill Lepore at an awards ceremony in Washington, DC.
Lepore was being celebrated for her national leadership in advancing the cause of liberal education,
and I was absolutely thrilled to be meeting the author about whom I had come to know so much.
Among the stories I enjoyed the most was one involving how Lepore’s life was changed by a “once in a
lifetime teacher.” As a fourteen-year-old, she was given an English assignment by this teacher to write
a letter to her nineteen-year-old self. When the correspondence arrived in the mail five years later,
it stopped Lepore in her tracks and subsequently shaped the direction of her career.

In learning about Lepore’s trajectory, I couldn’t help but think about the dramatic changes in my own
life during that same short span of time between the ages of fourteen and nineteen—my transfer from a
fledgling community college to a residential liberal arts college for women; my growing understanding, as
a recipient of Pell grants and Comprehensive Employment and Training Act funds, of the impact
that access to excellence in higher education can have for those at the
lowest socioeconomic rungs; my
burgeoning commitment to the civic mission of colleges and universities, inspired by my engagement in
community-based learning; and my introduction to the study of philosophy, resulting in a lifelong passion
for the discipline and its practice. Each of these transitions, like Lepore’s, foregrounds the transformative
power of education.

Lepore’s transformation came in the form of her emergence as one of our nation’s most prolific
proponents of microhistory—a field she describes as founded on the assumption that “however
singular a person’s life may be, the value of examining it lies not in its uniqueness, but in its exemplariness,
in how that individual’s life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole.”
My acquaintance with microhistory through Lepore’s work happened to coincide with a colleague
of mine pointing me to a letter written by Emily Dickinson to her cousins in May of 1863. Reading it,
my mind immediately turned to the idea of examining a life in its exemplariness.

Enmeshed in the Civil War, Dickinson told her relatives “I must keep ‘gas’ burning to light the
danger up, so I could distinguish it.” The poet’s words reflect her unflinching pursuit of the truth,
prung from a humanistic sense that enables individuals to discern the patterns dominating their
lives and to move beyond their narrow points of view in order to bridge multiple modes of under-
standing. Dickinson wanted to “light the danger up”—not turn away from it. She sought to look boldly
at what others either could not or did not want to see. In the midst of national dissension and un-
certainty, she strove to use every ounce of her being in the process of discovery—perhaps under-
standing that deliberative democracy, especially in times of crisis, relies on the creation of a critical
public culture that foments reasoned debate and independent thought.

Dickinson was well aware that one cannot cope with complexity through fragmented consciousness
and discourse, or thrive on an entire diet of bread and circuses—a lesson even more salient in today’s
globally interdependent world, in which rapidly changing technology can mean rapid obsolescence.
Yet much of the current political discourse posits the illumination of consciousness achieved through
literature, philosophy, science, music, and the arts as a luxury, discounting the genuine value of that
which allows us to flourish fully as human beings, while simultaneously offering tools for grappling
with the most fundamental questions of human existence.

From assertions that we need more welders and fewer philosophers to proposals that students at
“non-elite” institutions should not receive federal student loans for majoring in the humanities, critics
suggest that a liberal education is not only frivolous, but downright un-American. By supplanting the notion of college as a public good with the idea that earning power is the only legitimate reason for pursuing a degree, such rhetoric threatens to drastically undermine our nation's historic commitment to educating citizens for democracy. Indeed, the prevailing discourse perpetuates a growing economic segregation in higher education through its treatment of college as a private commodity, contravening the concept that all students are entitled to the full promise of American higher education—an ideal that lies at the core of AAC&U’s mission-level commitment to inclusive excellence.

If we hope to redress this trend, those of us within the academy must be willing to engage in an honest and radical reckoning with the extent to which we have failed to take seriously the concerns of those who are raising questions about the worthiness of public and private investments in higher education, concomitantly reinforcing a false dichotomy between a pragmatic education and a liberal education. In response, we must enlarge the national conversation about access to embrace the many ways in which liberal learning and inclusive excellence enrich us all. To do so, faculty and administrators in higher education must partner with K-12 educators, leaders of business and industry, government officials at the state and national levels, and citizens from all walks of life to explore and enact new, innovative approaches demonstrating the true value of liberal education and the importance of eradicating social inequities in order to make excellence inclusive.

We must restore public trust in higher education, and in doing so, we must begin at home. Campus protests across the country have heightened consciousness with respect to a broad range of urgent and compelling issues: the limits of academic freedom, especially in relation to developing inclusive curricula; the legitimacy of “trigger warnings” and “safe spaces” in an environment founded on the free exchange of ideas; the implications of campus carry laws for students, faculty, and staff; the meaning of shared governance in the context of widespread accusations of corporatization; the scope of our commitments to access in relation to undocumented students and prisoners; faculty rights and responsibilities in determining reasonable accommodations for increasing numbers of students with learning differences and mental health disorders; and questions surrounding who gets to decide what constitutes offense concerning microaggressions and more overt racist, sexist, ableist, or heteronormative behavior.

Addressing these challenges is critical, not only to avoid campus upheaval, but because, as the philosopher Paul Feyerabend reminds us, a hegemony of one tradition over others enforces an unenlightened conformity, thwarting the variety of opinion “necessary for objective knowledge.”

As AAC&U builds upon Carol Geary Schneider’s extraordinary legacy and its many signature programs through the development of our next strategic plan, we invite and count on your collaboration. One of AAC&U’s most significant strengths is the diversity of our member institutions and the people working at these institutions—from community colleges to research universities, from independent liberal arts colleges and large comprehensives to private nonprofit agencies. What unites us across this diversity is our shared commitment to AAC&U’s mission of making liberal education and inclusive excellence the foundation for institutional purpose and educational practice. In championing these values, we must, like Dickinson, be willing to “light the danger up,” knowing that together we can fulfill the promise of American higher education by preparing all students with the skills necessary to meet the social and economic challenges of the future, grounded in civic learning and democratic engagement.—LYNN PASQUERELLA

NOTES
EDITORS NOTE: After serving as president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities for eighteen years, from 1998 to 2016, Carol Geary Schneider retired at the end of June. Reprinted below is her farewell message, which was sent to members of the association on her last day in office, June 30, 2016.

Dear AAC&U Colleagues,

In July, AAC&U will welcome Lynn Pasquerella as our new president, and I will open the next chapter of my life and work. I’m writing now to say thank you for your constant support, to share my thoughts on where we are now in the campaign to reinvigorate liberal education and make excellence inclusive, and to let you know how to stay in touch.

First, my deepest thanks. It has been an extraordinary privilege to serve since 1998 as your president. I will always be grateful for the opportunity I’ve had to learn from—and help illuminate—the dedication and inventiveness that characterize AAC&U member institutions across all sectors—public and private, two-year and four-year, broad-access and selective.

What an incredible period of shared learning this has been!

Trained as a historian interested in the intersections between ideas and institutional practices, I found myself (initially as an AAC&U vice president and then as AAC&U president) thrust into a veritable treasure trove of your ideas and your institutional initiatives—in general education, re-forming majors, diversity and global learning, STEM reform, civic learning and engagement, assessment, inclusive excellence, and above all, your efforts to help diverse and underserved students achieve a coherent and empowering education, whatever their majors and whatever their collegiate institutions.

Probing the intentions behind these myriad curricular, cocurricular, and pedagogical innovations through “deep dives” with campus leaders, faculty, and research scholars, my staff colleagues and I came to see that the established college curriculum—“breadth” followed by “depth”—was in the midst of far-reaching and much-needed reformation.
Setting greater expectations, making the LEAP to inclusive excellence

Inspiringly, AAC&U members have been—for the entirety of my term as your president—collectively reinventing the meaning, scope, design, and inclusiveness of a twenty-first-century liberal education.

Moving inquiry learning to the center, you are seeking—we believe—to create a more intentional, integrative, and public-spirited version of college learning, one that prizes engagement with the challenges of the wider world. You are foregrounding hands-on learning and working to connect college learning with significant questions and real-world contexts.

And, in making these changes, you have enlarged the scope and ambition of the liberal education project—moving it from “exclusionary excellence” toward a new commitment to “inclusive excellence.”

I have worked hard with you, and on your behalf, to simultaneously illuminate, promote, and actually advance these new approaches to liberal education—approaches that include all college students, not just those attending residential institutions or those majoring in liberal arts and sciences disciplines.

For over two decades, my colleagues and I have asked with you: What are we trying to achieve? How do we help students actually acquire the most world-enhancing forms of liberal learning? What does the evidence tell us about “what works”? How can we use that evidence intelligently and responsibly?

The result of this search for new clarity has been LEAP: Liberal Education and America’s Promise. In dialogue with you, LEAP has provided a clear framework for what we actually mean by a high-quality liberal education and inclusive excellence. Keyed to a complex and interdependent world, that framework for inclusive excellence includes

- a clear and compelling description of the big goals, or Essential Learning Outcomes, of a twenty-first-century liberal education—developed across, and essential to, both the liberal arts and sciences and career-related fields of study;
- Principles of Excellence that can be used to guide educational practice across programs, institutions, and systems;
- a strong and evidence-informed focus on high-impact practices that enable students to practice and demonstrate the intended forms of learning;
- The LEAP Challenge “call” for all students to prepare for, and successfully create, cross-disciplinary “signature work” that is focused on questions that matter, to the students and to society, and that shows their achievement of liberal learning outcomes;
- the VALUE strategy for assessment, which uses faculty-developed VALUE rubrics to probe students’ authentic work—e.g., projects, papers, e-portfolios—for evidence of their progress.
I am proud of the work we have done to make excellence inclusive through LEAP. I’m equally proud of VALUE’s pioneering work to assess students’ learning through rubric-based review of their authentic work—writing, research, projects, and more. And I’m excited that LEAP’s influence has been amplified through AAC&U’s involvement in the development and road testing of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP).

Together, we have created tools for reinvigorating college learning that simply did not exist even a decade ago. And you are using them—ELOs, HIPs, VALUE rubrics, the DQP, Guided Learning Pathways—to advance desperately needed educational change for today’s students.

Closing the deep divide between aspiration and achievement
Yet with all that said, I spent a good chunk of my life studying early modern Puritanism, an endeavor that produced, among other things, my own decidedly Puritan conscience. (Yes, it was in studying the Reformation that I first gained useful insights into reforming “college”—and also about how to proceed with integrity and creativity in a church or higher education system that has been only very partially reformed.)

With that Puritan conscience on full alert, I am acutely aware of the huge disconnect between our community’s aspiration to make excellence inclusive and the actual state of educational practice.

US higher education has a very long way to go before we can say that all or most college students are really getting that combination of big-picture learning, depth in areas of interest, strong cross-cutting skills, examined commitments to self and others, and applied integrative learning that LEAP—channeling our members’ goals—has articulated.

So how do we close the gap between these shared aspirations for an empowering education and students’ actual learning experiences, which remain too often fragmented and superficial rather than integrated and deep? I will share my own thoughts on the work that lies ahead in a future issue of Liberal Education.

But, in brief, it is clear that it will take an educational community—supported by a vigorous, smart, and creative AAC&U—to help overcome the reality that deep inequities stand in the way of underserved students successfully gaining access to the most empowering forms of college learning.

AAC&U can headline the grand direction for “making excellence inclusive,” but it is you, our colleagues, who necessarily do the hard work—across institutions and within programs—of recalibrating and strengthening day-to-day educational practices. And, to say the obvious, you are doing this against whip-strong headwinds, with policy poised to prefer and reward narrow college learning just when our nation is desperate for big-picture learning and new levels of trained intelligence and social imagination.
To my great pleasure, I know that my successor, Lynn Pasquerella, has already led the kind of educational reinvention at Mount Holyoke College that AAC&U both prizes and celebrates. Fresh from the front lines on connecting liberal arts education with students’ career hopes, she will bring her own creativity and dedication to her new leadership role.

I warmly hope that AAC&U’s campaign—on campus and with our publics—to make liberal education inclusive rather than exclusive will not only gain ground during Lynn’s term, but actually win the day.

Nothing would make me happier than to see headlines across the land: “Liberal Education Now Recognized as Essential, Not Optional for Low-Income, First-Generation Students” and “Determined Leaders from All Higher Education Sectors Resolve to Make the LEAP to Quality Liberal Learning for All College Students, Across All Majors, with Underserved Students Now First in Line.” And while I am dreaming on Lynn’s behalf, how about this: “Policy Leaders Collectively Apologize to the Nation for Promoting Meager Curricula and Dismally Reductive Metrics in Their Efforts to ‘Rate’ College Quality.”

Are these just impossible dreams? Our best hope, I strongly suspect, is that determined leaders will resolve to “make the LEAP.” For over one hundred years, AAC&U has benefitted from determined leaders. I know that tradition will continue!

**Staying in touch**

And, as you go forward, I will be doing what I can to help—now from a new perch, as AAC&U president emerita and, after October 1, as a “fellow” with an organization also strongly committed to bringing quality and equity together. (We’ll write more about that next fall.)

In addition, I will have my own website: www.carolgearyschneider.net.

The website will be a location for the writing, speaking, and advocacy I expect to do when I return from a three-month break as well as for many of my articles, presentations, and op-eds from my time as president of AAC&U.

I hope you will use the website to stay in touch.

And I equally hope you will give our new president, Lynn Pasquerella, that same unstinting guidance and support you have so generously given me.

With affection and gratitude,
Carol
This issue of Liberal Education features highlights of the 2016 annual meeting—a meeting that was, um, somewhat unusual.

On the eve of the meeting, AAC&U released the second of three reports presenting results from a national survey of chief academic officers; the first report had been released in November, and the third was subsequently released in February. Here, Debra Humphreys provides a synthesis of the three reports, situating the survey findings within a broader discussion of the ongoing reform of undergraduate education.

Then, on the evening of Wednesday, January 20, the annual meeting formally began: Cathy Davidson was presented with the New American Colleges and Universities’ Ernest L. Boyer Award and, thereafter, addressed the opening night forum. Her address appears in this issue as the lead article. After the forum, those members of the AAC&U community who had come for the daylong pre-meeting symposium, “The LEAP Challenge and the Equity Imperative,” along with others who had by then arrived for the annual meeting itself, gathered for a welcoming reception, an “AAC&U Social Hour.” Early the next morning, Lynn Gangone addressed the Networking Breakfast for Women Faculty and Administrators. Her address, too, is published here.

So far, so good.

By the time the meeting’s opening plenary session got underway on Thursday, however, Washington, DC, was under a “blizzard watch,” with the National Weather Service predicting high winds and at least two feet of snow. By the end of the next day, “Snowzilla” (the Washington Post’s name for the blizzard) had shut down the city’s public transit system as well as all three airports.

Yet, for those intrepid meeting-goers who had travelled to Washington, despite the forecast, and who opted to remain, even after it became clear that the storm would effectively strand them at the hotel, the annual meeting went on. Indeed, the program proved remarkably protean, as, notwithstanding the appeal of a truly captive audience, not all presenters were able to make it to Washington or, even if they did, to stay for their sessions. Included among these was the closing plenary speaker, Ed Ayers, who, by the time of the closing plenary, was stranded in Richmond by the storm. His intended address is published here.

The 2017 annual meeting will be held in San Francisco.

In addition to representing an unusual annual meeting, this issue of Liberal Education marks the transition in presidential leadership at AAC&U. In her first President’s Message, Lynn Pasquerella reflects on the challenges of advancing liberal education and inclusive excellence at a time of diminishing public trust in higher education. And we have included as a special section a small Festschrift honoring Carol Geary Schneider, now president emerita of AAC&U.—DAVID TRITELLI
Presidential Transition
In mid-June, Lynn Pasquerella completed her tenure as president of Mount Holyoke College and, on July 1, became AAC&U’s fourteenth president. On June 1, she joined members of the LEAP Presidents’ Trust for its annual spring convening, the first of several planned dialogues President Pasquerella will be having with the AAC&U membership. She also has been meeting and discussing membership priorities with campus teams attending AAC&U’s summer institutes.

On June 30, Carol Geary Schneider became president emerita of AAC&U and began a three-month leave, which will include travel to Scotland and Ireland, as well as time spent enjoying her garden at her home in Washington, DC. In October, she will resume her advocacy for quality and equity in higher education.

New AAC&U Vice President Named
Amy E. Jessen-Marshall has been appointed AAC&U vice president for integrative liberal learning and the global commons, effective August 8. She will succeed interim Vice President Kathy Wolfe, who will return to Nebraska Wesleyan University, where she is professor of English. Jessen-Marshall currently serves as a leader of AAC&U’s General Education Maps and Markers project, a member of the advisory board for Diversity & Democracy, and a faculty member for AAC&U’s Institute on Liberal Learning and the Departments. Dr. Jessen-Marshall served for four years as vice president of academic affairs, dean of faculty, and professor of biology at Sweet Briar College. Before that, she served for five years as dean of university programs and associate vice president for academic affairs, interim provost and vice president for academic affairs, and chair of the Integrative Studies Program at Otterbein University.

New Commission on Inclusive Excellence in STEM
AAC&U and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) recently announced the formation of a new Inclusive Excellence Commission, which will be chaired by AAC&U Vice President and Project Kaleidoscope Executive Director Kelly Mack. The commission is being formed as part of HHMI’s new Inclusive Excellence Initiative and will include nationally and internationally recognized experts on undergraduate STEM reform, broadening participation, leadership development, educational equity, and organizational change. Over the next four years, the commission will advance an evaluation of the strategic interventions being supported by HHMI through its new Inclusive Excellence grant program and develop a conceptual realist model for inclusive excellence in STEM.

Upcoming Meetings
- October 6–8, 2016
  Global Learning and the College Curriculum: Nurturing Student Efficacy in a Global World
  Denver, Colorado

- November 3–5, 2016
  Transforming Undergraduate STEM Education: Implications for 21st-Century Society
  Boston, Massachusetts

- January 25–28, 2017
  Annual Meeting: Building Public Trust in the Promise of Liberal Education and Inclusive Excellence
  San Francisco, California

- February 23–25, 2017
  General Education and Assessment: Design Thinking for Student Learning
  Phoenix, Arizona

- March 16–18, 2017
  Diversity, Learning, and Student Success
  Jacksonville, Florida

AAC&U MEMBERSHIP 2016
1,353 members

**Masters 31%**

**Bacc 24%**

**Assoc 12%**

**Doc 17%**

**Other* 16%**

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

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www.aacu.org
To my mind, that is educating higher: helping students find their own voices, words, learning, paths, journeys, and purposes.
You are crossing from definition by others to self-definition, from dependence on other human beings to legal independence. If you were born fortunate, you’re moving from a life of nurturance by others into a new time of self-care: “Self-care for the rest of your life.” This is the stuff of mythology, from the Epic of Gilgamesh forward.

In America, we call it “college.”

**Workforce readiness or world readiness?**

I have witnessed this transition thousands of times over the four decades that I’ve been teaching in college. I started young, teaching my first class when I was twenty-two. I began as a skeptic, but as I witnessed the transformation of my students, I came to realize that, no matter how good (or bad) I might be as a teacher, my real role is that of a guide along a much greater journey that begins after my course ends, after the streamers from graduation come down.

And it doesn’t matter if my students are traditional or so-called nontraditional. They are in college, and that’s the key. In one of the first courses I ever taught, I was twenty-four and my youngest student was thirty-two. Those returning, nontraditional students still looked to me as a guide. Depending on how you count, 40–70 percent of our current students are nontraditional. It doesn’t matter. All of the twenty-one million students in college are on a journey. They have one thing in common: they are there willingly. No one makes them do it. They are voluntarily making sacrifices of time, money, and character—willpower—to be in college because they want something bigger, better. It isn’t just a job. They don’t just want to be workforce ready. Most students today already have jobs, often several. My students who live the most precarious lives have had and lost jobs, have witnessed their parents find and lose jobs. As they make their way through college, they want something more: a career, a vocation, a life path.

At the coffee shop in my neighborhood, the barista is a student at one of the City University of New York colleges, a first-generation American and first-generation college student who majors in actuarial science with a second major in his true love, philosophy. I stop by on Sunday mornings after my dance class, and we talk Aristotle and Kant and Arendt. I ask if he hopes to be a “Philosopher Statistician” and, without a hint of irony, he says “of course,” and adds that he wants to “give back” to society. I ask how he plans to do that, and he tells me that, actually, he already does. He is good at reading and filling out forms, and he knows a lot of people who have a hard time with English and with online digital skills. After he gets off work, he hangs out at the coffee house where there’s free Wi-Fi and offers assistance where he can. This week, he helped a bright high school senior and his parents fill out complicated financial aid forms for college.

Ernest L. Boyer would be pleased.

I’m convinced that none of the “workforce readiness” pundits spend time in actual college classrooms, talking with real college students like this one. They miss the special qualities of our students today. The pundits are just plain wrong about this generation. Google hasn’t made them stupid; their iPhones don’t make them lonely; college hasn’t made them dumb and dumber. Whether at Duke University, where I was for most of my career, or at the City University of New York, where I moved in July 2014, I have found students to be engaged, aware of the problems they have inherited, and determined to gain the skills necessary to address serious social ills. They want to learn enough about the world to change it. They want to do a better job of addressing major world problems than their elders, frankly, have done.

Do they want jobs? Of course. But they don’t only want jobs. They are far too realistic for that. These are the “Uber Generation.” If they are traditional-age college students, they were born after the invention of the Internet and, thus, have spent their entire lifetimes living within the ecology of a disappearing, disrupted, distributed, disturbed, and disturbing economy. They have watched whole industries and professions disappear: the music business, journalism, law, college teaching. For the Uber Generation, the new normal is contingent, on-demand, part-time labor, without benefits, without insurance or assurances, expenses paid out of pocket, with no advancement, and with no futurity. “Adjunctification” means that the person who teaches their classes likely has no job security—and, likely, neither will they, after they graduate.

College has to be more than training for skills soon rendered obsolete. Here’s what we should be telling our students. College has to arm you to take on a very difficult world, not
merely to adapt to it. You go to college, now, to learn how to learn, how to succeed in a world changing so fast that no one can predict what will happen next. You need to know how to network, to draw strength from those around you, to learn together, and to be able to learn on the fly—widely, deeply, broadly, critically, and creatively. You have to be an analytical thinker and a synthesizer. You have to have enough confidence in your ability to unlearn your own habits and to learn new ones so that, when the next innovation disrupts your profession, you are prepared to build a new career and then rebuild it, if necessary, all over again. That doesn’t just require information and skills. It requires self-knowledge.

Any pundit who reduces college to skills training misses the point. You are in college for something more: you are in college as an act of faith and hope that you will be able to find the right kind of career path for you, the right match between your skills, your talents, and, if you are incredibly lucky, your passions. College will expose you to a full range of new possibilities that were not available to you before. You will have the opportunity to study with researchers and scholars who have dedicated their lives to fields you didn’t even know existed and, somehow, through the kind of liberal education that Boyer championed and that is uniquely American, you will have the opportunity to find a match between what you most want to do in the world, what you are uniquely capable of doing, and what, realistically, will allow you a way to support yourself. Ideally, you will be able to do so while contributing something meaningful to the world that you have inherited and that you, in turn, will help shape. You might become a Philosopher Statistician Who Gives Back.

This is far more than workforce readiness. It’s world readiness.

Fordism for the Uber generation?

Inspired by great educators like Ernest L. Boyer, I’ve spent the last several years committed to student-centered learning, to finding all the ways that higher education can help students find that special connection between their aspirations and ways of thriving in the world while improving it.

It’s a challenge. Student-centered learning reverses the assumptions of the research university that have dominated our academic value system since the late nineteenth century. Between approximately 1860 and 1925, the Puritan college was redesigned as the modern research
The research university is not structured to foster a student's self-realization, transformation, or social activism—what Boyer calls “purpose.” The research university is not structured to foster a student’s self-realization, transformation, or social activism—what Boyer calls “purpose.” The research university is calibrated to certify the acquisition of expertise as defined and conferred by a certified expert.

There are historical reasons why this is the case. The great educational project of the nineteenth century was to train farmers to be factory workers and shopkeepers to be corporate managers. Urbanization and industrialization required new forms of professionalization, specialization, and credentialing. Consider the following infrastructural and institutional innovations of formal education that were not in place before 1860 and that were all fully operational in the United States by the end of 1925: mandatory public secondary schooling, K-12 curricular requirements, land-grant universities, research universities, junior colleges, extension education, majors, minors, electives, divisions, certification, graduate schools, collegiate law schools, nursing schools, graduate schools of education, collegiate business schools, degree requirements, credit hours, grades, IQ tests, giftedness, learning disabilities, multiple-choice tests, college entrance exams, multiple-choice entrance exams (SAT), the Association of American Colleges and Universities, tenure, sabbaticals, faculty pensions, school rankings—this list could go on for several pages, with each component connected to the other in complex ways.

Significantly, not a single item on that list needs explanation in 2016. Why? Because the apparatus designed a hundred years ago is still in place today. Our students, seeking a career path, self-actualization, and social engagement, must somehow find their own identities through a thicket of regulations, practices, silos, certifications, assessments, and educational assumptions that were designed to train the professional-managerial class in the era of the telegraph and the Model T. This is problematic on many levels. On an intellectual level, it’s a problem of anachronism: the world of the telegraph was a one-way broadcast world in an era of mass urbanization and industrialization. What Paulo Freire calls the “banking model” of knowledge transmission—transferring content from the expert teacher to the student—was suited to the standardization, production, and output metrics of the Industrial Age.

But the world changed on April 22, 1993, when scientists at the University of Illinois’s National Center for Supercomputing Applications announced that the Mosaic 1.0 browser would now be available for free for educational and nonprofit purposes and at a modest fee for commercial enterprises. Suddenly, anyone with an Internet connection could communicate with anyone else in the world with access to an Internet connection. Anyone could be a broadcaster. A company, an expert, an official outlet was not required. Anyone could make and exchange content without certification as an expert knowledge provider, without an editor, and without a pause button. We humans were suddenly given a new power, one fraught with promise and rife with danger.

Yet, all these years later, we still train youth by last century’s system of formal education, kindergarten through professional school: Fordism for the Uber generation.

John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and other progressive educators objected to the hierarchical, banking model of knowledge transfer of that time. Imagine what they would say now as the Uber Generation of students pays increasingly exorbitant tuitions to be schooled with the pedagogy, standards, apparatus, values, and assumptions of the assembly line, mass production, and industrialization limiting and delimiting a future now over one hundred years in the past.

In social terms, we have a problem of inequality. The system we have inherited has led to what Lani Guinier calls the “tyranny of meritocracy.” We have a legacy from a world in which structural inequalities of racism, sexism, homophobia, nativism, and even eugenics came bundled into the inputs and outputs of formal education. We have a legacy of summative, high-stakes testing, for example, that maps onto the income levels of those taking the tests. Yet we act as if we are testing for merit, intelligence, and achievement. It is a cooked system that skewes the metrics by which we admit students, grade them, and rank them. We then rank and reward our colleges and universities by a standard of selectivity driven by the same logic, a logic that extends all the way up to peer review for faculty.
This leads to a societal mismatch. Some 84 percent of full-time full professors are white, even as we have a new “majority minority” of students entering our universities who are not.\(^1\) We have a full-time faculty that is nearly 70 percent male, with documented levels of gender bias at every level of the system.\(^2\) And those racial and gender inequalities become more extreme the higher up the academic hierarchy one moves.

Sadly, our classroom practices are not egalitarian either. If we teach only by an apprenticeship model, we replicate obsolete intellectual models and unequal social structures.

That’s the bad news. The good news is that we can change this.

**The classroom as a site of transformation and engagement**

The changes we need in higher education must occur on all the levels that educators addressed between 1860 and 1925, when they developed the structures we have now. Realistically, that means we have a few decades of work ahead of us—and, all over, educators are working together on all of these areas. It takes time, and the development is always “uneven.”

However, even as we are working together toward systemic institutional change, there is one area where we can all make change immediately and effectively: our own classrooms. We can make a difference on that transformational, aspirational, engaged level that Ernest Boyer so passionately advocated. We can change our pedagogical practices right now, in ways that empower our students and encourage them to experience their own agency and that, in turn, inspire us, as academics, to see what freedoms we, too, still possess and what we can accomplish in our realm.

So what holds us back? If how we teach and how we scaffold our students’ learning is the easiest thing to change, why don’t more of us engage in student-centered, engaged learning practices? The answer is simple: it requires us—professors—to learn, to change, to deconstruct our own training, legacies, status, and assumptions. We have to move from the banking model to what Freire calls the teacher-as-student and student-as-teacher model.

That may sound daunting. In fact, I’ve found it to be exceptionally rewarding to implement what the American Psychological Association calls “Total Participation.” Structuring a classroom for equality, where every student can be heard, turns out to model a better way of interacting with the world, organizing community action, modeling productive collaboration in the workplace, and participating in a democratic society.

Following are six principles with simple, corresponding tactics (mostly learned from others) that I have found to be useful in helping to turn the classroom into a site of transformation and engagement.

1. **Structure active participation: Think-Pair-Share.** I learned this from a second-grade teacher, and I have seen it done in medical school. I use it nearly every class session—sometimes to start the class, sometimes as attention lags in the middle, sometimes as an exercise in “metacognition” at the end. It could not be simpler. I pass out index cards and ask for quick responses in order to avoid self-consciousness. The content changes; the structure remains basically the same.

   For “Think,” I might say, “Take ninety seconds to write down the three most important ideas you learned from this week’s reading assignment.”

   For “Pair,” students work with partners, with one reading the three items on the card while the other listens, and then they switch roles. Only after each has read, and each has listened, do they decide on what one idea they will share with the class, sometimes blending two answers, editing, synthesizing, compromising, and collaborating.

   For “Share,” they then take turns, with each pair reading their combined idea to the class and leading that portion of the class discussion.
If the group is large—I once conducted Think-Pair-Share with six thousand International Baccalaureate teachers in the Philadelphia 76ers arena—I have them “share” on an online collaborative tool, rather than read aloud.

Think-Pair-Share is simple, fast, and it works. It gives the shy student an opportunity to write and to speak and to be heard. It gives everyone practice in listening and working together. It’s more structured than an open-ended seminar and more egalitarian. Students don’t just learn content from “the expert”: they learn how to become expert themselves.

2. Let students collectively establish the principles and practices for learning. On the first day of class, I give students the chance to write a class constitution. I give them a guide—either a constitution previous classes of students have written, or we’ll use something like the Mozilla Manifesto or even the preamble to the US Constitution. The point is for students to decide what they hope to accomplish, why, and how they will work together to achieve their goals, in the classroom and beyond it. Rarely are students afforded the opportunity to discuss the outcomes they perceive as important in their education.

3. Practice digital literacy. You cannot just talk about digital literacy; you must practice it. A large portion of all my courses happens online and in public for this reason. Students decide about security, privacy, self-representation in public, data management and use, and communications strategies for our class website. Students may use pseudonyms. We work with librarians and technology advisors, and students learn how to create a portfolio of their work so that, when future employers or graduate school admissions officers “Google them,” they find a careful, thoughtful, and a curated self-presentation—not just an OkCupid profile, goofy Tweets, or an incriminating Instagram account.

We typically make a simple site for the course as well as a Group on the hastac.org site (the world’s first and oldest academic social network, with a strong community of graduate and undergraduate student leaders). Typically, I have one or two students blog each week about the reading, and then the other students comment. Students learn to write with a public voice, for a larger audience, and with the purpose of having an impact on the world.

4. Turn endings into beginnings: The exit pass. At the end of each class—and this technique works well at meetings, too—each student jots down one or two pressing questions that still remain. They sign these cards and turn them in. One friend of mine does this in a lecture hall with six hundred students. It is faster and easier than taking attendance, serves better than a pop quiz, helps the professor prepare for the next lecture, and gives every student a chance to reflect on what they have learned. Win-win.

5. Contribute to public knowledge. I have stopped requiring any paper or project for which I am the only audience. Every final project—whether accomplished individually or by a group—now must make some kind of public contribution to knowledge. These range widely. At Duke several years ago, my students contributed new history to the town museum of Wilmington, North Carolina, to include documentation of the race riots of white citizens against African Americans during Reconstruction and helped put on a major centennial to commemorate those devastating events, remapping the town’s African American history. A few years ago, a class wrote an entire textbook on student-centered learning, *Field Notes to 21st Century Literacies: A Guide to New Theories, Methods, and Practices for Open Peer Teaching*. 

**AAC&U Annual Meeting**
End with a mission statement. I used to begin my courses by having students write a mission statement. Now, I have them do it on the last day of class. I have them reflect on all they have learned in the course—the content, the collaborations, the methods, and the relationships. And then I have them write a mission statement about how they might use all of these in their imagined, projected, ideal future. I like to have them find something they themselves have written in the class and incorporate that into their mission for the future. I want them to be inspired by their own aspirations. To my mind, that is educating higher: helping students find their own voices, words, learning, paths, journeys, and purposes. It’s the best we can do in higher education.

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

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3. See https://www.hastac.org/explore/groups.
Edward L. Ayers

**Strengths Hidden in Plain Sight**

America has a complicated relationship with its colleges and universities. Love for those places is evident in the number of alumni who give back to their schools; in the millions of bumper and window stickers proclaiming a driver’s loyalty; in the number of caps, shirts, shorts, sweatshirts, jackets, flags, mailbox covers, toilet seats, golf bags, and even caskets emblazoned with school logos and colors.

And yet many Americans are suspicious of, disdainful of, and even antagonistic to higher education in general. The press is filled with stories, features, and op-eds recounting a broad range of failures. Critics from inside and outside our colleges and universities bemoan their shortcomings; everyone from faculty and administrators to students come in for criticism and offer criticism of their own. Some of the critiques are accurate and useful, while others are ill informed and driven by agendas in which education is only incidental. Commencement speakers, alumni magazines, and college presidents, faced with such criticism, extol lofty purposes and timeless values. Everyone seems to be talking past one another.

Whether in criticism or in defense, the language we use to talk about higher education misses most of what we do most of the time. It neglects the commonplace accomplishments of every day, the successes hidden in plain sight. After twenty years as a professor, six years as a dean of arts and sciences, and eight years as a university president, there is still much I do not understand about the vast and complex world of American higher education. What I have learned over the decades, though, makes me wish I could better convey the profound and prosaic accomplishments of American higher education.

**From student to president: My education in higher education**

Like many Americans of my generation, I took it for granted that college was within my reach. The University of Tennessee, where I was an undergraduate, was a large, open-access school that provided everything I could have imagined wanting, needing, or deserving. It cost virtually nothing, and yet the professors invested heavily in their students. The University of Tennessee gave me every opportunity I’ve had since, including a fellowship to Yale.

Yale, in turn, gave me my calling and the confidence to pursue it. My job in graduate school was to absorb all that I could of my new discipline and to build an identity within it—an exhilarating and all-absorbing task. When I was fortunate enough to get a tenure-track job at the University of Virginia, my professional world expanded from my discipline to my department. Teaching was thrilling and so was working with colleagues, publishing books, giving talks, and advising graduate students. I did not want to spend any time doing anything else.

Along the way, however, I inadvertently learned about other parts of the university, often through appointments to committees outside my department. My eyes opened even more widely when I became chair of the faculty.
senate. In that role, I suggested that we hold a university-wide conversation about teaching, sure that the rest of the university would be enlightened by the excellent example of my department and of the humanities more generally. To my surprise, I learned that innovative and dedicated teaching was also taking place in the business and engineering and education and law schools. It turned out that parts of the university that had seemed antagonistic to the parts of the university I cared about were not so easily caricatured and dismissed.

When I became dean of arts and sciences at Virginia a few years later, I made other disconcerting discoveries. Reading hundreds of tenure files, I saw twenty-seven disciplines from the inside. I winced when I heard people in the humanities criticize scientists for not pulling their weight—and when I heard scientists patronize people who sought to understand medieval France or who produced plays. Every discipline bore its particular configuration of challenges, I saw, whether the incessant demand for grant proposals or the impossibility of
getting a grant in the first place. Reading honest and touching anonymous letters of evaluation from hundreds of students, I saw good teaching in many forms, from labs to large lectures, from all kinds of personalities using all kinds of strategies. After looking into the lives and work of my colleagues, I found it harder to look down upon entire fields of study and ways of sharing discovery.

When I went out on the road as dean to advocate for the college, I made other discoveries. Alumni, it turned out, were at least as smart as I was and, if they were talking to the dean, probably more philanthropic. They remembered faculty members who had changed their lives and asked me to pass on their memories and gratitude. After hundreds of those conversations, I found it harder to caricature alumni as engaged only by tailgating and reunion parties.

I knew from teaching that the lifeblood of education travels through capillaries, small vessels that reach into small classrooms, quiet conversations, silent reading. But when I became dean, I saw that these capillaries flow only because of the arteries and veins of admissions, finance, student affairs, and advancement. People far removed from the classroom make it possible for other people to be teachers and students. They minister to students when professors are not there in the middle of the night, call the parents when a terrible accident strikes, make sure the classrooms and offices work, balance the budgets and protect the benefits of everyone.

After seeing the work of the committed people behind the scenes, I knew that the demeaning talk of “administrators,” from inside and outside the academy, was often profoundly misplaced. The tired jokes of faculty about their colleagues “going over to the dark side” of administration came to seem not merely clichéd but misguided and self-defeating, trivializing and diminishing dedication to the shared purpose of the institution. Thus, after only a few years as chair of the senate and as dean, I was less fun when my faculty friends tossed out easy explanations for what was wrong with our institution and with higher education in general. I became intrigued by the possibilities of academic leadership and was grateful to be offered the presidency at the University of Richmond, in part because I had never been a faculty member at a private university, a smaller institution, or a school where teaching stood as an equal with research. At Richmond, the dedication to students and colleagues inspired me every day.

My horizons broadened in new directions when I was asked to serve on the board of the American Council on Education and to cochair a committee charged with analyzing accreditation in higher education. In that work, I saw how all kinds of schools—ranging from the Ivy League to small for-profits, from vast regional and urban publics to tiny faith-based colleges—fulfilled their distinct missions. Those institutions shared little in common beyond a determination to do the right things for their students, a determination that naturally took many shapes and that succeeded in unique ways. I was struck by how hard people worked and how successful they often were.

I learned, too, from the presidents of other private colleges and universities in Virginia. I was humbled by the challenges many of them faced and inspired by their accomplishments. Nearly 50 percent of students in those schools receive Pell grants, meaning that they have great financial need and few resources. Those schools, often small and seldom wealthy, welcome students who might have stumbled in high school and help them learn how to succeed. With only small amounts of support from the state, with tiny endowments and no margin for error, these schools change lives decade after decade. I saw how historically black colleges and universities, generation after generation, make an outsized impact.
Along the way, speaking at many kinds of institutions in my work as a historian, I came to see how broadly distributed talent and passion are among faculty and students across our country. I saw the pride of people who teach students from over a hundred different countries, students proficient in English at various levels, students with only limited time to devote to a course because they are also working and raising families. I saw that those who teach in community colleges and in regional public schools do not buy into the notion, common inside and outside the academy, that the more thoroughly preselected the students are the smarter the professor or the more important the work is.

Rhetoric versus reality: The remarkable successes of American higher education

As I received this belated education in higher education, I became more frustrated with commonplace criticism of higher education. It bothered me mainly because it undermines the possibilities of higher education. Because mothers and fathers read about scary levels of debt among some students, they fail to explore the hundreds of millions of dollars of financial aid available to them. Because their sons and daughters read exaggerated articles about getting into a few colleges, they miss opportunities in their backyards. Because students are told that the only skills that matter are the skills employers want this minute, they deprive themselves of the opportunity to acquire tools for a lifetime.

Lazy and clichéd criticism creates cynicism and defeatism. It also ignores fundamental facts about the remarkable expansion of those benefited by American higher education over the last forty years. The range, depth, and diversity of Americans achieving higher education have increased exponentially. Between 1970 and 2010, the total number of students increased from 8.5 million to 20.6 million, and the numbers and rates are still increasing. Between 2002 and 2012, the percentage of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds in higher education rose to 41 percent, the highest ever. The number of female students increased from 3.5 million to 11.7 million between 1970 and 2010. The percentage of students of color has doubled since 1976.

Evidence of the success of that ongoing transformation is everywhere before us. Demand for all kinds of education has never been stronger. Our community colleges are bulging at the seams; public universities of all sizes and kinds are flooded with applicants; for-profit and online enterprises have grown up to meet a demand that states and nonprofits cannot meet. We know from surveys that the great majority of college graduates are glad they went to their colleges, felt they got their money’s worth, and would go there again.

American higher education, in other words, has never educated more people, it has never educated a broader array of people, it has never offered an education that embraces so many fields of learning, it has never offered degrees more valuable and more coveted, and it has never been more respected and appreciated by the people who benefit from it. The world admires and copies every aspect of America’s diverse system of higher education, from our liberal arts colleges to our research universities.

Despite these remarkable successes, a rhetoric of systemic failure discourages us from confronting, in a pragmatic and urgent way, the challenges that remain. Common sense explains many of those challenges. It is not surprising that higher education costs more when it finally begins to serve a vast, diverse, and often poorer student body, when it educates more people from more backgrounds in more ways. Higher education is hard, intellectually and socially, and it is not surprising that those who are the first in their families to go to college or who speak English as a second language or have other work responsibilities may struggle and require more support. Student welfare, engagement, and protection have become institutional responsibilities, and those responsibilities bring costs as well as enormous benefits to people within and beyond our colleges and universities.

American institutions of higher education have embraced one new challenge after another over the last half century. Confronting those challenges, day in and day out for generations, has built the strength to confront the challenges before us now.

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the author’s name on the subject line.
I was talking with my partner about these remarks, and for some reason my red sauce came to her mind. She told me that I should talk about my red sauce. I wondered how I could possibly talk about my red sauce in remarks on women and leadership and the myths surrounding our advancement. Now, maybe she was just scheming to get me to make my red sauce—or gravy, as my family would call it. It's terrific (if I do say so myself), legendary in some parts, and always a favorite among my friends, who know when I make them gravy I am showing them lots and lots of love. My gravy is especially great the day after it has simmered fully on a low-heat burner . . . but I digress!

The notion of talking about my red sauce and women and leadership and the myths surrounding our advancement “simmered” in my mind as I considered these remarks, and I wondered how I could use red sauce as metaphor. I remembered that most working-class Southern Italian American women never used recipes. Never. My nana never did. In fact, it was a very big joke in my family that my mom, self-admittedly not the best or the most interesting cook, would stand over or behind or next to my nana armed with measuring cups and spoons, trying to figure out how Nana made her red sauce, her meatballs—in fact, most of her recipes! My mom would try to place measuring cups strategically under Nana's hands as she quickly and adeptly moved through her cooking rituals. Nana just did it. She intuited what the right combinations were and what the right ingredients were—the right tomatoes, the right spices, the right amount of cheese, the feel of the meat in her hands as she molded it into balls ready to be fried in the best olive oil. She intuited, and she practiced, and she intuited, and she practiced, and she did that with her cooking over and over again.

Creating recipes for women's advancement

I think the early higher education leaders, who happened to be women, were like my nana. Those pioneering women didn't have a set of recipes to follow. They worked to find the right ingredients and the right combinations to lead and serve their institutions. They didn't have leadership development programs or books on effective leadership, on how to lean in, or on how to be more confident. There were no apparent mentorships or sponsorships. These women intuited, and they practiced, and they intuited, and they practiced, and they did that with their leadership over and over again. There really just wasn't a recipe for women’s leadership.

As the many social movements of the 1960s and 1970s progressed, the egregious ways in which women were overlooked for leadership roles became clearer and clearer, and remedies were developed to address the gaps that existed in higher education leadership. It was then that we started to create recipes for women’s advancement.
We knew that there were systemic issues. Clearly, there was institutionalized racism, sexism, and heterosexism. Women, and men and women of color, and LGBT men and women were clearly not welcome and, therefore, not visibly present in the academy, particularly in senior administration. We created Higher Education Resource Services and other leadership development programs to discern and teach the right recipes for advancement. We had the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ Campus Women Lead initiative; we identified the chilly classroom climate and worked to utilize Title IX to gain educational equity and leadership equity. We had the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors (later the National Association for Women in Education), which was always in the lead, creating recipes for all women and for leadership at all levels. We had the American Council on Education (ACE) Office of Women and the ACE National Identification Program to assist women in creating recipes for women’s advancement. We had the recipes that were based on gaining the skills, knowledge, and tenacity necessary for leadership.

Fast-forward to today. I wonder, has the “recipe” for women’s advancement in the twenty-first century become, perhaps, a little too measured?

Like many of you, I read all the reports and books and blogs about women in leadership across all sectors, thinking that there may be clues as to why women leaders are still so few and why this circumstance still exists in the twenty-first century. In recent years, attempts to address the seeming intractability of moving the needle on women’s leadership have led to an explosion of books written by women to tell us—women—how to enter into leadership and become successful leaders. It seems as though each woman spooning out this advice has her own recipe for success. I ask myself, do we or don’t we—“lean in”? And if we do “lean in,”
how will we be perceived? And what, exactly, are we leaning in to?

Or is it that we don’t have enough—what? Confidence? Chutzpah? Ambition? Drive? Are we not “tough enough,” because “nice girls” don’t get the corner office? But aren’t we supposed to be nice girls, to be liked? Do the guys worry about being liked as they seek the corner office?

Moreover, are these contemporary recipes for leadership for all women, or just some women? I strongly encourage you to read bell hooks’s critique of Sheryl Sandberg’s book Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead. hooks notes that “Sandberg’s definition of feminism begins and ends with the notion that it’s all about gender equality within the existing social system. From this perspective, the structures of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy need not be challenged. And she makes it seem that privileged white men will eagerly choose to extend the benefits of corporate capitalism to white women who have the courage to ‘lean in.’ It almost seems as if Sandberg sees women’s lack of perseverance as more the problem than systemic inequality.”

I agree with hooks, for there is deep, systemic inequality still. And that systemic inequality perpetuates a culture that values men as leaders, still, to the exclusion of women in any significant way; in no sector do women make up 30 percent of the senior leadership. I am on the national board of the Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA). In the national campaign led by GSUSA and its CEO, Anna Maria Chavez, to “ban bossy,” there was an effort to call out the fact that when boys lead they are called “leaders” and when girls lead they are called “bossy.” Is it any wonder that boys stay in leadership and girls opt out of leadership? In fact, younger girls just run away from leadership! This flight is indicative of this culture, this system, in which white and male are the norm and women and those of color are outside the norm and, therefore, not welcome at the table of leadership.

Is it our fault?

Are the right ingredients to be found in any or all of these books? Is it really our fault?

Like my mother’s attempt to replicate my nana’s red sauce recipe with measuring cups and spoons, contemporary books on women’s leadership seem, at least to me, far too prescriptive. It’s not just our fault. Many of us push forward every day. We are mission driven and student focused. We understand the importance of equity-inclusion-diversity, and we know we have a role in making higher education more accessible at all levels. Most of us have confidence. Many of us are still managing a set of gendered notions of how we’re viewed when we actually exercise leadership. And balance? Try daily negotiation around a whole host of tasks that are never balanced.

There is still a significant lack of advancement for women, but is it our fault?

In January 2016, the American Council on Education released an information brief titled Pipelines, Pathways, and Institutional Leadership, a follow-up to the Academia section of the 2013 Benchmarking Women’s Leadership in the United States report. The brief examines the stunning lack of advancement—and, at times, actual decline—for women in faculty, administrative, and board of trustee positions.

First, there is the pipeline myth, the persistent idea that there are too few qualified women for leadership positions. The most current data on educational attainment show that women make up more than 50 percent of students in all degree programs; since 2006, the majority of doctoral degrees have been awarded to women. Women’s educational attainment can no longer be questioned.
Next, there is the glass ceiling, the longstanding metaphor for the intangible, systemic barriers that prevent women from obtaining senior leadership positions. As of 2014, women hold only 31 percent of the full professor positions at degree-granting institutions. The higher the rank—from service or research only to tenured full faculty—the fewer women one finds. Women of color often outnumber men of color in lower-ranking faculty positions, but more men of color hold full professor positions that do women of color.

Even though women have higher educational attainment levels than men, there are few women at senior ranks in both faculty and administration. In 2014, male faculty members held a higher percentage of tenured positions at every type of institution, even though they did not hold the highest number of faculty positions at every rank.

Regardless of academic rank, men are paid more than women and are more likely to be on the tenure track. In fact, the pay gap has actually widened. Men outearn women by $13,616 at public institutions and by $17,843 at private institutions. Men make more than women at every rank, in every discipline, and in every institutional type except two-year private institutions. Data from the US Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System on the average salary of full-time, nine-month, instructional faculty show that the gap between the salaries of men and women has grown from $3,106 in 1975–76 to $15,173 in 2013–14.

Finally, when it comes to presidents, chief academic officers, and governing boards, the needle hasn’t moved much. The percentage of women who serve as college and university presidents has stayed at the 26–27 percent mark for many years. The American Council on Education will be conducting its American College Presidency Study in 2016, and I am eager to see whether the needle has moved for women in the presidency. Men outnumber women on governing boards, both public and independent, by more than two to one. And
here’s an example of some back-drift: the percentage of women serving as chief academic officers in public, doctoral degree-granting institutions actually declined between 2008 and 2013, the last year for which we have data. And since chief academic officer is still the primary position from which most women enter the presidency, this decline should not be taken lightly.

As part of its Moving the Needle: Advancing Women in Higher Education initiative, the American Council on Education has set an ambitious goal of achieving gender parity in higher education administration—a goal of having 50 percent of college and university presidents be women by 2030. In this context, Politico’s coverage of the Pipelines, Pathways, and Institutional Leadership information brief was ironic: “A few days after launching its campaign to see that half of college chief executives are women by 2030, the American Council on Education put out an infographic showing just how far they have to go.” Just how far we have to go? Is this our fault?

No. It’s not our fault.

**Passing our recipes on**

When I make my red sauce today, I combine my nana’s wisdom and intuition with my mother’s measurements. I have a set of faded yellow index cards on which I wrote my mother’s recipes many, many years ago in my Catholic-school cursive.

In preparing these remarks, I reflected on my own leadership journey and on the leadership journeys of valued colleagues. There is no doubt that the pipeline is full, that the glass ceiling exists, and that we still have far to go. The higher we look, the fewer of us are there. We know we simmer in environments that were not designed for us or for our leadership. In our work, just like being at the stove making the red sauce, we literally manage the heat and stay until we are able to make our leadership sauce.

I look at the recipe for today’s leadership journey as combining wisdom and intuition with foundational and measured effort. It’s about recognizing the realities of systemic barriers and acknowledging that we all must continue our work to advance ourselves and other women. It’s about taking that dog-eared, cursive-written recipe for our leadership red sauce and passing it on to the next younger woman. To whom will you pass your recipe?

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**NOTES**

5. To learn more about the Moving the Needle initiative or to sign on to the call to action, visit http://www.acenet.edu/leadership/programs/Pages/Moving-the-Needle.aspx.
Progress and Prospects for the Reform of Undergraduate Education

Results from the Latest Survey of AAC&U Members

BARELY A WEEK GOES BY without the release of yet another article or book making a case for “disruptive innovation” within higher education institutions. Commentators calling for disruption often begin from the premise that all traditional institutions are “stuck in the past” and resistant to change. In The End of College, for example, Kevin Carey describes how, in the face of student underachievement, leaders of “traditional” higher education simply “throw up their hands and say that nothing, really [can] be done. College is what it is, and has always been.” Not all commentators are as sweeping in their condemnation, and even Carey documents many examples of innovation in teaching and learning that are emerging both from outside and from within traditional institutions of higher education. But how resistant to change is higher education really? And how much change is actually needed?

Undoubtedly, undergraduate education is a very long way from where it needs to be in terms of preparing the next generation of students for success in an innovation-driven global economy and to help solve significant societal challenges. As the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has documented repeatedly, employers are “raising the bar” for what they expect from college graduates, and they are frustrated by the insufficient levels of knowledge and skill that too many college graduates bring to the workplace as new employees. Moreover, AAC&U’s ongoing VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) family of projects is documenting serious underachievement across undergraduate education in terms of key learning outcomes, including written communication, critical thinking, and quantitative literacy. Clearly, change is needed. The nation simply needs more from higher education, both in terms of the numbers of students who graduate and in terms of what those graduates know and can do with the skills they acquire in college.

Yet, while I am firmly convinced that undergraduate education is in need of significant reform, I see among AAC&U member institutions a lot of serious work to improve student outcomes. Many educational leaders and practitioners are working hard to make changes and improve educational outcomes. Carey and other commentators are wrong to suggest that higher education leaders have thrown up their hands. In fact, I believe that the reform of undergraduate education may have reached a tipping point, as various streams of work have begun to converge and are now poised for acceleration.

Promisingly, far more serious attention is being paid to issues of equity and inclusive excellence than ever before. Educators are developing new approaches to close achievement gaps among students from different backgrounds. There is broad recognition across higher education that far too many students from low-income backgrounds and historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups are either not graduating from college at all or are graduating without the skills and knowledge they need to flourish and succeed.

So what really is the current state of undergraduate education reform? How are the approaches taken at colleges, community colleges, and universities changing to respond to the needs of a new generation of students, the demands of the contemporary workplace, the challenges of a global democracy? What more could be done to promote equity and inclusive excellence for today’s students?

To explore these and other, related questions, AAC&U recently commissioned Hart Research Associates to do a national survey of chief
Reform of Undergraduate Education
academic officers at its member institutions. The survey was conducted in 2015, and findings are summarized in three separate reports. As with the previous survey of AAC&U members, conducted in 2008–9, the respondents were representative of AAC&U’s total membership, which includes institutions of all types—public and private, two-year and four-year, large and small. The findings paint a portrait of undergraduate education reform, revealing how much progress has been made at institutions of varying types—and how much remains to be done.

### Clarity of purpose

No higher education leader would ever say that he or she was not focused intensely on ensuring that all students “succeed.” And most would likely define “student success” in terms of reaching high levels of achievement on key proficiencies and reaching the finish line—i.e., graduating with a postsecondary credential that truly signifies attainment of those learning goals. But the truth is that, for many years, higher education institutions have not been particularly clear, at the level of the institution or program, about the specific learning goals for all students. Addressing this lack of clarity remains an important first step in any acceleration of the national undergraduate reform movement. The good news is that the latest AAC&U member survey reveals clear progress in this area.

Nearly all AAC&U member institutions have a set of learning outcomes that is common for all undergraduate students; 85 percent of academic leaders reported that their institutions have such outcomes, up from 78 percent in 2008–9. Perhaps even more importantly, especially for the purposes of informing the broader national dialogue about the meaning of “quality undergraduate education,” the survey found widespread consensus on the specific learning outcomes all students in all programs should achieve. Participants in each survey were asked whether specific skill and knowledge areas are included in their institution’s set of common learning outcomes. Table 1 compares the findings, showing the percentages of respondents who affirmed the inclusion of each outcome area. While there is still a need to map individual programs of study to these common goals, we do now have greater clarity about the broad goals from which to begin this mapping exercise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World</th>
<th>2008–9</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global/World Cultures</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity in the United States</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Intellectual and Practical Skills

| Writing Skills                                               | 99%    | 99%  |
| Critical Thinking                                            | 95%    | 98%  |
| Quantitative Reasoning                                       | 91%    | 94%  |
| Oral Communication                                           | 88%    | 82%  |
| Intercultural Skills*                                         | 79%    | 79%  |
| Information Literacy                                         | 76%    | 76%  |
| Research Skills                                              | 65%    | 75%  |

### Personal and Social Responsibility

| Intercultural Skills*                                        | 79%    | 79%  |
| Ethical Reasoning                                            | 75%    | 75%  |
| Civic Engagement                                             | 68%    | 63%  |

### Integrative Learning

| Application of Learning                                      | 66%    | 65%  |
| Integration of Learning                                     | 63%    | 68%  |

* “Intercultural Skills” is shown in two categories because the associated learning outcomes apply to both.

There has been surprisingly little change in the specific outcomes most commonly adopted over the past six years. Of note, however, are a few areas of learning that more institutions seem to be prioritizing for all their students. Today, for instance, 75 percent of institutions seek to advance the research skills of all students, up from 65 percent in 2008–9. In this regard, higher education institutions are fully in sync with employers and with shifts in the economy. A 2013 report on how employers view a variety of educational goals and practices notes that “large majorities believe that colleges that set expectations for students to achieve [particular] learning outcomes will do the most to prepare them for success.” The top-rated goal or practice of the ten evaluated was “expecting students to develop the skills to research questions in their field and develop
Students need not only to understand the learning goals set by the institution, but also how and where the curriculum helps them develop the expected outcomes.
Higher education. At nearly three in four institutions, integrative and applied learning projects—the kinds of projects that are often embedded in capstone courses or experiences—are now required for all or at least some students. These institutions as well are fully in sync with employers, large majorities of whom agree that requiring students to complete significant applied-learning projects would improve the general quality of their learning and their preparation for careers. Nearly three in four employers believe this required practice would improve graduates’ preparation for work either “a lot” or “a fair amount.”

**General education and major programs**

The 2015 AAC&U member survey found that colleges and universities continue to redesign their approaches to general education, ensuring that this vital part of the curriculum remains both effective in advancing key learning goals and well aligned with twenty-first-century realities. At many institutions, for example, a greater emphasis is being placed on “integration of knowledge, skills, and application” (67 percent) and “applied learning experiences” (61 percent). A slight majority of institutions are emphasizing “cross-cutting skill development” (51 percent). Far fewer are focusing their general education programs solely on the acquisition of broad knowledge. As the pace of knowledge creation continues to accelerate, educational leaders recognize that students need much more from their general education programs than “exposure” to broad knowledge areas. The “name of the game,” according to economists, is building the capacity to work with new knowledge and to put knowledge to use in the world in innovative and responsible ways. This economic imperative will have profound implications for the design of general education programs, if those programs are to continue to serve students and society well.

AAC&U member institutions are addressing this challenge incrementally, rather than by making radical changes. As in 2008–9, the vast majority (76 percent) still rely on some form of the “distribution” model, with students selecting courses from broad lists in different knowledge or skill areas. However, 68 percent now employ a “hybrid” model that includes at least some choice for students, while also incorporating more “integrative” or common features such as thematic required courses, structured skill-development courses, learning communities, and integrative capstone courses. At only 8 percent of institutions is the general education program based on a pure distribution model.

Today’s students tend to focus on their own undergraduate fields of study, rather than on the broad skills they acquire and develop across the academic experience as a whole. In fact, few students really seem to grasp what their prospective employers prioritize in this area: more than 90 percent of employers agree that a graduate’s “demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.” This disconnect requires even greater intentionality and integration on the part of higher education institutions. The good news is that there has been significant progress on the integration of general education programs with major requirements. In 2015, 58 percent of academic leaders reported that their general education and major programs are either “fairly well integrated” or “very well integrated,” whereas only 48 percent had reported that in 2008–9.

As students across the country demonstrate and engage in heated protests about institutional action or inaction related to race, equity, and meaningful inclusion, it is important to note that higher education institutions of all sorts continue to need both cocurricular and curricular reforms to meet goals related to diversity and inclusion. Faculty members have, of course, been transforming curricular pathways for at least fifty years to teach far more multicultural content and to ensure that all students learn about issues of diversity and justice. This work has had a profound impact on major programs and general education requirements. Yet, the 2015 member survey reveals that the momentum may be slowing in this particular area of undergraduate education reform. In 2008–9, about 56 percent of chief academic officers reported that their general education programs included diversity courses. In 2015, that number had increased, but only to 60 percent. Those reporting that their programs include global courses jumped from 60 percent in 2008–9 to 70 percent in 2015. Moreover, about 73 percent of institutions...
include “knowledge of diversity in the United States” as a common learning outcome for all students, no change from 2008–9.

It is clear, then, that much curricular reform is underway—notably including efforts to ensure that more students can integrate and apply what they are learning to complex problem-solving and research-intensive challenges. But we must accelerate the pace of these reforms, especially if we are to advance inclusive excellence and ensure that all students—not just the most privileged—gain the benefits of this more integrative, problem-based learning approach.

**Assessment for improvement and accountability**

Even as institutions redesign their curricular pathways to make them clearer, more coherent, and more focused on developing the skills of integration and application, many are also developing new approaches to the assessment of student learning. However, although many institutions now gather assessment data, too few of them use the data to improve the quality of their programs. Moreover, educators at many institutions are coming to realize that earlier approaches to assessment, especially those that rely on standardized forms of measurement and multiple-choice/single-right-answer tests, are inadequate drivers of institutional change and improvement. Faculty members need not only to have confidence in the assessment methods being used, but also to be able to use the data they yield in order to improve assignments and curricular designs.

The 2015 member survey provides evidence that significant reform is underway in these areas. Today, learning outcomes are being assessed in at least some departments at 87 percent of AAC&U member institutions, up from 72 percent in 2008–9. Learning outcomes in general education are being assessed at 67 percent of AAC&U member institutions, up from 52 percent in 2008–9. For those institutions where general education outcomes are being assessed, the use of rubrics to evaluate samples of student work is by far the most common method of assessment. Of those institutions, 91 percent use rubrics, about one-third use standardized national tests of general knowledge, and about 38 percent use standardized tests of general skills such as critical thinking. Anecdotally, educators and practitioners at AAC&U member institutions report that a rubric-based approach to assessment—an approach that focuses on the work students produce as they progress through the required curriculum—is preferable, in part, because it provides data that faculty can use to make improvements.
Advancing equity

In sum, the 2015 survey of AAC&U members reveals notable progress in clarifying outcomes, strengthening the coherence of the curriculum, implementing evidence-based learning practices, and assessing student learning. The task now is to accelerate the progress in all these areas, and to do so in ways that help close persistent equity gaps. Some commentators suggest that only disruption from without will truly move the needle in higher education. However, a broader view of the higher education landscape suggests that focused and committed academic leaders could accelerate change by bringing together various streams of reform.

For example, several leading institutions have shown that data—intentionally and intelligently collected—can be used to address serious inequities related to students’ pathways to graduation. By tracking students’ progress through the curriculum—with particular attention to points at which some students are blocked or diverted from successful paths—it is possible to close gaps in completion rates for students from different backgrounds and with different entering characteristics. The exact same strategy could be deployed with respect to learning outcomes. This would require that data be collected and disaggregated and that faculty members and other educators be supported and assisted as they interpret the data and use them to chart a way forward.

The 2015 member survey found that most institutions are tracking all the right things—retention and graduation rates, but also participation in evidence-based learning activities, actual achievement of learning outcomes, and rates at which students reach key curricular milestones. Too few, however, are disaggregating these data (see fig. 1). Many institutions are deploying strategies to close achievement gaps and increase student achievement of learning outcomes, but they are not specifically targeting these strategies to support students who are most likely to face challenges. For instance, while 57 percent of institutions have goals related to closing gaps in retention or on-time completion among students from different racial/ethnic groups, far fewer institutions have goals related to closing similar gaps in student achievement of learning outcomes (31 percent) or participation in high-impact practices (28 percent).

All campuses can accelerate reform by collecting better data and using them to drive the improvement of academic programs. However, investment of time and resources in effective teaching strategies and greater faculty-student interaction—both key to advancing students’ achievement of higher-order skills—may ultimately prove to be the most powerful accelerant of all. Faculty must be at the center of any reform effort, and they need time and support to improve curricular designs and teaching approaches. To that end, 42 percent of chief academic officers report already having in place programs designed to build faculty, instructor, and staff capacity to use culturally competent teaching strategies. Another 35 percent do not yet have such programs, but are planning to develop them. And 67 percent report either having or developing goals to work with faculty in order to build new opportunities for high-impact learning for first-generation and low-income students as well as for students of color.

It is clear from the latest survey of AAC&U member institutions that educators have not thrown up their hands in the face of daunting expectations for higher education and a very challenging policy environment. By bringing together the many areas of work discussed above in more intentional and coordinated ways, collaborative teams of educators and leaders could deploy data and target resources to promote student success more effectively. Students who come to our colleges, community colleges, and universities place their hopes and dreams in our hands. We must not let them down, as their futures—and our shared futures—are at stake.

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

NOTES

3. See “Multi-State Collaboration Produces Valuable New Evidence About Writing, Critical Thinking, and Quantitative Literacy Skills of Undergraduate Students.”


6. The 2015 survey found that 85 percent of AAC&U members have a set of learning outcomes that is common for all undergraduates throughout the institution, up from 78 percent in 2008–9. For each of four outcome categories, table 1 compares the percentage of these institutions whose common set of student learning outcomes includes a specific goal or outcome in the knowledge or skill area indicated. The four categories correspond to the listing of LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes, which was developed as part of AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative (see www.aacu.org/leap).


9. Ibid., 18.


AAC&U Has It Right—
It’s “Liberal Education”

DANIEL F. SULLIVAN

More than ever before in our nation’s history, there is alignment between what we in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) call the Essential Learning Outcomes of undergraduate education (see sidebar page 39) and what the nation needs for its own flourishing. It is the broad, integrative knowledge and the higher-order intellectual and practical skills articulated in the Essential Learning Outcomes, in addition to knowledge and competence in liberal arts and/or professional disciplines, that employers have told us over and over in a series of surveys that they want more of from higher education in America.¹ To have a “liberal education” is to have both, and such an education is crucial not just for success in work but also for the reasoned and thoughtful civic participation our democracy requires and, we strongly believe, for “living fully and freely.”²

In our muddled and conflicted national discourse about what the goals of higher education should be, throughout her presidency Carol Geary Schneider has argued consistently and eloquently that the rallying vision of AAC&U and the watchword for excellence in American undergraduate education should be “liberal education,” not “liberal arts education”—and absolutely not “work-force development” stripped of the liberal learning a steadily increasing share of all, not just professional, workers must acquire and citizens must gain to play the roles our democracy envisions for them. The first critically important rhetorical and substantive public manifestation of this argument on her watch was the “Statement on Liberal Learning” adopted by the AAC&U Board of Directors in October 1998. The opening paragraph cuts to the chase:

A truly liberal education is one that prepares us to live responsible, productive, and creative lives in a dramatically changing world. It is an education that fosters a well-grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward lifelong learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions. Liberal education requires that we understand the foundations of knowledge and inquiry about nature, culture, and society; that we master core skills of perception, analysis, and expression; that we cultivate a respect for truth; that we recognize the importance of historical and cultural context; and that we explore connections among formal learning, citizenship, and service to our communities.³

Liberal education goes beyond understanding of “the foundations of knowledge and inquiry about nature, culture, and society” to include skills, habits of mind, commitments to the commons and to values linked to living fully and freely.

Those advocating a liberal arts education, focused on the content of the traditional liberal arts disciplines, often just assume that the habits of mind

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and higher-order skills of liberal education will be achieved if one just studies liberal arts content using appropriate pedagogy. This is Georgia Nugent’s position in her recent lengthy defense of the liberal arts and liberal arts colleges, which does not once mention AAC&U’s national and international leadership in the cause of liberal education, even as a foil. But experience and growing evidence show that just studying liberal arts content using the right pedagogy isn’t enough; teachers of liberal arts courses must set liberal learning goals above and beyond content goals and devise assignments and practice designed to help students achieve them. The closest Nugent comes to being explicit about learning goals above and beyond content, as AAC&U does powerfully in its Essential Learning Outcomes, is to introduce a distinction between so-called “deep” and “surface” learning.

At the same time, one can’t teach for liberal learning outcomes in the absence of content. It’s during the thoughtfully designed study of content that well-guided students also develop the habits of mind and skills of liberal education. Both are necessary.

To be sure, some content is closely linked to particular higher-order learning goals. To study literary criticism, for example, is to study a certain kind of critical thinking, but it isn’t necessarily about how to become a better critical thinker. Students will become better critical thinkers in literary criticism courses that include assignments and practice designed to improve critical thinking per se.

Others—most notably far too many federal and state political leaders—argue that a narrow, practical, applied, pre-professional and professional undergraduate education should be our national goal: “we have too many philosophers.” But students pursuing practical, job-oriented fields also need a liberal education, and one absolutely can develop the habits of mind and skills of liberal education in courses of study outside liberal arts disciplines if teachers intentionally include the learning goals of liberal education in their curricula and syllabi. This must happen if students today and in the future are to have the education they need for the twenty-first century. How can students in programs like undergraduate nursing not be expected to develop analytical skills, critical-thinking skills, written and oral communication skills, integrative and quantitative reasoning skills, real-world problem-solving skills, and ethical reasoning skills?

Deciding what we mean by quality in higher education is the most important decision we have to make as a profession and as a country. Everything follows from that. It is impossible to assess our performance, or whether higher education costs too much, if the goals for a quality college education are left unspecified. Carol saw this from the very beginning, and she argues persuasively that evidence is growing that more and more of America’s higher education stakeholders get this argument too and are reaching a consensus that quality undergraduate learning looks very much like AAC&U’s Essential Learning Outcomes:

All these goals for learning have been captured in AAC&U’s Essential Learning Outcomes and in Lumina Foundation’s Degree Qualifications Profile. Both documents have been widely used and adapted by institutions across higher education.

The good news, in other words, is that US higher education does have—right now—clear expectations for what counts as quality learning. Moreover, as abundant other research makes clear, employers hold largely the same expectations for quality learning, and see these kinds of learning as critical to career navigation and success. Recent widely read and reviewed books—e.g., Michael Roth’s Why Liberal Education Matters and Fareed Zakaria’s In Defense of Liberal Education—speak not of liberal arts education, but of liberal education.

This sea change in how we describe our goals for undergraduate education is not just a clearer, far more appropriate way to think of higher...
education in the twenty-first century, it also promises to remove us from the minefield of having to defend all liberal arts content in today's supercharged political environment only on grounds of the content's value to students and the nation. If we commit to ensure that all liberal arts courses have explicit liberal learning goals beyond content, with assignments designed to foster student achievement of these goals in addition to content learning, defense of the liberal arts is far easier. When we can say unequivocally that undergraduate study of the classics, or philosophy, or art history, or gender studies always explicitly—not just implicitly—includes goals and assignments meant to improve students' critical thinking, analytical and quantitative reasoning, writing, oral communication, evidence-based reasoning, and other liberal learning skills, we almost always find agreement across the political spectrum on the value of such an education. That's a way forward toward consensus that Carol has seen for a very long time.

Finally, it is always important to add that the broad learning goals we have characterized as "essential" must be a part of the undergraduate education of all students. If the way we structure access to quality college learning means that it is far less available to disadvantaged students, then we ensure that whole segments of our population will never participate fully in American economic and political life. Without higher-order skills and adaptive, learning-oriented habits of mind, individuals will not be able to compete for the jobs that represent the upward mobility we so often—wrongly for at least three decades—proclaim as America's distinctive societal characteristic. Liberal education cannot be elite education. Carol's insistence on this from the beginning makes me proud every day to be a part of AAC&U.

NOTES
Carol Geary Schneider, Liberal Education, and Social Justice

JOHNNELLA E. BUTLER

In her article in the fall 2014 issue of Liberal Education, an adaptation of her 2005 address marking the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), Carol Geary Schneider discussed the 1976 expansion of the focus of our association from exclusively colleges of arts and sciences to “all of the nation’s colleges and universities, large and small, public and private, two-year and four-year.” With this change, the board of directors stated that the future goal was for liberal education to “serve our entire nation as an instrument for shaping a future consistent with its highest ideals.”

An extraordinary leader who understands the moment, and a visionary who understands the role of history, Carol points out that this expanded focus coincided with the incorporation of what she termed “our nation’s recently included students”:

adult students, students of color, first-generation students, international immigrant students, students from less advantaged families, students who were working full time and attending part time . . . . And so, starting in the 1970s, this association became a gathering place for everyone who believed that these recently included students needed and deserved the very best education we could provide—and for everyone who recognized that we would need to reexamine both the aims and the practices of liberal education if we wanted to meet that very high standard. We were guided by our commitment to liberal or liberating education. But we were also embarked on a search for new ways to make that kind of education available to an extraordinarily diverse generation of students.

She reminds us that a generation of teacher-scholars (of which she was one in the 1980s) from institutions across the landscape of higher education “set off not just one movement for reform in undergraduate education, but literally dozens of them,” ultimately resulting in a new vision for liberal education.

Now, eleven years later—and eighteen years after Carol assumed the presidency of AAC&U—the organization has an impressive record of initiatives and innovations advancing inclusive excellence in liberal education.

Arguably, those initiatives and innovations were spearheaded by two pioneering initiatives: the “chilly climate” work on gender equity, begun by the distinguished Bernice “Bunny” Sandler, director of the Project on the Status and Education of Women (PSEW) from 1971 to 1991, and the Engaging Cultural Legacies: Shaping Core Curricula in the Humanities project, led by Carol.

PSEW continued as the Program on the Status and Education of Women under the leadership of Caryn McTighe Musil until 2012, publishing the quarterly newsletter On Campus with Women and a number of important reports and monographs—including A Measure of Equity: Women’s Progress in Higher Education (2008)—and establishing both Campus Women Lead and the Women’s Leadership Project for Inclusive Excellence.

Engaging Cultural Legacies: Shaping Core Curricula in the Humanities took on the huge, daunting, and still unfinished task of “designing curricula that broaden traditional notions of ‘our common cultural heritage’ to incorporate the plurality of cultures around the world and, increasingly, within the United States.” Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, sixty-three institutions participated in a collaborative dialogue “to engage the complexities of the contemporary world.” Many colleges and universities were already working on similar projects, and 250 of them applied to participate in the AAC&U project.

Engaging Cultural Legacies emphasized the importance of civic competencies to participation in a pluralistic democracy. Carol continued to build on that foundation, leading the development of programmatic work ranging from American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning to Liberal Education and America’s Promise—initiatives that take seriously the late Frank Wong’s observation that “contemporary debates about diversity” are part of “this country’s ongoing negotiations over the meaning, application, and inclusiveness of its democratic principles.”

Two other projects set the standard for the faculty expertise needed to improve undergraduate education. The first, Preparing Future Faculty...
Under Carol’s leadership, AAC&U has continued to connect liberal education, diversity, democracy, and civic engagement to advance inclusive excellence.

(1993–2000), was designed to help graduate students prepare for faculty roles. This partnership between AAC&U and the Council of Graduate Schools received generous support from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the National Science Foundation, and the Atlantic Philanthropies. The second, Preparing Critical Faculty for the Future (2010–2016), was a leadership, curriculum, and pedagogy development project for women faculty of color in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields at historically black colleges and universities.

This project, together with the recent incorporation of Project Kaleidoscope into AAC&U and the ongoing Teaching to Increase Diversity and Equity in STEM project, has made AAC&U the place to go for improving undergraduate STEM education.

Under Carol’s leadership, AAC&U has continued to connect liberal education, diversity, democracy, and civic engagement to advance inclusive excellence in composition as well as substance. Carol deftly led AAC&U to advocate for diversity in public policy, partnering with the American Council on Education on the Affirmative Action Collaborative Research Project (1998–2000), which sought to identify the best ways to report and research the educational benefits of diverse student populations learning together, and with the Harvard Civil Rights Project (2000–2003) on both Achieving Diversity in Higher Education: How to Establish Educationally and Legally Sound Financial Aid and Admission Policies, a national training institute, and the preparation of an amicus curiae brief to the Supreme Court on campus diversity policies and their effects.

Recently, in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Carol asserted that “it’s never been more important that students have a big-picture education that prepares them to deal with complexity, and prepares them to take ethical responsibility and civic responsibility for what they’re learning.” Her commitment to inclusive excellence during her tenure has both led and brought together faculty, staff, and administrators who serve our changing, heterogeneous population in order to bring equity to assessment, student success, mentoring, and, in short, to educational practices that improve the educational opportunities and experiences of all students.

With her leadership, AAC&U has assisted institutions to develop and assess diversity initiatives, infuse those initiatives into liberal education, and aspire to bring inclusive excellence to all levels and dimensions of higher education.

Because of her leadership and commitment to both liberal education and social justice, Carol has set AAC&U on a clearly defined course to meet the challenges and complexities of liberal education and social justice yet to come in this century. I am certain she will continue to do so beyond AAC&U, because it is just in her DNA.

NOTES

4. Ibid., 49.
Bequeathing a Legacy for a Just and Inclusive Democracy

CARYN MCTIGHE MUSIL

When I first met Carol Geary Schneider in 1988 while I was heading the National Women’s Studies Association, she had invited a women’s studies task force to be part of an ambitious, complicated project on the organizing principles of the major. With her characteristic IMAX vision, she was orchestrating twelve disciplinary society task forces and a national advisory board in a three-year project that spawned fourteen publications, all done while balancing the somewhat differential interests of two separate funding sources. It should have been a clue to what lay ahead when she hired me in 1992 as a senior director of what turned out to be an even more expansive initiative that spanned ten years instead of three: American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning.

If the project on the major was about designing a logical and robust intellectual beginning, middle, and end to a student’s major, American Commitments asked for what purpose. It explored the fundamental aims of higher education in a diverse yet persistently unequal US democracy and defined what was needed to foster “social learning about United States diversity in relation to the nation’s democratic aspirations and values.”

By pairing diversity and democracy, Carol sparked a dramatic new direction for the association and further expanded the horizon of the diversity movement that had been transforming higher education in the preceding decades. Her evolution as a champion of democratic engagement across differences to create a world lived in common took root and was about to turn into a massive national forest.

The program officer of her key funding source for American Commitments, Edgar Beckham of the Ford Foundation, was her influential and intellectual partner in this new democratic initiative. He challenged and cajoled all with whom he engaged to take risks, widen the circle of perspectives and players, keep education at the center, and dive deep into unfamiliar knowledge that questioned complacent assumptions. As Edgar once put it in a speech, “Like everyone else associated with AAC&U, I consider myself an advocate of liberal education, and for me the function of liberal education is to liberate. To liberate us all from both oppression and privilege, from unexamined assumptions, from passivity in the living of our lives, from ignorance of ourselves and others; to free us for the pursuit of a world lived in common. Our diversity is our pathway to liberation.”

The other powerful influence on Carol in American Commitments was the national panel that guided the initiative, mapped and wrote the three conceptual papers that shaped it, and offered recommendations for campus practice. In what was to be a defining choice, Carol selected panel members who collectively decentered the usual dominant patterns of influence. She sought distinguished academic leaders, scholars, and practitioners who would bring diverse perspectives and experiences, deep knowledge about diversity and democracy, and divergent disciplinary and positional frameworks. For this project on American pluralism and US democracy, the national panel included nine people of color and seven white people, eight women and eight men, and identities that spanned differing religions, ethnicities, class backgrounds, and sexual orientations. What we had in common was our commitment to listen to, and learn from, one another across our differences. It was transformative to a person.

We began by telling our stories to one another as part of trying to live what we were determined to explore. We speculated about what now may be possible in colleges and universities that had abandoned racial apartheid practices and sex segregation and were more inclusive than ever before. How could such rich diversity affect learning and the preparedness of graduates to enact the aspirations of a just and equitable democracy? We did our intellectual and professional work on the national panel not in spite of our differences, but through them. Or in Carol’s own words from the foreword to The Drama of Diversity and Democracy, “Panel members brought their own diversities . . . not as suppressed background but as the context for everything they know and value and work for as leaders in higher education.”

The scope of the American Commitments initiative was vintage Schneider: ambitious,
forever evolving, and anchored in a recast definition of liberal education. In her own words, American Commitments sought “both to describe the knowledge participants need in this diverse democracy and to identify effective ways of fostering this learning in goals for liberal education and the curriculum, in institutional life and campus ethos, and in the classroom practices that comprise teaching and learning.” The initiative produced three monographs; three generations of faculty and curriculum development institutes involving 130 different colleges and universities and nearly 700 faculty and academic administrators; a series of campus-community dialogues followed shortly after by community-campus dialogues called Racial Legacies and Learning; and DiversityWeb, one of the first digital portals to capture examples of the fast-growing diversity initiatives on campuses.

AAC&U also became a leader in Ford’s Public Information Project with national briefings, lessons on how campuses could tell their stories to a broader public, and the creation of a quarterly publication called Diversity Digest. Under Carol’s leadership, that publication has continued uninterrupted since 1995, even after outside funding for it had evaporated. It continues now as Diversity & Democracy. In the partnership with the Ford Foundation, AAC&U also began organizing annual diversity conferences for all the four hundred Ford Foundation–funded colleges and universities. Again, when funding ceased, Carol made sure to incorporate conferences on diversity and learning into AAC&U’s regular operating budget. These conferences continue today as “Diversity, Learning, and Student Success.”

When she became president of AAC&U in 1998, Carol turned her attention to new projects, but brought to them her accrued insights about the relation of diversity and democracy. In conceiving the Greater Expectations initiative, for example, she wanted to pose millennial questions about higher education, diversity, and democracy: How prepared is higher education now that a nation is coming to college? What needs to change to accommodate the new students who are more diverse than ever before but with vastly different preparation for college-level work? The most defining initiative for Carol as president was Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP), launched in 2005 and still going strong. How she incorporated democratic and diversity lessons from American Commitments can be seen with particular clarity in one of the four pillars of the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes: personal and social responsibility. Within that quadrant, AAC&U has included civic knowledge and engagement, both local and global; diversity knowledge and intercultural competence; and ethical reasoning and action. Not surprisingly, these specific learning outcomes are described as being best achieved if “anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges.”

Dubbed by Carol as “the orphan outcome,” personal and social responsibility was, she realized, verbally embraced but too often handed off to others instead of forming the bedrock of all learning across the campus and curriculum. So she invented Core Commitments: Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility, a new initiative funded by the Templeton Foundation and designed to make such learning more pervasive. It became the key project in my office for five years. Two of the five dimensions of personal and social responsibility entwine with dimensions of American Commitments. Genetically tied to the democratic emphasis in American Commitments is “contributing to a larger community: recognizing and acting on one’s responsibility to the educational community and the wider society, locally, nationally, and...
globally.” The second, also revealing its genetic relation to the diversity emphasis of the earlier project, is “taking seriously the perspectives of others: recognizing and acting on the obligation to inform one’s own judgment; engaging diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning, citizenship, and work.”

Another of Carol’s major democratic initiatives, developed through her close relationship with US Undersecretary of Education Martha Kanter, led to the publication of A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future, a major national report that was released at a White House event in 2012. Since I served as project director and writer of the report, channeling ideas from a multitude of people around the country, I was once again working in close partnership with Carol, as we had in American Commitments. Carol served on the national task force, attended almost all the national roundtable meetings, was the principal editor of my text, helped orchestrate the White House event, and found funding that enabled AAC&U to publish thousands of copies of the report so it could be widely and often freely distributed.

Crucible’s principal argument resonates with Carol’s earlier American Commitments initiative: “A socially cohesive and economically vibrant US democracy and a viable, just global community require informed, engaged, open-minded, and socially responsible people committed to the common good and practiced in ‘doing’ democracy.” The report proposes a new, twenty-first-century framework for civic learning and democratic engagement, asserting that students need, among other things, to acquire “historical and sociological understanding of several democratic movements”; to understand “one’s sources of identity and their influence on civic values, assumptions, and responsibilities to a wider public”; and to gain “knowledge of the diverse cultures, histories, values, and contestations that have shaped US and other world societies.” A Crucible Moment also asserts that civic problem solving in collaboration with diverse partners is the frontier of the democratic engagement across difference that promises to enhance student learning, address pressing public challenges, and reinvigorate our floundering US democracy.

In Carol’s final column for Liberal Education as AAC&U’s president, she evoked the links between American Commitments, A Crucible Moment, and the LEAP Challenge, which is focused on students’ Signature Work—integrative and substantive problem-solving opportunities that, by her own admission, were not first presented as necessarily tied to an earlier democratic vision. However, the hope she expresses in her final words to AAC&U members is that Signature Work will, in practice, be linked to “the public problems we need to solve as a diverse and globally engaged democracy.” Carol has bequeathed AAC&U the legacy that will make such a transformative commitment possible.

NOTES
4. Ibid., xiii.
5. For more information about the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative and the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes, see http://www.aacu.org/leap.
8. Ibid., 4.
In Praise of Carol Geary Schneider

JERRY G. GAFF

I first got to know Carol Geary Schneider in the mid-1980s when, as a new dean at Hamline University, I received phone calls from her asking for advice. She was then at the University of Chicago and had received a grant to develop principles for adult education. We had met previously, when I was directing a multi-institutional project called General Education Models, and she was eager to learn how to work with diverse institutions in order to advance an educational agenda. I soon saw that she was smart, committed to improving higher education, and persistent in doing not just a good job but an excellent one.

When I left Hamline, Carol convinced Paula Brownlee, president of what was then called the Association of American Colleges (AAC), to invite me there in 1991. I worked closely with Carol and the rest of the staff until my retirement in 2003—and beyond. During Carol’s time at the association, I was fortunate to have been her friend and colleague, helping her lead the organization through nothing less than a transformation. In brief, over nearly three decades of service—first as vice president, beginning in 1987, and then as president, beginning in 1998—Carol put her mark on the association, most fundamentally by devising and advocating a clear educational vision.

Originally, AAC was an association of colleges and their presidents, and both liberal arts colleges and colleges of arts and sciences in larger institutions comprised its membership. While the mission of AAC was to promote “liberal and humane education,” that was always assumed to be linked inextricably with study in the disciplines of the liberal arts and sciences. Many activities during most of its history were intended to help strengthen the institutions that offered instruction in the “liberal arts.”

Like the consummate teacher that she was, Carol was interested in students, and she concentrated on what students needed to be liberally educated. She learned from early analyses offered by AAC reports like Integrity in the College Curricula (1985), from views expressed by scholars in countless publications, and most of all from the learning goals set forth by hundreds of faculties at diverse colleges and universities. She integrated all these sources and spoke of an “emerging consensus” about what students should learn in college in order to possess the marks of a liberally educated person. These goals always included far more than acquiring a major or preparation for a career. Eventually these goals were refined and are known today as the AAC&U “Essential Learning Outcomes.”

As Norman Jones observed, “By centering on the student, rather than the institutional type, the delivery method, or the content area,” this new educational vision “reaffirms what has been obvious to most thoughtful observers: a broad liberal education is possible and necessary for all and should prepare graduates, simultaneously, for work, civic participation, and life.” It also allowed for the development of many projects that helped diverse colleges and universities cultivate these desired qualities, support faculty development, and learn to overcome resistance to change. These projects generated new learning about strategies to devise reformed curricula, new courses, student-faculty interactions, institutional supports, assessments, and academic cultures. The projects gained support from funding agencies, which allowed experimentation with innovations, enabled the hiring of an exceptional staff to lead them, and generated income for the association.

Carol’s acknowledged brilliance is perhaps best expressed in the several projects that she conceived and led. One of the keys to her success was the framing of projects in terms of larger societal goals—American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning, for example, and Liberal Education and America’s Promise. Another secret of her success was the ability to shape a practical project that had genuine potential to improve educational programs on campuses of all sorts. This “realistic idealism” was central to Carol’s leadership.

In addition, Carol always took a collaborative approach. Many scholars writing about higher education are solitary figures who make analyses, formulate solutions to problems, blame various forces resisting change (mostly the faculty), and lament the decline from some imagined “golden age.” But not Carol and her colleagues at AAC&U. These leaders have worked with faculty members and administrators...
on campuses to learn firsthand from practitioners about their problems, their suggestions for improvement, and their willingness to provide needed campus leadership.

Another quality of Carol’s leadership that can be seen throughout the projects she led is the ability to connect many disparate dots and exhibit the kind of integrative thinking she has long advocated. For example, she made significant contributions to two different strands of funded projects: those improving the quality of students’ education and those addressing the growing diversity of students. These two strands historically have been viewed in opposition. That is, efforts to improve the quality of education were seen to be undermined by the increasing diversity of students, including women, ethnic minorities, adults, and those for whom education had previously failed. But she saw that each of these kinds of “new” students brought different experiences, expectations, and ideas into the academy and fostered a sense of inclusion. Perhaps her crowning achievement was in 2012 when the board of directors approved a modification of association’s mission. The new statement reads, “The mission of AAC&U is to make liberal education and inclusive excellence the foundation for institutional purpose and educational practice in higher education.”

Another talent, less well known, is Carol’s savvy in growing an educational association.

Not only did she secure many millions of dollars from funding agencies, but she was able to use a portion of that funding to support a stronger staff and annual budget. The number of staff grew under her presidency, and over time the intellectual capital generated largely via projects also grew. AAC&U was learning how to make campus change and to improve the education of students. More and more campus leaders wanted to become members and to attend meetings, bringing colleagues as a “team.”

Since Carol became president in 1998, the AAC&U membership has grown significantly in size and diversity. She and her senior colleagues, including the board of directors, launched several initiatives to expand the membership. These included efforts to increase community college membership to reflect the increasing numbers of students enrolled in two-year institutions. State and regional systems became members, as larger numbers of institutions became parts of larger groupings. International affiliates and other organizational affiliates also became members. From 678 members in 1998, the membership grew to more than 1,350 today.

I recall that during the 1990s Carol and I would celebrate the achievements of the annual meeting, especially the intellectual and educational excitement, and lament that more academics were not involved. At that time, attendance at our annual meeting typically ranged from about 750 to nearly 1,000. Over the years, Carol and her colleagues took several steps to increase the meeting’s attractiveness, particularly to faculty members and other campus leaders. Specifically, they

• added pre- or post-conference workshops to give participants hands-on experiences with a particular topic, such as using technology or creating learning communities;
• planned a pre-conference symposium on some special topic to appeal to particular academic audiences—e.g., integrating the sciences, arts, and humanities;
• actively solicited proposals from faculty members, student affairs staff, and other campus leaders to increase the range of issues and session leaders;
• encouraged teams of largely faculty members from institutions with financial incentives for additional attendees from the same institution;
• invited meetings of related organizations.

As a result of these various strategies, attendance finally topped the 1,000 mark in 2002,
rose above 1,500 in 2008, and surpassed 2,000 for the first time in 2011. The average attendance for the five years between 2010 and 2014 was 1,921.

In the early 1990s, there were only two types of meetings offered by AAC—project-funded events that were closed to nonparticipants and the annual meeting. Carol and other leaders began to think about how to offer more meetings open to all. In 1991, AAC offered the first Institute on General Education in collaboration with the University of North Carolina at Asheville. During its first twenty-five years, the institute drew 517 institutions—103 of which attended twice, suggesting satisfaction that this gathering produced significant benefits for participants and their campuses.

Carol and I considered creating a series of two-day “short courses” on specific topics related to curriculum, teaching, and learning. In discussing this idea with various deans and provosts, we learned that what they wanted from these meetings was an opportunity for their faculty to become familiar with the national reform agenda. In 1993, President Brownlee approved the first series of meetings on topics that would allow AAC to share what had been learned from its various projects. The first meetings were attended by a couple of dozen people, but they soon grew to between fifty and sixty. We learned as we went, and in the 2015–16 academic year the attendance at the four Network for Academic Renewal meetings was 2,800. These meetings increased the association’s impact on individuals and institutions and its standing in the academy.

Under Carol’s leadership, AAC&U expanded its publication of books and monographs on a range of educational topics. Liberal Education had always been the association’s flagship quarterly publication, and it progressively became a magazine of useful ideas. It published more articles about innovations in teaching, learning, and the curriculum, and the writing became more lively and engaging. Other quarterly periodicals were added to the portfolio, including Peer Review and Diversity Digest, (now Diversity & Democracy). As electronic communications became mainstream, the AAC&U website became a major means of communication, blogs were published, and an electronic newsletter was added to the mix. In all, AAC&U became a rich resource of information about liberal education for large numbers of academics on member campuses and beyond.

As it developed additional resources, the association began to address new audiences. For its entire history its primary audience had been campus leaders, first presidents and academic officers. Gradually it addressed faculty members, staff in teaching-learning centers, and student affairs staff. Eventually, AAC&U began to address public policy makers and the general public.

The natural result of the growth in the number and range of funded projects, staff, meetings, and communications was a growth in membership and finances. In all the years I worked with Carol, I never heard her talk about growing AAC&U for the sake of growth. It was always growth in order to provide more resources to institutions so they, in turn, could offer better education for students. But financial growth and strength grew out of that educational focus. It turned out that good education was good policy, and Carol had the knack for numbers and for growing an organization. The reality is that member dues never provided more than a fraction of the association’s income. But under Carol’s leadership, the revenue streams broadened. Today, the association is less dependent on external funds and better able to set its own agenda.

One of the goals of any professional should be to make his or her job a better one when she leaves than when she arrived. AAC&U is a much more valuable national resource today than it was before Carol Schneider.

NOTE

To respond to these articles, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the author’s name on the subject line.
What is the value of a private education? Not that version on offer at a private college or university, but an education that is private in respect of being essentially invisible to the larger public—under the radar, unaccredited, uncertified, undocumented. Can such an education be said to have any cultural relevance in our performance-minded age, when conspicuousness, transparency, and inspection carry the day? If, as appears to be the case, we are all voyeurs and exhibitionists now, fixated on seeing and being seen, of what account is the education experience (or any experience at all) that goes unnoticed—and, therefore, cannot be appraised—by a perpetually peeping public?

A recent development may prove illuminative. In 2010, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia voted to ban undocumented students from attending the state’s top five public universities. Similar measures had been implemented already in South Carolina and Alabama, and poll results indicated that about two-thirds of Georgians favored a policy to bar illegal immigrants from public higher education altogether in Georgia, even if they were to pay out-of-state tuition. The board of regents seemed to be on solid ground, the policy action reflective of the uncompromising mood of many in the state and throughout the country on the particular matter of immigration, whether motivated by xenophobia, nativism, law and order, concerns over the scarcity of public goods, or some concatenation of these. The policy went into effect immediately.

Predictably, not everyone took the news sitting down. Many took to the streets instead. The wave of campus protests that erupted across the state featured the usual laments, the customary appeals to authorities to overturn the policy, the typical iconography (hand-painted placards and banners, megaphones, marches, chants, testimonials—optics straight out of central casting) associated with demonstrations wherever an aggrieved people assemble to vent their collective outrage at some injury, indignity, or injustice. As recently as 2015, a year marking the golden anniversary of the historic Selma-to-Montgomery marches to secure voting rights for disenfranchised African Americans, student protesters in Georgia were still actively engaged in the struggle for civil rights, staging sit-ins in full academic regalia, defiantly shouting “undocumented and unafraid” in the style of call-and-response, and occasionally getting themselves arrested for criminal trespass or failure to disperse. Documentary evidence of these several protests was captured in cellphone videos, shared through social media, and preserved for posterity in the peculiar amber of the Internet.

A decidedly less visible response—one with tactics, in many ways, more subversive than those routinely employed by community organizers or social movement activists—was the establishment of an underground university for some of the very students prohibited from matriculating at Georgia’s most selective state

David J. Siegel

Seeking Asylum in Freedom University
In Praise of Undocumented Education

Freedom University deftly balances the equally forceful pulls of civic withdrawal and civic engagement, creating a kind of liminal space in which the border between revolution and retreat is effectively blurred

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institutions. Named Freedom University (or, in its saltier incarnation, FU), it is a modern-day freedom school now based in Atlanta, where volunteers provide rigorous academic courses, leadership development, movement skills training, and assistance in navigating the college application and financial aid process, all at no cost to students. The initiative was founded by a small group of professors affiliated with the University of Georgia who simply wanted to offer an intellectually stimulating learning experience to students denied the opportunity for study at institutions of their choosing. In the early days, faculty taught weekend classes at an undisclosed location in Athens, and a far-flung web of supporters pitched in with guest lectures, books, supplies, transportation, modest financial contributions, or whatever other resources happened to be needed—a testament to the power of bricolage over bricks and mortar. The operation relocated to Atlanta in 2013, where it continues to grow in student enrollment, course offerings, and participation in the undocumented student movement.

Not a lot is known about the inner workings of Freedom University, which is likely by design. Life could be made more difficult than it already is for students and their families if certain details of their education activities were to come to light. Some worry about harassment, arrest, or deportation. Out of an abundance of caution, then, portions of the Freedom University experience are conducted under a protective veil of secrecy. But its very presence is a glittering example of how we might contend with broader anti-freedom forces rapidly advancing on higher education in America.

After all, the battle being waged here is not just for the rights of undocumented students to a quality postsecondary education, nor is it chiefly even about the larger cause of social justice, as all-encompassing as that project is. Rather, the revolution in question may be more properly understood as one for the self-determination—or autonomy—of a higher education enterprise that is increasingly dictated to, and intruded upon by, special interests and whose every dark corner is, as Nabokov put it in Invitation to a Beheading, ultimately invaded by “the solicitous sunshine of public concern.” That mellifluous bit of phrasing contains a decidedly malefic undertone; the surfeit of attention being directed at the academy is turning the place into something resembling a Panopticon, an elaborate system of incarceration and surveillance.

Problems of life in the Panopticon

The Panopticon, conceived in the late eighteenth century by the English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham as an innovation in prison reform, has become a widely used metaphor for the ubiquitous monitoring of our lives in a technological age. Architecturally, the structure Bentham designed, though never fully realized, consisted of a central tower from which a single supervisor could view the circularly arranged cells of inmates at all times; the sense of observation would be constant and complete, the objective to confine, correct, and control the convicted. The sinister genius of this “mill for grinding rogues honest” was that its subjects would never know for sure when or even whether they were being observed and so would be forced to conduct themselves as if their every move might be detected. The mere specter of the watchtower presiding impassively over their affairs would be sufficient to induce the desired effect.

Today, the panoptic ideal extends far beyond its origins in the penitentiary; no modern institution, nor any individual contained therein, is immune to the withering gaze of the all-seeing eye. Thus have we all been consigned to the status of prisoners. “Is it surprising,” Foucault asked rhetorically in Discipline and Punish, “that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?”

This may seem an extraordinary claim to make about the academy, which still looks—in the eyes of much of the public anyway—like a veritable citadel of professional privilege and protection, where professors are free to come and go as they please, free to sound off without fear of reprisal, free to pursue projects of personal interest. Are these to be understood as illusions, as apparitions of times gone by? In what respects has the landscape changed? Let us count the ways.

For starters, the institution of academic freedom is itself being abraded with the systematic dismantling of tenure. Fully 75 percent of new hires across disciplines are classified as part-timers who labor under the perennial threat of employment insecurity and are eligible for only a fraction of the benefits traditionally accorded the
professoriate. With the erosion of the tenured and tenure-track ranks, the faculty’s share of shared governance is diminishing, and its discretion over the terms and conditions of academic work is being replaced with mechanistic rules, regulations, and procedures that further the age-old cause of worker docility and manageability.

This, of course, makes it easier to narrow the scope of higher learning for purposes of tighter adhesion to society’s economic priorities. The reign of instrumentality—of education as a tool for the furtherance of state and market interests—is by now nearly absolute, governing the conduct and concerns of universities all the way down. The notion of learning for its own sake has virtually zero purchase anymore, the arts and humanities are suffering a prolonged devaluation for their failure to be STEM fields, and programmatic decisions—what is offered, how material is taught, and the uses of knowledge—are being outsourced to state governments, such that overtly political or ideological agendas increasingly shape the curriculum. (See Jedediah Purdy’s “Ayn Rand Comes to UNC” in The New Yorker for an especially chilling account of this dynamic.) Performance-based funding, which has been adopted in thirty-five states so far, is further yoking higher education to the great millstone of economic development.

Superintending all of this is a sprawling accountability and assurance regime to certify that stakeholder bidding is done. One can easily spot examples of this regime at work. It is to be found in an almost pornographic obsession with evaluation and assessment, much of it required by and conducted for accrediting bodies, to the point that we are now laboring under a “forever review” in which the examiners never really leave campus but are always lurking around as shadow figures; in the official pieties about evidence-based decision making, evidence-based culture, and evidence-based practices (the Othello-like demands for “ocular proof” leaving vanishingly little room for the virtues of mystery, uncertainty, and experimentation); in the quantification and measurement of outcomes and output; in the hyper-rationalization of our organizations along the lines of the industrial model; and in the abiding faith in standardization and uniformity as managerial conveniences that substantially enable ease of counting and control.

We might also mention the incessant inquiries and interrogations requiring academic programs to plead their case for existence or demonstrate their utility, setting them on an endless quest for validation and legitimation by external judges whose favorable opinions are deemed to matter. The access project in higher education, usually uttered with reference to student access, has expanded to include any member of the public who wishes to inspect the goings-on of the academy; everyone is granted viewing rights in this new era of ceaseless exposure. For their part, the news media tend to paint a particularly grim portrait of higher education, highlighting all that is wrong in and with the ivory tower and detailing how the enterprise ought to be radically reformed in the consumer interest.

Comes the objection: These are nuisances, to be sure, but isn’t it misleading to suggest an equivalence between criminal imprisonment and the abridgement of liberties being described here? (One is reminded of the inspector’s cool retort to K. in Kafka’s The Trial: “You are under arrest, certainly, but that need not hinder you from going about your business. Nor will you be prevented from leading your ordinary life.”) True enough, the academy is most assuredly a long march from the Gulag, and some of the micromanagement that must be endured is more along the lines of Big Bother than Big Brother. Still, there is a pervasive sense that the city of intellect is yielding—obsessively, in many cases—to the scrutiny of the police state. When our working lives give way to performances for, and observances by, omnivoyant authorities, whose purpose is ostensibly a form of social control, can thought control be far behind?

Such concerns are behind a growing cultural anxiety (bordering on full-blown paranoia) over our loss of privacy and the proliferation of electronic ways and means to breach it, leading the philosopher John Gray to quip that “fifteen minutes of anonymity has become an impossible dream.” But notice how complicit we are in the arrangement. We enthusiastically embrace an evolving ethic of showiness, choosing as we do to share the intimate details of our lives, giddily effacing our own privacy at every turn. After all, the point, it seems, is not just to have experiences but to be seen having them. “Pics or it didn’t happen” is the mantra of the social media age, an updating of the “new visual code” that Susan Sontag described in On Photography in
1977, but it might as well be said also of education. It isn’t sufficient nowadays that our students have learned anything, much less anything ineffable; their acquisition of knowledge must be verified according to the approved metrics and rubrics, or it just didn’t happen.

If all of this constitutes a carceral condition, we collude in its maintenance. We aid in the preservation of the status quo by our overreliance on the good offices of the ruling class for remedy of what ails us and by our failure to envision and enact workable alternatives from below. This is another way of saying that the cage to which we imagine we’ve been consigned isn’t always the one imposed by the bureaucratized academy and its surrounding regulatory environment; just as often, the portable prison we carry atop our own shoulders is the culprit. Indeed, this is the most insidious effect of the Panopticon: it penetrates and programs our consciousness by degrees, making us not only accomplices or accessories in an imprisonment scheme but, in effect, our very own warders.

**What is to be (un)done?**

Anyone who has looked on in dismay at this deteriorating state of affairs has doubtless entertained a corollary thought: Wouldn’t it be nice to slip free of it all, to steal away to a place not only far from but blissfully invisible to the madding crowd? In such a place as this, we might finally focus on what really matters. In their imaginings of an Edenic elsewhere, perhaps something very like Freedom University is conjured in the minds of the disaffected and disillusioned.

For, on one level, Freedom University can be understood in this purely figurative sense, as a symbol of, and covering term for, a whole range of fantastical alternatives to the contemporary university and its ever-widening web of entanglements. The more we feel constricted or simply unfulfilled by present arrangements, the more likely we are to repair to fictive versions of Freedom University, counter-institutions mentally constructed and customized according to our own idealistic designs. If the academy is steadily becoming less hospitable to the life of the mind, we can create a compensatory university of the mind, one always and easily available for restorative sojourns, with no pre-travel authorization required by Accounts Payable.

It may be tempting to dismiss occasional getaways—or disappearing acts—of this sort as the enchanted wanderings of daydreamers, idlers, and utopians, far too self-indulgent and ephemeral to be of any real use to the body politic. But that would be shortsighted, a negation of the idea that the seeds of social transformation are sown in the fertile subversions of the imagination. Lewis Mumford, writing in 1922, distinguished between what he called “the utopias of escape and the utopias of reconstruction,” both of them serving the primary function of making everyday life on earth somehow more tolerable. Although both utopias are, crucially, mechanisms of transcendence contrived by restless and captious minds, the first one is strictly interior and abstract, whereas the second manages to stick itself concretely into the world.

Freedom University, the literal entity back in Georgia, would seem to split the difference: it is a tangible presence and a communitarian endeavor, to be sure, but a subterranean one
meant to be mostly unseen by the masses. As such, it deftly balances the equally forceful pulls of civic withdrawal and civic engagement, creating a kind of liminal space in which the border between revolution and retreat is effectively blurred.

By taking their education underground, the students and faculty of Freedom University are iconoclasts in the original sense of the term: they are “breakers or destroyers of images.” This is true in two mutually reinforcing ways: they are removing their activities from view by severing the line of sight into them, and they are simultaneously attacking the cultural conventions that make a fetish of visualization.

Perhaps this designation was beyond their scope, not in their initial calculation; perhaps they were simply trying to secure a safe haven for their intellectual pursuits. This would, of course, put them in the company of anyone—from the serially marginalized to the intermittently neglected—ever compelled to invent workarounds to bureaucratic policies or rule systems that stifle human potential, creativity, and aspiration. Or, to come at it through another lens, our institutional (and institutionalized) conditions invent insurgencies, producing alienated students and teachers who are in exile from some preferred version or vision of the enterprise and find that they must do what individuals have always done when the experience they desire eludes them in some way: they must become refugees—refuge seekers—in search of sanctuary for the free exercise of their ideals. With Freedom University, they have found it in the legislation of their very own DREAM Act, the bold move of envisioning and constructing a learning community that neither requests nor receives any official
This return to the essentialism of teaching and learning, minus the labyrinthine layers of support services with which we have eclipsed the core of the education experience, is a quintessentially radical act, a return to our humble roots.

Warrant to operate. In the process, they are doing their part to keep alive a fragile idea—dying, sadly—of the academy as an unapologetically countercultural, contrarian institution, rather than one that seeks always to ingratiate itself, to be affirmed, to try mightily not to give offense.

Freedom University is a reclamation project in another sense, as well. It is an act of excavation, a recovery or disinterment of higher learning for its own sake, as though by an archeological dig through layers of sedimentation that have built up over time to obscure or encrust the original artifact; eventually, we arrive at the substratum—the underground—where exists the real substance, sparkling in its simplicity. The absence of much of what one finds on the modern college campus these days, from quality enhancement plans to proverbial climbing walls, is, paradoxically, brought into sharp relief. This return to the essentialism of teaching and learning, minus the labyrinthine layers of support services with which we have eclipsed the core of the education experience, is a quintessentially radical act, a return to our humble roots.

The denizens of Freedom University are not necessarily pioneers; they follow in a long line of grassroots activists, anarchists, and disrupters of the status quo in education. Various alternative schools and informal academies have appeared over the years across cultural settings, often in reaction to government censorship, excessive state control, structural barriers to access, or the systematic disempowerment of particular groups.

The freedom schools of the American civil rights movement were the immediate model and inspiration for Freedom University, but these schools were themselves patterned after 1950s-era Citizenship Schools, an adult education project designed in large part to assist African Americans in passing the required voter registration literacy tests of the time. The classes offered by the freedom schools and Citizenship Schools were conducted in church basements, beauty parlors, kitchens, and other spaces temporarily annexed to the cause, and they would come to play a durable role in the “cognitive liberation” (a concept introduced by sociologist Doug McAdam) and civic participation of African Americans during the height of the movement and beyond.

A different sort of “freedom school” was to be found in the counter-university movement of the 1960s. Also known as anti-universities or open universities, these institutions were typically established by experimental free-thinkers and radical leftists at odds with what they perceived to be the repressive policies and structures of their home institutions during a period of profound civil unrest. The social critic Ivan Illich was, at about this same time, arguing forcefully for “deschooling,” or the deinstitutionalization of school (and of society more generally), in favor of flexible webs of self-motivated, self-sufficient learners. A similar spirit animated the hobo colleges of the early 1900s, which offered gathering places for the homeless to hear lectures in social science, law, labor relations, philosophy, and literature.

Anarchist free schools (or free skools), built on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century libertarian education experiments of Tolstoy’s Yasnaya Polyana in Russia and Francisco Ferrer’s Escuela Moderna in Spain, have been for many years vital laboratories for the development of critical consciousness and community empowerment. They stand in firm opposition to the hierarchical and authoritarian organizational structures of mainstream schools, which—so the argument goes—simply reflect and reproduce the worst aspects of modern industrial capitalism.

These are among the worlds we create or co-create for ourselves in the face of intolerable circumstances, bitter betrayals, routine disappointments, or exclusionary systems and practices. Behind every adventure in alternative or transgressive education is an overriding impulse to be free of something or free to do what is not sanctioned elsewhere.

The cultural significance of Freedom University

The possibility that something special, even magical, might be happening in the underground precincts of Freedom University is perhaps more of a contribution to the reform agenda in higher education, and ultimately to the common good, than meets the eye. The fact that we are invited into an entirely speculative relation with it—that we are permitted to wonder from a distance about its activities without being able to behold them directly—restores a certain
primacy to the place of mystery in the learning process, which is relentlessly under siege by the cults of efficiency and certainty. At the same time, Freedom University's existence invites us to consider how we might foster additional education experiences that are completely out of sight (ones that enable us to “teach and learn as if nobody is watching,” to riff on the popular exhortation) and how we might come to see the considerable virtues in opacity as against transparency.

This is a tricky prospect, not least because there is a tendency in cultural discourse to conflate invisibility with victimhood and powerlessness. (Of course, invisibility—the kind that is elective, rather than assigned—also confers certain powers, for good or for ill, as Plato’s myth of the Ring of Gyges illustrates.) Notwithstanding the considerable personal and societal losses sustained when the oppressed are rendered invisible by callous indifference, our emerging problem has as much to do with the corrosive effects of excessive exposure. There are untold victims of this form of visual trespass. As the Jewish legal doctrine of hezzek re’iyah instructs us, “the injury caused by seeing cannot be measured” with absolute precision, though it can be estimated to include the social costs incurred when speech is inhibited or ideas are suppressed out of anxious concern that we are being monitored.

Going underground offers not just shelter from the lidless gaze of the surveillance machine but a return to what is at base a private—and invisible—enterprise, the life of the mind. This is bound to be unsettling or even galling to anyone who believes, apparently in keeping with the tenor of the times, that higher learning is a public good, that it ought to be directed toward whatever particular outcomes are preferred by technocrats, that the only credible education is one that is competently managed within formal institutions, and that the whole affair must be scrutinized at all times to ensure that it is in service to the crowning objective of a credential with an exchange value in the commercial markets.

Meanwhile, such an overdetermined program of education does not sit well with many who believe that it constitutes nothing less than an assault on intellectual and human freedom. But rather than asking them either simply to accept without protest the decisions of policy-makers or to petition the power elite for redress of grievances (the two ends of a continuum), the Freedom University model is a reminder that we can be the architects of our own emancipation, that structures of authority can be circumvented when they no longer serve—or serve well—the purposes or the people they were initially designed to support, and that in our era of scarce resources, we still control inner resources of imagination and initiative.

Like the students and faculty who established Freedom University, we can decamp for new terrain, even if only temporarily. We can estrange ourselves from what is common, customary, conventional; we can give ourselves over to a mystery. In the end, like Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse, we will come to discover that “this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures.”

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Reconsidering Our Definition

An Argument for an Authority-Based Approach to University Education

Paul Hanstedt

This essay begins with a lingering dissatisfaction over the idea of the “whole student.” A few years back, I heard a keynote speaker talk about the “six touchstones” necessary for educating whole students: intellect, spirit, the physical, the emotional, and . . . well, to be frank, I don’t recall the other two. But I do remember this speaker’s overall argument: “If we educate all these components,” this college president, or dean, or provost argued, “then we have truly educated the whole student.”

Except, of course, when we haven’t. The fact is, this model of education has been around for a long time, dating back at least to St. Ignatius of Loyola. And for at least the last fifty years, American (and some international) universities have been deliberate about structuring a “whole person” approach into their curricula; indeed, we’d be hard pressed to find the college that doesn’t require phys ed or that doesn’t encourage students to take at least one course that nods in the direction of ethics or philosophy or religion. And there are many, many schools that require fine arts courses and attend to wellness and whatever else those final two categories are that we wish to include on our list of six or five or seven essential components necessary to educating the “whole student.” And still we produce tens of thousands of graduates a year who enter the workforce convinced that the purpose of their college education was merely to increase their lifetime incomes.

The purpose of this article is not to dismiss the metaphor of the whole student. On the contrary, in a political and economic climate that seems intent on educating as many students as cheaply as possible and as quickly as possible, an educational model that pushes back is ethically imperative. We need to insist that the complex biological, sociological, psychological wonders that are our students are acknowledged, always, as more than just names on a spreadsheet or swipes of a monetized ID card.

My goal here is to rethink the metaphor of the whole student, reshaping it to assure that the “wholeness” we’re aiming for actually matches our highest ambitions for the individuals in our classrooms. Further, I’d like to argue that redefining this metaphor has a subtle but significant domino effect throughout tertiary education, restructuring nearly everything that we do—and more importantly, that we have our students do—in the classroom.

An alternative definition

Another story: At a recent workshop on assessment and course design, a department chair stood up and said, “Well, obviously we don’t want our graduates to be the line workers—we want them to be the line managers.” It was a powerful statement, and many in the room nodded their heads. Nevertheless, several of us questioned this assumption, wondering if perhaps our academic work wasn’t driven by more meaningful goals for our students. Maybe, we wondered, what we want is for our graduates to walk into the room, look at the line workers, look at the social worker and look at the welfare recipient—and wonder if there isn’t a better way. Or look at the political left and the political right—and wonder if there isn’t a better way.

The only way to truly develop authority—a sense of one’s right to engage the world in a meaningful manner—is to practice it

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of the “Whole Student”
This questioning, and any consequent action, perhaps provides a much better example of what “wholeness” means than the traditional, Ignatian model. In this second definition, “wholeness” is less quantitative than qualitative. The end goal is a student who isn’t afraid to engage what Carol Geary Schneider, president emerita of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, refers to as “unscripted problems”—that is, problems that their education may not necessarily have prepared them for, problems that others might not even perceive as problems. Further, this “whole” student is capable of not just identifying and questioning these problems, she is able to analyze them in deliberate ways, propose thoughtful solutions, and enact those solutions.

This newer definition of wholeness—a student who is able to engage in the world and change it in thoughtful ways—comes much closer than the Ignatian model to what drives our work as faculty. In other words, what keeps us going despite long hours, moderate pay, and an increasingly rancorous public discourse about university education is the belief that our efforts help to make the world a better place, that we’re working with students to develop in them a sense of their ability to rethink and reshape their fields in positive ways—and, by extension, to rethink and reshape the world.

This isn’t to say that we necessarily believe that all our students will be the next Einstein, the next Toni Morrison, the next Max Weber. At the very least, though, I feel comfortable arguing that most faculty wish to place all students in the position where they understand that it is their obligation to participate in the world in meaningful, powerful ways—and that they have the ability to do so.

**Nuts and bolts, part I: Authority**

All of this is a very nice vision, of course; very few would argue with the idea that students should leave college with the capacity to engage in positive change. But how to achieve it?

Almost reflexively, most institutions and academic programs respond to this question with a very simple assumption: \( \text{Content Knowledge} + \text{Skill Knowledge} = \text{Thoughtful Change} \).

While the acquisition of content knowledge and skills are crucial for arriving at the goal of positive change, the kinds of complex challenges I’m discussing here require more than that. Simply put, if content and skills were enough, education would be there already, particularly after the rise in standardized testing that the United States has experienced over the last two decades.

In the end, content and skill knowledge must be augmented by an attitude, a disposition, a sense of one’s ability and right to enter the world not as a mere cog in the machine, but as a thoughtful, competent individual who, when the situation calls for it, is able to step forward to ask questions and propose solutions that may lead to the reinvention of the machine. Something along these lines: \( \text{Content Knowledge} + \text{Skill Knowledge} + \text{Attitude} = \text{Thoughtful Change} \).

To a generation of faculty wary of a culture—real, perceived, or otherwise—of “entitled” students, this may seem like a risky venture. With that in mind, it’s important to note that what we are after is more than “confidence” or “agency.” After all, one can be confident without necessarily being correct, or even informed. Similarly, agency, the ability to act upon the world and reshape it, does not necessarily require wisdom or forethought; a sixteen-year-old...
driving a car the wrong way down a one-way street has agency. But certainly we hope for more than that from our students? Instead, I would like to posit the term “authority.” Key here is the idea that authority looks both forward and backward: it implies authorship, the ability to write and rewrite, to shape, to create. At the same time, this ability comes from something: authority is granted, given, earned. The content and skills students acquire during their years in college are crucial: they are part of what creates a sense of authority in students. What we teach them matters.

Perhaps then, we’re not looking for a single equation, but two simultaneous, perhaps even slightly contradictory, equations: both Content Knowledge + Skill Knowledge = A Sense of Authority and Content Knowledge + Skill Knowledge + A Sense of Authority = Thoughtful Change.

That said, how we teach our students is also crucial in the development of authority. If what we’re talking about is a kind of authorship of the world, it follows that the learning process that prepares students for this kind of active, thoughtful response to the problems we face today must allow them to practice these skills. In other words, the only way to truly develop authority—a sense of one’s right to engage the world in a meaningful manner—is to practice it. Constantly. From the start. In ways at first small, then increasingly large. In ways that are perhaps less complex (though never simple!), and then increasingly more complex. In ways that allow students to fail, fall down, and pick themselves back up again. In ways that allow students to learn how problems are solved—with deliberation, creativity, resilience, collaboration. In ways that allow them to understand that they are capable of solving problems—and that solving problems leads to a rewarding relationship with the world and with themselves. In ways, in short, that allow them a sense that
this is what it means to live to their fullest capacity as human beings.

**Nuts and bolts, part II: Pedagogies**

So what does this mean in practical terms? What it doesn’t mean is that content disappears from a course or is shoved to one side: without a sense of the what of a course, the how is impossible. If the equations I’m creating here are accurate, authority is not possible unless it is grounded in knowledge.

That said, mere acquisition of knowledge is not enough. Very few students will be able to sit in a classroom for thirteen weeks, passively taking notes, and then in the final week of the term suddenly become active and, *voilà!,* demonstrate the perfect capacity for active engagement with the course content—much less with the complex problems of the world. Placing a focus on the type of students we wish to graduate will require changes in the kinds of projects we assign, the types of exams we give, our day-to-day pedagogies, the structure of our courses, and, indeed, in some cases, the very structure of our curricula.

How can we change our paper assignments so that students are less able to gloss the authority of others (the instructor, outside sources) and must instead struggle to articulate terms, problems, and solutions in a language...
they themselves have mastered—and, in a way, even created? How might we supplement exams that require content knowledge with exams that require students to solve problems they haven’t encountered before? How might this require us to rethink our grading strategies and grading scales? How might we ensure that the skills required to write papers of this nature or take exams of this kind are practiced throughout the course—in ways ranging from low to high risk—so that our students can learn how failure and struggle are essential steps in true learning?

On a larger scale, it’s easy to see how an authority-based approach to education explains the need for signature projects, problem-based course design, service learning, internships, and other pedagogies that blur the artificial lines between “learning” and “world.” In each of these, students are pushed away from the controlled environment of passive learning into situations where they must engage with the unpredictabilities of life beyond the textbook. Indeed, considered through this lens, we gain a further understanding of why George Kuh’s “high-impact practices” have such an impact: it’s not just that these practices allow students to be “engaged,” it’s that these particular kinds of engagement push students to enter the room, to assess the situation, and then to ask not “What would my professor do?” but “What, based on my learning, should I do?” And only through engaging in this kind of thinking and problem solving—repeatedly, in multiple settings both in and out of the classroom, at increasing levels of difficulty—can our students be expected to leave college with a sense of their right and ability and obligation to engage in the complex challenges facing us right now.

Conclusion
In the end, then, perhaps this redefinition of Whole Person Education is less a radical shift than a fine-tuning. After all, active pedagogies, alternative paper assignments, high-impact practices, problem-based course design—none of these things is new to our vocabulary.

At the same time, I would argue that this shift in definition—from wholeness as a quantified checklist to wholeness as a state of mind, a quality of engagement with the world—is valuable in that it keeps us, individually and institutionally, honest. If ensuring that all our students attain wholeness is as simple as checking off several curricular boxes (mind, body, spirit, creativity, and . . . and . . . ?), then almost every student would leave the university with a sound sense of who they are, of their purpose in life, of their ability to fulfill that purpose. There seems to be little evidence that this is the case.

If, on the other hand, we embrace an authority-based definition of wholeness, a definition that insists that knowledge and skills must be augmented with a sense of being that allows us to use those skills, then our feet are held to the fire. For we know that this sense of authority, this sense of the human right and ability to engage in the complex problems of the world in meaningful ways, is not easy to come by. In order to get our students to this point, we need to rethink what we do—and what we have students do—in our classes on a daily basis. And we need to rethink the kinds of exams we give and the projects we assign. And we need to rethink how we structure our courses. And our majors. And our departments. And, perhaps, our institutions.

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On the International Baccalaureate

Reflections and Review, or “To IB or not to IB?”

At first glance, the IB curriculum is indeed a strange animal. Compared to the more straightforward AP curriculum of one-year courses with exams graded on a 1–5 scale, the IB program offers a mix of one-year (standard level) and two-year (higher level) courses, with exams graded on a 1–7 scale, along with three additional components that ensure the capacity for sustained inquiry (the extended essay), a depth of metacognition or philosophical reflection (the Theory of Knowledge seminar), and a connection to the world (the community, action, service project). In other words, the IB program provides an integrated curriculum that is far greater than the sum of its parts but that, for this very reason, is less readily quantifiable in terms of college credit.

All components of the IB curriculum are writing intensive and get graded outside of the school, and often outside of the country, by international reviewers or examiners. Even the exams for a given course are proctored not by the course instructor, but by other teachers who are dubbed—just to add strangeness—*invigilators*. The organization of the curriculum is complex, rigorous, and broadly based in an international scope of inquiry. Students receive specific course scores as well as an overall score that includes the three additional components. The IB diploma requires an overall score of 24 out of the possible 45 points. Like much grading outside the United States, inflation is not the rule; for example, only 7 percent of students get the highest exam score of 7. In the IB program, American students are graded by competitive and exacting international standards.

Why don’t colleges and universities award credit as generously for IB as they do for AP?

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Curriculum and US Higher Education
But what is this complex curriculum worth in American higher education? What’s the exchange rate, so to speak, of this foreign educational currency?

Valuing the IB diploma

Despite a steady increase in the number of schools participating in the IB program, the IB diploma remains for many individuals and institutions in the United States an unfamiliar currency with an uncertain value—to the detriment of IB students entering college in the United States, whether they are American or international students. Yet at the same time, the IB program has emerged as a very strong indicator of success in college, due in part to its heavy emphasis on writing and oral presentation. The extended essay, the Theory of Knowledge seminar, and the community, action, service project help prepare students for prolonged performance or inquiry—or, in a word, research, which counts in higher education as a “high-impact educational practice” in terms of its effect on student performance and retention. In fact, as John Young, head of research at the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), noted at the IBO’s 2015 Higher Education Symposium, first-year retention of IB students in US higher education is 98 percent, versus the national average of 77 percent, and IB students are more likely to complete their degrees (79 percent versus 39 percent in four years, and 83 percent versus 56 percent in six years).1

Yet inertia, or the accumulated force of momentum holding an object (or policy) in place—i.e., the pressure to do nothing—will continue to govern the reception of IB at a given institution until circumstances change or reach a critical turning point. That would entail, basically, a local revolution in thinking or a revaluation of the currency. Changing the status quo would require extensive and immersive labor to establish course credit equivalencies.

Over the past several years, my own university has modified its policy toward the IB program. We recently completed a protracted departmental review of the IB curriculum, with each department determining course credit equivalencies based on the IB’s curricular content as it relates to the department’s own area of study. Such a review generates both grumbling (a bit) and good-faith engagement (a lot), and it represents an elevated instance of conscientious labor on behalf of incoming students. But how many colleges and universities have actually conducted such a review of the content of the IB curriculum?

Colleges and universities need to recognize that the trend toward IB is gaining momentum as more US school districts are adopting the curriculum, even though doing so requires a substantial commitment of resources, and as more students from IB schools abroad, both US citizens and others (visiting F1-visa students), choose to attend colleges and universities in the United States. These two trends converge, making fairness toward IB a vital interest for US higher education. At the IBO’s 2015 Higher Education Symposium, Enis Dogan, associate director of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, elucidated the affinity of Common Core State Standards with the IB curriculum in its “greater focus on fewer topics”; coherence and rigor, in terms of conceptual understanding; procedural skills and fluency; and on reasoning (logical) and explaining (oral), with greater complexity of texts and the use of multiple sources (not opinion or personal experience) in an argument. In fact, the IB program inspired to some extent the Common Core standards; Dogan noted succinctly that “IB was ahead of the game.” With a verve and humor perhaps atypical of statisticians, he offered the quasi-Cartesian slogan for practitioners, he offered the quasi-Cartesian slogan for

IB and AP: Credits and equivalencies

Some signs of the increased pressure on the entrenched inertia have begun to emerge. The Washington Post’s higher education correspondent, Jay Mathews, has devoted numerous columns to the IB curriculum and its transformative effect on schools and individuals. His ongoing inquiry into the value (relative and absolute) of the IB curriculum culminated in Superest: How the International Baccalaureate Can Strengthen Our Schools, a book-length study, coauthored by Ian Hill, that contains illuminating perspectives on, and anecdotal illustrations of, the IB in practice.

Moreover, as Education Week’s Caralee Adams has observed, “state lawmakers are entering the debate by passing laws requiring public colleges
and universities to set uniform policies for recognizing AP, IB and dual-enrollment courses that students take in high school. In 1995, the state of Texas began to offer a variety of financial incentives through the Texas Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate Incentive Program. In 2010, the Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation on course credit for IB and AP, amending the Code of Virginia to mandate that public institutions “implement policies” to award entering first-year college students course credit for IB and AP; that the equivalencies get stated specifically (i.e., “minimum required scores on examinations”); that the specific course credit or other requirements also get stated for “completing the diploma program”; and, that each public institution’s policy granting credit for IB courses “be comparable […] for granting course credit for Advanced Placement courses.” Such a mandate overturns the de facto depreciation of IB. In this case, the Virginia legislature was ahead of higher education itself.

Why have legislatures had to step in to get higher education institutions to address the equivalencies of AP and IB? And what about states where there is no legislative mandate to do so?

In Virginia, the legislative mandate establishes parity between two main sources of transfer credits (AP and IB) that do not come from another college or university. The effect is that each public institution in the state had to conduct its own evaluation of the IB curriculum, as it had probably already done long since with AP, in order to establish the particular equivalencies of IB to its own courses. These reviews then have to address, in particular, the difference between IB standard-level courses (one year of advanced work) and IB higher-level courses (two years of advanced work) in relation to one-year AP courses. As a result, many institutions in Virginia, such as James Madison University and George Mason University, have now posted detailed equivalencies for IB scores (at both standard and higher levels). Many other institutions there and elsewhere have likewise conducted reviews and established equivalencies. Far more commonly, however, some nominal credit is awarded only for higher-level courses and without the identification of specific course equivalencies. This is most likely a sign that no departmental review has taken place and that convenience has trumped conscience.

The most selective colleges and universities avoid the issue altogether, since they typically do not award any college credit for IB or AP courses and, instead, simply indicate that such challenging curricula get taken into account in the admissions process. The policy of these most selective institutions resembles, by plan or accident, the situation in the United Kingdom, where the IB program is formally recognized as one of only several outcomes or scores (based on the whole curriculum, not a single test like SAT or ACT) for admission into the more strictly hierarchical (or vertically integrated) ranking of universities, with Oxford and Cambridge at the top. For students seeking to study in the UK, their admission hinges on their overall scores, without all the individual essays and recommendations of the overwrought US college admissions process. In fact, UK students are limited to five applications with one essay for the lot. The single IB score has a very different weight and value there, and recognition is counted differently than in
the more holistic (or maddening) admissions process in the United States.

Of course, many highly selective US colleges and universities have curricula based on 4-credit courses—a student only takes 31 courses for the degree, based on 124 credits. At institutions with 3-credit courses, by contrast, a student takes at least 41 courses for the degree, which means more content coverage, more faculty contact (more opportunities to be inspired!), and far greater possibilities to add a second major or a minor. In other words, students at institutions with 3-credit courses can bring in up to 30 credits (through IB, AP, or other colleges) and still take the same number of courses that students at institutions with 4-credit courses take. The incoming credits for AP or IB allow students to advance in their majors, add additional majors or minors, or just have a great deal more flexibility for electives beyond the core or distribution requirements. Credit for AP or IB opens possibilities for students to avoid duplicate work and to advance more quickly in more areas of interest—or to graduate early, if that’s their wish or need.

**Problematic nomenclature**

Some colleges and universities have, in fact, also begun to award credit for the yearlong standard-level IB courses, aligning them with credit for yearlong AP courses. That makes sense and is long overdue, but for some it also crosses a line. Why? Because many, if not most, colleges and universities have in the past simply imitated each other in adopting the policy and attitude that “no credit will be awarded for standard-level courses” (with slight variations in wording). No further explanation seemed necessary; literally, no one gave it any further thought.

Again, why? Well, it’s an easy and convenient dictum, and sounds like a high principle. But it also assumes that the term “standard” refers to some level of instruction aimed only at basic competencies, which is not at all the case. That dismissive perception is skewed and inaccurate, but to award credit for standard-level IB courses would require a profound change of policy. Though it might seem implausible, I have come to the conclusion that, in the absence of an actual faculty review of course content, the reluctance to correlate the transfer credit between AP and IB often hinges simply on nomenclature and inertia.

For its part, the IBO declines to modify its terminology or adopt a phrase more reassuring to American audiences. At the 2015 Higher Education Symposium, I asked about the term “standard,” since for Americans it suggests the car model without air conditioning or other features, without distinction. The chief external academic relations officer for the IBO, John Bader, acknowledged the problem of terminology and perception in different countries, and indicated that there was “open debate” in the IB community about this. But with respect to that specific term, he said, “it’s not about to change,” though “change is possible.” His exquisitely diplomatic response reflects the fact that IB is established in over 140 countries, and any such change would be like “threading 140 needles” at once. In a separate follow-up conversation, he added neatly: “we’ve tried to avoid pleasing one system over another.” That’s a perfectly defensible position, but I had to ask.

Nonetheless, in the United States, IB’s standard level would translate more accurately as advanced or honors or accelerated college-track level. For IB diploma candidates worldwide, the United States is by far the favorite destination for their university education (roughly 50 percent).
Perhaps an asterisk could be added somewhere to explain the term. Or maybe the best solution is to make institutions and individuals in the United States more aware of the IB curriculum and students in their relations to US standards and practices.

Rather than to meet some lowly norm, students with advanced aptitudes and ambitions take IB courses to challenge themselves at a high level. The IB’s standard level comprises one full year of such high-level instruction—just like Advanced Placement, though more writing intensive. A year of IB standard-level coursework generally corresponds to a year of AP, though the approaches are different. To take the IB exam in a given area, one has to have completed the yearlong course, for example, which is not true of AP. IB does not use multiple-choice exams and is writing intensive, often with oral presentations or performances as well. The IB courses often have less topical breadth, but require more analytical or conceptual synthesis, which teaches active critical thinking, rather than just passive recognition.

In general, one year of AP instruction correlates to one year of IB standard-level instruction. In 2007, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute issued Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate: Do They Deserve Gold Star Status?, a report in which leading educators review AP and IB courses and exams side-by-side in four representative areas (biology, math, literature, and history) with a discursive evaluation and an overall letter grade. In two cases, IB standard-level courses were graded higher than the corresponding AP courses; in two cases, IB standard-level courses were given the same grade as the corresponding AP courses, and differences of breadth or depth of content or of accentuation and organization were duly noted. The report acknowledges, but does not address, the added benefits of the second-year content of the IB higher-level courses.

**Conclusion**

There is clear evidence of IB’s worthiness of college credit and its value as preparation for advanced college-level work. In light of the increased presence of IB students in American higher education and the quality of their preparation (even without the full IB diploma), along with the recognition of IB’s educational merit by various independent authorities, US institutions of higher learning should review their policies on transfer credit and make sure that incoming IB scores receive course credit on a par with AP courses. That course credit should be determined by a review within a given department based on the actual content of the IB program in relation to existing courses. A full departmental review of IB is the only way to ensure parity and fairness to incoming IB students. Such an IB review might then require a further review of the standing AP equivalencies, since the correlation of AP courses to both IB higher-level courses and, especially, IB standard-level courses might have to be determined anew. In this very concrete way, colleges and universities in the United States could demonstrate their openness to an international educational community and serve both US and international students and their own missions by showing a commitment to high standards and global learning.

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**NOTES**

1. John W. Young, paper presented at the International Baccalaureate Organization’s Higher Education Symposium (Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands, October 2015).
2. Enis Dogan, paper presented at the International Baccalaureate Organization’s Higher Education Symposium (Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands, October 2015).
Confessions of a
Well-Trained Mind

STUART PATTERSON

I sometimes hesitate when people ask what I teach. The shorter answers—“liberal arts” or “Great Books”—usually need explaining, even when the terms sound familiar. If I don’t mind sounding a bit arch, I might say “a little bit of everything,” another entrée to more detail than most polite inquirers were asking for.

Still, I’ve learned that in a world of experts, it helps for generalists like me to get a hearing now and then. So, the long version of what I teach goes something like this: a structured set of undergraduate seminars on classic and contemporary landmarks of natural science, social science, and humanities. In slightly more detail, my courses run from Euclid’s proof of the Pythagorean Theorem to Richard Feynman’s Q.E.D., from Plato’s Republic to Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex, and from the Hebrew Bible to Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God. This is what every student studies at Shimer College, the tiny liberal arts school in downtown Chicago where I’ve taught for thirteen years.

This might all suggest I teach a lot “outside my area.” But it’s really that I long ago gave up having an area. Rather, I—and my colleagues and our students—have a curriculum. Though it’s hard to point to professional qualifications for teaching this broad a set of subjects, in my fifth year at Shimer I did earn one claim to expertise when I was named “Master of the Shimer Curriculum.” This was a degree honoris causa my dean cooked up as a pat on the back for having taught all fifteen of the core courses we require for a bachelor of arts. I do also teach my own courses, though these have ranged just as widely, from theories of metaphor to the history of economics. And my colleagues teach just as widely; I’m one of only three who’ve taught the whole curriculum. None of us, however, has gotten through it all quite as fast as most of our students do.

Apart from doing a lot of heady reading, though, what does “mastering” such a broad, cross-disciplinary curriculum mean for me or my students? Not surprisingly, my students encounter the same kind of difficulties explaining what they study as I do describing my teaching. Officially, unless they decide to “concentrate” in the humanities or the social or natural sciences, our students earn a degree in the liberal arts; thus my official title: associate professor of liberal arts. But again, while the term “liberal arts” typically rings a bell, it’s helpful to be able to describe what it names in the way of knowledge and skills—especially in an age when politicians of a certain persuasion use it as a badge of scorn for the spoiled and feckless.

“A well-trained mind” is one phrase I’ve found helpful in describing the goal of a liberal arts education. I borrow it from the title of a popular guidebook for a “classical” education, not unlike what we offer at Shimer, but for elementary schoolers. By itself, the book is a heartening reminder of how deeply ingrained, albeit embattled, the liberal arts ideal is in the educational psyche of the United States, and at all levels. Its title captures the essence of that ideal, one I try to hold to as I “teach” works by figures as various as Sappho, Michelangelo, and Marie Curie, even without expert knowledge of their works or their worlds. The prime directive at Shimer is to make ourselves responsible for discovering the meaning and significance of the poems we read, the artworks we study, and the experiments we repeat. This means taking a cue from Plato’s Socrates and putting much less emphasis on claims to knowledge than on mutual inquiry guided by common reason,

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and reasonableness. In short, our students don’t master one or another academic discipline but something like academic discipline itself; in the briefest possible terms, we teach the art of learning.

Practically speaking, this means I ask my students lots of questions. On some questions, I am as confident as I can be of the answer. On others, I’m not sure there is an answer. The overall aim is to enliven and strengthen the basic attitudes anyone needs to learn anything: persistent curiosity and the kind of patient attention such curiosity takes to satisfy.

With the right mix of questions (and at least some provisional answers), our discussions begin to shuttle between insight and wonder, setting up a self-perpetuating, dynamic equilibrium of inquiry.

The inquiry perpetuates itself because once students have experienced the exhilaration of this balancing act, they begin to teach themselves. They begin to formulate their own questions, the kind toward which the most interesting experts orient themselves as well: Why are Penelope and Odysseus so circumspect with
each other on his return to Ithaca? Just how does sunlight become a rainbow through a prism? Why does Sojourner Truth’s question “Ain’t I a Woman!” of a century and a half ago ring with such relevance today? My students’ answers won’t certify them as classicists, physicists, or historians. But their ability to ask and answer such questions for themselves goes far in demonstrating the adage that the best way to learn something is to have to teach it, as they do for each other. What’s more, they begin to recognize the importance of speaking and writing well in offering their own views and addressing those of others, especially the authors we read.

Our students cultivate the skills of verbal expression, as well as mathematical and logical reasoning, not as isolated goods but as means toward gaining further insight and opening new inquiries of the kind they practice in the classroom.

In sum, at Shimer, we teach each other how to “make our way” in the sense Ludwig Wittgenstein described in remarking that “a philosophical problem has the form ‘I don’t know my way about.’” So there’s no shame when I admit to a class that I’ve lost my way, which happens often enough discussing works I may have been through any number of times but that tend to shift, presenting new features of meaning on each reading, whether it’s Nikolai Lobachevski’s Imaginary Geometry or Dante’s Inferno. But my students and I do get better at figuring out how to get around, or deeper into, such shifting terrain as we make our ways through such works.

Lest I be taken for a hopeless dilettante, I should stress that I have the highest respect—and gratitude—for experts in all the myriad disciplines we touch on at Shimer. Something like Dante’s Virgil, I play the part of the experienced one, but I often have to turn for help from on high—i.e., the experts—in order to find a way through the thornier and more obscure parts of our curriculum. Indeed, I would be easily convinced that there is a net gain in the division of labor in the academy, as almost everywhere else, and that the process of specialization tends not to reverse itself, anyway. I’d even allow, for the sake of argument, that my difficulty naming what it is I teach might signal that I have only succeeded in confusing myself. I’d like to think, rather, that it means I am trying to keep a view of the whole in a world of accelerating interdependence. It is, after all, nice to think that any of us could still assert with Terence that (however distant it may seem) nothing human lies beyond our concern. But at the very least, we generalists can be relied on to keep people talking to each other, looking for nuanced answers that open more questions, rather than falling into rote replies that tend to end, rather than renew, the conversation.

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

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Open and Integrative: 
Designing Liberal Education for the New Digital Ecosystem

BY RANDY BASS AND BRET EYNON

Authors Randy Bass and Bret Eynon explore the implications of emerging digital capacities and culture for higher education, arguing that any discussion to reinvent higher education that begins with technology is doomed to a diminished vision of learning.

Bass and Eynon begin instead by reimagining the core purposes of liberal education in this new context and ask: What is the role of the digital ecosystem in making a quality liberal education available to all, equitably?

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