President’s Message
It’s Not Just the Economy...
By Carol Geary Schneider
New surveys of employers and recent graduates reveal strong support for the core LEAP assertion that the skills and knowledge developed through a liberal education are essential to economic success. Yet they also provide further evidence that higher education has failed to establish the essential connections between democratic freedom and college learning.

From the Editor

News and Information

FEATURED TOPIC

Engaged Learning and the Core Purposes of Liberal Education: Bringing Theory to Practice
By Donald W. Harward
Founded on the premise of a connection between the neglect of the core purposes of undergraduate liberal education, on the one hand, and certain patterns of disengagement exhibited by students, on the other, the Bringing Theory to Practice project provides support for campus programs as well as for research on the connection of certain forms of engaged learning to student health, well-being, and civic development.

Linking Engaged Learning, Student Mental Health and Well-Being, and Civic Development: A Review of the Literature
By Lynn E. Swaner
Conducted for the Bringing Theory to Practice project, this literature review examines the theoretical and research bases for linking engaged learning, student mental health and well-being, and civic development.

So Much Depends Upon a Red Chili Pepper:
A Faculty Perspective on the Bringing Theory to Practice Project
By Rebecca Hergig
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It’s Not Just the Economy...

Last month, in conjunction with the release of the new LEAP report, College Learning for the New Global Century, AAC&U released findings from two surveys of senior-level employers and recent college graduates about their views of college learning in the global economy. (The report and the survey findings are available in full at www.aacu.org/advocacy/leap.) These two surveys elicited respondents’ views about the right balance of breadth and depth in a twenty-first-century college education. The surveys further probed the degree of priority that respondents assign to fifteen specific liberal education outcomes, ranging from areas of knowledge such as “concepts and new developments in science and technology” to skills and responsibilities such as “teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings” or “civic knowledge, civic participation, and community engagement.”

The findings reveal very strong support among both employers and recent graduates for the core LEAP assertion that, in this new global century, the skills and knowledge developed through a liberal education have become essential to economic success. From now on, we can say with confidence that, when employers urge investment in “workforce development,” they actually mean that we need to expand rather than reduce the nation’s commitment to the knowledge and skills developed through liberal education. Succeeding in the new global economy will require more and better liberal education, not less.

On the other hand, these two surveys, and indeed all the research LEAP has conducted over the last two years, contain more sobering news for those of us who regard liberal education as the best preparation for knowledgeable and active citizenship. Civic learning—the focal topic in this issue of Liberal Education—seems to have become a curricular “also-ran” for employers, recent graduates, and—as AAC&U reported in the fall of 2005—for college seniors and faculty as well. More on these troubling findings below.

But first, the good news. Two-thirds of employers and 82 percent of recent college graduates (i.e., respondents who completed college between 1997 and 2001) soundly reject the proposal that college should focus “primarily on providing knowledge and skills in a specific field.”

Fifty-six percent of the employers prefer an approach to college that builds well-rounded knowledge and skills along with competence in a specific field, with another 10 percent preferring that college focus primarily on providing a “well-rounded education.” Only 22 percent of the employers and 13 percent of the recent graduates think that college should provide field-specific preparation alone. With the global economy highly dependent on creativity and innovation, respondents want college to emphasize broad learning and transferable skills.

When it comes to specific liberal education outcomes, the survey results are equally arresting. Majorities of both employers and recent graduates think colleges and universities should place more emphasis on key knowledge areas, including science and global issues, as well as on key capabilities, such as critical thinking and analytical reasoning, written and oral communication skills, and a sense of integrity and ethics. Strong majorities of employers also want to see more emphasis on information literacy, the ability to solve complex problems, the role of the United States in the world, and the ability to work with numbers and understand statistics. Only 34 percent of recent graduates share employers’ preference for greater quantitative and statistic literacy, but 51 percent of the graduates would endorse more college emphasis on “proficiency in a foreign language.”
Respondents also strongly endorse what AAC&U and our partner the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching have called “integrative learning,” or the demonstrated ability to apply knowledge to unscripted problems and real-world settings. Seventy-six percent of employers and 67 percent of recent graduates want higher education to place more emphasis on real-world experiences and applications.

All in all, the message is clear. Those who are already navigating today’s economy know that the bar is rising for both broad knowledge and higher-level intellectual and practical skills. To prepare graduates successfully for this more demanding environment, these forms of learning need to become shared concerns for the entire educational experience, from school through the final year of college. AAC&U’s new LEAP report, *College Learning for the New Global Century*, provides a road map for this more intentional approach to liberal education across the curriculum.

But a democracy does not prosper on its economic vitality alone. And in this sphere, there is abundant evidence that higher education has largely failed to establish—either in principle or in practice—what LEAP has called the essential connections between democratic freedom and college learning. In the current survey, less than half of both employers (48 percent) and recent graduates (46 percent) think that higher education should place more emphasis on “civic knowledge, civic participation, and community engagement.” A separate item on “democracy and government” ranked even lower, with 42 percent of employers and 39 percent of recent graduates recommending stronger emphasis.

The low standing of these civic topics might have been predicted for this particular survey, given its focus on college learning and the economy. But arrestingly, this also-ran status for civic topics shows up in all the research either done or consulted for the LEAP initiative. As we reported in 2005, in six separate student focus groups held across the United States, all groups selected civic learning as the least important personal priority for college when asked to rank high and low priorities for learning from a master list of learning outcomes. Similarly, according to the National Study of Student Engagement, only 41 percent of college seniors report that college contributed significantly to “contributing to the welfare of your community.” Concurrently, the Faculty Study of Student Engagement shows that only 54 percent of faculty consider it important or very important that their campus emphasize community service. Citing numerous studies, Derek Bok shows persuasively in *Our Underachieving Colleges* that these shortfalls are part of a larger pattern of civic inattention at the college level.

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates persuasively that higher education leaders have a dual assignment in the years ahead. The first is to firmly resist the policy pressures for narrow learning at the college level on the grounds that a broad liberal education—across all college majors—is the only sound preparation for today’s economy. The second is to reclaim and vigorously advance the vital connections between liberal education and a sustainable democracy. Democracy, economic prosperity, and liberal education require one another to reach their fullest potential. And each addressed without attention to the others must inevitably fall short. These necessary connections set the course and the context for college learning in the new global century.—CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER
At first blush, the term “engaged learning” appears to be one of those bits of educationese that name something—typically a new educational trend or “movement”—that would be hard even to imagine opposing. (After all, who would be for disengaged learning?) Such terms seem to engender consensus. But what does “engaged learning” really mean?

Having reviewed the relevant literature, Lynn Swaner concludes there is no “unifying definition of engaged learning.” In fact, she reports, “there is considerable confusion in the literature regarding the term ‘engagement,’ which is further compounded by its growing popularity among scholars and practitioners.” Stephen Bowen, writing recently in Peer Review, concurs: “an explicit consensus about what we actually mean by engagement or why it is important is lacking. Is engagement an end in itself, or a means to other ends? Is engagement as important as other characteristics of a good education?”

In light of this confusion, one novelty of the Bringing Theory to Practice project is its specificity. Developed in 2003 by AAC&U and the Charles Engelhard Foundation, the project is currently gathering evidence of measurable and replicable outcomes that link specific forms of engaged learning—namely, service learning and community-based research experiences—to behavioral choices and to student development. Moreover, it explores the key questions about engaged learning through a focus on certain prevalent patterns of student disengagement, including substance abuse and depression.

Three years on, the Bringing Theory to Practice project has involved over two hundred colleges and universities. Forty institutions have received grant support for their programmatic or research work, and seven institutions now serve as national demonstration sites and as the focus of the project’s research. The Featured Topic section of this issue presents perspectives on what these participating campuses have learned.

Notwithstanding the sanguine belief in the possibilities of engaged learning on which it is premised, the Bringing Theory to Practice project does not promise to solve the problem of student disengagement. Indeed, as Swaner readily admits, “it is unlikely that engaged learning will constitute a ‘silver bullet’ for either substance abuse or depression, given the complex causes and risk factors for both.” Rather, what the project is now exploring is a particularly promising approach to the problem. The results of that exploration—findings from the research, the demonstration sites, and the related work on campuses—will appear in the summer 2007 issue of Peer Review.—DAVID TRITELLI
Leap Report Released
AAC&U released a report from the LEAP National Leadership Council, College Learning for the New Global Century, at a public briefing and leadership forum held on January 10 at Georgetown University. At the briefing, members of the council and national education, business, and policy leaders discussed findings and recommendations from the report. They also presented results of new national polls that examined business leaders’ and recent graduates’ views of liberal education outcomes. The public briefing was followed by an invitational leadership forum that brought educators and employers together to discuss ways of better preparing students for success in the new global century. For more information, and to download or purchase a copy of the report, visit www.aacu.org.

AAC&U President Briefs Reporters on Impact of Spellings Commission Report
On November 17, AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider spoke on the opening panel of the annual seminar for higher education reporters sponsored by the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media. The topic of this year’s seminar was “Access, Affordability, and Accountability—A Turning Point for Higher Education,” and the opening panel addressed the impact of the recent report from the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Schneider joined commission members David Ward (American Council on Education) and Richard Vedder (Ohio University) in a moderated discussion that followed a presentation by U.S. Department of Education official and Deputy Director of the Spellings Commission Victoria Schray.

2007 Annual Meeting
AAC&U’s 2007 annual meeting, “The Real Test: Liberal Education and Democracy’s Big Questions,” was held January 17–20 in New Orleans. This year’s meeting explored how higher education can engage students with the “big questions”—in U.S. society and globally—and how it can foster the habits of mind that students will need for life, work, and citizenship. Featured speakers at the meeting included Marvalene Hughes, president of Dillard University, and Walter Isaacson, president and CEO of the Aspen Institute.

Upcoming Meetings
April 19–21, 2007, The Student as Scholar: Undergraduate Research and Creative Practice, Long Beach, CA.
May 18–23, 2007, Institute on General Education, Newport, RI.
June 20–24, 2007, Greater Expectations Institute, Burlington, VT.

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Engaged Learning and the Bringing Theory to Practice

DONALD W. HARWARD

Regrettably, most of us committed to liberal education agree that the outcomes of an undergraduate liberal education are not widely understood or valued by the general public. While the college degree is universally recognized as the key to economic and social mobility, what lies behind that credential—the educational experience, its full value and its purposes—is more or less ignored. In general, in the popular imagination, undergraduate education is a commodity: students and their families are customers, faculty are service providers, and institutions compete to provide accommodations. Specific attention to the full purposes of liberal education is even less focused; and in light of that, it is now rarely considered a necessary element of undergraduate education.

Because of its neglect of the core purposes of liberal education, the academy itself bears some responsibility for popular misperceptions—or, lamentably, ignorance of what liberal education promises.

There has been, and remains, a “triad” of interrelated core purposes for liberal education: the epistemic (coming to know, discovery, and the advancing of knowledge and understanding); the eudemonic (the fuller realization of the learner, the actualizing of the person’s potential—classically to achieve individual well-being and happiness); and the civic (the understanding that learning puts the learner in relation to what is other, to community and its diversity in the broadest sense, as well as the responsibility that comes from sustaining

Engaged learning appears to be the normative condition for multiple types of development—cognitive, emotional, moral, and civic

DONALD W. HARWARD, president emeritus of Bates College, is director of the Bringing Theory to Practice project.
Core Purposes of Liberal Education
the community and the civic qualities that make both open inquiry and self-realization possible).

On one level, we have lost track of this complexity—focusing in the academy only on the epistemic. On another level, we have hardly attended to the issue of purpose at all. The gaining and transfer of knowledge and discovery, the “epistemic” purpose of liberal education, has been emphasized at the expense of the other core purposes—namely, fostering self-discovery and well-being, and establishing the relationship between knowledge and responsibility for what is beyond self, the “civic” purpose. While other institutions, such as church or the family, and other educational or training experiences certainly can separately contribute to a dimension of this triad of core purposes, liberal education is unique in that it contributes to achieving all three purposes and reveals their interdependency.

These core purposes determined the original missions of the many colleges and universities that were founded to provide a liberal education. These institutions forged a de facto social contract. For its part, the college or university was expected to contribute to what is known, to teach and discover, to serve as a positive and reinforcing context for the emotional and moral development of young adults, and to encourage greater responsibility for the common good. In return, society supported both the institution and the conditions of liberty required to sustain open inquiry. Although some colleges and universities may no longer define their missions in terms of the three core purposes of liberal education, the great preponderance of institutions still do. It is not clear, however, that these institutions actually give priority to the practices that instantiate the core purposes. Nor is it clear they recognize that the intentional development of all three interrelated purposes results in confirmable outcomes affecting the full development of students.

In recent years, much excellent work has been devoted to the assessment of learning outcomes. This work helps to establish whether and how the epistemic purpose of liberal education is being achieved. However, the scope of assessment should not be restricted to a single aspect of liberal education. Attention to each of the core purposes—the epistemic, the eudemonic, and the civic—is necessary to achieve the full promise of liberal education. The Bringing Theory to Practice project is about demonstrating that, as they are actualized in particular educational practices, all three core purposes produce outcomes—effects and affects, including behavioral results or consequences as well as dispositional patterns, attitudes, and inclinations—that can be documented and studied.

**Student disengagement**

The Bringing Theory to Practice project was founded on the premise of a connection between the widespread misunderstanding, devaluation, and neglect of the core purposes of undergraduate liberal education, on the one hand, and certain patterns of disengagement exhibited by a significant and growing number of students, on the other. Multiple-year national data show that, even excepting students who drop out of school, 40 to 60 percent of all
adolescents are “chronically disengaged” from their academic experiences (Blum and Libby 2004). This student disengagement is expressed in a variety of ways, from drug and alcohol abuse to cheating, from nonclinical forms of depression to suicide attempts.

More than 30 percent of students abuse alcohol, for example; nearly half of these are repeat abusers whose objective is to disengage completely by becoming “wasted” to the point of passing out. Indeed, over the past decade or so, campuses nationwide have reported dramatic increases in binge drinking. “Students [are] often stuporous in class, if they get there at all,” explains Hara Estroff Marano, editor of Psychology Today and member of the Bringing Theory to Practice advisory board. “The heaviest drinking occurs on weekends, beginning Thursday, but the effects increasingly hang over the whole week.” After counseling many students, Paul Joffe, a psychologist at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, has concluded that “at bottom binge drinking is a quest for authenticity and intensity of experience. It gives young people something all their own to talk about, and sharing stories about the path to passing out is often a primary purpose. It’s an inverted world in which drinking to oblivion (disengagement) is the way to feel connected and alive” (Marano 2004).

While it may be the most visible expression of student disengagement, alcohol abuse is among a host of behavioral and mental health issues affecting undergraduates. Somewhat less visible, for example, is the rising incidence of depression among college students. Studies generated by the University of Kansas Counseling Center suggest that, nationwide, over 40 percent of undergraduates report at least one incident of depression sufficient to interrupt their academic work. “Psychological distress is rampant on college campuses,” says Marano. “It takes a variety of forms: anxiety and depression—which are increasingly regarded as two faces of the same coin—binge drinking and substance abuse, self-mutilation and other forms of self-disconnection.” According to Steven Hyman, provost of Harvard University and former director of the National Institute of Mental Health, psychological distress is now so widespread among students that it is “interfering with the core mission of the university” (Marano 2004).

Overall, the response of colleges and universities to student disengagement has been partial, focused on enforcement or treatment; rarely have institutions seen the possibility of addressing these issues of disengagement through the outcomes of specific forms of undergraduate learning. Awareness of the problem has often led to institutional concern for liability and, in some cases, to the dismissal of students who acknowledge experiencing psychological distress. Only rarely does awareness lead to campus-wide consideration of the gaps between academic purposes, expectations, and practices—gaps that impede student learning, health, and civic engagement. At most institutions, where attention to students’ mental health is relegated to counseling professionals and where the academic aspect of students’ lives is disconnected from the social and developmental aspects, faculty and administrators may be unaware of the full extent of the problem, and of the possibility of addressing the manifestations of student well-being and civic development through academic experiences.

Engaged learning

The development of the “whole person” has traditionally been the goal of liberal education; however, on most campuses today, the “whole person” is fractured into discrete parts. Students themselves are expected to integrate, cumulatively and developmentally, what institutional structures and operations formally divide. By compartmentalizing students’ intellectual, emotional, and ethical lives, colleges and universities dichotomize the various facets of learning. This paradigm of compartmentalized learning is extended to campus life: faculty take care of the intellect, student-services staff and coaches handle the rest. Accordingly, the classroom is regarded as the exclusive setting for “real” learning, which is seen as wholly separate and different from what takes place elsewhere.

The Bringing Theory to Practice project began with the hunch that engaged learning is the key to reintegrating the epistemic, eudemonic, and civic purposes of liberal education.
and civic purposes of liberal education. That is, we believed that by engaging students, by involving them in demanding service-learning and community-based research experiences, the academy could force them to consider their own privilege; challenge their assumptions of entitlement and self-indulgence; help them recognize that learning has implications for action and use; help them develop skills and habits of resiliency; and make them aware of their responsibilities to the larger community. And further, we believed that, with these gains, students would be more likely to transfer academic engagement to greater personal well-being and to deeper civic engagement.

It may seem quixotic to describe learning as a transformative activity. Many students, faculty, and staff may see no connection between their lives and the problems facing the community, the nation, and the world. They may not feel responsible for others. The many students who today participate in volunteer programs may fail to take action to address the problems they seek temporarily to relieve. In fact, volunteering may reinforce preconceptions and stereotypic beliefs held by students. As D. Tad Roach, headmaster of St. Andrew's School in Delaware, puts it, “students may volunteer in a soup kitchen, and accumulate hundreds of hours of volunteer service; but if service is not linked with learning, they are likely to understand nothing about the systemic socio-economic conditions that lead to poverty. And they are, thereby, unprepared to address the desperate need for change.”

We have identified service learning and community-based research as exemplars because they require active involvement by students and they have the greatest potential to transform attitudes, behaviors, and dispositions. Quite distinct from volunteerism, both forms of engaged learning require academic intensity. They entail greater expectations for students, pushing them beyond the classroom and beyond the model of learning as the passive receipt of information. And both forms of engaged learning can lead students to take greater responsibility for their learning and for its connection to both their individual development and their civic lives. Students come to recognize that not all learning occurs in the classroom, and that not all teachers are faculty.

In truth, the Bringing Theory to Practice project was founded on more than just a hunch. All of us in higher education have seen the transformative potential of engaged learning. We know, for example, that when students are engaged, when someone else is counting on them, the incidence and frequency of abusive behaviors and depression decrease. We also know that students themselves report increased confidence and a positive sense of self-value as results of experiences that take them “out of the bubble” of their school or collegiate life and into the community. Students who experience engaged learning in contexts where they are expected to contribute, and where their contributions are valued, tell us of their greater satisfaction with their education, their personal choices, and their futures. The documentation of these outcomes and their replicability are among the objectives of the project’s research.

In fact, part of what the project hopes to document is how findings confirm the now
accepted (but, regrettably, less often practiced) view that these are forms of learning and pedagogies (in comparison to traditional emphasis on lecturing as a means of information transfer) that more effectively assure student retention of what is learned and more effectively aid student development of higher critical skills of analysis and synthesis. To this extent, the project will not only be documenting the linkage of outcomes and core purposes of liberal education; it will also be reinforcing educational practices that are more effective in realizing knowledge acquisition and intellectual development. Engaged learning appears to be the normative condition for multiple types of development—cognitive, emotional, moral, and civic. The project explores how the commitment to understanding a topic with significant connection beyond the learner, obliging the learner to put her own views and preconceptions in judgment, makes a positive difference to students’ intellectual development, to their sense of empowerment, and to their civic lives.

The sources of the “hunch” the Bringing Theory to Practice project was founded to explore are hardly new. Aristotle and Dewey, among many others, began with similar assumptions about the links among the core triad of educational purposes—the necessity of the pursuit of knowledge, the pursuit of self-realization, and the pursuit of justice. They too believed that realizing these interrelated purposes would result in particular forms of moral development and social action. What we would identify as liberal education was, on the classical model, focused on a public community purpose, namely good citizenship—the understanding that individuals were realized or actualized in the context of community. And it was the Enlightenment that encouraged the grounding of learning, knowledge, and discovery in replication, evidence, and the nonauthoritarian bases for any claims to know. These historical strands became linked elements in describing the sustaining core purposes of liberal education. In translating our hunch into a set of testable hypotheses, we recognized that not all relationships are causal, that discernible effects are distinguishable from likely affects, and that the relationships may be additive or even symbiotic. Nonetheless, concrete evidence is needed to substantiate the effects and affects of actualizing the core purposes of liberal education. The Bringing Theory to Practice project is supporting ongoing research that seeks to document outcomes and to justify the changes in educational practices required to make engaged learning normative.

The key role of faculty

Faculty are viewed by students as the primary agents of transformation on campus, and they are the group students respect the most. Thus, faculty are perhaps the only group on campus with the authority and the educational responsibility to confront the proximate conditions of self-indulgence and the withdrawal of students from the challenges of engagement. For this reason, the Bringing Theory to Practice project is attempting to demonstrate that, through their teaching and their expectations, faculty can affect students’ choices and behaviors, as well as students’ emotional and civic development.

Faculty are not counselors or therapists. Appropriately, they recognize that the provision
of mental health services is beyond their expertise. But faculty are often aware of the crises their students experience. They are very likely to notice when individual students are incapacitated by depression or abusive behaviors, and they are concerned about these problems. Most faculty recognize that they have considerable influence on the choices and behaviors of young adults, and most want to help create positive contexts for learning and for student choices. If faculty do not actively encourage the full integration of students’ lives, if they elect to address the issues through grading alone and to relegate all other responsibilities to student affairs staff, then the current conditions of disengagement will continue to prevail.

The Bringing Theory to Practice project
Developed jointly by the Charles Engelhard Foundation and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the Bringing Theory to Practice project was designed to encourage colleges and universities to revisit or review the core purposes of liberal education and to assess their students’ achievement of the full range of related outcomes. Such an effort can reveal the need for a significant redirection of energies and resources or for broad cultural changes. Most significantly, it can result in changed student expectations.

In addition to providing support for specific campus programs, the project, now in its fourth year, supports research on the connection of certain forms of engaged learning to student health and well-being, and to the complexity and depth of students’ civic development. To date, over two hundred colleges and universities have been linked to aspects of the project, and forty institutions have received grant support for their programmatic or research work. Project research is currently focused on seven institutions that are serving as national demonstration sites (see p.13).
The Bringing Theory to Practice project has awarded grants to seven campus demonstration sites. Each of these institutions is being funded to develop and evaluate new strategies to get students more engaged with their learning, and in so doing, improve their health and civic engagement.

**Barnard College**

**Identity, Community and Belonging: Engaged Learning and Engaged Living for Mental Health: A Demonstration Project**

This project targets two groups of students who are often more vulnerable to the challenges of depression and disengagement: transfers and sophomores. It includes an academic seminar exploring the concepts of community, identity, and belonging as well as three distinct civic engagement living/learning communities.

**Dickinson College**

**Student Impact Assessment of Engaged Learning Initiatives**

This multiyear study of the effects of student participation in an expanding learning communities program seeks to examine whether variously structured learning experiences—classroom-based, service learning, outdoor experiential learning, and a non-credit learning community organized around community service—yield different impacts on student learning, mental health, and civic engagement.

**Emory University**

**Sophomore Year at Emory Living and Learning Experience: An Interdisciplinary Seminar Course/Internship in Addiction and Depression**

In order for students to appreciate the complexities of addiction and depression in the world and in their own lives, this model seminar course/internship experience in the new Second Year at Emory Residence Hall integrates several successful but so far distinct campus programs and uses problem- and research-based approaches grounded in the interdisciplinary context of the history, science, and impacts of these issues in society.

**Georgetown University**

**Connecting the Safety Net to the Heart of the Academic Environment: Curriculum Infusion of Mental Health Issues into Lower-Division Courses**

This project focuses on “curriculum infusion”—the blending of college health issues into the curriculum content of academic courses to positively affect student attitudes and behaviors. Bringing these important health issues into the academic environment enables them to be addressed with intellectual seriousness and free from the fear of social stigma in targeted curriculum modules across a wide spectrum of lower-division general education courses.

**Morgan State University**

**SHARE (Students Helping and Receiving Educational Development) Experiences**

This program expands Morgan State University students’ involvement in ongoing community-based research and program development in Southwest Baltimore and in the development and implementation of initiatives to promote student and community well-being and prevent substance use and depression.

**St. Lawrence University**

**The St. Lawrence University Center for Civic Engagement and Leadership: Creating Opportunities for Agency and Intentionality in Student Learning Experiences**

This intensive living–learning program employs the best practices of engaged learning pedagogies and assesses their impacts on civic engagement, depression, and alcohol abuse among students through primary data collection using multiple methods over a three-year period, coupled with secondary analysis of existing student databases.

**Syracuse University**

**SAGE (Self-Assess, Grow, Educate) Options**

Through rigorous evaluation, this project seeks to demonstrate the association between curricular and cocurricular student engagement as effective prevention strategies that address the roots of depression and substance abuse—indications of interpersonal and intrapersonal disengagement.

For more information, please visit the project Web site at www.aacu.org/bringing_theory.
Getting at purposes through an examination of possible outcomes is a complex task; it is exceedingly difficult to isolate the epistemic purpose and to determine effectiveness in creating and measuring learning outcomes. The Bringing Theory to Practice project is focused on very specific forms of pedagogy and learning that already are important elements of many undergraduate liberal education programs—namely, service learning and community-based research. These particular forms of engaged learning encourage students to examine how concepts translate into practice, how they expect and value greater personal involvement from students, and how they oblige students to link action and understanding.

The project is currently studying the possible effects and likely affects produced by engaged learning experiences that are expected, intensive, and valued elements of the undergraduate experience. We are gathering evidence—both testimonial and empirical—of outcomes that link engaged learning to behavioral choices and to student development. And we are learning how faculty and administrators who are involved across many campuses can begin to structure a “learning community” of their own affecting directional change at their own institutions. The provisional evidence supports the initial premise of the Bringing Theory to Practice project: the core purposes of liberal education can be realized through particular forms of engaged learning that affect the health, behaviors, and well-being of students and foster civic responsibility.

Even as the research goes forward, the project is encouraging campuses to continue, or to initiate, conversations about the purposes of liberal education and about the institutional means available for achieving them. This effective strategy already has led several campuses to reexamine the extent to which they are defining and actualizing their own sense of quality, and the extent to which they are pursuing services and activities that are driven by perceived “market” demands. Additionally, the project has supported the efforts of individual campuses to better understand the actual behaviors and patterns of experience chosen by their specific populations of students, and to assess those data within the context of national studies.

The overarching aim of the Bringing Theory to Practice project is to help colleges and universities deliver on the full promise of a quality undergraduate education by orienting their campus practices to the achievement of the three interrelated core purposes of liberal education. The project encourages institutions to create and support learning contexts that
enable student transformation and, where current practices do not succeed in creating such contexts, the project argues for change. In creating and sustaining contexts for engagement, faculty must be supported, valued, and rewarded for experimenting with new and emerging pedagogies. This work is complex and often difficult; however, faculty frequently find such experimentation to be among the most intellectually, emotionally, and morally satisfying dimensions of teaching—especially when they are supported culturally and institutionally.

The faculty members and professional administrators involved in the project have demonstrated their strong commitment to the students on their own campuses. They have been willing to act somewhat counter to prevailing campus cultures by seriously considering how the very heart of their institutions—the faculty, dominant pedagogies, and the curriculum—can positively and holistically affect the lives of their students. Through their involvement in the project, faculty and administrators alike have found the reinforcing rationale and evidence for strengthening the academic experience in ways that more directly involve students, that expect more from them, that take them out of the classroom, and that involve them in experiencing and understanding the relation of what they study to issues and responsibilities rooted outside of themselves.

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

REFERENCES

NOTE
1. In April 2005, the Bringing Theory to Practice project supported a major research study, completed by Lynn Swaner, that examines both the theoretical levels and the available empirical research regarding the linkages among forms of engaged learning, forms of depression and substance abuse, and the civic development of students. An abridgment of the review is published in this issue of Liberal Education.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
Announcing funding support during 2007–10 for the study, practice, and institutionalization of forms of engaged learning, and their relation to outcomes affecting student well-being and student civic development.

Categories of support, funding levels, and proposal deadlines:

**Category I**
Mini-Grants and Student Programming Grants
Up to $2,500; rolling application and award deadlines; matching support not required. Separate mini-grants from an institution for separate projects are permitted.

**Category II**
Program or Research Start-up (“Initiative”) Grants
Institutions are awarded up to $10,000 of total grant; may be renewable. Matching support is expected; rolling application and award deadlines.

**Category III**
Demonstration Site Grants
Institutions are awarded up to $45,000 a year for two years; total grants of $90,000. May be renewable. Matching support required; application deadline: April 1, 2007.

**Category IV**
Intensive Site Grants
Institutions awarded up to a total of $250,000 over three years. May be renewable. Matching support required; application deadline: April 15, 2007.

Before submitting proposals in any category, please review information, announcements, and publications available online at www.bringingtheorytopractice.org. For additional information, contact Jennifer O’Brien, program associate of the Bringing Theory to Practice project, at obrien@aacu.org.
A growing number of colleges and universities are endorsing the realization of students’ full potential—including their well-being and civic development—as central to the mission of higher education. Concurrently, substance abuse and depression have reached crisis levels on the college campus, spurring calls for institutions to develop campus-wide, community-level prevention strategies in response. The Bringing Theory to Practice project asks whether and how engaged learning, an emergent wave of curricular reform, might both advance the holistic mission of higher education and constitute a strategy for addressing substance abuse and depression on campus. To this end, a review of the literature was conducted to examine theoretical and research bases for linking engaged learning, student mental health and well-being, and civic development. The findings of this review are discussed here in brief; the full review is available online at www.aacu.org/bringing_theory.

Defining engaged learning
Before considering whether and how engaged learning may be linked with student mental health and well-being and with civic development, an understanding of what is meant by the term engaged learning is needed. Rather than being concretely defined in the literature, the concept of engaged learning emerges from multiple theoretical frameworks and educational practices. It is helpful therefore to begin by examining the two concepts of which it is comprised—learning and engagement in college.

“Learning” in college
As would be expected, there is substantial evidence that students experience gains in content knowledge during college, particularly in their major (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991). However, there is evidence that learning in college extends beyond simple content acquisition to involve the development of increasing cognitive complexity, multiple domains of self as loci for learning, and active processes that are integrative of experience and reflection. In terms of cognitive development, Perry (1970) found that as students become more capable of recognizing and incorporating diverse perspectives into their worldviews, they in turn develop increasingly complex ways of thinking, knowing, and making meaning. Through the positions of Perry’s model, or “scheme,” students move from a dualistic worldview that endorses absolute right and wrong to a recognition of multiple and potentially valid perspectives and then to a contextually relative approach to judging the adequacy of differing perspectives. This developmental path is echoed in the work of Belenky et al. (1997), who describe women’s development in terms of increasingly complex ways of knowing and understanding self; in this view, students...
shift from relying on external authorities for self-knowledge to recognizing themselves as authorities and finally to reconstructing knowledge generated both external to and within the self. Similar development is also described by King and Kitchener (1994), who discuss how students learn to comprehend and address the complexity inherent in ill-structured problems, and by Baxter-Magolda (1992, 2004), who focuses on how students develop a more complex sense of knowledge and self. A range of psychosocial theories extend this developmental view beyond the cognitive domain to areas such as students' identities, social interactions, affect, moral values, and life plans and purposes (Chickering and Reisser 1993).

In addition to these perspectives, adult and experiential learning theory holds that students learn best from the integration of experience, reflection, and action in an iterative cycle (Kolb 1984; Hutchings and Wutzdorff 1988; Schön 1987; Garvin 2000). Such learning is inherently active, in that it requires ongoing experimentation rather than passive absorption of information. It may also involve transformation as individuals come to question, test, and reformulate their ways of making meaning and, in doing so, their views of themselves and the world in which they live (Mezirow 1991). Finally, rather than occurring in a vacuum, learning requires engagement with social contexts, as learners construct shared meaning in collaboration with others in their communities (Wenger 1998). These descriptions are particularly salient because much of the pedagogy that is considered “engaged” in higher education—such as service learning and community-based research—has adult and experiential learning theory as its conceptual framework.
“Engagement” in college
There is considerable confusion in the literature regarding the term “engagement,” which is further compounded by its growing popularity among scholars and practitioners. Two distinct definitional strands for the term are evident and can be differentiated by their answer to the question, with what are students engaged?

The first, the involvement perspective of engagement, posits that students are engaged in educational experiences that lead to better learning outcomes. In this perspective, engagement in learning is a function of student motivation and effort, as well as the degree to which learning environments are conducive to student involvement. This perspective is grounded in Astin’s work (1984, 1993), in which student involvement in academics was directly correlated with learning, performance, and retention. Kuh et al. (1991), in their study of “involving” colleges, found that the quality of students’ undergraduate experience was also related to involvement in campus life. The responsibility for involvement is not solely the student’s, however; Kuh explains that institutions foster involvement by “encouraging students to put forth more effort (e.g., write more papers, read more books, meet more frequently with faculty and peers, use information technology appropriately) which will result in greater gains” (2003, 1).

Although earlier writing from this perspective used the term “involvement,” a shift in recent years—as exemplified by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)—appears to have replaced this word with the term “engagement” without a significant change in meaning. For example, in describing NSSE’s conceptual framework, Kuh explains (2003, 1–2), “What students do during college counts more in terms of desired outcomes than who they are or even where they go to college . . . [NSSE is] specifically designed to assess the extent to which students are engaged in empirically derived good educational practices.” This reflects the involvement perspective underlying NSSE as well as the shift toward the term “engaged” instead of involvement.

The second perspective, that of civic engagement, holds that students are engaged with larger communities beyond the campus. As widely employed in service-learning literature, this concept of engagement reflects two philosophies: the civic model, which focuses on enabling students to become active, informed, and empowered citizens of a participatory democracy (Hoppe 2004), and the communitarian model, which places emphasis on the responsibilities of individuals to the larger communities of which they are a part (Etzioni 1995). These perspectives coexist in the literature as well as in practice, which suggests that civic engagement entails the development of both citizenship capacities necessary for participatory democracy and social responsibility necessary for community membership. From the service-learning literature, this is evident in Jacoby’s “working” definition of civic engagement:

Civic engagement is a heightened sense of responsibility to one’s communities that includes a wide range of activities, including developing civic sensitivity, participation in building civil society, and benefiting the common good. Civic engagement encompasses the notions of global citizenship and interdependence where individuals—as citizens of their communities, their nations, and the world—are empowered as agents of positive social change for a more democratic world. (2004, 10)

According to Jacoby, this definition is operationalized when students develop informed perspectives; actively participate in civic life; serve as leaders; promote social justice; develop empathy, values, and social responsibility; and reflect critically on diversity and democracy.

Engaged learning: Toward a definition
Although the current state of the literature does not provide a unifying definition of engaged learning, these perspectives of learning and engagement in college provide starting points. Both an involvement perspective and a civic engagement perspective would endorse engaged learning as being active, integrative of experience, marked by increasingly complex ways of knowing and doing, interactive with social contexts, and holistic in its encompassment of multiple domains of self. However, the civic engagement perspective adds to this description the development of students’ civic capacities for democratic participation and responsible engagement in community life.

Although conceptually these two definitions may coexist in institutional mission statements—and in the best hopes of college educators—they are still far apart in the literature. Further
work is needed to determine if and how they should be merged, particularly given the divergent use of the terminology of “engagement.” In practice, however, there is already promise of such movement: at the crossroads of these two perspectives of engaged learning stand common pedagogical practices, or what Edgerton (1997) describes as pedagogies for engaged learning.

Pedagogy at the crossroads
Innovational pedagogical practice in higher education has provided meeting ground for the involvement and civic engagement perspectives of learning in college. Edgerton, in his Higher Education White Paper developed for the Pew Charitable Trusts, cites such pedagogies for engaged learning as both deepening student learning and fostering civic development:

The dominant mode of teaching and learning in higher education [is] “teaching as telling; learning as recall.” As we have seen, this mode of instruction fails to help students acquire two kinds of learning that are now crucial to their individual success and critically needed by our society at large. The first is real understanding. The second is “habits of the heart” that motivate students to be caring citizens. Both of these qualities are acquired through pedagogies that elicit intense engagement. (1997, 67, emphasis added)

Similarly, Benson and Harkavy describe service learning as one of “a handful of creative, active pedagogies . . . that enhance a student’s capacity to think critically, problem solve, and function as a citizen in a democratic society” (2002, 362, emphasis added).

Engaged learning pedagogy is fundamentally different from much of the teaching and learning that occurs in higher education. Traditional approaches involve the transmission of static knowledge from expert faculty to novice students (Freire 1970; Howard 1998), while engaged learning pedagogies share the assumption that knowledge is actively co-constructed by communities of teachers and learners (Palmer 1998). Both Edgerton and Colby et al. (2003) identify a small number of such engaged pedagogies—what Edgerton calls “strands of reform” (1997, 67) in higher education. These include

- **service learning**, which combines volunteer experience in the community with academic coursework and structured reflection (Jacoby 1996; Eyler and Giles 1999);
- **community-based research**, which involves faculty, students, and community members in joint research to solve community problems (Strand et al. 2003; Nyden 2003);
- **collaborative learning**, which actively engages students in learning from peers as well as faculty (MacGregor 1990; Bruffee 1993);
- **problem-based learning**, which structures students’ learning around the study of complex, real-world problems (Willkerson and Feletti 1989; Barrows 1996).

In addition, several forms of engaged learning are described in the literature that do not correspond fully to these strands. These include intergroup dialogue (Schoem and Hurtado 2001), curricular service, internships, interdisciplinary team teaching, and learning communities (a detailed discussion of each is offered in the full literature review).

Research has established that many of these approaches enhance learning, increase content mastery, encourage critical thinking, and foster personal development (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Eyler and Giles 1999). Yet despite such evidence, engaged learning experiences are offered only on a limited and elective basis on most campuses. Most students do not participate in such opportunities or may only do so once during college. The value-added of these pedagogies may thus be limited by their isolated use in higher education, as Eyler and Giles assert that “no single intervention, particularly over the course of a semester, can be expected to have a dramatic impact on student outcomes” (1999, xvii).

For such an impact to occur, engaged pedagogies must move from being exceptions to being building blocks for a fundamental transformation in the way faculty “teach” and students “learn” in higher education. By shifting engaged pedagogy and its philosophical base from the periphery to the center of educational practice, institutions move toward establishing larger cultures of engagement that can harness the full promise of engaged learning.

Linkages with mental health and well-being
Like the concept of engaged learning, “mental health” and “well-being” are complex constructs in need of definition. They are broadly described in the literature as encompassing individuals’ abilities to realize their potential, cope with stress, relate positively with others, make healthy decisions, and contribute to
community (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2005; World Health Organization 2005). In conceptualizing these constructs on the college campus, the Bringing Theory to Practice project has chosen to focus its efforts on two issues—substance abuse and depression—that not only significantly contribute to students’ mental health and well-being, but also are of “epidemic” proportions on campus (Wechsler and Wuehrich 2002; Kadison and DiGeronimo 2004).

Evidence suggests that despite the critical nature of these problems, colleges and universities have been largely unsuccessful in addressing them. This is perhaps because, though the causes of substance abuse and depression involve both personal and environmental factors, typical prevention efforts tend to be univariate (e.g., offering alcohol-free events, or disseminating data on the health consequences of behaviors). These efforts are conducted primarily by the campus counseling center, though sometimes with support from student affairs personnel; the academic enterprise, however, including the faculty and the curriculum, remains largely uninvolved. This limited approach is insufficient to the complexity of the problem, as Gonzalez explains:

> One growing realization in the prevention field, especially on the college campus, is that comprehensive, communitywide approaches are needed. . . . A long-term, systems approach that addresses the relationships among individual and social factors is necessary for effective prevention. (2002, 14)

Similarly, Kuh highlights the importance of an environmental perspective wherein colleges create “small, ‘human-scale’ environments [that] encourage responsible, health-enhancing behavior,” and emphasizes that where faculty and student contact is frequent and classes are small, “a college or university encourages its members to know each other, a precursor to caring for one another” (2002, 59).

This leads to the fundamental question asked by the Bringing Theory to Practice project: does engaged learning constitute one such community-based approach to prevention? In reviewing the literature, no instances were found in which engaged learning was identified as an explicit means of addressing depression or substance abuse on the college campus. However, the following preliminary evidence, as well as theoretical suggestion, was found for considering engaged learning as a promising approach.

Findings from involvement measures: Astin (1993) reports that elements of engaged learning (e.g., involvement in group projects and interaction with faculty) are correlated with self-report of better emotional health and reduced drinking behaviors. Sax, Bryant, and Gilmartin conclude that students’ engagement in academic experiences is “not unrelated” (2002, 20) to emotional well-being. Wechsler et al. (1995), Jessor et al. (1995), and Fenzel (2005) all describe a correlation between participation in pro-social activities like community service and lower rates of heavy drinking, though it is unclear whether students who are civically inclined are also less predisposed to heavy drinking behaviors. Because these studies are correlational in nature, more research is needed to determine the direction and degree of any causality.

Stress in academic environments: While moderate levels of environmental stress can lead to optimal performance, extreme levels of stress can inhibit learning and result in stress-induced emotional problems, including “fatigue, anxiety, fear, depression, or boredom” (Whitman, Spendlove, and Clark 1986, 10). Fife explains that college faculty largely “set the level of stress to which students are subjected” and often believe that “if a course does not stressfully challenge students completely, then it cannot be wholly worthwhile” (1986, xiii). If compounded across a student’s academic course load, this view can lead to extreme levels of stress and, in turn, students may not only become dis-engaged from their learning, but also experience negative effects in terms of their emotional health and well-being.

Engaged learning may provide one means of optimizing the level of stress in the learning environment: as Whitman, Spendlove, and Clark report, students who are “given the opportunity to participate actively in the learning process report less stress than those forced into a more passive or helpless mode” (1986, 20).
Such active engagement provides students with a higher degree of control over their learning, which in turn may moderate stress levels and potentially reduce mental health problems associated with excessive levels of academic stress.

Developmental challenge and support: Rivinus (1992) identifies a host of developmental challenges in college: rapid change in environment and roles; separation/individuation from family; identity crises; establishment of peer networks; and resolution of vocational choice. A developmental perspective holds that these challenges must be balanced with environmental support for optimal growth to occur (Sanford 1966), but Schulenberg et al. assert that the college environment—and society in general—does not provide adequate support and structure for students:

There is far less institutionally- and culturally-imposed structure on the roles, experiences and expectations of young people when they make the transition out of adolescence. . . . the lack of structure creates a developmental mismatch that adversely influences their health and well-being. (1998, 1)

In such a scenario, both depression and substance abuse can be seen as negative consequences of developmental “overchallenge” and lack of environmental counterbalance.

The solution from this perspective would be to restore equilibrium between challenges and environmental support. Schulenberg and Maggs, who claim the “balance between freedoms and responsibilities is crucial,” suggest “slowing down the pace of increased freedoms during the transition” through measures like curfews, as well as increasing students’ “social responsibilities through community work” (2001, 33). Similarly, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation recommends that to reduce substance abuse, campuses require students “to undertake a certain number of hours of volunteer work to reduce their free time and to give their educational experience additional meaning” (1997, 39). The responsibilities conferred on students through such pedagogies may help counter excessive levels of freedom, and therefore opportunity for substance abuse; moreover, engaged learning experiences can provide students with significant mentoring relationships (e.g., with faculty, community members) which can counteract depression arising from developmental issues like separation/individuation from family (Mann 1992).

Moral development and personal and social responsibility: There is some evidence that students’ level of moral development is related to substance abuse and other self-injurious behaviors. Berkowitz (2000), in reporting a correlation between adolescents’ substance use and assessment along Kohlberg’s stages of moral reasoning, claims that the “more mature one’s ability to make these moral decisions, the less likely one is to use such substances” (1984, 40).

Additionally, Berkowitz found that adolescents who view substance abuse as a moral issue—rather than an issue of personal choice—are less likely to engage in such abuse.

If substance abuse and self-harm are linked to students’ moral development, it follows that encouraging such development might reduce negative behaviors. For example, while Schrader reports that a majority of moral dilemmas reported by college students involve substance abuse issues, most students address these dilemmas by “doing nothing” or “by going along with the situation or with others in it” (1999, 48). Forms of engaged learning (e.g., service learning and community-based research) might require students to think more complexly about moral dilemmas and their own actions, thereby providing opportunities for students to craft identities as moral individuals responsible both to self and to larger communities.

Conclusions

It is unlikely that engaged learning will constitute a “silver bullet” for either substance abuse or depression, given the complex causes and risk factors for both. However, current prevention literature recommends a shift from targeted interventions toward community-level approaches in addressing students’ mental health concerns. There is enough preliminary evidence—as well as theoretical suggestion—in the literature to consider engaged learning as one such possible approach.
Clearly, further research is necessary to test this possibility. Such inquiry must be sufficiently complex in design to account for the multivariate nature of student identity, experience, and behavior, which can both affect study outcomes and constitute a potential source of self-selection bias. Research also must be time-sensitive to account for the normal maturational processes that occur during college and the limited duration of most engaged learning experiences. It must consider the broad impact of the college environment and social contexts on student experience as well. Thus, research that utilizes quantitative and qualitative measures, adequate control or comparison groups, and longitudinal design holds the most promise for exploring the full possibilities of engaged learning. These principles can also be incorporated into existing assessment efforts, whether at the programmatic or institutional level.

In every sense, colleges and universities are experiments in community: multiple constituencies gather around a set of common purposes, share the same physical and intellectual space, and experience together the consequences—both positive and negative—of each other’s actions. It makes sense therefore that the literature calls for a community-level approach to the most important goals and pressing concerns of higher education: engaging students in their learning and in society, and preventing substance abuse and depression, respectively. While many questions remain about the linkages between engaged learning, student mental health and well-being, and civic development, a community perspective is both a starting point for research exploring such questions and a promising means of addressing them in higher education practice.

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STOPPING BY THE CAMPUS CAFETERIA to buy coffee and a doughnut one late afternoon, I bumped into an untenured colleague from another department doing the same thing. After joking a bit (in some predictably gendered ways) about just how many baked goods were required to get through a semester of teaching, she added a quip about the impact of stress-related eating on her chili pepper ratings. Chili pepper ratings? I nervously professed my ignorance. She then patiently explained that the popular RateMyProfessor.com Web site allows students to rate faculty members not only according to standards of “clarity,” “helpfulness,” and something called “easiness,” but also in terms of “hotness,” denoted with a cheerful cartoon of a red chili pepper. Choking on my (second) doughnut, I sputtered something about how irrelevant such Web rankings were to collegial opinion. She corrected me. Many of her students reported checking the online evaluations before selecting courses, and those predeterminations affected not only enrollment numbers in her classes but also eventual student satisfaction. If personnel committees take student feedback seriously in deciding individual review and promotion cases (as we like to believe happens at our small teaching college), then the absurd little chili peppers actually might influence her long-term professional prospects—including her case for tenure. More immediately, she noted, the specter of the chili pepper alone shaped her judgment about whether to split that second doughnut with me.

My engagement with the Bringing Theory to Practice project did not grow out of that unsettling exchange in the cafeteria. Nonetheless, the conversation continues to shape my sense of the urgency and import of this innovative effort. My prior training in the history of science led me to reflect on my junior colleague’s self-disciplining response to the lurking threat of Internet rankings, and to appreciate anew how particular social and material circumstances act to condition our possibilities for knowledge. Understanding the relationship between the production and transmission of knowledge and broader social conditions, the Bringing Theory to Practice project strives to direct that connection in particular ways during this crucial moment of transformation.

Transformation in higher education

Of course, America’s colleges and universities have always been products of larger cultural and economic movements. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the passage of the Morrill Land Grant Act and the advent of large philanthropic giving radically altered the shape and scope of American higher education. As funding expanded, the organization of knowledge also changed: an array of new disciplines and electives replaced strict adherence to classical and religious curricula. Small ecclesiastical seminaries gave way to larger public land-grant colleges and private research universities, and the day-to-day practice of academic life shifted accordingly. Increasingly, the laboratory, gymnasium, and seminar room replaced the chapel as centers of campus activity.

If the late nineteenth century marked the first great transformation in the conditions of American higher education, all signs indicate
that we are now in the midst of another, equally profound shift. Campus operation costs continue to rise even as taxpayer support for higher education dwindles. As a result, both private and public institutions grow newly reliant on industrial funding, from commercial research contracts with patent and licensing protections to joint marketing ventures. The four-year college degree is now rare, as more and more students enroll part-time or halt their studies midway through due to work, illness, or dependent care. And, as in the nineteenth century, the locations and habits of intellectual activity also are shifting with the times.

Millions of students now pursue their courses online, logging on to institutions from Harvard Law School to Disney World’s “College of Knowledge.” Tethered by networks of satellites and underground cables, academic life now takes place not only in seminar rooms and faculty offices, but also at airports and beaches, field sites and private homes. Today’s increasingly wired students communicate with one another about the relative expertise, efficacy, and “hotness” of their faculty on pickaprof.com, whototake.net, grademypassword.com, and the more decorously titled myprofessorsucks.com. Meanwhile, the federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education seeks to bring unprecedented levels of governmental monitoring and surveillance to the business of higher education, through recommendations of novel standardized tests and other kinds of educational quality control.

Much ink has already been spilled trying to assess these and other recent changes. Some commentators stress the benefits of the last few decades of transformation, including the expansion of access to higher education; the creation of new fields of inquiry such as urban studies, environmental studies, and ethnic studies; and the growing influence of women students on college campuses. Other commentators, focusing on unsettling trends in grade inflation, corporate sponsorship, and the construction of on-campus malls, detect the demise of intellectual rigor and academic freedom, and perhaps the end of the “campus” itself. In publications such as *The University in Ruins* or *Excellence without a Soul*, critics decry the ways in which global economic competitiveness forces the marketization of even those things once thought to be of incalculable forms of value.

The existence of these competing concerns is by now well known. Nor by this point will it come as any surprise to suggest that students on American campuses appear to embody the tumult of their age: radically increased rates of depression, substance abuse, and self-injury point to evidence of disengagement and alienation not only from the ideals of scholasticism but from the joy of life more generally.

Less frequently considered, however, are the ways in which recent transformations in higher education also affect the lives of individual faculty members and the character of the professoriate as a whole. Are today’s faculty—increasingly temporary, part-time, and economically vulnerable—any less heavily medicated, subject to severe depression and self-injury, or disengaged from a sense of civic responsibility or larger communal purpose than today’s students are? Are they any less beholden to commitments outside the reach of conventional academic curricula: care for dependent family members, service to political and religious communities, part-time paid work? Recent faculty surveys conducted by the respected Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California–Los Angeles ask professors to assess the extent to which we “engage in regular exercise,” “eat a well-balanced diet,” or “experience joy” in our work. Twenty-first century professors, like our students, struggle to maintain what these surveys refer to as “a healthy balance” between “personal” and “professional” life.

**Addressing the faculty side of things**

The Brining Theory to Practice project is exceptional in its recognition that the rupture between students’ curricular and cocurricular lives is mirrored—if not encouraged—by the analogous ruptures experienced by today’s faculty members. The project begins with the recognition that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between students and professors: the fracturing of the “whole student”...
mimics the fracturing of the whole professor, and vice versa. In so doing, the project seeks to specify—rather than simply to declare—the concrete institutional and intellectual value of civic engagement, and to acknowledge that revamping educational institutions would result in some scholarly careers that look very different from existing models.

Addressing these fissures from the faculty side of things presents an enormous challenge. To begin, there is the simple matter of faculty overwork and exhaustion—particularly on non-affluent campuses. As Linda Kerber (2005, B6) noted in the Chronicle of Higher Education in the wake of former Harvard President Larry Summers’s infamous remarks about women in the sciences, the resulting onslaught of media coverage concentrated on the matter of “innate sex differences,” largely ignoring the more “primary assumption that
the 80-hour workweek is a nonnegotiable requirement for a successful research career in the sciences (along with the implication that it does not require an 80-hour week to be successful in fields where women have made strides, like history or philosophy or English).” Added to the difficulty of keeping up with work expectations is the much-discussed (and widely lamented) fact that current structures of university hiring, review, and compensation disproportionately reward research productivity (defined almost exclusively in terms of peer-reviewed publication) over any other form of contribution or effort.

But matters of institutional review are merely the tip of the iceberg. Pressures to accommodate the odd demands of the modern university extend far beyond conventional structures of hiring and compensation: consider my colleague amending her eating behavior in response to an anonymous student Web site. To urge untenured and temporary faculty merely to disregard or ignore such pressures denies the existence of powerful and unequal social relations. Faculty who by birth or choice do not fit dominant social norms of behavior and appearance will always be more adversely affected by such individualist and individualizing approaches.

In the context of increasing pressure to publish in highly competitive publishing environments and intensely cutthroat academic job markets, against a backdrop of enhanced surveillance and monitoring by students and state and federal governments, one can hardly fault individual faculty members for disconnecting from their larger college communities or for withdrawing from participation in campus life—to say nothing of failing to bridge that community and its larger publics.
The task, therefore, must be to join faculty members together in a common endeavor. In this sense, the Bringing Theory to Practice project’s goal for “faculty development” is twofold: to begin where faculty actually are, to acknowledge the complex realities facing contemporary faculty with the same kind of unflinching rigor and affection with which we are trying to comprehend today’s students, while creating a space for us to tackle the Big Picture—where we think liberal education is headed and why. Ultimately, real transformation would require mentoring for graduate students and postdocs that invites and encourages the integration of research, pedagogy, and civic engagement. It would require standards of hiring, collaboration, tenure, and promotion that reward deeper public engagement, without ignoring (or simply discrediting) received values of specialized, peer-reviewed research.

To these ends, we have been seeking ways to seize faculty according to their intellectual interests—that is, through the scholarly sub-specialties in which they were trained and the research commitments in which they are now engrossed. We then strive to move with them toward a deeper and broader examination of the fundamental contract between the professoriate and the public. For instance, in June 2005, a colleague at the University of Michigan, Jonathan Metzl, and I organized a small, interdisciplinary faculty research workshop on the increasing “medicalization” of issues once thought amenable to the effects of education. This workshop, spawned by the existing research interests of colleagues, opened the door not only to scholarly publication and influence (the papers appear in a recent issue of The Lancet), but also to further conversation on each of our respective campuses about the shifting relationship between biomedicine, individual well-being, and practices of collective engagement.

In other settings, too, the project has been attempting to create novel spaces in which to address the inescapable and yet underappreciated mirroring between the lives of students and faculty. This process entails encouraging faculty—including tenured, untenured, and the growing legions of non-ladder-rank instructors—to rethink boundaries between teaching and learning, between conventional disciplines, between faculty and students, between faculty and student services professionals, between the university and students’ families, and between the “inside” and the “outside” of their highly heterogeneous institutions. By acknowledging the often harsh, occasionally pleasurable contradictions and tensions of professional survival in the contemporary era, the project seeks to promote a collective, ongoing conversation about the core purposes of American higher education.

The recent Association of American Colleges and Universities conference on faculty work, held in November 2006, provides a case in point. There, time and space were devoted to the exploration of some fairly fundamental questions: What, if anything, characterizes the professional identities of today’s heterogeneous faculty? How have changes in their residential experiences (increased commuting times and distances, for example) affected their capacities for civic engagement? If the residential college is one of the historic advantages of the American higher education system, how might we learn whether increasing travel and commuting demands on faculty are chilling the residential climate? How might practices that link curricular with cocurricular experiences be embedded in faculty development at various levels: institutionally, disciplinarily, culturally? How might faculty be individually and collectively prepared to link these experiences—to work more effectively with student affairs officers, community members, coaches, employers, and families?

In providing and supporting spaces where such questions can be explored, the Bringing Theory to Practice project assumes that for students to flourish, faculty also must flourish. Students and faculty must join together in building institutions dedicated to an expansive vision of collective advancement. What role those cartoon chili peppers will play in that vision remains to be seen.

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REFERENCE

LIKE OTHERS, I bring multiple perspectives and, therefore, have multiple reasons for caring about the issues and challenges facing our students and our educational institutions. First and foremost, I am a parent of two recent college graduates, and have made it my business to communicate directly with them and their many friends now attending our colleges and universities. I do, as they say, enjoy and learn from being connected.

I have been a partner in the development of the Bringing Theory to Practice project since its inception. My involvement began with a question regarding what seemed to me to be the difference between what students were experiencing and what colleges and universities have as their priorities. This observation emerged following years of experience and service as a trustee on the boards of many fine educational institutions, from prep schools to universities.

In the summer of 2002, I posed the question of a perceived disconnection to Don Harward, president emeritus of Bates College, who had just completed his service and leadership at one of the most respected liberal arts and sciences colleges, and who had championed at Bates the cultivation of the full promise of liberal education. With Tad Roach, headmaster of the St. Andrews School in Delaware, we began a conversation that took more definitive shape following meetings with the leadership of the Carter Center, of which I am also a trustee, and with the Center for Alcohol and Substance Abuse, a research and policy group at Columbia University. As we carried the conversation forward, we formed a committed group of advisers and fellow participants—researchers and practitioners, policy leaders and institutional leaders, scholars and counselors, faculty and students—and began explorations with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), which became a partner in supporting our basic “hunch.”

The “hunch” with which our conversations began was as follows: specific educational experiences—especially those that asked of students greater and more intense involvements, experiences where they encounter their own privilege as learners and examine the application of ideas to the communities of which they are a part—could have identifiable and replicable effects on the mental health and behaviors of college students and on their civic development and involvement.

In the years that have followed, the project has developed strategies and support for the necessary research and for initiatives individual campuses have proposed to affect the multiple and troubling increases in forms of student disengagement. We have sought to understand the chasms between the academic and the other dimensions of student experience, and to reconsider what is at the center of our institutional agendas. Campuses have

SALLY E. PINGREE

Bringing Theory to Practice & Liberal Education

My Perspective

SALLY E. PINGREE, a trustee of the Engelhard Foundation, serves on both the advisory board for the Bringing Theory to Practice project and the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise.
their own perspectives, and we have had the pleasure of supporting many of them as they address common challenges with the uniqueness of their own cultures.

Learning from those campuses with promising initiatives; holding annual conferences for faculty with attention to what the project’s implementation could mean for their preparation, their expectations, and any reward structure that supports them; and developing research reports, workshops, student conferences, protocols for model initiatives, commissioned research, and the national demonstration sites have contributed to what is known and what credibility can be extended to those pursuing various means of involvement with the project.

AAC&U’s partnership with the project has emphasized liberal education’s commitment to understanding and strengthening the context in which students learn—including the complex relationships among the multiple aspects of a student’s development and the structures and mission of liberal arts and sciences institutions. The partnership has come to reflect the promise of AAC&U’s ongoing campaign, Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP), which seeks to advance liberal education for the twenty-first century.

I am most fortunate to be in a position to support educational initiatives that are so clearly aligned with my passions. Nothing has been more important to me than how higher education affects the academic success, as well as the emotional health and civic lives, of students—for my own children, for the many students at institutions where the Engelhard Foundation has been supportive, and now through the Bringing Theory to Practice project for an extended category of young people at hundreds of colleges and universities throughout the country.

The Bringing Theory to Practice project is not only about justifying contributive aspects of a possible strategy for addressing the increasing number of disengaged students, it is equally about the core purposes of our colleges. The project asks us, as educators, to reexamine what has become on many of our campuses the primary agenda—for that agenda appears to have less and less to do with students.

In similar ways, LEAP is not simply about presenting liberal education to wider audiences, or finding preferable language to describe it. I am involved because LEAP is about the effectiveness of liberal education, the need to understand its most useful nature and meaning, and then to encourage its practice and priority in colleges and universities of all sorts. We
need to encourage its centrality, especially by providing resources and leadership both from within and from external voices, to explore and to document liberal education’s inherent value, and to confirm what it can make possible for all students and for the future of our democracy.

**Focusing on students**
The materials developed by AAC&U for LEAP, the strategic planning that has been achieved with President Carol Geary Schneider’s leadership, and the appointment and functioning of a development and advancement initiative are each quite wonderful. I, however, am a firm believer in the admonition that we must be even more vigorous in communicating the importance and values of liberal education to those outside of the higher education community. My inclination would be to do so by focusing on students.

Our campuses have for purposes of admission and retention learned much. But they have shared little beyond their inner groups that would counter, or confirm, popular judgments about students, their experiences, and their expectations. Collective information, focus group data, observations and stories could be shared—as ubiquitous as “awareness pieces”—with the result of a better understanding of who students are, and which challenges they think real and which they think contrived. What do they bring with them as expectations? Are those expectations met or critiqued? We need to hear their views, their aspirations, their hopes, and their dreams. What is important to them needs to be heard and, perhaps, forcefully challenged. But the faculty and the institutional culture can only do its work of challenging if there is the receptive context of listening, respect for civility, and the pervasive encouragement of students to contribute by thought and action—stretching students to squawk, as well as to enjoy “dueling with ambiguity.”

Students and the wider public must understand how a liberal education offers them the best tools for their own emancipation and their own complex realization. Students, their parents, and the public at large are not so jaded as to conflate education with job training (important as that is), or to confuse the values of education with only economic benefits. Unfortunately, the predominant social communication mechanisms have stressed only the role of education in the preparation of “upwardly mobile” credentialing. In my experience, ask any parent what they truly want for their student and the answer is not training for a first job. Rather, they want happiness, well-being, multiple dimensions of success, and the wisdom to contribute to what is greater than themselves—the rough translation of the purpose of a liberal education.

LEAP counters the prevailing limiting perceptions. It champions the promise of our students, their candor, and their receptivity to thinking how liberal education encourages contrarianism, independent judgment, and the self-emancipation of learners and civically responsible citizens who are as comfortable with challenge and controversy as with compliance.

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the author’s name on the subject line.
College Learning for the New Global Century

A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise

The LEAP report was released by the National Leadership Council on January 10, 2007, and shared with the AAC&U community at a special plenary session at the 2007 annual meeting in New Orleans. The National Leadership Council is the public voice of the LEAP campaign, and includes members of the business, educational, civic, and philanthropic communities. Following is the executive summary of the LEAP report.

College Learning for the New Global Century is a report about the aims and outcomes of a twenty-first-century college education. It is also a report about the promises we need to make—and keep—to all students who aspire to a college education, especially to those for whom college is a route, perhaps the only possible route, to a better future.

With college education more important than ever before, both to individual opportunity and to American prosperity, policy attention has turned to a new set of priorities: the expansion of access, the reduction of costs, and accountability for student success.

These issues are important, but something equally important has been left off the table. Across all the discussion of access, affordability, and even accountability, there has been a near-total public and policy silence about what contemporary college graduates need to know and be able to do.

This report fills that void. It builds from the recognition, already widely shared, that in a demanding economic and international environment, Americans will need further learning beyond high school.

The council believes that the policy commitment to expanded college access must be anchored in an equally strong commitment to educational excellence. Student success in college cannot be documented—as it usually is—only in terms of enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment. These widely used metrics, while important, miss entirely the question of whether students who have placed their hopes for the future in higher education are actually achieving the kind of learning they need for life, work, and citizenship.

The public and policy inattention to the aims, scope, and level of student learning in college threatens to erode the potential value of college enrollment for many American students. It has already opened the door to the same kind of unequal educational pathways that became common in the twentieth-century high school, which set high expectations for some and significantly lower expectations—expressed in a narrower and less challenging curriculum—for others.

In the twenty-first century, the world itself is setting very high expectations for knowledge and skill. This report—based on extensive input from both educators and employers—responds to these new global challenges. It describes the learning contemporary students need from college, and what it will take to help them achieve it.

Preparing students for twenty-first-century realities

In recent years, the ground has shifted for Americans in virtually every important sphere of life—economic, global, cross-cultural, environmental, civic. The world is being dramatically reshaped by scientific and technological innovations, global interdependence, cross-cultural encounters, and changes in the balance of economic and political power.

Only a few years ago, Americans envisioned a future in which this nation would be the...
New Global Century
world’s only superpower. Today, it is clear that the United States—and individual Americans—will be challenged to engage in unprecedented ways with the global community, collaboratively and competitively.

These waves of dislocating change will only intensify. The world in which today’s students will make choices and compose lives is one of disruption rather than certainty, and of interdependence rather than insularity. This volatility also applies to careers. Studies show that Americans already change jobs ten times in the two decades after they turn eighteen, with such change even more frequent for younger workers.

Taking stock of these developments, educators and employers have begun to reach similar conclusions—an emerging consensus—about the kinds of learning Americans need from college. The recommendations in this report are informed by the views of employers, by new standards in a number of the professions, and by a multiyear dialogue with hundreds of colleges, community colleges, and universities about the aims and best practices for a twenty-first-century education.

Across all these centers of dialogue, a new vision for learning is coming into view. The goal of this report is to move from off-camera analysis to public priorities and action.

What matters in college?

American college students already know that they want a degree. The challenge is to help students become highly intentional about the forms of learning and accomplishment that the degree should represent.

The LEAP National Leadership Council calls on American society to give new priority to a set of educational outcomes that all students need from higher learning, outcomes that are closely calibrated with the challenges of a complex and volatile world.

Keyed to work, life, and citizenship, the essential learning outcomes recommended in this report (see sidebar) are important for all students and should be fostered and developed

### The Essential Learning Outcomes

Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

**Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**
- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

**Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring**

**Intellectual and Practical Skills, including**
- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

**Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance**

**Personal and Social Responsibility, including**
- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

**Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges**

**Integrative Learning, including**
- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

**Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems**

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*The articles in this series are collected online at [www.aacu.org/advocacy/LEAP_Series_Articles.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/LEAP_Series_Articles.cfm).*

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Liberal education and American capability

The essential learning outcomes are important for a globally engaged democracy, for a dynamic, innovation-fueled economy, and for the development of individual capability. A course of study that helps students develop these capacities is best described as a liberal—and liberating—education.

Reflecting the traditions of American higher education since the founding, the term “liberal education” headlines the kinds of learning needed for a free society and for the full development of human talent. Liberal education has always been this nation’s signature educational tradition, and this report builds on its core values: expanding horizons, building understanding of the wider world, honing analytical and communication skills, and fostering responsibilities beyond self.

However, in a deliberate break with the academic categories developed in the twentieth century, the LEAP National Leadership Council disputes the idea that liberal education is achieved only through studies in arts and sciences disciplines. It also challenges the conventional view that liberal education is, by definition, “nonvocational.”

The council defines liberal education for the twenty-first century as a comprehensive set of aims and outcomes that are essential for all students because they are important to all fields of endeavor. Today, in an economy that is dependent on innovation and global savvy, these outcomes have become the keys to economic vitality and individual opportunity. They are the foundations for American success in all fields—from technology and the sciences to communications and the creative arts.

The LEAP National Leadership Council recommends, therefore, that the essential aims and outcomes be emphasized across every field of college study, whether the field is conventionally considered one of the arts and sciences disciplines or whether it is one of the professional and technical fields (business, engineering, education, health, the performing arts, etc.) in which the majority of college students currently major. General education plays a role, but it is not possible to squeeze all these important aims into the general education program alone. The majors must address them as well.

In the last century, higher education divided educational programs into two opposed categories—an elite curriculum emphasizing liberal arts education “for its own sake” and a more applied set of programs emphasizing preparation for work. Today, the practices are changing but the old Ivory Tower view of liberal education lingers. It is time to retire it.

This outmoded view is seriously out of touch with innovations on campus, which increasingly foster real-world experience and applications in all disciplines. But it is especially injurious to first-generation students who, the evidence shows, are the most likely to enroll in narrower programs that provide job training but do not emphasize the broader outcomes of a twenty-first-century education. To serve American society well, colleges, universities, and community colleges must take active steps to make liberal education inclusive.

The LEAP National Leadership Council calls, therefore, for vigorous new efforts to help students discover the connections between the essential learning outcomes and the lives they hope to live. The goal—starting in school...
and continuing through college—should be to provide the most empowering forms of learning for all college students, not just some of them.

**A new framework for excellence**

The LEAP National Leadership Council recommends, in sum, an education that intentionally fosters, across multiple fields of study, wide-ranging knowledge of science, cultures, and society; high-level intellectual and practical skills; an active commitment to personal and social responsibility; and the demonstrated ability to apply learning to complex problems and challenges.

The council further calls on educators to help students become “intentional learners” who focus, across ascending levels of study and diverse academic programs, on achieving the essential learning outcomes. But to help students do this, educational communities will also have to become far more intentional themselves—both about the kinds of learning students need, and about effective educational practices that help students learn to integrate and apply their learning.

In a society as diverse as the United States, there can be no “one-size-fits-all” design for learning that serves all students and all areas of study. The diversity that characterizes American higher education remains a source of vitality and strength.

Yet all educational institutions and all fields of study also share in a common obligation to prepare their graduates as fully as possible for the real-world demands of work, citizenship, and life in a complex and fast-changing society. In this context, there is great value in a broadly defined educational framework that provides both a shared sense of the aims of education and strong emphasis on effective practices that help students achieve these aims.

To highlight these shared responsibilities, the council urges a new compact, between educators and American society, to adopt and achieve new Principles of Excellence (see sidebar).

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**The Principles of Excellence**

**Principle One**

**Aim High—and Make Excellence Inclusive**

Make the Essential Learning Outcomes a Framework for the Entire Educational Experience, Connecting School, College, Work, and Life.

**Principle Two**

**Give Students a Compass**

Focus Each Student’s Plan of Study on Achieving the Essential Learning Outcomes—and Assess Progress.

**Principle Three**

**Teach the Arts of Inquiry and Innovation**

Immerse All Students in Analysis, Discovery, Problem Solving, and Communication, Beginning in School and Advancing in College.

**Principle Four**

**Engage the Big Questions**

Teach through the Curriculum to Far-Reaching Issues—Contemporary and Enduring—in Science and Society, Cultures and Values, Global Interdependence, the Changing Economy, and Human Dignity and Freedom.

**Principle Five**

**Connect Knowledge with Choices and Action**

Prepare Students for Citizenship and Work through Engaged and Guided Learning on “Real-World” Problems.

**Principle Six**

**Foster Civic, Intercultural, and Ethical Learning**

Emphasize Personal and Social Responsibility, in Every Field of Study.

**Principle Seven**

**Assess Students’ Ability to Apply Learning to Complex Problems**

Use Assessment to Deepen Learning and to Establish a Culture of Shared Purpose and Continuous Improvement.
Informed by a generation of innovation and by scholarly research on effective practices in teaching, learning, and curriculum, the Principles of Excellence offer both challenging standards and flexible guidance for an era of educational reform and renewal.

The principles can be applied by any college, community college, or university. They are intended to influence practice across the disciplines as well as in general education programs. But the principles and the recommendations that accompany them also provide a framework for shared efforts, between school and college, to develop more purposeful pathways for student learning over time. Collectively, they shift the focus—at all levels of education—from course categories and titles to the quality and level of work students are actually expected to accomplish.

Taken together, the Principles of Excellence underscore the need to teach students how to integrate and apply their learning—across multiple levels of schooling and across disparate fields of study. The Principles of Excellence call for a far-reaching shift in the focus of schooling from accumulating course credits to building real-world capabilities.

A time for leadership and action
The Principles of Excellence build from an era of innovation that is already well under way. As higher education has reached out to serve an ever wider and more diverse set of students, there has been widespread experimentation to develop more effective educational practices and to determine “what works” with today’s college students.

Some of these innovations are so well established that research is already emerging about their effectiveness. The report provides a guide to tested and effective educational practices.

To date, however, these active and engaged forms of learning have served only a fraction of students. New research suggests that the benefits are especially significant for students who start farther behind. But often, these students are not the ones actually participating in the high-impact practice.

With campus experimentation already well advanced—on every one of the Principles of Excellence—it is time to move from “pilot efforts” to more comprehensive commitments. The United States comprehensively transformed its designs for learning, at all levels, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Now, as we enter the new global century, Americans need to mobilize again to advance a contemporary set of goals, guiding principles, and practices that will prepare all college students—not just the fortunate few—for twenty-first-century realities.

What it will take

■ **Make the Principles of Excellence a priority on campus**
Colleges, community colleges, and universities stand at the center. Many have already implemented pilot programs that address the vision for learning outlined in this report. The goal now should be to move from partial efforts to a comprehensive focus on students’ cumulative accomplishment over time, and across different parts of their educational experience.

The LEAP report describes steps that each institution can take to scale up its efforts and focus campus-wide attention both on aims of education and on intentional practice to help students achieve the intended learning (see p. 38).

■ **Form coalitions, across sectors, for all students’ long-term interests**
While the value of strong educational leadership on campus cannot be overstated, raising the quality of student learning across the board will require concerted and collective action at all levels of education.

The barriers to higher achievement are systemic, and no institution can overcome them on its own. Leaders at all levels will need to work together to build public and student understanding about what matters in college and to
establish higher operative standards across the board for college readiness and college achievement.

■ **Build principled and determined leadership**

While everyone has a role to play, three forms of enabling leadership will be absolutely essential to champion and advance the work of raising student achievement across the board.

1. **High-profile advocacy from presidents, trustees, school leaders, and employers.** These leaders, more than any others, are in a position to build public understanding of what matters in a twenty-first-century education. They should vigorously champion and support the essential learning outcomes with the public and in their outreach to students and families. And, they should make the essential learning outcomes a driving priority for their institutions and communities.

2. **Curricular leadership from knowledgeable scholars and teachers.** While recognized leaders can make higher achievement a priority, faculty and teachers who work directly with students are the only ones who can make it actually happen. At all levels—nationally, regionally, and locally—they will need to take the lead in developing guidelines, curricula, and assignments that connect rich content with students’ progressive mastery of essential skills and capabilities. Equally important, those responsible for educating future teachers and future faculty must work to ensure that they are well prepared to help students achieve the intended learning.

3. **Policy leadership at multiple levels to support and reward a new framework for educational excellence.** Leaders in state systems and schools, in accreditation agencies, in P–16 initiatives, and in educational associations need to act together to set priorities and establish policies that focus on the essential learning outcomes. As they adopt new standards for assessment and accountability, they need to ensure that these standards are designed to foster cumulative accomplishment and
integrative learning over time. And, they need to create an environment that both supports and rewards faculty, teacher, and staff investments in more powerful forms of learning.

■ **Put employers in direct dialogue with students**
Students are flocking to college in order to expand their career opportunities. They need to hear now from their future employers—at career fairs, on campus Web sites, and even through podcasts on their iPods—that narrow learning will limit rather than expand their options. When both senior executives and campus recruiters underscore the value of the essential learning outcomes, students will have strong incentives to work steadily toward their achievement.

■ **Reclaim the connections between liberal education and democratic freedom**
The essential learning outcomes and the Principles of Excellence are important to the economy, certainly. But they are also important to American democracy.

As Americans mobilize determined leadership for educational reform, we need to put the future of democracy at the center of our efforts. An educational program that is indifferent to democratic aspirations, principles, and values will ultimately deplete them. But a democracy united around a shared commitment to educate students for active citizenship will be this nation’s best investment in a shared future.

**Liberal Education and America’s Promise**
With this report, the LEAP National Leadership Council urges a comprehensive commitment, not just to prepare all students for college, but to provide the most powerful forms of learning for all who enroll in college.

Working together, with determination, creativity, and a larger sense of purpose, Americans can fulfill the promise of a liberating college education—for every student and for America’s future.
During the early 1990s, as the culture wars raged, many on the right leveled the charge of “political correctness” against those of us who were intent upon revealing the biases and distortions of the traditional curriculum. Largely as a result of work in women’s studies and, as it was then called, black studies, many educators had come to understand that knowledge is positional, that what we say about the object of knowledge reflects the position of the knower as well as the object itself.

Prompted by work across the disciplines that detected gender, race, and class biases in much traditional scholarship (an enterprise subsequently extended and deepened by work in ethnic and multicultural studies, working-class studies, and LGBT studies), many came to question prevailing notions of objectivity and the belief that it was possible to teach and write from a neutral point of view.

In September 1990, nationally syndicated columnist George Will wrote a column denouncing my diversity text, then titled *Racism and Sexism in a Changing America*, which had been adopted by the English department at the University of Texas, Austin, for use in its required writing course. Will warned of a dangerous trend at U.S. colleges and universities. His column was followed by a coordinated right-wing attack on “multiculturalism” in remarkably similar letters and articles appearing in papers across the nation. In December of that year, the cover of *Newsweek* shouted “Watch What You Say: Thought Police,” and articles and editorials in a host of publications from the *Wall Street Journal* to the *Atlantic Monthly* and *New York Magazine* poured gasoline on the flames. In the months that followed, a small but vocal and well-positioned group of public intellectuals and academics, including Nathan Glazer, Diane Ravitch, Lynne Cheney, Gertrude Himmelfarb, and Arthur Schlesinger, warned that multiculturalism was likely to destroy American higher education and, perhaps, America itself.

But things have changed a lot since those days. As the title of Glazer’s (1998) recent book proclaimed, “we are all multiculturalists now.” What happened? How did the inclusive curriculum, a curriculum that places issues of diversity at its core across the disciplines, weather the attacks of the 1990s to become a model for twenty-first-century higher education? How has the idea of what constitutes an inclusive curriculum and education evolved over the past several decades, and how adequately have we integrated issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality into our curriculum, pedagogy, and campus climate?

**Multiculturalism**

My own sense is that multiculturalism was an idea whose time had come. Certainly the changing demographics of the U.S. population, which had always been multicultural but was becoming even more so, seemed to make a compelling case for a more inclusive curriculum. Perhaps more importantly, U.S. corporations and multinationals needed workers, managers, and consumers who were prepared to function in the new globalized economy. U.S. colleges and universities were simply not educating students for this new world. The narrowly white, male, Eurocentric, privileged...
Half-Full?
perspective that so many traditional scholars had come to mistake for “reality” was out of sync with the changes that globalization was bringing to every aspect of life. Business required an inclusive, multicultural curriculum that would prepare students to live and work in a multicultural, global society. But exactly what kind of multiculturalism would fit those needs?

The movement toward a multicultural curriculum began, as did women’s studies, as a radical challenge to the ways in which a particular hierarchy of power and privilege was simultaneously perpetuated and rationalized by traditional curricula and scholarship across the disciplines. But corporations were interested in “celebrating diversity,” not challenging hierarchy or dismantling privilege. They wanted graduates who could manage a McDonald’s in Beijing and feel comfortable as part of a highly diverse workforce, be it in Detroit, Delhi, or Dar es Salaam. They were much less interested in graduates who wanted to address the unequal and inequitable distribution of natural resources around the world, replace unbridled consumerism with a concern for social justice, and create human and humane working and living conditions. So in the end, the left in this country won the culture wars, but the needs of the corporations have played a pivotal role in defining what that victory looks like in practice.

It is indisputable that U.S. higher education has changed enormously over the past thirty or forty years and that the new, often intellectually stunning, feminist and multicultural scholarship and pedagogy of this period has found its way into the curriculum. On the other hand, there are equally enormous differences, within and among schools, in how extensive and how deep this transformation has been. What I value most in both feminist and
multicultural scholarship is the profound epistemological questions they raise about how knowledge is constructed and their ability to both model and teach critical thinking.

But multiculturalism has come to mean many different things. When I am feeling most pessimistic, I am inclined to agree with Zillah Eisenstein (1996, 64), who has observed that “multiculturalism has become a lot like democracy, everyone is for it, but it has no meaning.” Recently, I served as outside evaluator for an institution seeking to assess how well its diversity initiative was succeeding and was amazed when the chair of the business department cited as evidence of its success the fact that his division had held its spring meeting at a local Indian restaurant. Equally disturbing is the reductionist version of feminism embraced by some in women’s studies who seem to have forgotten the real meaning of a fundamental claim on which the field was grounded—that “the personal is political”—and who, in the words of Katha Pollitt (2004), have “learned to describe everything they do, no matter how apparently conformist, submissive, self-destructive or humiliating, as a personal choice that cannot be criticized because personal choice is what feminism is all about” and in this way defend lifestyle choices that seem to me wholly incompatible with feminism.

It is of course no accident or surprise that women’s studies departments at many institutions have lost sight of the politics of choice or that, for many, “gastronomic pluralism” (to again quote Eisenstein) is the most appealing and least threatening version of multiculturalism. Faculty who have not thought very deeply about multiculturalism are quick to embrace the elementary school version, which urges us to celebrate American pluralism by sharing our traditions and cultures. It’s true that tolerance has long been an American virtue, but as Robert Paul Wolff (1965) pointed out in an essay many years ago, the problem with the ideal of tolerance is that it is grounded in the assumption that we need to learn to tolerate what we can not eliminate. This is a far cry from valuing difference and a far cry from the more radical project of reexamining relations of dominance and subordination and interrogating the politics of the curriculum and whose interest they serve.

On many campuses in the United States, diversity continues to be primarily a campus climate issue rather than an academic imperative. It is about ethnic food festivals and fashion shows, tacos and egg rolls, reggae and rap. Often focused on “sensitizing” students to “difference,” its advocates rarely recognize that this way of framing the task continues to place white students (and faculty) at the center, striving to make them comfortable with difference, instead of looking at ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, and class difference operate on the campus, in the curriculum, and around the world to privilege some and disadvantage others.
Perpetuating privilege

Certainly, sharing cultures is not a bad thing and teaching tolerance as an alternative to having people attack and kill each other is a good thing. But in the end, the problems of our urban neighborhoods will not be solved by having a piñata party, and the conflict in the Middle East will not end simply by inviting Palestinians to a model Seder and having Israeli Jews celebrate the end of Ramadan in Beirut. These problems have a lengthy and tortured history, and they will not be understood—let alone solved—unless we understand the ways in which privilege has been institutionalized and justified through colonialism, imperialism, racism, sexism, capitalism, and patriarchy.

Yes, it’s good for people to get to know each other and find out that we are similar in many ways. However, the “color-blind” approach to difference so popular among politicians, public figures, and many educators is considerably premature. The first step toward leveling the playing field, and ultimately abolishing the kinds of lethal differences that separate us (and pit us against each other), is to acknowledge them, not to pretend they don’t exist. A naive and simplistic culture sharing, one that occurs within the context of the existing inequality and hierarchy among groups and the continuing privileging of whiteness, will produce results that are less than we hope for and that come closer to what we should fear.

In this regard, I am particularly concerned about the ways in which both K–12 and higher education are reinforcing and exacerbating class and race differences in this country at a time when the gap between rich and poor is continuing to grow with determination and at an alarming rate. Cuts in federal and state support for public schools and higher education are occurring, perhaps not coincidentally, at a time when our public schools are more diverse than ever before, creating a situation that Jonathan Kozol (2006) recently has called “the shame of the nation.” Kozol’s thesis is that education in the United States continues to be separate and unequal to such an extent that it both constitutes and perpetuates a system of apartheid. To put it another way, not every child who receives a high school degree gets a high school education. And while there is something to celebrate in the reality that large numbers of students are receiving college degrees today who never dreamed of doing so a few decades ago, the sad truth is that not every student who receives a college degree receives a college education. The gap between elite, often private, schools and mass, often public, institutions is growing. The curriculum, the caliber and preparation of teachers and faculty, the physical plant, and the enrichment opportunities vary enormously—one might say, disgracefully—from school to school, and often “improvements” in the educational opportunities offered to working-class students are cosmetic at best.

In my state, New Jersey, many of the state colleges recently have turned themselves into universities because of the marketing benefits that accrue to them when they assume that status. In many cases, the name changes have not been accompanied by any substantive changes in academic programs. Instead, these name changes were prompted by the realization that New Jersey was losing students to neighboring Pennsylvania, where many state colleges had already renamed themselves as universities. A similar trend can be seen as former secretarial schools and technical institutes such as Berkeley, Gibbs, and Drexel become “colleges” overnight. They are being joined by other for-profit
institutions, such as the University of Phoenix, that offer online degrees and announce proudly that they are providing their students with “no-frills” education.

Increasingly, the line between “education” and “training” is becoming nonexistent. While a small percentage of college students in this country continue to receive a liberal arts education that emphasizes critical thinking, increasingly large numbers of students receive something much closer to training. They are credentialed rather than educated. While training students to prepare them to move directly into jobs in this economy is not a bad thing in itself, many of these students are led to believe that they are receiving a college education. To me this smacks of pacification passing as empowerment. And which students get what? What is the color, the sex, and the class background of the students who are trained versus those who are educated? And whose interests are served by the current arrangement?

Education as empowerment
Many of those of us who spend our lives teaching, at whatever level, or who provide other forms of support and service in our schools, do so because we see education as the route to realizing the American dream. And surely this has been true for some and at some times in our history. But, as Paul Krugman recently warned us in his New York Times column (2002), this “key doorway to upward mobility, a good education system available to all, has been closing.” And as history teaches us, education can perform other functions as well. It has often served as a mechanism for reproducing the existing race, class, and gender hierarchy and its attendant division of wealth and power. For those of us who are heartened by the increasing diversity of our schools some fifty-plus years after Brown v. Board of Education, the words of Asa Hilliard (2004) add a chilling note: “Brown was mainly about Black and white. Now a rainbow of other ethnic groups has arrived to share in the savage inequalities that persist.”

It is in the context of this reality that adopting the version of multiculturalism that stops at celebrating pluralism does a disservice to both our students and our ideals. At its worst, it offers all of us an idealized and false vision of a pluralist world that renders racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, and class privilege invisible. At its best, multiculturalism celebrates the idea of difference while teaching us how to use the categories of hierarchy, power, and privilege to examine the past and the present. We need to return to a version of multiculturalism that combines celebration with attention to issues of dominance and subordination, hierarchy, power, and privilege. In the same way, women’s studies must once again turn its attention to the ways in which patriarchy along with class and race provide the context in which so-called “personal choices” are made and then go on to explore the broad implications and consequences of what we choose. By reclaiming the critical thinking that was once central to both fields, we will come closer to achieving the goal I believe most of us share, the goal of making education a source of empowerment rather than pacification, in the service of both economic and political democracy rather than privilege.

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

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Diversity
& the AAC&U Statement on Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility

An Alignment of Strategic Objectives

No longer just a technical legal justification for affirmative action programs, diversity has evolved into a broader concept that embraces the Jeffersonian principles of equal justice under the law and the dignity of all people. These principles were built into the foundational documents of the United States—the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution. In short, as the diversity statements of colleges and universities demonstrate, diversity now refers to the vitality and intellectual excellence of the collective student and faculty experience. Hamline University’s statement is typical:

Hamline’s five schools have more than 4,500 students, and each one of these students is different. They’re different in ways you can see and in ways that you cannot. Each comes here with a unique set of experiences and has their own individual experience at Hamline. This diversity is not merely a characteristic of Hamline, but an integral part of its identity and values. It’s who we are, what we do, and how we see the world. Hamline isn’t a place where you “fit in,” conforming to the Hamline mold. Rather, Hamline “fits in” you, welcoming your unique contributions and valuing who you are.

The new focus on the collective experience of students and faculty provides a critical linkage to an educational institution’s strategic planning initiatives.

The same objectives consistently found in college and university statements on diversity are embraced by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). In its Statement on Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility, the AAC&U Board of Directors urges that “there must be curricular space, capable guides and models, and a supportive institutional culture to encourage students to learn to develop their own critical judgments” (AAC&U 2006, 6). Shifting demographics make it imperative that colleges and universities consider positioning their institutional cultures to provide the opportunity for all students to learn to develop their own critical judgments. As institutions examine their strategic goals and objectives, the clear alignment of the evolving definition of diversity and the AAC&U Statement on Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility is crucial because it creates the opportunity to think about diversity in the context of the academy’s strategic direction.

A strategic planning effort can be litmus tested against whether the institution’s strategic initiatives address effectively engaging students, faculty, and staff from all types of backgrounds. However, it will take skilled facilitators to help these groups openly acknowledge, discuss, explore, and document personal and institutional biases. For some time now, experts in organizational development have been tackling the engagement challenge in some of the
best-run companies in the world. It may be time for seasoned and effective organizational development specialists to help the academy think through the engagement challenge.

In a recent study of small-business leaders, Christopher Collins, associate professor of human resources at Cornell University, surveyed employers with up to six hundred employees (Crawford 2006). He found that three specific human resources strategies are especially effective in helping small businesses achieve double-digit increases in sales and profits:

- hiring based on fit with the organization, not just the candidate’s skills
- creating a family-like environment
- trusting employees to manage themselves

While they are not all that surprising, these findings may shed some light on how colleges and universities can effectively engage diverse students, faculty, and staff.

**Unconscious biases**

In his book *Immigration: A Study in American Values* (1964), Edmund Traverso makes the point that dominant cultures unconsciously ascribe negative attributes to minority cultures and positive attributes to the dominant culture. It may surprise many African and Latino Americans to learn that Jewish parents once battled the New York City school system over the perceived bias of its teachers or that the media used to commonly portray Irish and Jewish women as prostitutes and their men as comic figures. Colleges and universities are currently grappling with similar unconscious biases as they attempt to bring credibility to their diversity initiatives.

The notion that some biases are unconscious is further illustrated by Malcolm Gladwell’s discussion of word-association tests in *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking* (2005). Even when the test takers tried consciously to avoid biased word associations, Gladwell reports, both African Americans and white Americans unconsciously associate the “bad” with African Americans and the “good” with white Americans. Gladwell also describes research that reveals the unconscious

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**Diversity: The Legal Framework**

Diversity is now the umbrella under which college and university admission and hiring practices are justified. Although they continue to be controversial, college and university affirmative admission and hiring policies can be crafted to pass legal scrutiny. The relevant Supreme Court cases were decided on very close votes, however, and could be revisited by a more conservative Supreme Court.

**1960s: Affirmative Action**

Affirmative action programs are “race-conscious” strategies to promote minority opportunity in jobs, education, and governmental contracting. The concept of affirmative action originated in the early 1960s, when the Supreme Court outlawed racial segregation in the public schools. Judicial rulings from this period held that, under the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution, local school boards had an “affirmative duty” to desegregate school systems and to eliminate the last vestiges of state-enforced segregation.

**1964: The Civil Rights Act**

Following the lead of the Supreme Court, Congress and the executive branch approved a series of laws and regulations promoting race-based strategies to expand job, education, and business opportunities for minorities. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, for example, is a comprehensive code of equal employment opportunity regulations. Title VI of the act has been interpreted by the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Education as requiring schools and colleges to take affirmative action to overcome the effects of past discrimination and to encourage voluntary affirmative action to attain a diverse student
bias of new car salesmen. Even after controlling for education, dress, employment, and income, white males were given better prices than African American males. Traverso and Gladwell make the same point: these biases are cultural manifestations; they are not consciously intended.

It would serve a strategic planning effort well to consider questions like the following: When a young female student arrives in a physics classroom, is her ability to achieve excellence limited by an unconscious bias of the physics professor? How welcoming is the African American student union to a white male who is seriously interested in learning about the concerns of African Americans on campus? If an Asian male shows up to compete on the basketball team, what is the likelihood that the coach will be biased against his ability to be a serious competitor? What about an East Indian male who wants to study theater in the drama department rather than computer programming? How comfortable is an African American male student walking around campus between classes? What has been the turnover of African American professors? What is the reaction of staff and students to a group of young Latino students walking together?

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau show substantial increases in Asian and East Indian populations across the country. In addition, Liberian, Somali, and Hmong populations have increased dramatically, and African American and Hispanic populations continue to grow. Increasingly, over the coming decades, these diverse populations will supply the pipeline of students for the nation's colleges and universities. An institution can gain a strong competitive advantage by creating a campus environment where the students from these diverse populations believe and feel that they fit in, where they are welcomed like family, and where there are no biases against their ability to achieve academic excellence. Or, in the words of the AAC&U Statement on Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility, only when the academy has the curricular space, capable guides and models, and

body. Another Title VI regulation permits a college or university to take racial or national origin into account when awarding financial aid if the aid is necessary to overcome the effects of past institutional discrimination.

1978: Regents of the University of California v. Bakke

The “diversity rationale” originated in a 1978 U.S. Supreme Court case involving Allan Bakke and the University of California–Davis Medical School. Bakke, a white applicant, had twice been rejected by the medical school, even though he had a higher grade point average than a number of the minority candidates who were admitted. He successfully challenged the affirmative action program at the university, arguing that it was an illegal form of reverse discrimination. The Supreme Court ruled that, by maintaining a 16 percent minority quota, the medical school had discriminated against Allan Bakke. However, the Supreme Court also held that race could be one of the factors considered in choosing a diverse student body in university admissions decisions. Following the decision, colleges and universities across the United States began to re-cast their affirmative action admission programs to embrace the concept of diversity.

2003: Grutter v. Bollinger

The use of the diversity rationale to support affirmative action in college admission programs was upheld in a 2003 Supreme Court decision involving the University of Michigan Law School. Barbara Grutter, an applicant who was denied admission, sued the law school on the grounds that its consideration of race and ethnicity in admissions decisions violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Supreme Court held that the law school had a compelling interest in the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body and, therefore, that the consideration of race in admissions in order to assemble a critical mass of underrepresented minority students was justified.
a supportive institutional culture to encourage students [from diverse backgrounds] to develop their own critical judgments” will it have fulfilled its diversity and academic mission objectives.

**Expectations**

I spent three years as a human resources executive for a Minnesota-based Fortune 500 company. As a part of its annual planning process, each strategic business unit would go offsite to prepare its strategic plan. At the same time, each of the support functions would take time to prepare their strategic plan. The business unit plans and objectives would then be translated into hard numbers and fed into the financial reporting systems. The human resources initiatives, by example, would be documented on paper and filed in three-ring binders. The business unit managers would read their financial reports and respond as needed to the key financial indicators that were aligned with their strategic goals. The human resources initiatives were for the most part ignored or not resourced. On occasion, the tenacity of a human resources manager would drive deliverables into a business unit work plan. But this was driven more by relationship than by business process.

It became apparent to me that human resources initiatives must be surfaced by each
business unit as a part of its planning process, and they must be documented and re-sourced in their business plans. The financial systems, I realized, required a tweak to include human resources head count, training, and development budget data as line items for tracking by a business unit manager.

Diversity initiatives are no different. In the absence of a credible business context, diversity initiatives are viewed as just another program that will come with great fanfare and die with little notice. Diversity initiatives will fail or lose support if they are isolated activities, if they are not developed as integral components of a school’s or department’s business planning effort. Furthermore, as experienced managers and leaders know, what gets measured gets managed. Clearly defined metrics for the outcome expectations of a school’s diversity strategies should be made a part of the reporting system. For example, what percentage of graduating women should indicate a willingness to make a contribution to the university’s annual fund? What are the retention rate goals for first-year Hmong students? What is the percentage target for the number of graduating African American students who will strongly encourage their children to attend their alma mater? Integrating carefully considered diversity metrics into the institution’s financial reporting system will enable diversity strategies to become an integral part of the university management system.

The academy must hold itself accountable for deploying strategies that are specifically crafted to engage its diverse student body, faculty, and staff. The AAC&U Statement on Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility aligns well with the outcomes sought by the best diversity initiatives, and it provides the added impetus to fully integrate diversity and strategic planning activity.

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Simply stated, I was quite comfortably set in my academic ways. Having taught at the same private college for thirty-four years, I had—over the decades—established a very agreeable routine. I taught only courses I chose to teach. I taught them how I wanted and I taught mostly upperclassmen. Everyone at the college seemed to hold me in high regard as an exemplary pedagogue. I had it made. I had tenure. My student evaluations were more than enviable. I was pretty much doing my thing and doing it my way. As I saw the situation, the last thing I needed was a bevy of bewildered freshmen to mess up this most appealing situation.

With a measure of arrogance, I prided myself on being both popular with students and academically demanding. Although my classes closed out quickly, my classroom style was regarded by many students as “intimidating.” This reputation kept most freshmen at a distance. Over the years I had also designed—and now taught on a regular basis—a number of upper-level honors courses. Although freshmen would, from time to time, enter these classes, their numbers were few, particularly in the first semester of each year. When freshmen did take my classes, I treated them exactly as I would treat the upperclassmen. I demonstrated virtually no concern with their particular issues as wide-eyed (or bleary-eyed) novitiates. Although I was certainly conscientious in addressing their academic needs, I could by no means be considered “nurturing.” Simply stated, “freshmen” did not really exist for me as a unique and separate link in the great chain of being.

The freshman program
My college’s first-year program, an ambitious and carefully designed innovation that required faculty to think very differently about the pedagogical experience, had been in place for a number of years. It was, in fact, the foundation of the overall “Wagner Plan for the Practical Liberal Arts,” which had attracted a great deal of national recognition and was serving as a model for other institutions. The new curriculum was anchored in required first-semester learning communities that consisted of three interrelated courses taught by two professors. One of the three courses, the reflective tutorial, split the approximately twenty-six students in the learning community into two groups, with each of the two professors then crafting that tutorial according to specific pedagogical guidelines.

Although I had been encouraged for years by the administration to participate in the program, I consistently declined the invitation. I was quite set in my ways, quite comfortable, and quite convinced that I was doing a good job. I didn’t have to advise students. Why would I want to start now? I had never really taught writing in any consistent way. Why would I want to start now? I had never concerned myself with easing a first-semester freshman into the college experience. Why would I want to start now? I had never worried

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the Freshman Program
about whether freshmen were “bonding” with each other and with the school. Did I really want to think about that? From my point of view, I was teaching and I was doing that rather well. Please, no new tricks—or pedagogical challenges—for this old dog! But, alas, the best laid plans of mice and men—and senior dogs—do often go awry. As things turned out, an interwoven set of events was about to change my viewpoint rather dramatically.

**A new perspective**

Two events, in particular, were very responsible for changing my outlook on teaching. The first came in the form of a dynamic and persuasive new provost who finally convinced me to teach in the first-year program. I was apprehensive, to be sure, but resolved to give it a chance. Maybe, I thought, I wouldn’t have to change my routine all that much. The second event, the event that really changed my perspective on teaching, took place much closer to home. It fact, it took place at home. Kristen, my only child, was herself getting ready to leave for college. She was about to begin her freshman year at a small liberal arts college very much like the one at which I taught.

Her mother and I grappled with all the predictable apprehensions that parents in our situation confront. Our little girl was, after all, leaving home for the first time, going off into the wide realm of academe—and wild parties, late hours, noisy dorms, cafeteria food, and unknown friends. We wondered whether her particular needs would be met in that brave, new world. But I had other concerns as well. Having spent more than three decades as a college professor, my apprehension focused very much on the academic experience that lay before Kristen. Would her professors be up to speed in their respective disciplines? Would they be enthusiastic, engaging, articulate, understanding, and (dare I say it?) nurturing? After all, this was my daughter we were talking
about here, not just another freshman.

Then came the fine day in late August when my wife, my daughter, and I loaded up the SUV with all the clothing, school supplies, and assorted paraphernalia that we felt a freshman at college would need. Later that day, having deposited Kristen in her new educational environs, my wife and I headed back home. A touch of sadness replaced our little girl in the front seat. Our daughter was beginning a great adventure. Though I didn’t know it yet, so was I!

Two days later I walked into a very familiar classroom but looked out onto some very unfamiliar faces. Freshman faces! There they were: twenty-six freshmen with all those freshman doubts and freshman hopes and brand new freshman notebooks. Every one of them, I suspected, was feeling very much as Kristen was feeling so many miles away. That realization dramatically changed my pedagogical perspective. For my entire tenure as a professor, I had worked under the assumption that it was my responsibility to teach and the student’s responsibility to learn. I very conscientiously kept up my part of the bargain and expected the students to do likewise. It is true that in recent years I had attended any number of conference sessions that argued against such an artificial division of labor. Speaker after speaker had insisted that learning was a responsibility shared by both professor and student. Oh, I’d come away from those sessions agreeing completely with the presenters, but change my style of teaching? That was something else.

Here before me sat a group of students the same age as my daughter. They wore clothes just like those worn by Kristen. They chattered like her friends. They listened to iPods. Outwardly they seemed happy and confident, but their eyes and shy speech expressed the same eagerness and anxiety I’d seen in Kristen. For the first time, I felt I had some inkling of how it felt to be a freshman.

My wife, daughter, and I believed that the ethic of family revolved around shared values, shared responsibilities, and shared rewards. In a similar vein, I began to view the teaching and learning process as a fully collaborative endeavor. The hard and fast line between teaching and learning began to dissolve in the light of my new perspective on the student–teacher partnership. More than before, I began to share the responsibility for learning with my freshmen. I also began to feel the weight of student failure. No longer was it me, the professor, and them, the students. We were in this together.

With this new perspective on the pedagogical challenge came a surprising and dramatic change in my view of assessment. Like many faculty, I had viewed the emerging, national emphasis—indeed insistence—on assessment as just one more burden imposed upon an already overworked faculty by some higher, insensitive, and possibly sinister power. Now, when I thought of the four years of college that lay before my daughter, when I thought of the expenditure of time, of effort, of financial resources, I too began to think in terms of “outcomes” and of meaningful ways of assessing those outcomes.

Perhaps, as a college professor, my idea of outcomes was rather different from that of the average parent. I was, no doubt, less concerned than the average parent with the more typical questions: Will she be able to get a good job? Will this be worth all the money? Will her grades allow her to keep that meager scholarship? I was more inclined to wonder if those four years would enable her to read more insightfully, think more critically, write more effectively, speak more persuasively, and work more collaboratively with her peers. Would she emerge from college an ethically alert and civically minded citizen better able to thrive in a complex and confusing world? It suddenly became clear to me that if I wanted these “outcomes” for my daughter, then surely I should help the freshmen now sitting before me attain a similar goal.

Although I had always encouraged students to pose questions in the classroom and engage in discussion, I now began placing an even greater emphasis on active learning and critical thinking. Rather than using one text to cover any given topic, I now assigned two texts that offered different points of view. My class presentation now provided a third view of the material, thereby compelling students to weigh and reconcile these three different
perspectives. Learning became more active, questions became more common, discriminate thinking and reflection became more evident. I encouraged the use of e-mail for students who were too shy to pose questions in the classroom. Final exams became cumulative. There were more writing exercises. Students had to do more (and so did I), but there were few complaints. All in all, we moved quickly and aggressively beyond an antediluvian “chalk and talk” passivity. Good things were beginning to happen.

**Mutual reward**

Each faculty member participating in the first-year program has a large measure of latitude in designing his or her own courses. It is, however, the collaboration between all fifty or so members that help make the program distinctive. The first-year faculty meet often and on a regular basis to discuss best practices and shared problems. The meetings are, in fact, a pedagogical “think tank,” providing an opportunity for discussion of strategies, goals, and a shared vision. In addition, each spring, a scheduled two- or three-day retreat, devoted solely to first-year issues, is held at an appealing venue off campus.

The partnership among faculty in the program mirrors in many ways the faculty–student partnership that the program engenders. We critique each other, encourage each other, laugh with each other, and even inspire each other. We complain, to be sure, but we also bond. Particularly after our spring retreat, where we plan improvements in our courses, many of us feel renewed and more ready to meet our freshmen in the upcoming fall.

Not long ago, a newly minted freshman came to my office. She looked a little under the weather and more than a bit concerned. She hadn’t been doing as well in her first semester of college as she had hoped. Moreover, she had done poorly on one of my recent tests. She was wondering if I could give her some advice. I offered her a seat and asked her some of my traditional questions: Have you been going to class regularly? Are you taking good notes? Do you understand the readings? Then, quite spontaneously, I turned to my computer and printed out a copy of a “checklist for college success” that I had carefully composed for Kristen.

We went over the checklist together. Her pale, weary face began to come alive. I thought of my daughter again, who had also looked a bit run-down when we visited her a few weeks into her first semester in college. As my student gathered up her notebooks, getting ready to leave, I couldn’t help saying to her: “Make sure you get enough sleep. And make sure you eat right.” She smiled, said thanks, and went on her way. After she left the office, I had to laugh at myself. “Boy,” I thought, “That all sounded an awful lot like…nurturing!”

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Fall 2006, Vol. 92, No. 4
**Faculty Work**
Articles examine threats to professional autonomy, the future of faculty governance, and support for faculty in the middle phase of their careers. Also included are the winning student essays from the University of Wisconsin System's Liberal Arts Scholarship Competition and articles exploring the roles of “social justice” and “other ways of knowing” in liberal education.

Spring 2006, Vol. 92, No. 2
**Academic Freedom**
Among the articles on the featured topic is an official statement from AAC&U’s board of directors, as well as three responses to it. Also included are a discussion of the relationship between academic advising and liberal learning, a report from two engaged learning experiments, and a look at an institutional change initiative designed to foster “equity-mindedness.”

Summer 2006, Vol. 92, No. 3
**2006 Annual Meeting**
Selected papers presented at the meeting, “Demanding Excellence: Liberal Education in an Era of Global Competition, Anti-Intellectualism, and Disinvestment.” Additional articles explore collaborative scholarship and tenure, faculty engagement in the liberal arts, and the “success” of learning communities.

Winter 2006, Vol. 92, No. 1
**Leadership in the New Academy**
Articles explore issues related to educational leadership and shared governance and examine the role of both faculty and presidential leadership in guiding curricular change. Also included are a report on students’ perceptions of the disciplines and a look at the role of spirituality in liberal learning.

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