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College Outcomes for Work, Life, and Citizenship: Can We Really Do It All?
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The Proof Is in the Portfolio

AS I PEN THIS MESSAGE, Washington is poised for a new era—a new presidency and a new chapter in the nation’s struggle toward equality and justice for all. It is a momentous period—fraught with perils, clearly—but also a time to both probe and recommit to the principles and the possibilities that are fundamental to our American heritage.

I believe this is also a propitious time to open a new chapter in the national dialogue about assessment and accountability in higher education. Let’s band together as a community and insist that it is high time to break free of the reductive focus on standardized testing of “general skills,” quantitative metrics for achievement, and the national obeisance before the false gods of comparable scores and faux rankings.

Together, we can work toward a new era of commitment to forms of assessment that challenge students both to meet high expectations and to show how well they can actually apply their learning—their knowledge as well as their skills—to real problems and complex challenges. And, just as we have broken free from the idea that an African American could never be elected president in our lifetimes, we can also agree to retire, once and for all, forms of assessment that, in practice though not by intent, have helped perpetuate the patterns of stratification and unequal opportunity that still disfigure our democracy.

Led by the dean of admissions and financial aid at Harvard, a commission for the National Association for College Admission Counseling made exactly this point when it urged colleges and universities, in a recent report, to move away from admissions reliance on national tests of general skills, and to shift toward admissions materials much more closely tied to the high school curriculum and to students’ academic achievement. Admissions tests of general skills, the commission concluded, “appear to calcify differences based on class, race/ethnicity, and parental educational attainment.” Or as Georgetown University economist Tony Carnevale has repeatedly pointed out, SAT scores are so tightly correlated with family income that higher education would have gotten the same level of (modest) predictive validity if it had used family income instead of tests in selection screening. (See the latest correlations online at www.diversityweb.org/DiversityDemocracy/vol11no3/report.cfm.)

When standardized college admissions tests became part of the admissions process in the 1930s and 1940s, it was widely assumed that only a fraction of the population needed college study, and that tests of general skills (then thought to be native abilities) could help discover those natural gems who would benefit from higher learning, irrespective of family background or the quality of their earlier schooling. But now, after nearly a century of experimentation with standardized testing in college admissions, we know that students’ scores tells us much more about the test-takers’ resource base—or lack of it—than about their potential or their capacity to learn. We also know, from numerous studies at selective institutions where standardized tests have become optional, that students who are admitted on other criteria do as well academically as those who submitted the SAT.

And yet, in the very year that the admissions community has called for a shift toward admissions measures that are less focused on general skills and more tightly tied to a challenging high school curriculum, large parts of the higher education community have agreed to a “trial test” of standardized
general skills testing in order to make themselves “accountable” for students’ level of learning across the multiple years of college. Why would we do this? Why are we relying on strategies that short-circuit the actual curriculum to report student “achievement” in college, when we already know the “calcification” effects of similar tests used in admissions?

Worse, while high school students have good reason to do their very best on the ACT or the SAT, since the scores still “count” in many admissions decisions, higher education proposes to build its own accountability system on a small sample of “volunteer” test-takers. These volunteers will be asked to show how well they can do on tests that bear no connection to their actual course of study in college. The unsettling result of this approach to accountability testing will be high stakes for the universities and no stakes at all for the students whose performance nonetheless becomes the measure of higher educations’ “success.” Meanwhile, since most of the students on a given campus will not take part in these voluntary tests, the resulting assessment system will do nothing at all to focus or sharpen most students’ learning.

We can do better. We are scholars and we are educators. As scholars, we need to mobilize the already abundant evidence showing why narrowly focused standardized tests are misaligned with the way knowledge is actually put to work in twenty-first-century contexts. As educators, we need to move beyond the reactive mode provoked by the Spellings barrage and help society get ahead of the curve on forms of assessment that can actually drive higher achievement.

Policy leaders have asked for transparency about student performance. In response, we must point out that ill-focused tests can be neither transparent nor informative about what a student has accomplished, over time, on a range of learning outcomes that are important to our economy, our democracy, and his or her own hopes for the future.

What then should we recommend? Educators around the country are pointing to an accountability strategy that can provide, simultaneously, a framework for raising student achievement, evidence of progress over time, and transparency about the extent to which students are achieving what AAC&U’s LEAP initiative calls “essential learning outcomes.”

The strategy—well attuned to the technologies of our time—uses e-portfolios, or what we might call “supplemental transcripts.” Already adopted by institutions as diverse as the University of Michigan, LaGuardia Community College, Hampshire, and Carleton and in development at many others, e-portfolios enable us to see what a student is working on over time, to discern an emerging sense of purpose and direction, and to review samples of writing, research projects, and creative work as well as progress in integrating learning across multiple levels of schooling and multiple areas of study and experience. An e-portfolio also opens windows into a student’s field-based assignments by creating opportunities to present supervisor evaluations or even videos showing real-world performance. They can be sampled, using rubrics, for external reporting.

What we need now is a proactive movement—involving committed leaders, faculty members, and assessment scholars—to chart an educationally productive direction for assessment, transparency, and accountability. This is already a high priority for AAC&U. I hope we can also make it a high priority for the entire educational community.—CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER
John Adams is often quoted as saying “there are two types of education. One should teach us how to make a living and the other how to live.” In fact, the quotation originates in an essay published in 1929 by the historian James Truslow Adams, who goes on there to say “it doubtless helps greatly to compress some years of experience into far fewer years by studying for a particular trade or profession in an institution; but that fact should not blind us to another—namely, that in so doing we are learning a trade or a profession, but are not getting a liberal education.” What’s most striking is not the frequent misattribution of the “two types” quote but its ongoing popularity as an epigraph to anything other than the woolliest of thinking about education in and for our own time. The overall thrust is to suggest that what was true at the turn of the nineteenth century (and true also in 1929) remains true at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Yet the choice between vocational training and liberal education is an especially false one at a time when the quantity of technical information is doubling every two years, with the result that by the time today’s first-year student completes a four-year technical degree, fully half of what he or she learns next year will be outdated already. It’s a false choice at a time when the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that learners will have ten to fourteen jobs by the age of thirty-eight. As former Secretary of Education Richard Riley memorably put it, “we are currently preparing students for jobs that don’t yet exist, using technologies that haven’t been invented, in order to solve problems that we don’t even know are problems yet.” The top ten in-demand jobs in 2010, Riley tells us, did not yet exist in 2004.

There are still those who seek to preserve a distinction between education for work and education for life, who look with disdain on the notion that higher education ought to be responsive to the needs of a changing economy—to say nothing of the legitimate career interests of students themselves. For its part, however, AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative is notably less polemical on this point, instead recruiting the views of a full array of stakeholders in American education. What’s distinctive about the LEAP vision is that, in foregrounding the broad consensus in favor of liberal education outcomes, it demonstrates that while liberal education remains the best preparation for life, it is now widely recognized as the best preparation for making a living as well.

To argue that a liberal education is the best preparation for work and for life is not to degrade liberal education, but rather to recognize its supreme utility in our own time. It’s one thing to propose a twenty-first-century vision of liberal education for all students, however, and quite another thing to implement it. This issue of Liberal Education examines how the LEAP vision is being enacted by particularly effective forms of educational practice and explores some of the ongoing challenges to implementation.—DAVID TRITELLI
AAC&U Partners with Project Kaleidoscope
AAC&U is joining forces with Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL), one of the leading advocates in the United States for building and sustaining strong undergraduate programs in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Working groups from the leadership boards of both AAC&U and PKAL are currently developing plans for bringing together their respective projects and for capitalizing on the unique strengths of both organizations. Detailed plans of action for the new formal partnership will be released in 2009.

New Summer Institute for Deans, Department Chairs, and Faculty
A new grant from the Teagle Foundation will support the participation of campus teams in Engaging Departments, an AAC&U summer institute to be held on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania on July 8–12, 2009. The new institute will be designed to build leadership within and across departments in order to connect learning and assessments in specific academic fields with the overarching aims and outcomes of a contemporary liberal education. The Engaging Departments institute will focus attention on the role of the academic major as the place where students achieve their highest levels of cognitive sophistication, integrative learning, and demonstrated accomplishment in both disciplinary and broader liberal education outcomes. Applications to participate will be accepted online beginning in February (see www.aacu.org/meetings/engaging_depts).

Lumina Grant to Support Making Excellence Inclusive
A new grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education will support the scaling up of efforts, already underway as part of AAC&U’s Give Students a Compass initiative, to increase the academic success of students from traditionally underserved groups. Colleges and universities within the three public systems currently participating in the Give Students a Compass initiative—California State University, the Oregon University System, and the University of Wisconsin System—will seek to broaden student participation in a set of “high-impact” educational practices. They will also build institutional capacity to track, document, and monitor access to these practices as well as how students—especially those from underserved groups—benefit from them.

Upcoming Meetings
- January 21–24, 2009, Ready or Not: Global Challenges, College Learning, and America’s Promise, AAC&U annual meeting, Seattle, Washington
- February 26–28, 2009, General Education, Assessment, and the Learning Students Need, Network for Academic Renewal conference, Baltimore, Maryland
- April 2–4, 2009, Shaping Faculty Roles in a Time of Change: Leadership for Student Learning, Network for Academic Renewal conference, San Diego, California

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SOMETHING REMARKABLE is happening in programs of liberal education all over the country. The longstanding notion that learning should occur almost exclusively in classrooms is being amended to give a much more prominent place to various forms of experiential education. The belief that liberal education should focus on a narrow range of intellectual qualities is being revised to include an emphasis on connecting ideas with action. These developments constitute a profoundly important, indeed revolutionary, challenge to the version of liberal education that has dominated American higher education since the early years of the twentieth century.

The trend to connect liberal education with practice takes multiple forms at the campus level and reflects a range of interests among students, faculty, and administrators. The various developments that make up this trend do not yet constitute a coherent movement, nor are they united by shared purposes. They remain on the margins of mainstream thought about the proper characteristics of liberal education. Yet they should command the attention of thoughtful academics for one basic reason: they seek to enact the traditional mission of liberal education to nurture engaged, effective, constructive professionals and citizens, and they implicitly question whether learning experiences that cultivate analytic skills in classroom settings constitute the most effective way to achieve this purpose.

Forms of experiential education
The most prominent attempt to introduce practical activity into liberal education is the civic engagement movement, through which students are encouraged to participate in off-campus community service, sometimes in connection with credit-bearing service-learning courses, sometimes outside the formal curriculum. Such programs aim to cultivate habits of “active citizenship” and build problem-solving skills in community settings. Some explicitly promote an appreciation of democracy and sophistication about influencing public policy. Many campuses have created administrative units charged with promoting service. Among the better-developed programs are those offered by the Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford, the Harward Center at Bates, the Morgridge Center for Public Service at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and the Nutter Center at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Effective Practice
Campus Compact is the most prominent national organization promoting community service within higher education. Though important in its own right, the civic engagement movement is also a specific instance of the broader effort to link liberal education with action and practice. Even more common are programs offering students off-campus work placements, frequently related to their career interests. These programs are organized in many different ways, but all use direct experience to deepen understanding and nurture practical effectiveness. Wellesley College, for example, encourages students to participate in internships and annually cancels classes for a day so that those who do can report on what they have learned. Cooperative education, in which students alternate periods of full-time paid employment and periods of full-time study, is the fullest expression of this idea. At Northeastern University, most liberal arts majors do at least one co-op placement during the course of their studies.

Internships have, of course, been available at many colleges and universities for many years. But during the final quarter of the twentieth century, these types of programs became far more popular with students and far more pervasive among institutions than previously. At present such programs are nearly universal on American campuses, and most high school students indicate an intention to complete an internship during college. These programs have become so central to the idea of a college education that traditional liberal arts colleges frequently emphasize the availability of off-campus work experiences in their recruiting materials.

Two other widely available forms of experiential education are undergraduate research and study abroad. Like internships, programs that involve undergraduates in faculty research have existed for a long time, but they have become more widely available and have found common ground with the civic engagement movement. Community service often involves
students working with faculty on community-based research projects intended to help residents address local problems. The Center for Urban Learning and Research at Loyola University Chicago is an outstanding example of this approach. David Hodge of Miami University of Ohio and his collaborators, Marcia Baxter Magolda and Carolyn Haynes, have advanced an even deeper link between discovery-oriented education and effective action. They argue that the developmental capacity for self-authorship, or an internally generated belief system, is an essential ingredient in both scholarly intellectual work and effective action. Study abroad, which also has an extensive history, has become far more widespread in an era preoccupied with globalization and often now includes non-classroom experiences.

The movement to link liberal education more closely to action and practice is not limited to programs that take students out of the classroom. The trend is also reflected in modifications of arts and sciences coursework. Most liberal arts colleges now offer opportunities to study applied and professional subjects, for example, and many universities encourage liberal arts majors to take minors in professional fields. The Carnegie Foundation has sponsored an effort to enrich the “thinking” orientation of liberal education with the “doing” emphasis of professional studies by incorporating practice-oriented pedagogies, such as simulations and case studies, in liberal arts courses. Many colleges offer interdisciplinary, problem-focused minors like urban studies or international relations through which students learn to think about complex, real-world problems. These programs often provide platforms for community-based research projects, internships and service opportunities, and Model UN–type simulations.

All forms of experiential education—community service, internships, cooperative education, undergraduate research, study abroad—and the curricular modifications associated with them have been developing independently and with little interaction among their advocates, who tend to focus on their own specific goals. Yet these movements share a focus on empowering students to be effective actors and problem solvers in organizational, social, and civic settings, and they reflect the perception that direct experience adds significantly to classroom study in promoting student development. These movements are in no way hostile to liberal education; on the contrary, their champions have deep roots in the liberal arts and sciences. The goal is to enrich liberal learning by connecting it more strongly with the lives students will actually live after college. In advancing the link between learning and experience, today’s educators are rediscovering ideas articulated by John Dewey in the early 1900s but largely ignored by mainstream higher education for the last century.

The convergence of student, faculty, and administrative interests

Many forces are driving the movement to connect liberal education with practice. Some of the energy comes from students. In recent years, undergraduates have sensed that a traditional liberal education may not, by itself, be a sufficient preparation for the adult world. They have been pressuring colleges to offer internships, work placements, and volunteer activities through which they can gain experience and competence. Two impulses appear to be involved here. The first is anticipating the workplace. Many students want to explore
career possibilities even as they pursue a liberal arts degree, and they know a successful internship can help them land a first job. The second is contributing to the community. The interest of young people in community service and social entrepreneurship is one of the most exciting and hopeful developments within contemporary youth culture.

Faculty are drawn to including practice-oriented experiences in liberal arts programs for reasons of their own. Some are impressed by research indicating that “engaged learning”—that is, learning through activities that require active participation—is more pedagogically powerful than learning based on traditional, frequently passive, classroom study. Other faculty, concerned by reports of diminished student interest in political and social issues, see the civic engagement movement as a way to counteract this trend. Still other faculty focus more on the practical challenges that students will face after graduation and are sympathetic with student desires to equip themselves for the world of work.

Institutional leaders are also attracted to a version of the liberal arts actively engaged with the nonacademic world. Individuals in these roles are mindful of the criticism of governmental, political, and business leaders that higher education does not contribute enough to the community, the state, and the nation—a longstanding complaint that has gained force from current worries about the global competitiveness of the United States. Presidents of urban campuses, faced with concerns among civic officials and neighbors about the adverse impacts of their institutions, love to highlight the contributions their students make through community service. Many current academic leaders, moreover, began their careers imbued with the idealistic spirit of the 1960s and 1970s. For these leaders, the impulse to expand the concerns of liberal education beyond the walls of the campus reflects a personal commitment to social progress and a resistance to the historical association of the liberal arts with withdrawal from the nonacademic world. Administrators also know that offering off-campus experiences or adding practice-oriented coursework to a liberal arts curriculum can help maintain strong enrollments.

Viewed from a historical perspective, the convergence of student, faculty, and administrative interests in amending liberal education to include an emphasis on practice represents the flowering of ideas that emerged from the wave of curricular experimentation of the early 1970s. A response to the student protests of the 1960s, that movement was inspired by the belief that the expanded enrollments and more diverse student bodies that characterized higher education after World War II required a wider array of learning experiences than had been appropriate when access to higher education was more restricted. Off-campus learning opportunities and interdisciplinary, problem-focused studies were two of the most widely advocated innovations emanating from those years.

Two recent enrollment trends have reinforced interest in these curricular ideas. One involves the accelerating diversification of the student body as more and more young people from
disadvantaged and minority backgrounds enter college. This phenomenon has heightened the focus on creating dynamic learning experiences appropriate for a wide variety of learning styles that highlight the diverse perspectives all students bring to the learning environment. An additional factor has been the shift in higher education’s center of gravity from country to city, with the majority of the nation’s students now attending urban institutions. Urban campuses tend naturally to be more involved with their surrounding communities than are campuses in more isolated settings, and they have often taken the lead in creating off-campus service and work opportunities for their students.

Sources of resistance
The idea that liberal education should help students become effective actors and problem solvers as well as disciplined thinkers has inspired initiatives at most colleges and universities, and it is being championed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Nonetheless, the movement’s most important innovations remain controversial within academia. Undergraduate research and study abroad can be easily accepted, since they involve essentially academic activities. But because they imply the educational value of practical experience, community service and off-campus employment are more challenging. Stanley Fish (2008) speaks for many when he argues that the proper end of college is the mastery of intellectual and scholarly skills because that is what academics know how to teach. Translating ideas into action is unfamiliar territory. Including practice-oriented material within the liberal arts
curriculum also inspires traditionalist objections. When leaders of the Carnegie project on bridging the gap between liberal and professional education convened faculty from both traditions, they found deep skepticism among both groups about each other’s work. There are sources of resistance to moving liberal education toward effective practice at the institutional level as well. Academia’s prestige hierarchy is dominated by the major research universities and exclusive liberal arts colleges, and these institutions tend to be deeply committed to the intellectually focused version of the liberal arts that Fish articulates. Although many high-status institutions have made room for internships and service-learning courses—among New England’s leading liberal arts colleges, for example, Amherst, Bowdoin, Clark, Smith, and Williams have all done so—none, as yet, has made these types of experiences a central part of the learning experience or explicitly embraced the linking of liberal education with practice. Some upwardly mobile institutions like Northeastern University, Wagner College, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute have placed greater emphasis on these innovations, but most institutions will follow the lead of the top-ranked schools. Against this background, the basic pattern at the campus level with respect to all of these ideas has been to make room for them to accommodate interested students and faculty while leaving the overall program untouched. There are exceptions. Tulane University has made completion of a community service project and related coursework a graduation requirement. But in most instances, service learning and internship opportunities exist as “one-off” experiences tied to particular courses and individual faculty members but not integrated into the overall structure of general education or the major. Indeed, in many cases, off-campus experience is offered as an extracurricular activity, valued and encouraged but not incorporated into the formal program of instruction. A recent assessment of the service-learning movement by some of its strongest advocates expressed frustration that the effort had achieved little success in becoming institutionalized.

The movement at a crossroads

The effort to connect liberal education with action and practice is at a crossroads. The question is this: Since advocates of various themes within this movement—the importance of civic engagement, the pedagogical power of “active learning,” the legitimacy of attention to practical skills, the advantages of undergraduate research and study abroad—have gained a measure of acceptance around the edges of the curriculum for their particular purposes, should these different advocacy groups come together to advance the broader idea that the ability to translate careful thought into effective action should be a central element of what it means to be liberally educated? This is, after all, the implicit educational idea that unites all these developments.

The case for moving in this direction is clear. Champions of liberal learning have historically insisted that their primary mission is to educate the next generation of national leaders and to prepare young people to be effective participants in society. I have yet to read a college catalog that identifies the nurturing of

Conference on Liberal Education and Effective Practice

In March 2009, Clark University and the Association of American Colleges and Universities will cosponsor a conference on liberal education and effective practice. Intended to explore in greater depth the issues raised in this essay, the conference will bring together educational leaders, administrators, and practitioners from around the country. The goal is to advance the national discussion of these matters. Materials related to the conference, including papers commissioned by Clark University for consideration by the participants, will be available online at www.aacu.org and www.clarku.edu.
intellectuals as the institution’s primary mission. The qualities of mind historically associated with the arts and sciences are typically described as essential for enlightened participation in social and organizational settings, which includes but is not limited to membership on a university faculty. Top liberal arts programs take as much or more pride in the corporate and governmental leaders they have produced as in the scholars they have graduated. Yet there has been little actual analysis showing that cultivating certain intellectual qualities in classroom settings is the optimum way to prepare young people to engage the adult world. The movement to connect liberal education with practice contends that there can be a more effective way to achieve this time-honored goal.

Advocacy for a stronger and more direct focus on practice in no way repudiates either the traditional goals of liberal learning or the educational practices associated with them. On the contrary, research indicates that the ability to master complex material, to analyze difficult problems, and to communicate effectively is critical for success in many areas of life. The point is that these qualities are only part of the equipment we need to be effective in our careers and our civic activities. Psychologist Robert Sternberg of Tufts (1999), who has studied the characteristics of successful people, argues for a “triarchic” concept of mind that includes not only “academic (or analytic) intelligence,” but the capacity to respond creatively and independently to unforeseen, multidimensional problems (creative intelligence) and the ability to use ideas to solve practical problems (practical intelligence). He stresses the importance of a balanced deployment of these capacities while also urging colleges and universities, in cultivating these capacities, to emphasize the importance of using them for the common good, a characteristic that he calls “wisdom.” Most programs of liberal education focus almost exclusively on only the first of these qualities.

There is room for debate about Sternberg’s particular formulations. Other scholars have developed other ways to characterize the multiple intelligences that contribute to effective action in various realms of activity. But the basic point that success in institutional, professional, and social contexts requires qualities of character, personality, and mind that go far beyond “academic intelligence” is widely accepted as a matter of folk wisdom (even among professors) and is also supported by scholarly research. If this is true, and if the most important mission of liberal education is to nurture individuals who will make important contributions to society, then shouldn’t we take account of these realities in designing undergraduate programs in the liberal arts and sciences?

There is much at stake in seeking wider appreciation of the value of linking liberal education and effective practice as well as greater understanding of the role experiential education can play in establishing that link. The pedagogical claims advanced by advocates of community service and internships are too important merely to be tolerated at the margins of our thinking about liberal learning. We need to take a hard, fresh look at the qualities needed for effectiveness as professionals and as citizens, to compare those qualities to the outcomes we cultivate through the arts and sciences, and to design educational formats that will empower our graduates to translate the values and skills we nurture into constructive social action. As Carol Geary Schneider has argued in championing a heightened emphasis on practice, the challenges our country faces in the twenty-first century are too great for us to rest comfortably with any lesser educational goal.

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

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NOTE
1. See David Hodge, “The Engaged University and Student Success,” as well as other relevant reports and speeches available at www.miami.muohio.edu/president/reports_and_speeches/index.cfm.
WHEN THE Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) launched the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative in 2005, we did so with our eyes wide open. We certainly knew that it would not be easy to achieve the sort of transformation needed to ensure that higher education serves all students—and our society—more effectively. But we presented the ambitious LEAP vision for twenty-first-century learning with confidence that the necessary changes are vitally important to our nation’s future, and that they are within reach. Where did this confidence come from? It came primarily from watching our members reinvent undergraduate education for a new age—with liberal education at its core.

The LEAP initiative builds on many years of prior work, including innovative educational reform efforts at colleges and universities of all types across the country. In fact, AAC&U and its member institutions have been hard at work on the educational challenges inherent in the LEAP vision for many years, most recently through the Greater Expectations initiative (2000–2006) and, since 2005, through LEAP itself. As part of the Greater Expectations initiative, AAC&U identified promising reforms at a variety of leading institutions and facilitated multiyear dialogues with faculty members, academic administrators, employers, accreditors, civic leaders, and K–12 educators. These dialogues made it clear that something fundamental is shifting in our society, in our economy, and in our educational institutions. We learned from these leaders and practitioners that higher education is, indeed, in a period of profound transformation, and the reason is that society itself is setting higher expectations for citizens and workers in the twenty-first century (AAC&U 2002).

The research and dialogues conducted as part of the Greater Expectations and LEAP initiatives have also made it clear to us that

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some of the core elements of an excellent education endure: the development of intellectual powers and capacities; ethical and civic preparation; personal growth and self-direction. But the particulars of educational excellence are necessarily always in flux. What counts as powerful knowledge changes periodically as societies, cultures, and economies change. Today’s transformative changes are diverse, numerous, and unsettling. Economic, environmental, global, intercultural, technological, scientific, and geopolitical shifts all have far-reaching implications for what counts as empowering knowledge. On every front, more is now being demanded from educated people—and the economy, to remain strong, needs more of these educated people.

What does the changing landscape mean for liberal education?

Liberal educators at the dawn of the twenty-first century confront an especially volatile global environment. Through the Greater Expectations and LEAP initiatives, we at AAC&U have taken a hard look at the challenges and opportunities presented by this environment—and we have done so with a sense of both the contemporary realities we now face and the long history of liberal education. Moreover, as a result of the Greater Expectations dialogues and the additional research we have sponsored as part of LEAP—focus groups, public forums, employer surveys, meetings with faculty members—we have identified a set of student learning outcomes that almost everyone now regards as essential (see sidebar). Of course, given that American colleges and universities are highly diverse in their missions and in the curricular approaches they take to advance them, the essential learning outcomes are inevitably described in broad terms.

As readers of Liberal Education will recognize, however, the LEAP vision updates as well as demonstrably builds on the enduring aims of liberal education: broad knowledge, strong intellectual skills, and a grounded sense of ethical and civic responsibility. But LEAP also moves beyond the traditional limits of liberal or liberal arts education—moving, most notably, away from the self-imposed “nonvocational” identity and rejecting the more recent association of liberal education with learning “for its own sake” alone, rather than for its practical value in real-world contexts. The LEAP vision for student learning places stronger emphasis on global and intercultural learning, technological sophistication, collaborative problem solving, transferable skills, and real-world applications—both civic and job-related. As AAC&U’s president recently noted, “in all these emphases, LEAP
repositions liberal education, no longer as an option for the fortunate few, but rather as the most practical and powerful preparation for ‘success’ in all its real-world meanings: economic, societal, civic, and personal” (Schneider 2008, 3).

Is this just rhetoric?
Can we really do all that?
We have been gratified by the creativity with which institutions of all sorts are adapting the LEAP vision in order to advance their own institutional change agendas. Students and faculty at Miami Dade College, for instance, came together in October 2007 to sign a covenant of engagement with ten learning outcomes based on the LEAP vision (Padrón 2008). The covenant ceremony demonstrated a campus-wide commitment to the core values of liberal education, including a commitment to foster in all students the ability to “communicate effectively” and to “solve problems using critical and creative thinking and scientific reasoning.” To help students achieve these outcomes, Miami Dade College is providing multiple, varied, and intentional learning experiences through both academic disciplines and cocurricular activities.

The California State University—the largest state system of higher education in the country—recently established new guidelines for general education courses that “focus on core values of liberal education” and are framed by the LEAP essential learning outcomes. Each campus in the system is developing its own curricular designs, however, to ensure that its students achieve the outcomes. And Brown University (2008) recently unveiled its own new approach to providing a twenty-first-century liberal education. While retaining its well-known lack of formal general education requirements, Brown is educating all students about the values of liberal education. Every department is reviewing its major requirements and curricula to ensure that students are achieving a core set of intellectual capacities key to the aims of liberal learning.

Nonetheless, we recognize that many obstacles stand in the way of bringing the LEAP vision to reality for all students. From a lack of awareness about what really is needed for success in today’s workforce to a lack of resources to support the necessary learning, the obstacles are daunting. But some recent trends—including those relating to the pace of change and the need for innovation in the economy—work in our favor. The biggest challenge we face, however, is demographic. We are attempting to educate far more students at much higher levels of learning than ever before. And this new cohort of college students is larger, more diverse, and probably less well prepared for college-level learning than were cohorts in earlier eras. Yet we are firmly convinced that the success of our economy and our democracy both depend on making excellence inclusive; we must find a way to provide all students with the outcomes of a quality liberal education.

Some might ask whether the LEAP vision is too broad, too idealistic, too ambitious. Others might ask whether our claim to discern an emerging consensus on essential learning outcomes is really just a cynical or even disingenuous assertion designed to forestall inappropriate governmental intervention or, in a purely self-interested way, to limit trends toward narrow vocationalism at all levels of education. In the remainder of this article, I want to focus on two key questions: Is there really a consensus about outcomes across a wide array of stakeholders? And with a single set of learning outcomes, can we really accomplish several goals at once—preparing students to be critical and informed citizens, while also providing them with skills and knowledge to succeed professionally in a competitive global economy?

Is there really consensus support for liberal education?
Through the Greater Expectations initiative, we examined the goals for undergraduate learning stated by hundreds of AAC&U member institutions and dozens of accrediting organizations—both regional and specialized. This review of what educators believe should be the broad outcomes of college learning established the basis for the LEAP initiative. Building on that consensus across the academy and its accrediting bodies, AAC&U then engaged others outside of higher education—those in public policy sectors, elected officials, philanthropic leaders, and employers of all sorts—in discussion about their own expectations for college learning.
It became very clear early in these public dialogues that a broad consensus was, in fact, emerging. And additional research that AAC&U has sponsored confirms that this consensus extends to leaders in business and industry across many areas of the economy. Through the LEAP initiative, AAC&U has commissioned several national surveys and sponsored several focus groups with business leaders. This research suggests that business leaders do not tend to use the language of “liberal education.” Instead, they focus on what they need college graduates to know and be able to do so that they can “hit the ground running” in a very fast-moving economic environment. Yet precisely because of that challenging environment, employers do strongly endorse the broad knowledge of science and society and the intellectual and practical skills that characterize liberal education. And, moreover, they strongly affirm a heightened emphasis on intercultural and ethical learning in college.

When presented with a description of liberal education and asked how important they feel it is for colleges and universities to provide this type of education, 95 percent of business leaders surveyed said that it was “fairly” or “very important” for them to do so. In fact, 76 percent of employers would recommend this type of education to a young person they know. AAC&U’s national surveys also examined the specific liberal education outcomes commonly endorsed by educators and asked whether business leaders really want colleges to place more emphasis on these outcomes for all students. A clear majority of business leaders want colleges to place more emphasis on the skills and areas of knowledge that are cultivated through a liberal education (AAC&U 2008).

Taking cues from the limited number of people who formally recruit on college campuses, some college educators believe that employers only pay lip service to liberal education but actually prefer graduates who are more narrowly trained in professional fields. AAC&U’s research suggests that this is not the case. A clear majority of the employers we surveyed think colleges and universities should focus on providing all students with both a well-rounded education and knowledge in a specific field. As one employer put it, “I look for people who can take accountability, responsibility, and are good team people over anything else. I can teach the technical.” Another focus group participant noted, “when I hire someone, I’m investing in them. I want them to be able to study, to analyze, to present, to write” (Peter D. Hart Research Associates 2007).

The clear message that has emerged from years of research, then, is that at least at a general level, there is, indeed, an emerging consensus on the most important outcomes of college. Moreover, it is clear from all this research that business leaders strongly endorse liberal education outcomes—including those related to ethics, values, and responsibility. Fifty-six percent of those we surveyed, for instance, believe that colleges should place more emphasis on cultivating in students a strong sense of integrity and ethics.

The business leaders whose counsel we have sought through the LEAP initiative also confirm that employers want to hire college graduates with broad skills as well as a developed sense of civic and personal responsibility. In addition, they argue that innovation is the single most important ingredient to future economic success at the individual corporate level and at a national level. And because they take a long-term view, “yes-men” or “yes-women” are the last thing these leaders believe that corporate America needs right now. This innovation imperative is one of the reasons we believe we can accomplish our educational goals through liberal education, which has always been the best preparation for dealing creatively with change.

**Can we really accomplish multiple goals with one set of learning outcomes?**

College education can effectively—and simultaneously—prepare students for both professional success and responsible citizenship. We believe this not because of some theoretical educational models, but because we see every day how leading AAC&U member institutions are already organizing their students’ educational experiences to meet multiple goals. They are providing students with contextual learning in the arts and sciences; practice in
scientific and humanistic inquiry and problem solving on issues, both enduring and contemporary; and opportunities to apply what they are learning in community-based settings, in nonprofit organizations, and through internships of all sorts. These programs are strengthening students’ liberal learning, rather than diminishing it. They are helping students become responsible citizens and thoughtful practitioners. Colleges and universities have an obligation to their students and our society to do nothing less. As Grant Cornwell (2008) recently put it in his inaugural speech as incoming president of the College of Wooster, it is right and fair that students and their families expect a Wooster education to empower them to do well in the world. [A quality liberal education] provides access to leadership and, for many, prosperity. Access to leadership and prosperity is also, therefore, access to influence, and with the ability to influence comes the obligation to apply influence in the service of justice, fairness, respect, and decency.

Cornwell is surely right that liberal educators have a heightened obligation to educate the next generation of leaders to be responsible, especially as they become successful.

Moreover, it is useful to remember that the multiple goals related to professional success, ethical leadership, and responsible citizenship have never really been as separate as some suggest. The truth is that there has never been a sustained period in our nation’s history when higher education was divorced from the task of preparing students for work—preparing them, indeed, for success in a market economy. Even at our most traditional and elite liberal arts colleges like the one I attended as a first-generation student in the early 1980s, students may pursue degrees in the traditional liberal arts and sciences fields rather than in more defined professional fields. But these same students have always known that a job—and probably a well-paying job—will await them after graduation. Frankly, these institutions don’t really need to connect their learning goals with their students’ professional aspirations because, year after year, they send their graduates on to prestigious graduate schools, law schools, medical schools, or to highly remunerative careers in finance, advertising, and consulting. As a first-generation college student, I was undoubtedly far more aware than many of my classmates of what my parents risked and sacrificed and worried about in sending me to an elite liberal arts college. They certainly took it on faith that my education would prepare me both for work and for an examined and responsible life as an “educated” person. Today’s students and their parents—especially those without much experience of higher education—are, justifiably, even more concerned about success in an even more volatile and precarious job market than the one I faced. What the LEAP vision provides is a more comprehensive and comprehensible map of that path to becoming an educated person. It also responds to the perfectly legitimate question my parents and others like them pose: How exactly will this education prepare my child for a successful life, including a successful career?

In developing curricular designs for the twenty-first century, colleges and universities simply do not have the luxury of ignoring either the realities of the contemporary labor market or their students’ own professional aspirations. In survey after survey, college students say that they seek a college education primarily to ensure their future professional success. This is true whether they attend Harvard University, the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, or LaGuardia Community College. However, in the AAC&U focus groups held with high school and college students, we found that students do not connect their educational and economic aspirations in a simplistic, narrow, or short-term sense. Substantial financial reward is not their top priority (Peter D. Hart Research Associates 2004). In a clear-eyed way, students know that they must make their way in a knowledge economy. They know that a college education is the key to economic opportunity and stability. But in our focus groups, students talked much more about wanting fulfilling and rewarding work than about wanting a lot of money or prestige. A more recent survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers revealed that, when asked to rank the qualities they seek in their first jobs, college graduates list a high starting salary below opportunity for advancement, job security, health insurance, friendly coworkers, and opportunities for personal development (Koc 2008).
Like generations before them, today’s students want professional success, but they also aspire to something more. They want to build a better future for themselves, for their communities, and for future generations. All the efforts that educators at all levels have made for decades to introduce students to community service and civic engagement are paying off in a new generation of students who yearn for lives of purpose and meaning (Astin 2004). It would be foolish—and even condescending—for educators to ignore the complexity of these aspirations.

Only about 10 percent of BA degree holders currently work in the nonprofit sector, and only about 20 percent work in the public sector. Yet a larger percentage of those working...
in both sectors (about 50 percent) hold at least a BA degree, compared to those working in the private sector (30 percent). Economists warn that future shortages of workers will be proportionally larger in the public and nonprofit sectors (U.S. Census Bureau). We can and should encourage students to consider careers in government and nonprofit organizations. But the reality remains that a vast majority of college graduates—nearly three-quarters—are making their way in the world by working at for-profit companies. Indeed, some are even creating their own for-profit companies. Moreover, graduates are likely to move among the different economic sectors throughout the course of their careers. All students deserve the opportunity to follow their own dreams, and a college education should prepare them as well as possible for whatever career paths they choose.

While preparing students for successful work lives, we also owe it to society to ensure that these same students—whatever careers they pursue—have a strong ethical compass and a commitment to civic and personal responsibility. Colleges can, and indeed must, do both of these things. The task of meeting these multiple educational goals is not all that different today than in years past, although the skills needed for citizenship and work are more complex. It isn’t an either-or choice, and it never has been.

As Stanley Katz (2008) put it in a recent blog posting, "is it wrong for our students to go to work for AT&T, Proctor & Gamble, or Sara Lee? I don’t think so . . . What counts, I think, is that their liberal education causes them to reflect on what it is they are doing for a living, how they are doing it, and what more they can do to live a fully examined life.” This is why we must rededicate ourselves to liberal education, to providing more students with the full set of learning outcomes they need. And this is why we must help students, their parents, and policymakers understand that what counts as “college success” is not limited to whether students earn degrees in particular subject areas. “College success” also depends on whether students achieve the level of preparation they need to thrive in a fast-changing economy and within turbulent, highly demanding, global, societal, and often personal contexts. Indeed, this more comprehensive—and, yes, ambitious—understanding of “college success,” along with our shared obligation as educators to help all students achieve it, is at the very heart of the LEAP vision of college learning for the twenty-first century.

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

REFERENCES
In its Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) outlines four clusters of learning outcomes that are essential for all college students in the twenty-first century and that, taken together, represent a high-quality liberal education. These include (1) knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, (2) intellectual and practical skills, (3) personal and social responsibility, and (4) integrative and applied learning. Core Commitments, a related AAC&U initiative, focuses specifically on the third of these clusters. This initiative is designed to strengthen the academy’s capacity to foster students’ personal and social responsibility. In order to clarify what that means, the Core Commitments initiative has outlined five key goals within the broader category of personal and social responsibility (see sidebar p. 23).

Initial surveys conducted for the Core Commitments initiative have shown strong consensus among faculty, administrators, and students that these five aspects of personal and social responsibility are important goals of a college education. Unfortunately, however, many fewer respondents say that their institution is working toward these goals in an effective way. Why are so few institutions working to achieve these outcomes if so many acknowledge their importance? A likely explanation is that, despite evidence to the contrary, many educators hope and expect that these outcomes will be achieved as by-products of a college education, that they do not require explicit attention.

The relative lack of institutional investment in students’ personal and social responsibility reflects the widespread assumption that academic content knowledge and the intellectual skill of analytic or critical thinking, quite divorced from either action or responsibility, are the overriding aims of higher education and that the development of personal and social responsibility is only distantly connected with those aims. In what follows, we take issue with both of these assumptions, arguing that colleges should aim to teach students how to use knowledge and criticism not only as ends in themselves but also as means toward responsible engagement with the life of their times. We also argue that this can be accomplished best by addressing some core developmental dimensions or processes that underlie and tie together the various elements of personal and social responsibility articulated by the Core Commitments initiative.

Developmental foundations of personal and social responsibility
Each of the five Core Commitments goals involves many factors, and large bodies of research point to the particular configurations that make each of them unique. Despite their distinctiveness, however, the five goals share some underlying dynamics and sources. In order to uncover the developmental logic that we believe underlies these five outcomes, we
have suggested three developmental dimensions that form a common foundation for the apparently separate elements of personal and social responsibility. We will consider how each of those elements depends upon the processes of identity formation, cultivation of purpose, and learning to put knowledge to responsible use in practical reasoning. First, then, we need to understand in outline each of these developmental dimensions or processes.

By identity formation, we mean the development of the contents and dynamics of an individual’s special, identifiable sense of self and, ultimately, his or her subjective sense of individuality, continuity, coherence, and agency. An identity that has these qualities is a powerful motivational force. Research in moral, civic, and political development, for example, shows the critical role that moral and civic identity play in making espoused values real in one’s actual behavior (Colby et al. 2003; Youniss and Yates 1997). We know that college is a prime moment in life for students, including many older students, to question and redefine their core sense of who they are. Educators have the potential to contribute to that process in ways that help students build into that evolving sense of self positive ideals, concern for the common good, and a strong sense of responsibility.

An identity that is well grounded in positive values is closely linked to the second process we want to highlight: the development of a sense of purpose. Recent research shows how powerfully motivating a sense of purpose can be, and how important it can be in supporting young people’s desire to learn. In The Path to Purpose, William Damon (2008) defines purpose as a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self. Purpose brings people, including young people, outside themselves and into activities that are intensely engrossing.

The pursuit of ends larger than the self also creates strong resilience and well-being. Damon (2008) reports this finding in his studies of adolescents and young adults, and Colby and Damon (1992) found similar dynamics at work in the morally exceptional adults profiled in their book, Some Do Care. It is noteworthy in this regard that in his influential studies of happiness, Martin Seligman (2002) points to absorption in a challenging activity, particularly one that makes a contribution to something beyond the self, as the most reliable source of well-being.

Forming an identity and developing purpose are deeply implicated in the cultivation of a “life of the mind,” the formation of a disposition of reflection and criticism. Since identity and purpose are powerful motivators, their proper development contributes significantly to genuine intellectual engagement. But they also help individuals connect intellectual growth with more informed and responsible action, with developing a life of the mind for practice. In A New Agenda for Higher Education: A Life of the Mind for Practice, William Sullivan and Matthew Rosin (2008) call the cultivation of this capacity to put knowledge to responsible use “practical reasoning.” Unfortunately, higher education pays relatively little attention to fostering this productive interplay of ideas and their use in life. Yet, just that is at the core of liberal education.

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<th>Five Key Dimensions of Personal and Social Responsibility</th>
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<td>1. Striving for excellence: developing a strong work ethic and consciously doing one’s very best in all aspects of college</td>
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<td>2. Cultivating personal and academic integrity: recognizing and acting on a sense of honor, ranging from honesty in relationships to principled engagement with a formal academic honor code</td>
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<td>3. Contributing to a larger community: recognizing and acting on one’s responsibility to the educational community and to the wider society—local, national, and global</td>
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<td>4. Taking seriously the perspectives of others: recognizing and acting on the obligation to inform one’s own judgment; engaging diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning, citizenship, and work</td>
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<td>5. Developing competence in ethical and moral reasoning: developing ethical and moral reasoning in ways that incorporate the previous four dimensions, and using such reasoning in learning and in life</td>
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education’s goal of ensuring that students will gain from their college experience the ability to use knowledge and reflection to inform their judgment in complex worlds of practice and to shape their own lives for critical engagement in the world.

All three of these processes—the formation of identity, the cultivation of life purpose, and the practice of relating ideas to life and responsibility—are involved in achieving the five dimensions of personal and social responsibility highlighted by the Core Commitments initiative. The three foundational processes provide an essential developmental nexus for fostering those dimensions. This is evident from a brief examination of each of the Core Commitments goals with our three developmental processes in mind.

Consider the first, and most fundamental, of the five: a consistent pattern of striving for excellence. In order for students to engage responsibly with their work, they need a sense of themselves as conscientious (“I am the kind of person who fulfills his obligations and can be counted on to do a competent job”). If the majority of students could be helped to rise to this degree of conscientious effort, that would be an impressive achievement in itself. But we believe that a more ambitious educational goal is achievable—a drive for real excellence, both during college and beyond. The development of knowledge-in-action and a sense of purpose can both contribute to achieving that goal.

One key to fostering the pursuit of excellence is to help students see and feel a strong connection between their own goals and the subjects they are learning, so that they find themselves saying: “I need to know that! I see how to use it.” In order to feel this way, students need to experience engagement with the world so that they grasp the practical, personal, and moral significance of what they are learning. Hence, the importance of practical reasoning. We see this in the best kind of preparation for a career: teaching practices that place students in their future roles as businesspeople or nurses or teachers or other professionals so that they can experience the many dimensions of knowledge, skill, and responsibility needed to practice these demanding occupations.

When the goals students are pursuing are more fundamental and long-term, extending beyond instrumentality, they represent the kind of life purpose that Damon has described. Purpose in this sense supports exceptionally robust motivation that leads people to work extremely hard, persisting even in the face of serious obstacles. In studies of the development of expertise through professional education reported in their book, Surpassing Ourselves, Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia (1993) point to a sense of intrinsic fascination and intense engagement or flow as one of the key factors that lead people to keep investing in their own deepening expertise over time, well beyond the end of their formal education. Evidence suggests that the better students understand and the more they embrace the larger significance of what is being learned, the more likely is this attitude of fascination and the greater the likelihood that they will make striving for excellence their basic disposition.

The second outcome articulated by the Core Commitments initiative, the cultivation of personal and academic integrity, is equally connected to the underlying developmental
processes we have been describing. The key factor for developing and maintaining integrity throughout life is a sense of self or identity in which ethical values are central. To support academic integrity, this must include a strong sense of oneself as honest and trustworthy.

But identity is not the whole story. The perception that knowledge is useful for pursuing one’s goals plays a major role as well. If students are really trying to learn, if they believe they need the knowledge and skills being taught, there is less incentive to cheat. However, in order to protect against academic misconduct, the desire to learn has to be grounded in something beyond self-promotion, which points again to the importance of intrinsic rather than extrinsic interest—a sense of purpose and meaning in the work itself. For this reason, learning only for the sake of future advancement is not enough for integrity. A focus on competition for the best jobs or graduate schools rather than on a desire for real excellence in a calling can even increase cheating.

For the third Core Commitments outcome, contributing to a larger community, a sense of purpose comes to center stage from the outset. Making a contribution beyond the self is what a sense of purpose is all about. Importantly, lasting commitment develops most effectively when young people find their own sense of purpose, which means that they have a real passion and desire to make a particular kind of
contribution. So again, opportunities to experience, reflect upon, and practice such engagements are critical to students’ achieving this kind of commitment. This is borne out by research—our own and others’.

The fourth Core Commitments outcome, taking seriously the perspectives of others—the capacity to be open-minded and look at issues and situations from others’ points of view—is an essential balance to the passion that can be generated by a strong sense of purpose. The research for Some Do Care (Colby and Damon 1992) showed an important quality of open-mindedness in people who exemplify extraordinary moral leadership. This critical quality of intellectual and moral humility seems to be missing in fanatics. It is, therefore, especially important that academic efforts to educate for civic or moral purpose teach students to test and balance their passion through genuine openness to others’ points of view.

If they are to succeed in life, students also need to learn how to engage skillfully the human complexities of real situations, the varied perspectives, preferences, and claims that different people bring. The need to negotiate these complexities is a big part of why knowledge-in-action, or practical reason, is different in basic form and process from the usual kind of academic understanding. Interpersonal skill is not sufficient for wise and responsible judgment-in-action, however. For that, it is also essential to pay attention to the underlying dynamics of identity formation and the explicit cultivation of purpose. These issues are integrally connected, because engaging diverse perspectives on issues that are important to them leads students to rethink their identities, their moral values, and other unquestioned assumptions toward the achievement of a more mature and thoughtfully examined identity.

Finally, developing competence in ethical and moral reasoning such that it will permeate one’s life requires going beyond the purely cognitive aspects of morality to practical wisdom; engaged judgment; ethical habits of mind, heart, and behavioral response; and a sense of identity with integrity and purpose at its core. In order to accomplish this, students need to engage messy, complicated, ambiguous realities and learn to identify and respond to the ethical features of those realities. This points to a different kind of educational experience than academic ethics courses typically provide—one that is tied to engaged experience and practice, along with reflection on that practice.

Beyond critical thinking

If college educators generally agree that these five Core Commitments goals are important, why, then, are they so rarely a priority in educational practice? There are a number of plausible explanations, but the basic problem seems evident: the academy generally neglects the development of students’ sense of personal and social responsibility because many in higher education see those learning outcomes as alien to the cherished value of analytical thinking. The misalignment between institutional priorities and the Core Commitments goals is the unforeseen consequence of believing that the inculcation of analytic thinking is, in itself, the central point and responsibility of higher education.

Analytical thinking involves making sense of particular events in terms of general concepts and then manipulating those concepts according to general rules or principles. Analytical thinking involves framing the particularity of actual experience in terms of categories at a higher level of abstraction. This “rigorous” thinking is central to modern societies. It enables scientific explanation and theory-building as well as their powerful application in technological innovation.

Analytical thinking is necessary for adequate functioning in most domains of modern culture, and most entering students need considerable help to gain the essential intellectual skills it entails. These skills play an important part in making democratic as well as academic or intellectual life possible. Without clarity of thought and argument, without the ability to think critically and reason logically, people are captive to unexamined biases and unable to evaluate the validity of others’ claims or their own intuitions.

Our quarrel, then, is not with analytical thinking itself but instead with the tendency in the academy to treat analytical thinking as a sufficient scholarly and scientific ideal and educational goal. When this happens, it creates an academic culture that reveres analytical rigor as the only important consideration, disconnecting rigorous thinking from sources of human meaning and value. This threatens to create a culture of argument that is so critical,
skeptical, and detached that it can become unmoored from the human purposes that rationality and rigor are meant to serve. Analytical thinking teaches students how to argue all sides of an issue, but pursued by itself, it often leaves them with the sense that the ultimate choice of where to come down is arbitrary. One result is that humanities disciplines, in particular, come to be regarded by students as trading in mere “opinion” as opposed to rigorously demonstrated “facts”—which appear to be the only kind of knowledge worth having.

This is not a new problem. At the source of Western rationality, Plato already was warning about the nihilistic potential of acquiring skills of critical argument that are not well grounded by a moral compass. Plato has Socrates humorously compare such unmoored, fledgling dialecticians to young hounds who discover that they can tear to bits any argument, making the weaker and worse case seem like the stronger and better one. (Many academics, perhaps, can recognize in this description more than a few young and not-so-young hounds they have encountered.)

The development of analytical thinking is an incomplete educational agenda in part because it disconnects rationality from purpose, and academic understanding from practical understanding or judgment. In order to prepare for decision and action in the world, students need to develop not only facility with concepts and critical analysis but also judgment about real situations in all their particularity, ambiguity, uncertainty, and complexity. They need to develop practical reasoning.

The university, however, has been organized around a specialization of research that drives discovery but has also overshadowed the educational mission of the liberal arts. As advancing research has become more prominent as an institutional goal, it has fed back on the educational environment. In largely unintended but nevertheless destructive ways, the research emphasis has reinforced the tendency among many academics to view the promotion of disciplined inquiry as the central or only educational agenda.

The first Core Commitments outcome, the pursuit of excellence, points to a key problem with the “critical-thinking agenda.” That agenda represents the nature of disciplined inquiry well but it cannot explain how to get students to care about disciplined inquiry and invest the work that is necessary to master it. In order for that to happen, inquiry needs to serve some kind of engagement with the world. It is through such engagement that it gains the energy, spirit, and purpose that lead to curiosity and commitment.

An appreciation of the insufficiency of the critical-thinking agenda also clarifies the challenges presented by the other Core Commitments outcomes. It points to the importance of grounding the consideration of multiple perspectives in real situations and purposes in order to offset the risk that engaging multiple perspectives will lead to a morass of relativism, as the young hounds metaphor suggests. Likewise, acknowledging the dominance of the critical-thinking agenda also clarifies the fifth goal, moral reasoning. Teaching for sophisticated moral thinking is more widespread in the academy, and more easily achieved, than fostering a morality that permeates life, precisely because moral reasoning is a variant of analytic thinking. But high-level analytic thinking about morality is insufficient; it must be accompanied by the kind of habitual, embodied, pervasive morality that is the basis for a moral life.

Despite these challenges, we are optimistic about the potential for higher education to cultivate personal and social responsibility. Once recognized, the thinness of the way critical thinking is currently characterized for students can be corrected. A better understanding of the importance of identity formation, the development of purpose, and practical reasoning opens the possibility of institutionalizing a fuller agenda for liberal education, one that enlists analytical reasoning toward the end of a wider cultivation of humanity.

How to support the development of identity, purpose, and practical reasoning

How, then, might we accomplish such a reorientation of academic practice to better support the aims of liberal education? We suggest three steps that educators can take immediately. Realizing their full potential, however, will require effort, organization, patience, and the ability to learn from experiment.
First, pay attention to questions of meaning, purpose, and personal identity in the classroom. A recent study of student attitudes in higher education by Alexander and Helen Astin (2004) shows (1) that the great majority of students want faculty to raise questions of purpose and meaning, (2) that by and large their teachers do not raise these issues, but that (3) when they do, students feel they gain a great deal. In order to achieve the combination of open-mindedness and commitment that is essential to mature adulthood, it is important that faculty model and provide experience with the interplay between analytical detachment and sensitivity to moral purpose and meaning.

Second, incorporate throughout both the curriculum and the cocurriculum high-quality experiential learning, using active, hands-on, collaborative, inquiry-based pedagogies (AAC&U 2007). These pedagogies are commonplace in some kinds of professional education, and also in education for civic and political engagement, though they are less widely used in typical liberal arts courses. Through active, hands-on learning and reflection on their experiences, students are able to bring theory and classroom knowledge together with practice. In the process, academic learning is challenged and refined by the complexities of the practice arena, and the complexities of practice are illuminated by conceptual frames and contextual knowledge drawn from classroom learning.

At least as important is the fact that in many settings of experiential learning, students encounter models of persons they want to be like or fear becoming. This enables students to think in new ways about their own identities and central commitments, making it an extremely powerful kind of learning. This, too, holds still largely untapped potential for teaching in the arts and sciences.

The third important principle in educating for identity, purpose, and practical reasoning is to give explicit attention to the campus culture. We can enhance the culture's support for personal and social responsibility by providing inspiring models, embedding symbols of key values throughout the campus, and paying attention to rituals and other aspects of socialization into the campus community. It is important for the institutional culture to help students think about what they want to be like as individuals, as professionals in their fields, and as citizens as well as to engage them habitually in socially responsible behaviors through providing opportunities, incentives, and structures for that behavior.

If colleges could successfully expand beyond the critical-thinking agenda, we believe American higher education would have a much better chance of achieving the five goals of personal and social responsibility that AAC&U has articulated as Core Commitments. But that is not all. Research on professional education and education for citizenship provides strong evidence that this kind of preparation would make all aspects of undergraduate learning more robust, memorable, and usable—both in college and in the years beyond. An agenda for undergraduate education that thoroughly integrates education for purpose, identity, and practical reasoning with the already strong education for analytic capacities will better serve our students and also our culture; our civic, professional, and commercial institutions; and our democracy.

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Imagine you are given carte blanche to reconfigure a free-standing college campus of a large public university according to your own structural ideal for higher education, and that you take as your conceptual model the vision of the “New Academy” outlined in *Greater Expectations*, the 2002 report of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Physically, the space would be open and inviting; it might even include an art gallery in its spacious lobby to encourage and showcase “the human imagination, expression, and the products of many cultures” (xii). The boldest and most substantive innovation in this utopian model, however, would be the total eschewal of the traditional, discipline-specific, departmental system of organization, which “reinforces the atomization of the curriculum by dividing knowledge into distinct fields, even though scholarship, learning, and life have no such artificial boundaries” (16). In its place, you would establish interdisciplinary programs that deliberately confound conventional distinctions among the professions and the liberal arts. You would recruit a faculty of generalists committed to interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship as well as to fostering empowered and intentional learners able to “draw on differences and commonality to produce a deeper experience of community” (22).

When most of us conjure such an ideal restructuring of the academy, we don’t imagine the setting to be an industrial park off a strip mall expanse of urban roadway. Yet that is precisely where you’ll find the University of Southern Maine’s Lewiston-Auburn College. In fact, to get there, you must pass Altered Image Tattoos at the Lewiston exit and take a left at Chick-A-Dee’s Restaurant. Turning into the parking lot across from the United Vending Company, you’ll see the main building, which, despite extensive renovations, remains squat-looking and low, reminding inhabitants of its initial use as indoor tennis courts. Housed in this setting, the college reflects the greater aspirations and firm commitments of this former manufacturing city to provide its young—and not-so-young—citizens the opportunity for just the sort of “inclusive educational excellence” AAC&U promotes in its Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative.

**The “New Academy”**

In 1988, civic and business leaders worked collaboratively with university representatives to establish a campus of the University of Southern Maine in the Lewiston-Auburn area, and they decided to build the new college on a solid foundation in the liberal arts. Rather than
establishing a curriculum focused myopically on professional preparation, they agreed on the importance of emphasizing critical thinking, written and oral communication, and an orientation toward lifelong learning that would enrich students’ professional, personal, and civic lives well beyond their first—or next—jobs. Since its inception, Lewiston-Auburn College’s mission has been to offer a curriculum “marked by integration between the liberal arts disciplines; between the liberal arts, the professional concentrations and the workplace; and between the college and the community” (Lewiston-Auburn College University of Southern Maine 2007). In their decision to provide what the LEAP report describes as “the kind of life-enhancing, liberal—and liberating—education that once was available only to the fortunate few” (AAC&U 2007, viii), the founders of Lewiston-Auburn College anticipated many aspects of the “New Academy” that now guide curricular reform at all three campuses of the University of Southern Maine.

Conceptually, the “New Academy” emerges from higher education reforms that address the “multiple purposes of higher learning in a complex society” and attempts to “bring together the divergent expectations” of students, employers, policymakers, faculty, and the general public (AAC&U 2002, 9). As friendly yet probing faculty of this “New Academy,” we seek in this article to draw attention to the tensions concealed by the salutary rhetoric in AAC&U’s calls for educational reform. We juxtapose an account of our experiences in curricular reform with an analysis that problematizes the rhetoric of AAC&U documents. What, we ask, does the vision of the “New Academy” look like when it is put into practice at an actual institution? What pedagogical advances are made, and what difficulties are intensified? Even at a college like ours—whose mission is to help aspiring students achieve the “greater expectations” set by their own community and where we collaborate with and enjoy strong support from business and civic leaders—it is necessary, productive, and healthy to heighten recognition of the differing and often competing interests, values, and expectations of our constituents and to engage those differences thoughtfully.

To frame the tensions we seek to scrutinize, we borrow the phrase “market-smart and mission-centered” from the subtitle of Robert Zemsky, Gregory Wegner, and William Massy’s Remaking the American University (2005). This contradictory formulation, which aptly summarizes AAC&U’s rhetorical lexicon, is rooted in the belief that the academy can hold to its traditional mission of serving the common good while also functioning as a key player in the neoliberal market. Unlike those who consider the ideology of the market to pose the single-greatest threat to the future of American education (Washburn 2005; Caffentzis 2008; Readings 1997), AAC&U endeavors to bring together the divergent stakeholders in higher education. While we applaud AAC&U for its vitally important leadership, we advocate reflective critique of these terms.

As Washburn (2005, 39) reminds us, when John Dewey and other educational leaders created the American Association of University Professors in 1915, their aim was to gain legal protections for the academic freedom of faculty and to establish the academy as a rare space in American society where intellectuals could express views that challenge the status quo and question the moral legitimacy of certain business practices. While these larger issues remain of serious concern, they are not central to our focus on the curricular reform efforts advocated by AAC&U. Nonetheless, they should be kept in mind as we explore the potential effects of the AAC&U’s efforts to integrate the market and the academy—two interpenetrated yet still separate spheres.

The Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative rests on AAC&U’s finding that consensus exists among business, civic, and educational leaders regarding the “essential learning outcomes” of college. In other words, what parents, policymakers, legislators, and employers want students to gain from college is essentially the same as the knowledge, skills, and abilities that faculty intend for them. To establish such consensus, AAC&U has had to urge faculty to define student learning outcomes clearly and to find effective ways to assess them. AAC&U has taken the position that when colleges and universities respond to public demands for greater transparency and accountability they do not—as Bill Readings (1997) and others have argued—succumb to the accounting logic of consumer capitalism. Instead, assessment operates as a stratagem to forestall federal
intervention that would parallel No Child Left Behind at the university level. Further, for AAC&U, the definition and assessment of student learning outcomes function as a way for the academy to maintain its autonomy, to resist the logic of the marketplace, and to transform the terms by which the public mission of the academy is evaluated and reaffirmed.

Curricular reform at Lewiston-Auburn College
In terms of the transformative curricular reforms advocated by AAC&U, the undergraduate curriculum at the University of Southern Maine’s Lewiston-Auburn College is an exemplar. Given the academic and political pressures for more explicit curricular “outcomes,” we began our work by intentionally revisiting the core values of a liberal education. We were guided by the common purpose to educate our students more effectively to take up the “unfinished work of building a successful, inclusive democracy” (University of Maine System 2000). Working with colleagues across the university to articulate a common vision of what the goals of a liberal education could and should be, we produced a document listing the multiple literacies expected of college graduates in the twenty-first century as well as goals pertaining to ethical citizenship, social responsibility, and civic engagement. The curricular plan we developed based on these learning outcomes represents, in the words of AAC&U Senior Scholar Lee Knefelkamp (2007), “a statement of the civic mission of the college.” Thus, in our experience, designing an outcomes-based curriculum has been a way to reaffirm the civic purpose of a college education. By making the intended learning more explicit, the “New Academy” articulates the specific ways it upholds its historical role of promoting the health of our democracy.

At the same time, however, as the curriculum committee began to translate the vision of liberal education into specific curricular themes and models, our commitment to serious, respectful dialogue and collaboration was repeatedly put to the test. Fundamental questions and differences emerged as we attempted to work out the details of a curriculum designed to “reach beyond the classroom to the larger community” and to ask students to “apply their developing analytical skills and ethical judgment to concrete problems in the world around them” (AAC&U 2002, 26). Such enduring topics as environmental sustainability, democracy and difference, and social and economic justice became the themes of our new general education curriculum. As they do everywhere, these vexing concerns quickly became highly politicized and hotly contested among our faculty. We grappled with differing disciplinary and philosophical positions, with questions of academic freedom, and with concerns about the pedagogies appropriate to the work of encouraging critical inquiry and ethically informed action. This work provided an indispensable and authentic lesson in our need to practice the habits of mind and heart necessary to the inclusive democratic practices we hope to teach our students.

The new core curriculum at Lewiston-Auburn College embodies many of the seven “Principles of Excellence” foregrounded in College Learning for the New Global Century, the 2007 LEAP report. Principle Four, for example, calls on schools to “engage the big questions,” which is exactly what our four curricular themes are meant to accomplish. However, what our faculty found in the process of constructing this new core is that AAC&U’s discourse quickly begs a lot questions itself: Which “big questions” do we tackle? Engage them how?
The process of curricular reform, we discovered, cannot make much progress without first airing our own differences on such global issues—an undertaking that can lead, in turn, to contentious debate over which pedagogies should be employed to entertain the questions that are ultimately selected for examination.

Indeed, the very title of the core curriculum produced the inquiry, “How, Then, Shall We Live?” Even in our college’s literature, each theme is accompanied by a question. For the theme of “sustainability,” for example, we ask, “in a world where there are never enough resources to do all that we might want, how do we live and make decisions in a just and ethical way?” Many on our faculty maintain that raising such “big questions” inevitably and rightfully leads to a form of “advocacy teaching” that might challenge the norms and ideologies of American possessive individualism. Pedagogically, such “advocacy teaching” requires an interrogative mode that does not shrink from guiding students toward making observations that may be critical of existing social or market practices.

Thus, when AAC&U advocates for “an invigorated and practical liberal education as the most powerful form of learning for the twenty-first century” (2002, ix), we must ask what is behind such rhetoric. The effect is an invitation not only to raise the “big questions,” but also to provide critiques that will necessarily depart from outcomes aimed directly at producing students committed solely to advancing “economic vitality” and “individual opportunity” (AAC&U 2007, 4). While we suspect that precisely this pedagogical outcome is anticipated—and even considered desirable—by the AAC&U leadership, its rhetoric nonetheless remains coy about making clear political commitments.

We attract students to our programs with the promise of marketability, but we hope that their actual learning will encourage them to question the very notion of marketability itself

“New Academy” intend for them. As we all know, what “really matters” to students is that their education enable them to land a good job and advance in their careers after graduation. Obtaining a college degree is generally considered an investment necessary for financial security and personal advancement. As such, outcomes related to social responsibility, civic engagement, and global awareness are low on the list of student priorities, while critical thinking, communication skills, and competency in math and science are held to be of moderate importance. That is, students’ priorities tend to be the inverse of those of academic, civic, and business leaders (Humphreys and Davenport 2005). To address this divide, AAC&U recommends helping students and their parents understand “what really matters in college.”

AAC&U believes that this statistical discrepancy establishes the need for the “New Academy” to be “market-smart”: the LEAP report explains that the designated set of learning outcomes are “essential” because “in an economy fueled by innovation, the capabilities developed through a liberal education have become America’s most valuable economic asset” (2007, 13). Similarly, in Lewiston-Auburn College’s own marketing materials, we confidently assure our students that the skills and abilities they will hone will help them get a job and further their careers. We recruit students with the promise of marketability and then—in a fairly undisguised “bait-and-switch” maneuver—entice them into an educational experience that intends to upend their previously cherished priorities. We attract students with the promise of upward mobility and then—in a fairly undisguised “bait-and-switch” maneuver—entice them into an educational experience that intends to upend their previously cherished priorities. We attract students to our programs with the promise of marketability, but we hope that their actual learning will encourage them to question the very notion of marketability itself. To be sure, we are all in favor of student success in the workplace; but we also hope, in the pedagogical spirit of Paulo Freire, that our graduates will leave with the ability to critique “the logic of the present system” even as they enter into it. Only then can higher education serve out Freire’s vision of a “practice of freedom” that affords younger generations the intellectual capacities to transform the more malevolent

Cross purposes
Two related elements in AAC&U discourse warrant further consideration, namely the oft-repeated references to “essential learning outcomes” and to “what really matters in college.” These phrases cover the divergence between what students expect to gain from their college education and what the faculty of the
practices and values of capitalism (Shaull 2000, 39).

Our purpose here is not to scold AAC&U for its rhetorical capitulation to the ideology of the marketplace. On the contrary, we maintain that the effort to help the general public understand what “really” matters in college contains within it a progressivist agenda to conserve the academy's traditionally oppositional calling. Indeed, when AAC&U and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2008) assert that “higher education has an obligation to our democracy as well as our economy,” it’s clear that the liberal education envisioned by AAC&U runs counter to the “competing curriculum” of global consumer capitalism. However, when it foregrounds a perceived seamlessness in the student outcomes desired by business, civic, and education leaders, AAC&U undermines the unique and historical role the academy has played in providing a countercultural voice.

We appreciate the political exigencies under which AAC&U operates. Nonetheless, we contend that without clearer delineation of the conflicting ethical implications of learning outcomes, we risk the loss of autonomy. As Toni Morrison warns (2000, 7), “if the university does not take seriously and rigorously its role as guardian of wider civic freedoms, as interrogator of more and more complex ethical problems, as servant and preserver of deeper democratic practices, then some regime or ménage of regimes will do it for us, in spite of us, and without us.” Indeed, we need only look to the 2006 report of U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spelling’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education for evidence that such a usurpation of academic autonomy is well underway already.

As we endeavor to assess the learning of our graduating students at Lewiston-Auburn College, we share the sentiments of a single mother working her way out of poverty, who, like many of our students, was the first in her family to earn a college degree: “One of the wonderful things about America is that we’re continually making progress, and we make progress because we continue to question the way things are now” (Bazar 2006). Such convictions, however innocent, reflect a dual disposition and a transgressive role for higher education. On the one hand, students remain hopeful about a progressive narrative for the country’s future; on the other, they believe that meaningful and continuous civic transformation is essential for that progressive narrative to be realized.

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Scholarship and teaching in the humanities can sometimes be overly self-referential. Rather than foster citizenship and social engagement, undergraduate literature classes are often limited to exercises in textual interpretation as students learn to compare and contrast formal devices and thematic motifs. How do we measure the student’s mastery of Dostoyevsky’s Crime and Punishment, for example? Is it by his or her ability to retain the plot and character actions? Is it by the number of different motifs the student is able to identify? Is it by his or her ability to recognize verbal polyphony? Or, rather, is it by the student’s refusal to hurt another person regardless of how miserable and despicable that person may be? Is it by his or her decision to volunteer at a homeless shelter because poverty, as Dostoyevsky depicts, corrodes humanity? The step from analyzing verbal polyphony to fighting poverty is not a short one, and only rarely does teaching and scholarship in the humanities help students make that step.

Ultimately, fostering the ability to own (enact and embody) a literary or philosophical insight should be central to humanities learning in college. Withdrawal into information transfer without a view of tangible action or application is a serious failure of education. “We know we can teach [students] Keynesian economics and the history of the Italian Renaissance,” Richard Hersh and Carol Geary Schneider explain (2005, 10). “But if that is all we do, then we have failed them. If, in the process, we don’t also teach students about passion and the relationship between passion and responsible action, then we leave them dulled.”

If this insight is true of science, it is doubly true of the humanities. Science students at least have the advantage of practicing the application of scientific concepts to phenomena...
Bridging the Gap between Building Theory & Fostering Citizenship

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through projects, practica, and labs. For humanities students, however, the transfer of knowledge from concept to action often goes untested and unrealized. Yet, the stakes in the humanities are just as high as in science, if not higher. If we cannot afford to have students fail in the application of trigonometry concepts, we definitely cannot afford to have them read Robert Graves and easily justify a war, or to have them read Daniel Quinn’s *Ishmael* and remain indifferent to animal extinction. Embodied and enacted humanism is more powerful than its theoretical counterpart, and it results in better conceptual learning as well.

**Strategies for making concepts tangible**

How can we foster this type of learning in the humanities classroom? In attempting to answer this question here, I propose five strategies for making concepts tangible: through media and the arts, through activism, through cocreation, through contemporizing, and through cross-pollination. Underlying these strategies are three interconnected ideas that have been suggested in the literature on the crisis of the humanities. These ideas are centered on overcoming extreme specialization and formalism (Spellmeyer 2003), opening a wider frame of reference through interdisciplinary crossover (Klein 2005; Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000), and reattaching the humanities to the arts (Scholes 1998; Spellmeyer 2003; McBride 2004).

The five strategies derive from my own personal teaching experience at two colleges as well as from the observation of countless classrooms across the country in the course of a nationwide study of interdisciplinary education conducted by the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The course examples discussed below are composite portraits of courses either observed or personally delivered. The idea behind proposing specific strategies is not to foreclose further experimentation, but rather to open doors wide for building upon these pedagogies by way of extension, critical development, and adaptation to individual instructional needs.

1. **Embodiment through media and the arts.**

The media and the arts strategy calls upon students to embody abstract concepts through the creation of artifacts. Literary styles or philosophical ideas are transformed into objects (masques, models, designs, drawings) executed in a medium of the student’s choice (clay, charcoal, wood, computer animation, poetry, music). Students have to capture—and be able to articulate—the essential aspect(s) of the humanistic concept studied. As a result, reading the textbook description of the concept becomes not an end in itself but an idea generator for the creative project. The physical expression of an abstract idea through art makes the concept more real and personally meaningful for students. Through creative embodiment, students acquire ownership of ideas.
The application of this strategy transforms the teaching of Introduction to Humanities from a dates-and-names course into a studio environment. Instead of overloading students with reams of data, the instructor identifies core themes and categories of the topic (e.g., the Renaissance, linearity, the mechanical universe of the Enlightenment) and then asks students to represent them in an artistic medium of their choice. The creative process may take place inside or outside the classroom, depending on time and material constraints. The critique session takes place in class and involves both the presentation of the artifacts by students and their justification of creative choices by the content of the explored concept.

2. Activism. The activism strategy provides opportunities for students to act upon insights developed through conceptual learning in the humanities classroom. Not all humanities courses lend themselves equally well to an activist extension (interdisciplinary or problem-based
courses are the best candidates), and it takes both instructional and institutional effort to make this work. But when established, on however limited a scale, these opportunities offer the most direct way to experience humanistic concepts in action.

In the course Literature and the Environment, for example, the discussion and interpretation of texts (e.g., Daniel Quinn’s *Ishmael*, Aldo Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac*, Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*) is reinforced by real-life opportunities to act upon newly forged beliefs through limited service at a local environmental organization. To make a transition from understanding biocentrism to practicing it, students may engage in investigative reporting on industrial pollution, participate in tracking a compromised species, or address K–12 audiences on a particular environmental issue. They also write a “call-to-arms” term paper documenting their experiential learning and calling attention to an urgent civic issue. Students in such a class develop a new approach to the environment and to the humanities as they begin to see the world-changing potential of the texts they read. Their writing style matures through better argumentation, increased social engagement, and the development of a distinctive personal voice. Students emerge from this course as concerned citizens—asking why before they ask how, and driven to translate humanistic insight into social practice.

3. Cocreation. The cocreation strategy transforms a student of literature from an admiring reader into an involved cocreator. Students read texts with a view to their potential transformation, extension, or critical development. They see in “Great Books” the act of great creativity and craftsmanship in which they, too, can take part. Such creative participation tends to foster deeper understanding and appreciation of literature, while also developing in students a more critical stance.

A course that focuses in-depth on a few literary texts or authors is a good candidate for the application of this strategy. One way to make interpretive efforts vibrant and vital to students (and not too formal or abstract) is to connect them to students’ own imaginations and writings. A student may be asked to act as coauthor of *Middlemarch*, for example, and to expand upon or further develop the original masterwork. The student may invent a new character and insert it into the story, provide a different ending to a novel, or situate the events of a novel within a different culture or time. By enacting these transformations, the students become deeply immersed in the style and subject matter, and they are empowered by cocreative license to change and critique them. The result is critical and mature ownership of both the mechanics of the text and its core ideas.

4. Contemporizing. The contemporizing strategy brings abstract concepts to life by steeping them in the present moment. As engaged participants in their own culture, students read the past through the lens of the present and develop deeper insight into it. By “trying on” a particular concept that is made obscure and abstract by spatial and temporal distance, students become aware of the particulars of their own cultural experience, which they begin to see as more malleable and open to transformative action and intervention. This strategy involves the process of embedding remote ideas within contemporary culture and personal experience.

Teaching Daniel Defoe’s novel *Moll Flanders*, for example, may involve a dry analysis of the materialism of early capitalism in the *Age of Enlightenment*. Alternatively, the instructor can make this historical period come alive by comparing and contrasting Moll Flanders’s acquisitiveness to our own cultural obsession with profit, image, and personal security. What is our judgment of our own materialism? Is it similar to or different from Moll’s? Students can also be asked to find a contemporary equivalent of Moll among media personalities or to rewrite an episode of the story—using the cocreation strategy in addition to contemporizing—for a contemporary audience. Through the search for points of connection and disconnection between the text and their own culture, students emerge as historically informed readers of classical texts and as critical consumers of their own culture.

5. Cross-pollination. New insights or plans of action are often born at the intersection of two ideas, methodologies, or concepts. Since the humanities disciplines are in the business of commenting on, critiquing, and contextualizing events, experiences, and phenomena, they lend themselves most naturally to interdisciplinary crossover. The cross-pollination strategy involves bringing a humanities perspective to bear on topics or methodologies outside of its realm or on different disciplines within its own
realm. Substance and depth are imparted by linking concepts from different disciplines.

A more complex and multifaceted understanding of human memory is bound to emerge within a college classroom when, for example, the perspectives of a neuroscientist and a literary critic converge. In a class such as Science and Literature of Memory, students learn about memory mechanisms as manifestations of brain function. But by also reading biographies and autobiographies, they recognize that different memory mechanisms lead to different ways of recording or retaining life events. Students discover both the fallibility and the internal logic of memory through the lenses of neuroscience and creative writing. In the process, the whole notion of memory is enlarged, concretized, and transformed into a tool for self-inquiry.

All five of the preceding strategies for making concepts tangible aim to take students beyond theoretical abstraction and put them in touch with tangible reality: the reality of one’s creative process, wordsmithing, or craftsmanship in any medium (strategies 1 and 3); the reality of social life (strategy 2); the reality of one’s own time and culture (strategy 4), and the reality of knowledge as revealed in transfer (strategy 5). None of the strategies shortchanges conceptual learning in any way. But they all view conceptual learning as a means, not as an end in itself. To embody concepts in clay or charcoal or to push them further through coauthoring requires close reading and sophisticated interpretation. To implement ideas—such as environmental agency—in a real-world setting, one needs to possess thorough and critical knowledge of those ideas. The act of “trying on” in the present concepts that may be rooted in the remote past or converging ideas from several different fields make it imperative that students know the historical and disciplinary context well enough to be able to engage in a productive compare-and-contrast process. Thus, the goals of liberal education and the personal ownership of ideas impart a higher purpose and motivation to the study of the humanities and enhance, rather than compromise, theoretical and conceptual learning.

This conclusion is echoed and substantiated by Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University, a new report from the Tenure Team Initiative of Worcester Polytechnic Institute.
A number of top humanities scholars are gaining recognition for pioneering approaches that bring the humanities out of the ivory tower and back into the thick of cultural life.

Engaged humanities scholars

Many more strategies could be developed to help move academic practice beyond theory building to active reengagement with social life. The obstacles to this goal of liberalizing humanities education, however, are many. The tenure system pushes for ultraspecialization and for the formalization of humanities disciplines, cultivating the ivory purity of their abstract conceptual bases. The continuing dominance of postmodernist thought in research and criticism challenges and deconstructs the role of the humanities as a positive force in society. Yet there is reason for hope. A number of top humanities scholars are gaining recognition for pioneering approaches that bring the humanities out of the ivory tower and back into the thick of cultural life. By attending to the goals of liberal education, these scholars inspire hope that humanities research and teaching may move in this direction.

Elaine Scarry, the Walter M. Cabot Professor of Aesthetics and the General Theory of Value in the English department at Harvard University, keeps a very close eye on how literary theory can be applied to the most urgent issues in the world—war, electronic signaling, plane crashes, nuclear weapons, and the experience of pain. She applies the same analytical energies to the study of Thackeray as she does to reading documents on the 1996 crash of TWA flight 800 or naval weapons manuals. Scarry sees her mission as that of an engaged public intellectual. “There is nothing about being an English professor that exempts you from the normal obligations of citizenship,” she observes. Literary criticism provides a methodology for “reading” contemporary culture and even for “solving social problems and saving lives” (Eakin 2000). Passion for disciplinary crossover and public activism mark Scarry’s work in the humanities and demonstrate that, even from atop the ivory tower, humanists can branch out into the real world and make their voices count.

With doctoral and master’s degrees in electrical engineering and computer science as well as a Master of Fine Arts degree in music, Diana Dabby, associate professor of electrical engineering and music at Olin College of Engineering, bridges two academic worlds: the sciences and the arts. A concert pianist and a composer, Dabby feeds initial musical themes into a “chaotic mapping” engine she developed to produce nonlinear musical variations of the original works. Composers around the world use her engineering innovation to generate creative nonlinear variations on musical themes. This technique for connecting chaos theory and musical expression can also be applied to other art forms—visual or kinetic inputs in graphic art, word sequences in poetry, or dance movements. In a sense, Dabby makes physics concepts audible and tangible in her musical compositions. This cross-disciplinary translation is a form of cocreation: she actually extends and enriches her musical expression through subtly engineered variations. She also demonstrates the creative range of science and makes her students aware of its power to channel personal expression.

Stephen Greenblatt has long been a proponent of “treating cultures as texts” (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000, 13). The New Historicism approach, of which he is considered the founder, treats a literary text as a product of its time and social environment rather than a thing in itself. The placement of a text within its broader social and historical context transforms it into a tangible cultural artifact, the carrier of contemporaneous social concerns, economic practices, and philosophical beliefs. The New Historicism project, according to Greenblatt and Gallagher, is concerned with “finding the
creative power that shapes literary works outside the narrow boundaries in which it had hitherto been located, as well as within those boundaries” (2000, 12). In this effort, Greenblatt “contemporizes” the literary text; he makes it aware of its historical and cultural roots and connects it powerfully to the audience. Students process the text on more levels than the linguistic and become engaged readers of the whole culture that produced it.

Scott Gilbert, an accomplished biologist at Swarthmore College and author of a major textbook of developmental biology, is also trained in cultural and feminist theory and teaches a course called History and Critique of Biology. Humanistic insight helps him put biology in a broader social context. In this encounter, cultural theory of gender roles, for example, meets with biological facts on mimicry, gender cannibalism, and the process of fertilization. Some of the theory stands up to the test and is enriched by scientific data. Other concepts and metaphors—for example, “sperm as a warhead”—prove to be biologically fallible and misleading. Gilbert sees both science and the humanities as two interpretive systems—one bent on limiting interpretations and paring away false assumptions (science), and the other (humanities) on generating a steady stream of new interpretations. This cross-disciplinary dialogue helps Gilbert’s students overcome the misconceptions that science is just solid truth and that humanistic concepts are pure abstractions. They realize that the conceptualizations of the humanities refer to phenomena and tangible relationships in the real world and that the real world both learns from these ideas and metaphors and informs them in a reciprocal way.

Conclusion
The efforts of these scholars are driven by the same core impulse as the five strategies proposed above, namely, the desire to restore to the humanities its liberal education mission of fostering involved citizenship and active ownership of ideas. Scarry imparts the sophistication of literary analysis to the interpretation and resolution of urgent issues of the day. Dabby extends musical ideas by translating them into a physical medium. Greenblatt opens up literary texts to the larger culture that produced them. Gilbert tests and probes humanistic insights by bringing relevant scientific data to bear on them. These approaches indicate the variety of opportunities for connecting the humanities to real issues and physical phenomena and for fostering in students a sense of tangible ownership. Following the lead of these scholars could create momentum for reawakening humanities teaching to its civic duty.

The engagement of students in cocreation, action, and ownership of concepts does not compromise conceptual learning in the humanities. On the contrary, it enhances it. On a par with measuring students’ conceptual understanding and skill at textual analysis, new outcomes should be developed within the humanities disciplines to measure the maturity of students’ moral judgment, their degree of social awareness, and their ability to own and embody their beliefs and theories.

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Although it may be different at your institution, if you hang around public universities that have less than selective admissions policies, you are bound to hear a litany of complaints about today's students. They lack the attitude required for productive and serious academic work, and too many lack disciplined study habits; they have short attention spans and very little patience with academic work. Furthermore, they are too frequently devoid of self-criticism, unable to delay gratification, intellectually incurious, and unwilling to tolerate principled difference. Sadly, some can even wear ignorance as an entitled right.

The blame game
But who's to blame for this? The popular press indicts ineffective public school teachers at the elementary and secondary levels; parents who preempt their children's problem solving and, as a consequence, erode their self-reliance; parents and teachers who insulate students from failure, resulting in unrealistically high self-esteem and an unreasonable sense of entitlement; computer games, MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, and similar distractions; teachers, administrators, and students who conspire to expect little from each other and fail to hold each other accountable. Other observers invoke more general sociocultural changes, including a generational lack of empathy, an eroding work ethic, and a deepening cynicism about the value or relevance of work and educational accomplishment.

Some of this sounds very like blaming the victim, and we academicians are well advised to address our own complicity and culpability. Universities overpay “CEOs” and faculty stars, whose salaries elevate not standards but tuition and fees; teachers fear facing the risks and discomforts of maintaining appropriately high academic standards; college leaders and alumni show more interest in sports than academics; and many board members and presidents are more attendant to the interests and concerns of politicians than to the need to create educational environments that support student accomplishment. Too often, our propaganda about ourselves outstrips the academic experience we actually provide.

And, of course, political leaders rarely consider their own culpability. Postsecondary schools have suffered large and repeated cuts in state financial support. Politicians stay in power and thrive by cutting their constituents’ taxes, and they portray higher education institutions as wasteful in order to justify cuts in state support. Their actions injure public universities, but the resulting burden falls even more harshly on parents and students. In terms of academic preparedness, midrange students who cannot qualify for academic scholarships must make up the deficit—they or their parents. Extreme family or student debt is one result. Another is the dramatic rise in the number of students who work twenty hours or more per week—some merely to maintain a more comfortable lifestyle, others out of necessity, but with both groups losing hours that should be devoted to academic work. Rising costs, financial and otherwise, intensify student and parent skepticism about the value of higher education.

Faculty, individually and collectively, can reassert the value of education by acting to raise academic standards
Academic standards

Many, perhaps most, faculty openly applaud high standards and privately disdain colleagues with weak standards and high grades. The academic culture encourages exactly the kind of remedy many faculty publicly advocate: setting high but attainable standards that students must struggle to meet and that result in accomplishments in which they can justly take pride. Many students, after all, desire to possess degrees and grades that testify to their intellectual courage, effort, and accomplishment; they want an education that measures more than mere accumulation of credit hours.

Despite acknowledging the need to expect more of students, however, individual faculty may anticipate that implementing stronger academic standards will lead to student backlash and consequent low student evaluations, hostile commentaries on RateMyProfessor.com, embarrassing grade appeals and grievances filed through a process that demeans student and professor alike, and a lower demand for their courses that will be noted disapprovingly by chairs and deans. Insofar as personnel decisions rely upon student approval, faculty, especially those without tenure, fear disadvantage if they raise standards.

Far from reassuring faculty, administrators may emphasize that enrollment and retention figures depend upon student and parental satisfaction. The subtext is inescapable: it is preferable to cut assignments, dumb down exams, and grant the marginal grade than to lose students. Individual students will surely not object; nor will their parents, most of whom simply want their children to obtain the economic advantages that accompany a college degree. These circumstances inhibit and undermine faculty efforts to develop courses in directions that improve learning.

Although public colleges may refer to traditional liberal arts ideals, their missions stress egalitarianism and democratic values that too often become confused with capitalism. Thus, to escape accusations of classism or elitism, public schools declare themselves open to business for everyone. They become enterprises accountable to their boards for efficiency and cost effectiveness, students become customers, teachers and staff devolve to merchants or mere providers of services, and parents think of themselves as consumers who pay for degrees. The simplified democratic mission is to grant certification for middle-class employment, to train workers, and, at its most idealized, to educate for citizenship.

At elite colleges, research universities, and graduate schools, the professoriate retains its high stature. But this is not the case at regional comprehensive colleges that have adopted, even if only by default, the consumerist model in which the products for sale are grades and degrees. If eroding standards are relevant to this perspective, it is only because they debase the economic value of the degrees to which students are entitled.

Grading practices

Faculty may pay token tribute to the traditional use of grades as determining incentives, but they typically resist discussing with any particularity the grading practices of others. In private, many admit to deep resentment against colleagues who encourage students to expect unearned high grades and no serious consequence for violating the conditions or policies spelled out on syllabi. They seem to forget that they are all, of course, held hostage to each other’s behavior, as students approach each new professor with attitudes and expectations created in part by previous professors. Inflated grades distort students’ attitudes and undermine the credibility of higher education with graduate schools, employers, and other stakeholders. Many universities do not include grading practices in their faculty evaluations and personnel decisions. Grading policy as described in syllabi might be examined, but individual grading standards and patterns are ordinarily considered somehow to be an academic freedom that is outside anyone else’s concern.

University-wide grading policies also should be reexamined in light of their contribution to discouraging student responsibility. Included here are overly generous drop and withdrawal periods, grade forgiveness options, and weakening dismissal and probation standards. One grading policy reform that merits consideration is to use the “pass-fail” system for all courses in which grades are not determined by level of academic performance but by mere attendance or participation in work experiences. The grades that accrue in any course lacking academic performance expectations have a dilatory effect on faculty efforts to strengthen standards. Grades ought to reflect
knowledge, skills, and understandings, not mere obedience to rules, short-lived memorizations for tests, or showing up regularly for an internship or practicum.

Grade inflation is commonly cited as the heart of the standards issue. However, in any particular course or class, high, even very high, grades may or may not reflect low standards, just as low grades may or may not reflect high standards. Obviously, teachers can shift their grade distributions without truly altering their academic standards. Only careful evaluation of what students are being asked to learn and how well that learning is being assessed can determine whether standards are appropriately high. The true center of the standards issue concerns whether an instructor’s grades reflect differences among students in terms of their acquisition

The simplified democratic mission is to grant certification for middle-class employment, to train workers, and, at its most idealized, to educate for citizenship
of the knowledge, skills, and understandings expected of graduates of the university. But we cannot determine whether our students are learning what they should until we improve our assessment procedures and grading practices.

Although developing better assessments of meaningful educational goals will require time, some solutions to the problem of grade inflation are immediate and direct. For example, universities can record and report all students’ rank within a class along with the letter grades. Certainly, a student’s overall average rank would be more useful than today’s highly inflated grade point averages. These transcript changes—joined with a grading scale that assigns the C grade only to those who meet basic university-level standards, the B grade only to students who substantially exceed basic course and university expectations, and the A grade only to students who are truly outstanding—would give external parties more confidence in the honesty of our students’ transcripts.

In broadest terms, the general problem of declining effectiveness and repute is best addressed by institutional self-criticism and the reassertion of core values. It should not be the mission of a university to reassure students so they can merely continue along their
comfortable paths. Rather, universities ought to test the limits of students’ learning and challenge them with the realities of their academic abilities, degrees of competitiveness, and levels of motivation. Sometimes students will come painfully to understand that they are not as talented or diligent as they have been led to believe. Many times, however, they will experience the deep satisfaction of discovering their own greater capacities.

Time to act
Even in nonselective and poorly funded institutions, faculty, individually and collectively, can reassert the value of education by acting to raise academic standards. We offer below a list of politically and personally difficult actions that would help accomplish that important goal:

- As leaders, teachers, or colleagues, seriously examine the extent of your own complicity in the decline of academic standards.
- Develop and implement clear, tough, fair standards in your classes and assign grades that reflect levels of student performance that match the traditional meanings of A, B, C, D, and F grades—and ask your colleagues to do the same.
- Remember that the level of learning we expect of our students reflects the degree to which we take their educations seriously and the respect we have for our disciplines.
- Develop and implement a rigorous approach to the evaluation of teaching that focuses on learning outcomes and that rewards clarity and high-but-achievable academic expectations.
- Conscientiously evaluate each other's teaching, and absolutely do not delegate that important work to students via student evaluations.
- Speak truth to power—educate boards, legislators, and administrators on the limits of efficiency, of crude measures of productivity, and of the corporate model of academe.
- Through outspoken advocacy, test deans, provosts, and presidents for their commitment to establishing conditions that strongly support student learning and accomplishment.
- Resist parental and political pressure to lower expectations or standards, even at the short-term cost of decreased retention rates, longer time to degree, and smaller graduating classes.
- Strengthen admissions standards for your major programs; departments might, for example, develop standardized examinations for use in gatekeeping courses.
- Collaborate with other departments such as English, mathematics, and computer science in the identification of those minimum skill levels appropriate for admission to your major.
- Above all, patiently persuade students to share your convictions about the long-term value of a well-earned education.

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Infusing Liberal Learning into a Business Curriculum

LYNN S. ARENELLA, ANGELIQUE M. DAVI, CYRUS R. VEESEER, AND ROY A. WIGGINS III

Business and the arts and sciences are complementary, rather than competitive, elements of a complete education.

At Bentley College, a four-year private institution located in Waltham, Massachusetts, over 90 percent of students major in business disciplines. For decades, Bentley’s strong arts and sciences departments have battled for a place within an overwhelmingly career-focused curriculum, and great strides have been made to change the traditional relationship between business and the arts and sciences. Recently, for example, students gained the opportunity to pursue a double major comprising a business discipline and an interdisciplinary liberal studies program. And over two recent summers, in an effort designed to facilitate the integration of liberal learning principles across the curriculum, the college has offered weeklong workshops to faculty in both business and the arts and sciences.

The value of liberal learning
Bentley’s desire to integrate liberal learning principles across the curriculum is based on the belief that business and the arts and sciences are complementary, rather than competitive, elements of a complete education. A genuinely rich education should be the basis for both professional success and a more meaningful life. The ability to deal with ambiguity, for example, or to integrate seemingly unrelated ideas and perspectives helps young women and men succeed in their chosen fields. This notion is echoed by the former chief executive officer of General Motors, Roger Smith (1987), who believes that “the Liberal Arts may ultimately prove to be the most relevant learning model. People trained in the Liberal Arts learn to tolerate ambiguity and to bring order out of apparent confusion. They have the kind of sideways thinking and cross-classifying habit of mind that comes from learning, among other things, the many different ways of looking at literary works, social systems, chemical processes, or languages.”

Fostering such “sideways thinking” is one aim of the liberal arts. Getting business students to recognize that they, too, can benefit from such a background is essential to their success in industry. Employers are asking for a broader set of skills and attitudes that include more effective communication and quantitative skills as well as familiarity with and grounding in issues related to innovation, diversity, and global cultures (Schneider 2005). According to Roberts T. Jones (2005, 35), “virtually all occupational endeavors require a working appreciation of the historical, cultural, ethical, and global environments that surround the application of skilled work.”

Given the economic effects of globalization, institutions of higher education need to reexamine their approaches to teaching and learning in order to ensure that they are preparing their students for the ever-changing nature of “the world of work” (Schneider 2005, 3). As Thomas L. Friedman (2006, 302) observes,
“the first, and most important, ability you can develop in a flat world is the ability to ‘learn how to learn’—to constantly absorb, and teach yourself, new ways of doing old things or new ways of doing new things." Such an approach is the basis of a liberal education.

**Liberal learning workshops**

In 2004, Bentley College received a grant from the Davis Foundation to integrate liberal learning with professional training. Recognizing the overlap between the two traditional approaches and enhancing some of those approaches was one goal of the workshops supported by the Davis Foundation. “Our goal,” the grant application explained, “is to reshape the curriculum in such a way that our students will encounter core liberal arts skill sets and perspectives in all their courses, and will be able to make meaningful and productive links between and among seemingly vastly different learning contexts. The priorities of liberal education will then be ‘marbled’ throughout the curriculum.” In addition, we set out to “marble” these perspectives and skill sets into the curriculum so thoroughly that students will repeatedly encounter and practice these elements in a multitude of courses and contexts well beyond the general education core. Ideally, students will be exposed to these ideas, concepts, and complexities over four years in their general education, arts and sciences, and business programs of study.

Following a collegewide search, the dean of arts and sciences appointed the chair of the finance department as the program director for the Davis grant. In conjunction with the dean, the director, in turn, appointed three liberal arts faculty members to serve as both organizers and facilitators of the workshops. These faculty members were chosen from the history, natural and applied sciences, and English departments. During the fall and spring semesters of the first year, they met to assess current liberal learning initiatives on campus, to discuss the needs of the faculty, and to design a faculty workshop. They determined that the workshop should encourage faculty to examine the limitations of discipline-based thinking and practices, to consider interdisciplinary approaches to current assignments, and to infuse their courses with materials that highlight the five strategic areas of the grant: ethics and social responsibility; technology and effective communication; creative thinking and critical analysis; service to the community; and diversity and global citizenship.

Throughout the first year, the Davis group worked to develop a workshop that would provide the support, forum, and resources to help faculty consider their syllabi, cases, and course projects in light of the strategic priorities and perspectives; explore productive ways of integrating some dimension of these priorities into what they already do in the classroom; and present their new ideas to and get feedback from workshop colleagues. Faculty were then invited to apply for a place in one of two weeklong workshops to be held during the summer. As part of the application process, each described an aspect of a course
he or she was interested in revising (e.g., modifying an existing assignment, revising a course syllabus, rethinking an approach to classroom lectures or discussions, or designing a new module). Once accepted, faculty were encouraged to come to the workshop having thought through the ways in which they might already be incorporating these liberal arts perspectives into their courses or to consider ways in which they might begin to infuse their courses with these perspectives or skill sets.

In addition to enhancing the classroom experience for students, the workshops enabled participants to hone their teaching craft.

Bentley already provides faculty with a variety of resources for creating dynamic classrooms, such as technologically advanced classrooms and seminars on topics like ethics and diversity. The workshops supported by the Davis Foundation grant supplemented those programs by providing participating faculty with the opportunity to infuse their courses with liberal learning principles.

**Modeling one approach**

In designing and leading the workshops, the facilitators were committed to modeling liberal learning principles in the modules offered.
For example, facilitators designed sessions that allowed workshop participants to give input on the direction of a session. Recognizing that faculty might attend the sessions with some reservations about being able to implement all of the demonstrated liberal learning strategies in their courses, the first day’s module, entitled “Obstacles and Impediments,” gave faculty an opportunity to voice their concerns. These included worries about teaching in areas outside of their expertise and sacrificing course content in order to include themes like diversity or ethics. Participants also discussed their anxieties about whether they could rely upon institutional support for innovative approaches as well as about the potential downside to innovation.

The overall approach of the workshop was to break down preconceptions of how faculty from different disciplines and divisions teach. During the first two days of the weeklong session, faculty participants deconstructed what currently goes on in classrooms across the college. In order to free them of any disciplinary constraints, modules asked faculty to create assignments, syllabi, and business cases for courses other than their own. In one module, for example, faculty were asked to create a syllabus for a course on Southeast Asia. They were given no other particulars or parameters. The resulting syllabi emerged from collaborations among faculty from a range of departments, including economics, philosophy, finance, and English. Faculty collaborated across disciplines and, by doing so, came up with creative solutions to the many “obstacles” they had listed on that first day. In one case, faculty from history, English, and finance created a transdisciplinary...
course that included a two-week embedded travel component.

The experience of designing “someone else’s syllabus,” along with kindred exercises, largely succeeded in liberating faculty participants from their devotion to narrow, rigid disciplinary paradigms. The transdisciplinary collaborations proved beneficial as faculty moved into a “reconstruction” phase toward the end of the week and were asked to concentrate their efforts on changes they wanted to make to their own course materials. This was performed in concentrated personal time called “mini-sabbaticals,” which were used to finalize independent work. Following these focused efforts, faculty were asked to pair up with another participant from a different discipline in order to present their ideas. Then, each person presented his or her partner’s plans to the larger group.

These paired presentations turned out to be among the most powerful experiences of the workshop. In each case, participants made a special effort to understand and accurately articulate what their partners had developed. For example, in one presentation, a faculty member from the finance department reviewed the proposed changes of a faculty member from the English department. Together, they collaborated on ways the literature professor could “marbleize” the themes throughout her Shakespearean film course. In return, the literature professor helped the finance professor think through the integration of ethical issues into his corporate finance course. In another pairing, a faculty member from the taxation department helped a historian create Great Thinkers of the Twentieth Century, an ambitious course that incorporates material usually fenced off within philosophy and literature and that was later submitted to the college’s curriculum committee for consideration as a future undergraduate offering.

Unexpected benefits
While facilitators planned numerous activities and exercises for the workshop participants, some of the benefits of the workshops derived from experiences outside the classroom setting. Faculty who had often seen each other only at full faculty meetings or during committee work spent one week together from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day. The lunch hour, often a break from workshop modules, gave participants a chance to become acquainted and to learn about each other’s areas of specialization. The discussions generated during these open periods resulted in arts and sciences faculty and business faculty disabusing each other of misunderstandings about their pedagogies, curricula, and disciplines. Many faculty expressed delight at being officially encouraged, for the first time in their careers, to think in unorthodox and even subversive ways about the content of their courses and their classroom methods.

The Davis Workshops have been an extraordinary success for Bentley College and have influenced pedagogy and thinking across departments and disciplines. Over the course of two summers of workshops, seventy-four of approximately 250 full-time faculty members took part, including thirty-five tenured faculty and twenty-four tenure-track faculty. In all, sixty syllabi in undergraduate and graduate courses were in some way reshaped by the workshops. But the Davis Workshops were also at the core of a broader redefinition and realignment of the role of the arts and sciences in the culture of Bentley. They served as the intellectual inspiration for innovative arts and sciences initiatives at the core of the college’s mission. In retrospect this makes perfect sense, since the workshops encouraged critical reflection about the limitations imposed by our disciplines and promoted creative connections across disciplines around shared values and perspectives. But the degree to which interdisciplinary collaboration has grown is quite astounding.

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REFERENCES
I occasionally look in on college and university Web sites to see what they are telling the public, particularly prospective and current undergraduates and their families. On a recent such visit to the Web site of a leading liberal arts college, I came across an article reproduced from the college’s alumni magazine that brought me up short. If this is how we defend the liberal arts and liberal education, I thought, the future of the enterprise is indeed in trouble.

The article begins with an epigraph from George Will: “The term ‘liberal arts’ connotes a certain elevation above utilitarian concerns. Yet liberal education is intensely useful.” While I can give total and enthusiastic assent the second sentence, the two taken together reflect a classic confusion between liberal education and the liberal arts. The two terms are not synonymous. “Liberal arts” refers to certain subjects of study, which may be pursued to many possible ends. “Liberal education” may be pursued through any subject matter, but the term implies distinct purposes: breadth of awareness and appreciation, clarity and precision of thought and communication, critical analysis, honing of moral and ethical sensibilities.

Thus an education in the liberal arts and sciences disciplines is not, by definition, a liberal education. Study exclusively in the liberal arts disciplines does not guarantee a liberal education. Indeed, many liberal arts majors are as narrowly specialized as any professional program. Conversely, many career-specific programs are insistent on liberal learning. For instance, the accrediting standards of ABET (Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology) are equally divided between professional content and liberal education.

Meanwhile, the “open curriculum” espoused by several liberal arts colleges leaves the door open for students to pursue a narrow education. A particular peeve of mine is the absence in such curricula of any insistence that students pursue studies in science. In an age when all citizens are called on daily to evaluate arguments and make decisions in their personal and civic capacities that require some understanding of the sciences, a college’s failure to ensure that its graduates have some appropriate grounding in these fields is educational malpractice. Classically defined, the artes liberales are the studies pursued by free men and women. If humanity cannot make informed collective decisions about such topics as energy, the environment, or public health, then we will not have many free people left to study the liberal arts.

Do liberal arts colleges “own” liberal education?

That magazine article I found online proceeds by describing the decreasing number of liberal arts colleges, defined as institutions awarding more than half their bachelor’s degrees in those fields. The piece notes that as the number of collegegoers has increased, the percentage of undergraduate degrees awarded...
Liberal Arts Colleges

Bates College
in the liberal arts has declined—although the actual number of degrees in those fields collectively has not. But these data are beside the point! The question is not in what fields of study students are majoring, but rather what kind of education they are getting in whatever studies they pursue.

My experience with many institutions outside the liberal arts college category convinces me of their seriousness about providing a liberal education. Many have highly intentional statements of educational purpose—on which they actually follow through—that would do credit to any liberal arts college. At the same time, I find that the faculties of many liberal arts colleges take it as axiomatic that they are offering a liberal education, giving little thought to the purposes and practical effect of what and how they are actually teaching in the classroom.

I grant that pursuing an undergraduate education at a college exclusively committed by tradition to liberal education increases the likelihood that students will actually get a liberal education. But that will happen only if faculty members are committed to liberal learning and not primarily to the apparatus of their own disciplines.

The thrust of liberal education (and of the liberal arts when they are part of a liberal education) should be toward addressing human dilemmas.

The utility of a liberal education

I am in total agreement that a liberal education in the liberal arts, an education that is purposefully designed to develop critical and communicative powers and a sense of the complexity and diversity of the world, is the best preparation for work, for citizenship, and
for a satisfying life. The article in that liberal arts college alumni magazine that got me thinking about all of this cites the director of an aerospace company who claims that, in hiring, “I’ll always go for the philosophy major. They know nothing about aerospace, but they know all about complexity—and that’s what I need.” I applaud such insight and only wish that the people this executive sends out to do his recruiting had the same understanding of the utility of a liberal education, wherever its locus in the curriculum.

I am the product of a liberal arts college. I attended during a time when its faculty was as clear as it could be about its intention to give students a liberal education. That intention was clearly reflected in the curriculum, which was designed first and foremost to sharpen the intellectual skills we would find indispensable wherever we were. It was a utilitarian education in the broadest sense, directed toward enhancing our usefulness to our communities, our workplaces, and ourselves.

This experience makes me impatient with the argument that the distinctive educational role of a liberal arts college is to “offer students the past.” This view seems both mistaken and perverse. History, cultural anthropology, and the arts certainly do that. Philosophy and literature used to and maybe still do sometimes. But science and most social sciences? What do most scientists know of the origins of the concepts and hypotheses with which they work? Are psychology or sociology faculties concerned that students know the history of their disciplines or the application of their disciplines to the past?

But regardless of various disciplines’ orientation to the past, the value of a liberal education—whether pursued in a liberal arts college or a research university and whether through the study of literature or architecture, biology or business administration—is most properly directed toward the future of the individual and society. We lead students to study the past for the wisdom and insight to be found there so that it can inform present and future decisions. But the thrust of liberal education (and of the liberal arts when they are part of a liberal education) should be toward addressing human dilemmas: those that we have always faced because we are human, those that always loom large now, and those we can anticipate.

What we are—and are not—about
I trust any college wishes to give its students the qualities of intellect and heart to live a responsible and satisfying life. Perhaps liberal arts colleges preeminently achieve that purpose—or perhaps not. But they do not exclusively achieve it. The notion that liberal education goes on in only 8 percent of colleges enrolling 4 percent of students suggests that an education thus oriented requires special pleading to justify it. It reflects an isolation from the rest of higher education that is often self-imposed and only reinforces the unfair accusation that such colleges are elitist and increasingly irrelevant.

Any competent undergraduate education requires a constant battle to disabuse youth of its perennial insistence that what is of the moment is all that matters. That struggle is, if decreasingly, the pedagogical bread and butter of some of the liberal arts disciplines. However, equating a liberal education with the study of the liberal arts and insisting that such an education is to be found today only in those colleges whose hallmark is a focus on the past does not much help the cause of either the liberal arts or liberal education.

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What Will I Learn in College? What You Need to Know Now to Get Ready for College Success
BY ROBERT SHOENBERG
This publication is a short guide to college learning designed for the college-bound high school student. It presents a picture of college learning that will help students understand what will be expected of them. The guide also features candid recommendations from contemporary college students about how to prepare for college success.
$10/$12

LEAP Student Brochure
This brochure introduces AAC&U’s LEAP initiative to students and explains in clear terms why the outcomes of a liberal education can give them an edge in school, life, and in their future careers. It quotes CEOs who believe a liberal education is central to students’ professional success, and features ten questions designed to help students construct a purposeful pathway through college. The LEAP Student Brochure is available for bulk purchase only in increments of 500 copies (1 box).  $200/$240

Why Do I Have to Take This Course? A Student Guide to Making Smart Educational Choices
BY ROBERT SHOENBERG
This practical guide, written for undergraduate students, is intended to take some of the mystery out of curricular requirements and educate students about what really matters in college—the broad learning outcomes developed over the entire course of their undergraduate years.
$10/$12

BY GEORGE D. KUH
This publication defines a set of educational practices that research has demonstrated have a significant impact on student success. Author George Kuh presents data from the National Survey of Student Engagement about these practices and explains why they benefit all students, but also seem to benefit underserved students even more than their more advantaged peers.
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College Learning for the New Global Century
This signature report provides a roadmap for reforming higher education and an outline of essential learning outcomes necessary for graduates to succeed in a complex global environment. The LEAP report spells out the essential aims, learning outcomes, and guiding principles for excellence in 21st-century college education.
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The Executive Summary of College Learning for the New Global Century (with findings from Employer Surveys) is available online.

Also available at www.aacu.org:
- Public opinion data on higher education and the needs of the new global economy
- Compendium of speeches and articles making the case for liberal education
- Focus-group discussion guide to explore students’ attitudes toward liberal education
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