

Liberal Education

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



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THE HUMANITIES

When, in this country, we become fully ourselves, we will have balanced our great accomplishments in progressive abstraction—in mathematics and the natural sciences—with an equally great absorption in art, and in the disciplines ancillary to art.

—HELEN VENDLER

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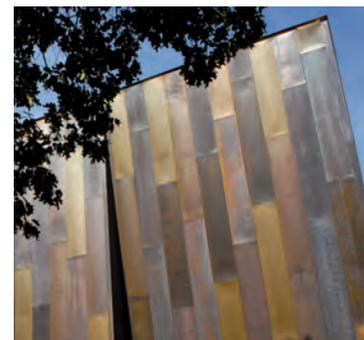


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Just as we have come to dispute the notion that liberal education is only achieved through studies in the arts and sciences, it is time to enlarge our understanding of the liberal arts college to include the public sector.



Real Reform, Faux Reform: Facing the Cost of the “Throughput” Follies

At the 2010 annual meeting, the AAC&U community marked the halfway point in Liberal Education and America’s Promise, the LEAP initiative. Members shared examples of engaged liberal learning and worked on solutions to problems that stand in the way of student achievement, including the all-important “wallet” issue. The sense of momentum was palpable and energizing.

It is exciting to see the extraordinary range and number of colleges and universities—and even whole state systems—that have adopted their own versions of the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes and invested significantly in “high-impact/high-effort” practices that help students achieve the outcomes. Together, AAC&U members have developed the broad parameters needed to take the learning outcomes challenge seriously and to help today’s students acquire high-level skills, essential knowledge, and

P R E S I D E N T ’ S M E S S A G E

an examined sense of their responsibilities to self and others as they progress from school through college.

Articulating twenty-first-century aims and outcomes for student achievement is only the first step, however. We still have a very long way to go to help all college students embrace, achieve, and demonstrate high levels of accomplishment on the essential learning they need. Moreover, we are now facing a new crop of faux reforms that, if adopted, would send us backward.

What are these faux reforms? In one way or another, they all seek to accelerate degree completion by cutting students’ time in school and college. Some focus on high school, proposing to cut the expected time by one year. Others urge curricular downsizing at the college level. If three years is enough for Europe, the thinking goes, why not here? Still others are more ambitious, seeking to cut high school *and* college. Shrink the high school curriculum by half, one set of recently funded “reforms” proposes, and get students into community colleges where they can earn the high school diploma and an associate’s degree both in a total of four years.

It is only possible to believe these so-called reforms would “work” if you are operating with no framework whatsoever for the quality of essential twenty-first-century learning. No vision of necessary knowledge. No conception of how far students now are from meaningful competence in writing, critical thinking, problem solving, and quantitative reasoning. No sense that a democracy needs knowledgeable and ethical citizens. No recognition that our graduates play a disproportionate role in deciding whether global problems are seriously addressed or left to fester and deepen. No serious understanding of scientific inquiry and literacy.

Focused mainly on degree and certificate production, the “throughput” proponents have not taken the time to interrogate what it really means—or what it would take—to educate STEM-literate and globally savvy citizens who are ready to tackle twenty-first-century challenges. Here’s the basic truth that the “faster/cheaper” crowd needs to face: the majority of college graduates are far from prepared for the challenges of either the economy or our democracy. By every possible measure—outcomes studies, employer assessments, faculty reports, and proficiency levels on standardized tests—too many students already are currently falling short.

LEAP has insisted from the outset on three points. First, changes in the external environment—global, economic, civic, demographic—require higher levels of learning than used to be needed to

succeed in any sphere: career, civic, or personal. The bar for essential learning is being raised, not just by global competition from other nations, but by the very nature of the complex problems we now face in every sphere of our lives. Second, to prepare students for these new realities, we need to move way beyond the twentieth-century curriculum, with its fragmented and often shallow surveys of many disconnected subjects and topics. The LEAP report outlines the dimensions of learning and the curricular remapping we need. Third, we need to establish new forms of intentionality and aligned efforts, between school and college, in order to help students start on the essential outcomes earlier and achieve them at the much higher levels required for real-world success.

Shrinking the curriculum—at whatever level—is exactly the wrong thing to do. The move to substitute high school course-taking for college-level study takes direct aim at the very heart of a high-quality education. The No Child Left Behind Act has already weakened these studies in the schools; the throughput proposals would make a bad situation worse.

Optimally, school studies lay a foundation in the arts and sciences, and college helps students build on that foundation, by tackling cross-disciplinary topics and problems at a level reflective of their complexity. This is a central LEAP principle: that college students need to “engage big questions” using the lenses of the arts and sciences, throughout their college studies and especially in the final years, when they can bring both specialized knowledge and cross-disciplinary insight to their investigations. Yet big questions and problems can only be engaged rigorously, across disciplinary lines, when students have a working foundation that includes modes of inquiry as well as core concepts.

Indifferent to such issues, the “less time, more degrees” proponents want students to use so-called college courses in high school to satisfy not just their high school “core subject” requirements, but college-level arts and sciences requirements—the general education curriculum—as well. These proposals would effectively blinker the breadth of vision that has always been this nation’s competitive strength. Students should indeed start rigorous work earlier in school and do as much advanced placement as they can in high school. But the point of this should be to get them started on even more rigorous “big questions” studies in the arts and sciences at the college level.

AAC&U has long recommended that professional and arts and sciences studies should be woven together at the college level, so that big-picture thinking and the student’s chosen field become part of an integrated liberal education. But this kind of integration would become impossible if the college curriculum shrinks and students are hustled forward into the narrowness of the major. (Any major, including a major in one of the arts and sciences, is, by itself, much too narrow to constitute the entirety of college study.)

We need to take note that Asian countries already are busily weaving a broader liberal arts component into their own designs for university studies. This is exactly the wrong time to persuade ourselves that the dominant three-year European model of primary study in a single field ought to be the future design for college-level learning in the United States.

The forces promoting faux educational reforms are well organized and well funded. And with the economic crisis deepening, legislators see schemes for “faster, cheaper, narrower” education as lifesavers. This is a very sobering state of affairs. When we called on higher education to LEAP, the idea was not to leap backward. Or downward. The AAC&U community needs to speak out—forcefully and urgently—about the difference between designs for learning that can expand American capacity, and forms of learning that would put our future at risk.—CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER

It is only possible to believe these so-called reforms would “work” if you are operating with no framework whatsoever for the quality of essential twenty-first-century learning

During a highly anticipated media event in January, Apple introduced its latest innovation: the iPad. At the conclusion of a ninety-minute presentation extolling this “magic and revolutionary device,” CEO Steve Jobs said “the reason that Apple is able to create products like the iPad is that we’ve always tried to be at the intersection of technology and liberal arts, to be able to get the best of both . . . And it’s the combination of these two things that I think has let us make the kind of creative products like the iPad.” For the audience gathered, as if to underscore the point, at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, this may have seemed a somewhat mystifying explanation for Apple’s position on the cutting edge of consumer electronics. But readers of *Liberal Education* will know exactly what Jobs meant. Indeed, Dan Edelstein’s article here, “How Is Innovation Taught?” speaks directly to the same point, explaining why “a liberal arts education grounded in the humanities” is the best preparation for success in an economy driven by innovation.

FROM THE EDITOR

The argument that study in the humanities results in the development of highly marketable skills is gaining salience in the current educational environment, which is characterized by a predominant emphasis on job preparation. As Leslie Berlowitz reports in this issue, data from the Humanities Indicators project “show that, overall, the humanities have lost significant market share to vocational degrees, primarily business, as the number of students entering college has increased.” Among the reasons to lament this decline, Berlowitz explains, is the relevance of the humanities to “the preparation of a literate, flexible, creative American workforce.”

Persuasive and necessary though it undoubtedly is, the case for the economic benefits of study in the humanities distracts attention from and, in effect, downplays the broader importance of the humanities themselves. This is especially regrettable given their centrality to liberal education. As the LEAP report notes, “throughout history, liberal education—and especially the arts and humanities—has been a constant resource, not just for civic life but for the inner life of self-discovery, values, moral inspiration, spiritual quests and solace, and the deep pleasures of encountering beauty, insight, and expressive power.” In this issue’s lead article, Helen Vendler elaborates this notion of the arts and humanities as a resource for life and proposes making the arts central objects of humanistic study because, as she says, they “help us live our lives.”

Although it does not begin or end in college, the exploration of what it means to be human—along with the allied project of striving to live more fully—is enriched and advanced there through sustained engagement with the arts and humanities. Critically important though they so obviously are, learning to innovate and preparing for success in the global economy are but ancillary outcomes of this exploration.—DAVID TRITELLI

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New Employer Survey

AAC&U has released the results of a new national survey of employers. Conducted by Hart Research Associates, the survey found that employers want their employees to use a broader set of skills and have higher levels of learning and knowledge than in the past to meet the increasingly complex demands they will face in the workplace. Within this context, to the degree that employers' emphasis on hiring will be affected by the economic downturn, the shift will be toward greater emphasis on hiring four-year college graduates. Only one in four employers thinks that two-year and four-year colleges are doing a good job of preparing students for the challenges of the global economy. A majority of respondents think that both two- and four-year colleges need to make at least some improvements to prepare students for the global economy, including one in five who thinks that significant changes are needed.

The full report on the survey findings, *Raising the Bar: Employers' Views on College Learning in the Wake of the Economic Downturn*, is available for download at www.aacu.org/leap.

Two New Assessment Publications

Two new AAC&U publications draw on the work of the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) project. The first, *Assessing Outcomes and Improving Achievement: Tips and Tools for Using Rubrics*, edited by Terrel Rhodes, provides practical advice on the development and effective use of rubrics to evaluate college student achievement at various levels. Included are the rubrics developed by faculty teams for fifteen liberal learning outcomes. These VALUE rubrics can be readily adapted to reflect the missions, cultures, and practices of individual colleges and universities and their specific programs.

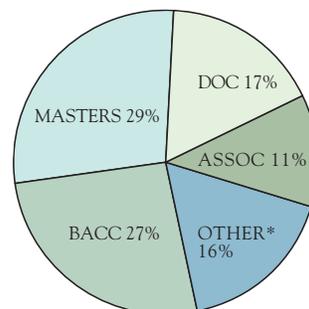
The second publication, *Electronic Portfolios and Student Success: Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Learning*, by Helen L. Chen and Tracy Penny Light, presents an overview of electronic portfolios. To be released later this spring, this publication is organized around eight issues that are central to the implementation of an e-portfolio approach to student learning assessment. These issues are illustrated through a case study of a single course and through multiple campus examples.

For more information about these new VALUE publications, or to order copies, visit www.aacu.org.

Upcoming Meetings

- June 4–9, 2010
Institute on General Education and Assessment
University of Vermont
- June 15–19, 2010
Greater Expectations Institute: Leadership to Make Excellence Inclusive
Vanderbilt University
- July 7–11, 2010
Engaging Departments Institute
University of Pennsylvania
- July 17–22, 2010
PKAL Summer Faculty STEM Leadership Institute
Colorado College
- October 21–23, 2010
Facing the Divides: Diversity, Learning, and Pathways to Inclusive Excellence
Houston, Texas

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HELEN VENDLER

**The Ocean,
the Bird,
and the Scholar**

Centering Humanistic Study on the Arts

WHEN IT BECAME USEFUL in educational circles in the United States to group various university disciplines under the name “The Humanities,” it seems to have been tacitly decided that philosophy and history would be cast as the core of this grouping, and that other forms of learning—the study of languages, literatures, religion, and the arts—would be relegated to subordinate positions. Philosophy, conceived of as embodying truth, and history, conceived of as a factual record of the past, were proposed as the principal embodiments of Western culture, and given pride of place in general education programs.

Confidence in a reliable factual record, not to speak of faith in a reliable philosophical synthesis, has undergone considerable erosion. Historical and philosophical assertions issue, it seems, from particular vantage points, and are no less contestable than the assertions of other disciplines. The day of limiting cultural education to Western culture alone is over. There are losses here, of course—losses in depth of learning, losses in coherence—but these very changes have thrown open the question of how the humanities should now be conceived, and how the study of the humanities should, in this moment, be encouraged.

I want to propose that the humanities should take, as their central objects of study, not the texts of historians or philosophers, but the products of aesthetic endeavor: architecture, art, dance, music, literature, theater, and so on. After all, it is by their arts that cultures are principally remembered. For every person who has read a Platonic dialogue, there are probably ten who have seen a Greek marble in a museum, or if not a Greek marble, at least a Roman copy, or if not a Roman copy, at least a photograph. Around the arts there exist, in orbit, the commentaries on art produced by scholars: musicology and music criticism, art history and art criticism, literary and linguistic studies. At the periphery we might set the other humanistic disciplines—philosophy, history, the study of religion. The arts would justify a broad philosophical interest in ontology, phenomenology, and ethics; they would bring in their train a richer history than one which, in its treatment of mass phenomena, can lose sight of individual human uniqueness—the quality most prized in artists, and most salient, and most valued, in the arts.

HELEN VENDLER is the A. Kingsley Porter University Professor at Harvard University. This article was adapted from the thirty-third Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, delivered by the author in Washington, DC, on May 6, 2004. Copyright held by the author.

The humanities should take, as their central objects of study, not the texts of historians or philosophers, but the products of aesthetic endeavor



What would be the advantage of centering humanistic study on the arts? The arts present the whole uncensored human person—in emotional, physical, and intellectual being, and in single and collective form—as no other branch of human accomplishment does. In the arts we see both the nature of human predicaments—in Job, in Lear, in Isabel Archer—and the evolution of representation over long spans of time (as the taste for the Gothic replaces the taste for the Romanesque, as the composition of opera replaces the composition of plainchant). The arts bring into play historical and philosophical questions without implying the prevalence of a single system or of universal solutions. Artworks embody the individuality that fades into insignificance in the massive canvas of history and is suppressed in philosophy by the desire for impersonal assertion. The arts are true to the way we are and were, to the way we actually live and have lived—as singular persons swept by drives and affections, not as collective entities or sociological paradigms. The case histories developed within the arts are in part idiosyncratic, but in part applicable by analogy to a class larger than the individual entities they depict. Hamlet is a very specific figure—a Danish prince who has been to school in Germany—but when Prufrock says, “I am not Prince Hamlet,” he is in a way testifying to the fact that Hamlet means something to everyone who knows about the play.

If the arts are so satisfactory an embodiment of human experience, why do we need studies commenting on them? Why not merely take our young people to museums, to concerts, to libraries? There is certainly no substitute for hearing Mozart, reading Dickinson, or looking at the boxes of Joseph Cornell. Why should we support a brokering of the arts; why not rely on their direct impact? The simplest answer is that reminders of art’s presence are constantly necessary. As art goes in and out of fashion, some scholar is always necessarily reviving Melville, or editing Monteverdi, or recommending Jane Austen. Critics and scholars are evangelists, plucking the public by the sleeve, saying “Look at this,” or “Listen to this,” or “See how this works.” It may seem hard to believe, but there was a time when almost no one valued Gothic art, or, to come closer to our own time, *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd*.

A second reason to encourage scholarly studies of the arts is that such studies establish in

human beings a sense of cultural patrimony. We in the United States are the heirs of several cultural patrimonies: a world patrimony (of which we are becoming increasingly conscious); a Western patrimony (from which we derive our institutions, civic and aesthetic); and a specifically American patrimony (which, though great and influential, has, bafflingly, yet to be established securely in our schools). In Europe, although the specifically national patrimony was likely to be urged as preeminent—Italian pupils studied Dante, French pupils studied Racine—most nations felt obliged to give their students an idea of the Western inheritance extending beyond native production. As time passed, colonized nations, although instructed in the culture of the colonizer, found great energy in creating a national literature and culture of their own with and against the colonial model (as we can see, for instance, in the example of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ireland). For a long time, American schooling paid homage, culturally speaking, to Europe and to England; but increasingly we began to cast off European and English influence in arts and letters, without, unfortunately, filling the consequent cultural gap in the schools with our own worthy creations in art and literature. Our students leave high school knowing almost nothing about American art, music, architecture, and sculpture, and having only a superficial acquaintance with a few American authors.

We will ultimately want to teach, with justifiable pride, our national patrimony in arts and letters—by which, if by anything, we will be remembered—and we hope, of course, to foster young readers and writers, artists and museum-goers, composers and music enthusiasts. But these patriotic and cultural aims alone are not enough to justify putting the arts and the studies of the arts at the center of our humanistic and educational enterprise. What, then, might lead us to recommend the arts and their commentaries as the center of the humanities? Art, said Wallace Stevens, helps us live our lives. I’m not sure we are greatly helped to live our lives by history (since whether or not we remember it we seem doomed to repeat it), or by philosophy (the consolations of philosophy have never been very widely received). Stevens’s assertion is a large one, and we have a right to ask how he would defend it. How do the arts, and the

scholarly studies attendant on them, help us live our lives?

The arts help us live our lives

Stevens was a democratic author, and expected his experience, and his reflections on it, to apply widely. For him, as for any other artist, “to live our lives” means to live in the body as well as in the mind, on the sensual earth as well as in the celestial clouds. The arts exist to relocate us in the body by means of the work of the mind in aesthetic creation; they situate us on the earth, paradoxically, by means of a mental paradigm of experience embodied, with symbolic concision, in a physical medium. It distressed Stevens that most of the human beings he saw walked about blankly, scarcely seeing the earth on which they lived, filtering it out from their pragmatic urban consciousness.

The arts and their attendant disciplines restore human awareness by releasing it into the ambience of the felt world, giving a habitation to the tongue in newly coined language, to the eyes and ears in remarkable recreations of the physical world, to the animal body in the kinesthetic flex and resistance of the artistic medium. Without an alert sense of such things, one is only half alive. Stevens reflected on this function of the arts—and on the results of its absence—in three poems that I will take up as proof-texts for what follows. Although Stevens speaks in particular about poetry, he extends the concept to *poesis*—the Greek term for making, widely applicable to all creative effort.

Like geography and history, the arts confer a patina on the natural world. A vacant stretch of grass becomes humanly important when one reads the sign “Gettysburg.” Over the grass hangs an extended canopy of meaning—struggle, corpses, tears, glory—shadowed by a canopy of American words and works, from the Gettysburg Address to the Shaw Memorial. The vacant plain of the sea becomes human when it is populated by the ghosts of Ahab and Moby-Dick. An unremarkable town becomes “Winesburg, Ohio”; a rustic bridge becomes “the rude bridge that arched the flood” where Minutemen fired “the shot heard round the world.” One after the other, cultural images suspend themselves, invisibly, in the American air, as—when we extend our glance—the Elgin marbles, wherever they may be housed, hover over the Parthenon,

once their home; as Michelangelo’s Adam has become, to the Western eye, the Adam of Genesis. The patina of culture has been laid down over centuries, so that in an English field one can find a Roman coin, in an Asian excavation an Emperor’s stone army, in our Western desert the signs of the mound-builders. Over Stevens’s giant earth, with its tumultuous motions, there floats every myth, every text, every picture, every system, that creators—artistic, religious, philosophical—have conferred upon it. The Delphic oracle hovers there next to Sappho, Luther’s theses hang next to the Grunewald altar, China’s Cold Mountain neighbors Sinai, the B-minor Mass shares space with Rabelais.

If there did not exist, floating over us, all the symbolic representations that art and music, religion, philosophy, and history, have invented, and all the interpretations and explanations of them that scholarly effort has produced, what sort of people would we be? We would, says Stevens, be sleepwalkers, going about like automata, unconscious of the very life we were living: this is the import of Stevens’s 1943 poem “Somnambulisma.” The poem rests on three images, of which the first is the incessantly variable sea, the vulgar reservoir from which the vulgate—the common discourse of language and art alike—is drawn. The second image is that of a mortal bird, whose motions resemble those of the water but who is ultimately washed away by the ocean. The subsequent generations of the bird, too, are always washed away. The third image is that of a scholar, without whom ocean and bird alike would be incomplete.

On an old shore, the vulgar ocean rolls
Noiselessly, noiselessly, resembling a thin bird,
That thinks of settling, yet never settles, on a nest.

The wings keep spreading and yet are never wings.
The claws keep scratching on the shale, the shallow
shale,
The sounding shallow, until by water washed away.

The generations of the bird are all
By water washed away. They follow after.
They follow, follow, follow, in water washed away.

Without this bird that never settles, without
Its generations that follow in their universe,
The ocean, falling and falling on the hollow shore,

Would be a geography of the dead: not of that land
To which they may have gone, but of the place
in which
They lived, in which they lacked a pervasive being,

In which no scholar, separately dwelling,
Poured forth the fine fins, the gawky beaks,
the personalia,
Which, as a man feeling everything, were his.
(1990, 304)

Without the bird and its generations, the ocean, says the poet, would be a geography of the dead—not in the sense of their having gone to some other world, but in the sense of their being persons who were emotionally and intellectually dead while alive, who lacked “a pervasive being.” To lack a pervasive being is to fail to live fully. A pervasive being is one that extends through the brain, the body, the senses, and the will, a being that spreads to every moment, so that one not only feels what Keats called “the poetry of earth” but responds to it with creative motions of one’s own.

Unlike Keats’s nightingale, Stevens’s bird does not sing; its chief functions are to generate generations of birds, to attempt to sprout wings, and to try to leave behind some painstakingly scratched record of its presence. The water restlessly moves, sometimes noiselessly, sometimes in “sounding shallow[s]”; the bird never settles. The bird tries to generate wings, but never quite succeeds; it tries to inscribe itself on the shale, but its scratchings are washed away. The ocean is falling and falling, the mortal generations are following and following. Time obliterates birds and inscriptions alike.

Imagine being psychically dead during the very life you have lived. That, says Stevens, would be the fate of the generations were it not for the scholar. Stevens does not locate his scholar in the ocean or on the shale, the haunts of the bird; the scholar, says the poet, dwells separately. But he dwells in immense fertility: things pour forth from him. He makes up for the wings that are never wings, for the impotent claws; he generates fine fins, the essence of the ocean’s fish; he creates gawky beaks, opening in fledglings waiting to be fed so that they may rise into their element, the air; and he produces new garments for the earth, called not “regalia” (suitable for a monarchy) but “personalia,” suitable for the members of a democracy. How is the scholar

capable of such profusion? He is fertile both because he is a man who “feels everything,” and because every thing that he feels reifies itself in a creation. He gives form and definition both to the physical world (as its scientific observer) and to the inchoate aesthetic world (as the quickened responder to the bird’s incomplete natural song). He is analogous to the God of Genesis; as he observes and feels finness, he says, “Let there be fine fins,” and fine fins appear.

Why does Stevens name this indispensable figure a “scholar”? (Elsewhere he calls him a “rabbi”—each is a word connoting learning.) What does learning have to do with creation? Why are study and learning indispensable in reifying and systematizing the world of phenomena and their aesthetic representations? Just as the soldier is poor without the poet’s lines (as Stevens says elsewhere), so the poet is poor without the scholar’s cultural memory, his taxonomies and his histories. Our systems of thought—legal, philosophical, scientific, religious—have all been devised by “scholars” without whose aid widespread complex thinking could not take place and be debated, intricate texts and scores could not be accurately established and interpreted. The restless emotions of aesthetic desire, the wing-wish and inscription-yearning of the bird, perish without the arranging and creative powers of intellectual endeavor. The arts and the studies of the arts are for Stevens a symbiotic pair, each dependent on the other. Nobody is born understanding string quartets or reading Latin or creating poems; without the scholar and his libraries, there would be no perpetuation and transmission of culture. The mutual support of art and learning, the mutual delight each ideally takes in each, can be taken as a paradigm of how the humanities might be integrally conceived and educationally conveyed as inextricably linked to the arts.

“Somnambulisma” is the illustration of Stevens’s adage that “poetry is the scholar’s art.” What is necessary, asks “Somnambulisma,” for creative effort? Emotion, desire, generative energy, and learned invention—these, replies the poem, are indispensable in the artist. But there is another way of thinking about art, focusing less on the creator of art than on those of us who make up art’s audience. What do we gain in being the audience for the arts and their attendant disciplines? Let us, says Stevens,

imagine ourselves deprived of all the products of aesthetic and humanistic effort, living in a world with no music, no art, no architecture, no books, no films, no choreography, no theater, no histories, no songs, no prayers, no images floating above the earth to keep it from being a geography of the dead. Stevens creates the desolation of that deprivation in a poem called “Large Red Man Reading.” The poem is like a painting by Matisse, showing us an earthly giant the color of the sun, reading aloud from great sky-sized tabulae which, as the day declines, darken from blue to purple. The poem also summons up the people of the giant’s audience: they are ghosts, no longer alive, who now inhabit, unhappily (having expected more from the afterlife), the remote “wilderness of stars.” What does the giant describe to the ghosts as he reads from his blue tabulae? Nothing extraordinary—merely the normal furniture of life, the common and the beautiful, the banal, the ugly, and even the painful. But to the ghosts, these are things achingly familiar from life and yet disregarded within it. Now they are achingly lost, things they never sufficiently prized when alive, but which they miss devastatingly in the vacancy of space among the foreign stars:

There were ghosts that returned to earth to hear his phrases,
As he sat there reading, aloud, the great blue tabulae.
They were those from the wilderness of stars that had expected more.

There were those that returned to hear him read from the poem of life,
Of the pans above the stove, the pots on the table, the tulips among them.
They were those that would have wept to step barefoot into reality,

That would have wept and been happy, have shivered in the frost
And cried out to feel it again, have run fingers over leaves
And against the most coiled thorn, have seized on what was ugly

And laughed, as he sat there reading, from out of the purple tabulae,
The outlines of being and its expressings, the syllables of its law:
Poesis, poesis, the literal characters, the vatic lines,

Which in those ears and in those thin, those spended hearts,
Took on color, took on shape and the size of things as they are
And spoke the feeling for them, which was what they had lacked.
(1990, 423–4)

The ghosts, while they were alive, had lacked feeling, because they had not registered in their memory “the outlines of being and its expressings, the syllables of its law.” It is a triple assertion that Stevens makes here: that being possesses not only outlines (as all bodies do) and expressings (in all languages) but also a law, which is stricter than mere “expressings.” Expressings by themselves cannot exemplify the law of being: only *poesis*—the creator’s act of replicating in symbolic form the structures of life—pervades being sufficiently to intuit and embody its law. *Poesis* not only reproduces the content of life (its daily phenomena) but finds a manner (inspired, vatic) for that content, and in the means of its medium—here, the literal characters of its language—embodies the structural laws that shape being to our understanding.

Stevens’s anecdote-of-audience in “Large Red Man Reading” suggests how ardently we would want to come back, as ghosts, in order to recognize and relish the parts of life we had insufficiently noticed and hardly valued when alive. But we cannot—according to the poem—accomplish this by ourselves: it is only when the earthly giant of vital being begins to read, using poetic and prophetic syllables to express the reality, and the law, of being that the experiences of life can be reconstituted and made available as beauty and solace, to help us live our lives.

The humanities centered on the arts

How could our life be different if we reconstituted the humanities around the arts and the studies of the arts? Past civilizations are recalled in part, of course, for their philosophy and their history, but for most of us it is the arts of the past that preserve Egypt and Greece and Rome, India and Africa and Japan. The names of the artists may be lost, the arts themselves in fragments, the scrolls incomplete, the manuscripts partial—but Anubis and the Buddha and *The Canterbury Tales* still populate our imaginative world.

They come trailing their interpretations, which follow them and are like water washed away. Scholarly and critical interpretations may not outlast the generation to which they are relevant; as intellectual concepts flourish and wither, so interpretations are proposed and discarded. But we would not achieve our own grasp on Vermeer or Horace, generation after generation, without the scholars' outpourings.

If we are prepared to recognize the centrality of artists and their interpreters to every past culture, we might begin to reflect on what our own American culture has produced that will be held dear centuries from now. Which are the paintings, the buildings, the novels, the musical compositions, the poems, through which we will be remembered? What set of representations of life will float above the American soil, rendering each part of it as memorable as Marin's Maine or Langston Hughes's Harlem, as Cather's Nebraska or Lincoln's Gettysburg? How will the outlines and the expressings and the syllables of American being glow above our vast geography? How will our citizens be made aware of their cultural inheritance; how will they become proud of their patrimony? How will they pass it on to their children as their own generation is by water washed away? How will their children become capable of "feeling everything," of gaining "a pervasive being," capable of

Our culture cannot afford to neglect the thirst of human beings for the representations of life offered by the arts

helping the bird to spread its wings and the fish to grow their fine fins and the scholar to pour forth his personalia?

Our culture cannot afford to neglect the thirst of human beings for the representations of life offered by the arts, the

hunger of human beings for commentary on those arts as they appear on the cultural stage. The training in subtlety of response (which used to be accomplished in large part by religion and the arts) cannot be responsibly left to commercial movies and television. Within education, scientific training, which necessarily brackets emotion, needs to be complemented by the direct mediation—through the arts and their interpretations—of feeling, vicarious experience, and interpersonal imagination. Art can often be trusted—once it is unobtrusively but ubiquitously present—to make its own impact felt. A set of Rembrandt self-portraits in a shopping mall, a group of still lifes in a subway, sonatas played in the lunchroom, spirituals sung chorally from kindergarten on—all such things, appearing entirely without commentary, can be offered in the community and the schools as a natural part of living. Students can be gently led, by teachers and books, from passive reception to active reflection. The arts are too profound and far-reaching to be left out of our children's patrimony: the arts have a right, within our schools, to be as serious an object of study as molecular biology or mathematics. Like other complex products of the mind, they ask for reiterated exposure, sympathetic exposition, and sustained attention.

The arts have the advantage, once presented, of making people curious not only about aesthetic matters, but also about history, philosophy, and other cultures. How is it that pre-Columbian statues look so different from Roman ones? Why do some painters concentrate on portraits, others on landscapes? Why did great ages of drama arise in England and Spain and then collapse? Who first found a place for jazz in classical music, and why? Why do some writers become national heroes, and others not? Who evaluates art, and how? Are we to believe what a piece of art says? Why does Picasso represent a full face and a profile at the same time? How small can art be and still be art? Why have we needed to invent

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so many subsets within each art—within literature, the epic, drama, lyric, novel, dialogue, essay; within music everything from the solo partita to the chorales of Bach? Why do cultures use different musical instruments and scales? Who has the right to be an artist? How does one claim that right? The questions are endless, and the answers provocative; and both questions and answers require, and indeed generate, sensuous responsiveness, a trained eye, fine discrimination, and a hunger for learning, all qualities we would like to see in ourselves and in our children.

Best of all, the arts are enjoyable. The “grand elementary principle of pleasure” (as Wordsworth called it) might be invoked more urgently than it now is to make the humanities, both past and present, mean something relevant to Americans. Once the appetite for an art has been awakened by pleasure, the nursery rhyme and the cartoon lead by degrees to Stevens and Eakins. A curriculum relying on the ocean, the bird, and the scholar, on the red man and his blue tabulae, would produce a love of the arts and humanities that we have not yet succeeded in generating in the population at large. When reality is freshly seen, through the artists and their commentators, something happens to the felt essence of life. As Stevens wrote in the third of my texts, “Angel Surrounded by Paysans,” the angel of reality then briefly appears at our door, saying:

... I am the necessary angel of earth,
Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,

Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set,
And, in my hearing, you hear its tragic drone

Rise liquidly in liquid lingerings,
Like watery words awash; like meanings said

By repetitions of half-meanings. Am I not,
Myself, only half of a figure of a sort,

A figure half seen, or seen for a moment, a man
Of the mind, an apparition apparelled in

Apparels of such lightest look that a turn
Of my shoulder and quickly, too quickly, I am gone?
(1990, 496–7)

**The arts have a right,
within our schools,
to be as serious an
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as molecular biology
or mathematics**

That art-angel of the earth, renewing our sense of life and of ourselves, is only half meaning, because we provide the other half. Among us are the scholars who interpret those half-meanings into full ones, apparelling us anew in their personalia. In the apparels of his messenger, Stevens is recalling Wordsworth’s great ode (2004, 157):

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

The secular angel refreshing our sense of the world, apparelling in Wordsworthian light, stays only for a moment, our moment of attention. But that moment of mental acuity recalls us to being, the body, and the emotions, which are, peculiarly, so easy for us to put to one side as we engage in purely intellectual or physical work. Just as art is only half itself without us—its audience, its analysts, its scholars—so we are only half ourselves without it. When, in this country, we become fully ourselves, we will have balanced our great accomplishments in progressive abstraction—in mathematics and the natural sciences—with an equally great absorption in art, and in the disciplines ancillary to art. The arts, though not progressive, aim to be eternal, and sometimes are. And why should the United States not have as much eternity as any other nation? As Marianne Moore said of excellence, “It has never been confined to one locality” (2003, 142). □

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DAN EDELSTEIN

How Is Innovation

On the Humanities and the Knowledge Economy

FEATURED TOPIC

Longtime fans of the *New Yorker* will remember Michael Maslin's 1999 cartoon, in which a theater director opens the curtains to ask, "Is there a doctor of literature in the house?" Few funnier incongruities could be staged than calling an English professor to the rescue. PhD graduates in the humanities, after all, have long been known by prospective in-laws as "the wrong kind of doctor." And new interpretations of *The Tempest* are unlikely ever to save lives.

When carried to its logical, curricular conclusions, however, this healthy skepticism about academic self-importance can start to erode the foundations of American higher education. In the face of limited resources, administrators and policy makers are urged to invest more in science, engineering, and technology programs (Goldin and Katz 2008); meanwhile, liberal arts colleges are on their way to becoming an endangered species (goodbye, Antioch!). But what might look like an inevitable market trend could itself have negative economic effects. Indeed, I argue in this article that the humanities play a determining role in producing not only the "right" kind of doctor, but also the entrepreneurs, engineers, and designers that make the American economy so productive. The reason, I suggest, is that the humanities provide students with the best opportunities for learning how to innovate.

Valuing the humanities (or not)

Humanists do not like to talk about their trade in terms of, well, trade. One of the reasons that many of us pursue graduate degrees and academic careers is precisely to sidestep the corporate ladder. As last year's economic hurricane came crashing down on the ivory

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tower, however, it became impossible to ignore that even classes on Petrarch or Pétain could become victims of the Great Recession. And while we may prefer to think about our teaching and research as residing far from the madding crowd on Wall Street, we also owe ourselves and the public a forceful and convincing explanation of why the humanities are worth fighting—and paying—for.

The virtues of the humanities have hardly gone unsung. But their most eloquent champions usually point to lofty accomplishments, underscoring, for instance, the central role of the humanities in cultivating a sense of civic duty and citizenship, in enabling students to assess standards of human excellence, or in developing a sense of compassion for others. In a more practical vein, the skills that the humanities foster—such as a clear writing style, or rational analysis—bear only indirectly on professional success.

The contributions of the humanities to our consumerist society, by contrast, are rarely addressed, and for good reason: however one defines its ambitions, a liberal arts education grounded in the humanities is almost universally viewed as the opposite of vocational education. Taken to an extreme, this perspective led to Stanley Fish's declaration that "to the question 'of what use are the humanities?' the only honest answer is none whatsoever" (Fish 2008).

Remarkably, while representatives of the humanities shy away from, or flatly reject, arguments for their practical value, scholars who do not make their homes in traditional humanities disciplines are actively promoting them. The following three examples from entrepreneurship studies, science and engineering, and medicine illustrate this tendency.

First, the sociologist Mary Godwyn recently emphasized the commonalities between the

We owe ourselves and the public a forceful and convincing explanation of why the humanities are worth fighting—and paying—for

Taught?



Stanford University

goals of the liberal arts and of entrepreneurship: “Entrepreneurship is a tangible, practical manifestation of a liberal arts sensibility,” she argued; “it has economic ramifications that extend the ability of the entrepreneur to engage with social discourse—to develop and express personal identity by influencing the larger social context” (Godwyn 2009). She further encouraged faculty and administrators “to integrate liberal arts and entrepreneurship courses,” a suggestion that will probably fall on deaf ears in most humanities departments. But she also underscored how, for many scholars in the field, entrepreneurship is about more than just business. Like the humanities, it “involve[s] the study and analysis of what *is* [...] and, by identifying and evaluating opportunities for improvement, consciously contribute[s] to *what will be*.” As we will see, this process of improving an existing situation is very similar to the lessons in innovation taught in humanities courses.

The second argument endorsing the importance of humanistic training comes from a physicist and an engineer. In a recent *Forbes* piece, Mark Mills and Julio Ottino (also the dean of Northwestern’s Robert R. McCormick School of Engineering) made the case that the government funding agencies ought to support “whole-brain” research agendas, as opposed to the usual “left-brain” grant proposals. “Perhaps art, literature or music portfolios [should] become part of the science and engineering application processes,” they propose. Their reason? “Innovation [...] requires the attributes of the humanities found in right-brain thinking: creativity, artistry, intuition, symbolism, fantasy, emotions.”

A final example comes complete with statistics showing measurable gains for students who spend more time in the right sides of their brain. Dr. Joel Katz, of Harvard Medical School, and his team had a group of first- and second-year students spend a little over half their weekly class time at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, in classes and workshops on art, and the remaining hour in lecture, for a course on physical diagnosis (Naghshineh et al. 2008). A control group, meanwhile, attended the lectures but did not join in the museum visits. At the end of the eight-week term, the students who had participated in the art classes made 38 percent more positive observations than did the students in the control group.

Innovation:

An anthropological perspective

The lasting disdain that many defenders of the humanities display toward utilitarian outcomes seems particularly misplaced in light of such recognition of their importance by other professionals. This importance becomes more understandable when one considers the extent to which ideas have replaced goods as the dynamo powering the economy. Indeed, while politicians still express hopes that America will continue to survive as a manufacturing nation, most economists, businesspeople, and commentators seem to accept the fact that our economic future lies in patents, not products. For these analysts, it doesn’t matter if China or other developing nations take over our manufacturing sector, so long as the Silicon Valleys of the country keep designing the goods. Accordingly, the greatest possible investments our government can make for our future prosperity are those that make our “population smarter and more innovative” (Friedman 2009).

But how exactly does one teach students to be “smarter and more innovative”? Innovation is perhaps the most difficult of all skills to impart. It cannot be learned merely by copying, nor are there any rules for its practice. It is simply something we hope students will pick up on their own, in or out of school. There is even a suspicion that universities can hinder innovative instincts: famously, neither Steve Jobs nor Bill Gates graduated from college.

My argument that humanities courses are better suited to provide students with lessons in innovation may seem to some as laughable as the *New Yorker* cartoon cited above. But I would ask them to pause and consider why certain cultures and nations are more innovative than others. As anthropologists have taught us, all cultures are in fact programmed to be predominantly conservative. Like our DNA, culture is transmitted from one generation to the next, but in a much more instable manner: there is always a risk that the myth, dance, text, or song will be transformed in the act of transmission. For this reason, as Greg Urban (2001) pointed out, many cultures have safeguards to limit the risk of mutations. Elders make children repeat poems or credos word for word; games have strict rules; and schools ensure that the knowledge of generations past does not disappear with the next.

Of course, some societies also value innovation. Alongside the traditional mode of cultural transmission, there is what Urban calls a modern one. Where in the traditional mode, cultural object x_1 is meant to undergo as little change as possible in the act of transmission, thereby reproducing cultural object x_2 in the next generation, the modern mode accepts that cultural object x will be transformed into cultural object y , with the assumption that x and y still bear a degree of resemblance. To put matters more plainly, to the traditional repetition of folk songs over centuries, modern music prefers the remix. To the adoption of traditional garb in tribal societies, modern societies oppose fashion (in French, *la mode*, to which the word “modern” is related).

It is somewhat misleading, in this regard, to speak of “modern societies,” since no culture proceeds by *tabula rasa*, burning yesteryear’s books and records (except perhaps in the case of a cultural revolution). Even for us moderns, conservation is necessary. We do not rewrite the Constitution every fifteen years; and most adults wince when their teenagers mutilate grammar. Moreover, innovation is itself a kind of conservation. The modernist poet T. S. Eliot reworked the *Divine Comedy* in *The Waste Land*; the old Volkswagen Beetle is still perceptible beneath the new. To innovate is thus less to abandon the past than it is to tinker, transform, and revise what came before.

Innovation in the academy

What anthropology shows us, then, is that innovation occurs on a continuum ranging from staunch traditionalism to avant-garde radicalism. Different cultural groups can themselves be situated along this continuum, depending on their degree of preference for a traditional versus modern mode of transmission. An anthropological perspective also highlights how the production of new artworks, commodities, or ideas can be thought of in terms of cultural transmission. This framework for understanding innovation is particularly helpful when we turn our gaze to the academy.

Like cultural groups, academic disciplines can also be characterized by their variable emphasis on reproducing versus transforming

Like cultural groups, academic disciplines can also be characterized by their variable emphasis on reproducing versus transforming knowledge

knowledge. Organic chemistry, for instance, might be described as a more “conservative” field than, say, neurobiology: because the former has been explored for much longer, the knowledge that one generation of organic chemists transmits to the next is rarely challenged by new findings. Graduate students in neurobiology, conversely, will almost certainly produce theories about the brain that contradict the assumptions of their professors.

Similar distinctions could be made in the humanities: the study of logic, in analytical philosophy, changes at a far slower pace than, for instance, the study of revolutionary movements, in history.

It might be objected that, regardless of the discipline, scholarly research is by definition an attempt to modify an existing body of knowledge. In that case, innovation, understood as the *transformative* mode of knowledge transmission, could equally well be experienced in, or exemplified by, any field. To an extent, this is true: freshman seminars at research universities seek to introduce students at a beginner’s level to the excitement of research in, say, electrical engineering, marine biology, or U.S. constitutional history.

When one considers the curricular requirements of most scientific majors, however, it becomes equally apparent that the majority of courses focus on *reproducing* knowledge in the students. Neurobiology may be a field in flux, but before you can study the interaction of synapses, you need a solid foundation in biochemistry. Today’s majors in theoretical physics may go on to discover new subatomic particles and rewrite the rules of quantum mechanics, but first they have to master the more mundane—and largely unchanging—practice of deriving integral equations.

Of course, humanities disciplines are also structured around canons of knowledge (even if these canons are more liable to change). You cannot major in French without having read a number of seventeenth-century plays and nineteenth-century novels; if you never read a page of Kant, you probably won’t be allowed to major in philosophy. But the real difference between studies in the humanities and the sciences resides in how their respective canons are assimilated. Students studying the

American Revolution, for instance, are not only expected to know the names and dates of all the important players or events. They are also obliged to demonstrate that they can make sense *on their own* of the material; that they can develop *original* arguments about reasons, motivations, and outcomes for the past.

This point may seem overly subtle, but it becomes clearly evident in the case of final papers. If you provide the same answers as fifty other students on a calculus exam, you may very well get an A—assuming, of course, that those were the correct answers. But if you hand in a final essay for your American history course, in which you develop the same thesis as fifty other students, you would most

The best pedagogical practices in the humanities draw attention to the fact that the knowledge being conveyed is questionable

likely *not* get an A, since original thinking is one of the criteria used to evaluate a student's understanding and assimilation of material.

Furthermore, while science and math classes may on occasion demand that the students find innovative methods for solving problems, the humanities demand originality from day one. As I recounted in an earlier version of this piece (Edelstein 2009), I first became aware of this expectation when teaching an Introduction to the Humanities course to freshmen at Stanford. Speaking with me after class, two Chinese students expressed their confusion at having to write papers that defended an original thesis. Their high schools had focused only on memorization,



whereas we were asking them to explain what *they* thought about literary texts.

What took our international students by surprise is precisely one of the central ingredients of American liberal education. As part of our ambition to create independently minded individuals, we encourage students to think for themselves. They might not come up with ideas that are “original” in the grand scheme of things, but they are expected to reach conclusions on their own. The entire reward system of the humanities, moreover, favors those students who either make a convincing case for an unusual argument, or an unusual case for a convincing argument. In both scenarios, high grades and prizes go to students who demonstrate the most originality.

Classes in the humanities not only offer students the best opportunities to practice innovative thinking, but also provide them with models for how to do so. Professors, after all, are not simply there to transmit discrete data packages about books, compositions, theories, or events, but rather to show the students how one goes about piecing together an argument and narrative around a subject. Professors “perform innovation” when they offer, say, a political reading of *Hamlet*, an economic interpretation of the American Revolution, or a Hegelian analysis of Marx. The best pedagogical practices in the humanities draw attention to the fact that the knowledge being conveyed is questionable. This is not an invitation to rampant revisionism or postmodernism, but a simple recognition that historical, literary, political, and anthropological knowledge is not made up of equations or organic structures, but of perceptions, arguments, aesthetic effects, philosophical concepts, and other representations whose signification is subject to change. The words of *Hamlet* or of the Declaration of Independence may not vary, but their meaning can.

A humanist turn

To sum up, it is not that humanities disciplines are more innovative than their scientific counterparts: it is simply that students are required to practice innovative thinking earlier on in their studies. Though there is a great difference in outcome between, say, a close reading of Balzac’s *Père Goriot* and the development of a new software operating system, both rely on similar cognitive processes. And

students will be exposed to these processes more often in humanities than in science or engineering classes.

Some might still consider this to be a self-aggrandizing claim of the sort humanists are rumored to be prone. But what these examples and arguments highlight is that the cognitive leap between, say, analyzing a Picasso portrait and diagnosing a patient is not that wide: though the subject matter is different, the intellectual process is closely related, and training in one field carries over into the other. The work done by students in humanities fields can have direct benefits for a wide array of professional activities. Who knows? Maybe doctors of literature can help save lives, too. □

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LESLIE BERLOWITZ

The Humanities

The Case for Data

IN HER 2008 PLENARY ADDRESS to the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, philosopher and legal scholar Martha Nussbaum spoke eloquently of how a liberal arts education conveys humanistic “abilities of citizenship” such as critical thinking, cultural literacy, and narrative imagination. She emphasized that these abilities promote human development in the broadest terms and encourage responsible engagement in a pluralistic democracy and in the global economy. Nussbaum’s case for the liberal arts, and for the humanities in particular, merits serious consideration, especially at a time when the concept of a knowledge-based society is widely embraced and policy makers focus on economic competitiveness and Americans’ scientific and technical competencies.

How do we determine whether our colleges and universities are adequately cultivating “abilities of citizenship” in our students? How do we assess the teaching of complex literacy skills and critical thinking? What do we know about student attainment in foreign languages and cultural understanding as graduates set out to pursue careers in a rapidly changing global economy? What do we know about the humanities workforce within and beyond educational institutions? The search for answers to questions such as these would benefit from reliable, comprehensive, and ongoing quantitative information about the state of the humanities in our country. As Francis Oakley, Edward Dorr Professor of History and president emeritus of Williams College, has suggested, “for the humanities, perhaps surprisingly, such data [have

been] either altogether lacking, or were inconsistently assembled, hard to access, poorly disseminated, unwittingly ignored, and routinely underutilized” (2009, 27).

Scientists have long recognized the value of having statistical data to measure the scope and vitality of education, research, and workforce development in their fields. Such data support evidence-based policy discussions in professional and governmental forums. Since 1982, the National Science Board has been required by law to publish *Science and Engineering Indicators* (SEI), a biennial report providing a range of quantitative information about U.S. science, engineering, and technology in domestic and global contexts. With the SEI data available as an authoritative point of reference, stakeholders can engage in well-informed discussions and make consequential decisions about investments in science and technology, including STEM education and basic research in colleges and universities.

Nothing similar exists for the humanities even though the 1985 reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Humanities called for a “national information and data collection system on humanities scholars, educational and cultural groups, and audiences.” Such data are critical. Following the model of the SEI, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences initiated the Humanities Indicators (www.humanitiesindicators.org), a demonstration project to enrich public understanding of the humanities by increasing our empirical knowledge of the humanities in action, both within schools and colleges as well as in other social contexts. Supported by generous grants from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Indicators are the culmination of several years of planning and collaboration with many of

For the first time, we have in one place baseline statistics about many areas of concern to the humanities community

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the country's leading humanities organizations, including the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Council of Learned Societies. The project was codirected by Academy Fellows Steven Marcus, the George Delacorte Professor in the Humanities Emeritus at Columbia University; Patricia Meyer Spacks, the Edgar F. Shannon Professor of English Emerita at the University of Virginia; and Norman M. Bradburn, the Tiffany and Margaret Blake Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago and senior fellow at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC).

The Indicators provide a prototype for collecting data necessary to answer questions about the state of the humanities and how they are faring. For the first time, we have in one place baseline statistics about many areas of concern to the humanities community, including K–12 education in the humanities, undergraduate and graduate education in the humanities, the humanities workforce, research and funding for the humanities, and the humanities in American life beyond the academy. The project also enables the coherent tracking of a variety of trends in the humanities. Narrative summaries of salient trends and relevant contexts support more than seventy indicators and two hundred graphs. The oversight of Norman Bradburn and NORC ensures that the Indicators conform to the highest standards of accuracy and usefulness.

Since publicly launching its online database in January 2009, the Academy has frequently updated the findings. More than one million visits to the Indicator's Web site suggest widespread interest in this portfolio of statistics. We hope to sustain and expand the project as new data, methodologies, and disciplinary questions emerge. Past efforts to collect humanities data have been episodic, with the dissemination of findings limited to occasional publications. For data to be valuable to the widest constituency, their collection and use must be ongoing, and we look to governmental agencies and the scholarly community to help sustain us in this effort.

The Indicators allow us to assess how well we are doing as a society in educating students in the competencies that the humanities foster.

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Existing and new data will help academic departments and cultural organizations understand trends, determine priorities, and measure progress in specific areas. Given enhanced capacity to interpret trends and compare results, educational leaders, policy makers, scholars, teachers, and inter-

ested citizens can form a more complete picture of what is working and where interventions are needed.

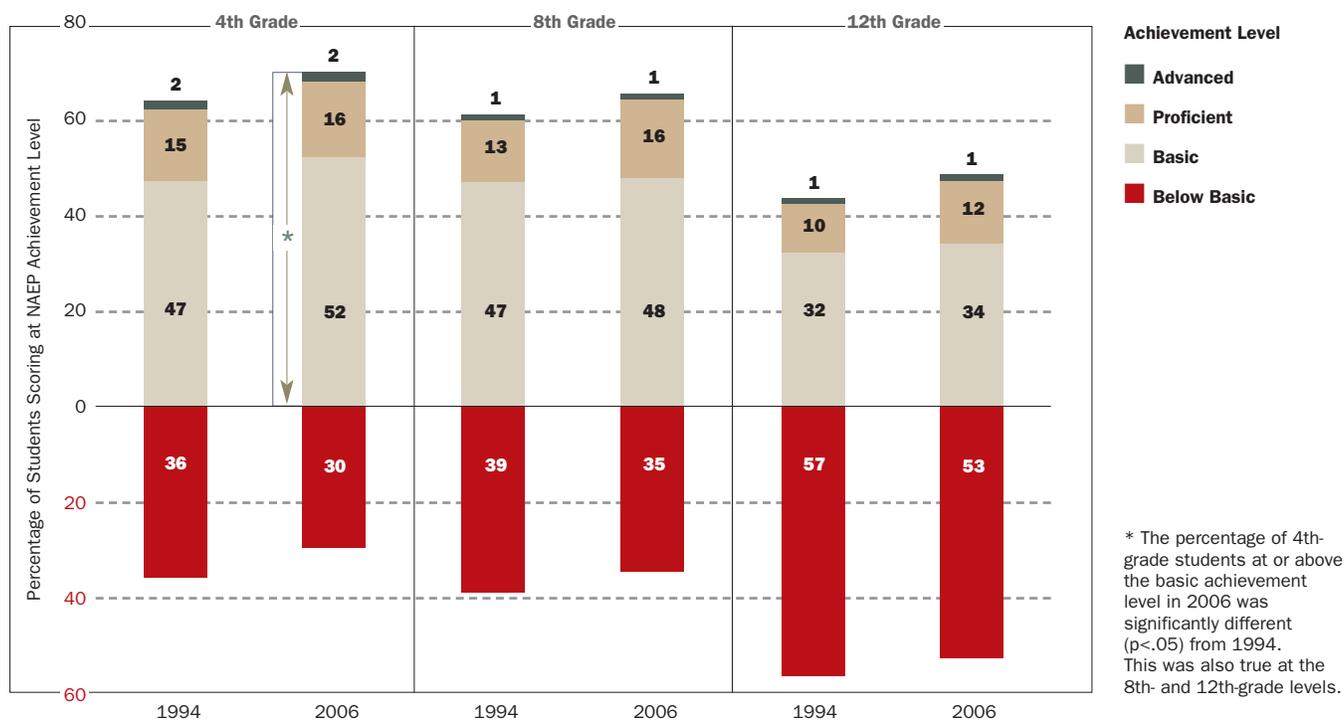
For example, at the primary and secondary school levels, Indicators on proficiency in reading and writing at different ages, as well as on knowledge of U.S. history and civics, show mixed results. On the whole, there has been a slight national improvement in basic literacy skills since 1971. But a consistent pattern of decreasing achievement as students get older is also evident, suggesting that students do not continue to develop the competencies introduced in primary school.

- More than half of the students graduating from our high schools in 2006 failed to demonstrate basic knowledge of history, and over a third of the students lacked basic knowledge of civics.
- Humanities competency is concentrated in a relatively small number of students. Only a modest percentage of the nation's young people are leaving high school with at least proficiency—versus only the most basic skills—in civics (27 percent) or history (13 percent). [Indicators I–3 and I–4 (see figs. 1 and 2)]

Indicators on K–12 teacher qualifications tell us that the humanities face the same issues of teacher preparedness as math and science. The lack of well-prepared teachers is especially severe in some core humanities subjects.

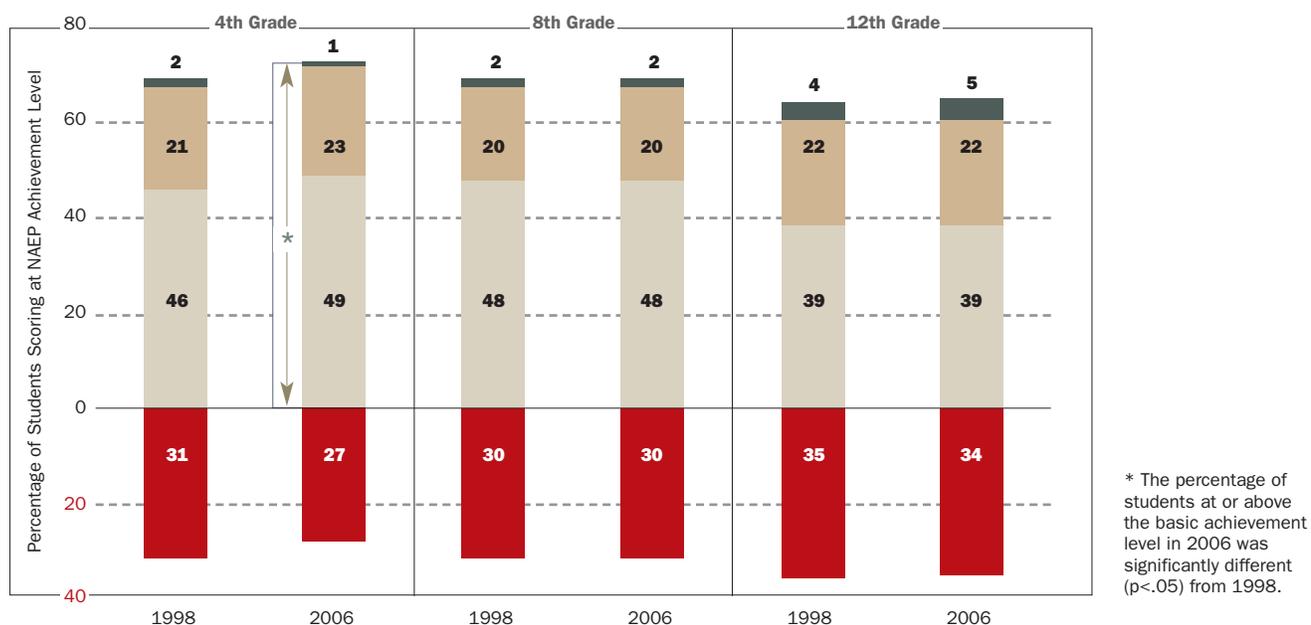
- In 2003–2004, the percentage of high school students (26.5 percent) taught by a highly qualified history teacher was lower than for any other major subject area. (The definition of “highly qualified” is a teacher who has certification and a postsecondary degree in the subject he or she teaches.) Similarly, the percentage of high school students (28.2 percent) taught history by someone lacking a certification and a postsecondary degree in history was greater than for any of the other measured subject areas.

Figure 1 History Achievement of 4th-, 8th-, & 12th-Graders as Measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1994 & 2006 [Indicator I-3]



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, *The Nation's Report Card: History 2006*, NCES 2007-474 (2007), 7-9 figs.3, 6, 9.

Figure 2 Civics Achievement of 4th-, 8th-, & 12th-Graders as Measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 & 2006 [Indicator I-4]



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, *The Nation's Report Card: Civics 2006*, NCES 2007-476 (2007), 9 fig.3.

- The percentage of least-prepared high school history teachers was more than double the percentage for mathematics (12.1 percent) and five times the percentage for the natural sciences (5.2 percent) in the same year. [Indicator I-9 (see fig. 3)]

As we set priorities for the American educational system, we should consider these Indicators in the context of how teacher preparedness relates to student performance, how our public commitment to K-12 humanities instruction influences the educational choices that students later make, and how the curricula of our public and private colleges prepare students to become primary and secondary teachers in humanities subjects.

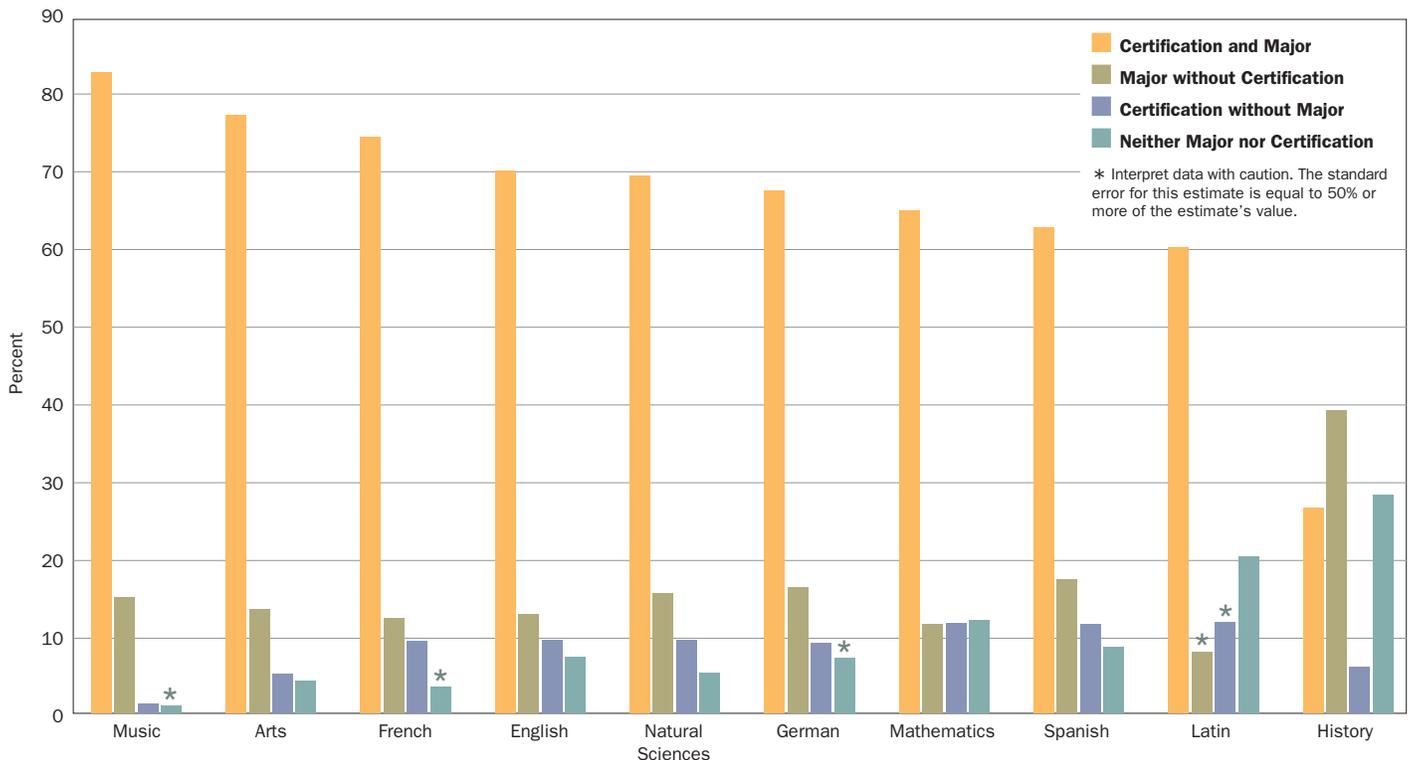
Data on postsecondary education confirm a decline in bachelor's and doctoral degree completions in humanities programs over the last forty years, following peak levels in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A modest recovery starting in the early 1990s continued through at least 2004. In the three largest disciplines—English, history, and foreign languages—data indicate slight declines in absolute numbers of

doctoral degrees in the first half of the past decade. As measured against the increasing number of students now enrolled in postsecondary education, however, the proportion of humanities degrees has declined dramatically.

- Between 1970 and 2004, completed bachelor's degrees in English compared to all other undergraduate degrees dropped by about 50 percent. [Indicator II-18]
- Comparable or even greater changes in market share can be seen in history and foreign languages and, at the doctoral level, for the humanities generally. [Indicators II-19, II-20, and II-10]

These data show that, overall, the humanities have lost significant market share to vocational degrees, primarily business, as the number of students entering college has increased. The declines are relevant not just to the pipeline for future teachers and scholars in the humanities, but also to the preparation of a literate, flexible, creative American workforce and a well-informed citizenry. As Jim Leach, chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has said, “we live in perilous times, but nothing

Figure 3 Percentage of Public High School Students Taught by a Teacher with Certification & Undergraduate or Graduate Major in the Course Subject Area, by Course Subject Area, 2003–2004 [Indicator I-9]



Source: Beth A. Morton et al., *Education and Certification Qualifications of Departmentalized Public High School-Level Teachers of Core Subjects: Evidence from the 2003–04 Schools and Staffing Survey*, Statistical Analysis Report NCES 2008–338 (Washington, DC: NCES, 2008).

can be more costly than shortchanging the humanities” (Pitcher 2009).

Moreover, in a global economy, we need to be sure that our educational system develops strong competencies in reading and writing, cultural literacy, and foreign languages. Some evidence suggests that we are in fact falling behind. For instance, China is not only increasing its efforts in science and math as it rapidly develops its trained workforce, but is also strengthening education in the liberal arts. As Mark Yudof, president of the University of California system, points out, it is a “great irony” that as countries in South and East Asia are “attempting to emulate the American example of investing in world-class public higher education [the] example to which they are looking is eroding in the very place it originated” (2009, 40).

The importance of the humanities for an educated citizenry

At an Academy conference on “The Public Good: The Humanities in a Civil Society,” U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice David Souter made an important distinction between the transformative but occasional “epiphanies” celebrated in the humanities and the life-changing and lifelong “habits of mind” that the humanities foster. Justice Souter reminded us that these empowering habits of mind, formed when we are young, require continual nourishment. He underscored the importance of the humanities for good citizenship—without a strong grounding in history we cannot understand and protect our democratic institutions, or comprehend the rulings of our courts.

The Indicators tell us that as a nation our humanistic habits of mind are not faring well. Much attention is paid to the importance of science and mathematics education as an engine for economic vitality. Advanced literacy, critical thinking, and civic understanding are equally important to our national well-being and our capacity to innovate. But instrumental arguments alone are not enough to convey the significance of the humanities. Don Michael Randel, president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, defines the domains of the humanities, along with the arts, as including “the study of the values that support the production of knowledge and its proper application in society [and] the study of, contemplation of, and exploration of what it means to be a human

Online Resources

More information on the status of humanities programs in colleges and universities is available online (www.humanitiesindicators.org) with the recently posted results of the Academy’s humanities departmental survey. The survey complements other new research, such as the assessment of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s Graduate Education Initiative outlined in *Educating Scholars: Doctoral Education in the Humanities* by Ronald G. Ehrenberg, Harriet Zuckerman, Jeffrey A. Groen, and Sharon M. Brucker (Princeton University Press, 2009).

being and why and how we should want to organize our lives in relation to one another around the globe” (2009, 11). To support these fundamental pursuits, we need to continue to assess the state of the humanities as we prepare students both to become active participants in a democratic society and to compete most effectively in a global economy. Until recently, our evidence for claims about the state of the humanities had been largely anecdotal. With the Humanities Indicators, we can argue with data and conviction. □

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

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DAVID A. BERRY, GERALD GRAFF, AND CARY NELSON

Symposium on Center

FEATURED TOPIC

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Why Teach the Humanities at a Community College?

DAVID A. BERRY

So you are thinking of teaching the humanities at a community college? Choose your college carefully.

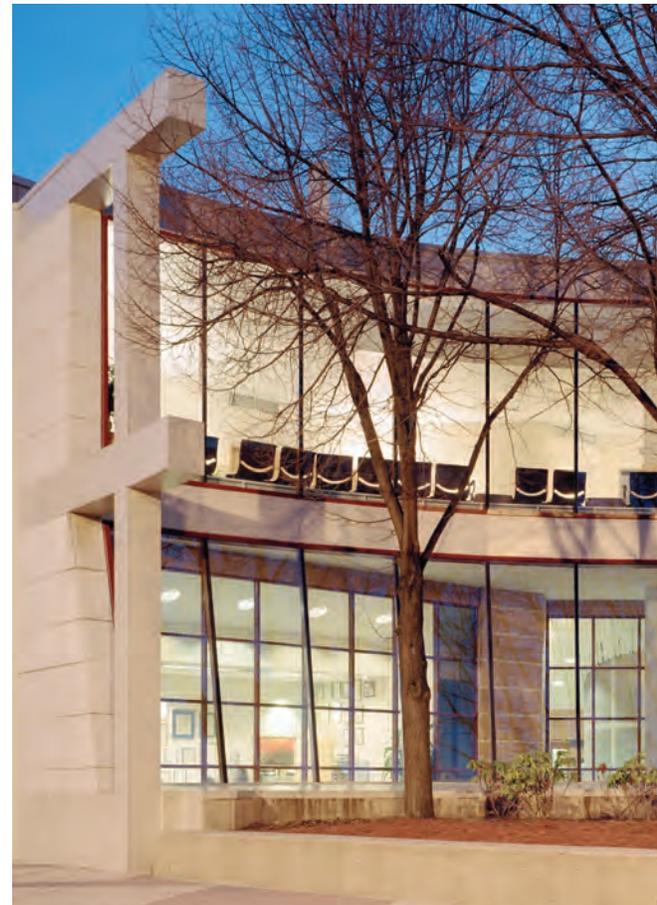
Do you want to teach in an urban, suburban, or rural area? Do you want to teach primarily developmental students (not college ready)? Primarily transfer students? Honors students? What is the ratio of full-time to adjunct faculty? Will your teaching load include distance education courses? What percentage of faculty holds the PhD or EdD? What flexibility will you have to select texts and primary source readings? To develop new courses?

What opportunities are provided for professional development, including active involvement with professional associations? Are sabbaticals contractually awarded? A five-course-per-semester load is common, with an average class size of thirty to forty students (indeed, small classes are a hallmark of community colleges). Some colleges have four-course loads or options, and some require an outrageous six-course load. Many faculty members teach overload courses and in the summer to boost their income. Some colleges pay an adequate salary and excellent benefits. Some boast high salaries, but these are often in areas with expensive housing and high living costs.

Make certain that you love teaching and that you have a self-sustaining engagement with your discipline—perhaps more than one or even with interdisciplinarity—and the academic life in general. Not all colleges will provide a nurturing, academic environment. You may be on your own. Your options for research will be limited, and the reward structure of the college may not sufficiently recognize the value of research.

If you do choose to teach at a community college, you will soldier on despite all of this because the rewards are extraordinary. You will have the opportunity to transform the lives of students. Many are often the first in their family to attend college. Many will be (by current definitions) minorities, older (the

You will have the opportunity to transform the lives of students



average age nationwide is twenty-seven and dropping), and most (typically 60 percent) will be women. You will discover the honors student, the ESL immigrant, the seasoned mom or dad, and the developmental student—all in the same classroom. Your teaching strategies will evolve as you confront rapidly changing student demographics.

In my own case, the intellectual rewards of teaching history in exciting and academically rigorous ways have been substantial. You will be able to knock the socks off of students who arrive poorly prepared and cynical, burned by low-level jobs and life's diminished prospects. You will be astonished by students who juggle family obligations, full-time work, and four or five college courses—some performing at the highest levels of academic achievement. Your students will leave you and move on to top colleges and universities. This is the bittersweet aspect of community colleges: you do not con-

Temporary Challenges



Essex County College

continue to serve students as they move on to their future academic, career, and professional lives. You will write letters of recommendation for them as they continue at senior institutions (including top universities and liberal arts colleges) and later for graduate and professional schools. Many of your students who transfer will have taken virtually all of their liberal arts and humanities courses at the community college. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that your efforts were truly significant components in their achievement. Some will come back and let you know.

In the end, it is really all about our disciplines, our knowledge and creative teaching, the students and, for all of us, lives worth living. □

DAVID A. BERRY is professor of history at Essex County College, and executive director of the Community College Humanities Association.

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The Costs of Runaway Disconnection Have Come Home to Roost

GERALD GRAFF

Many academics today explain the financial crisis of higher education as a symptom of “the corporatization of the university,” its reduction to a business model in which cost-efficient “content delivery” replaces good teaching and research as the dominant value. The traditional idea of liberal education, we complain, is being pushed aside in favor of training a competitive workforce to compete in the global marketplace.

There is some merit in this complaint about educational corporatization, but it also betrays our habit of blaming external forces for problems that we’ve helped bring upon ourselves. The complaint ignores inconvenient facts, particularly that the traditional organization of universities that is now threatened by the managerial ethos has been not only inefficient in market terms, but also deeply flawed educationally. You don’t have to be a fan of Total Quality Management and other market-driven models to see that universities are organized in ways that prevent students from learning.

In today’s fiscal crisis, American higher education is reaping the consequences of bad organizational habits it got used to during the massive expansion of universities after World War II. In the post-Sputnik era when generous government support was flowing into higher education, a university on the make could advance itself by simply enlarging its playing field, proliferating new courses, research fields, subfields, and intellectual theories and methodologies while giving all parties enough separate space to ward off supposedly unproductive turf wars. Universities had the luxury to better themselves by simply *adding* new components without bothering to think about how to *integrate* and *connect* what was added. The result was a notoriously incoherent college curriculum that leaves it up to the student body to connect what the university itself does not.

This failure to help students cope with college is now recognized by educational critics

from Margaret Spellings on the right to Mike Rose on the left. As the 2006 Spellings Report puts it, “most colleges and universities don’t accept responsibility for making sure that those they admit actually succeed.” A similar diagnosis had been made in detail by Rose’s 1989 book, *Lives on the Boundary*, which depicts the college curriculum as a “litany of misdirection” that all but ensures failure for the underprepared students from poor backgrounds who manage to get admitted.

This incoherence has also been a product of democratizing forces that made the academic curriculum more intellectually and culturally diverse but also more difficult to make sense of, since it exposes students who go from one course or discipline to the next to confusingly

Universities are organized in ways that prevent students from learning

mixed messages about how intellectual work is done. Interdisciplinary programs have made useful connections, but interdisciplinarity has itself reproduced curricular fragmen-

mentation rather than overcome it, since interdisciplinary programs tend to be disconnected from each other as well as from the disciplines themselves. The more we idealize “the classroom” as a space disconnected from other classrooms (and the more we glorify the small, intimate course), the more we fragment the curriculum and reproduce cluelessness in academe.

The problem is that the expansion and redefinition of the liberal arts that date from the upheavals of the 1960s were absorbed in the form of courses, fields, subfields, texts, cultures, and theories—a structure of separate spaces that has become unaffordable in the face of current financial exigencies. In short, the runaway expansion by addition of disconnected units that higher education got so accustomed to a generation ago has become unsustainable both economically and educationally.

To put it more positively, now that higher education no longer has the financial luxury to continue proliferating separate units, it needs to learn how to put its disconnected components into dialogue. We need to seriously explore alternative models—learning communities, paired courses, integrated curricula, the use of the Internet to connect classrooms instead of reinforcing their isolation. This would also be a good time to dust off the 1991 AAC&U report, *The Challenge of Connecting Learning*, to which I contributed when I served on the national advisory committee in the late 1980s (it was just the AAC back then).

In short, higher education can’t win the fight against corporatization by circling the wagons and protecting a system of isolated courses and teachers that should never have been allowed to take hold. □

GERALD GRAFF is professor of English and education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and former president of the Modern Language Association.



University of Illinois
at Chicago

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Will the Humanities Be Dehumanized?

CARY NELSON

Although some humanities disciplines help bring in significant tuition revenue, their historical inability to obtain grants with indirect costs makes them second-class citizens in the corporate university nonetheless. Meanwhile, they are easy targets for the nearly forty-year trend of increasing reliance on contingent faculty, whether part-time or full-time off the tenure track. Contingent faculty, frequently concentrated in the humanities, not only often work without a living wage but also have little or no academic freedom or job security and no role in shared governance. If their use comes to dominate an institution, faculty members lose what the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has emphasized is their traditional authority over designing the curriculum and hiring their colleagues. If contingent faculty exist alongside tenured faculty, a two-tier system with the two groups sharing few values or interests evolves that can eliminate any vestige of collegiality or consensus about institutional mission.

The number of factors pushing us in this direction is considerable. Why, for example, require a book for tenure if fewer and fewer presses can afford to publish them? And if traditional outlets for major research projects are disappearing, why not increase teaching loads and eliminate research expectations? At the same time, conservative participants in the culture wars often endorse a model of the humanities that emphasizes transmitting a stable and ideal cultural tradition, not adapting approaches and interpretations to contemporary social and political conditions. The reality that the material character of the past continually changes, as new facts and documents are unearthed and forgotten texts are rediscovered, is often lost when it seems convenient to deny part-time faculty time to stay current in their fields. The end result is that independent-minded humanities professors can come to seem an unnecessary luxury.

Like the willingness of both parties to support cost shifting to tuition for public education, some elements of this pattern show depressingly bipartisan political support. Even President Obama's plan to begin refinancing

community colleges emphasizes job training without crediting the broader aim of educating students to be critical participants in our democracy. Nor has any NGO spokesperson concerned with degree completion rates, so far as I know, pointed out that hiring a stable workforce of tenured faculty with the time to advise students—whether at a community college or a research university—helps students complete their degrees.

In *No University Is an Island: Saving Academic Freedom* (New York University Press, 2010), I analyze these trends in detail and offer numerous suggestions for how to resist or modify them. Yet the task will not be easy. I urge faculty unions, for example, to commit themselves to the social good, not just their members' more narrow self-interest. I urge colleges to grant long-term part-time faculty tenure and commit themselves to hire no more contingent teachers. I recommend the creation of research communities that embrace the dissemination of new knowledge in the classroom—at all postsecondary institutions—as a fundamental part of the research agenda that we can evaluate and reward. I urge the AAUP to open a broad dialogue with all faculty members about the standards it promotes and the violations it investigates.

I do not believe we can preserve the humanities and interpretive social sciences as we now know them unless we develop more effective forms of community that bridge the differences between types of institutions and hiring categories for faculty. To do so we will have to promote faculty identities that balance careerism with community responsibility. That means reversing two generations of character formation pointing in the opposite direction, toward isolation and individual gain. Yet a faculty member can be both intellectually ambitious and socially responsible, concerned that all community members earn a living wage and enjoy fair working conditions. □

CARY NELSON is professor of English and Jubilee Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and president of the American Association of University Professors.

To respond to these articles, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the author's name on the subject line.

A STATEMENT FROM
THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES
AND UNIVERSITIES

The Quality Imperative

Match Ambitious Goals for College Attainment with an Ambitious Vision for Learning

PERSPECTIVES

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Quality Imperative was approved by the Board of Directors of the Association of American Colleges and Universities in December 2009.

Introduction

Facing an avalanche of evidence that the United States no longer leads the world in

postsecondary attainment, educational

leaders at all levels have begun a far-reaching effort to increase significantly the number of students entering and completing higher education. This is a top priority for the Obama administration, for policy leaders and philanthropy, and for colleges and universities.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities welcomes and strongly supports the emerging national commitment to expand appreciably both access to college and successful completion. We are especially concerned that higher education provide equitable access and expanded opportunity for groups and communities that continue to seek full participation in the promise of American democracy.

Taken alone, however, the headline terms for this effort—"Access and Completion"—threaten to perpetuate what this association has long described as a "dangerous silence"¹ on the most fundamental question of all: what do college students need to learn and be able to do?

The current focus on college-going, while important, short-circuits the core issue of educational quality. Yet both employers and educators know that the quality shortfall is just as urgent as the attainment shortfall. As new research released with this statement makes clear, today's employers want higher education to place significantly more emphasis on a set of

outcomes (see fig. 1) that range from writing to complex problem solving to ethical decision making, science and global learning, intercultural competence, and the ability to apply learning to real-world challenges. This association strongly agrees.

Public policy cannot simply assume that program completion and high-level student achievement on key learning outcomes are one and the same.² Access and completion are necessary but far from sufficient. To regain our position as a world leader, the United States now must work both to increase degree attainment and to improve significantly the breadth, level, and quality of students' actual learning.

Quality must become the centerpiece of this nation's intended investments in postsecondary attainment.

Aim high—and make excellence inclusive

The Board of Directors of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, on behalf of its 1,200 college, university, community college, and career-technical college members, urges a far-reaching and unprecedented effort to ensure that *all* the nation's college students—whatever their age and whatever their background—receive the finest possible preparation for the demands and challenges of this global century.

Preparing Americans for opportunity and success in the turbulent global economy should be one of the guiding themes for this far-reaching initiative. And, with massive funding expected to flow into both school and postsecondary reform, we need to recognize from the outset that narrow training—the kind currently offered in far too many degree

Narrow training—the kind currently offered in far too many degree and certificate programs—will actually limit human talent and opportunity for better jobs in today's knowledge economy



**University of Illinois
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Figure 1
The Essential Learning Outcomes

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

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

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

Personal and Social Responsibility, including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

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

Integrative Learning, including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

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

Reprinted from Association of American Colleges and Universities, College Learning for the New Global Century: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007), 12. This listing was developed through a multiyear dialogue with hundreds of colleges and universities about needed goals for student learning; analysis of a long series of recommendations and reports from the business community; and analysis of the accreditation requirements for engineering, business, nursing, and teacher education. For more information, please visit www.aacu.org/leap.

and certificate programs—will actually limit human talent and opportunity for better jobs in today's knowledge economy.

Why is narrow training a barrier to opportunity? In this turbulent and fast-paced economy, employees frequently change industries as well as jobs, and they already are expected to engage in significant new learning across their careers. Moreover, nine out of ten employers say their organizations now look for broader levels of knowledge and skill than in the past, and assign higher levels of responsibility to those they employ.³ To prepare for these career realities, all students need to develop broad knowledge—of science, society, and global developments—and the kinds of advanced, cross-cutting capacities that prepare them to grapple with complexity, contingency, and new learning in contexts of rapid change.

To prosper in today's knowledge economy, in sum, all Americans will need a contemporary blend of liberal and applied learning. Many colleges, community colleges, and universities already are moving in just this direction as they connect their degree programs with twenty-first-century challenges, but the pace of change is much too slow and seriously hindered by the current economic crisis. Federal and philanthropic investments should help educational institutions and programs build their capacity to ensure that all students achieve the breadth and level of learning that the economy seeks and rewards. Helping all students achieve the essential learning outcomes outlined in figure 1 is fundamental to this effort.

Invest in the multiple goals for college-level learning

Important as it is, economic preparation is not the only college outcome that matters. As a democracy, the United States also needs to ensure that the curriculum prepares graduates richly for the responsibilities and challenges they face as citizens—citizens whose decisions and judgments will profoundly affect the decency, integrity, and even the sustainability of our shared future.

Across all sectors, higher education already has provided vigorous leadership to establish civic, ethical, and intercultural learning as institutional priorities. But to date, only about half of all seniors make significant gains on these learning outcomes.⁴ Public discussions

of “accountability” almost never address these essential areas of learning.

As we commit to the importance of college learning for all Americans, we also should commit to civic, ethical, and cross-cultural learning as priorities for every degree program and every student. Anything less will leave too many Americans seriously underprepared for their responsibilities to our democracy, to this nation’s global leadership, and—yes—to the civic, ethical, and diversity challenges that are basic to work in the twenty-first century.

With unprecedented leadership turnover looming in virtually every area of endeavor, we further need to take seriously the development of leaders at all levels, for our organizations, the community, the state, and the nation. And not least, we also must commit to providing learners with the capacity to pursue their individual goals for their own lives, their families, and their communities.

These multiple goals for education—preparation for work, citizenship, leadership, and life—should apply to all students who are educated in American higher education, especially students who begin or return to their studies in career and technical programs.

A great democracy cannot be content to provide a horizon-expanding education for some and work skills, taught in isolation from the larger societal context, for everyone else. Yet this is what the postsecondary system, viewed as a whole, provides now. And this is what we must work together to change.

Connect liberal education and workforce learning

The world is changing dramatically, and designs for learning that have long drawn clear distinctions between liberal education—intended for future leaders—and more targeted job training—envisioned as workforce development—now are obsolete. Today, even highly technical jobs require the high-level intellectual skills, contextual understanding, and ethical judgment that long were identified with liberal education in arts and sciences fields.

To help students meet twenty-first-century challenges, the United States needs to engage in a far-reaching effort to ensure that *all* degree programs—in liberal arts, technical, and professional fields alike—address the learning outcomes that both educators and employers recognize as essential (see figs. 1, 2).⁵ Helping

Figure 2
Percentage of Employers Who Want Colleges to “Place More Emphasis” on Essential Learning Outcomes

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

• Science and technology	70%
• Global issues	67%*
• The role of the United States in the world	57%
• Cultural diversity in the United States and other countries	57%
• Civic knowledge, participation, and engagement	52%*

Intellectual and Practical Skills

• Written and oral communication	89%
• Critical thinking and analytic reasoning	81%
• Complex problem solving	75%
• Teamwork skills in diverse groups	71%*
• Creativity and innovation	70%
• Information literacy	68%
• Quantitative reasoning	63%

Personal and Social Responsibility

• Ethical decision making	75%
• Intercultural competence (teamwork in diverse groups)	71%*
• Intercultural knowledge (global issues)	67%*
• Civic knowledge, participation, and engagement	52%*

Integrative and Applied Learning

• Applied knowledge in real-world settings	79%
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* Starred items are shown in multiple learning outcome categories because they apply to more than one.

NOTE: These findings are taken from *Raising the Bar: Employers’ Views on College Learning in the Wake of the Economic Downturn*, a survey of employers conducted for AAC&U by Hart Research Associates and published in 2010. For a full report on this survey and related employer findings, see www.aacu.org/leap.

all students achieve these outcomes will be the defining work for liberal education in the twenty-first century.

It would be a tragedy—and a massive failure of vision for our future—if the new investments in postsecondary access flow mainly to programs that provide narrow training or short-term

credentials apart from these larger aims of a twenty-first-century education. We have long since recognized the inequities that vocational versus academic tracking created in our public schools. It is time now to focus on making excellence inclusive in higher education as well.

New investments should help our society set twenty-first-century standards for the meaning of a degree and ensure that, whatever a student's pathway into higher education, that pathway helps build the broad knowledge, high-level skills, and grounded sense of responsibility that Americans need in every area of endeavor: work, citizenship, and the challenges of daily life. It should not be liberal education for some and narrow or illiberal education for others.

In particular, new investments should create clear linkages between short-term training programs and degree programs that carry long-term value in the economy and in our democratic society. Programs that provide job-specific and short-term training will continue to be needed, but such programs now need to be transparently connected to the intended learning outcomes and curricular requirements for high-quality associate's and bachelor's degrees.

The time is right and the need is urgent to provide a horizon-expanding education to all who participate in our educational system—in school, in community college and career-technical institutions, and in four-year colleges and universities, public and private. Access to educational excellence is the equity challenge of our time.

What it will take

To succeed in this landmark effort, educators and stakeholders will need to do the following:

Acknowledge the inequities. Recognize and confront the systemic arrangements that now impede access to a horizon-expanding education for far too many Americans, including many of those who are now obtaining a postsecondary degree or certificate. Set guidelines for new investments that make academic versus vocational tracking a relic of the past.

Set twenty-first-century goals. Embrace a set of powerful learning outcomes—outlined in figure 1—that both educators and employers have already determined to be *essential*. Organize and align educational reform efforts, across school and all forms of postsecondary education, to help all graduates achieve them.

A Guide to Frequently Confused Terms

LIBERAL EDUCATION*: An approach to college learning that seeks to empower individuals and prepare them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. This approach emphasizes broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g., science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth achievement in at least one specific field of study. It helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, strong cross-disciplinary intellectual and practical skills (e.g., communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills), and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.

LIBERAL ARTS: Specific disciplines (e.g., the humanities, sciences, and social sciences).

LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE: A particular type of institution—often small, often residential—that facilitates close interaction between faculty and students, while grounding its curriculum in the liberal arts disciplines.

ARTES LIBERALES: The *trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music), which together form the historical basis of the modern liberal arts.

GENERAL EDUCATION: The part of a liberal education curriculum that is shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing important intellectual, civic, and practical capacities. General education can take many forms, and increasingly includes introductory, advanced, and integrative forms of learning.

*Seventy-six percent of employers would recommend this approach to college-bound students, according to a survey of employers conducted for AAC&U by Hart Research Associates and published in 2007. For a full report on the survey and its complete findings, see www.aacu.org/leap.

Adapted from *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a National Goes to College* (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002).

Break free of the silos. Develop a comprehensive approach to student achievement that fosters new and transforming connections between and among school, college, and work; two- and four-year institutions; technical and liberal education; arts and sciences and professional programs. Ensure that all fields of study help students achieve demonstrable competence in the essential learning outcomes, including the ability to apply their learning to new settings and unscripted problems.

Focus on what students actually do. Across school and college, direct resources toward “high-effort/high-impact” educational practices that—research shows persuasively⁶—support both student persistence and student achievement of essential learning outcomes. Expand accountability frameworks to ensure that the curriculum provides extensive opportunities for students to work on—and develop skill in addressing—complex problems, significant questions, and real-world applications.

Work systemically. Foreground collaborative efforts—national, regional, and local—to advance a shared framework for accomplishment that embraces all students, whatever their background, choice of major, or postsecondary institution. Build institutional, faculty, and, in public institutions, system capacity at all levels to help students meet these goals.

Build public understanding and will. Use every available venue—from the White House to social networking—to shape new understandings, not just of the importance of college, but about how to reap the full benefit of college for individuals, the economy, and our democracy.

Conclusion

The quality of individuals’ actual learning is the most important resource we have as a society. To build a global future, the United States must erase the educational dividing lines that were designed long ago for a far more parochial and socially stratified world.

It is not just wrong but risky to provide a 360-degree education to some Americans and a much more blinkered form of training to others. A great nation needs and deserves more.

In today’s far more competitive global environment, we must work together toward standards that, once and for all, make excellence truly inclusive, not just in the schools, but in postsecondary education as well. Quality must

drive our commitment to college completion, both for the economy and for our future as a great democracy. □

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org.

NOTES

- 1 Association of American Colleges and Universities, *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002); Association of American Colleges and Universities, *College Learning for the New Global Century: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007).
- 2 Peter D. Hart Research Associates, *How Should Colleges Assess and Improve Student Learning: Employers’ Views on the Accountability Challenge* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008); Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
- 3 Hart Research Associates, *Raising the Bar: Employers’ Views on College Learning in the Wake of the Economic Downturn* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010).
- 4 National Survey of Student Engagement, *Promoting Engagement for All Students: The Imperative to Look Within; 2008 Results* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2008). Norman Nie and D. Sunshine Hillygus, “Education and Democratic Citizenship,” in *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society*, ed. Diane Ravitch and Joseph P. Viteritti (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 30–57. This major study of civic learning found correlations between specific major fields and a reduction of students’ interest in civic participation from college entrance to exit.
- 5 For employers, see notes 2 and 3 above. For educators, see Hart Research Associates, *Learning and Assessment: Trends in Undergraduate Education* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009); Hart Research Associates, *Trends and Emerging Practices in General Education* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009). The results from the AAC&U member survey underscore the importance educators across all kinds of institutions assign to the essential learning outcomes.
- 6 George D. Kuh, *High-Impact Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008); Lynn Swaner and Jayne Brownell, *Outcomes of High-Impact Practices for Underserved Students: A Review of the Literature* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009), available online at www.aacu.org.

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WISCONSIN-MADISON
CONVERGENCE GROUP

Liberal Education & Institutional Identity

The University of Wisconsin-Madison Experience

PERSPECTIVES

FOR MANY YEARS, the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) has been working with other institutions in the University of Wisconsin System to change the conversation about higher education in the state. In the spring of 2006, these partners participated in a systemwide advisory group convened to promote better understanding of liberal education and to highlight its public purpose. The

work of this advisory group converged so closely with the ongoing Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) that Wisconsin became one of the initiative's pilot states. This article describes how we, a group of people from across UW-Madison, leveraged such convergences to effect change, how we hope to maintain momentum, and what we have learned.

To understand our project, it is important to know that we are an informal, self-convened group of administrators and faculty responsible for in- and out-of-class aspects of our students' university experience. We hail from various realms within the university, and converge upon a shared commitment to liberal education and the promotion of high-impact educational practices. We use this commitment as a touchstone for work we are already doing. When we began our collaboration, we imagined that we might convert relatively small actions and limited decisions into change on a larger scale.

Those of us working on LEAP had reason to believe that while liberal education was valued

widely across campus, it was not part of daily conversation. (One of our members likened this state of affairs to a family in which the most deeply held values are not discussed explicitly at the dinner table.) Therefore, our first goal was to get people talking about student learning, liberal education, and how the LEAP essential learning outcomes (see fig. 1, page 38) relate to teaching, advising, and the other work we do with and for students.

Given that our group was self-organized and our members have varying degrees of authority, our first task was to secure strategic support from across the campus. After the provost readily supported our grassroots plan, we identified important groups of faculty and staff with whom we wanted to talk (e.g., deans from our largest undergraduate colleges, admissions and recruitment officers); we also accepted any invitation to talk to others about student learning. We found an important ally in the University General Education Committee, a group of faculty and staff instructors, advisors, and administrators who actively supported our efforts by serving as both a sounding board and an advisory council.

As we took our presentation from meeting to meeting and from group to group, we faced frustrating moments and heard various questions and objections (see fig. 2, page 39). We honed our responses and built on the enthusiasm generated as people recognized the value of LEAP and saw how discussing "essential learning" helped promote a common language to describe what UW-Madison students learn in and out of the classroom. Our listeners praised the elegance with which the essential learning outcomes were stated, and they understood the power of taking part in a national conversation about liberal education.

The early joining of the UW-Madison Experience and LEAP made for a powerful statement that deepened our aspirations for our students—and for our institution as a whole

The members of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Convergence Group are listed in the sidebar on page 43.



As one of our members observed, this common language enhances conversations with students and their parents: “These learning

Figure 1
The Essential Learning Outcomes

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

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

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

Personal and Social Responsibility, including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

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

Integrative Learning, including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

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

Reprinted from Association of American Colleges and Universities, College Learning for the New Global Century: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007), 12. This listing was developed through a multiyear dialogue with hundreds of colleges and universities about needed goals for student learning; analysis of a long series of recommendations and reports from the business community; and analysis of the accreditation requirements for engineering, business, nursing, and teacher education. For more information, please visit www.aacu.org/leap.

outcomes allow me to describe how my department's courses promote learning in areas that are not only highly valued by us, but that are also seen as important by employers and educators across the nation. [Students and parents] learn that our major and the liberal arts degree are relevant and useful.”

As some of us talked about LEAP, others sought to describe the characteristics of a distinctly UW–Madison learning experience. This group recognized that a UW–Madison education has historically been associated with helping students pursue learning opportunities that enhance thoughtful civic and social engagement and that have a strong positive impact on students' lives and on communities beyond college. This group identified a variety of opportunities, both in and out of the classroom, that engage students in learning experiences that sustain that goal. Our students are encouraged to use those experiences to create their own “UW–Madison Experience” in the context of (and in dialogue with) our traditions. When the LEAP group and the “student experience” group began to work together, the synergy took both projects to a higher level. Although LEAP had allowed us to connect our conversation about learning outcomes to the national initiative, the process of identifying a “UW–Madison Experience” linked liberal education to those “high-impact practices” (Kuh 2008) that resonate particularly well with our campus community. By coupling the two initiatives, we were able to communicate most effectively about how liberal education learning outcomes are realized and lived out *here*. Had we only addressed liberal education as it applies to any institution of higher education, the idea that we can provide a richer learning environment may not have been as readily accepted.

The essential learning outcomes provided an academic focus for discussion of the UW–Madison Experience, while the UW–Madison Experience made LEAP relevant and local by connecting it to our campus traditions and identity. As expressed in a campus document entitled “The Wisconsin Experience and the Essential Learning Outcomes”:

UW–Madison graduates become extraordinary citizens, community members, and national and global leaders. We have produced more Peace Corps and Teach for America volunteers than almost any other university in the country. More leaders of

major corporations have graduated from UW–Madison than any other university in the country. We are among the top producers of faculty members who teach at research-intensive institutions around the world. Something about the UW–Madison Experience prepares our students to become outstanding leaders who are engaged locally, nationally and globally. (University of Wisconsin–Madison)

The essential learning identified by LEAP, and the extent of our own students' engagement in high-impact practices (see fig. 3, page 40), suggested to us that liberal education is the bedrock on which our university is founded.

“The Wisconsin Experience and the Essential Learning Outcomes” was circulated across campus for broad discussion. It has been embraced by a wide variety of groups and units as

the best expression of our shared aspirations for our students. It has been adopted by governance and academic committees, used as an organizing framework for our recent reaccreditation self-study, and serves as one component of the foundation for the university's strategic framework.

Events and activities

Armed with this sense of connection and focus, and with very modest financial resources, we began to reach out strategically to specific groups that could have an even greater impact on the effort to change our campus culture.

The first group we gathered for discussion consisted of advisers, since their work involves faculty, instructional staff, student affairs professionals, administrators, and students. These colleagues advise students throughout their

Figure 2
Conversations about liberal education

Objections Raised

These are nice platitudes, but are they useful?

We shouldn't have to justify our work!

Where did these come from? Who decided these outcomes are important?

Why do we focus so much on jobs? Shouldn't we promote learning for the sake of learning?

How are these learning outcomes relevant to us, here?

My course is about [...]; I don't teach anything else, and these goals don't apply to my course.

Productive Responses

If we agree that we value these concepts, we may benefit from having a common language to communicate effectively about them and about what we do.

Like it or not, we do. We may prefer that we not have to justify what we do, but it is useful to be able to explain what we do.

AAC&U conducted a national study that engaged leaders in higher education and in business to develop the essential learning outcomes. But these outcomes should not be seen as the “lowest common denominator” for learning. They will accumulate detail and focus as they intersect with locally described learning outcomes, and as they are articulated at increasingly sophisticated levels.

Students seek assurance that what they learn has value, and we have a responsibility to ensure that it does. We know that employers value employees who are creative and who can learn; society benefits from an educated citizenry; and the goal of liberal education is not just to make a living, but to make a life.

Although these goals help us participate in state and national conversations about higher education, they also challenge us to help students attain them at our university in a distinct way.

Every course fits into a larger whole. If, in our rapidly changing world, the content of any course is rapidly outdated—what endures? What do students learn beyond course content? What if your course is the only exposure students may ever have to your field, or to the broader realm of knowledge?

Figure 3
High-impact educational practices
at UW–Madison

Certain high-impact educational practices have been widely tested and shown to be beneficial to students from diverse backgrounds (Kuh 2008). UW–Madison offers students a range of these practices throughout the college years.

In the first year:

- First-year interest groups
- Residential learning communities
- Undergraduate research scholars

In the final year(s):

- Capstones
- Internships
- Senior theses

Throughout the college years:

- Study abroad
- Service learning/community-based research
- Undergraduate research
- Student leadership (in class, such as peer mentoring, and out of class, through student organizations)
- Some aspects of general education requirements (notably communication, quantitative reasoning, and ethnic studies)

The following chart depicts bachelor's degree recipients' participation in high-impact practices:

Graduation Year	Percentage participating in at least one activity	Percentage participating in more than one activity	Total number of degree recipients
2002–3	69%	34%	6,107
2003–4	73%	46%	6,156
2004–5	80%	52%	6,289
2005–6	84%	57%	6,256
2006–7	82%	58%	6,017
2007–8	87%	66%	6,175
2008–9	89%	67%	6,565

careers, and frequently help them consider big questions about education and purpose. The half-day symposium we held on LEAP and essential learning at UW–Madison was a success, from the keynote address by AAC&U's Debra Humphreys to break-out sessions featuring UW–Madison faculty, staff, and students.

For our second activity, we hosted structured conversations with forty members of the faculty and instructional staff who teach or influence the twenty courses taken most frequently by first-year students. During this half-day event, the group focused on two sets of questions: (1) Beyond the specific disciplinary content of your course, what do you want students to learn that will stay with them into the future? That is, what are students learning in your course beyond the content you teach them? (2) Narrowing the focus from this broad view of student learning, and moving to the more focused goals expressed in the general education requirements, what do you try to teach your student in your “breadth” area or in the relevant general education area, such as communication or quantitative reasoning? What do they learn? What do you want them to learn? How do you make these goals, which are implicit in the requirements, explicit for students?

Both activities paved the way for ongoing conversations about the “big questions” related to liberal education. Participants shared strategies for helping students make a successful transition from high school to college and for promoting skills that are useful not just for college, but for life. Participants from diverse departments were surprised to find that they all address similar issues with our newest students. Thus, discussions of “essential learning” have helped identify common ground—not just within a course or discipline, but across the campus.

At a similar event held one year later, we asked these same instructors whether they had brought essential learning concepts into the foreground in their classes. Their comments, sampled below, suggest that our conversations had a small but promising effect:

- “I’m talking about [learning outcomes] in different contexts, and drawing connections.”
- “I’ve tried to stop thinking about ‘in’ vs. ‘out’ of class learning. If our role is to shape minds to think broadly, we need to do it in broad ways.”
- “I’ve never before stated explicitly to students what I expect them to get out of course beyond the content. Articulating broader goals helped them—and me—understand the context for learning.”

We learned from these conversations that an important next step is to facilitate conversations about student learning outcomes at the departmental level.

Since many UW–Madison graduate students take positions at other colleges and universities, our third initiative focuses on graduate students. With these future faculty members in mind, we incorporate discussion of essential learning into the training provided to teaching assistants. We stress the responsibility of teaching assistants to help articulate learning outcomes for students, as well as why attaining these outcomes is relevant to students' future experiences. Teaching assistants who are assigned to required courses report that awareness of these connections helps them and their students understand the courses within the context of what is most important, both during and after college.

Interest in both the essential learning outcomes and the UW–Madison Experience continues to grow, and individuals, units, and groups on campus frequently contact us to report on how they are using these concepts in their work. Across campus, the essential learning outcomes are being used

- to connect nonacademic units and business processes to educational mission (e.g., strategic planning, technology grant selection processes);
- to describe shared aspirations that apply to other purposes (e.g., assessing student learning, reviewing programs, including learning outcomes in student employment expectations);
- to update programs (e.g., reenvisioning the honors program, reframing campus library user instruction).

The project goes viral

As more groups were drawn to and engaged in the discussion of essential learning, we were faced with what could have been a dilemma about who holds responsibility for these activities. We have come to use LEAP and the UW–Madison Experience as a rhetorical framework that allows us to discuss our goals in a common language. We now actively promote this framework as a tool that can be used by anyone who wishes to adopt it. Its use is not centrally mandated, nor do users need permission to employ it. LEAP and the UW–Madison Experience have gone viral. They have grown into a movement that no particular group owns

Discussions of “essential learning” have helped identify common ground—not just within a course or discipline, but across the campus

but that, instead, belongs to everyone.

By now, the essential learning outcomes have been presented to and supported by groups across the campus. University-level committees—including the key governance committee addressing academic issues and the university assessment council—have endorsed the essential learning outcomes and the UW–Madison Experience as reflecting well our shared aspirations for student learning. A wide range of other groups have also endorsed the essential learning outcomes, and are now working to incorporate the guiding principles of the UW–Madison Experience wherever they may be useful. And, we are pleased to note, this list of supporters continues to grow.

What next?

In addition to facilitating conversations and communicating with groups across the campus,



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the UW–Madison Experience is beginning to inform activities at the institutional level. For example, several campus committees are working to develop a systematic method for collecting evidence to evaluate the degree to which students are achieving the learning outcomes. We envision a cross-cutting approach to assessment, modeled on AAC&U’s Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education project (see www.aacu.org/value). Moreover, the Office of the Dean of Students and the College of Letters and Science are working in collaboration to use the essential learning outcomes as a framework for documenting learning in cocurricular experiences. The essential learning outcomes will be incorporated into the guidelines for program review—a highly valued and useful process—to stimulate conversations about the diverse ways departments and programs contribute to the UW–Madison Experience. These efforts will not only help improve the educational experience for students, but will also help us communicate with external audiences about higher education. The “convergence” group will continue to expand our learning community, inviting an ever-wider group of faculty and staff into these conversations through face-to-face discussion groups and Web-based tutorials.

Lessons learned

In our efforts to increase understanding on our campus of liberal education and the essential learning outcomes, we discovered that a shared framework for discussion can promote healthy institutional change and growth. Following are some of the key lessons we have learned:

- Although we adopted a convergence strategy intuitively, by gathering people from across campus around the topic of liberal education, we considered carefully who might be able to contribute and how we might strategically create or take advantage of other opportunities. Just as the “LEAP group” and the “UW–Madison Experience group” sought alignment instead of competition, we continually found ways for others to work together and contribute to the LEAP/ UW–Madison Experience campaign.
- We were able to promote change because of the breadth of our collective knowledge, the variety of type and degree of authority we hold, and our ability to leverage modest resources to support our activities. For most of us, what we do for this project is work we would do anyway—work with faculty on course innovations, assessment of programs, administration of general education—so our efforts do not feel like an add-on or a burden.



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- We have approached people and groups through extant connections and common interests—“working into the bell curve” by reaching out first to those likely to be on board already or to sympathize with the cause. As we expand our efforts, our early contacts help us convince others.
 - Our work has benefited greatly from our ability to collaborate with and call upon our colleagues across the University of Wisconsin System to explore ideas, share news of success, and commiserate about challenges. We used our own social and professional networks extensively.
 - Shared governance groups were included in ways commensurate with our campus culture. We sought their support for several reasons: to honor our institutional and governance traditions; to ensure that these bodies were familiar with the essential learning outcomes; and to solicit their contribution to conversations about student learning, since their voices are vital to the spread and use of this common framework. Other institutions are likely to have different experiences as these concepts intersect with their own institutional missions and cultures.
 - We linked the essential learning outcomes and the UW–Madison Experience to institutional accountability and assessment. Connecting these concepts helps ensure not only that our work persists, but also that the ideas are meaningful and useful to UW–Madison’s future.
 - These efforts were embedded in the university’s decennial reaccreditation process. The authors of our institutional self-study cited the convergence project, the articulation of the UW–Madison Experience, and participation in LEAP as evidence that UW–Madison values and promotes student learning in ways that suit our institutional context. By casting essential learning within a framework for an institution-wide conversation, we created a tool available to a wide variety of units that reconceptualized their work as learner-centered, demonstrating that many groups and individuals on campus evaluate the purpose and utility of their work in light of student needs. Our shared language helped many people articulate these shared values as an essential element of an institutional identity.
- In retrospect, the most important lesson we learned was that the LEAP message cannot

The University of Wisconsin–Madison Convergence Group Members

Following are the members of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Convergence Group: *Lori Berquam* is the dean of students; *Mo Noonan Bischof* is assistant vice provost and cochair of the University Assessment Council; *Aaron Brower* is professor of social work and vice provost for teaching and learning; *Elaine M. Klein* is assistant dean for academic planning, program review, and assessment in the College of Letters and Science; *Ann Groves Lloyd* is associate dean for student academic affairs in the College of Letters and Science; *Jocelyn Milner* is associate provost and director of academic planning and analysis; *Rebecca Ryan* is associate director of cross-college advising services; *Wren Singer* is director of the Center for the First-Year Experience; *Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor* is associate professor of German and Dutch; *Argyle Wade* is associate dean of students; and *Nancy Westphal-Johnson* is associate dean for undergraduate education and academic administration in the College of Letters and Science, and chair of the University General Education Committee.

survive solely as an abstract set of learning goals. To become part of our institutional fabric, LEAP needed to have an institution-specific context. On our campus, the early joining of the UW–Madison Experience and LEAP made for a powerful statement that deepened our aspirations for our students—and for our institution as a whole. □

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with UW–M Convergence on the subject line.

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MICHELLE LORIS

The Human Journey

Embracing the Essential

PERSPECTIVES

AT THE BEGINNING of the second decade of the twenty-first century, a new vision for college learning is clearly in view. Through its Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has outlined what contemporary college students need to know and be able to do—in ever-changing economic, political, environmental, global, and cross-cultural contexts. The LEAP essential learning outcomes (see fig. 1) provide a framework to guide student learning in both general education and the major. The LEAP initiative calls upon college administrators and faculty members to give priority to these essential learning outcomes in order to prepare students for the challenges of an increasingly complex

world. (see fig. 1, page 46)

Sacred Heart University has developed a core curriculum that responds directly to the LEAP challenge

Sacred Heart University, a comprehensive Catholic university whose mission is rooted in both the liberal arts and the Catholic intellectual traditions, has developed the Human Journey, a core curriculum that responds directly to the LEAP challenge. The development of the core program began in 2001, when Sacred Heart President Anthony J. Cernera charged a faculty committee to develop a new curriculum that would be consistent with the university's mission, engage students in both the arts and sciences and the Catholic intellectual traditions, and provide students with a common, coherent, and integrated core foundation. Five years of lengthy and detailed faculty discussion, debate, and compromise brought forth, in 2006, a proposal for a new core curriculum. This proposal was approved first by the university's academic assembly, which is comprised of all full-time faculty members and academic administrators, and then—unanimously—by the university's board of trustees. In 2007, Sacred Heart's freshman class of 950 students took the first courses in the Human Journey.

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The challenges

The proposal for the Human Journey included only a framework of four common core questions, six principles to guide curricular development, and the five disciplinary areas that would eventually design the common core courses. The four core questions of enduring human meaning and value that unify the Human Journey are: What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to live a life of meaning and purpose? What does it mean to understand and appreciate the natural world? What does it mean to form a more just society for the common good? These “big questions” would be used thematically to organize five disciplinary areas:

1. The Human Journey: Historical Paths to Civilization (history)
2. Literary Expressions of the Human Journey (literature)
3. The Human Community: The Individual and Society (political science, sociology, psychology)
4. The Human Community and Scientific Discovery (biology, chemistry, physics)
5. The Human Search for Truth, Justice, and the Common Good (religious studies, philosophy)

The core proposal provided the following guidelines for the development of the curriculum and assessment of these five disciplinary areas: a common focus on the four big questions; multidisciplinary, integrative engagement of these disciplinary areas; engagement with the Catholic intellectual tradition as characterized by rigorous scholarship and intellectual inquiry; incorporation of common readings; presentation of Western and non-Western culture; continuous development of critical thinking and oral and written communication skills across all courses.

Following the development of the core proposal, the department chairs and other faculty members from the disciplines involved in the core formed a Common Core Chairs Committee to consider how best to implement the proposal. How could each discipline embrace the four core questions? Should we parcel out different questions to different disciplines? Doesn't the question about the natural world,

Learning Outcomes



for example, pertain mainly to the physical and natural sciences? Does literature really ask about the common good, and what does that question have to do with wanting our students to analyze the literary elements of a work of literature?

We were really stumped when we considered how each discipline could engage the Catholic intellectual tradition. First, we sought to clarify that we were *not* to be teaching the catechism, and that if this tradition was characterized by rigorous intellectual inquiry, then we wanted

to make sure that that was what we would be doing. But we still needed to know how the tradition was defined or described, and we needed to determine which works, ideas, and principles constituted the tradition.

Next, we had to face the seemingly unbridgeable divide between commonality and individuality. This debate almost capsized us. How do we connect the individual courses, both within a discipline and across the disciplines? Should we connect the courses? Do we need common texts? Some argued vehemently

Sacred Heart University

Figure 1
The Essential Learning Outcomes

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

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

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

Personal and Social Responsibility, including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

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

Integrative Learning, including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

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

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for separate and distinct courses even within the same discipline. Others fought back just as strenuously for commonality and connectivity.

It was one thing to have this argument within the same discipline—the historians debating whether to approach the course from the perspective of social history, for instance—but the argument took on gale-force-wind proportions when we tried to bring all the disciplines together. We had six different disciplines (psychology, political science, sociology, biology, chemistry, and physics) to organize in some common and coherent fashion. We had to hold additional biweekly meetings just for this group.

Without a common language, we were like the citizens of Babel, trapped in the separate and distinct languages of our specializations. Even those of us in the same discipline had difficulty speaking with each other. The room echoed with statements like the following: “I am a specialist in Chinese history.” “I specialize in early American history.” “I am a postmodernist.” “My world ends in 1642 and doesn’t go outside of the literary text.” “I am a political theorist; what do I have in common with a neuroscientist?” “What is non-western science? There is only science.” “I am not Catholic; I’m an atheist.” We argued about texts, time periods, themes, and topics. We debated endlessly about pedagogy and best practices for teaching.

And as if these issues were not challenge enough, we tilted our wordy swords at the next daunting monster: the assessment dragon. For some of us, assessment was both an uncharted and a presumably treacherous wilderness fraught with all kinds of threats to academic freedom and the intellectual life of a university. For some, a syllabus had little more to it than the course title and required texts. Some among us had spent years as excellent teachers convinced that one could not “assess” what takes place in the magic of good teaching; beyond the grade given on an essay, they disclaimed that one could truly “assess” what a student learned. There were those who were not aware of the debate on assessment taking place in the upper environs of higher education, or they put little stock into it. But nonetheless, we were committed to developing an assessment model for our new core.

So we had to begin the arduous and necessary task of educating ourselves. We started

with the basic vocabulary of assessment—learning outcomes, rubrics, artifacts, “closing the loop.” We struggled to understand what these terms meant; we agonized over how to formulate a clear outcome statement and a meaningful rubric; and then once we could do that, we were able to argue with each other over what the common outcome statements and rubrics would be for each common core course. Most of all, we had to learn—and this was a major breakthrough—that assessment was neither threatening nor treacherous, but rather that it is the systematic ordering and recording of what we already excelled at: effective teaching and learning. Assessment, we came to understand, was the compass we needed to ensure the continuous development and improvement of our new core.

Human cultures, science, and the big questions

Each syllabus for every course that constitutes the Human Journey is framed by the four core questions, and includes a boilerplate, signature statement about the common core. At least two common readings are included in all course sections taught within each discipline. The course material is then presented from the perspective of the four big questions.

In literature, students read and discuss how authors from Homer, Shakespeare, and Dante to Toni Morrison, Chinua Achebe, and Marjane Satrapi invite us to think about the big questions across cultures, eras, and genres. Students in history examine these questions from the perspectives of both the foundations of Western civilization as well as from a non-Western culture.

In the natural and physical sciences, students begin with a unit on science and religion by reading Dawkins and Collins or Polkinghorne to discuss and debate this contentious issue. They also investigate any number of topics such as biodiversity in nature and human nature; humans and their environment; evolution and natural selection; the mechanics of physics in Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton; or atomic and nuclear physics and quantum mechanics. But the main emphasis for each of these topics is on getting students to think critically and analytically about how our knowledge of the

Assessment, we came to understand, was the compass we needed to ensure the continuous development and improvement of our new core

physical and natural world relates to our humanity; helps us to understand the meaning and value of our place in the world; enables us to recognize our responsibility to the world and to each other. Similarly, in the social and behavioral sciences, whether students are reading Hobbes, Locke, Gandhi,

Skinner, or Freud, they are focusing on the four big questions of human meaning and value.

A capstone course in religious studies or philosophy focuses on the development of students’ ethical and moral reasoning as well as on issues of social justice. Whether our students read Aristotle, Augustine, or Aquinas, and whether they read Rawls’s *Theory of Justice*, Rabbi Jonathon Sacks’s *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility*, Lao Tzu, or the Sermon on the Mount, the course challenges students to think ethically and morally as they grapple with real-world challenges and contemporary issues dealing with the environment, global and national political-economic issues, women’s issues, governmental leadership, health and disease, poverty, genocide, war, and prejudice. The questions underlying



Sacred Heart University

Figure 2
Five Dimensions of Personal and Social Responsibility

Ethical, civic, and moral development should not be addressed separately from students' basic responsibilities as learners. Core Commitments identifies five key dimensions of personal and social responsibility that describe developmentally appropriate goals for students in college:

- 1. Striving for excellence:** developing a strong work ethic and consciously doing one's very best in all aspects of college;
- 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 honors code;
- 3. Contributing to a larger community:** recognizing and acting on one's responsibility to the educational community and the wider society, locally, nationally, and globally;
- 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;
- 5. Developing competence in ethical and moral reasoning and action:** developing ethical and moral reasoning in ways that incorporate the other four responsibilities; using such reasoning in learning and in life.

While these five dimensions do not encompass all aspects of conscience and citizenship, they offer a compelling claim as the initial focus for a widespread reengagement with campus values and ethics. For additional information about AAC&U's Core Commitments initiative, please visit www.aacu.org/core_commitments.

the conversation, regardless of the topics, are: What does it mean to form a more just and equal society for all human beings? What are our ethical, moral, and civic responsibilities to forming a more just and equitable world?

As often as possible, classes are brought together for cross-disciplinary conversations on various topics. A cross-disciplinary conversation on love intrigued the students. Faculty from chemistry, literature, religious studies, and psychology came together with students to discuss the different ways the disciplines think about love. Students read a scientific article on the neurochemistry of romantic love,

an article by an evolutionary psychologist, Pope Benedict's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, and a wide selection of love poetry. The wide-ranging conversation addressed what love is—emotion, chemistry, cultural conditioning, hard-wired need—what the different kinds of love are, whether love is essential to human existence, and whether it contributes to a life of meaning or misery?

Intellectual and practical skills

We had diverse opinions about topics, themes, and texts as we developed the core, but we all agreed about the importance of developing our students' intellectual and practical skills. Our assessment model enabled us to incorporate the development of critical thinking as well as oral and written communication skills into the course rubrics. We shared best practices for developing assignments and class exercises for teaching these skills in our various courses.

This work led us to a larger discussion about the advancement of academic rigor across the university. A subcommittee of the Common Core Chairs Committee developed a substantive and comprehensive white paper on academic rigor, which the authors defined as "challenging students to perform beyond their current level of achievement through an educational process that nurtures critical, creative, and integrative learning." The authors of the white paper outlined what teachers need to do with and for students in order to help them cultivate the habits and skills of academic rigor. The paper was disseminated to all faculty members across the university and used as the focus a daylong faculty institute. The white paper has generated university-wide attention to the development of our students' intellectual and practical skills.

Personal and social responsibility

Sacred Heart University has a long-standing commitment to educating students to become ethical and moral leaders and active citizens who are responsible to the common good of society. Community service, service learning, and attention to issues of social justice are hallmarks of the university's mission.

Based on a proposal to extend the work of the core across the cocurriculum, Sacred Heart University was selected to be part of the National Leadership Consortium of the AAC&U initiative Core Commitments: Education for

Personal and Social Responsibility. One goal of this consortium is for institutions to create and disseminate innovative practices and programs that foster students' ethical, moral, and civic development across the curriculum and cocurriculum, guided by Core Commitments' five dimensions of personal and social responsibility (fig. 2). Joining the five dimensions and our core's four big questions into a single framework, we formed a leadership team comprised of forty student affairs staff, common core faculty, and academic administrators. This collaboration was a major accomplishment at our university, and with great momentum we created several lasting projects. Two initiatives, in particular, stand out: the establishment of Core Communities, a learning-living community that links our core courses to a residence hall, and the reestablishment of academic clubs that are now built around the five dimensions. Our participation in the Core Commitments leadership consortium has generated university-wide collaboration to foster our students' personal and social responsibility.

Integrative Learning

At colleges and universities where departments, disciplines, and faculty areas of research are increasingly specialized, integrative learning does not just happen. Integrative learning requires work—and lots of it—by faculty, administrators, and students. Our work on developing integrative learning actually began with our faculty development discussions about the core courses within the departments. History was the leader. The faculty of that department began the hard work of getting all their members—full-time and adjunct—on board to develop a common syllabus. The history department's effort was a great success, and it became a model for the other departments.

Our next endeavor to create multidisciplinary, integrative core courses began with the goal of including weekly colloquia for our students. We first established a weekly colloquium hour as part of the university course schedule. Then fifteen faculty members from the different disciplines collaborated during an intensive and immersive weeklong seminar to create multidisciplinary curricular modules. Our aim was to bring together faculty members from different disciplines who were en-

gaging students in making connections across the disciplines. We presented such topics as prejudice, the environment, genocide, ethical leadership, ethics, and genetic engineering.

The colloquium format includes a presentation by three or four faculty members from the different disciplines, followed by roundtable discussion among the students. The faculty members prepare questions or problems for the roundtable discussion, a student from each table reports on the group's discussion, and the colloquia conclude with open conversation. We tape the sessions and make them available online for further viewing.

Catholic intellectual tradition

Engagement with the Catholic intellectual tradition is entirely consistent with our effort to help our students achieve the LEAP essential learning outcomes. We understand the Catholic tradition as an ongoing, two-thousand-year-old conversation about the world, our place in it, and God's work in it. The tradition is marked by a set of moral values including love, human dignity, social justice, the common good, concern for the poor, and respect for freedom and human rights.

From the time of Thomas Aquinas, this tradition has rested on the primary assumption that reason and faith are compatible, and so a Catholic university must be first and foremost a university dedicated to search for truth wherever analysis and evidence leads us. Moreover, the Catholic intellectual tradition emphasizes the importance of the integration of knowledge. From the perspective of this tradition, integrative learning involves the education of the whole student—mind, body, heart, and spirit. Finally, the tradition is characterized by rigorous scholarship and intellectual inquiry.

The journey continues

We have worked long and hard to develop the Human Journey, and we take pride in what we have accomplished so far; but we also know that we still have more work to do. We are committed to the continuous development and improvement of our core. We continue to meet monthly, with a little less debate but just as much discussion about how to proceed with the Human Journey. □

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Infusing Civic Engagement

AN EFFECTIVE HIGHER EDUCATION curriculum is woven from threads that unite into a whole cloth for students, and such has been Miranda's experience of the curriculum at Wagner College on Staten Island in New York City. One morning during her junior year, Miranda arrived at a pivotal moment. In her first-year learning community, she had tutored youngsters on how to improve personal health. Next, as a sophomore in an intermediate learning community, Miranda participated in an inventory of health issues on Staten Island. Then, as a junior enrolled in a course on health policy, she and her classmates were invited to a breakfast meeting at which neighborhood residents testified to the lack of affordable care on Staten Island.

Heads of social service agencies and nonprofit organizations described their ever-increasing workloads and the loss of essential city and state funding. In the audience, along with the students, were members of the Borough Council and representatives to the New York State Assembly. They described the shortcomings of their five-year campaign to revise state law and regulations and to generate increased funding. Their concerns, added to what Miranda had experienced as a tutor and, later, in building a health-issue assessment, provided the impetus that solidified her transformation. Miranda is now committed to pursuing community health as her profession.

Miranda's experience illustrates the twin-track progression that characterizes Wagner's new Civic Innovations program. On the one hand, the intentional integration of public service into three learning communities allows students to see how new experiences build developmentally on previous ones. On the other hand, the progression explicitly links service to both the curriculum and career preparation.

Civic Innovations

In the fall of 1998, Wagner College instituted the Wagner Plan for the Practical Liberal

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Arts, an innovative curriculum that unites deep learning and practical application. Among the basic tenets of the Wagner Plan is a commitment to experiential learning and civic engagement that begins with all incoming students' initial educational experience: the first-year learning community, which requires thirty hours of experiential learning and accompanying reflective tutorials. The Wagner Plan continues during the sophomore or junior year with an intermediate learning community, and concludes in the senior year with a capstone course in the major. The capstone is complemented by a reflective tutorial that includes a hundred-hour community-engagement practicum linked to the student's principle field of study.

By 2005, Wagner had recognized a need to extend and deepen the service-learning component of its signature curriculum. Linkage between academic departments and the community organizations that hosted student practica was not strategically or developmentally organized. Faculty members suggested community venues for service learning, but their collaboration with community organizations in the development of academic requirements for the courses was cursory, at best. Accordingly, Wagner sought answers to three core questions: (1) How can we ensure that students receive community-based experiences that are truly meaningful within the context of their disciplinary preparation and career aspirations? (2) How can we concentrate the human and intellectual resources of students and faculty on achieving sustainable social improvement of the lives of residents of our home community, the Borough of Staten Island? (3) How can we ensure that community agencies have ongoing, consistent, and worthwhile partnerships with the college?

If civic engagement were to *walk its talk*, it would need to create mutuality among the student, the course, the institution, and the community partner. The courses must be mutually beneficial, require mutual reciprocity, and be based firmly on mutual trust and respect. To be successful, Wagner's civic engagement initiative would have to create partnerships that engage entire academic departments with

Civic Innovations embodies an intensive system of college and community collaborations

across the Curriculum



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individual community service agencies or organizations; establish courses within the department that fulfill desired student learning outcomes as well as meet the needs of the community partner; and commit to sustainability—to provide continuity for the community partner, participating students, and partnering academic departments and their faculty. To address these issues, in 2005, the provost wrote a grant proposal to the Corporation for National and Community Service to create a unique civic engagement program at Wagner College. The proposal was funded, and in 2006 Civic Innovations was born.

Civic Innovations embodies an intensive system of college and community collaborations that focus the college's commitment to civic engagement on developmentally addressing the needs of disadvantaged youth and adults on Staten Island, while concurrently engaging entire departments in partnerships that encompass courses throughout each department's curriculum. Civic Innovations adds strategic depth to the integration of curricular offerings, experiential learning, and community engagement.

The initial plan was to engage six academic departments over three years with six community organizations, at the rate of two new agencies and academic departments per year, so that the faculty would become more attuned to the needs of community-based nonprofit agencies. We call these "Community-Connected Departments." Each department designates four courses per year (two each semester) as Civic Innovations courses and partners with a single "Department-Connected Agency." Together, the Community-Connected Departments and the Department-Connected Agencies design courses to achieve student learning outcomes and, concurrently, to meet the agencies' need to deliver services to the disadvantaged. These courses span the first through fourth years within a major, providing continuity of service to the community partners throughout the school year. Students taking courses in Community-Connected Departments devote between thirty and a hundred hours per semester to working with their Department-Connected Agencies.

The School of Nursing and the Department of Government and Politics were the first to participate in Civic Innovations. The School of Nursing partnered with United Activities

Unlimited, an organization that provides evening youth centers, after-school tutoring, summer camps, employment training, and preventive services to more than fifteen thousand young people. The Department of Government and Politics collaborated with Project Hospitality, a social service agency that provides services for the homeless, hungry, those living with HIV/AIDS, and the mentally ill.

What both nursing and government and politics learned during the first year of the Civic Innovations program helped the next two departments, education and history, whose previous relationships with community organizations tended to be based on the initiative of individual faculty members. The Department of Education deepened its engagement with the Staten Island public schools in the neighborhoods of St. George and Park Hill, which are among the most diverse and underserved on Staten Island. The Department of History partnered with the African Refuge Center and one of Staten Island's most diverse public elementary schools.

The Community-Connected Departments have fully engaged multiple, significant, ongoing, developmentally related, and continuous community partnerships. For example, junior and senior nursing students developed and implemented a daylong antismoking institute for middle school students and a public school health fair. Students majoring in government and politics presented forums on homelessness and HIV/AIDS with Project Hospitality staff and volunteers. Students helped staff Project Hospitality's annual homeless count. Students in the Department of History's first-year learning community rewrote a Wikipedia entry for the Park Hill neighborhood, which includes the largest Liberian-born population in the United States. The students felt that the original entry was misleading and maligning. Not only did the students gain a deeper understanding of distinctive aspects of Liberian culture, but Park Hill residents came to appreciate the college students' commitment to their community.

In the third year of the Civic Innovations program, the Department of Business Administration created a partnership with the Staten Island YMCA and designed a course to integrate YMCA's afterschool educational program with the business students' learning needs. Seniors majoring in business administration helped develop and market new YMCA products and

programs, and taught principles of finance to area youths and immigrant families.

Not all partnerships are successful, however, and this too presents a learning opportunity. In 2008, the Department of Sociology and Anthropology partnered with an agency to provide intergenerational work at area elementary schools and nursing homes. After several months, both partners agreed that the match was not achieving the mutuality of benefit desired in the relationship. The agency serving older adults was undergoing a leadership transition and simply did not have the human resources or the time to commit to the partnership with Wagner students. The department has since developed an excellent partnership with Community Health Action of Staten Island, a community-based organization that educates Staten Islanders about HIV and AIDS and advocates for HIV-positive people.

Staffing and faculty development

To integrate civic engagement throughout the college experience, it is essential to have a full-time director, with appropriate support staff, dedicated to the effort and to create a

Faculty development is an especially important aspect of the Civic Innovations program

physical and publicly visible locus for the effort. The successful integration of Civic Innovations required a dedicated staff person to facilitate collaborations and faculty development, and Wagner hired a full-time director who also heads Wagner's Center for Leadership and Service. This center is located in the student union, in the suite occupied by staff responsible for experiential learning, student advising, and career development—all complementary student services. Situated on the same floor as the college bookstore and a popular snack bar, the Civic Innovations office is easily accessed by students and faculty alike, which conveys the message that community engagement is central to campus culture.

Faculty development is an especially important aspect of the Civic Innovations program. Experiential learning is an explicit component of Wagner's mission, and all faculty members are, therefore, aware of and somehow engaged in its implementation. The faculty shared a basic understanding of and commitment to service learning before the advent of Civic Innovations. However, the new initiative required a deeper level of



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engagement than most had anticipated. Seminars, workshops, and mentoring were required to ensure that the faculty understands how to infuse service learning into course content and pedagogy. In addition to traditional faculty development activities, Wagner brought to campus nationally known academic leaders who have integrated service learning into the disciplinary areas initially targeted by the program. Learning from peers at other institutions accelerated the adoption and implementation of Civic Innovations.

To ensure that all parties understand their own responsibilities as well as those of their partners, the Director of the Center for Leadership and Service works closely with the Department-Connected Agencies and with each member of the Community-Connected Departments. In many instances, this model has challenged the traditional view of community, faculty, and student responsibilities to one another. Faculty development in support of Civic Innovations is an ongoing commitment of the college.

Student Outcomes

Civic Innovations utilizes community-based learning experiences to help students develop skills necessary for effective participation in civic affairs. Following are results from a recent survey of students participating in the Civic Innovations program:

- Fifty percent reported that the community experience helped them better understand the course content and apply their knowledge to address community problems.
- Seventy percent believed that community-based experiences should be a standard part of college coursework.
- Sixty-six percent said the community experience helped them learn effective communication strategies in community settings.
- Fifty-eight percent said the community experience helped them become more comfortable working with diverse communities.
- Sixty percent said they feel more able to engage in community problem solving as a result of their community experience.
- Seventy percent reported having a stronger sense of personal responsibility for the health of youth on Staten Island as a result of their community experiences.

Assessment

Civic Innovations has employed a multipronged assessment strategy. During each year of the program, outcomes data have been collected through faculty and staff interviews, community partner interviews, student surveys, observations of students in community settings, and review of student work samples. Interview and survey data clearly indicate that program stability, learning, and community partner outcomes are substantially enhanced as partnerships mature. Communication processes are established, synergy between course offerings and community needs is sustained, and continuing refinement of developmentally sequenced projects for freshman through senior years in each Community-Connected Department is ensured. We are learning that first-year students are ideally suited to providing such direct services as one-to-one youth mentoring and tutoring, while more complex activities involving research, problem solving, and facilitation are better accomplished by upper-level students.

Analyses conducted by community partners are especially helpful in framing the results of Civic Innovations. Faculty and students tend to set higher benchmarks for success than do the specialists within the community organizations. This mismatch of goals and expectations can often lead to disappointment within the college classroom. It is, therefore, important for all collaborators to discuss realistic learning outcomes for both community members and college students, and to frame project expectations collaboratively. Once all parties are in agreement, a true learning partnership can develop.

The one-on-one attention offered to at-risk youth has resulted in marked improvement in both their behavior and their academic performance. Moreover, survey results indicate how student learning has improved as a result of participation in community service (see sidebar at left).

Strategic outcomes

Civic Innovations has changed the way faculty members perceive the relationship between service learning and curricular offerings. Faculty members not only list their involvement in Civic Innovations in the course bulletin and in course syllabi, but they also expend greater effort to use service learning as a contextual construct throughout the semester. Close ties

to collaborative partners afford access to excellent visiting speakers from the community, and students are invited to attend a wide range of community forums, seminars, conferences, and events.

Community leaders, as well, are increasingly likely to embrace experiential and civic engagement as an integral component of their organizational and personal activities. They are encouraging their staff and colleagues to become more involved with Wagner, and they are increasingly likely to extend opportunities to the college. Fostered by Civic Innovations, the Higher Education Alliance of Staten Island, a budding collaboration among local institutions, is another manifestation of the power of civic engagement to provide strategic benefit both to students and to the larger community.

The partnerships developing through Civic Innovations are helping evolve answers the two primary issues that have plagued service learning from its inception:

Civic Innovations has changed the way faculty members perceive the relationship between service learning and curricular offerings

- How can higher education partner with community agencies in a way that is developmental within the academic curriculum, fulfills student educational and career aspirations, and meets the community agencies' human resource needs?
 - How can we sustain a program of community-based learning that is comprehensive and pervasive and that provides long-term continuity for colleges, students and faculty, and agency partners?
- Answers are derived only through trial and error; through the willingness of each entity to understand the perspective of the other; and through an enduring commitment to relationships that achieves mutually beneficial, mutually reciprocal, and mutually sustainable outcomes. □

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Wagner College

BILL SPELLMAN

The Public Liberal Arts Sector

ONE OF THE MORE FAMILIAR TRENDS in American higher education in the decades since the end of the Second World War has been the growth of very large, comprehensive institutions. Prior to the Civil War, virtually all American colleges were small, private, and parochial. Only toward the end of the nineteenth century did larger universities, both public and private, make their appearance on the higher education landscape.

Today, of course, large institutions with undergraduate and graduate programs in distinct colleges and professional programs are commonplace. Like so many areas of American culture, where growth is associated with progress and the enhancement of human life, universities expanded in response to public need, a desire to improve access, and a sense of institutional pride. Today's large universities offer students a wide range of disciplinary majors, faculties with expertise in multiple areas of specialization, and a diverse array of cocurricular programming.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has affirmed that a liberal education can be achieved at all types of colleges and universities, including very large ones. There is no simple correlation between institutional size and educational outcomes. For many college-bound students, however, a smaller campus learning environment is an important factor in their ability to develop the type of communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills that are essential to meeting the global challenges of the twenty-first century.

It is time to enlarge our understanding of the liberal arts college to include the public sector

M Y V I E W

Private and public liberal arts

Historically, this smaller environment has been provided by America's private liberal arts colleges, which, despite recurrent predictions of their inexorable demise in the face of competing models of postsecondary education, continue to attract outstanding students who understand the value of a liberal—and liberating—education. And the private liberal arts colleges are no longer alone.

Over the past two decades, a new sector of public liberal arts colleges—all members of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC)—has taken its place as another option for students seeking a college experience where the focus is on undergraduates, where classes are small, and where collaboration and civic engagement are deeply embedded in campus culture. With the addition of COPLAC institutions, the health of the liberal arts college and its attractiveness to students—even in challenging economic times—belies the recurring narrative of decline.

Why public liberal arts?

In one respect, the growth of the public liberal arts sector reflects a wider trend in contemporary society to revisit the virtues of smaller, more personal institutions, living spaces, and relationships. From the “new urbanism” in the field of architecture, to local food co-ops and family-owned businesses, to neighborhood public schools and community projects, a deeper environmental awareness and desire for inclusion has guided the life decisions of a growing number of citizens. Private liberal arts colleges have always been committed to the value of campuses on a human scale, to a residential community of learners where faculty members are teacher-mentors, all in an educational environment

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and America's Promise



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characterized by rigor and a strong sense of personal and social responsibility.

Another, perhaps more compelling reason for the rise of public liberal arts colleges over the past twenty years involves the issue of access or affordability. A college education is an expensive investment, and as families struggle to meet the rising costs associated with a four-year baccalaureate degree, it is little wonder that many are prioritizing the practical and vocational side of postsecondary education. But as AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider (2009) cautioned recently, such programs “provide technical training and job skills, but little insight into the larger issues of science, society, human community, global cultures or the values and institutions that

provide the foundation of democracy.” COPLAC institutions have worked hard to blend the goals of liberal learning with applied skills in the professions out of a conviction that there is no incongruity between liberal education and practical studies. Indeed the habits of critical inquiry and problem solving that are at the core of liberal education are the very skills that employers have called for in a wide range of professions.

As public institutions, COPLAC colleges and universities have a special obligation both to justify their atypical size, as the cost of delivering the curriculum may be higher than at much larger public institutions that practice economies of scale, and to explain the benefits of a liberal arts experience to students

(many of whom are first-generation) and their families. Thanks largely to the thoughtful support of state legislators and system-wide governing boards, a number of COPLAC schools (the most recent being Midwestern State University in Texas) have received official designation as their state's public liberal arts college, while one, St. Mary's College in Maryland, has been named the state's public honors college.

These designations, together with less formal acknowledgments of the special mission of COPLAC institutions, reflect the commitment of many state university systems to address persistent inequalities and afford students the option of a liberal arts campus experience in the public sector.

Public liberal arts and civic engagement

A dozen years ago, historian William Cronon suggested that one of the essential goals of liberal education was freedom—the freedom to explore and grow, the freedom to fulfill the promise of one's highest talents. But he also maintained that “education for human freedom is also education for human community” and that the two cannot exist without each other. The connections we have with other people remind us that we have to use our knowledge and power in a responsible, humane manner. Cronon demurred from classical liberalism's focus on the autonomous individual, on doing or saying what we will. He argued instead for using our freedom “in such a way as to make a difference in the world and make a difference for more than just ourselves” (1998, 79).

Service and community-based learning have been identified as high-impact educational practices, and the idea of giving something back as an important college outcome is enacted in different ways in public liberal arts colleges. The following three illustrations of this self-conscious effort to integrate academic and public purposes—to empower students with core knowledge, transferable skills, and habits of social responsibility—capture the spirit of the COPLAC mission.

At the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), a regional initiative begun in 2005 called the Berkshire Compact for Education studies the educational implications of the

COPLAC institutions have worked hard to blend the goals of liberal learning with applied skills in the professions

economic and demographic shift from a manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy. In partnership with legislators, business leaders, educators, and public officials, the college has committed to provide opportunities for every resident to

achieve the minimum sixteen years of education so essential to success in a new economy. The college now welcomes third- and sixth-grade students to campus to spend time with student-mentors and attend classes and demonstrations, all with the goal of helping young children begin to understand the value of a college education. The college also offers some dual-enrollment classes, affording high school juniors and seniors in good academic standing the opportunity to take introductory college-level courses that are team-taught by an MCLA professor and a high school teacher.

The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, has long been recognized for its commitment to environmental sustainability. Few were surprised when *Sierra* magazine ranked the college sixth on its 2009 list of the greenest colleges and universities or when the *Princeton Review* chose Evergreen as one of the fifteen colleges included on its 2010 Green Honor Roll. Still, what makes Evergreen truly distinctive is its effort to reach beyond campus to create positive change in its surrounding region through community service. Evergreen is deeply involved in efforts to improve the state's correctional system. Washington's Department of Corrections is the third largest employer of Evergreen graduates, and when Evergreen's president, Les Purse, signed an agreement for the college to lead a Department of Corrections–Evergreen sustainable prisons project at four western Washington prisons, faculty and students responded. Psychologist Mark Hurst and his students have been working with prisoners since 2004, studying the efficacy of treatment models emerging from positive psychology, a relatively new field in psychotherapy. The innovative “Gateways” program, founded by faculty emerita Carol Minugh, has turned college into a reality for incarcerated youth for the past fourteen years. The full-time academic program brings Evergreen students and faculty to detention facilities as mentors, tutors, and instructors to the young men held there.

ABOUT COPLAC

The Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges was established in 1988 and now represents twenty-six institutions in the United States and Canada. Administrative offices are located at the University of North Carolina–Asheville. For additional information, please visit www.coplac.org.

And at one of COPLAC's newest member institutions, the University of Illinois at Springfield, public affairs and citizen engagement serve as unifying themes in teaching, scholarship, and service. With its location in the state capital, the university has always emphasized the importance of the public sphere. A new general education curriculum requires every undergraduate to complete a core program called The Engaged Citizenship Common Experience, with interdisciplinary coursework in U.S. communities and global awareness. The core also requires a credit-bearing engagement experience, often related to the student's major, that generally takes place off campus with the coordination of the Office of Experiential and Service-Learning Programs. The engagement experience prepares student to integrate knowledge, practice, and reflection in the context of active, community-based learning.

Conclusion

The history of post-secondary education in America since World War II has been in many ways a success story, with greater student access a signature feature of the many changes witnessed on campuses large and small. Much work remains to be done in the area of access and affordability, especially in the financial aid system and in standardized testing, as Peter Sacks reminded attendees at AAC&U's 2009 annual meeting.

But in realizing America's promise for the twenty-first century, in the work of enrolling undergraduates and then empowering and preparing them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change, we must continue to



champion and defend the value of different learning environments, from research-intensives and large comprehensives, to small and medium-sized private—and public—liberal arts colleges. Just as we have come to dispute the notion that liberal education is only achieved through studies in the arts and sciences, it is time to enlarge our understanding of the liberal arts college to include the public sector. □

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

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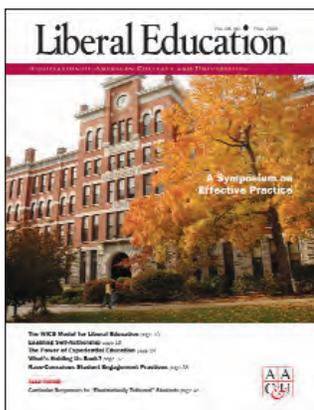
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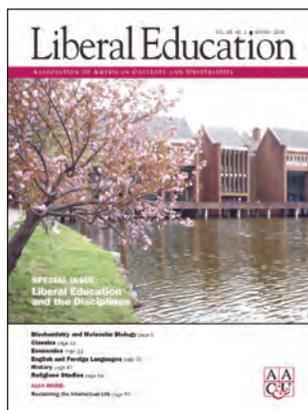
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