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President’s Message

Liberal Education and the Humanities
By Carol Geary Schneider

As a community, we must find a way to ensure a continuing commitment to the humanities as central to educational excellence. Yet, the humanities will not survive unless we also find ways to ensure that the faculty of the future have the support they need to continue to reinvent how they teach the humanities to future generations.

Confronting Contingency: Faculty Equity and the Goals of Academic Democracy
By Maria Maisto and Steve Street

Higher education needs to move into a new phase of coordinated, intentional, and ethically grounded activity to repair the damaging effects on students, faculty, and the country of the haphazard and shortsighted decisions that have led to the widespread increase in the use of contingent faculty.

The Trouble with Diversifying the Faculty
By Walter Benn Michaels

The general rule of American upper-class life is that inequality is not a problem except when it comes to race and sex; the application of that rule to American colleges and universities is the call for faculty diversity.

Following the Cuts: How Is the Recession Affecting Faculty Work?
By Andrew Lounder, Chelsea Waugaman, Mark Kenyon, Amy Levine, Matthew Meekins, and KerryAnn O’Meara

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Liberal Education and the Humanities

Readers of this journal will surely agree that the humanities are necessary and central to a liberal—and liberating—education. As this issue of Liberal Education goes to press, we are all witnessing dramatic demonstrations of the struggles for justice and meaningful democratic inclusion both here in the United States and around the world. As educators committed to justice and greater inclusion—and to the mission of educating informed and globally engaged citizens—we must all raise our voices to ensure that the humanities remain a vital part of our educational systems. While funding for the humanities is under attack, it is encouraging to me to see that there are now some very powerful voices beyond those in the AAC&U community who are helping make the case for the importance of the humanities in higher education and in our society.

Why have members of Congress—both Republicans and Democrats—called for the formation of a new national commission on the arts and humanities? Why has Cornell’s President David Skorton, a physician and scientist by training, publicly decried—in the Washington Post—the proposals to decrease funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities?

These national leaders—along with myself and thousands of dedicated faculty members in many fields and colleges all across the country—understand how important the humanities are to this nation’s future. For too long, however, we have not clearly and loudly articulated why the humanities are so important to our shared futures.

The humanities help us make sense of the complexity of the world we inherit—including our histories, values, and cultural traditions. They help us to explore competing visions of the past and future, and to probe what it means to be human. All these themes are vitally important to individuals and to our society as a whole. One of the academy’s most fundamental responsibilities is to explore and teach about global issues and democratic aspirations and realities at home and abroad. These explorations and the root commitments to equality, liberty, and the expansion of justice all depend fundamentally on the humanities’ heartbeat.

While there are other important dimensions to liberal education, as AAC&U has made clear in the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative’s articulation of “essential learning outcomes,” it is absolutely impossible to provide students with the benefits of liberal learning absent a strong grounding in humanities questions, disciplines, and perspectives. As Martha Nell Smith so passionately asserts in this issue, the humanities are not a luxury. They are necessary to any student’s preparation for success in college and to any institution that claims to provide a high-quality college education.

With the exceptions I cite above, however, most of the discussion about higher learning today, especially in policy circles, ignores the humanities completely—a neglect that could prove disastrous to our nation’s future. If one looks, for example, at the majority of the for-profit institutions that now
occupy so much policy attention (pro and con), one sees that the great majority of them have no capacity
to teach the humanities at any level of acceptable quality. (That is the scandal we should be investigating.)

Yet, as Dan Edelstein noted in this journal last year, “by providing students with the best opportunities
for learning how to innovate, the humanities play a determining role in producing the entrepreneurs,
engineers, and designers that make the American economy so productive.” This point was recently
reinforced by Apple CEO Steve Jobs’s high-profile recognition of the key relationship between the
humanities and innovation. Speaking at the March 2nd unveiling of the second-generation iPad, Jobs
explained that “it’s in Apple’s DNA that technology alone is not enough; it’s technology married with
liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the result that makes our heart sing. And
nowhere is that more true than in these post-PC devices.”

Moreover, the humanities challenge graduates—regardless of their profession—to raise larger questions
about the wisdom and implications of their choices. And, as one faculty member pointed out to me,
when life comes knocking at our door, the humanities help us ensure that a full human being will be
ready to respond.

In that spirit, I was mightily encouraged by the gift that the Andrew Mellon Foundation has just
given to the University of Wisconsin–Madison in support of the humanities. As Chancellor Biddy
Martin put it when announcing the grant, “philosophy and history are at the core of the cultural legacy
that makes us, in part, who we are.” Martin noted further that “the funding will allow [the university]
to strengthen fields that are essential to the education of our students and to the body of scholarship
that preserves and reinvents culture.”

We are, indeed, in the midst of a radical reinvention of our culture—and of
our higher education institutions. Part of that reinvention entails exciting new
designs for learning and new ways to integrate technology into our classrooms,
including our humanities classrooms. This reinvention is also, however, happen-
ing in the midst of profound economic, civic, and educational challenges.

At the heart of meeting these challenges, and of reinvigorating the humanities
and reenergizing our society’s commitment to them, is a set of realities sketched
out powerfully in this issue of Liberal Education. Tens of thousands of faculty
members—full-time and part-time, with and without tenure or the prospect of tenure—have committed
their lives to research and teaching in the humanities. Tens of thousands more faculty in many other
fields are strongly committed to partnering with their colleagues in the humanities to help students
“connect the dots” of their own learning about complex societal issues. The challenges these faculty
members face, however, are profound. As a community, we must find a way to ensure a continuing
commitment to the humanities as central to educational excellence. Yet, the humanities will not survive
unless we also find ways to ensure that the faculty of the future have the support they need to continue
to reinvent how they teach the humanities to future generations.—CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER

It is absolutely impossible to provide students with the benefits of liberal
learning absent a strong grounding in humanities questions, disciplines, and perspectives
Clearly, liberal education would not be possible without faculty. But would it still be possible with only contingent faculty? Would it be possible without tenure and academic freedom? Without faculty engagement in research, scholarship, and service? Without faculty participation in shared governance or curriculum development? The answers to these and other, more finely grained questions about the relationship between an institution’s commitment to its faculty, on the one hand, and its commitment to academic integrity and educational quality, on the other, ought to be obvious. Yet as several broadly consequential trends threaten seriously to undermine the integrity of the academic profession, few seem to “connect the dots” between the deteriorating conditions of faculty work and the corresponding deterioration of the conditions for student learning.

Consider, for example, the dramatic changes in faculty appointments that occurred over the two decades between 1975 and 1995: tenure-track appointments decreased (by 12 percent), while both part-time and full-time nontenure-track appointments increased dramatically (by 103 percent and 93 percent, respectively). This trend has continued, with the result that, as Maria Maisto and Steve Street point out in this issue’s lead article, the percentage of postsecondary faculty on contingent appointments rose to nearly 75 percent in 2010.

What difference does this make to student learning? Consider the conclusion reached by Paul Umbach after studying the impact of contingent faculty on undergraduate education in 2007: “it is clear that, currently, contingent faculty tend to be less effective than their tenured and tenure-track peers in how they work with undergraduates.” More specifically, Umbach found that, by comparison, “part-time faculty interact with students less frequently, use active and collaborative techniques less often, spend less time preparing for class, and have lower academic expectations”; full-time nontenure-track faculty also “interact with students less frequently” and “require slightly less effort from their students.”

The same year Umbach published his findings about the relative effectiveness of contingent faculty, AAC&U released the LEAP report, College Learning for the New Global Century, which includes “A Guide to Effective Educational Practices.” This coincidence presents an opportunity to connect the dots by asking with Paul Umbach, “is it reasonable to expect that contingent faculty will engage in effective practices as frequently as their tenured and tenure-track peers?” And so as AAC&U continues to document the effectiveness of the ten high-impact practices recommended by the LEAP report, shouldn’t we also sound the alarm about the fast-shrinking number of faculty members who are more likely actually to use them?

In this same vein, the articles in the Featured Topic section explore several trends affecting today’s faculty, connecting dots between the casualization of academic labor and the ideals of liberal education and academic democracy; between the commitment to faculty diversity and the emergence of a two-tier professoriate; and between institutions’ responses to the economic recession and the implications of fiscal decisions for faculty work and student learning.—DAVID TRITELLI
AAC&U Statement on the Lumina Degree Profile
At the end of January, the Lumina Foundation for Education released its proposed Degree Qualifications Profile, which defines US degrees at the associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s levels in terms of what students know and can do with their knowledge. In response, AAC&U’s board of directors has released a statement about the profile, noting that the board is “particularly encouraged by Lumina’s pledge to partner with the higher education community in funding and learning from experimental efforts to both strengthen and demonstrate students’ achievement of key learning outcomes or competencies, across all the many pathways today’s students follow to and through college.” The AAC&U statement can be read in full at www.aacu.org/about/statements/luminadp.cfm.

Project Kaleidoscope Director Appointed to National Governors Association STEM Advisory Committee
The National Governors Association (NGA) recently announced the formation of a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Advisory Committee to inform its work in this area and help the twenty-nine new governors, as well as incumbents, develop comprehensive STEM agendas in their states. Susan Elrod, executive director of Project Kaleidoscope, was appointed to the committee, along with eighteen other national leaders with expertise in education, policy, business, and STEM content areas. The committee will guide the expansion of the NGA Center STEM agenda to include both K-12 and higher education; provide a series of recommendations for building and advancing comprehensive STEM education agendas; and inform the development of a national STEM meeting the NGA will host in the fall of 2011.

New AAC&U Senior Fellows
Gary R. Brown and Ann S. Ferren have been appointed as senior fellows in the AAC&U Office of Quality, Curriculum, and Assessment. Gary R. Brown is the former director of Washington State University’s Office of Assessment and Innovation. He is now an assessment consultant at Washington State University, working with colleges and academic departments on focused assessment projects. Ann S. Ferren is the former Provost at the American University in Bulgaria. In his role as senior fellow, Brown will work on projects of interest related to advancing liberal learning—including assessing student learning, electronic portfolios, the Harvesting Gradebook and other modes for communicating the results of student learning assessment, and networking with the e-portfolios professional community and with those involved in AAC&U’s VALUE project. In her role as senior fellow, Ferren will work on issues related to institutional resources and educational priorities in financially challenging times, general education, effective leadership, and other campus-based projects. Ferren will also continue her ongoing work as a planner and faculty member in AAC&U’s yearly Institute on General Education and Assessment.

AAC&U MEMBERSHIP 2011
1,254 members

Upcoming Meetings

- June 4–8, 2011
  Institute on General Education and Assessment
  San Jose State University, California

- June 14–18, 2011
  Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success
  The University of Vermont

- July 13–17, 2011
  Engaging Departments Institute
  The Hotel at Turf Valley
  Ellicott City, Maryland

- October 13–15, 2011
  Educating for Personal and Social Responsibility: A Twenty-First-Century Imperative
  Long Beach, California

- November 3–5, 2011
  Arts & Humanities: Toward a Flourishing State?
  Providence, Rhode Island

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Much has been written about higher education’s increasing reliance on contingent academic labor over the last few decades. The narrative, which includes differing accounts of what, or who, is most to blame, has been well rehearsed: the increase came in slow and steady waves tied to significant political and economic events, including postwar enrollment surges, economic downturns, and the shift to a corporate management model; it came with the knowing or unknowing complicity of administrators; it was caused by the complacency of the tenured, the fear of the untenured, or is simply collateral damage in a war against tenure.

It is not our purpose here to analyze the causes of contingency; in this essay we focus on the efforts of those who have worked to reform or eliminate it. However, because the decades-old struggle to mitigate or reverse the trend has, in spite of a variety of efforts, seen the percentage of post-secondary faculty on contingent appointments actually rise from 43 percent in 1975 to almost 75 percent in 2010, and because troubling new developments include brazen union busting by the administration at East-West University in Chicago and the proposals by two community colleges in Michigan to outsource the hiring and administration of contingent faculty to new “academic temporary agencies,” it is impossible not to return to questions of cause—and effect. For whether one believes that the reliance on contingent employment is a positive development, a simple fact of life of contemporary higher education, or (as we believe) one of the biggest threats yet to its integrity, it is imperative that we consider the implications for the health of the profession, for the future of institutional

Higher education needs to move into a new phase of coordinated, intentional, and ethically grounded activity to confront contingency
Academic Democracy
leadership, and for the state of liberal education. Such consideration will allow us to (re)write the narrative going forward, rather than to allow the narrative simply to repeat in an endless and ever-expanding loop, as it seems to have done since the American Association of University Professors issued its first official policy statement on contingency in 1980.

We suggest that the growth of contingency reflects a gradual distancing of the practice of higher education from its purpose as trustee of the ideals of liberal education and democracy. Contingency persists for the following four reasons.

1. The solutions that have been offered by unions, activists, and progressive administrations on individual campuses have been too few and too isolated (if not too localized), and organizing efforts have been too difficult to coordinate effectively on a larger scale. Additionally, in some—particularly nonunionized—locations, contingency has become so much a part of the institutional culture that reform has been scarce and the pessimism or fear of would-be reformers difficult to overcome.

2. These same reform efforts, though isolated and sporadic, have also been substantial enough to lead far too many individual administrative, faculty, and union leaders into thinking that problems with contingency have been sufficiently addressed—or into shielding them from realizing that the problem was ever truly there to begin with.

3. The heterogeneity of the contingent faculty population, long recognized but inadequately documented, researched, or addressed, has encouraged the various stakeholders in the debate over contingency to extrapolate the experiences of one sector—usually the sector whose characteristics are most compatible with those stakeholders’ interests—to the whole. This leads many adjunct faculty advocates to suggest that the “satisfied adjunct” is an anomaly and many administrators (and satisfied adjuncts) to deny that there are any contingent faculty members who qualify for food stamps. Such attitudes create a stubborn myopia that impedes conversation and cooperation.

4. The debates that have raged within and about higher education over vocational versus liberal education, tenure, the “corporatization” of higher education, governmental oversight and accreditation, and funding models and sources have obscured, deferred, or overridden the need for action on the fundamental ethical and practical concerns that attend the professional and personal needs of faculty on contingent appointments. Yet, ironically, attending to those concerns—ensuring a living wage, access to health care, professional development, and the protections of academic freedom—would exercise the very values of academic democracy that these debates are really all about.

While the roots of contingent academic employment go back many decades, and surged in the early 1970s (Berry 2005), it was not until the 1980s that the higher education community really began to notice that contingency had exploded to a level of concern. Marked by radically reduced wages, frequent lack of access to benefits, limited access to professional support and opportunities for advancement, and institutional disrespect, contingency is one of higher education’s darker secrets. In the last twenty-five years, however, and particularly in the last decade, there have been sincere, if belated, efforts to respond. These include a proliferation of studies, articles, and books; resolutions, statements, guidelines, and best-practice publications by unions, institutions, and associations; and most effectively, both union- and nonunion-affiliated organizing efforts leading to successful collective bargaining, cooperative negotiations with receptive administrations, and groundbreaking litigation and legislation. All of these efforts have resulted, practically speaking, in some improved working conditions for many adjunct faculty members.

Yet, paradoxically, even as these accomplishments have signaled a huge step forward, they have not succeeded in substantially alleviating the sense of foreboding over the status and future of the professoriate, or the ramifications for education that the higher education community began to recognize a generation ago. In fact, that sense of crisis has been heightened as the federal government, allied with major corporations, seeks greater influence over college curricula, particularly at the community college level, with the danger of minimal—or token—consultation with higher education faculty (Wilson 2010).

Several years ago, activists in the contingent faculty movement recognized the impasse at which the movement found itself in the face of this lack of progress (Hoeller 2007), and initiated discussion about the need for a structured national organization. In 2009, such an
organization was founded. New Faculty Majority: The National Coalition for Adjunct and Contingent Equity (NFM) is the only national organization exclusively devoted to improving the quality of higher education by improving the working conditions of the majority of its faculty.

NFM came into existence because we believe that higher education needs to move into a new phase of coordinated, intentional, and ethically grounded activity to confront contingency. The goal of such efforts should be to repair the damaging effects on students, faculty, and the country of the haphazard and shortsighted decisions that led to the spread of contingency in the first place, and to bring to fruition the valiant but uncoordinated and all too often superficial reforms that a generation of educators has tried to implement. And, while incremental change may continue to be the only way forward, we believe that what is needed is a new sense of urgency and a defined goal that acknowledges the need for a transformation of academic culture from its current hierarchical, stratified structure into real academic democracy rooted in the values of liberal education.

The current lay of the land: 
One step forward, two steps back
The first decade of the new century began with many advocates for contingent faculty feeling hopeful. The previous two decades had seen a gradual intensification of awareness of the severity of the contingent faculty problem, along with efforts that culminated in the formation of two important groups: the Coalition on Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL), a loose coalition of unions and activists, and the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW), notable because it brought disciplinary associations, higher education associations, and unions together with a wide range of representation in its membership. COCAL was instrumental in creating a national community of adjunct activists where none had existed before, which aided tremendously in organizing efforts and in the ability of unions to consult with contingent faculty members in the development of many union positions and policy statements. CAW encouraged its member organizations to focus attention on contingent faculty issues.

Several milestones from the 2000s deserve special mention, not least because they represented concerted efforts by contingent faculty to effect change themselves: two Washington State part-time faculty class-action lawsuits related to retirement and health care, which cost the state $25 million (Ruiz 2007); the efforts in California to work legislatively to eliminate caps on part-time faculty workloads (Yoshioka 2007); Barbara Wolf’s documentary A Simple Matter of Justice (2002), a follow-up to Degrees of Shame (1999); and the 2005 publication of Joe Berry’s Reclaiming the Ivory Tower.
and his later guide, along with Helena Worthen and Beverly Stewart, for contingent faculty applying for unemployment insurance.

Even as many conscientized faculty, higher education associations, and unions were mobilizing to resist the new trend toward contingency—albeit with different motives, levels of urgency, and conceptions of the crisis—insti tutions themselves were also beginning to recognize that the cost savings of contingency come with educational and human costs that require reform. While much of the literature dealing with contingency from managerial perspectives is marked by paternalism or rhetorical distancing from contingency’s real-life effects (some of the more disconcerting titles include “Making Adjuncts Part of the ‘Family,’” “A Systems Approach to Strategic Success with Adjunct Faculty” and, incredibly, “Managing a Department’s Adjunct Faculty: Let Them Eat Sweet Rolls”), more tenure-stream faculty and administrators began to confront the contradiction between institutional and professional ideals, on the one hand, and the day-to-day reality of life on contingent appointments, on the other. Outspoken professors like Dan Maguire at Marquette University (2009) and administrators like A. G. Monaco (see Jaschik 2008) made moral and ethical cases for reform, and quantitative studies (Jaeger 2008; Eagan and Jaeger 2009; Umbach 2007; Bettinger and Long 2010) debated the effectiveness for student outcomes of so-called “exposure” to contingent faculty.

The effect of this heightened awareness has been undeniable: concrete improvements in contingent faculty working conditions in many places, from mailboxes and parking passes to faculty senate representation and access to professional development funds. Some unions have even obtained access to due process, benefits, and increases in pay for adjuncts, while nonunionized adjuncts are occasionally able to work with administrators to address working conditions (McGrew and Untener 2010).

It has become increasingly clear, however, that cumulatively, these improvements have been the equivalent of faint praise, and are equally damning (or at least confusing). A recurring theme over the last ten years has been the periodic impulse to restudy and resurvey the issue or to issue guidelines and recommendations that are promptly ignored or that lack any enforceability.1 These studies and guidelines, along with limited improvements, may allow tenured faculty, administrators, and presidents to remain ignorant of the reality of life for many contingent faculty and of the effects on education. At the 2009 Chronicle Leadership Forum session on “The Road Scholar,” for example, an administrator responded with incredulity to the session presenters’ descriptions of the typical hardships faced by many adjuncts, claiming that she had “never heard” of any such thing, and a significant number of her fellow attendees indicated a similar perspective. If contingent faculty members remain silent, either by choice or out of fear (because they have no union—or, worse, a union that replicates the divide between the two tracks), then campus leaders must have the interest and ability to seek out the truth, which is certainly more complicated than the administrator above understood.

Complicating matters further is the release of studies and surveys that identify a percentage of contingent faculty as “satisfied” with
variously described working conditions (Gappa 2000; American Federation of Teachers 2010), blurring a crucial distinction between the gratifying nature of teaching and satisfactory working conditions. Seldom adequately parsed, such studies challenge administrators and faculty activists alike to confront the complicated reality that the contingent faculty population is not homogeneous. The response to that challenge, all too often, has been entrenchment rather than engagement.

Entrenchment persists in matters of finance, as well. While attempts to “integrate” faculty more effectively into the life of the institution have become more commonplace, institutions making these efforts have largely ignored bread-and-butter issues like salary, benefits, access to due process, academic freedom, job security, and professional advancement. These institutions cite financial hardship and resist inquiry into the questionable prioritizing suggested by recent studies that show massive increases in spending on such items as presidential and administrative salaries, facilities, athletics, and public relations along with sharp decreases in spending on direct instruction (Desrochers, Lenihan, and Wellman 2010; Schneider 2009).

In short, solutions meant to alleviate the worst aspects of contingency have had the paradoxical effect of promoting it. For example, institutions often cite with approval the rapid growth of the category of the full-time, non-tenure-track instructor. However, this trend has made the divisive academic class system even more so, and more firmly entrenched; with three classes of faculty rather than two, the “division and conquering” of faculty solidarity is more pronounced. Part-time faculty who see a possible promotion to full-time status have incentive not to speak out, and those who get such a contract, maybe after years of part-time service, are so relieved that they may not dare express concern about their own position and prospects, much less that of their colleagues on the often inaccurately named “part-time” track. Similarly, workload caps imposed on contingent faculty members by their unions are proclaimed to be in the interest of contingent faculty themselves, but, without real progress on per-course compensation or an ultimate goal of equity, caps force many contingent faculty members to teach on multiple campuses in order to earn a living wage.

From incrementalism to goal-oriented structural reform

In practical terms, these examples point to the short-sightedness of many of the solutions to the contingent faculty crisis that have been enacted over the last twenty-five years. The problem has been that, to date, there is no common goal toward which to work and no benchmarks by which to assess the changes that have been made. Like the growth of contingency itself, the response to contingency has been haphazard, localized, self-interested, arbitrary, and defined by the very institutional structures that created it. (Indeed, the claim that “many part-timers don’t want to be full time” is a common objection in discussions of inequity, as if the notion of equivalent compensation for equivalent work can only be addressed in terms of the very two-tiered system that needs to change.) Many of the advances that have been made have been short-term gains and long-term losses, treatment of symptoms rather than causes: a new orientation program here, a $100-per-credit-hour gain there.

Incremental or piecemeal change that brings occasional, by no means comprehensive progress on some fronts while lacking a clear understanding of why change is necessary or what kind of change must ultimately be achieved, we contend, is not deep enough change. Treating symptoms does not necessarily lead to the correct diagnosis or treatment of the underlying disease, and in fact it can further mask the real root disorder. The danger of incrementalism, in other words, is not that it makes small changes over time; it is that without a clear view of the ultimate destination, small changes over time can actually obstruct progress toward a definable goal.

But of course the question becomes, what is the definable goal? If the problem is that no consensus exists on how to define that goal, then addressing that problem becomes the first step. At NFM, we propose adapting the thriving example of the Vancouver Community College model, where, among other things, there is a single salary schedule and where all faculty have equal access to permanent status. We have articulated the goals of equity in compensation, job security, academic freedom, faculty governance, professional advancement, benefits, and unemployment insurance. We contend that each of these...
goals is rooted in a larger goal that has long been defined in the foundational principles of the idea of the university and in the purpose and functioning of our democracy: the protection and refinement of academic, or campus, democracy for the purpose of ensuring quality education and safeguarding and advancing our national democracy. As Rich Moser (2004, 5) explains, “the concept of campus democracy implies that the campus is a distinctive but integral part of the broader society serving the public good. If we take a step further and define the public interest as the defense of core values, then the campus should become an exemplar of freedom, democracy, equality, and justice. The constitution of the campus could be considered its most important pedagogy and the efforts to shape that constitution our best classroom.” There are few more compelling definitions of the purpose and process of education. As every parent and every educator knows, there is no better—or more unforgiving—pedagogical tool than the power of example. The next step forward, then, involves a look inward.

**From ivory tower to academic democracy**

To many observers, the formation of NFM was puzzling and counterintuitive; hadn’t unionization efforts among contingent faculty increased and hadn’t advances been made through collective bargaining? And weren’t many institutions now paying attention to and implementing the types of reforms and strategies that for years had been recommended for the purpose of “integrating” contingent faculty more effectively into the life of the college and university and showing them respect?

If the concerns of contingent faculty had only to do with working conditions, then the progress made over the last generation might not have required NFM’s formation. Contingent faculty would have continued to support local organizing efforts and internal reform efforts, celebrating advances as they have occurred and fighting for change where necessary.

But NFM is not just about improving working conditions. It is about improving working conditions for an ultimate purpose: to ensure the quality of education and the integrity of the profession. NFM aims to remind the academy that it exists not for itself, and not simply to preserve itself, but for the common good—and that the operative definition of “common” in that expression should not evoke the unfortunate connotation of “second rate,” but rather its root, *communis*, or community.

Clearly, the contingent faculty crisis is simply the most obvious manifestation of the steady erosion of community in higher education. The faculty (in part, through its own doing) has moved, or been pushed, away from its role as a full partner in higher education to a literally “adjunct” position—peripheral, disempowered—in terms of either numbers or function. Tenure-stream faculty, who have authority over the curriculum and at least a nominal role in governance, are now too small in number or too cowed to initiate or resist change effectively, while faculty off the tenure track, though the majority in number, must risk their livelihoods to do so. To fight against this trend is to “reclaim” the ivory tower, as Joe Berry (2005) has put it, by transforming it into the academic democracy that it is really supposed to be.

If the marginalization of the faculty as a whole is the disease whose most obvious symptom is the mistreatment of those with the lowest status, then what is needed is a cure that builds on the body’s natural strengths. What is needed is a revitalization of the concept of academic democracy, one rooted in the social contract that has traditionally defined faculty work and that embodies the values of liberal education. Again, as Moser (2004, 2) explains, “as students, faculty, and campus workers make common cause to secure workplace rights and basic economic security, we must also articulate new ideals and mobilize alternative forms of community. We could organize such a project under the rubric of ‘campus democracy, community and academic citizenship’; ideals of service that revisit classical conceptions of the university, are grounded in existing economic and political conditions, rooted in democratic traditions of freedom, and already legible in the many struggles for justice on today’s campuses.” It is those ideals and traditions—along with sheer willpower—that will be needed to combat the pessimistic notion that “once the university budget has absorbed their [nontenure-track faculty] lower cost . . . it becomes almost impossible to retreat” (Cross and Goldenberg 2002, 27–28).
Confronting contingency is not an impossible task, though it is a formidable one. As Caryn McTighe Musil has pointed out, it is “radical”—but only because it is so necessary: “Of course, treating the contingent faculty like ‘real’ faculty, especially women and women with children, is a radical act. It requires considerable shifts in attitude, in economic remuneration, and in job security. It means incorporating these faculty members as equal partners in departments, welcoming them as academic colleagues, and nurturing their professional growth” (Musil 2009). As daunting as this task is, however, Musil reminds us that we can do it—because we’ve done it before. “The academy figured out how to rethink entire fields when DNA was discovered and mapped, when technology changed everything about our lives and work, and when women’s studies and ethnic studies forever altered the foundations of knowledge. The academy should be able to make this other change too” (Musil 2009).

We could not agree more. It will take leadership, courage, trust, and a willingness to reject the ignorance and cynicism that always plague change. We could not agree more. It will take leadership, courage, trust, and a willingness to reject the ignorance and cynicism that always plague change.

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

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NOTE
1. A notable exception is Phi Beta Kappa’s denial of a chapter to the University of Akron thanks to high numbers of adjunct faculty at that institution (Biliczky 2010).
The widespread sense that faculties at US colleges and universities need to be more diverse is tied to the sense that the students at US colleges and universities have become more diverse, which indeed they have. In 1971, entering freshmen were overwhelmingly (90.9 percent) white, 7.5 percent were black; Asians and Latino/as, at 0.6 percent, were almost invisible. Today, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education’s annual survey of freshmen at four-year colleges, 73.1 percent are white, 11 percent are black, 8.9 percent are Asian, and 9.7 percent are Latino. Of course, these numbers don’t amount to complete success: Latinos and Latinas are underrepresented, and blacks are also still slightly underrepresented. Furthermore, if we take numbers from more selective colleges, even the 11 percent for blacks begins to look a little high. Northwestern, for example, is only about 5 percent black; the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is closer to 7 percent (US College Search). So here, blacks are significantly underrepresented.

But they are not underrepresented because they are black. On the contrary—this is what scholars in the field call the “net black advantage”—once “baseline economic disparities are discounted,” African Americans are more likely to attend four-year colleges than white students are. What this means, as the authors of the study “Racial Inequality and College Attendance” say, is that the idea that “African-American educational disadvantage is rooted in cultural deficiencies and/or resistance to the mainstream educational system” is pretty much nonsense (Charles, Roscigno, and Torres 2007).\(^1\) And, of course, what it also means is that the underrepresentation of African Americans in colleges and universities has nothing to do with those universities keeping out African Americans (or, for that matter, Hispanics and Native Americans). Universities don’t keep out minority students; they keep out poor students.

Indeed, the increase in diversity in higher education over the last forty years has been matched by an increase in wealth. In 1971, the median income of entering freshmen at the 297 colleges participating in the American Freshmen Survey was 46 percent above the national average; by 2007, it had climbed to 60 percent (Pryor et al. 2007). As a result, poor students of all races are scarcer than blacks or Latinos. So places like Northwestern may be only 5 percent black, but since, according to Richard Kahlenberg (2007), only around 3 percent of the students in the 146 most selective colleges and universities come from the bottom socioeconomic quarter of the American population, you still have a better chance of meeting a black kid than you do of meeting a poor one on their campuses.

The two-tier professoriate

Thus the question about who should be on the faculty is a question about who should teach the rich kids, and although no one has argued that professors should be both as diverse as their students and as rich, the incomes of the teachers have, in fact, risen. The median household income in 2008 was a little over $52,000; according to a 2009 survey by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the average salary for full-time faculty was $79,439. Professors, like their students, are about 60 percent above the median.

Or at least some of them are. The AAUP survey doesn’t include contingent faculty, and any number that doesn’t include contingent faculty is ignoring the vast majority of American faculty members. For just as the increase in student diversity and student wealth have tracked each other over the last forty years, the increased reliance on contingent faculty has tracked them both. In 1975, almost 57 percent of faculty were tenured or on the tenure track; today that percentage has been almost cut in half, and the percentage of non-tenure-track faculty has gone from 43.2 percent to 68.8

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percent (AAUP 2010). The people who work these jobs do not make anything like $79,000 a year; they don’t even make anything like the median income of $52,000.

At my university, the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), for example, adjuncts on nine-month contracts, teaching six courses a year, make between $26,788 and $30,900, a salary that, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education, is “high among those who work outside the tenure track in the region” (June 2009). Even at the high end, however, it’s more than a thousand dollars below the minimum $6,200 per course section called for by the Modern Language Association (2008). This year, we have hired (on one-year contracts) thirty-six adjuncts, which is nothing like the two-thirds of the faculty they constitute nationally (many of whom teach at community colleges) but is, since the number of tenured and tenure-track faculty in our department is thirty-five, a slight majority of the UIC English department. And, since the adjuncts, with no research responsibilities, have a heavier teaching load than do the tenured and tenure-track faculty, their courses constitute a very large majority of the teaching our department does. Indeed, since at UIC the number of those on the tenure track has declined over the last twenty years, while the number of students has grown, it would be completely impossible for the university to staff our courses without adjuncts. Thus, as American college students have become, on the average, richer, the people who teach them have become, on the average, poorer. If you assume that the average UIC tenure-track professor of English makes the national average and you take her salary and average it with what our lecturers make, what you get is a faculty that earns about $54,000—more like 2 percent above the median than 60 percent.

But just as the colleges themselves worry much more about the student body’s diversity than about its wealth, they worry much more about the faculty’s diversity than about its poverty. At UIC, for example, we have a commitment to “increasing the numbers of
underrepresented faculty” and we have administrators who, within the best of their ability in difficult times, are seeking to honor that commitment. So although we don’t have very many searches, when we do, they’re often targeted at scholars of color or toward areas—like African American Studies or Latino literature—where we can plausibly hope that the successful candidate will embody as well as profess his or her subject, since it is, after all, the underrepresentation of bodies, not professional specialties, that our commitment to diversity is seeking to rectify. And insofar as searches like these are successful, our tenure-track faculty may continue to dwindle but it will do so in colors that come closer to matching those of the American population and at salaries that continue to exceed those of the American population.

Meanwhile, however, much of our teaching will be done by people whose salaries trail the median and whose colors we don’t care about. Which is to say, we are being made into precisely the kinds of employees neoliberal managers love. On the one hand, most of our work is done by cheaper and less secure labor (the adjuncts) and, on the other hand and even in the depths of the Great Recession, our commitment to social justice (the faculty of color) remains intact. The advantages of the two-tier professoriate, in other words, are both material and moral: on the bottom tier, a flexibilized work force; on the top tier, a diversified one. And although the bottom tier at present is nowhere near as diverse as the top, that’s not really a problem, since no one of any race really wants to be on the bottom. Success here consists only in diversifying the elite and thus achieving the new American Dream: not a more equal society but a society in which inequality is more evenly distributed, in which a few more of the winners are people of color and a few more of the losers are white guys.

This is the dream Adolph Reed is describing when he says that we live today “under a regime that is capable of simultaneously including black people and Latinos, even celebrating that inclusion as a fulfillment of democracy, while excluding poor people without a whimper of opposition” (Reed 2009b). His point is not, of course, that we should be unhappy because this regime challenges white privilege; it’s that we should be unhappy because it consolidates class privilege. Indeed, it not only consolidates class privilege, it enhances it. For the replacement of the idea of equality with the ideal of proportional inequality has taken place at the very moment—beginning in the late 1970s—in which inequality has been rapidly on the rise. And as the rich have become richer while everyone else has not, what we’ve developed is an institutional morality that objects to the inequalities produced by prejudice and discrimination but not to the ones produced by competitive markets. The “triumph of neoliberalism,” as Reed puts it, is the idea that “only inequalities resultant from unfavorable treatment based on negatively sanctioned ascriptive designations like race qualify as injustice” (Reed 2009a, 271). Thus markets win on both the material and the ideological levels. Neoliberalism creates greater disparities between the rich and the rest, and it teaches us that those disparities, so long as they’re produced by markets and not by discrimination, are deserved.

It’s in this context that we can recognize the fundamentally conservative and antiegalitarian character of the call to diversify the faculty and, indeed, of the American university system in general. The University of Michigan, a determined and at least partially successful (notably in Grutter v. Bollinger) combatant in the fight for diversity, is emblematic here. In 2004, Kahlenberg (2010) points out, as the university “was celebrating its victory in the Supreme Court, this national symbol of racial diversity had more students from families making in excess of $200,000 per year than families earning less than the national median of $53,000 a year.” In other words, the university’s commitment to “racial and ethnic diversity” and especially “to the inclusion of students from groups which have been historically discriminated against . . . who without this commitment might not be represented in our student body in meaningful numbers” did not extend to the students who are most underrepresented at Michigan and at its private competitors: the poor. That is, the attempt to open the university’s doors to people without money
of color has taken precedence over the attempt to open them to people without money. Indeed, judging by the results, there hasn’t really been any attempt to open them to people without money, or, for that matter, even to people with just a normal amount of money since, as David Leonhardt (2004) has observed, “at the most selective private universities across the country, more fathers of freshmen are doctors than are hourly workers, teachers, clergy members, farmers or members of the military—combined.” But, of course, no one could even have dreamed of suing Michigan on behalf of the children of hourly workers. There may be a constitutional question about whether race-conscious admissions policies discriminate against white people, but it’s definitely not against any law to give preferences to the rich. Just as it’s not against any law to underpay the people who teach their children—which is not to say that the benefits of faculty diversity are reserved only for those universities whose enthusiasm for combating racism and sexism sits comfortably alongside their indifference to combating exploitation. On the contrary, the advantages of diversity are almost equally vivid in situations where both the students and the faculty are well-off since here, too, the institution’s sense of its own virtue is largely dependent on the idea that rich people getting paid to help other rich people make sure that their wealth and status get transmitted from one generation to the next is a good thing as long as the rich people in question aren’t all white and male. Indeed, in this respect, our universities, despite our tendency to think of them as the most liberal of institutions, are just like almost every other American institution of the upper-middle class. No one can plausibly think of banks as liberal institutions, but the annual Vault ranking of the “50 Most Prestigious Banking Firms” takes diversity into account, and the number one firm last year—both in diversity and overall—was Goldman Sachs.

Of course, the recent suit alleging discrimination against women at Goldman Sachs and complaining of their “stark underrepresentation” in management—“just 29 percent of vice presidents, 17 percent of managing directors, and 14 percent of partners” (Mangan 2010)—may have a negative impact on its rankings for this year. But it’s the logic according to which the complaint is conceived rather than its validity that makes the relevant point. If Lloyd Blankfein’s $9 million bonus were instead going to Jane Doe, would that make Goldman Sachs a more liberal institution? Would the United States be a more egalitarian country if the beneficiaries of our increasing inequality included more women?

Reproducing inequality

University leaders regularly puzzle over the fact that, as President Drew Faust (2008) of Harvard has put it, their undergraduates “are going in such numbers . . . into finance, consulting, i-banking.” But it’s hard to see why anybody should be surprised. After all, it was President Faust herself who at her installation congratulated our universities on being engines of “the expansion of citizenship, equality and opportunity—to blacks, women, Jews, immigrants, and others” (2007). And we’ve already seen who the others aren’t. The only difference between the banks and the universities is that at Goldman Sachs, where the goal is to make the kids even richer, they don’t just appreciate diversity; with “a global client base that reflects a multitude of cultures,” they “leverage” it (QS). So if 39 percent of the Harvard graduating class is going into banking and finance, it’s not an anomaly. It’s because they’ve learned very well the lessons in social justice (the lessons of student and faculty diversity) that Harvard has taught them, and they’ll fight just as hard to make those lessons a reality on Wall Street as they have in Cambridge.

Even more striking than the bad news about 39 percent of the students going into banking, however, is what President Faust thinks of as the good news, namely, that a significant number (thirty-seven) have “signed on with Teach for America.” The Wall Street Journal describes the fact that
there are more college graduates wanting to join Teach for America (TFA) than there are schools wanting to hire them by declaring it a “tragic lost opportunity” produced by “union and bureaucratic opposition” (A10). The Journal doesn’t mention the studies showing that “the students of novice TFA teachers perform significantly less well in reading and mathematics than those of credentialed beginning teachers” (Heilig and Jez 2010). And the well-meaning college administrators, delighted that more of their charges are going off to do good, don’t say much about the fact most of them won’t do it very well or for very long. More than 80 percent of TFA teachers leave after three years. But as Michelle Rhee, one of the heroes of the recent film Waiting for Superman, likes to say, it’s really all about the adults, not the kids. If, for instance, you juxtapose the claims the film makes on behalf of Wall Street’s favorite charter school, the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ), with the reality of its performance—starting with the fact that just 15 percent of its seventh graders passed the 2010 New York reading test—it’s not hard to see that HCZ, although even more beloved of Wall Street than Teach for America (Goldman Sachs just gave HCZ $20 million [Otterman 2010b]), is not much better at actually educating children. And it’s even easier to see that Jeffrey Canada’s solution to HCZ’s recent failure on the reading tests—“Several teachers have been fired as a result of the low scores, and others were reassigned” (Otterman 2010a)—is closer to the heart of school reform than is any actual improvement in the kids’ education, although this is an insight that comes more easily to conservatives who know they’re conservative that it does to high-minded liberals. Thus, the little band of Harvard idealists going off to teach for America, like the much larger band going off to sell CDOs for Goldman Sachs, are making their own contribution to the reproduction and intensification of inequality in America. The Wall Street materialists contribute the old-fashioned way, by making a lot of money; the job of the TFA idealists—to make public school employees (“Several teachers have been fired. . .”) as disposable as college adjuncts—requires more virtue than greed. But both the materialists and the idealists have learned the fundamental lessons of American higher education very well. There’s no injustice at Goldman Sachs as long as women and bankers of color get their fair share, and there’s no injustice in turning as many college teachers as possible into underpaid adjuncts as long, once again, as women and people of color are proportionally represented on what’s left of the tenure track. The general rule of American upper-class life is that inequality is not a problem except when it comes to race and sex; the application of that rule to American colleges is the call for faculty diversity.

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

REFERENCES


NOTES

1. In fact, when you net out the economics, the disadvantage in college attendance of other underrepresented groups like Native Americans and native-born Hispanics is also virtually eliminated. Furthermore, the difference between native blacks and immigrant blacks (who attend selective colleges in a much higher proportion than native blacks) also disappears when socioeconomic status is netted out (see Bennett and Lutz 2009).

2. It’s also true, I’m glad to say, that at UIC we are at least a little bit worried about the situation of our adjuncts, and I am currently cochaired a committee to see what can be done about it.

3. More generally, although Michigan does well in admitting minority students, it does badly in admitting low-income students: “Overall, nearly 39 percent of students attending Michigan colleges and universities receive Pell Grants. Yet among University of Michigan students, only 13 percent receive Pell Grants, an indication that low-income students in the state are going elsewhere” (Dervarics 2010).

The recession of 2008–9 and the continuing decline in local, state, and federal funds available to support higher education have resulted in serious budget cuts and belt-tightening. Given that faculty constitute an institution’s most costly resource, it was not surprising, though it is nonetheless disheartening, to learn of the University of Arizona’s, the University of Nevada Las Vegas’s, and the California State System’s massive reorganization and personnel layoffs, which have resulted from recession-related financial pressures. These three institutions are not alone in implementing these cost-cutting strategies. Such cuts may seem inevitable in states that have also to decide how much, rather than whether, to cut services to K–12 education, health care, and public safety. Yet what often gets lost in policy discussions during times of scarce resources are the strategic ways in which faculty can be a most valuable resource and asset during a recession.

In this article, we examine the state of the academic profession and faculty working conditions in the current recession with two purposes in mind. First, we provide real-time insights into what is happening to faculty across the country. Second, we discuss the implications of several recession-driven strategies affecting faculty work—especially the implications for student learning.

Institutional responses to the recession
Little research has so far been conducted on how higher education institutions are responding to the ongoing recession. To provide a preliminary understanding, we synthesized data indicating the variety and prevalence of these institutional responses. We collected these data by searching via the Internet for available documentation of institutional responses to the recession. Through the use of online search engines, we searched national news periodicals, websites of major national higher education groups, periodicals specific to the field of higher education, and news media more broadly. Our criteria for identifying responsive measures were: (1) a new, cost-saving action was taken during the recession, and (2) a campus spokesperson affirmed that the action was taken in response to recession-based fiscal pressures. We then considered these actions in light of the research and theory on faculty work and working conditions. The data we synthesized were published between May of 2007 and June of 2009. Altogether, we compiled information from thirty-eight sources, which yielded information on the actions of seventy-four colleges, universities, and state systems (fifty-four public and twenty private). We categorized each action according to seven common measures: (1) freezing hiring, (2) adjusting pay, (3) limiting professional development, (4) dismissing faculty and consolidating programs, (5) cutting academic unit budgets, (6) increasing teaching loads, and (7) shifting faculty appointments.

It is important to note that cost-cutting measures are implemented in specific and varied contexts. For example, California’s budget shortfall is especially dramatic, and the severity of response measures there reflects that context. Moreover, each institution is faced with...
a unique set of contracts and obligations to its employees. This helps explain, for example, why the state system in Maryland has furloughed its faculty several times, whereas the Massachusetts system, whose faculty are unionized, has not. Each institution also has different assets to be shifted or expended. No doubt differences in endowments, overhead for grants, and income from revenue-generating centers have all affected campus and system-level decisions.

Nonetheless, the cost-saving measures we identified result from certain shared assumptions and viewpoints, and they have major implications for faculty work. While research on the short-term effects is underway, we will not know the long-term opportunity costs of these measures for some time. Existing research on faculty work and productivity does, however, indicate the likely shape and direction of the effects, and we discuss this below within each of the three categories of faculty work: teaching, research, and service.

Our analysis of cost-saving measures suggests that most campus leaders have focused on improving cost efficiency. The rationale for this choice is similar to the rationale for perpetuating the increasing shift toward contingent labor. It is rooted in a corporate business philosophy known as scientific management (Bolman and Deal 2008; Perrow 1986), which assumes the labor at different stages of an assembly line can be exchanged and manipulated purposively to produce the same product with less effort or cost. The philosophical assumptions and management techniques underlying this paradigm of organization also precipitated the introduction of top-quality management and strategic planning to colleges and universities in the 1980s and 1990s (Birnbaum 1998). The effect for labor is that it turns the employee into a task-oriented technocrat, rather than a professional expert, and it tends only to consider aspects of the higher education process that are quantifiable (e.g., the number of students in seats, rather than the quality of faculty-student relationships) in evaluating performance. Many scholars and leaders in higher education have critiqued this perspective and its application
to decision making in colleges and universities, noting that it does not distinguish between collegial and hierarchical cultures and that it does not recognize fundamental differences in higher education goals, processes, and labor (Birnbaum 1998; Rhoades 1996). In 2000, Robert Birnbaum critiqued the flow of management techniques into higher education, citing what he saw as a common assumption in them that “if we could just run our universities as General Motors is managed, most of our educational problems would vanish” (215). Given the condition of the major US car companies in the last two years, few campus leaders would adopt this particular metaphor today, yet the operating assumptions it represents remain intact.

Exemplifying the alternative, despite endowment losses, Bard College President Leon Botstein has chosen strategically to expend resources, requisitioning funds raised in a capital campaign for campus construction and reallocating them toward the college’s core academic missions in the arts and sciences (Jaschik 2008). Instead of executing a strict cost-cutting agenda, Botstein has embraced a cost-effectiveness approach that provides room for investment in the central academic work of the college. He has literally moved investments in the bricks of campus buildings to the people within their walls. This approach to budgeting is also reflected in Colorado State University’s “Commitment to Colorado” program, which began in the fall of 2011. Beckie Supiano (2010) reports that Pell-eligible, in-state students will have their entire tuition and fee costs met by a combination of federal, state, and university aid; additionally, Colorado families making up to the state median income will have at least half the cost of tuition met with grant aid. The university’s expenditure on financial aid will increase by two million dollars, and while some of those funds will be generated through tuition revenue, unspecified budgetary reallocations will make up the rest. This investment is taking place despite state cuts in funding to the university over the past three years. While many other aggressive student-aid initiatives across the country have scaled back their commitments since 2008, Colorado State University has found a way to expend resources in accordance with its mission-based priorities.

With these two examples before us, we make three critical points. First, we posit that the efficiency argument is hazardous to mission achievement. Second, the alternative cost-effectiveness approach can be an available and superior option. As Bard and Colorado State have demonstrated, finance strategy can be shifted to protect and improve quality in central campus programs, as opposed to maintaining or expanding offerings at the edges of institutional mission. Finally, third, we return to the repeatedly used faculty union mantra that faculty working conditions are student learning conditions. Larger class sizes, greater course loads, and decreased faculty autonomy and reward are likely to result in a reduction in student learning opportunity.

Teaching
Teaching takes up the majority of faculty work time, across appointment types (Fairweather 2005; Antony and Raveling 1998). Outside of direct classroom hours faculty engage in many teaching-related activities that have an impact on the learning process, including but not limited to designing new courses, preparing lessons, remaining current in a discipline, grading student work, meeting with students, and exchanging e-mail with students about course content (O’Meara, Terosky, and Newman 2008). Likewise, while many institutions have full-time academic advisers for undergraduate students, much of the career development and preparation for graduate school still falls on the shoulders of full-time faculty. This involves meeting with students, writing letters of recommendation, and maintaining a strong network that can be mined for internship and job opportunities for students.

All seven of the cost-cutting measures identified above conceivably impinge upon faculty teaching and advising capabilities. Among our research sample, hiring and salary restrictions are linked: the majority of institutions (80 percent) and state systems (57 percent) that have implemented salary freezes, cuts, or faculty furloughs have also implemented hiring freezes. Logically, this makes sense; if you
cannot pay the faculty you have, why hire more? Yet, for faculty, the national trend toward increasing admissions means increasing teaching loads. As a result, their time spent per student, per paper, and per class must necessarily decline, suggesting a similar decline in the quality of their teaching and advising work. Moreover, teaching and related responsibilities must necessarily replace time spent in research and service roles, which suggests similar effects on the quantity and quality of work in those areas. In both cases, the nature of such an imposition on faculty work reduces the professional latitude traditionally afforded to noncontingent faculty, as experts in defining their own work. As this autonomy decreases and faculty work becomes more technocratic, a propensity develops for the job to become less attractive. In turn, this suggests a likelihood of reduced investment in work by current faculty members, as well as discouraged aspirations for talented rising scholars.

Our study found that relatively few campus spokespeople have identified increases in contingent hiring related to budgetary reductions. There are three possible explanations for this. First, few campuses are hiring contingent faculty because they are not hiring, period. In this case, simply not contracting for a new semester is tantamount to firing many of these faculty members, regardless of their value as teachers. Contingent faculty, who are contracted on a per-semester basis, are often used as a budget “flexibility” mechanism in hard times (Goldstein 2005). A second possible explanation is that institutions are hesitant to report further increases in contingent hiring, particularly if they have been working to improve their academic reputation. Recent studies suggest that, in certain settings, part-time contingent faculty are less effective teachers than full-time tenure-line faculty because they are less likely to use high-impact teaching practices (Benjamin 2002; Umbach 2007). Also, part-time faculty have been found to be less effective in retaining college students and helping them succeed in gatekeeper courses (Jaeger, Thornton, and Eagan 2007). Given the long-term trend toward increased contingent labor, however, this explanation is unlikely.

While the current recession did not cause the unbundling of faculty roles, neither will a return to prosperity cause the reintegration of faculty roles

The most broadly plausible and perhaps most troubling explanation is that campus leaders simply do not know where the historical trend of increasing contingent hiring on their campus ends and where the recession-responsive hiring begins. As Bland et al. (2006, 117) observed, “unfortunately, most schools’ current collection of faculty appointment types have not occurred as a result of thoughtful planning but rather through uncoordinated decisions by individual subunits of the institution.” Failure to differentiate between hiring decisions made because of the recession and decisions made as part of an ongoing cost-efficiency strategy could easily cause underreporting. Likewise, it would necessarily undermine any institutional efforts to maintain or improve quality of teaching through control of faculty appointment type.

Cost-saving measures that may seem only to affect faculty members can have related effects on students. To better measure and demonstrate the effects of the recession on faculty teaching and student learning, future institutional researchers will need to take into account student evaluations, faculty satisfaction, changes in course load and faculty-to-student ratios, and outcomes assessments of hiring practices instituted during the downturn. Key institutional indicators for judging teaching effectiveness, with the benefit of a post-recession perspective, will center on changes in such student success indicators as job placement rates, retention rates, and graduate school attendance rates from before the recession, through it, and in its wake.

Research

Restricting conference travel and tightening academic budgets have a clear and direct impact on faculty research capabilities. Without paper and ink, for instance, where are faculty to go to print tables and transcripts? Without conference travel, how are they to vet their research and gain attention? Nearly one-third of our sample have instituted travel restrictions and curbed professional development opportunities, inhibitions likely to prove injurious to those campuses’ relative research productivity.

Another concern centers on who is not doing research. As part-time and other contingent
appointments have risen dramatically in recent decades, replacing the norm of tenure-track labor with a nearly three-to-one norm of contingent labor (American Federation of Teachers 2009; Schuster and Finkelstein 2006; Umbach 2007), there are real concerns that research has been “unbundled” out of the majority of new faculty appointments.

Part-time and full-time nontenure-track faculty members are hired almost exclusively to teach, at the cost of service and research responsibilities, and they are frequently under-supported and underremunerated in that work (Gappa, Austin, and Trice 2007; Umbach 2007). Additionally, as research increasingly becomes the defining characteristic of tenured and tenure-track faculty work, the potential exists for these faculty members to conceptualize their work primarily in terms of research, to the detriment of their teaching and shared governance responsibilities. Massy and Zemsky (1994) famously described this challenge in terms of a vicious cycle, “the academic ratchet,” a process by which faculty members engaged in research tend to privilege that work over teaching and service, and being rewarded for it through appointment, tenure, and promotion experiences encourages them to maximize the imbalance. Alternatively, Milem, Berger, and Dey (2000) found that while faculty time on research has increased over the past twenty years, so, too, has time on teaching. Thus, in practice, the academic ratchet appears complex. However, the increasing proportion of faculty members being appointed to research-noninclusive roles and the decreasing proportion of faculty members being appointed to research-inclusive roles mark a shift in the nature of faculty work toward specialized roles.

While the current recession did not cause the unbundling of faculty roles, neither will a return to prosperity cause the reintegration of faculty roles. Yet current budget constraints may offer opportunities to reassert the importance
of comprehensive faculty roles. This will not be an easy argument to make, however, as research to date has shown inconclusive relationships between faculty scholarship and excellence in teaching. Pascarella and Terenzini (1995), for example, observed from a meta-analysis that good teachers do not have to be good researchers. At the same time, Astin and Chang (1995) observed that where institutions have created a strong balance between being student-centered and maintaining a research-active faculty, those faculty tend to be full time, engaged in interdisciplinary and team teaching, working with undergraduates on research projects, and designing new classes related to their research. In effect, these faculty display qualities of the “integrated professional” (Colbeck, O’Meara, and Austin 2008), blending teaching and research roles in service of key higher education missions. Campus leaders who want to make growth-oriented investments should consider how these two roles can be mutually enriching.

**Service**

As we have suggested, something somewhere has to give when teaching and advising loads are increased and furloughs are implemented. And since in most institutions service is less appreciated than either research or teaching, faculty service may give the most. Engaged faculty members often work over long periods of time to develop effective community partnerships and applied learning experiences for students. Yet the seven cost-cutting measures identified above threaten the time and capacity of faculty to engage in long-term partnership development. Whether because of job security, increased teaching load, or because of shortages of faculty in departments, this important faculty role and the crucial work it facilitates may be at risk. Some campuses have created centers for community engagement to support this work and to strengthen and even expand university and faculty commitments to communities that create projects of lasting scholarly, pedagogical, and public value. Yet many institutions have closed their engagement offices or slashed budgets for faculty professional development. Given changes in teaching and knowledge production that require deep partnerships between faculty and “publics” (Saltmarsh and Hartley 2011), it is vitally important that such centers not be regarded as peripheral.

In addition to service to external communities, we are concerned about faculty involvement in campus governance during the recession. As layoffs and hiring restrictions reduce faculty numbers and impose additional duties on those who remain, committee requirements will increase. This may result in reduced effort across committees at a time when many colleges and universities are involved in major decisions with long-term implications for student learning. For example, a recent survey of chief academic officers found that 89 percent of institutions are at some stage of assessing or modifying their general education program (Hart Research Associates 2009). Many campuses also have important decisions to make about whether to move more programs online and whether to build new buildings (Burgan 2006). Further, major shifts are required in faculty evaluation systems to bring them up to date with a more diverse faculty, technological changes in how research is conducted and disseminated, and trends in interdisciplinary and engaged work (O’Meara 2011). Who will take on these roles if full-time faculty members are eliminated, overburdened, or depersonalized? Finally, academic leaders have tended to emerge from the ranks of full-time tenure-track faculty with committee service experience. Yet these ranks are now so thin that the pipeline supplying academic leadership is weakening (American Council on Education 2008).

The problem of who will perform the core, often unrewarded stewardship of service may be the most foreboding and far-reaching of all. Faculty should be the key players in designing the curriculum, making strategic-planning decisions, and creating faculty evaluation systems. They know this work better than any other institutional constituency, and they also have formal avenues for controlling this work through shared governance. While administrative leaders share the burden of campus leadership, faculty have a unique responsibility to look after the academic mission.

**Conclusion**

Colleges and universities are primarily charged with the creation and dispersion of knowledge. Thus, teaching is absolutely central to the mission of all institutions of higher education, and research and service are also central to the missions of many four-year institutions.
Perhaps this assertion is best expressed in juxtaposition with those endeavors that are not as fundamental to mission. Some pursuits, such as funding student organizations and supporting residential learning experiences, supplement and even enhance academic education. Others, like big-time athletics or venture initiatives (even academic ones) driven by institutional aspiration and mimicry, threaten to siphon critical funds from core academic improvements. The economic crisis brings such unaffordable distractions into sharp relief. Rather than cutting both academic cost and quality, campus leaders should recognize the necessity to invest in and invigorate faculty work, particularly in ways that enhance the quality of academic processes and products.

Research tells us that class size matters to student learning (Kokkelenberg, Dillon, and Christy 2005) and that appointment type is associated with the types of pedagogy employed (Umbach 2007) as well as with student retention (Jaeger, Thornton, and Eagan 2007). Accordingly, funding for nonacademic pursuits should be reallocated to shore up strained teaching and learning environments. Likewise, faculty research agendas, shared governance, and external service should be supported as critical activities, even at the cost of secondary and noncritical pursuits. Faculty layoffs, across-the-board hiring freezes, mandatory furloughs, nonstrategic changes in faculty work responsibilities, and other restrictions should be recognized as detrimental to the core function of any college or university. Where other cuts can be made in order to sustain and build academic effectiveness, they must be.

It is important for academic leaders making budget decisions to consider the long-term ways in which full-time—often, though not
exclusively, tenure-track—faculty add value to the institution. In 1996, Ernest Lynton encouraged academic leaders to “reverse the telescope” and consider not just individual faculty work, but individual activities in the context of overall department contributions. Similarly, we believe academic leaders need to use a wider, longer lens to consider the implications of current budget cuts and decisions. For example, alumni are more likely to give to an institution if they had a positive experience there, including significant out-of-class contact with faculty (Clotfelter 2001; Monks 2003). How is contact time being preserved and leveraged in the recession? Is work being considered as an investment? Further, many states have produced workforce development reports showing major shortages in key areas such as STEM, K-12 education, nursing, and computer science. To what degree are campuses looking ahead and investing in faculty positions or in professional development for current faculty to create or grow these programs? National surveys reveal that an increasing number of faculty want to become involved in service learning and community engagement but lack the resources or reward structures to do so (Higher Education Research Institute 2009). Given that today’s students desire experiential, interdisciplinary, and problem-oriented experiences such as service learning and community-based research, can more be done to maximize existing intellectual capital in these areas? Responding to these sorts of questions requires a far more sophisticated approach to budgeting.

Breneman (2002) suggests that the substantive significance of past recessions has been the responsive actions undertaken by higher education leaders, rather than any lasting impact directly extending from fiscal losses. The following observation, made by Cameron in 1983, remains applicable in the current context: “when faced with conditions of decline, administrators define these problems exclusively as resource allocation problems or problems of efficiency, and they respond conservatively rather than innovatively.” In other words, higher education leaders’ responses to the recession remain focused on enduring, rather than on taking advantage of recession opportunities in key mission-focused ways. Many leaders have not seen beyond the threat of fiscal decline to envision the underlying opportunity. The result is detrimental to faculty teaching, research, and service.

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

REFERENCES


NOTE

1. It is important to note that according to our own research Colorado State University has simultaneously engaged in faculty hiring restrictions, academic budget reductions, and faculty layoffs. Thus, the praise we offer its academically centered efforts in student aid are tempered with concern that some of the budgetary trade-offs enabling that initiative likely come from cuts to the faculty side of the academic enterprise. Still, the investments in student aid represent a departure from broad stroke cost-cutting endeavors during the recession, and we recognize that innovation as such.
A substantial body of research affirms the commonsense notion that involvement in academic work and quality of effort pay off: the more students engage in educationally purposeful activities, the more they learn (see comprehensive reviews in Kuh et al. 2007 and Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). An important element is how much time students invest in studying (Astin 1993). Yet while time is important, it is increasingly clear that how students spend their study time also matters. Spending many hours memorizing facts in order to perform well on an exam may earn a good grade, but it is not likely to result in long-term retention or the ability to apply what was learned in novel situations (see Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 2000). A recent longitudinal analysis of student performance on the open-ended performance task of the Collegiate Learning Assessment, administered to the same students at the beginning of the first year and at the end of the sophomore year, found that hours spent studying alone corresponded to improved performance, but hours spent studying with peers did not (Arum, Roksa, and Velez 2008). While we should not ignore the importance of how study time is used, this article focuses on the simple question of how much full-time college students study, whether study time has declined, and if so, what may account for the decline.

In higher education, a well-established rule of thumb holds that students should devote two hours of study time for every hour of class time. Assuming a full-time load of fifteen credit hours, students adhering to this standard should spend thirty hours per week studying. But since its first national administration in 2000, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has found that the average full-time college student falls well short of that standard. NSSE asks students how many hours they spend “in a typical seven-day week” on a variety of activities, including “preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities),” and the results indicate that, on average, full-time NSSE respondents only study about one hour for each hour of class. This figure has been relatively stable from 2000 through 2010. For example, among some 420,000 full-time first-year students and seniors attending 950 four-year institutions in the United States in 2009 and 2010, only 11 percent of first-years and 14 percent of seniors reported studying twenty-six or more hours per week. About three out of five (58 percent of first-years and 57 percent of seniors) said they study fifteen or fewer hours per week. On average, full-time 2009 and 2010 respondents at US institutions studied only 14.7 hours per week. The results were comparable for Canadian students in NSSE 2009 and 2010, who studied an average of 14.3 hours per week. (Students taking all of their classes online were excluded from these analyses.) These findings also track closely with time-use studies from the late 1980s and early 1990s using both survey and time-use diary approaches (see Gardiner 1994, 51–53).

The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE, a companion survey to NSSE) includes questions about how much time faculty members expect students to spend preparing for class, and how much they believe students actually spend. Interestingly, faculty expectations for student preparation time are much closer to what students actually report than to the conventional standard. In 2010, the average faculty expectation for study time was 16.5 hours per week, only two hours higher than what students reported. But when asked how much time they believe students actually spend preparing for class, faculty provided a low estimate of nine hours per week, on average. So the faculty perception is that students...
in How Much College Students Study
are studying about 7.5 hours less per week than they should. But what do long-term trends in college students’ study time look like?

Economists Philip Babcock and Mindy Marks recently assembled time-series survey data on college student time use from a number of sources spanning four decades (see table 1). Their study, titled “The Falling Time Cost of College: Evidence from a Half Century of Time Use Data,” will appear in a forthcoming issue of the Review of Economics and Statistics. While the journal article discusses the implications of diminished study time for understanding trends in the economic return to baccalaureate education and in human capital investment, the authors summarized their findings in the more sensational title “Leisure College, USA: The Decline in Student Study Time” published by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) (Babcock and Marks 2010). As both titles indicate, they found evidence of a pronounced decline in the number of hours that full-time college students say they study, from about twenty-four hours per week in 1961 to fourteen hours per week in 2003. Although Babcock and Marks examined change in study time over three time periods (1961 to 1981; 1987, 1988, and 1989 to 2003, 2004, and 2005; and 1961 to 2003), I focus attention in this article on the long-term change from 1961 to 2003, which is also the focus of the AEI article.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Elicitation</th>
<th>Response frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Talent</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Nationally representative sample of students who were high school seniors in 1960 (N=17,985; 4,665 for matching with NSSE 2003)</td>
<td>Number of hours per week “on the average” spent “Studying (Outside of class)”</td>
<td>Direct entry of number of hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Longitudinal Study of Youth, 1979 (NLSY79)</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Nationally representative sample of undergraduates (all four classes) (N=1,314)</td>
<td>Number of hours “in the last week” spent “studying or working on class projects,” asked separately for “on campus” and “off campus”</td>
<td>Direct entry of number of hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Research Institute College Student Survey (HERI)</td>
<td>1987–89 &amp; 2003–5</td>
<td>On-time seniors at participating institutions 2 (N=5,012 and 26,612)</td>
<td>Time spent “during a typical week” on “Studying/Homework”</td>
<td>None, Less than 1 hour 1–2 hours 3–5 hours 6–10 hours 11–15 hours 16–20 hours More than 20 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Random samples of first-year students and seniors at participating institutions (N=3,195)</td>
<td>Hours spent “in a typical 7-day week” Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)”</td>
<td>0 hours/week 1–5 hours/week 6–10 hours/week 11–15 hours/week 16–20 hours/week 21–25 hours/week 26–30 hours/week More than 30 hours/week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1HERI data from each three-year period were pooled to increase the likelihood of institutional matches between periods.

2HERI surveys were administered locally, with random sampling recommended but not verified.
Babcock and Marks devote a portion of each article to identifying and addressing factors that might account for the apparent drop in study time. I will briefly summarize these and the evidence marshaled to dismiss them. Next, I consider some possible explanations for the decline advanced by the researchers, adding some of my own to the list. I conclude with a discussion of what we are to make of these findings.

**Accounting for possible confounding factors**

A dramatic difference between undergraduate education in 1961 and today involves technology. The mechanics of information search and retrieval, and of preparing and revising written assignments, have profoundly changed since 1961. Information that previously required a visit to one or more libraries, sometimes even at other locations, is often only a few mouse clicks away today. With regard to writing, most students now compose at the keyboard rather than writing longhand and transcribing. Sentences and whole paragraphs can be inserted, altered, moved, or removed in a matter of seconds, whereas in the past such editing often meant arduously rewriting or retyping pages. Given these changes, it seems plausible that some of the change in study time may reflect efficiency gains due to new technologies. But Babcock and Marks counter that the lion’s share of the drop in study time occurred between 1961 and 1981, predating the wide adoption of microcomputers, modern word processors, and easy electronic access to research sources over campus computer networks. So, new technology fails to explain most of the decline.

It is well established that subtle variations in survey design can affect responses. The several surveys examined each have their own idiosyncratic ways of both asking about time use and structuring the response (see table 1). Some surveys ask about a typical week, one asks about the last week, and one asks students to report an average. One explicitly defines “week” to mean seven days, while the others do not. Two surveys asked students to fill in an exact number, while two others asked students to select from different sets of discrete ranges. As a result of these differences, some of the observed decline in study time may be an artifact of the different survey questions and response frames. To test for such framing effects, the researchers administered the several question versions to randomly selected students in four large classes at a single public university. The observed differences were then used to adjust mean study hours from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, 1979 (NLSY79), the Higher Education Research Institute’s College Student Survey (HERI), and NSSE surveys to be comparable to the 1961 baseline, Project Talent. (The adjustment reduced the means for NLSY79 and increased them for HERI and NSSE.) While this procedure is by no means conclusive—for example, it assumes that students in the four selected classes at a single university are sufficiently representative of the larger survey populations to provide a fair comparison, and also that framing effects are constant across historical eras—it is reasonable, and the use of adjusted means boosts confidence that distortions due to question wording and different response frames have been reduced, if not decisively eliminated.

The 1961 baseline data are for first-year students (plus perhaps a small number who may have had sophomore standing at the time of the survey), while the later comparisons include other classes. Babcock and Marks assert that because NLSY79 and NSSE data show first-year students study slightly less than seniors, any bias introduced by including the other classes would have the effect of increasing, rather than decreasing, the average study time in the later surveys.

Another set of questions involves the institutions in the different datasets. Recent decades have witnessed the emergence of new postsecondary providers, but this does not explain the change because the 1961 to 2003 comparison is limited to students at institutions represented in both data sets. Only the 1961 to 1981 comparison, involving nationally representative samples of students, did not match institutions. The study also shows that large declines in study time between 1961 and 2003 remain evident when the sample is disaggregated by broad institutional type (doctorate granting, master’s level, baccalaureate liberal arts, and other baccalaureate, identified hereafter as Carnegie groups). The drop in adjusted average study time ranged from nine hours at master’s institutions to 11.6 hours at baccalaureate liberal arts colleges (the group with the highest average study time in each period—
nearly five hours per week above the overall mean in 1961, and about three hours above the mean in 2003).

Using matched sets of institutions raises the question of whether the students at those institutions are sufficiently representative of the US undergraduate population. Babcock and Marks show that selected background characteristics of students at the subset of Project Talent institutions matched to NSSE are very similar to those for the full Project Talent data set, both in the aggregate and when examined within Carnegie groups. They also contrast students at the matched NSSE institutions in 2003 against nationally representative data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), again both in the aggregate and by Carnegie group. For the most part the two populations are similar, though NSSE shows an overrepresentation of women, students whose fathers have a bachelor's degree, and students not working for pay. But they note that because each of these groups tends to report more study time, any bias introduced would increase, rather than decrease, the overall estimate of study time for 2003, and thus reduce the magnitude of the decline from 1961.

The college-going population today is itself considerably different from what it was in 1961—with more women, more students of color, more nontraditional-aged students, and a larger share of high school graduates who continue their education. To what extent do these changes in the composition of the college-going population account for changes in study time? Babcock and Marks show descriptive data that document a consistent decline in study hours across categories of gender, race, and parents’ education. They also employ a statistical technique to decompose the change in study time so as to isolate the amount of the observed change that is attributable to change in the underlying populations (using gender, age, race, and parents’ education to describe those populations). The general conclusion from these analyses was that changes in the student body explain only a trivial amount of the change in study time between 1961 and 1981 or 2003. But the analysis of the intermediate period—1987,
Recent decades have seen escalating criticism of the lecture method, accompanied by new approaches to engage students with learning inside and outside of class.

1988, and 1989 to 2003, 2004, and 2005—yielded somewhat different results. For these data, verbal SAT scores were available and included in the analysis, which found that changes in student composition accounted for nearly one-fifth of the total change in study time. To be sure, that leaves four-fifths unexplained, but it does suggest that some of the change in study time is related to differences in students’ preparation for college.

There is one other important point to make with regard to compositional differences in the student population between 1961 and 2003. More students are now working for pay, and the number of hours worked has risen as well. Comparing the 1961 and 2003 samples, the proportion of full-time students who work increased from about one-quarter to 55 percent. The share working more than twenty hours per week—whom I will call “heavy workers”—jumped from 5 to 17 percent. At the 1961 baseline, heavy workers studied seven hours per week less than those not working, and five and a half hours less than those working up to twenty hours per week. While all groups declined by 2003, the heavy workers started from a lower base and their drop in study hours was half that of the other groups. In a footnote, Babcock and Marks indicate that when hours worked and major were added to the analysis of compositional differences, the change in student population accounts for 18 percent of the drop in study time. Students working long hours and caring for dependents have competing claims on their time, and it is not surprising that an increase in the heavy-work population (21 percent of whom had dependents in 2003–4, according to NPSAS) accounts for an appreciable portion of the decline in study time. This finding raises questions about other characteristics not included in the composition analysis, such as age, hours spent working in the home, and residential versus commuter status—all of which are related to demographic changes in the undergraduate population during the period studied.

A final possible explanation for the change in study time involves the well-documented transformation in the distribution of undergraduate majors (Brint et al. 2005). But as with demographics and Carnegie groups, the descriptive data show a consistent pattern of decline within groups of related majors. And as noted above, a version of the decomposition analysis took major into account, and a large share of the decline remained unexplained.

In their efforts to identify and rule out possible explanations for the observed drop in study time, Babcock and Marks overlook changes in pedagogy. Recent decades have seen escalating criticism of the lecture method, accompanied by new approaches to engage students with learning inside and outside of class. Several of these new approaches can involve significant time commitments apart from “studying” as conventionally understood, but little is known about how students account for such activities when prompted to report on their time use. Consider service learning and various forms of field-based learning, such as co-op or internship programs and other field placements. If students take our questions literally, it’s doubtful that they consider time spent on those activities to qualify as “studying,” “homework,” or “preparing for class,” but the truth is we don’t know. Even NSSE’s parenthetical elaboration, “studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities,” does not explicitly incorporate such activities. In NSSE 2010, 40 percent of first-years and 52 percent of seniors reported at least sometimes participating in service learning, and half of seniors reported having done a practicum, internship, field or co-op experience, or clinical assignment. If students exclude these activities when reporting how much they study, that could explain some of the decline in reported study time. This illustrates a difficulty with making long-term comparisons on how students spend their time when the activities that count as teaching and learning are themselves changing.

What should we make of reduced study time? Who or what is to blame?

While we might quibble over some of the details, Babcock and Marks make a fairly persuasive case that the amount of time that full-time college students devote to their studies on a weekly basis has dropped by about ten hours between 1961 and 2003, and the decline
cannot be fully accounted for by changes in how study time was measured, in technology, in the college-going population, in the mix of college majors, or in the range of higher education providers. So what has changed? As suggested by the “Leisure College, USA” title, the researchers conclude that the decline in study time represents “increased demand for leisure,” which they attribute to two mechanisms. The first of these is student empowerment, largely linked to the wide institutionalization of student evaluations of teaching. The argument goes that institutions cater to students’ needs in a competitive market, and students can demand easier courses by rewarding some faculty and punishing others through their teaching evaluations. While this is hardly a new assertion, little evidence exists to back it up. The researchers also implicate faculty incentives and preferences, referencing Murray Sperber’s (2005) assertion that a “nonaggression pact” exists between students and faculty, in which each party agrees not to demand too much of the other. As Babcock and Marks put it, “we are hard-pressed to name any reliable, noninternal reward that instructors receive for maintaining high standards—and the penalties for doing so are clear” (2010, 5). This line of reasoning is consistent with the FSSE results reported earlier, which show that faculty expectations for study time are not too different from what students actually report. The evidence on incentives for faculty to invest effort in activities other than teaching is stronger than it is for pressure exerted by students through their evaluations. (More on this to follow.)

Second, Babcock and Marks propose that employers may be relying less on grades and more on educational pedigree, that students have recognized and responded to this preference, and that this has reduced achievement orientation in college: “students seem to be allocating more time toward distinguishing themselves from their competitors to get into a good college, but less time distinguishing themselves academically from their college classmates once they get there” (2010, 6; emphasis in the original). But widely expressed concerns with grade inflation suggest that there has been no observable decline in overall performance as measured by grades. Furthermore, this argument seems primarily applicable to students at the most selective institutions. If educational pedigree matters so much to students, we should expect students at less prestigious institutions to put in additional effort in the first year or two so as to improve the prospects of “trading up” through transfer, a pattern that is not evident in the analysis of study time.

A word about “leisure.” In both articles, Babcock and Marks define leisure as time spent neither working for pay nor engaged in academic pursuits (i.e., attending class or studying). This definition misclassifies certain nondiscretionary activities, most significantly work in the home, including dependent care, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Alternate Classifications of Average Time Allocations¹</th>
<th>First–years</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>First–years</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work for pay</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>Non-discretionary²</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Leisure”³</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>Discretionary⁴</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Survey of Student Engagement, combined 2009 and 2010 data. Results are unweighted. Average hours calculated by taking the midpoint from each range given on the survey, and assigning a value of 32 to the “more than 30 hours” category.

¹Limited to full-time students at US institutions who are not taking all classes online.
²Work for pay, dependent care, and commuting.
³Cocurricular activities, relaxing and socializing, dependent care, and commuting.
⁴Cocurricular activities, relaxing and socializing.
time spent commuting to work or school—both activities that consume more time among older students, a subset of the college-going population that has grown considerably since 1961. We can examine the implications of these definitional choices by applying them to NSSE’s time-use questions. NSSE asks students how many hours they spend per week on seven activities: preparing for class, working for pay on campus, working for pay off campus, participating in cocurricular activities, relaxing and socializing, caring for dependents, and commuting to class. NSSE does not ask about time spent in class, nor does it ask about work in the home apart from dependent care. With those caveats, let’s compare the broad definition of leisure to a classification that distinguishes discretionary and nondiscretionary activities other than studying (table 2). Looking at the results for first-years and seniors combined, fully eight hours are reclassified from “leisure” to nondiscretionary activities, resulting in an approximate balance between discretionary and nondiscretionary activities, exclusive of academic commitments. (The differences by class level are interesting, as well, with seniors devoting more time to nondiscretionary activities than to either of the other categories.) This paints a very different picture from the depiction of twenty-five hours a week devoted to leisure. Definitions matter. We can have legitimate concerns about how much time students should be devoting to coursework, but it’s important to acknowledge the full range of students’ nonacademic commitments. “Leisure College” may be provocative, but it mischaracterizes the lived experience of a substantial portion of the college-going population that has grown markedly over the period studied.

The contemporary discourse about declining standards in higher education conveys an image of steady, if not accelerating, erosion. Thus one of the most interesting findings from the Babcock and Marks study is that the bulk of the decline in study time—nearly eight out of ten hours—took place between 1961 and 1981. This is corroborated by their analysis of HERI data between 1987 and 2005 (table 3). Technological change may not account for the large initial drop, but it likely does account for the slight subsequent decline. Whatever happened to studying appears to have happened between 1961 and 1981.

This was a time of profound change in US higher education. The higher education system grew by more than one thousand institutions between 1960 and 1980. Enrollments nearly doubled. Women’s participation increased dramatically: from 1961 to 1981, the share of female high school graduates who enrolled in college grew from 30 to 53 percent while the male participation rate stayed flat at 56 percent (National Center for Education Statistics 2010). The civil rights movement led colleges and universities to expand opportunities for ethnic minority students. By 1981, the last of the baby boomers had graduated from high school, colleges and universities were looking at

Table 3: Summary of Three Study Time Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time frame</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Number of matched institutions</th>
<th>Class levels in the two samples</th>
<th>Change in weekly study time (hours)¹²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961 to 1981</td>
<td>Project Talent &amp; NLSY79</td>
<td>Not applicable²</td>
<td>First-years &amp; all years³</td>
<td>24.43 to 16.86 (–7.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987–89 to 2003–5</td>
<td>HERI</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>On-time seniors</td>
<td>16.61 to 14.88 (–1.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961 to 2003</td>
<td>Project Talent &amp; NSSE</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>First-years &amp; combined first-years and seniors⁴</td>
<td>24.43 to 14.40 (–10.03)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Adjusted for framing differences between different surveys (except HERI).
² Because Project Talent and NLSY79 involve nationally representative samples, the researchers considered it unnecessary to compare identical sets of institutions.
³ Project Talent surveyed 1960 high school graduates in 1961, thus the sample likely includes a small share with sophomore standing.
⁴ The researchers report that first-year students studied less than seniors in NLSY and NSSE, and they conclude that restricting the comparison to first-year students would result in a larger decline in study time.
⁵ See note 3 above.
smaller cohorts of prospective students, and serious doubts were voiced about the viability of many institutions. As institutions were increasingly concerned about maintaining enrollments, the students’ rights movement and the demise of in loco parentis had given students greater voice in campus affairs. And the research enterprise expanded between 1960 and 1980, as federal sponsorship of research and development activity expanded by $1.4 trillion in constant 2000 dollars (Thelin 2004).

At the same time, faculty attitudes and institutional priorities were changing. Between 1975 and 1984, the proportion of faculty at four-year institutions who reported a greater interest in teaching than in research dropped from 70 percent to 63 percent. Faculty agreement with the proposition that teaching effectiveness, not publication, should be the primary criterion for promotion dropped from 70 to 58 percent. And the share who agreed with the statement “In my department, it is very difficult to achieve tenure without publishing” rose from 54 to 69 percent (Boyer 1987). These comparisons use 1975 rather than 1961 as the baseline, so they likely understate the full extent of the change in faculty attitudes and departmental practices between 1961 and 1981. But it is clear that the sharp decline in study time roughly coincided with an increasing emphasis on scholarly productivity in faculty incentives and preferences, as well as increased federal R&D support.

Babcock and Marks attribute nearly all of the drop in study time to students’ “demand for leisure,” but this neglects the full range of factors that may be at work. Some are fairly speculative, others less so. The speculative accounts include: student pressure on faculty to cut back on out-of-class requirements, imposed through end-of-course teaching evaluations (the demand for
leisure argument); diminished employer emphasis on academic performance in hiring decisions; and expansion in the range of out-of-class activities associated with students’ coursework, which students may not include when accounting for their study time. Plausible though they may be, little evidence exists either to support or to refute these accounts.

Two other explanations for the decline in study time, involving both students and faculty, have at least some supporting evidence. The composition of the student body has changed substantially since 1961, with more students working for pay, more hours worked, more students with responsibilities in the home, and more students who commute to school. Adding only the first of these to their statistical analysis, Babcock and Marks found an appreciable increase in the portion of the decline in study time that is attributable to changes in the student population. It seems likely that a more comprehensive analysis would account for still more of the decline. The other explanation involves erosion in the importance of teaching in both the faculty reward structure and faculty preferences, coinciding with expansion of the research enterprise. This is consistent with Sperber’s “nonaggression pact” account, as well as the fact that faculty expectations for study time are relatively close to how much time students actually report.

Between the 1960s and the early 1980s, higher education began to serve a more diverse population of students, with many students having greater work and family commitments. At the same time, faculty interest in teaching declined as colleges and universities increasingly emphasized their role in producing new knowledge through research and scholarship. We began asking less of our students during this period, and their performance fell to meet our expectations. The good news, such as it is, is that the steep decline arrested itself in the early 1980s.

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

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NOTES
1. As the authors acknowledge, a gross measure of “hours spent studying with peers” does not distinguish the different circumstances under which such study may take place. They leave open the possibility that differentiating the nature and organization of group study might reveal some forms to be effective, and others not.
2. This underestimates the national percentage. Using a nationally representative sample of four-year institutions in 2003–4, NPSAS data show 34 percent of undergraduates working more than twenty hours per week.
Seven Lessons Learned from General Education Reform at Saint Mary’s College

JOSEPH M. INCANDELA

Our work on general education has apparently led to the reevaluation and modification of other parts of the curriculum.

AT SAINT MARY’S COLLEGE, a single-gender Catholic institution in northern Indiana with approximately 1,600 students, we have just revised a general education curriculum that had been in place for nearly forty years. The board of trustees unanimously approved the new curriculum in April 2010. In reflecting here on how we reached this point, I will discuss seven key lessons we learned along the way.

1. Do not rush
My primary responsibility as associate dean of faculty, which was made very clear to me when I was named to this position in 2006, was to lead the college’s effort to reform general education. A new president, who had taken office the year before, had made the reformation of general education her top academic priority.

Our general education curriculum was an amalgam of courses in search of some higher, more encompassing identity—which, as a pure distribution model, it could never have. Throughout my time at Saint Mary’s, criticisms of general education were common, and every three or four years, there was a great flurry of activity: some group of faculty would get very exercised by a litany of deficits, enlist the support of like-minded colleagues, and then start working on a successor curriculum; much discussion, many meetings, and a good bit of writing would ensue, always to the same unhappy end—people got busy, arguments arose, the task loomed too large, and things stopped.

I was entirely conscious of that history when I assumed my new responsibilities, and I was convinced that a campus with a history of failure at curricular reform would not abide an especially long process. Nobody with the slightest sense of what had come before could be expected to commit to any open-ended attempt to fashion a new program. The window of opportunity was exceedingly narrow, I thought, and was narrowing further by the day. In about November of that first fall semester (2006), I proposed coming up with three new models to take to the faculty for their feedback. The ad hoc committee on general education (which I chaired) named them, stirringly enough, Model A, Model B, and Model C. They each had a catchy subtitle and several innovative features. But the most important thing they shared was an approach that sought to jazz up the distribution model we already had. When we took these choices to the faculty, the feedback was decidedly mixed, and no clear victor emerged. That was the first of many “what do we do now?” moments. In retrospect, we were probably naive to think we’d get anything other than this result, as these models began and ended in largely incommensurable places. It was hard to weigh or combine them in any meaningful way. Worse still, discussions that even attempted to do so took time, and time was what I was sure we didn’t have.

My best intentions to speed toward a new curriculum before anyone could come up for air long enough to lose interest were frustrated. As the spring semester of the 2006–7 academic year came and went, we faced an uncertain future. So, in near desperation, we purchased plane tickets to Rhode Island, where the...
Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) was hosting its annual Institute on General Education that summer.

2. Avoid attempts to be too clever

One of things that surprised me most about the reform process was that so many faculty maintained their interest in what we were doing for so long. That’s testimony not only to my error in thinking we didn’t have much time, but also to the good people with whom I was working. From the outset, I was convinced that our general education committee should not be constituted as a typical faculty committee. I believed that assigning representation of elected members to a specific cluster of departments or programs would likely balkanize the process from the beginning, virtually ensuring that the pursuit of competing interests would overwhelm the prospects for cooperation in service of some greater good. Accordingly, I worked with the chair of our faculty assembly to create a committee made up (initially) of six faculty members, plus myself. Three of the members were elected by the faculty assembly, and three were appointed by me. (Since I had just recently come into administration from the full-time faculty ranks, I probably enjoyed more trust at that point than many other administrators would have.)

I was both surprised and pleased that the election netted two untenured faculty members, and I went on to appoint an additional untenured member to the committee. Having this core group of faculty who were relatively new to the institution—and, thus, didn’t have firsthand experience of our previous, unsuccessful attempts to reform general education—ended up being a godsend. It meant that we were forced to look seriously at all ideas without those of us who were longer in the tooth summarily dismissing proposals that had been tried years earlier. It also meant that when we encountered additional “what do we do now?” moments, we were less inclined to consider giving up than we might have been if all of us had known the same previous disappointments. Throughout the four years of our work as a committee, failure truly was not an option.

Before we even got started, however, I made a mistake that threatened to derail the whole enterprise. Saint Mary’s has several robust professional programs that, together, account for over one-third of the degrees we award each year. These programs—in education, nursing, social work, business, and communicative disorders—have never been part of general education. That fact, along with the college’s historical identity as a liberal arts institution, had left many faculty in these departments feeling marginalized. And so I thought that if a way could be found to incorporate contributions from these departments into the new general education curriculum, the reform process could perhaps help redress this sense of marginalization.

To avoid creating the impression that this was the primary agenda of any particular member of the committee, I purposely did not appoint anyone from the professional programs. I figured that if a groundswell to include the professional programs came from faculty completely outside of them, the cumulative force of the case would be compelling. Yet, when no one from the professional programs was elected or appointed to the committee, the prevailing sense of marginalization was actually reinforced. I can still remember the phone call from the dean saying that she thought I had “a bit of a problem” on my hands. I could take refuge in my good intentions, but good intentions can be the noble cloak of both incompetence and tyranny, and I had no desire to associate myself with either. My failing, as I later came to see it, was simply trying to be too clever by half. Forever after, my horizon was humbler, as was my own estimation of how successfully I could conduct this process on marionette strings. With the reluctance that comes from wounded pride, I followed my dean’s advice and appointed an excellent faculty member from one of the professional programs who brought a wealth of experience and wisdom to our deliberations that would otherwise have been excluded by my grand plan.

3. Start with the end

At the AAC&U Institute on General Education, five members of our committee had what amounted to a transformative experience that shaped the rest of our work. Most significantly, we encountered the idea of learning outcomes—probably old hat to many, but new to us and to our institution. For us, the notion of learning outcomes provided a possible foundation on which to build as well as a way to structure conversations about what most mattered in the education Saint Mary’s offers.
It gave us, in short, what we never had with Models A, B, and C, namely, a vehicle for achieving commensurability. We could now be talking about the same things, which made agreement more likely, disagreement more productive, and compromise less elusive.

In the fall of 2007, we crafted three primary learning outcomes derived from the college’s mission statement: (1) knowledge acquisition and integration of learning; (2) cognitive and communicative skills; and (3) intercultural competence and social responsibility. This set of outcomes formed the backbone of our effort to reform general education. We worked with both students and faculty to refine the text that accompanied each of the learning outcomes.

The third outcome connected our curriculum in very tangible ways to the mission of our sponsoring congregation, the Sisters of the Holy Cross, and proved to be especially energizing for our campus. It helped us clarify our Catholic identity—a notoriously slippery matter for many Catholic institutions—while also reaffirming values that might otherwise have dissipated entirely, given the diminished presence of the congregation on the faculty.

Adopting this third outcome enabled us to recommit the institution to its heritage, and it fostered the sense that the reformed general education program would be tailored to the distinctive education we offer at St. Mary’s College.

As an ethicist, I came (belatedly) to see in learning outcomes an analogue to old-fashioned Aristotelian teleology. We start with the end, the telos, which governs our actions, makes
progress meaningful, and keeps us on track. Learning outcomes do all of these things. While those of us who went to the AAC&U institute came back very committed to this, our eureka moment did not immediately transfer to everyone we had left behind. I’m sure some wondered what flavor of Kool-Aid they served in Rhode Island. Two things helped here. The first was the arrival in the summer of 2007 of a new academic vice president/dean of the faculty who was committed to the learning-outcomes approach. The second was the patience of our colleagues, both inside and outside of the committee. We just continued to use the language of learning outcomes, demonstrating the benefits it had for our work and for how all of us thought about our teaching. Eventually, I began to hear this language coming out of the mouths of those who had formerly resisted it, and it was being used constructively to speak about general education and about teaching in particular disciplinary contexts.

4. Technology enables transparency and group ownership

We were very fortunate to be undertaking general education reform at a time when technological advances had put at our disposal several helpful tools that were unavailable to previous reform attempts. By providing new ways to collaborate and to inform, these tools enabled greater transparency and lessened anxiety about what the committee was doing behind closed doors.

We used several such tools, including, for example, an online survey that enabled us to gather feedback about the then-current general education program and about the kinds (and levels) of change faculty most desired. We also used clickers, which gave us real-time feedback about wording and various turns of phrase as we developed the learning outcomes. This use of clickers helped build a sense of ownership among faculty and students. Clickers also provided a visual record of support for various elements of the reform effort and, thereby, helped us move forward. A clear depiction of the lack of support for a given proposal generally allowed the majority to proceed free of filibusters for favored causes, while also leaving those with minority viewpoints satisfied that they had been heard.

When we arrived at the final wording of the three primary learning outcomes, assisted by the group editing process described above, we then turned to a wiki to generate and refine the sub-outcomes that attached to particular curricular slots. These sub-outcomes were organically related to their parent outcomes, which, in turn, related directly to the college’s mission statement. We allowed all faculty members to edit all the outcomes. Most tended to work only on those that pertained most particularly to their disciplines (which was not unexpected). But putting everything out there for everyone to view, and potentially to modify, conveyed more clearly than words alone that the general education curriculum truly does “belong” to all faculty members.

Finally, throughout the process, we kept a blog that chronicled our meetings (minutes were posted) and made available other resources, including links to relevant articles, PowerPoint presentations, and handouts from public meetings or lunches at which general education was discussed. Throughout the four years, we rarely heard any criticisms about a lack of transparency.

5. Words matter, but so do pictures

At many steps along the way, we were reminded of the power—and limitations—of words. We learned early on that some faculty placed certain words on their forbidden index of that which cannot be uttered. The postmodernists, for example, never seemed to let pass an opportunity to tell us just how much they objected to any references to the “self” or to anything that connoted a fixed identity, especially since, for them, the latter tended to presuppose the former. Keeping track of minefields in the lexicon and watching where we all collectively stepped helped foster greater linguistic clarity and precision. And by developing the ability to anticipate and avoid tripwires, we were better able to diffuse criticism.

Another lesson I learned about words is how best to speak about a reform process. I noticed that when advocating for reform it was very easy to fall into a rhetorical posture that implies what came before was bad, and what will succeed it (with our time and your support) is, well, good.
that implies what came before was bad, and what will succeed it (with our time and your support) is, well, good. I never said this explicitly, but I'm sure I conveyed it from time to time. Bad message. Many faculty had invested careers in our current program, and we had graduated generations of students whose education was organized according to a distribution model that had numerous evident deficits, wasn’t a program in any meaningful sense, and certainly didn’t exploit what was most distinctive about our institutional identity as a Catholic women’s college in the tradition of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Yet, there they were: great faculty who were excellent teachers, researchers, and creative artists; and accomplished alumnae who were articulate, committed to worthy enterprises, and highly successful in their chosen fields. Once I (re)learned these things—really, I already knew them, having invested twenty years of my own life at the college, mostly teaching
general education courses—I was better able to express what was very good about what we had, while being clearer about what was better about what we were proposing.

Finally, one of the most unexpected lessons about words concerned how quickly people with initials after their names, who have made a career trafficking in precise vocabulary, seemed to leave all this behind when presented with a diagram. Early on, we thought that anything visual was ancillary to the closely reasoned text that we asked our colleagues to consider. We were wrong. Diagrams were the first things that our colleagues looked at and considered. Occasionally, we were surprised by what our diagrams said to some, even when we had thought the written word said the exact opposite or the spoken word carefully qualified. This, too, was a helpful lesson to learn; it encouraged us to think about a different way to make sense of the whole. In so doing, it gave us a quick way to connect with various audiences and explain how we saw the pieces fit together.

6. Parallel tracks help the train keep moving

Four years ago, as I was trying to get myself ready for what we were undertaking, I went through old files left over from past attempts to reform general education at the college. As I read through notes, minutes of meetings, records of faculty discussions, and so on, I was humbled to run across the names of individuals whom I regard as members of Saint Mary's pantheon of legendary faculty—many retired, some still here. This made me even less confident of success, but it also encouraged me to think about what might be different this time around.

One important difference was that earlier attempts did not have clear administrative support. As mentioned previously, general education reform was a priority of our new president from her earliest days on campus. She mentioned it in talks and highlighted it in her strategic plan. Reform efforts that are initiated and led by faculty alone can certainly succeed, but they usually must operate without much of a safety net. Indeed, I’ve come to believe that a truly extraordinary confluence of moment, energy, and individuals is required to sustain faculty-initiated curricular reform. That said, I also want to be clear that, sometimes, the right kind of administrative support is to stand back and let conversations and work proceed, while continuing publicly to acknowledge ongoing efforts and ultimate goals.

The problem with any single-track approach is that when progress is blocked or delayed for any reason, things either end there or get stalled long enough to discourage further efforts. If there are parallel tracks leading to the same goal, however, then even as progress is impeded on one track the overall effort can still move forward on separate tracks. The effect is to compensate for delays or to motivate those sidetracked by delays to find alternate routes, encouraging them to catch up with those who might otherwise leave them behind. I thought it very important, for example, to involve students in our effort and, to the extent possible, get them motivated about general education reform. Several times, I and other members of the committee briefed the student government about general education reform. And, in fact, the student government was the first group on campus to endorse the final proposal. In addition, I or other members of the committee gave presentations along the way to alumnas, donors, members of other divisions at the college, and trustees. By the end, too many people were invested in reform to let the process fail.

Related to this, I thought it important to involve as many faculty as possible by encouraging them to assume leadership roles in the process. At the AAC&U institute, I overheard a group at an adjoining table discussing faculty “design teams.” I happily “borrowed” that idea. Our process included three design teams, one for each of the three primary learning outcomes we had identified. The teams had between eight and fifteen faculty members each and were led by individuals who were not members of the general education committee—though two committee members served on the design teams as well, largely to keep the lines of communication open. This was a way to get lots of different fingerprints on the final result and to foster the sense of shared ownership of what emerged. By the end, about one-third of the full-time faculty had been engaged in a role either on the general education committee or on one of the three design
teams. At some point, it becomes difficult to oppose what you yourself labored to produce. It also makes friendly amendments to other parts of the plan, well, friendlier, due to a sympathetic appreciation of the work and seriousness of effort that went into producing them.

7. Finitude always wins
I’ve heard many plumbers say that “water always wins.” There’s something about liquid abetted by time and pressure that frustrates amateur attempts to contain it. I don’t want to draw too many parallels between general education reform and plumbing (though many came to mind over the past few years), but it’s worthwhile to consider the various inevitable constraints on any curricular reforms—especially at a small institution like Saint Mary’s. That is, it can be a fascinating thought experiment to imagine starting a new college and designing a curriculum from scratch, but most of us are not starting new colleges. Indeed, most of us are already swimming in the same streams we hope to rechannel. This means that there are established departments with tenured faculty (with families and mortgages) invested in particular programs with specific majors requiring certain general education courses as their foundations, and so forth. We don’t start over from scratch. And alongside the human issues, there are fiscal issues that inevitably assert themselves. Even though fiscal resources can be grown or reallocated, they always win. One of my colleagues on the faculty used the term “finitude” to describe all of these kinds of considerations, and that stuck in our collective vocabulary.

When I began this process, I put together a kind of idea map. I put “general education reform” at the center of the page and then, for everything I could think of that would or could be affected by it, I drew spokes extending away from the center. Some of these spokes branched into others, and by the end, I had a pretty robust lattice. As I looked back at it recently, I was pleasantly surprised by how accurate the map turned out to be. But I was also embarrassed by what I had left out. At the outset, I had simply not anticipated several of the factors that could make or break whatever lovely proposals we may have come up with. I’m speaking here about everything that would come under the heading of “implementation.” I mean by this not only staffing and budget questions, but questions as seemingly mundane as whether Banner could track (or be configured to track) student progress in the new curriculum. Ultimately, implementation is another way that finitude wins. Had I to do things over, I would pay more attention to these issues much earlier than I did. I also never anticipated that our work on general education reform could spur similar movements within departments in terms of reforming their majors. But I regard it as a tremendously salutary development that our work on general education has apparently led to the reevaluation and modification of other parts of the curriculum.

It is a bit trite to say that the perfect should not be the enemy of the good, but it is truer in few other contexts than the work of curricular reform. I have often found it necessary to admit publicly that whatever the perceived benefits and innovations being proposed, the fact remains that all of our efforts were the work of finite individuals with finite amounts of time and finite amounts of experience at this sort of thing. I couldn’t, therefore, guarantee that there would not be unforeseen problems. That’s why it was so important to pay careful attention to the governance issues that would attach to the new curriculum and to reassure faculty that no matter what ended up getting approved, there would be specific avenues identified in the very approval process that could be used to amend it, if necessary. Were that assurance not offered, I don’t believe we would have accomplished what we most wanted to do when we started our work, namely, to finish it.

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the author’s name on the subject line.
The humanities are at the heart of knowing about the human condition; they are not a luxury. Anyone who loves contemporary poetry and who knows the work of Audre Lorde will recognize the allusion to her early 1980s essay: “Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives” (1984, 38).

Lorde’s “our” means “women”; mine means “humans,” means all of us. My “poetry” includes music, history, art, philosophy, dance, theater—all the arts and humanities.

The subtitle of this article might have been “or, better thinking through poetry” or even “mind your metaphors.” Poets and poetry mine metaphors, and in doing so they restore our language, which is constantly being stolen from us—muddled as it is by many politicians, by advertising, and by others who want to move us with metaphor but who do not want us to think critically about the implications of their comparisons. Delivering a talk to students at Amherst College, Robert Frost plainly stated how important metaphor is for thinking itself: “We still ask boys in college to think . . . but we seldom tell them what thinking means; we seldom tell them it is just putting this and that
Not a Luxury
together; it is just saying one thing in terms of another. To tell them is to set their feet on the first rung of a ladder the top of which sticks through the sky” (1972, 336). Recent events in academe have made me more aware than ever of how crucial metaphors are for our thinking.

**Minding our metaphors**

In speaking about the effects of the California budget crisis on the state’s university system, Mark Yudof, president of the University of California, declared—on national television, no less—that “many of our, if I can put it this way, businesses are in good shape. We’re doing very well there. Our hospitals are full, our medical business, our medical research, the patient care. So, we have this core problem: Who is going to pay the salary of the English department? We have to have it. Who’s going to pay it in sociology, in the humanities? And that’s where we’re running into trouble” (Yudof 2009). As I was listening to Yudof, I suddenly heard the voice of my late father roaring in my ears: “A PhD in English? Are you insane? You’ll never get a job.” In my mind’s eye flashed the clippings from the *New York Times* that he used to send me, without comment but with red circles drawn around headlines such as, “Yale English PhD Drives Taxicab for Living.”

We fought—over the phone, at holiday dinners. “Law school,” he would yell. “PhD in English. Poetry,” I would yell back. These memories rushed over me when I heard Yudof single out English professors and ask, “who is going to pay the salaries?”

Later, in a letter to the editor of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Yudof sought to clarify his point. But instead, he made matters worse. When I told a television audience that a “core problem” the University of California faces is “who is going to pay the salary of the English department,” my point was that the state’s chronic underfunding of our public-university system has put more pressure on disciplines and departments that cannot rely on outside revenue streams, unlike, say, our hospitals and research laboratories. . . . My reference to English departments . . . was offered only as an example. I previously have made references in this context to a generic “Portuguese department.” I could just as easily have invoked freshman sociology. (Yudof 2010)
In the context of today’s university, Yudof’s remarks are hardly surprising. After all, the same point has been made over and again by many administrators and, indeed, by many faculty members. The prevailing narrative—that humanities curricula, professors, and research cost but do not pay—drives discourses, which drive decisions, which, in turn, create realities. The problem is that there’s a misleading metaphor lurking behind this narrative, a misleading way of “putting this and that together.”

Emily Dickinson declared, “We see—Comparatively” (1998, 580), and she was absolutely correct. Our metaphors frame our thinking; they shape what can be imagined. Yudof’s “how do we pay” begins to frame the humanities as “expensive.” Look up the definition of “luxury” and you find “expensive,” “inessential,” and “desirable but not indispensable.” It has become difficult not only to maintain but, in the first place, to obtain support for research in the humanities, which tends not to be funded by large drug corporations or by the military; support for our pedagogy so that classes are smaller, interactions between student and professor are more intimate, direct, personal; support for our administrative underpinning so that time that could best be spent reading or writing is not spent on photocopying or making PDFs or filling out yet another form documenting our time, our travel, our office supplies.

Rhetoric such as Yudof’s casts the humanities and the social sciences as luxuries, as desirable but not indispensable—in effect, as inessential for the corporatized world of the contemporary American university. Perhaps Yudof does not make the comparison more explicitly because he knows that his way of putting this and that together really does not compute.

In an essay titled “The Humanities Really Do Make a Profit,” which was published in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Robert Watson (2010), professor of English at the University of California at Los Angeles, took issue with Yudof’s televised comments. Watson pointed out that the humanities and the social sciences typically “generate more tuition income than 100 percent of their total expenditure.” Yudof’s letter to the editor of the Chronicle, which made matters worse by expanding his initial declaration to include all humanities and social science fields, was intended as a response to Watson. Yet astonishingly, after characterizing the humanities as expendable luxuries, Yudof confirmed Watson’s assertion that the humanities do, in fact, pay: “I have long made the case that, with undergraduates all paying the same fees, the humanities indeed can be seen as cross-subsidizing science, engineering and similar departments. Because of laboratory needs, the compensation markets which govern faculty salaries in these fields, and other factors, these latter disciplines simply are more expensive to operate” (Yudof 2010). So although he (and many others) uses language to describe the humanities as desirable but expensive, difficult to obtain, and increasingly difficult to maintain—language that describes and defines “luxury”—the humanities clearly are not a luxury. They not only bring in more tuition dollars than they spend, but, to paraphrase Lorde, the humanities form the “quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. [The humanities are] the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.”

The humanities are not in crisis
Yudof and others who seek to describe the present situation use another misleading metaphor that structures our thinking so we cannot think straight, at least not about the state of the humanities. Yudof’s “core problem” is a “crisis.” (Think of the many articles you have seen with “crisis” and “humanities” in the title.) We need to mind our metaphors again. Look in any dictionary, and you will find that a crisis is a turning point, a decisive change. At this point, a simple fact needs to be stated, clearly and unambiguously: the humanities are not in crisis.

Yes, images we never expected to see have been broadcast widely, making it seem that the humanities are in crisis. After all, who ever expected to see crowds of students, professors, and staff brandishing hand-painted signs that read, “save the humanities,” and being surrounded
by helmeted Darth Vader-esque policemen in full riot gear? Visually, these recall images I became accustomed to seeing in my teenage years—the war protests, the throngs throwing tear gas canisters back at police, the students being shot down by the National Guard at Kent State. One sees those “save the humanities” pictures and thinks crisis, turning point. But it is not crisis that led to those protests and those signs, though everyone keeps calling it that.

So that I can demonstrate my point, indulge me in a kind of temporal Jeopardy. See whether you can provide—in the form of questions, of course—the approximate dates of the following four quotations. The first is from a graduate application statement: “The statistics gathered by the MLA in annual surveys . . . are not encouraging for new PhDs seeking teaching positions.” Thank you, MLA, for bursting my bubble of undergraduate idealism and for rendering even more difficult the already monumental task of explaining Why I Want to Go to Graduate School. Why, indeed, in an age of declining enrollments, shrinking budgets, and waning interest in the humanities have I set my sights on an academic career?”

The second quotation is from a president of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS): “To be sure, the past ten or fifteen years have not been a particularly happy time for those of us in the humanities. In the colleges and universities we have seen a movement away from the study of history, philosophy, literature, and foreign languages, disciplines central to our concerns and—we would argue—to the nation’s concerns. We have seen a marked lowering of competence in reading and writing, the tools of our trade. We have seen our PhD graduates unable to find academic jobs and consequently earning a living wherever they can.”

The third is from an internationally renowned historian: “The humanities are attacked everywhere. They are losing ground every day; the host of their enemies is legion and their defenders a mere handful.” The fourth and final quotation is from an American academic and literary critic: “The humanities themselves
have ceased to be humane... [and are] content to become the humble handmaids of science.”

Following are the correct “Jeopardy” answers. “What is 1980?” The applicant is Professor Marilee Lindemann of the University of Maryland, who had more than one job offer when she went on the market in the late 1980s. “What is 1982?” The ACLS president is Robert M. Lumiansky. “What is 1938?” The historian is Gilbert Chinard. “What is 1902?” The literary critic is Irving Babbitt, noted for founding “New Humanism.”

There is actually great hope in the fact that these despairing words were uttered thirty years, seventy years, and more than a century ago. Notwithstanding the worries expressed during each of these previous periods, the humanities are still very much here—as are all the same anxieties. What does this tell us? For one thing, the humanities are not under the pressure of crisis. That way of thinking, allowing “crisis” to frame our sense of things, has had us lurching from one funding shortfall to another. It is as if there have never been funding shortfalls before, as if it is always Groundhog Day for the humanities. The erosion of support for the humanities—and the fear of erosion—as well as the perennial anxiety about the state of the humanities are systemic. Until we acknowledge this fact we will keep lurching from one point to another, unable to recognize the repetition, and continually slouching toward but then away from the problem.

**Public disinvestment**

In the years following World War II, access to quality education became increasingly democratized. Recent studies have found “strong causal ties between US early educational development and economic successes: the United States was far ahead of European rivals in high school graduation rates by 1940 and developed a similar lead over virtually every other country in college graduation rates in the thirty years after World War II. It consolidated this lead during the economic ‘golden age’ of high growth and broadening national prosperity” (Newfield 2010, 611). So what happened? Given that the data show that our economic prosperity has been directly related to broad access to higher education, why is it that we have been witnessing what Christopher Newfield (2010, 611) aptly terms “an aggressive disinvestment in high-quality public universities” that provide that access?

Newfield argues compellingly that the attempted disestablishment of the greatest public education system in the world, the one that has provided the most access to the highest quality education for the most citizens, correlates to the tumult of the 1960s and to responses to it. In the wake of the effective antiwar and civil rights protests, a joke circulated that the powers-that-be vowed, “We will never educate our children this well again.” I now wonder whether the joke bespoke reality. Indeed, in a confidential memorandum to leaders of the US Chamber of Commerce, titled “Attack on the American Free Enterprise System,” Lewis Powell (1971), a Nixon appointee to the Supreme Court, flatly declared that the real threat was not from the “revolutionaries who would destroy the entire system” but from “perfectly respectable elements of society: from the college campus, the pulpit, the media, the intellectual and literary journals, the arts and sciences, and from politicians. In most of these groups the movement against the system is participated in only by minorities. Yet, these often are the most articulate, the most vocal, the most prolific in their writing and speaking.” Powell’s memorandum is widely credited with inspiring the formation of the conservative think-tank system. Newfield concludes that Powell clearly understood “that the university’s educated middle-class cadres were more likely to change the US business system in the short run than were the more visible radicals” (2008, 53). The groups Powell saw as undermining business were those highly skilled and adept as critical thinkers and symbolic analysts.

It is beyond the scope of this article to determine whether Newfield is correct that the systemic assault on the humanities is an effort to contain critical thinking, to divest the university of its foundations for nuanced inquiry that may challenge the powers that be, and to transform higher learning into a machine for producing highly skilled but pacified workers rather than questioning citizens capable of symbolic analysis. But it is certainly worth

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**A strong, vibrant democracy depends upon an environment within which oppositional thinking is not feared but, rather, is used to advance us all**
taking such critiques seriously. These matters are, after all, central to our national security. A strong, vibrant democracy depends upon an environment within which oppositional thinking is not feared but, rather, is used to advance us all. “Not to discover weakness is,” as Emily Dickinson knew, “but the artifice of strength” (1976, 1054).

To return to the lesson about minding our metaphors, it is noteworthy that the metaphors used to describe the system of public education began to change dramatically in the late 1970s and early 1980s. With the “Reagan revolution” we saw the metaphors for all things public shift from “resource,” “investment,” and “enhancement” to “drain.” The “public good” ceased to be described as “commonwealth” and started to be characterized instead as “picking the pockets of private money.”

The technology of self-consciousness
In conclusion, I offer five recommendations for how we in the humanities can best use our most powerful tool: the technology of self-consciousness, of mindfulness.

1. Dispute the myth that the humanities cost but do not pay. We need not accept the metaphors we are given. Most important, we must work to correct the myth that we in the humanities do not pay for ourselves, that the humanities cost but do not pay. This is no simple matter. As Hans Robert Jauss (1970) pointed out, once an error has been received as fact, the “chain of reception” of that error becomes almost impossible to break—regardless of the amount of contrary evidence. In my work on Emily Dickinson, I have repeatedly learned how powerful Jauss’s insight really is. Many believe that Dickinson was a recluse, that she became that way because some mystery man broke her heart, and that this, in turn, inspired her to write her poetry. I and other Dickinson scholars have uncovered many facts that disprove this theory about her life, yet readers in thrall to demure, heartbroken Emily Dickinson simply cannot abide those inconvenient (for them) truths. Breaking the chain of reception that holds that the humanities do not pay will be very hard, and we must be mindful that we are working against a force field of collective delusion in which we ourselves have been complicit. Yet in dispelling the myth, we are teaching how to read a situation differently, how to evaluate evidence, how to synthesize and form a tenable narrative from the evidence at hand.

2. Actively champion the humanities. In one of her most famous poems, Emily Dickinson reflects on the power of literature (1998, 1286):

   There is no Frigate like a Book
   To take us Lands away
   Nor any Coursers like a Page
   Of prancing Poetry—

   This Traverse may the poorest take
   Without offence of Toll—
   How frugal is the Chariot
   That bears the Human Soul.

   There is no frigate, no bus, no plane, no spaceship, no car, no train like a book, like a song, like an operatic voice, like a painting, like a sculpture, like a drama to help us imagine other lands and cultures or to help us cultivate the compassion and empathy that are required for democracy, for practicing equality as a fundamental value. As noted in the New England Journal of Medicine, it was by thinking and working with theories of narrative that Priscilla Wald reached the conclusion that “an analysis of how the conventions of the outbreak narrative shape attitudes toward disease emergence and social transformation can lead to more effective, just, and compassionate responses both to a changing world and to the problems of global health and human welfare” (Chew 2008, 1203). Communicable diseases are indeed a function of social interactions beyond the biological, and Wald (2008) makes a convincing case that narratives of outbreaks have consequences for the health of individuals and of society as a whole.

3. Resist the casualization of our labor. Even as we call attention to the importance and the interconnectedness of the humanities’ contributions to higher education—the critical thinking skills, the rigorous but flexible sense of aesthetics—and even as we insist that the work of the humanities is worthy of financial investment, we must resist the erosion of full-time tenured and tenure-track positions. Indeed, we must resist all attempts to put financial concerns before educational concerns. Yes, in fact, we do generate more dollars and cents than we cost, but we cannot let that be the basis on which we are valued and judged. Our work offers sense and sensibilities that enable us and our students to luxuriate in the everyday, to be attuned to the fact that, after Eve introduced critical inquiry into the world, “never again
would birds’ song be the same” (Frost 1972, 451). Cultivating those sensibilities is vital if we are to relish and fully inhabit our own humanity.

4. Be mindful of the ethical burdens of technology. Humanities workers have always been involved with technology; there have always been machines in our gardens. Accordingly, we must be mindful of the “ethical burdens of technology, especially the technologies that create and disseminate” our work. Technology gathers into itself all the prejudices, biases, preferences, and moral orders associated with its creation. Therefore, technology will “valorize some kinds of knowledge skills and render other kinds invisible” (Bowker and Star 1999, 6). The former will be rewarded by the funding trends of the moment, and we in the humanities must bear the ethical burden that critiques any funding tail wagging a knowledge-worker dog. I will say flat out that the work for which I have obtained the most grant funding is not what I consider to be my most valuable work, though it has been richly rewarded in dollars and cents.

5. Never assume antagonistic relations with either administrators or scientists. I have interviewed or otherwise listened very carefully to administrators, deans, provosts, and presidents—most of whom are scientists. I have been profoundly and repeatedly impressed by the fact that scientists deeply value the humanities, and are quite eloquent in their appreciations. One cosmologist remarked, “the value of the humanities! Without the humanities, there are no humans in our knowledge-making, or at least we are amnesiac about them.” The provost of the University of Maryland, an engineer, speaks eloquently, profoundly, and movingly about how the love of poetry is embedded and ingrained in the culture of his home country, Iran, and about how the study of Persian poetry is neither an option nor a luxury; it is a necessity.

“What I,” in the words of my old friend Robert Frost, have been “pointing out is that unless you are at home in the metaphor, unless you have had your proper poetical education in the metaphor, you are not safe anywhere. Because you are not at ease with figurative values: you don’t know the metaphor in its strength and its weakness. You don’t know how far you may expect to ride it and when it may break down with you. You are not safe in science; you are not safe in history” (1972, 334). Rather than using metaphors derived from business management, we in the humanities ought to describe ourselves as gardeners. We work in fields, and we cultivate—and both activities are vital to the public good.

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

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TO AN EVER-INCREASING EXTENT over the last ten years, my colleagues and I have been hearing the call to measure learning outcomes. We are increasingly aware that we are living in an age of assessment, when bodies external to the university, including legislatures, are eager to see “accurate measurements” of student learning. While perhaps my humanities-inclined liberal arts cohort (within and beyond my particular university) is atypical, most colleagues with whom I have talked dismiss such measurement as an unrewarded add-on without course benefit, and see those who demand it as outsiders to our guild; that is, those who talk a lot about it aren’t “in the trenches” actually teaching. Many regard this conversation about learning outcomes as rhetoric in the negative sense. Further, this “time-waster done for others” comes in a strange and unfamiliar language. The result is often frustration, fear, and even anger.

Although I have been teaching for over a quarter century, I was never trained in, nor truly understood, “outcomes assessment.” I regarded it as a task to be completed for an outside accreditor that had little relation to my real “liberal arts” goals for students. Those goals include teaching critical self-awareness, developing empathetic understanding of others, realizing we exist in and are shaped by our historical context, and in particular, comprehending the disciplinary ways of thinking found in religious studies. Instead, what I believed “they” wanted was some objective measurement of the “name five key figures and three major schools of thought” variety. In fact, that exact question was the first thing I used in a class as an outcome measure. I had no sense that assessment could actually benefit me as a teacher.

Further, assessment always came as an uncompensated addition to my already busy schedule. Or it would be an extra committee assignment, taken on by a colleague who was “taking one for the team.”

Learning about Learning

A Liberal Arts Professor Assesses

Contrary to my prior perception of and experience with assessment work, I have been able to gather information that I actually wanted to know and found valuable.

MY VIEW

Confoundingly, I have been able to gather information that I actually wanted to know and found valuable.

Learning about learning outcomes

I began to look more closely at learning outcomes for two reasons. The first was serendipitous. I had become friends with a member of our teaching center, Romana Hughes, whom I first came to know through my training on the use of our learning management system, eCollege. I came to respect this staff member by observing how hard-working and skilled she was, and I believed she would not ask me to waste my time. Through a couple of group meetings, I later came to know the center’s director, Jeff King, and felt that he, too, was a talented and supportive person with whom I could work. During a lunch, I was informed that eCollege was introducing something called “learning outcomes management,” and that the center staff would like me to work with them as they created a pilot program for our university. My good relationship with them overrode my reservations about “assessing learning outcomes,” so I said yes.

ANDREW O. FORT is professor of religion at Texas Christian University.

Andrew O. Fort

Learning about Learning

A Liberal Arts Professor Assesses

MY VIEW
My second reason for learning about learning outcomes was that I knew we would have to do assessment for the new core curriculum and for our accrediting body. So it was not only a good idea in theory to know what our students are actually learning, it was also a practical necessity. As a full professor without the demands many others had to meet for promotion or tenure, I thought I could afford to be a good university citizen, doing something that took time and energy for little or no reward.

The next step was to decide which course to focus on, and this turned out to be easy. Our core curriculum requires all students to take one course in which they “will demonstrate a critical understanding of the role of religion in society, culture, and individual life,” and all faculty in the religion department teach at least one course per semester that meets this core requirement. Each of these courses must address one or both of the following learning outcomes:

• Students will demonstrate familiarity with one or more disciplinary approaches to the study of religion.
• Students will demonstrate knowledge of one or more major religious traditions through the study of some foundational texts, figures, individuals, ideas, or practices.

My own introductory course, Understanding Religion: Worldviews and Religions, takes up both of these outcomes.

I then began meeting with the staff of the teaching center. The director bought the books assigned for my course (which impressed me!), and we began discussing how well my personal goals for the course actually aligned with the university’s requirement, and how effectively
my course assignments measured students’ achievement of the outcomes. I reviewed each assignment in my course to determine which outcome it addressed and planned to measure the corresponding student learning over the course of the semester. Through this process, which I had never before attempted, I gained greater clarity about how course assignments fit with an outcome and how to measure the success of each student in meeting the outcome.

Although I already had a good understanding of my goals for the course, this review helped me more clearly recognize my true agendas and priorities. For example, it is even clearer to me now that my primary emphasis early in the course is on method (understanding various approaches to the study of religion), and that my emphasis shifts to content (the “data” of religious traditions in historical context) as the semester progresses. One must balance these, of course; a professor must always include some of both, and each enhances the other. I saw, for example, that while I used both method and data to demonstrate that religious beliefs and practices are socioculturally conditioned and historically contingent, I did not explicitly measure students’ awareness of this (and their own) conditioning; instead, I relied on comments arising from class discussion and various assignments to indicate whether students were reflecting on this contingency.

The next step was to develop a rubric—a term unfamiliar to me from prior academic training—that I could use to identify and measure students’ achievement of the expected learning outcomes enumerated above. By trial and error and through discussion with the teaching center staff, I found that a simple three-part rubric was sufficient for measuring progress on both outcomes (in a nutshell: got it well, got it sufficiently, didn’t get it). While we are currently working to expand and clarify the rubric further, I want to affirm that even a relatively brief rubric makes sufficient distinctions among students, especially in the case of short journal responses, and gets one out of thinking in terms of formal grades only. A grade, particularly on a paper or major critical essay, is really a summary of such various elements as form and grammar, clarity of focus or organization, utilization of course material, and critical reflection and personal insight. Learning outcomes assessment is far more focused.

### Lessons Learned from the Pilot Program in Learning Outcomes Training

As described in this article, the author’s rapprochement with outcomes assessment came about through his involvement in a pilot program in learning outcomes training that was administered by the Koehler Center for Teaching Excellence at Texas Christian University. Jeff King, director of the Koehler Center, has compiled the following list of lessons learned from the pilot program.

1. Help faculty divorce learning outcomes assessment from grading assignments or even from determining a course grade. Understanding this key difference can lead to “aha moments” that help faculty accept learning outcomes assessment as a worthy enterprise.

2. Allow faculty to work at their own pace and to select what they want to measure in a baby-steps process.

3. Provide guidance and direction in building rubrics, but don’t “over-teach.” Faculty realize on their own when trying to use a poorly constructed rubric that they haven’t accurately characterized the differences among levels of achievement. Learning to write good rubrics results in instructional strategy improvement in multiple ways. Don’t risk losing that, especially since adjusting rubrics as a “lesson learned” for the next time the class is taught is in itself extraordinarily valuable.

4. It takes time. We thought four training sessions about learning outcomes could do it. We were dead wrong. We’ve since adjusted our training to build in the one-on-one debriefing sessions about the rubrics that faculty submit. Those colleague-to-colleague conversations are pure gold; the learning-by-doing process and the trust-building engagement pay huge dividends.

5. Design a useful end-of-term report. Our report includes the data summary for outcomes achievement, but perhaps the most important components are “lessons learned” and “action steps.” In those segments, faculty describe where/how things could be better. Often these realizations are about improving rubrics, adjusting assignments (even—gasp!—eliminating them), or assessing differently. “Action steps” define what the professor will do differently the next time the course is taught, and faculty are usually eager to see whether the changes result in higher student achievement of outcomes.

Lessons Learned from the Pilot Program in Learning Outcomes Training
Buy-in
By this point, I was beginning to buy into the value of measuring outcomes. But then a serious and crucial question arose: when does a student demonstrate sufficient understanding to say that a course outcome has truly been achieved?

Liberal education goals are notoriously abstract and hard to measure, yet they are the aims that draw many professors into teaching. If the goals are sufficiently ambitious, they certainly can’t be fully accomplished in a course, semester, or even a college career. Since the achievement of outcomes that professors deem worthy of a lifetime commitment is inevitably partial and ongoing, calls for certain kinds of concrete, quantitative, or one-time assessments of them tend to breed cynicism about the adequacy of such measures. Yet if the outcome is too trivial—such as the memorization of names and schools of thought—then its achievement is not what we got into teaching for, and its assessment breeds serious skepticism about the value of the exercise. Further, preparing the measures takes time and often requires training; if the learning outcomes do not truly reflect what a teacher values and wants to measure, then the effort leads to frustration and scorn. Finally, as compared with numbers of publications and high scores on student evaluations, faculty work on learning outcomes assessment is not typically rewarded.

So, as we worked, questions percolated: What should one do when the significant time and effort invested in “deep” teaching and learning yields little or no extrinsic reward? What is a realistic goal for a semester? The answers obviously depend on the discipline and course level, and there is a learning curve for each professor (and for those who guide the program). Realism about what is possible should always be in the foreground.

More specifically, for achieving the outcomes listed above over an entire course, it is obviously not sufficient to measure a student’s success in a few word identifications or online discussion threads. But how about a single major essay on a test? And does one have to ask a particular question at some point in the semester and in a form that allows students to expound sufficiently to assess them by that question alone? If not, how do we measure their cumulative demonstration of understanding? One answer is to choose four or five measures, give each one a percentage, and total up the numbers at the end of the semester. One can then compare each student’s success with other times measured and the overall success of each measure.

Another possibility is to design an assignment that will unquestionably and effectively reveal the extent of students’ grasp of the outcome. I unwittingly did this when, finding myself with an extra class period due to missing a conference, I assigned a free-writing essay asking students to describe their own religion or worldview using the phenomenological approach found in many introductory religion texts. In my case, the specific model was that found in Ninian Smart’s Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs (2000), which uses a prototype with six aspects or “dimensions,” including experience, myth, ritual, doctrine, ethics, and society. In this exercise, most students described their “home” Christian denomination using these dimensions. Yet many reported understanding their tradition in a new way through these categories, and some described religion competitors or substitutes like humanistic psychology, nationalism, or scientifically influenced skepticism with this model. Most importantly for assessment purposes, they demonstrated their basic comprehension of a disciplinary approach to the study of religion. Many also showed they understood a definition of religion that is broader and more inclusive than simply “belief in god(s).” This exercise thus became the “gold standard” for revealing student success at understanding a core outcome and proved valuable enough to be added to my course in the future.

My thoughts about the value of measuring outcomes have changed over time, but there has been no single “conversion moment.” Incrementally and cumulatively, I have begun truly to see the point of focusing on student learning, and that doing so has improved my teaching and my students’ learning. Contrary to my prior perception of and experience with assessment work, I have been able to gather information that I actually wanted to know.
and found valuable. I have been able to work at my own pace and with goals I set myself, instead of being asked to add or alter some outcomes to fit someone else’s purpose. I became convinced that the staff of the teaching center wanted to support and facilitate what I was already doing.

I have never lost my awareness of the balance between time invested and benefit achieved. I have attended closely to the benefits, both intrinsic (more effective teaching) and extrinsic (university reward via stipend, credit on annual report for merit raise, reduction of other duties, etc.). As indicated above, I have found that my teaching profited from a refinement of my goals and priorities, and from greater clarity in how course assignments fit with an expected outcome. Because I also have gotten enormous support from the teaching center (and a small stipend), I would certainly say the benefits have outweighed the costs.

I think that positive balance will continue for at least two reasons. First, the workload becomes lighter and less demanding as one becomes more familiar with it. Further, what one learns in one course, such as how to build rubrics and how to define outcomes, is transferrable to other courses. Second, assessment work can provide useful data and models for various required reviews at the departmental, programmatic, or institutional levels. So assessment may save time and labor down the road. Familiarity tends to lessen the time commitment, and ongoing refinement provides opportunities to “close the loop.”

Recommendations
As far as recommendations for other liberal arts professors, I believe it’s essential to be realistic about the time and financial resources available. Start well in advance of any deadline, begin with “baby steps” and plenty of support, allow time for trust building, and to the extent possible, clearly identify any rewards (time or money). See whether your assessment work can be integrated with other mandatory reviews.

And remind your colleagues that assessment work gets easier over time and is transferrable to other courses.

Administrators especially need to realize that assessment requires a way of thinking for which the vast majority of professors have not been prepared by their academic training. It might, therefore, be helpful to provide workshops so they can learn the ropes. Finally, it cannot be said too often: if an administration wants faculty buy-in, then show that you value assessment.

Provide support or rewards for undertaking it: reduce other duties (committee work, teaching load), offer summer training or compensation, provide stipends, and give assessment work status in the annual report as well as in the tenure or promotion review process.

When I sit in a faculty meeting with my committed and hardworking colleagues, I still reflect on how to persuade others that the effort is worth it without university support and the level of assistance the teaching center has given me. I strongly believe that faculty members need a clear reward structure for assessment work. If that support is forthcoming, then outcomes assessment is work well worth doing.

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REFERENCE
**FALL 2010, VOL. 96, NO. 4**

**Integrative Learning at Home and Abroad**

An in-depth look at integrative learning, including its relation to interdisciplinary studies, its implications for faculty development, and its role in the sweeping changes to higher education in Hong Kong. Additional topics include Project Kaleidoscope’s role in fostering innovation in STEM pedagogy and faculty development, often-overlooked classroom variables that affect the quality of teaching and learning, the relationship between computer science and liberal education outcomes, students’ understanding of liberal education, and three-year degree proposals.

**Articles Include:**

- Educating for a Complex World: Integrative Learning and Interdisciplinary Studies  
  *By William H. Newell*

- Project Kaleidoscope 2.0: Leadership for Twenty-First-Century STEM Education  
  *By Susan Elrod*

- How Teachers Need to Deal with the Seen, the Unseen, the Improbable, and the Nearly Imponderable  
  *By Marshall Gregory*

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**SPRING 2010, VOL. 96, NO. 2**

**Liberal Education and Military Leadership**

Articles by educational leaders at West Point, the Air Force Academy, and the Naval Academy explore how and why these institutions continue to prioritize liberal education even as they reshape their curricula to meet changing demands of military service in the twenty-first century. The issue also presents new research on living-learning programs, strategies for strengthening higher education in tough economic times, and a case for making visual literacy a central component of a contemporary liberal education.

**Articles Include:**

- The Transformation of West Point as a Liberal Arts College  
  *By Bruce Keith*

- Commitment to Liberal Education at the United States Air Force Academy  
  *By Rolf C. Enger, Steven K. Jones, and Dana H. Born*

- Educating Warriors: Globally Engaged and Culturally Aware  
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