Quality, Equity, Democracy: Key Aspirations for Liberal Learning

Anchoring Democracy: The Civic Imperative
Achieving Equity through Applied Liberal Education
Ensuring High-Quality Learning for All
Incorporating Campus-Based Cultural Resources
Engaged Learning across the Curriculum
Preparing for Disruption
The very rhetoric now used to promote liberal education among students is leading predictably to a corruption of the values traditionally held to be fundamental to liberal education.

Miguel Martinez-Saenz
The Leap Challenge

Quality, Equity, Democracy: Key Aspirations for Liberal Learning

The renewal of higher learning must begin with the reestablishment of its civic mission—a mission not limited to civic engagement, but embedded within the essential aim of liberal education: namely, the development of independent and critical thinkers.

—Richard Guarasci
From 1818 R Street NW

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Bridging the Divides at the Heart of Democracy

At the opening plenary of AAC&U’s 2018 annual meeting, “Can Higher Education Recapture the Elusive American Dream?” I had the privilege of facilitating a panel discussion entitled “Identity Matters: Realizing the American Dream.” The panelists, Linda Martín Alcoff, professor of philosophy at Hunter College–City University of New York; Naomi M. Barry-Pérez, director of civil rights for the US Department of Labor; Tamara Draut, vice president for policy and research at the public policy organization Demos; and Wes Moore, CEO of the poverty-fighting organization the Robin Hood Foundation, brilliantly wove their personal narratives into their insights on higher education’s role in advancing the American Dream.

The panelists’ responses to my questions reflected several intersecting themes—the profound impact of the disinvestment in public higher education in the United States, despite the fact that education remains the most powerful catalyst for social mobility; the decline of economic diversity among students at the country’s top public institutions, fueled in part by the pursuit of rankings in *US News and World Report*; and the ways in which the transition away from the notion of higher education as a public good toward its being considered a private commodity has led to the decoupling of higher education from the American Dream. Underlying each comment was a concern for the function of colleges and universities as democratic institutions, alongside a recognition of the need to identify and overcome the institutional barriers that prevent offering the type of education that best serves the needs of all students.

Yet, like many successful panels, this one was not free from dissent among participants. Professor Alcoff questioned the construct of the American Dream and its false implication that with hard work, anyone can achieve success and gain upward economic mobility. This ideal, she maintained, fails to account for a pervasive institutional order that guarantees the success of some only by ensuring the failure of others. It is a “system of reality” highlighted by James Baldwin in his famous debate with William F. Buckley in 1965, held in the Cambridge Union at Cambridge University, on the notion that “the American Dream is at the expense of the American Negro.” Baldwin revealed to his audience: “It comes as a great shock around the age of 5, 6 or 7 to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. . . . It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and identity has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you.”

More than five decades later, the debate over whether the American Dream is available to some only at the expense of others rages on. As in the civil rights movement, the conversations have traversed beyond the academy onto the streets. Spurred by the Black Lives Matter movement in response to police killings of black youth and inspired by professional football player and social
By working together, institutions of higher education can lead the way in creating a society in which the American Dream is a reality for all students and their families.

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For many, 2017 was a year of taking stock, marked by reevaluation of longstanding assumptions and reassessment of deeply held priorities. Here at AAC&U, any personal contemplation along these lines took place, fittingly, alongside an organizational process designed to surface our members’ current needs and goals and align the work of our staff accordingly. The aim of this year of listening and reflection was to create a new strategic plan: the expression of our goals and hopes for AAC&U and its members—and, by extension, for the communities, country, and world we inhabit—over the next five years.

AAC&U’s 2018–22 Strategic Plan, We ASPIRE: Advancing Student Performance through Integration, Research, and Excellence, was released this past January. Described by AAC&U President Lynn Pasquerella in this issue of Liberal Education, it is at once a reaffirmation and a renewal, extending AAC&U’s longstanding commitments and infusing those obligations with new energy drawn from contemporary contexts. As social and technological forces threaten to ossify our country’s echo chambers, we are reasserting higher education’s critical role in promoting exploration of the unfamiliar. As new flares of animosity illuminate imposing divides, we are promoting healing and collaboration across racial, religious, and political differences. As social inequality seems increasingly acute, we are insisting on opportunity for all. And as the national discourse demands education narrowly tailored for employment, we are elevating education that is broadly conceived in the interest of perfecting our flawed and unfinished democracy.

Importantly, we are asserting the interconnectedness of the different elements of AAC&U’s mission “to advance the vitality and public standing of liberal education by making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in undergraduate education in service to democracy.” Here, quality and equity are equally critical to higher education, inseparable from each other and from the goal of educating for democracy. In this issue’s featured topic section, Elsa Núñez, Lenore Rodicio, and Richard Guarasci clarify and illustrate how these elements, each inevitably leading to the others, are vital to the educational and societal missions of their three distinctive institutions.

Sometimes taking stock reveals unexplored ideas, startling in their unfamiliarity, demanding a complete break from the past. Sometimes it illuminates truths we have long held dear, providing sustenance on long and uncertain journeys. In other cases, it brings nuance to the familiar, allowing for deeper understanding of the circumstances that surround us and of our own agency within and against apparent boundaries. The ability to take stock—to appreciate nuance and understand reality, but find ways of challenging circumstance—is among the critical outcomes of a liberal education, and is also an essential practice across the higher education landscape and at every institution. We invite you to join us in realizing the strategic goals developed during the past year of listening and reflection. We hope you see yourselves and your students reflected in them.—KATHRYN PELTIER CAMPBELL

AAC&U invites manuscripts that promote liberal learning in a broad sense. For writers’ guidelines and other communications, see www.aacu.org/liberaleducation or contact the editor at campbell@aacu.org. Liberal Education is indexed in the fall issue and is available on microfilm from NA Publishing, Inc.

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AAC&U Launches the VALUE Institute
In November 2017, AAC&U and Indiana University’s Center for Postsecondary Research (IU CPR) launched the VALUE Institute, a comprehensive resource for student learning assessment that will enable institutions to leverage learning outcomes evidence to improve student success. VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) is a rubric-based, campus-focused approach to direct assessment of student learning developed by AAC&U. The institute draws on this approach to provide actionable information—including validation of learning useful for accreditation—and to support capacity building for faculty, institutions, and policy makers. In December 2017, AAC&U announced that it had received a $1.7 million grant from Lumina Foundation to support the creation of the institute. For more information, visit http://valueinstituteassessment.org.

New Project on STEM Education Reform
AAC&U has received $4.8 million from the National Science Foundation to implement a new interdisciplinary approach to STEM higher education reform, as announced in December 2017. AAC&U’s Project Kaleidoscope will lead a five-year-long professional development experience for disciplinary STEM faculty and STEM education researchers to develop a common way of recognizing, identifying, and documenting practice and research linked to broadening participation of talented low-income students. “This work represents a unique opportunity for aligning education research and evaluation with proven undergraduate STEM teaching practices that contribute to diversifying the STEM disciplines,” said AAC&U President Lynn Pasquerella. For more information about Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL), visit www.aacu.org/pkal.

New Publication: A Vision for Equity
Presenting findings from a three-year project on Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence led by AAC&U in partnership with the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California, A Vision for Equity shares lessons learned about addressing equity gaps at thirteen participating campuses. The book details evidence-based interventions focused on improving student success and includes practical examples, models, and resources for identifying and addressing disparities in student outcomes. The project and publication were funded by Strada Education Network and Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates. To learn more, visit https://www.aacu.org/publications.

Upcoming Meetings
- June 5–8, 2018
  Institute on General Education and Assessment
  Salt Lake City, Utah
- June 19–22, 2018
  Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success
  Salt Lake City, Utah
- July 10–15, 2018
- July 17–22, 2018
  PKAL STEM Leadership Institutes
  Adamstown, Maryland
- July 17–20, 2018
  Institute on Integrative Learning and Signature Work
  Boston, Massachusetts
- October 11–13, 2018
  Global Engagement and Spaces of Practice
  Seattle, Washington
Preparing students for work, citizenship, and life in local, national, and global contexts requires connecting the education we offer students to broader societal issues in ways that inspire them to lead change in a society still plagued by profound inequities.

Coming on the heels of a United Nations report detailing the rise of poverty in the United States, the 2018 gathering, “Can Higher Education Recapture the Elusive American Dream?,” addressed the leadership role higher education must play in ensuring that all students have access to the dream. Despite decades-long research focusing on increasing economic segregation in America, the statistics revealed by the report proved startling: Forty million Americans live in poverty—nearly half in deep poverty—with a disproportionate number of women and people of color living in impoverished circumstances. At 18 percent, the United States now has the highest child poverty rate among the six richest countries in the world. These growing economic disparities led to the finding that “the American Dream is rapidly becoming the American Illusion, as the U.S. now has the lowest rate of social mobility of any of the rich countries.” 1

Democracy cannot flourish in a nation divided into haves and have nots, and education plays a critical role in improving social mobility, carrying the potential to undermine the perpetuation of intergenerational inequality. For this reason, providing educational opportunities for everyone—not just the privileged—is essential for our nation’s economy, and more importantly, for our democracy. Nevertheless, access alone is not sufficient. If we are to make strides toward an equity-minded approach to higher education, we need to reject, once and for all, a deficit perspective that focuses on what students are missing, and instead offer evidence-based interventions that target cognitive, noncognitive, and psychosocial factors showcasing students’ assets. 2 These strategies must span the curricular

LYNN PASQUERELLA is president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Portions of this article are adapted from AAC&U’s 2018–22 Strategic Plan, We ASPIRE: Advancing Student Performance through Integration, Research, and Excellence, available online at www.aacu.org.
and cocurricular and extend throughout the college experience.

Guided by its mission, over the next five years, AAC&U will strive to destabilize the reproduction of social inequality in the academy and foster success for every student, across all types of institutions. Together, we will

1. champion faculty-engaged, evidence-based, sustainable models and strategies for promoting quality in undergraduate education;
2. advance equity across higher education in service to academic excellence and social justice;
3. lead institutions and communities in articulating and demonstrating the value of liberal education for work, life, global citizenship, and democracy; and
4. catalyze reform in higher education to emphasize discovery and innovation as fundamental aspects of a liberal education.
In doing so, AAC&U will focus its efforts to advance these strategic objectives through three cross-cutting areas of work:

- **Building Evidence** that supports the development of best practices within the higher education community, promotes faculty-led assessment of student learning, and demonstrates the value of AAC&U’s work
- **Expanding Capacity** by enhancing faculty and leadership development, identifying and bringing effective practices to scale, and implementing educational reforms that further the goals of AAC&U and its members
- **Accelerating Advocacy and Outreach** by providing tools and resources that help faculty, academic and student affairs leaders, provosts, and presidents champion AAC&U’s mission and communicate broadly the value of an equitable, high-quality liberal education

Each of these goals and cross-cutting areas is grounded in AAC&U’s deep and abiding commitment to Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP). Since its inception in 2005, LEAP’s public advocacy and campus action initiatives have promoted the importance of a liberal education for students and for a nation dependent on economic innovation and democratic strength. Responding to contemporary demands for more college-educated workers and more engaged citizens, LEAP highlights a set of essential learning outcomes that all students should achieve in college.

Looking ahead, the next phase of LEAP will provide leadership and guidance to institutions of higher education regarding evidence-based models and strategies that show promise for meeting key student success challenges while also making certain that such approaches are coupled with, and include, an enduring emphasis on equity and quality. These efforts will embrace and develop faculty and administrative competencies to engage in processes of evidence development and creation regarding emergent practices that specifically address student success, quality in learning, and equity.

Closely aligned with the next generation of LEAP is an expansion of the scope of AAC&U’s work on guided pathways for general education and majors (GEMs Pathways). Particular attention will be paid to supporting student transitions from two-year to four-year institutions, applying high-impact practices in varied learning environments, and building capacity to support the success of every student, including nontraditional-aged students, incarcerated students, students of color, and students of varying socioeconomic status, alongside others who have been marginalized.

Founded on the principles and guidelines of equity, proficiency, agency and self-direction, integrative learning and problem-based inquiry, transparency, and assessment, AAC&U’s emerging pathways initiatives will promote a more intentional, integrated, and inquiry-centered undergraduate experience.

AAC&U’s intensified programming to support integrative learning will include scaling up existing models for stimulating a diverse and competitively trained STEM workforce. Indeed, responses to unscripted global problems, often driven by technological advancements in science, will require new levels of integration across disciplines. Using the STEM faculty professional development models created through Teaching to Increase Diversity and Equity in STEM (TIDES), AAC&U will empower STEM faculty to adopt culturally responsive pedagogies and sustain the necessary changes in practice required for relevant and inclusive STEM teaching. Additionally, by incorporating the use of its STEM Central online platform into dissemination efforts, AAC&U will provide STEM communities of practice with databases of resources focused on improving undergraduate STEM education through a shared knowledge, understanding, and appreciation for the evidence-based undergraduate teaching strategies that can address the national quest for global preeminence in science and technology, established following World War II.

**The future of work**

At the same time, AAC&U will redouble its efforts to demonstrate a false dichotomy between vocational, or preprofessional, and liberal education. Despite the dominant narrative that one’s undergraduate major is all that matters and that only some majors will prepare students for success in the workplace, the evidence from AAC&U’s own surveys of employers suggests that this is simply not the case. For instance, data from AAC&U’s 2015 survey of employers indicate that more than 90 percent of employers agree that a graduate’s “demonstrated capacity
to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than his or her undergraduate major." Such skills can be developed in a wide variety of chosen disciplines if the courses are well-designed and if they are integrated within robust, problem-based general education programs. Recognizing and communicating these data is critical at a time when the Washington Post has listed higher education as being on 2017’s “Out List,” replacing it with “hire education” on 2018’s “In List.”

The sentiments underpinning the prediction in the Post capture many of the elements reflected in the proposal by the chair of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Congresswoman Virginia Foxx, on the Higher Education Reauthorization Act. Entitled Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER), the plan calls for an emphasis on apprenticeship models, competency-based programs, and industry-led earn-and-learn initiatives spurred by deregulation that would allow increased outsourcing to non-college providers. Its aim is to partially address widespread concerns that education is too expensive, too difficult to access, and doesn’t teach people twenty-first-century skills. But the risk is that in the steps taken to promote accountability and immediate economic opportunity, long-term equity goals will be sacrificed.

Narrow career and technical training may prepare students for their first jobs, but our changing economy requires graduates who have broad-based skills that are transferable across jobs, including the jobs of the future that have not yet been invented. Therefore, AAC&U will continue to survey employers and other community members regarding the future of work and the knowledge, skills, and abilities that higher education graduates need to strengthen the economy and civic life. By encouraging members to engage with employers, program advisory groups, and other community partners to ensure that students have an opportunity to learn through internships, job shadowing, project creation and implementation, and other high-impact practices that deepen and integrate learning, AAC&U will help demonstrate the value of higher education in a healthy society. This work will address common differences in the language that employers, community groups, and educators use to describe desired skills and abilities and articulate the worth of liberal education as the foundation for graduates’ capacities to translate their knowledge and abilities into new and emerging jobs and situations, promoting lifelong growth and progress.

A new VALUE proposition
AAC&U takes seriously the public mandate to prepare students for success in all aspects of their lives, including work. Therefore, discussions about skills versus content, the meaningfulness and usefulness of the pragmatic liberal arts, the primary purpose of education as fostering lifelong learning, and the need to provide our students with opportunities to reflect on why they are being asked to do the work required of them, so they are able to tell a story about how those experiences are transferable, must be placed in conversation with discussions about how we assess students, train and reward future faculty, and demonstrate quality.

One of the most exciting initiatives detailed in We ASPIRE involves AAC&U’s partnership with Indiana University’s Center for Postsecondary Research, and our collaboration with the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association through the Multi-State Collaborative, to expand the scope and scale of our work on Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE). The VALUE Institute, representing an integrated system for safeguarding quality and equity in student learning, advances assessment based on the work students do through the curriculum and cocurriculum rather than on isolated standardized tests. VALUE responds to the need for direct evidence by assessing the quality of learning across skills and abilities, seeking to demonstrate student achievement of learning outcomes necessary for success in school, employment, and life; to empower faculty to assess student learning based on broadly shared expectations for quality; and to produce actionable evidence to improve teaching and enhance student success.

AAC&U takes seriously the public mandate to prepare students for success in all aspects of their lives, including work

Campuses as politically contested spaces
AAC&U’s new strategic plan was developed with a keen awareness of the ways in which higher education has shifted in the minds of many from being viewed as a public good to being a private commodity. Yet, beyond skepticism regarding the economic value of higher education, there has been a different type of attack on colleges and universities by those who have
come to reject what they regard as a stronghold of leftist, politically correct intellectuals perpetuating a liberal bias. Critics have attributed a new wave of student activism to faculty brainwashing in service to a progressive ideal that promotes civic engagement and globalization while tearing apart the fabric of American society.

The clash of perspectives over social values and the growing divide in the United States received heightened visibility on August 11, 2017, when hundreds of torch-bearing white supremacists descended upon the campus of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, alternately chanting “white lives matter, you will not replace us” and “Jews will not replace us.” The siege was a prelude to a “Unite the Right” rally held the following day at Emancipation Park, demonstrating solidarity in opposition to the removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. A group of counterprotesters had mobilized in anticipation, and amidst violent clashes, a white supremacist drove his car into a crowd of those gathered to oppose bigotry and hate, killing thirty-two-year-old Heather Heyer.

Though many Americans were surprised by these overt demonstrations of white supremacist ideologies in the public square, others pointed to a new permission structure that has normalized racist extremism. The year was already fraught with controversies over freedom of expression on campuses, as college and university leaders attempted to steer a course between condemning hate speech and promoting the free exchange of ideas—the very heart of the educational enterprise—while protecting the well-being of everyone in the community. Yet, that bleak night in Charlottesville highlighted for everyone the true extent to which campuses have come to serve as politically contested spaces.

In addition to a highly publicized Pew Research poll indicating a dramatic increase over a two-year period in the number of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents who believe that colleges and universities have a negative impact on the country, a 2017 annual University of California–Los Angeles Higher Education Research Survey found that first-year college students are more politically polarized than they have been in more than half a century. With 35.5 percent identifying as liberal or far left and 22.2 percent as conservative or far right, the increasing ideological identification among first-year college students reflects growing partisan divides. Individuals at either end of this widening political expanse not only disagree about how to respond to matters of racial and social injustice, but on whether inequalities exist in the first place. There is cause for concern, especially given the deleterious effect of partisanship and political polarization on state funding for higher education.

Nevertheless, there is also reason for optimism. Among those entering college, “68.1 percent of conservative students, 82 percent of non-partisan students, and 86.6 percent of liberal students view themselves as tolerant of other people’s beliefs.” This offers the opportunity for higher education to lead the way in fostering dialogue across differences, while simultaneously reaffirming the role that liberal education plays in discerning the truth. The Association of American Colleges and Universities and its members are committed to doing just that.

**Fostering dialogue across differences**

At the time of the Charlottesville tragedy, AAC&U had already established a goal of creating 150 centers for Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) across the country. Within a week, AAC&U, in partnership with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Newman’s Own Foundation, announced that it had selected ten colleges and universities as funding recipients to serve as models for empowering campus and community stakeholders in uprooting the conscious and unconscious biases that have triggered racial violence and tension in American society. Part of a national, community-based process to engage citizens in racial healing and mobilize efforts to address current inequities grounded in notions of a racial hierarchy, TRHT seeks to transform collective community narratives and broaden the understanding that Americans have of their diverse experiences.

Across the country, the presence of the Black Lives Matter movement in our communities and on our campuses has raised awareness of racial injustice, unveiling the ways in which institutionalized racism in the academy
inclusion at colleges and universities was rapidly expanded and amplified just a week into President Trump’s term, when an executive order was issued placing a travel ban to the United States on citizens from seven predominantly Muslim countries. Students and scholars were stranded overseas before a federal judge in Washington State successfully challenged the order, citing potential harm to public higher education. Recognizing the increasing importance of questions of religious identity and diversity on the national and global stage, and the underdevelopment of interfaith cooperation as a learning goal and practice on many college campuses, AAC&U has strengthened its partnership with the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) to infuse considerations of religious identity within curricular and cocurricular experiences at colleges and universities.

**Conclusion**

AAC&U’s 2018–22 strategic plan, *We ASPIRE*, makes explicit our pledge to prepare students for democratic citizenship by championing liberal education, quality, and equity across sectors. In a world in which the American Dream has ostensibly been reduced solely to prosperity, disconnected from the values of democracy and freedom, it is crucial to connect the work being done in the academy with people’s lives, sparking interest in mediating pluralism through dialogue and civic understanding.

Indeed, if we hope to bolster the reputation of higher education within democratic society, we need to have a visible impact on the communities in which we live—grappling with real-world problems alongside our neighbors, locally and around the globe. At the same time, in fulfilling the civic mission of higher education, we must infuse civic learning outcomes progressively across all academic disciplines. Above all, responding to the most pressing ethical, legal, and social issues of the day, those of us in higher education must reassert the role that liberal education plays in discerning the truth.

We invite you to engage online with AAC&U’s new strategic plan. To respond to this article, email liberaled@aacu.org with the author’s name on the subject line.

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**NOTES**


7. AAC&U’s strategic plan is available online at https://www.aacu.org/about/strategicplan.
Ensuring High-Quality Learning for All

As it continues to advocate the value and relevance of liberal education in contemporary life, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has embarked on a sustained program to enhance the quality of student learning on campuses, while also supporting AAC&U members’ efforts to bring liberal education to all sectors of society. This commitment to quality and equity in service to democracy forms the basis for AAC&U’s 2018–22 strategic plan and its vision for the future of liberal education.

The cornerstone of AAC&U’s advocacy is the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative, which seeks to ensure that students are prepared for success in the workplace and as active members of their communities and our great American democracy. These goals have gained added clarity and focus due to recent economic and societal trends.

On the economic front, labor experts project that as many as 90 million Americans will not have the skills needed in the technology-driven workplace of the next decade. In New England, where my campus is located, it is estimated that by 2020, 69 percent of jobs will require at least some postsecondary education.

At the same time, the postsecondary attainment of large sectors of the region’s population are lagging behind. Postsecondary attainment rates for African Americans and Latinos are only 37 percent and 33 percent, respectively, compared to 47 percent overall for the region. These regional data mimic national statistics and suggest that the population sectors that are growing the fastest don’t have the skills they need to succeed in the workplace.

The gaps between college attainment and labor market needs are occurring at a time of rapid demographic change that has major economic and social implications. In New England, for instance, the size of high school graduating classes will continue to decline by 14 percent over the next fifteen years, while the percentages of those classes that are African American or Hispanic students will continue to grow. Ensuring educational access to these growing populations—largely underrepresented on college campuses—is a major consideration when designing academic programs and support services.

To address these trends, higher education must continue to examine not only which students we are teaching, but also what we are teaching them, and whether or not they are receiving the best education we can provide.

As we consider what constitutes a high-quality education, we need to ask a series of questions: How can we teach students—including those from underrepresented populations—so they learn...
the broad intellectual and life skills they need to be successful professionals? How do we instill the values and knowledge our students need to lead civic lives in their communities and our nation? How can we ensure that all members of society have the opportunity and support to earn a college degree that conveys these skills?

Quality depends upon engagement
A decade ago, George Kuh and his colleagues at the National Survey of Student Engagement popularized the term high-impact practices to describe both classroom and out-of-class experiences that extend or reinforce classroom learning. They defined these practices to include first-year programs; learning communities; writing-intensive courses; undergraduate research; diversity/global learning; community-based learning; internships; and capstone courses and projects, both individual and team-based. A campus that uses such practices to challenge students while supporting their intellectual exploration has the best hope of retaining and graduating students who are ready for success in life.

High-impact practices. At Eastern, our data reaffirm what national statistics tell us about student engagement. When students actively pursue learning in a variety of settings on and off campus, they do better academically. Whether it is living on campus (versus commuting), participating in student clubs and intramurals, volunteering at a local school, or interning at a nonprofit agency, students at Eastern who are engaged in high-impact practices have higher rates of satisfaction with their learning, get better grades, and graduate on time.

Eastern students are busy learning leadership skills in more than ninety student clubs and organizations. They are using National Science Foundation and NASA grants to conduct undergraduate research on the effects of weightlessness on astronauts, the genetic implications of cancer, and the use of social media in political campaigns. They are interning at Pfizer, Pratt & Whitney, United Technologies, Travelers Insurance, and hundreds of other international companies based in Connecticut. They provide pro bono web design services to local nonprofits as part of service-learning courses. They take field study trips to Israel (history), Italy (creative writing), and Costa Rica (biology). Most recently, first- and second-year students in our liberal arts core courses are benefiting from a $200,000 Davis Educational Foundation grant to improve reading and writing skills in our first-year program. These and other engaging learning activities are products of our 2008–13 and 2013–18 strategic plans. Yet throughout our planning and implementation processes, we have grappled with a key question—when will we know if the engagement activities we have implemented are providing students with the competencies they need to succeed in the twenty-first century?

What employers want. Over the past decade, national surveys conducted for AAC&U indicate that the vast majority of US employers value the broad-based skills that a liberal education nurtures more than a graduate’s specific major. In the most recent of these surveys, more than 80 percent of employers cited oral and written communication, the ability to work in teams, ethical judgment and decision making, critical and analytical thinking, and the ability to apply one’s learning to real-world settings as key skills needed in today’s economy.

As a public liberal arts campus, Eastern is dedicated to infusing our curriculum with learning activities to develop these broad-based intellectual competencies and life skills. However, assessing these “soft skills” has been a major undertaking.

Assessing core competencies. Following their most recent site visit in 2010, our accrediting agency—the New England Association of Schools and Colleges—asked Eastern to develop a more comprehensive strategy for assessing student learning in our liberal arts core curriculum. We are not alone. Many colleges and universities across the nation are being asked to prove that students in core or general education courses are learning the broad intellectual competencies sought by employers. Governing boards, legislators, students, and their parents share this expectation with accrediting agencies.

Our university’s response to the challenge has been to redouble our assessment efforts while taking advantage of several AAC&U-sponsored projects in which we have had the fortune to participate, including the Multi-State Collaborative to Advance Quality Student Learning (MSC) and the LEAP Challenge New England Institutions Initiative.

The Multi-State Collaborative. In 2014–15, Eastern began participating in the MSC, a major
national project to assess broad intellectual competencies that is cosponsored by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association and AAC&U. Connecticut was one of nine states in the MSC pilot project, and Eastern was one of eight institutions in Connecticut that participated. The project used AAC&U’s Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics to assess the broad intellectual skills of critical thinking, written/oral communication, and quantitative literacy.

The project evaluated the actual artifacts of student work—for example, the portfolio of a graphic arts student, an award-winning educational video produced by early childhood education students, or a robotic prototype built by a computer science student. By focusing on student work, the project avoided using standardized tests, which faculty have consistently told us cannot properly evaluate the diversity and richness of individual student learning. The review process was led by out-of-state faculty reviewers who did not assign the work they evaluated or come from the campus where it originated.

Fifty-nine institutions were involved in the pilot, with more than a thousand faculty members across the nine states using the AAC&U VALUE rubrics to assess more than seven thousand products of student work. In an exit survey following the pilot project, almost 90 percent of participants said the VALUE rubrics were useful in measuring the quality of student work.

The LEAP Challenge New England Institutions Initiative, a project sponsored by AAC&U and funded by the Davis Educational Foundation, involving eight colleges and universities in New England.

Running through 2018, the three-year project aims to improve experiential learning by helping faculty modify their courses to enhance capstone projects as well as freshman research experiences. By engaging students in “signature work” that addresses real problems facing local communities, the initiative seeks to enhance students’ engagement, deepen their learning, and prompt assessment of how participation in experiential learning affects students’ progress in their majors.

At Eastern, our faculty are developing courses and hands-on learning experiences that begin in the first year and continue all the way to the senior capstone experience. For instance, our honors program has used a VALUE rubric to assess honors students’ problem-solving skills from their entrance into the program through their senior thesis work. The New Media Studies major has added a sophomore-level experiential learning course that serves as a link between introductory courses and the senior capstone experience; a recent theater production provided the hands-on component of the course. Computer science faculty have developed an introductory course to immerse new students in the goals of the computer science major through experiential learning and problem solving. A biology professor has developed a signature work experience for her microscopy students so they can grow their skills in the digital imaging of organisms.

Digital art and design students are using their skills to solve marketing problems for community
organizations like the local hospital, in collaboration with Eastern’s Center for Community Engagement. The psychology department has been conducting summer institutes for first- and second-year students to better connect them to their senior experiences in undergraduate research. Students who interned during the summer at the Jackson Laboratories for Genomic Research, as well as students working with local schoolchildren in after-school programs, have also been part of the LEAP Challenge.

**Nurturing an assessment culture.** In response to the recommendations of our accrediting agency, our assessment committee has created a five-year plan to ensure that we can validate student learning, whether across broad intellectual skill areas or within our majors. The Multi-State Collaborative and LEAP Challenge have been instrumental in informing the committee’s work.

Strategies include an Assessment Day to focus on data collection and analysis; a new program to teach ethics across the curriculum; efforts to assess critical-thinking skills through the Davis Educational Foundation grant mentioned earlier; and the use of broad surveys—such as the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement, and the Information Literacy Test—to measure essential core competencies.

These and other assessment strategies allow us to evaluate and support student learning on our campus while strengthening our liberal arts core by linking core courses more directly to high-impact practices outside the classroom. We aim for these efforts to result in curriculum reform, faculty development, and enhanced institutional effectiveness.

**Next steps**

Like other schools, Eastern has much left to do to ensure high-quality learning for all students. As AAC&U notes on its website, “On almost all campuses, utilization of active learning practices is unsystematic, to the detriment of student learning.”

While we must be much more systematic about coordinating high-impact practices, we also need to develop an integrated assessment model to evaluate the learning taking place both in and outside of our classrooms. The same evidence-based portfolio model we have used in the various LEAP initiatives can be adapted to evaluate student learning that occurs in experiences ranging from community service to internships to study abroad.

One place where we are beginning to use the knowledge we have gained to support and assess out-of-classroom experiences is in our initiatives on service learning and civic action. While more than 50 percent of our students participate in some form of community engagement, and we have received the Carnegie Foundation’s prestigious Community Engagement Classification, Eastern is committed to institutionalizing community engagement more broadly on our campus. A new Civic Action Plan seeks to link community engagement more closely to academic programs and to such LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes as intercultural knowledge and civic...
engagement. The plan provides faculty incentives, changes to institutional structures, and other initiatives to create a sustained culture of civic engagement on campus.

**Quality requires equity**

As Eastern and other college campuses work hard to ensure that our educational programs are of the highest quality, it is imperative that we do all that we can to ensure that all students succeed. In aspiring to provide high-quality learning experiences to all students, we must keep in mind that equality is not equity. Access is not enough; “equal opportunity” is not enough; a rising tide does not lift all boats! To achieve equal outcomes, we need to ensure that students from underrepresented and underserved populations have access to the specific supports they need to be successful in college.

Students of color, low-income students, and first-generation students—cohorts that often overlap—face significant structural barriers to achieving success on our campuses and in the workplace. Cultural isolation and generational poverty are just two of the barriers that underrepresented and underserved student populations encounter. To give these students a level playing field, we need innovative strategies that address the structural barriers they face. We also need to recognize and build upon the assets these students bring to campus. At Eastern, we have found that low-income, minority, and first-generation students embrace leadership opportunities and have a natural affinity for giving back to their communities. We need to design learning opportunities that allow these students to develop their strengths while building new capacities.

Emphasizing high-impact practices has been a good place to start. As George Kuh has written, “While these and other educationally purposeful activities are positively linked to desired outcomes for all types of students, historically underserved students and those who are less well prepared tend to benefit even more.”

**Clubs and community service.** On our own campus, we have found that minority and first-generation students embrace opportunities to join and practice leadership through student clubs. The Africa Club, the West Indian Society, the Organization of Latin American Students, and other clubs are specifically designed for students of color. We also have several leadership development programs on campus, and we work hard to encourage students from underrepresented groups to participate. The MALES (Men Achieving Leadership, Excellence, and Success) organization combines leadership, professional development, and service opportunities for male students—most of them students of color. The club just celebrated its twentieth anniversary with hundreds of alumni returning to campus to thank the faculty and staff mentors who coached and supported them.

Low-income, minority, and first-generation students have also been leaders in the many service projects coordinated by our Center for Community Engagement. Not only are they contributing to our local community, they are gaining valuable leadership skills and a sense of civic responsibility essential to our democratic way of life.

**On-campus internships.** Like most colleges and universities, Eastern has an impressive array of off-campus internship opportunities at companies such as ESPN, Aetna Insurance, Stanley Black & Decker, and other Connecticut-based corporations. But for low-income and minority students, accessing these internships can be difficult. Low-income students in particular may not have their own cars or the money to pay for gas, and our campus lacks easy access to public transportation. These students may benefit from opportunities located on or near campus, as well as from coaching and support to gain the cultural awareness necessary to succeed in unfamiliar professional environments.

In 2011, Cigna, the global health care company, opened a site of its Technology Early Career Development Program on our campus. The company provides staff to supervise a cadre of student interns, who learn such technical skills as web applications, database management, and technical writing. The students also learn to work collaboratively and independently while contributing to Cigna’s information technology infrastructure. These paid internships, located only a short walk from student housing, are a huge benefit for students who are financially strapped.

Almost one hundred students have completed the program. Many of them are minority students or from low-income backgrounds. Most are now working full time at Cigna, earning excellent salaries in rewarding technology careers.
Cigna recently indicated that they want to expand the program, which is a wonderful example of how we can provide a meaningful on-campus high-impact practice that provides career opportunities to underrepresented and underserved students.

**Additional supports**

In addition to making high-impact practices available to students of color, first-generation students, and other marginalized students, we strive to provide the specific supports these students need to overcome the structural barriers they face.

One fundamental support we offer is to provide students with the presence of familiar faces at the front of the classroom. When African American, Latino, and Asian students see someone who looks like them as a successful professor and role model, they are empowered to work harder to succeed. In recent years, Eastern has had the largest percentage of minority faculty of any college or university in Connecticut, public or private.

Another support system that has been instrumental is our “one-stop-shopping” Academic Services Center. Located on the first floor of the library in the center of campus, the center provides professional advising, peer tutoring, and supplemental instruction in writing and mathematics to more than half our students each year. Students themselves have created the center’s nonjudgmental learning culture, and students of all academic levels can be found in the center’s bustling environment.

**Conclusion**

As educators seek to ensure the quality of every student’s college experience and help each one prepare for career and life success, we need to connect our focus on quality to a focus on equity, while aligning our goals for employability with the broader benefits of a liberal education.

“Employability” does not have to be a forbidden word on a liberal arts campus, nor does a commitment to our students’ career success minimize the broader benefits of a liberal education.

Indeed, the broad-based intellectual and life skills that prepare students for careers are the same skills they need to be civically engaged in their local communities, active citizens of our American democracy, and ethical actors in the world at large.

Economic success enables active civic participation. It is difficult to think about serving on the board of your local YMCA, for instance, when you cannot pay your rent or mortgage. And people living in poverty, despite the fact that they may have the most to gain from shaping public policy, typically vote at lower rates than people in higher income brackets.11

Preparing our students for success in the workplace also prepares them for success in life. Ensuring that students of color, first-generation students, and low-income students share in the economic and social mobility that comes with a college education is not only necessary to bring equity to our campuses—it is imperative for the future economic and social vitality of our great nation.

A liberal education, with its focus on helping students become self-supporting free thinkers, continues to be the best path to the American Dream and the strongest support for our American democracy. While on our campuses, our students constitute a community of learners engaged in serious debate and discovery about the complex problems facing humankind, and solutions to those problems are rarely simple or certain. As the columnist George Will has written: “The greatest threat to civility—and ultimately to civilization—is an excess of certitude. . . . It has been well said that the spirit of liberty is the spirit of not being too sure that you are right.”12

In that spirit, colleges that offer a high-quality liberal education to all students, whether they are public liberal arts colleges like Eastern Connecticut State University, private universities, or community colleges, hold aloft AAC&U’s vision to provide students with engaging experiences that prepare them for the workforce and for democratic participation. With AAC&U’s leadership and a shared commitment to authentic learning and equity, we can become elite—not elitist—institutions that graduate active and economically empowered citizens.

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**NOTES**


7. The nine states participating in the MSC pilot were Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Utah.

8. In addition to Eastern Connecticut State University, institutions participating in the LEAP Challenge New England Institutions Initiative include Boston University, Champlain College in Vermont, Providence College, Quinnipiac University, the University of Hartford, the University of Massachusetts–Lowell, and the University of Southern Maine.


Measuring the number of college degrees we produce is not enough; more important are the experiences that shape who our students become.

IN 2017, the Association of American Colleges and Universities presented the Frederic W. Ness Book Award to The Aims of Higher Education: Problems of Morality and Justice. In this book, editors Harry Brighouse and Michael McPherson compiled a set of essays that analyzed the fundamental purpose of higher education: to develop a just and ethical citizenry. One contributing author, Erin Kelly, wrote that “higher education that is inclusive along the lines of race, gender, and socioeconomic class, and that has a participatory and deliberative orientation, has the potential to shape the values and aims of the members of its community of scholarship to make a valuable civic contribution beyond the university.”

Kelly’s observation about the importance of inclusive education carries particular weight as our nation’s population, and the students attending our postsecondary institutions, grow more diverse. Over the past fifty years, college enrollment has increased by over 650 percent. Nearly 20 million students are now enrolled in higher education, and these students are more racially diverse than ever: by fall 2015, over 40 percent of students were nonwhite, compared with just over 15 percent in 1976.

As the student population has diversified, equity has become a popular goal for higher education institutions; but finding a common definition for equity is difficult. Achieving equity is not simply a matter of diversifying the student body. At its core, equity means providing each and every student with opportunities to attain comparable goals. The question then becomes, What are these goals? Measuring the number of college degrees we produce is not enough; more important are the experiences that shape who our students become. How well do we train our students to think critically? How well can our graduates express their thoughts and argue their viewpoints? Can they sift through facts, misinformation, myths, and propaganda to identify truth? Most importantly, can they apply their learning to solve real-world problems?

Most educators would argue that these outcomes may be more important than the degree itself. This is not a new concept: in 1852, Cardinal John Henry Newman, in discussing the purpose of a university education, wrote, “It is the education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them.” However, these essential outcomes of a liberal education cannot be attained haphazardly, and will only be available to our students if we intentionally provide opportunities designed to elicit them. If we can ensure that each graduate, irrespective of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, or academic background, is able to attain these key outcomes, we will be one step closer to bridging the racial and social divides that persist in our nation.

Indeed, it has become increasingly clear that providing an education that conveys the skills necessary for graduates to obtain and thrive in good jobs, while a critical goal, is not sufficient to ensure the advancement of American society. Recent events across our nation indicate that we have reached a crisis point—one that is underscored by the civic disenfranchisement of certain segments of our population and compounded by our collective inability to engage in effective discourse that leads to understanding, solutions, and, most importantly, healing.

To help address these challenges, every higher education institution will need to ensure that all its graduates achieve the outcomes necessary to contribute to society. Just as importantly,
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higher education as a whole will need to ensure equitable outcomes across institutions. This means that, as a nation, we cannot rely on traditional liberal arts colleges alone to convey critical liberal learning outcomes. If our aim is to ensure that liberal education is available en masse to our future citizens and leaders, then all of higher education must rise to the challenge. All colleges—including community colleges, which are increasingly and critically important due to the populations we serve—must find ways to combine employment and skills training with the broader goals of liberal education. It is no longer a question of either/or; it must be a matter of both/and.

My institution, Miami Dade College (MDC), is dedicated to democratizing opportunity through an open-access mission. We believe that one of our most essential functions is not just to provide our students with the skills and learning traditionally associated with workforce degrees, but to help each and every student find a voice—and most importantly, to help students learn how to project their voices. This commitment to our students has two components. First, our curriculum, grounded in the principles of liberal education, helps students gain the fundamental mind-sets and skill sets they will need to address the complex challenges facing the world today. Second, our focus on applied learning equips students with the intellectual depth and breadth to add value to any problem they are passionate about solving.

Beyond opportunity: ensuring achievement of learning outcomes

At the heart of MDC’s general education curriculum are our ten college-wide student learning outcomes. In October of 2007, the entire college community—students, faculty, staff, and business and government leaders—signed a learning covenant acknowledging that “liberal learning is essential to a free society and that the Miami Dade College Student Learning Outcomes hold the promise of guiding principles and practices that lead to empowered, informed and responsible citizens.” The MDC Student Learning Outcomes are embedded in each one of our degree pathways, effectively ensuring that every student has the opportunity to engage in deep learning that transcends any specific major.

Our student learning outcomes are anchored in the belief that a liberal education has tremendous value to students and employers. It equips current and future employees with the ability to engage in thoughtful, meaningful, and engaged dialogue; it also helps students develop soft skills, including oral, interpersonal, and written communication, as well as the ability to work in teams. These skills are valuable for making decisions and interacting successfully with fellow employees and clients in the workplace. They also make for intellectually well-rounded employees whose contributions remain viable even when their technical and practical skills become obsolete in this rapidly changing world.

These outcomes are precisely the kinds of real-world competencies that working adults already possess or find they need to enhance. Therefore, for our adult and other nontraditional learners, competency-based education (CBE) is a natural extension of a holistic liberal education. MDC’s CBE programs honor and recognize these learners’ skills and experiences, and as a result, increase their access to college. Through MDC Accelerate, we are able to accommodate adult learners who possess relevant knowledge, skills, and work experience, with positive effects on their progression toward and completion of their credentials. Delivered online through self-paced modules adaptable to the needs of each learner and enhanced by embedded feedback, the program allows learners to proceed at their own pace as they demonstrate their abilities related to each program competency. Learners do not spend valuable time on competencies or skills that they have already achieved; instead, they continuously engage with activities that challenge them to practice or refine skills and knowledge they have not yet mastered. MDC Accelerate’s guiding premise is the principle of a growth mind-set—a commitment to the idea that one’s abilities are not fixed, but can expand with hard work.

MDC is also engaged in a continuous improvement process to ensure that our students not only have the opportunity to participate in the learning process, but also that they attain the MDC Student Learning Outcomes. Opportunity only results in equity when accompanied by assurances of quality. To provide such assurances, we rely on a college-wide, authentic approach to assessment that provides an alternative means of documenting student learning beyond GPA and standardized test scores, measures that
sometimes yield bias against racial and ethnic minorities and first-generation college students. Through a collaborative process, MDC faculty, administrators, and staff developed an Assessment Blueprint that provides a framework for ensuring consistent student learning and assessment practices. The Assessment Blueprint outlines policies and procedures for college-wide assessment of learning outcomes, related data collection and management, subsequent analysis, and use and dissemination of results. For faculty groups, the Assessment Blueprint is a starting point guiding expectations, standards, and activities related to student learning (such as Data Dialogues, a structured exploration of student learning data) that provide space and time for faculty to discuss student performance and educational quality.

**The role of applied learning**

Often, MDC students live in marginalized and disenfranchised communities whose members may be relegated to a permanent underclass. Our approach’s second key component, an applied learning environment, allows our students to break out of this cycle by transforming our classrooms into small laboratories for changemaking. MDC offers a robust culture of service that benefits our community while also creating opportunities that empower students to build the skills they need to actively engage and contribute, including through service learning. At MDC, service, service learning, and other opportunities for social engagement and changemaking find life primarily through the Institute for Civic Engagement and Democracy (iCED) and the recently established IMPACT Network for social innovation (Innovation Meets Purpose and Change in Teams). Together, these opportunities nurture the development of changemakers eager to improve their communities and the world. iCED and IMPACT prompt MDC students to become engaged citizens who take pride in their ability to add value to society.

iCED’s mission is to transform learning, strengthen democracy, and contribute meaningfully to the common good by awakening and empowering students for lifelong engagement. iCED oversees a myriad of curricular and cocurricular civic engagement initiatives that build essential civic and workforce readiness skills and mind-sets. In the 2017–18 academic year alone, over 7,500 students were engaged in academic service-learning opportunities thanks to the more than 275 faculty who integrated service learning in their course curricula. In the same academic year, over 580 MDC students earned the Presidential Volunteer Service Award, completing more than sixty-one thousand hours of community service.
Through voter engagement activities, iCED registered more than 6,100 new voters over the 2016 calendar year. iCED engaged students in a variety of different efforts toward this end, including more than sixty voter registration or voter education events, more than five hundred class presentations on voter registration, and various other college-wide campaigns. Our focus on voting is just one way in which we are empowering students to become active participants in democracy.

At its core, iCED’s work is rooted in MDC’s focus on social changemaking, which also grounds other key initiatives designed to strengthen the college-wide ecosystem. Our belief that all students can be changemakers expresses itself in our approach to educating for changemaking. We are working to ensure that students build key changemaking skills and mind-sets across all disciplines and not just in select ones.

To lead the broader work of engaging students to succeed not only in the classroom but also in their communities, MDC has established a “team of teams” approach involving faculty, staff, students, administrators, and community members in innovative problem solving. These teams, known collectively as the IMPACT Network, are designing, developing, and supporting changemaking initiatives that span curricular and cocurricular domains.

Equally important at this incipient stage, the network is influencing current college systems and operations in order to more sustainably advance a changemaking approach to education. Through participation in IMPACT Network initiatives, MDC students apply their education in order to address real-world challenges and make a difference in their jobs and communities while being nurtured by the campus community.

Today, the IMPACT Network has cocreated a college-wide strategy map that covers eight key areas of MDC’s changemaking ecosystem: communications, campus pathways, student engagement, campus spaces, faculty engagement, professional development, curricular enhancement, and cocurricular enhancement. Inherently aligned with our college-wide strategic plan, this strategy map guides us toward fully integrating social changemaking into both our college identity and our operations. We want all our students to have a multitude of possible entry points and deeper opportunities to explore and hone the critical skills and mind-sets needed for tomorrow’s workforce and world.

As the IMPACT faculty continue to deepen the college-wide scholarship around changemaking, we have learned that some core changemaking skills and mind-sets particularly resonate with our college learning outcomes and are developmentally appropriate for our students. Through our IMPACT work, we are focusing on empathy building, problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, innovation, and creativity for all students, not just some students, at MDC.

Connecting learning with our own equity challenges

The initiatives described above are designed to empower students, economically and civically, by applying their emerging skills toward the work of building a more just and equal society. These efforts contribute directly to MDC’s role as one of “Democracy’s Colleges”—a place that advances equal participation in the civic sphere, in part by developing the skills and capacities our students need for such participation. But the IMPACT Network in particular does more than just advance necessary learning outcomes; it also engages students, faculty, and staff in addressing equity challenges directly affecting our student body.

One exemplar among our IMPACT projects is the North Campus Food Pantry for Students. In partnership with Single Stop USA (SSUSA), Sarah Garman (senior associate professor of humanities) and Evelyn Rodriguez (director of the Multidisciplinary Academic Learning Lounges) have developed a program to identify students suffering from food insecurity and provide them with basic food and hygiene supplies. Students go through a benefits evaluation at MDC’s SSUSA office to determine needs, and qualifying students receive vouchers that they can use at the Food Pantry for Students.

One of Garman and Rodriguez’s primary goals in developing the program was to ensure that students were involved with every aspect of the pantry. Students are included in the Food Pantry Committee, and most donations come from students on campus. Service-learning students, overseen by an Americorps VISTA volunteer from SSUSA who serves as the North Campus Food Pantry manager, operate the
pantry. Trained student ambassadors make class presentations about the pantry around campus. As a result, MDC North students volunteer more than 1,500 service-learning hours annually and distribute over nine thousand food and hygiene products each academic year in connection with this program. These students have served more than 1,300 of their fellow students, and MDC expanded the model to three other campuses this year.

A similar pop-up project at MDC’s West Campus also provided key just-in-time assistance to our student body. When Miami was affected by Hurricane Irma in September 2017, the aftermath of the storm created numerous challenges and obstacles for our students, our staff, and their families. MDC West Campus responded by creating a pantry focused specifically on hurricane preparation and relief. Many students had no idea how to prepare for an incoming storm like Irma, and many were affected by it afterward. This innovative pantry allowed the student body to become better educated about how to prepare to weather major storms, while also allowing campus members to contribute hurricane supplies and food.

Among all of the food pantries’ outcomes, one of the most important is the chance for student volunteers to see the immediate impact that their work has on others in their community. They learn that they can, indeed, make a difference.

**Transforming individuals and communities**

MDC is a vibrant example of the transformation that can occur in a single student, a campus, and a community when liberal education opportunities are provided in an accessible and equitable manner. While small, private liberal arts institutions must advance equity in student learning and position all students for equal participation in democracy, we cannot expect those institutions alone to provide liberal learning for the entire nation. If we want to achieve equality as a nation, we need to take an equitable approach within our communities. Community colleges are essential to this work.

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**NOTES**


5. A complete list of the MDC learning outcomes is available online; see “General Education Outcome Statements,” Miami Dade College, accessed December 14, 2017, https://www.mdc.edu/learningoutcomes/.

American colleges and universities are facing a civic imperative. The nation is floundering, if not unwinding. We are living through another historical moment best described by the late Richard Hofstadter as part of “the paranoid style in American politics.” Nativism, racism, anti-immigration, and anti-intellectualism are its staples. Its origins date from the founding of the republic, and it has reappeared in the current resurrection of white supremacy. This paranoid style of American politics swells during periods of significant social change to established racial and class hierarchies. This is where we find ourselves now.

Since Franklin and Jefferson expressed their founding visions of higher learning as critical for engaged citizens and a stable republic, American colleges and universities have enacted an enduring commitment to preparing knowledgeable citizens and leaders. In the past, this has simply meant teaching the practices of citizenship; today, it involves building civic competencies through active engagement of students, faculty, and staff as participants in democratic culture. Now more than ever, this commitment is not only necessary for an effective democracy—it is imperative.

Democracies are vulnerable social constructions. They flourish in eras of social consensus and economic prosperity, when citizens believe in the prospect of brighter futures. They stumble, if not decay, during times of harsh economic downturn, deep social conflict, and political atrophy. The United States is not immune from these challenges, as was painfully illustrated by its Civil War, the inevitable result of the fundamental contradiction between its commitment to liberty and equality and its reliance on slavery and class subordination. While political movements have challenged racial and socioeconomic hierarchies, racism and economic inequality are currently ascending throughout American life alongside attempts to subordinate women, immigrants, and others. White supremacist organizations are now active and public, seemingly fortified by the presence, rhetoric, and actions of certain leaders in the executive, legislative, and judicial corridors of federal power.

While the specter of white supremacist demonstrators in Charlottesville, Virginia, chanting “you will not replace us” and “Jews will not replace us” is a stunning example of this renewed nativism, the deeper effects of racial and class hierarchies are found in the everyday realities of our local communities. Institutional racism and social inequality are lived every day in our schools, hospitals, streets, and, most vividly, our prisons. Consider the following facts: Students who are not on the third-grade reading level by the end of that grade year are unlikely to graduate high school; those youngsters below this benchmark constitute 63 percent of all high school nongraduates. Among fourth-grade students, 74 percent who demonstrate the lowest levels of reading proficiency come from low-income families, and roughly 50 percent of black and 47 percent of Latino students have below-basic reading skills. Low-income youths are thirteen times less likely than their peers from other income groups to graduate from high school. And here is the rub: more than 70 percent of all prison inmates in the United States read at a fourth-grade level or below. In short, reading is destiny for low-income children, particularly those of color. These statistics challenge our national narrative of individual merit and social mobility, suggesting that race, ethnicity, and
class status in early childhood determine the large majority of the remainder of one’s life. For the last decade, several colleges and universities have aimed to address rising inequality by establishing sustainable partnerships with their local neighborhoods. Serving as anchor institutions committed to strategic civic engagement, they have attempted to address the coefficients of inequality that limit educational and economic opportunities, building communities while educating citizens. Evolving from earlier efforts focused on volunteerism and community service (begun in earnest with the founding of Campus Compact in the late 1980s) and service learning (which emerged in the 1990s), anchor institutions have adopted a larger institutional role under the banner of civic engagement. Conceived of by Ira Harkavy and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania, the anchor institution model involves reciprocal neighborhood partnerships that increase community prosperity while strengthening the civic missions and practices of universities and colleges. Simply put, in economically challenged communities, institutions that are “anchored” in place—colleges and universities, but also hospitals, elementary and secondary schools, churches, and others—can serve as strategic partners with sizable material assets and significant social capital.

For colleges and universities, anchor partnerships can involve attacking social inequalities related to differential reading levels among elementary school students, mentoring middle and high school students, building college readiness, assisting families with health services, providing key assets and expertise that advance economic development, supporting new immigrants, and using the arts and humanities to tell rich community stories. These practices, focused on addressing racial, ethnic, and class inequalities, merge higher education’s civic work and our country’s struggle for equality into a larger project of building a fairer and more just democratic social order.

The goals, skills, and competencies associated with liberal education are indispensable foundations for the civic mission of higher education and for the United States itself. They form part of what the late political scientist Benjamin Barber referred to as the arts of democracy. The goals, skills, and competencies associated with liberal education are indispensable foundations for the civic mission of higher education and for the United States itself. They form part of what the late political scientist Benjamin Barber referred to as the arts of democracy.
And yet, these educational competencies are not sufficient in and of themselves, contrary to the operating narrative during long periods when higher education’s civic mission focused on preparing elite males to provide progressive leadership for a maturing nation. This narrative proved inadequate during the Truman administration, when the President’s Commission on Higher Education established college attendance for the majority as an ambitious national goal. A more inclusive democratic society whose campuses were bulging with first-generation college students needed more than well-educated leadership among the elite classes. Instead, such a society required a well-educated citizenry of individuals prepared through engagement with their richly diverse campuses and communities to contribute to the public good.

Thus, as colleges became more inclusive, the goal of providing access for students from previously excluded groups was circumscribed by a larger understanding of all the dimensions and obligations of truly diverse institutions. CIVICALLY engaged institutions found it increasingly difficult to divorce their well-being from that of their surrounding neighborhoods, and local communities of need became extensions of the campus. The dynamics of social inequality, particularly racial and ethnic hierarchies, became strategic challenges closely related to institutions’ civic missions. Today, many colleges and universities have begun joining their civic practices to their equity objectives, investing in the “shadow communities” that struggle with limited resources and opportunities but are flush with social assets and creative minds needed for economic and social prosperity.

**Anchors and allies**
In meeting its civic mission at this particular moment, higher education aspires to four primary goals, all of which find fulfillment in the anchor institution model. First, colleges and universities need to restore their reputations with the general public, segments of which view them as exclusive institutions enabling personal private gain rather than as providers of a public good benefiting the larger society. At the national level, both major political parties have advanced a transactional narrative of higher education. In its most punitive form, this narrative castigates universities and colleges as institutions consumed by their own self-interest; in the more benign version, it characterizes higher education positively, as an enabler of individual opportunity. Contrary to this characterization, universities and colleges play critical roles as anchors of communities much broader than themselves, with a vast array of local partners in the private, nonprofit, and public sectors. They are in fact essential to the political economies of their neighborhoods.

Second, colleges and universities can expand the menu of choices available to individuals and communities whose participation in the broader economy and American life is so often foreclosed. Anchor partnerships, when fully engaged, comprehensive, reciprocal, and democratic, can disrupt this cycle of exclusion. As members of such partnerships, higher education institutions can build educational pipelines from preschool through college; attend to health and wellness needs in places dependent on financially stressed hospitals and nonprofit health providers; augment economic opportunities by investing locally through strategic purchasing and employment decisions; and enhance the work of local partners in the fine, visual, and performing arts as they rejuvenate forgotten communities.

Third, civic practice should be embedded in the larger educational mission of each institution. At the most engaged anchor campuses, civic work flourishes through both the undergraduate curriculum and cocurricular programs. The impact of civic engagement on student learning is well documented. For a generation of students hungry for the integration of theory and practice and keen to link ideas with social problems, anchor work promises to positively influence intellectual growth, civic competency, and intercultural skills.

Finally, the civic imperative involves preparing a new generation of leaders to govern a more just and effective intercultural democracy. Some will come from our student bodies, and some will emerge from our neighborhoods. Together, using the arts and skills of democratic engagement, they promise to vanquish the current paranoia and mend our deep social divides. As anchor institutions nurturing such leadership, colleges and universities can cultivate the democratic culture we need now, building bonds across differences through shared civic practice.
Anchors at work

We are witnessing the civic renewal of higher education, supported by organizations like the Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF), Campus Compact, the Coalition for Urban and Metropolitan Universities, The Democracy Commitment, Imagining America, the Interfaith Youth Core, the American Democracy Project (organized by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities), and Project Pericles. These organizations and others, including the Association of American Colleges and Universities, are engaging in work designed to support higher education’s civic renewal. In 2015, over four hundred fifty of Campus Compact’s member presidents signed a national call for commitment to campus-community partnerships and pledged to build civic action plans within one year. Similarly, the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, with over ninety institutional members, shares a national objective of promoting urban anchor partnerships. More and more of higher education’s civic mission is now expressed through work addressing the equity challenges of local neighborhoods. Below, I highlight a few in greater depth.

Rutgers University–Newark is a remarkable example of the anchor institution model. Led by Chancellor Nancy Cantor with assistance from Vice Chancellor Peter Englot, the university partners with the city government, the public schools, local nonprofits, economic and arts institutions, and other higher education entities to provide the city of Newark with a jolt of material and social capital. Rutgers–Newark is a leading anchor in the Newark City of Learning Collaborative (NCLC), a partnership of roughly sixty public schools, nonprofits, and higher education institutions. The collaborative has set a goal of increasing the share of Newark residents holding postsecondary degrees and credentials from 17 percent in 2010 to 25 percent by 2025 by attacking key barriers to student success and providing important interventions in overcoming persistent obstacles.8 This work has critical implications for racial and socioeconomic equity, as Newark’s population is 50 percent black and 36 percent Latino, and 39 percent of its children live in poverty.9 Rutgers–Newark’s Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies is the organizational backbone for the NCLC’s efforts, managing data collection and analysis as well as efforts to demystify college admissions and financial aid. Rutgers–Newark undergraduates mentor local high school students, and the university partners with Shabazz High School to provide professional development for faculty and staff. In concert with the mayor’s office, Rutgers–Newark is expanding K–16 partnerships, reengaging disconnected youths, retaining college students, and reconnecting adult learners. Rutgers–Newark also treats its purchasing and employment practices as part of a larger strategy promoting economic growth and job opportunities. This work has changed not only the community, but also the institution.

The University of Nebraska–Omaha (UNO) is a powerful anchor partner with a unique approach to its civic coalition. Similarly committed to the economic and civic prosperity of its locale, UNO houses nonprofit partners on its downtown campus in the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center, a seventy-thousand-square-foot facility hosting thirty-seven organizations representing health, education, cultural, research, diversity, environmental, and civic interests. The physical proximity fosters greater integration, deeper trust, and stronger leadership within partnerships, including those involving service-learning faculty and community organizations. The Weitz Center offers free meeting space for important community dialogues and forums, workshops, trainings, speakers, and cultural events, as well as space for service-learning and cocurricular civic engagement programs.

The University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) focuses its anchor work in West Philadelphia, primarily in collaboration with nine schools. Its Netter Center for Community Partnerships supports nearly seventy academic service-learning courses, engaging approximately 1,700 students annually. In addition, the Netter Center mobilizes the vast resources and talents of a major research university to support “university-assisted community schools,” emerging innovative schools that engage and advance not only their students but also the entire local neighborhood. Undergraduate and graduate students offer school programming during and after the school day through service-learning courses, internships, work-study assignments, and volunteer opportunities. A number of esteemed
research faculty from across the university are directly engaged in UPenn’s overall efforts in West Philadelphia. UPenn has also had a major economic impact though strategic coordination of its purchasing and investment activity, with a particular focus on health care and business development. The goal is to spur local employment through training programs and provide assistance to minority-owned businesses. In 2015, UPenn’s Economic Inclusion Program spent $122 million in West Philadelphia, and its Health System hired more than 1,500 local residents.

Smaller institutions are equally effective in anchor partnerships. Guided by its founding Lutheran mission, Augsburg University in Minneapolis combines the liberal arts and professional studies “in service to our neighbors.” This civic commitment informs its curriculum and is present throughout campus culture. In the early 1990s, Minneapolis became part of the Somali diaspora resulting from that nation’s civil war. Assisted by Lutheran and Catholic relocation programs, Somali refugees migrated to the area, most notably to the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood just down the boulevard from Augsburg. Under the leadership of President Paul Pribbenow, Augsburg reached out to their Somali neighbors through service learning, its Bonner Leaders program, its nursing program, and other means to create a corridor of support and opportunity to the campus. The institution is now more diverse and more committed to its central mission. Augsburg helped form a coalition of two dozen higher education institutions in metropolitan Minneapolis, all located along the light-rail line linking the Twin Cities. These institutions have coordinated shared purchasing programs, workplace development initiatives, public safety initiatives, and community-based research around equity and social justice issues.
My own institution, Wagner College, is a small comprehensive institution on Staten Island, one of the five boroughs of New York City. Wagner’s curriculum, “The Practical Liberal Arts,” includes a sizable commitment to community-based learning. It began twenty years ago as the faculty and administration began honoring place-based inquiry and community engagement as central tenets for student learning in a diverse democracy. Concomitantly, the cocurriculum took on greater importance as diversity, leadership, and civic engagement all became essential priorities.

The Port Richmond neighborhood sits two miles from Wagner’s campus. It houses fifteen thousand residents, roughly 60 percent of whom are Mexican and 20 percent of whom are African American; the remainder are predominantly white working and lower-middle class. In the last ten years, through our Center for Leadership and Community Engagement, Wagner College has spearheaded a comprehensive partnership involving more than thirty-two neighborhood organizations, with a focus on five policy areas: immigration justice, the arts and public history, small-business economic development, health and wellness, and educational opportunity and college readiness. The latter two are the largest commitments.

The partnership works with K–16 institutions to connect with Port Richmond students and families who have little expectation of and no experience with higher education. Wagner maintains staff and offices in elementary school PS 21, middle school IS 51, and Port Richmond High School (PRHS). We work with a number of other elementary schools that feed into the pipeline as well, including two charter schools that Wagner cosponsored (one of which was founded for undocumented and other immigrant children). Mentoring, tutoring, after-school activities, adult learning opportunities, and teacher professional development form the spine of the partnership.

With the help of the New World Foundation and a major alumni donor who grew up in Port Richmond, Wagner and PRHS designed the Port Richmond Partnership Leadership Academy at Wagner College. The academy works intensively with PRHS students, who reside on campus for five weeks each summer as they complete enhanced high school courses (following the sophomore year) and full college courses (following the junior and senior years). Students also complete a course on the theory and practice of American democracy that involves engagement in Port Richmond, beginning with the construction of asset maps of their own neighborhoods. Upon completing the academy, students have earned one full semester of college credit. To date, the academy has an extremely high success rate; 100 percent of students who completed the program in the first two classes are now enrolled at four-year institutions, and half are full-scholarship students at Wagner. The academy’s mission is creating educational success for those often denied the support to succeed while also disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline.

There are many other rich examples of anchor work that attacks inequalities and fights for racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic equity. Johns Hopkins University maintains a truly comprehensive economic impact with its strategic initiatives in Baltimore. The University of Southern California is engaged in critical programs in South Los Angeles. The University of Maryland, Baltimore is working with middle schoolers preparing for eventual careers in the health professions. Many others are powerfully involved or beginning similar efforts in their locales.

The work ahead

There is a civic renewal underway in higher education. With the evolution from service learning to strategic and impactful neighborhood partnerships, higher education’s civic practice has become more intentionally connected to the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion. While the civic and equity agendas are distinct, they have become interrelated at this critical political moment with the resurgence of overt nativism, anti-intellectualism, and racism. The anchor model is built around direct partnership and reciprocity between higher education and local communities, including communities of color and class subordination. Integrating these two domains promises greater impact in both arenas, building leadership skills, civic competency, and social agency among all involved. The coalition building, personal trust, and basic empathy that result will increase the probability of a transformative politics leading to a more inclusive democracy.
To this end, the Association of American Colleges and Universities plays a key role. Much as it insisted in the early 1990s, in the face of significant opposition, that diversity and multiculturalism are central to a vibrant democracy, it is now pointing us toward racial healing and transformation as well as the centrality of higher education’s civic mission. Through strategic community partnerships, our work to advance civic engagement and equity can become common practice in fulfilling higher education’s historic role as an anchor within a just democracy.

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IT IS PERHAPS MORE EVIDENT NOW than at any other time in human history that current technologies are racing ahead while our skills and organizations are lagging behind. In their seminal book *Race against the Machine*, Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, both economists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, confirm the global convergence of technological, social, and economic trends and make the case that the trajectory of digital technology is transforming labor markets in unpredictable ways.¹

This pronounced restructuring of labor markets—what Brynjolfsson and McAfee term “the Great Restructuring”—is placing new and complex demands on education and on those connected with the educational enterprise, including students.

In the context of such uncertainty, Maxine Greene’s and Theodore Sizer’s ideas about empowering students to develop resiliency, perspective, judgment, and flexibility, as well as our responsibility to nurture their creativity and imagination, have never mattered more.² Students’ acquisition of these habits of mind hinges in part on their ability to develop positive and enduring social capital and networks; emotional intelligence; and an agentic perspective, or the belief that they are capable of authoring their own futures.³ Students also need to nurture the skills, abilities, and dispositions necessary to regulate a range of emotions in myriad social contexts.

These characteristics and capacities are critical as students face new challenges associated with a quickly evolving workforce, including the challenge of working creatively with, rather than being limited by, new technologies. As former president Obama emphasized in his farewell address to the nation, “the next wave of economic dislocations won’t come from overseas,” but “from the relentless pace of automation that makes a lot of good, middle-class jobs obsolete.”⁴ It is thus imperative that higher education institutions reimagine student prospects for upward mobility and professional success by helping students to cultivate a creative mind-set and the mental elasticity, courage, foresight and skill, to invent, discover, and create in ways that respect the fragile and finite resources of our world.

**Economists’ projections of change**

Economists Daron Acemoglu and Pascual Restrepo recently examined the effects of automation on employment and wages in manufacturing and found that the use of industrial robots in the automotive and electronics industries in local labor markets in the United States contributed to the loss of 360,000 to 670,000 manufacturing jobs between 1990 and 2007. Acemoglu and Restrepo estimate that for every one robot per one thousand workers, approximately six workers lost their jobs and wages declined by nearly 0.34 percent. They suggest, moreover, that the number of jobs lost in manufacturing is likely to increase as a result of automation, particularly given projections by the Boston Consulting Group that by 2025, one quarter of
industrial manufacturing tasks worldwide will be performed by robots. Notably, Acemoglu and Restrepo were surprised when they did not find “positive and offsetting employment gains in any occupation or education groups” to counteract the jobs lost in manufacturing.

As described in a recent New York Times article, Acemoglu and Restrepo suggest that while an increase in employment could still occur, “there are large numbers of people out of work, with no clear path forward—especially blue-collar men without college degrees.”

The effects of automation in the workforce are not limited to manufacturing, however. The authors of a January 2017 report from the McKinsey Global Institute assert that “advances in robotics, artificial intelligence and machine learning . . . match or outperform human performance in a range of work activities, including . . . cognitive capabilities.” McKinsey researchers used data from the United States Department of Labor to estimate the automation potential of more than two thousand work activities in more than eight hundred occupations across the economy, with the activities organized in five categories: sensory perception, cognitive capabilities, natural language processing, social and emotional capabilities, and physical capabilities. In their
analysis of automation potential and adoption timing scenarios for the United States and forty-five other national economies representing about 80 percent of the global workforce, McKinsey found that approximately half of current activities in the global economy, corresponding to nearly $15 trillion in wages, have the potential to be automated by adapting currently available technology. Automation is not a new phenomenon, however, nor is disruption in the workforce: for example, agricultural employment in the United States “fell from 40 percent in 1900 to 2 percent in 2000,” and employment in manufacturing declined “from approximately 25 percent in 1950 to less than 10 percent in 2010.” Nonetheless, automation will precipitate “significant labor displacement and could exacerbate a growing skills and employment gap” between high- and low-skill workers.

Other economists draw different inferences from the pace and scale of technological innovation. David H. Autor, for instance, posits that technological innovations may displace jobs from one part of the economy to another and/or may complement, rather than replace, humans. Meanwhile, Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael Osborne, who analyzed real-world data on 702 job categories, found that 47 percent were susceptible to automation within the next twenty years. Frey and Osborne, however, were more optimistic than Acemoglu and Restrepo that jobs lost would return. Given these projections, and Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz’s finding that low levels of human capital development have been the norm in the United States since 1975, it is imperative that American colleges and universities commence or continue dialogue about the new reality of work. This includes addressing the notion that as learning machines become more “cognitively” sophisticated, and the gap between machine and human abilities diminishes, those charged with hiring will increasingly have to decide whether to “hire” machines or people.

The skills students need

What does the rapidly changing landscape mean for our students? In the Great Restructuring, according to Brynjolfsson and McAfee, a disproportionate share of economic rewards will accrue to “high-skill workers,” “superstars,” and “owners.” The authors define high-skill workers as those with the ability to engage in abstract and data-driven reasoning driven by the demands of data visualization, analytics, high-speed communications, and rapid prototyping. Moreover, advances in high-speed communications and technologies that encourage collaboration have increased employers’ access to a global talent marketplace in a growing number of fields, including programming, marketing, design, writing, and consulting. More companies are thus open to outsourcing key roles to superstars who will flourish while the local talent pool becomes under- or unemployed. And as Karl Marx made clear nearly one and fifty years ago, those with capital and those who own or control the means of production (owners) will thrive. At this juncture in human history, current trends in technological innovation suggest a declining need for human labor in many industries; consequently, the proportion of wealth returned to those who invest capital or who own the technology we use is growing exponentially.

Cal Newport identifies two core abilities for success in the new economy: (1) the ability to quickly grasp difficult tasks or ideas, and (2) “the ability to produce at an elite level, in terms of both quality and speed.” These core abilities also apply broadly to fields that have seemingly little to do with technology. Newport posits that the capacity to quickly master hard things and to produce at elite levels depend on our adeptness at performing deep work, which he defines as the ability to focus, without distraction, on cognitively demanding tasks. Essentially, deep work requires the ability to consistently plan for and engage in the deliberate practice of particular skills or abilities, and using feedback to constantly improve. These properties of deliberate practice suggest the importance of uninterrupted concentration, which K. Anders Ericsson reminds us is antithetical to diffused attention.

The identification of deliberate practice as a valuable behavior has contributed to recent research on the neurophysiological mechanisms that inform progress on difficult tasks. This work points to the role of myelin, a layer of fatty tissue that grows around neurons and functions like an insulator that enables the relevant neurons to fire more effortlessly.
and effectively. However, if we are learning or practicing a difficult skill in a distracted state, we are, in effect, firing too many circuits concurrently and randomly to isolate the group of neurons we want to strengthen. Current scientific findings are thus expanding our understanding of the importance of focusing deeply, without distraction, when trying to quickly learn difficult skills and concepts. Regardless of the field in which students eventually work, the capacity to develop these abilities, and to exercise them in an agentic way, may be defining attributes of those who are successful in the new economy.

**Education for the new economy**

What does the increasing prevalence of driverless cars powered by artificial intelligence, as well as robots that can interpret medical images, evaluate vast amounts of data, conduct legal research, advise oncologists, and analyze stocks, mean for our students? How are we, as architects of the higher education experience, preparing students for this new reality? How can we enable students to develop the fundamental **transferable** skills, abilities, and dispositions that they will need to work well and creatively with technology to drive innovation, rather than be replaced by it?

The National Research Council advocates for the establishment of environments in which students can develop not only the ability to master difficult concepts, but also learn how to transfer those skills and abilities to new situations. These environments—including those that are learner centered, knowledge centered, and community centered—can help students to organize their knowledge and personal experiences into demonstrable results that they and others value.

In institutions of higher education that are student centered, faculty pay close attention to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions that students bring into the classroom and other learning venues. This awareness enables faculty to address students’ preconceptions about the subject matter at hand while simultaneously promoting shifts in students’ thinking, especially if students’ perceptions are not entirely accurate. Additionally, intentional attention to the background knowledge that a student brings into a new learning situation can reveal students’ conceptions of what it means to be intelligent. Indeed, students who believe that intelligence is a fixed entity are more likely to be performance oriented as opposed to learning oriented; they want to look good rather than risk making mistakes while learning and are thus more likely to give up when tasks become difficult. Alternatively, students who believe that intelligence is malleable are more willing to struggle with challenging tasks and to pursue them to completion.

Faculty in learner-centered classrooms are more likely to develop appropriate tasks that facilitate deeper understanding of the material taught, and tend to be more attentive to students’ progress in moving toward systematic ways of engaging with material. In student-centered learning spaces, faculty present materials that are demanding enough to maintain engagement but not so difficult as to lead to discouragement. The noted developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky has termed this the “zone of proximal development.”

Faculty can also encourage students to schedule, in methodical and intentional ways, uninterrupted periods of time in which to attend to difficult but important work—a technique that Newport connects with producing at an elite level. Recent studies affirm that the most successful students organize their time to enhance their concentration, which dramatically reduces the time it takes to master challenging material without diminishing the quality of results. Developing this ability reduces what Sophie Leroy calls the attention residue effect, which occurs when shifting from task to task. That is, when our attention is divided, we are unable to fully concentrate on the task at hand.
because a part of our attention is still focused on other tasks.

The idea of the malleability of intelligence can inform how we structure social and pedagogical interventions to reduce performance gaps among students. It also encourages us to recognize the diverse ways in which students can be engaged and the importance of reinforcing positive messages that can help students counter the many and varied odds against them. Recent research can help us to reorient our own perceptions with a view toward integrating new and nuanced understandings of existing programs and interventions and to strive for outcomes that include motivating an increasingly diverse student population to consider a wider range of future “possible selves.”24 When implemented well, this strategy results in more positive campus climates that enable students to immerse themselves more deeply in learning.

The late Ted Sizer and Maxine Greene, who advocated teaching students to be independent and creative thinkers, would applaud such a focus. But obtaining these results will not be easy, particularly when we consider the necessity of reconceptualizing the curriculum to emphasize interdisciplinary projects that develop students’ minds rather than testing them in ways that provide, at best, limited information of what they know, understand, and can do, which can lead to deeply misinformed views of students’ abilities and potential.

**More than economics**

The authors of the McKinsey report assert that education systems must evolve to meet the needs of a changing workplace. This means concentrated emphasis on “improv[ing] basic skills” and a new focus on “creativity, emotional intelligence, and leading and coaching others.”25 Indeed, the potential for change in all job categories requires us to become more agile, resilient, and flexible. So, too, will an increasingly automated world reward the rare and valuable ability to exercise good judgment, think strategically, make connections between seemingly disparate disciplines, and maintain a dispassionate presence of mind.26 Critically, encouraging students to think creatively, analytically, practically, and regeneratively may enable them to not only respond effectively to the challenges of automation, but also to address recurring challenges associated with global poverty, health epidemics, gender inequality, climate change, income polarization and human mobility.27 Indeed, addressing these challenges requires the capacity to collaborate, adapt, innovate, and create—which further suggests that students increasingly need access to both a broad knowledge base and adaptable strategies and dispositions that will enable them to effectively participate with diverse others from different regions and cultures.

When we encourage the development of these habits of mind in higher education, we enable more than the “ability to draw on or access one’s intellectual resources in situations where those resources may be relevant.”28 Indeed, we can inspire the ability to access not only cognitive resources, but also those that are emotional, psychological, physiological, social, and spiritual. Nurturing, training, and educating students to live lives that approach these standards can enable them to actively participate in creating future possible selves that can weather the economic and social repercussions of a rapidly changing world.29

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12. Brynjolfsson and McAfee, Race against the Machine.


29. Markus and Nurius, “Possible Selves.”
Prospects and Limits of Online Liberal Arts Education

For centuries, educators and philosophers have explored the benefits that a broad liberal education can offer to individuals and societies. More recently, prominent educational leaders have continued to articulate the value of a liberal education in the digital age. In Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters, Michael S. Roth cautions us about what can be lost if education is reduced to job preparation alone, contending that a strictly utilitarian approach fails to help students develop a sense of meaning and purpose, or to become engaged citizens who strive to make society more equitable, stable, and just. Mark William Roche’s Why Choose the Liberal Arts? advances an argument in favor of liberal arts education in particular, explaining why the liberal arts are so important to cultivate virtue, form character, help students find a sense of meaning and purpose, and engage learners in the so-called great questions. In Not for Profit, Martha Nussbaum goes as far as to say that the very health of a democracy depends on forming liberally educated citizens.

Books like these provide thorough and valuable rationales for the continued relevance of liberal education, especially in economically challenging times, when the cultural discourse encourages students to think of college solely in terms of return on investment. But these works don’t fully address one of the critical forces affecting liberal education, and specifically liberal arts education, in the twenty-first century: enrollment shifts toward online learning. According to the most recent federal data available, more than one-third of all students in higher education were enrolled in at least one distance education course in 2016, representing a major change since the twentieth century in how millions of students experience education. Some residential liberal arts colleges now offer online courses and degrees. These shifts toward online learning environments have occurred amidst uncertainty regarding the educational value of online learning. Some hope that online learning will improve learning outcomes, reduce the cost of instruction, and broaden access to higher education; however, annual national surveys of faculty and chief academic officers consistently reveal mixed perceptions of the quality of online learning. Education leaders such as Adam F. Falk, president of Williams College, say that technology can harm our ability to think deeply, be emotionally well, and connect socially with others. Despite these broad concerns, it is reasonable to assume that the implications of online learning environments will depend significantly on a variety of factors, including an institution’s mission and the student constituencies it serves. Although higher education may be able to reach new student populations through online platforms, it is critical to ensure that these formats do not undermine the quality of a liberal education, especially within programs designed to improve access for underserved populations.

In the spirit of exploring the relationship between liberal education and online learning to better understand the prospects and limits of
online liberal arts education in particular, I conducted an embedded stakeholder case study at a residential liberal arts college in the Midwest with about 3,800 full-time students where small, intimate classrooms are the norm. In 2012, this college had begun experimenting with online learning by offering one section each of a few of its core liberal arts courses—such as philosophy, history, and literature—online. In total, fewer than ten online course sections were offered; some courses were required, whereas others fulfilled distribution requirements. My goal was to listen to the voices of key stakeholders in the liberal arts mission of the college, including students, faculty, and administrators, who were uniquely positioned to speak with authority about their experiences with online learning.

I selected study participants through a process of purposive sampling in order to identify faculty, student, and administrator interviewees whose roles were closely connected to the research topic. I ultimately interviewed ten full-time tenure and tenure-track faculty members from a range of disciplines: Latin, English, classics, history, philosophy, art, and education. Seven of these faculty participants had taught online courses offered to residential students at the college. I also interviewed six upper-class students majoring in at least one liberal arts discipline, all of whom were recommended by faculty participants and three of whom had participated in online courses. Participating senior administrators included the president, provost, and two academic deans; in addition, I interviewed the staff member who coordinated the pilot online courses.

The data I gleaned from my interviews, conducted over a period of six months in 2015, enrich our awareness of several themes and considerations related to online approaches to liberal arts education. The broad questions guiding my research were, Will continued growth in online learning support, challenge, or undermine liberal arts education? What are the appropriate roles, if any, that online learning environments can or should play in liberal arts education in the digital age? If Nussbaurn is correct in saying that liberally educated citizens are essential for the flourishing of democracy, then a critical task should be to investigate whether online environments are effective formats for cultivating liberal education, including education in the liberal arts.

**Embodied learning and liberal education outcomes**

Among the liberal education outcomes that are essential to a just and thriving democracy is a sense of personal and social responsibility. Empathy, as both a skill and virtue, is a key ingredient in this outcome. As Jane Addams and W. E. B. Du Bois attested, empathy helps citizens to negotiate our individual differences and compels us to move beyond individualism and toward a form of civic engagement oriented toward social progress and mutual flourishing. Therefore, when considering particular pedagogical approaches, including online learning, colleges and universities should evaluate the potential of those approaches to develop students’ capacity for empathy. My study surfaced several interesting findings related to the potential for digitally mediated interactions to promote empathy among students.

My interviews with faculty in particular underscored the idea that online learning can seem ethereal, allowing the subject matter of a course, and the people who hold different views on that subject matter, to remain relatively abstract. For example, one history professor said that some competencies, such as the capacity to be an empathic citizen, are more easily developed in embodied, face-to-face settings. She offered the example of her course on religious history, commenting that class discussion is enriched when religious diversity is embodied among the students in the classroom. In her residential religious history courses, she said, face-to-face discussion prompts students to encounter, with physical immediacy, the lived experiences of those who are different from them. The power of encountering the physical presence of those with beliefs different from their own helps students question their assumptions about other religions. In this way, the classroom provides a physical experience that can facilitate learning and empathy in ways that text or images encountered in a more abstract way—such as on a screen—do not.

Faculty members participating in the study pointed toward eye contact as one critical aspect of embodied learning that facilitates empathy. As one philosophy professor noted, “I think my online students are less respectful . . . because
they never have to sit in that chair and look at me. And they can communicate in ways that[,] if they looked into my eyes[,] they would not [use to] communicate." During another interview, an English professor pointed out that it is physically impossible to make eye contact in digital environments. Eye contact, said the English professor, is one of the many important non-verbal cues that make up a physically embodied classroom discussion. These bodily cues can help communicate ideas, establish personal connections, develop mutual understanding, and support classroom learning. Other faculty participants agreed with the English professor that physically embodied interactions offer memorable multisensory learning environments that cannot be replicated by online discussion boards or videoconferencing.

These comments from faculty participants align with the observations of researchers and educators who have expressed particular concern that digital devices present barriers to empathy in interpersonal communication and relationships. Notably, Sherry Turkle draws from a body of psychiatric research to demonstrate that face-to-face conversations and eye contact aid the development of empathy and attachment. Specifically, Turkle describes research by psychiatrist Daniel Siegel, who concludes that eye contact allows children to develop attachments and prevents problems with developing capacity for empathy. To further support her point, Turkle cites the work of cognitive neuroscientist Atsushi Senju, explaining that "the parts of the brain that allow us to process another person's feelings and intentions are activated by eye contact." Although studies such as these point to the importance of eye contact, it is important to acknowledge that students with visual disabilities or other physical conditions that might impair eye contact are certainly capable of developing empathy. The broader point is that research confirms the intuition of faculty who believe that the various components of embodied, physical learning experiences matter.

Though administrator and student interviewees did not discuss empathy directly, they did raise concerns about the quality of interpersonal interaction that is possible online. Administrators believed that while individual courses could be offered online or in hybrid formats, essential aspects of a liberal education, namely opportunities to explore one's vocation, become a good citizen, and contribute to an intimate learning community, require face-to-face experiences. Students who had completed online courses spoke positively about their experiences with the format, but expressed concerns similar to those of administrators and faculty, and described face-to-face discussion as critical to their learning. As one student participant stated, in online environments, it is too easy to project a self that isn't real. Students' preference for face-to-face interaction extended beyond the classroom as students highlighted the central role that relationships with faculty played in their learning. Indeed, all three stakeholder groups said that meaningful interpersonal interaction and relationships were essential ingredients of a liberal arts education.

Prospective benefits of digital learning environments

Despite their concerns about digital learning environments, participants were willing to imagine ways in which these environments could contribute positively to the outcomes associated with liberal education. Faculty readily acknowledged that the use of digital tools and the internet could enhance face-to-face courses: for example, online tools can connect students to new social networks, such as professional associations, practitioners, alumni, or others who share an interest or expertise in course content. Additionally, incorporating the use of digital tools and resources into coursework can give students the chance to critically analyze these digital tools. One faculty participant speculated that online courses could be particularly well suited to developing skills that might be enhanced by solitude, such as critical reflection. In this line of thinking, digital environments can provide individuals with the space and flexibility for critical reflection, deep reading, and slow writing.
Some faculty went as far as to say that thoughtfully combining face-to-face and online learning environments could create hybrid learning experiences that were better than purely face-to-face learning. In one example, an art faculty member described teaching a hybrid course about sacred spaces. Students spent a week together at the beginning and end of the term, sharing meals and visiting sacred spaces; during the rest of the term, the class interacted purely online, with discussions conducted via an online posting board and highly individualized faculty feedback. The faculty member observed that students contributed to class discussion at their own pace, preventing talkative students from dominating the discussion, and allowing quieter students to find their voices. In contrast to faculty, administrators said that hybrid courses could have a place in liberal arts education, but did not say they believed these formats would improve learning. Students expressed their preference for face-to-face learning, saying that people can more easily be inauthentic online, that in-person discussions are more interesting, and that online learning environments impede their ability to focus.

Among all three groups, there was consensus that an entire degree could not be earned online without undermining some essential elements of liberal arts education. Stakeholders described the importance of embodied learning for developing empathy and other interpersonal skills that are necessary to live as flourishing citizens in a democracy. As one faculty member said, and student interviews confirmed, students “need to be able to sit down with somebody and talk face-to-face about what all this [course content and information] means.” Indeed, Terry Anderson, scholar of online learning, warns us:

It may be more challenging than we think to create and sustain these [online] communities, and the differences may be more fundamental—differences that are linked to lack of placedness and synchronicity in time and place, the mere absence of body language, and the development of social presence. Documenting student, faculty, and administrator perceptions of online and hybrid learning environments is an important step toward determining the role that these formats might play in liberal education. However, such research must ultimately be supplemented by direct assessment of student work, an approach long advocated by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. While my study provides context for a discussion about the future of educational technology, decisions about whether and when to incorporate hybrid and online learning should be informed by empirical research on specific student outcomes. Through direct assessment of student work, future research should compare hybrid, online, and face-to-face learning environments by examining the effect of these environments on student learning outcomes, such as personal and social responsibility, as well as on intellectual and practical skills.

The future of liberal arts education

One takeaway from this study is that hybrid learning environments may hold the most promise for liberal education in the digital age as compared with environments that are solely online or face-to-face. Instructors can carefully craft various combinations of embodied, online, communal, and solitary experiences that are best suited to advance particular liberal education outcomes, such as intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, critical and creative thinking, and teamwork and problem solving. Some outcomes, such as empathy, may be optimally supported by embodied interaction. However, with carefully crafted assignments, even purely online courses could incorporate embodied learning that facilitates empathy. For example, an online course on religion could require students to interact face-to-face with various members of different religious communities through interviews or attendance at religious events. In this model, content delivered online can prepare students for in-person interaction by providing relevant historical, sociological, and theological information, and the digital platform can provide a place for students to share, process, and connect their experiences to course content. In the digital age, college graduates should also have fluency with how to be good citizens of the web, and online learning environments are ripe with opportunities for students to explore the relationship between face-to-face civic engagement and civic engagement in digital spaces.

Indeed, hybrid courses and programs may be the most feasible approach to delivering liberal
arts education in new ways for a new world while still preserving its distinctive essential features. From a pedagogical perspective, online learning environments may open doors to new possibilities, while face-to-face settings can anchor critical aspects of liberal education. Leveraging these options together can equip students with the knowledge and skills that have always been required for effective citizenship. At the same time, structured learning experiences in digital environments may equip students to better navigate the dizzying and disorienting reality of life in a constantly connected digital age.

Still, these pedagogical insights do not solve some of the major financial and cultural challenges facing the liberal arts and liberal education more broadly. First, embodied instruction is an expensive endeavor. Yet while adding online programs may generate new revenue for institutions, moving coursework online has not been demonstrated to significantly lower costs of instruction.14 Second, cultural forces that emphasize the transactional aspects of higher education encourage students to invest time and money in exchange for credentials that serve as commodities on the labor market. Although gainful employment is a critical outcome of higher education, so is preparation for civic participation—and liberal education outcomes are uniquely suited to prepare students for both employment and citizenship. Disembodied online learning experiences may be less effective than face-to-face pedagogies in promoting some of these civic outcomes, such as those that rely on empathy, and may therefore have the potential to exacerbate the transactional nature of an educational experience. Colleges and universities should be careful to implement pedagogies, whether online, embodied, or hybrid, that result in the complex learning outcomes necessary for a healthy democracy rather than supplying comparatively transactional versions of education.

As recent books have demonstrated, there is a need to continue to rearticulate the value and importance of liberal education in the digital age. Strengthened advocacy is crucial. But educators also have the opportunity to drive hybrid pedagogical innovation that engages questions of embodiment, citizenship, and meaning-making. Hybrid courses and programs may be one possible means of adapting liberal education to a new world and new age.

This article is based on the author’s dissertation, “Liberal Arts Education and Online Learning: Practices, Prospects, and Limits” (Michigan State University, 2016). To respond to this article, email liberaled@aacu.org with the author’s name on the subject line.

NOTES

2. Babson Survey Research Group defines a distance education course as a course where course content is delivered exclusively online. See Julia E. Seaman, I. Elaine Allen, and Jeff Seaman, Grade Increase: Tracking Distance Education in the United States (Babson Park, MA: Babson Survey Research Group, 2018).
5. Allen and Seaman, Grade Change.
9. Roth, Beyond the University, 84–86.
13. The outcomes named here are among those essential learning outcomes identified in conjunction with Liberal Education and America’s Promise, an initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The full list of outcomes is available at http://www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes.
At a moment when sociopolitical tensions are threatening our collective ability to forge understanding across differences, community colleges bring together students of diverse backgrounds and experiences to explore the big-picture questions that define liberal education, many of which are global in scope. Exploration of these questions is frequently enriched by engagement with the humanities, including through cultural resources that enliven community college campuses.

The Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg Holocaust Center (KHC) is one such cultural resource at Queensborough Community College (QCC) of the City University of New York (CUNY), a minority-serving institution in one of the most diverse counties in the United States. In 2010, the KHC received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to create a national demonstration model for effectively incorporating campus-based cultural resources into humanities curricula. With matching support, in 2012, the KHC began endowing an annual yearlong faculty-coordinated colloquia series on the Holocaust, genocide, and mass violence. Since the inception of the series, faculty across the humanities have incorporated colloquia events into the syllabi of their courses. To date, five colloquia series have run successfully; a sixth series, focused on “Collaboration and Complicity,” will run throughout the 2017–18 academic year. Each year, a committee of experts from outside of QCC selects a series coordinator based on responses to a request for proposals, which is open to faculty of all ranks and disciplines at the college. At the time of this writing, faculty members representing six different disciplines—history, English, academic literacy, sociology, music, and psychology—have coordinated different years of the colloquia, and their content has reflected that disciplinary diversity.

Gender, mass violence, and genocide

The first author, a sociologist, coordinated the 2015–16 series, titled “Gender, Mass Violence, and Genocide.” That year’s series consisted of eight events linked to a newly established field of research within genocide scholarship: gender-sensitive studies of mass violence and genocide. According to Elisa von Joeden-Forgey, a gendered analysis of “genocide as a process”—“its roots, its immediate causes, its shape, its aftermath, and ultimately, its definition”—will lead to both a “better understand[ing] of the crime” and the improvement of “protocols for preventing and responding to it.” The colloquia were intended to engage students and community members in such analysis.

The eight colloquia had two foci. The first was how gender structures and mediates experiences of mass violence and genocide, including the nature of pre-genocidal propaganda, the agency and victimization of men and women, and the use and effects of certain genocidal tools (e.g., sexual violence, selective mass killing, and slavery).
The second was how attention to gender can aid efforts to predict, prevent, and reconcile experiences and instances of mass violence and genocide. For example, the colloquia events explored gendered precursors to (and early warning signs of) genocide, gendered memories of trauma, and gendered efforts to rebuild and restore justice after genocide.

To address these two foci, the series’ eight colloquia encouraged participants to engage with both comparative perspectives and in-depth reflections on specific historical events. Inspired by the research of Helen Fein and others, they addressed elements of gender-specific and gender-neutral genocides, and they examined women and men as perpetrators and victims of mass violence and genocide. The eight events also offered diverse disciplinary perspectives on the topic of gender and genocide, convening fifteen speakers from a range of humanities and humanities-oriented disciplines, including history, psychology, philosophy, women’s and gender studies, foreign languages and literatures, comparative genocide studies, linguistics, political science, English and comparative literature, and jurisprudence. (Videos and resources from each event are available at http://qcc.libguides.com/NEH.)

Twelve QCC faculty members agreed to link at least one course to an event in the series. These faculty members and their courses reflected the disciplinary diversity of the eight events, the range of humanities and humanities-oriented perspectives at QCC, and the gamut of QCC students’ interests and abilities: education, English, sociology, history, speech communication and theater, psychology, art, design, political science, foreign languages and literatures, and academic literacy. Students in each of fourteen participating courses were exposed to a curriculum module aligned with a series event, readings appropriate to the event’s content, and a writing assignment that tied together their course material and insights from the event. At least 335 students interacted with the series through these fourteen courses.

Exploratory research protocol
The twelve participating faculty members agreed to contribute to an exploratory research protocol that ran alongside the colloquia series. These faculty members shared their students’ aligned, deidentified, and anonymized papers with the first author and other researchers. To protect students’ privacy and align with institutional review board regulations, the first author visited each of the fourteen participating courses to introduce the series, explain the protocol, and obtain students’ consent. At the conclusion of both the fall 2015 and the spring 2016 semesters, participating faculty provided the first author with consenting students’ papers. For the purposes of the protocol, 191 students consented to share their papers—representing 57 percent of all of the students who were present during the consent-administration class periods. Of these 191 students, 75 percent (144 students) submitted papers for analysis.

These 144 papers became data for a two-phase study. Phase one was faculty driven, involving four QCC faculty members who engaged in rubric-based assessment of the consenting students’ papers. Phase two was student driven, involving an undergraduate CUNY research scholar who systematically analyzed the contents of those same papers. Both phases were informed by the following research questions:

1. How do American community college students respond to genocide education and prevention curricula across the humanities?
2. What is discovered through a faculty-driven, rubric-based assessment of students’ responses to genocide education and prevention curricula?
3. What is discovered through a student-driven content analysis of students’ responses to genocide education and prevention curricula, and how do these discoveries compare to those of the faculty-driven assessment?

These research questions are significant for two reasons. First, while more courses on the Holocaust, genocide, and mass violence are taught at the university level than ever before, little is known about how American college students—particularly American community college students—respond to these learning opportunities. This is a void that must be addressed. As Totten points out, “the levels, abilities, and backgrounds of one’s students” must be considered in the design, implementation, and evaluation of Holocaust, genocide, and mass violence curricula, in particular.

Second, political and economic threats to the humanities and liberal education demand that researchers study—and defend—the value of both political and economic threats to the humanities and liberal education demand that researchers study—and defend—the value of both
of both. Bradburn and Townsend demonstrate how data can be used to make the “case for the humanities,” pointing in particular to data on the earnings, employment rate, and job satisfaction of humanities graduates, as well as data on the percentage of humanities graduates employed in the helping professions. While data on the transformative impacts and societal benefits of a humanities education are certainly of value to this case, questions abound about how to best define, collect, and analyze those data.

**Phase one data analysis and findings**

Phase one of this study unfolded alongside the series during the 2015–16 academic year. A team of four trained and experienced QCC faculty members systematically assessed the protocol’s 144 papers, using the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Global Learning VALUE Rubric to measure students’ efforts to “analyze and explore complex global challenges.” The team opted to use this rubric because the KHC’s mission aligns with the goal of promoting diversity/global learning, recognized by AAC&U and others as a high-impact educational practice.

Team members met early in the fall 2015 semester to discuss the suitability of the rubric and to settle on the interpretation of its six dimensions (global self-awareness, perspective taking, cultural diversity, personal and social responsibility, understanding global systems, and applying knowledge to contemporary global contexts) and four levels of demonstrated learning (spanning from benchmark through two milestones to capstone). They also determined how to score content missing from the papers, as well as when to record examples that demonstrated achievement at each of the four levels. At the end of the fall 2015 and spring 2016 semesters, two team members read and assessed each submitted paper, with remarkably little variability across their respective scores. For each paper and each dimension, the first author averaged the reviewers’ two scores to produce a single score; at the end of the semester, she then calculated an average for each dimension across all papers.

Data from phase one indicate that students’ learning clustered around the global self-awareness dimension of the AAC&U Global Learning VALUE Rubric, revealing that the series’ events and assignments most profoundly affected students’ development of a “mature, integrated identity with a systematic understanding of the interrelationships among the self, local, and global communities.” Student learning proved weakest on the knowledge application dimension of the rubric, indicating that the series’ events and assignments could have done more to encourage students’ “ability to apply knowledge and skills gained through higher learning to real-life problem-solving.”

Assessment team members’ reflections on these results and on the scoring process provide additional insight. For example, members noted how the assignment design—including structure, relative length, and whether the assignment was completed in class or at home—mediated students’ achievement along the rubric’s dimensions. They also described how student success, as measured by the AAC&U Global Learning VALUE Rubric, often correlated with course level and disciplinary skill set. Members cited evidence of student learning that, while consistent across the papers, was not captured by the rubric: specifically, students’ overwhelming expressions of compassion and/or revulsion, as well as their ability to synthesize multiple types of content gleaned from the event, from assigned readings, and from course lectures. Finally, assessment team members reflected on the use of the AAC&U VALUE rubrics in the community college context, questioning whether to interpret the capstone measure of associate-level learning as equivalent to, or a step on the way toward, the capstone measure of baccalaureate-level learning. (AAC&U has since clarified that students who have nearly completed their associate’s degrees may produce work corresponding with milestone-level achievement, a step on the way toward capstone-level baccalaureate learning.)

**Phase two data analysis and findings**

Phase two of the study concluded in spring 2017. Led by the second author, then a CUNY research scholar and fourth-semester undergraduate at QCC, this phase consisted of the systematic content analysis of the 144 papers. The second author identified emergent themes and commonalities by developing codes for analysis that were sufficiently broad and inclusive to allow for multiple associations within and across the papers.

After the second author had analyzed student papers from two courses, the two authors met to discuss, define, and differentiate the four
codes that emerged: (1) global awareness, (2) emotional reaction, (3) planned action/response, and (4) personal connection. After the two authors had agreed on the codes, their meaning, and the nature of appropriate evidence, the second author analyzed student papers from two additional courses. The authors then met to discuss the possible creation of a fifth code—course content—to capture students’ learning of discipline-specific course facts, theories, and concepts. After the second author used these five codes to analyze student papers from an additional two courses, the authors opted to abandon the fifth code due to the protocol’s focus on cross-disciplinary learning.

While data from phase two were consistent with the findings of phase one, second-phase data indicated that content analysis of students’ papers can yield additional insights into their learning. For example, while phase two confirmed that students’ learning clustered around global awareness, it added nuance to phase one findings by exposing differences in how students conceived of self in relationship to global communities. More specifically, the second author’s content analysis revealed that students’ developing global awareness was generally of two types: cognitive or affective. Those students who reflected a cognitive global awareness expressed a new, informed approach to the world marked by a shift in attention from events in the United States to occurrences around the globe. In contrast, those students who reflected a more affective global awareness expressed an evolving emotional understanding of human interconnectedness across and despite the bounds of the nation-state.

Another pattern that emerged in phase two relates to the weak knowledge-application finding of phase one as well as the second author’s status as a student researcher. When read closely by a peer in phase two, more student papers suggested evidence of the “ability to apply knowledge and skills gained through higher learning to real-life problem-solving” than when read by faculty evaluators in phase one. This is because the second author recognized that students conceptualized learning itself as a “real-life” solution to the “problem” of their prior lack of knowledge. In fact, the second author’s careful content analysis uncovered moments in which students framed their acquisition of knowledge, and their efforts to build on and share that newly acquired knowledge, as a distinct form of action. For example, when reflecting on all that she had learned at a colloquia event, one student wrote, “On my end I have to do even more research.” Another student described how such learning had affected her interactions with her family: “The colloquia series prompted me to have a conversation about the Holocaust with my mother, who never knew it happened since it was not taught in her school in Ecuador.” Synthesizing both points, still another student captured her learning and communicating as mutually constituting acts of engagement with the world: “The more we share, the more we are aware.”

Conclusion

In this article, we reviewed one effort to deepen students’ connections to the humanities through the use of campus-based cultural resources on a community college campus. Focusing specifically on the 2015–16 colloquia series “Gender, Mass Violence, and Genocide,” organized by the first author through the KHC and with NEH matching support, we outlined and compared the findings of a two-phase exploratory research protocol designed to assess students’ aligned learning. While phase one measured that learning against the dimensions of the AAC&U Global Learning VALUE Rubric, phase two used content analysis to parse the meaning and evidence of each dimension from a student’s perspective.

Taken together, the protocol’s findings go beyond expressing the educative impacts of a single year of Holocaust and genocide colloquia events; they also point to three important takeaways for those committed to humanities education. First, campus-based cultural resources can serve as effective, enlivening partners in students’ exploration of the significant questions that define liberal education in the first two years of college. Community colleges should explore similar opportunities for public-private partnerships and campus-wide collaboration. Second, existing resources like the AAC&U VALUE rubrics can help humanities educators practice assessment in a way that makes a case for the humanities while improving student learning and faculty instruction. Third, and finally, students are invaluable partners and
resources in the aforementioned exploration and assessment. Whether tapped as formal researchers or heeded as agents in the classroom, students must—given the very nature of a humanities education—make sense of their own experiences and learning.

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

NOTES
One University’s Approach to Engaged Learning across the Curriculum

How can faculty, staff, and administrators design a high-quality academic experience for their institution’s undergraduates by adopting an established set of nationally recognized, evidence-based teaching and learning practices that promote engaged learning? How can they ensure that all students, regardless of major, achieve the essential learning outcomes associated with a liberal education, including written communication, critical thinking, and oral communication?

Over the past five years, the University of Hartford sought to answer these questions. As part of an institutional strategic planning process, the university’s provost asked groups of faculty, staff, and administrators to develop recommendations relating to five areas of strategic importance. As members of the group focused on Hartford’s educational mission, we were charged with rethinking undergraduate and graduate education. Our goal was not to propose an entirely new curriculum, but to outline a few changes that might be possible and desirable given the university’s strengths, needs, and institutional context. We opted to focus on working with faculty and staff to ensure that all students would encounter specific educationally effective practices in all four years of the undergraduate curriculum.

In this article, we share lessons learned in the hopes that others might benefit from our experience. While each institution has its own unique goals and context for reform, many share challenges similar to the ones we faced when undertaking curricular change.

Background and process

The University of Hartford is a primarily residential, midsized, private comprehensive university with approximately 4,500 full-time undergraduate students. It is composed of seven schools and colleges, including schools of art, music, and business; a college of arts and sciences; a college of education and health professions; a college of engineering, technology, and architecture; and a two-year college. Like many institutions, the university faces ongoing challenges related to the silo-like nature of these schools and colleges, each of which operates more or less independently. Fragmented curricular design has historically resulted in dramatically different undergraduate experiences across the various colleges. Moreover, the diversity of our undergraduate programs, of which there are more than eighty, has made it difficult to implement curricular changes that reach all students in all programs.

In fall 2013, the university brought renewed focus to these challenges as part of its development of a new strategic plan. Initially, the university’s provost invited “solution teams” to make recommendations related to five areas of
strategic importance, including revising the institution’s approach to our core educational mission; cultivating partnerships with employers and community organizations; expanding academic initiatives, especially online programs; making the university a first-choice destination for students and employees; and developing sustainable financial models. University officers distilled these recommendations into a draft strategic plan with five goals, and the provost identified chairs to lead “implementation committees” for each draft goal. Focusing on transforming the undergraduate educational experience, the Goal 1 committee included faculty from all schools and colleges, faculty from the All-University Curriculum (a university-wide interdisciplinary general education program), and staff representing the university’s Student Success Center, Office of Residential Life, and study abroad and international programs. The committee was charged with developing specific actionable recommendations related to the first goal, including recommendations about infrastructure, resources, and metrics for measuring success.

The committee divided into two subgroups, one devoted to the first-year experience and another to the undergraduate academic experience as a whole. Both groups focused on the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) literature on high-impact practices. Over the past decade, higher education researchers and practitioners have developed a robust body of literature about an established set of high-impact practices, including first-year experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, and others. These practices are designed to foster engaged learning and provide students with opportunities to apply knowledge in new or real-world contexts, to collaborate with peers and interact with mentors, and to learn beyond the classroom. Our curricular reform efforts were thus distinguished by a focus on instructional practices that are proven to increase learning, rather than on course syllabi.

The subgroup organized an inventory of high-impact practices within every program across the university, providing useful—if preliminary—information about existing strengths and weaknesses. For example, a number of programs had experience with writing-intensive courses, senior capstone courses and projects, internships, learning communities, and collaborative assignments and projects. However, these experiences varied in their consistency, quality, and scope. After a series of difficult conversations, the subgroup proposed a framework for incorporating high-impact practices across all four years of the undergraduate experience, with particular emphasis on the first year and the culminating year. In short, we recommended that all students encounter two high-impact practices in the first year, two in the middle years, and two in the final year, and that all students additionally take at least one writing-intensive course in each of their four years of study. With these recommendations, we aimed to ensure that every student would benefit from a challenging, experience-rich curriculum. Yet we also wanted the requirements to be flexible enough to be implemented across a diverse set of programs, while preserving the integrity of those programs and the disciplinary training they provide.

After the board of regents approved the university’s new strategic plan in early May 2014, goal 1 committee members convened to devise criteria for most of the ten high-impact practices. On-campus experts in related areas of work provided guidance as the committee discussed the proposed criteria. The committee’s cochairs then drafted a white paper articulating the details of its plan to ensure access to engaged learning for all University of Hartford undergraduates, regardless of major. The Goal 1 leadership team shared this white paper and the committee’s other work with the university community, university officers, and the board of regents via regular meetings, presentations, town hall–style open houses, and reports on the university website before shifting its focus to supporting campus-wide implementation of the goal.

Effective strategies
In our efforts to bring about widespread institutional change, we found several strategies particularly effective.

Focusing on teaching first. Early in the planning process, committee leadership decided to begin the change process by emphasizing
teaching inputs rather than outputs. That is, we opted to focus on encouraging faculty to implement engaging pedagogy, with an emphasis on high-impact practices. We sensed that faculty were fatigued with the number of assessment-related initiatives that the university had launched in recent years, and we believed that we could generate more excitement and buy-in by focusing on faculty’s work with students. We also recognized that many of our colleagues were already implementing versions of high-impact practices, and we wanted to build on their expertise. This decision paid off. Faculty from across the university were interested in using the Goal 1 framework to reimagine their program design, improve student engagement, and deepen student learning.

**Establishing criteria for high-impact practices.** The literature on high-impact practices defines these practices quite broadly. We wanted to find a way to safeguard quality despite these broad definitions as faculty began to implement high-impact practices across campus. We found that establishing criteria for certain high-impact practices, as described above, helped us ensure consistent implementation while maintaining a necessary degree of flexibility.

While some faculty have challenged the details of some criteria, these criteria have helped stakeholders distinguish between, for example, short-term group work in class and sustained collaborative projects and assignments that meet our expectations for a high-impact practice.

**Investing in faculty development.** We launched implementation activities by hosting George Kuh, a nationally recognized expert on high-impact practices, who helped inspire creative thinking about instituting these practices in both academic and extracurricular settings and made an evidence-based case for their transformative potential. Kuh’s presentation connected our work with national conversations about teaching inputs rather than outputs. That is, we opted to focus on encouraging faculty to implement engaging pedagogy, with an emphasis on high-impact practices. We sensed that faculty were fatigued with the number of assessment-related initiatives that the university had launched in recent years, and we believed that we could generate more excitement and buy-in by focusing on faculty’s work with students. We also recognized that many of our colleagues were already implementing versions of high-impact practices, and we wanted to build on their expertise. This decision paid off. Faculty from across the university were interested in using the Goal 1 framework to reimagine their program design, improve student engagement, and deepen student learning.

**Establishing annual campus-wide conversations about teaching.** To celebrate our accomplishments and generate excitement about implementation, we organized a full-day curriculum festival in May 2015, at the end of the project’s first year. At this event, a speaker from AAC&U discussed the benefits of high-impact practices in preparing career-ready college graduates, and the college deans led their respective faculty in discussions about their colleges’ program-level implementation plans, as well as other curricular and pedagogical issues. This event has become an annual tradition in which faculty present examples of high-impact practices and other innovative approaches to teaching. The curriculum festival provides a rare opportunity for collegiate deans to engage their faculty in discussions about undergraduate curricula, teaching, and learning.

**Unresolved challenges**
While we have enjoyed several initial successes, we have also learned key lessons from early setbacks. In the coming years, we hope to advance our efforts in multiple critical areas.

**Setting realistic expectations.** While the Goal 1 committee initially recommended that each student complete at least four writing-intensive courses and six additional high-impact practices sequenced across the four-year undergraduate program, it quickly became clear that this recommendation was too ambitious. Faculty from several high-credit programs reported that they could not fit ten experiences into their tightly sequenced curricula. We also determined that if faculty could focus their attention on fewer experiences, those experiences would likely be richer for students, produce better outcomes in the short term, and result in baseline expectations that would provide room.
We recognize the need to assess the impact of our work, including the connections among high-impact practices and essential learning outcomes such as writing and critical thinking.

for future development. Therefore, we modified our recommendations so that every program would implement one writing-intensive course and one additional high-impact practice in the first year, in the middle years, and in the final year, for a total of six experiences. Faculty appreciated this modification, and even those who initially resisted the recommendations became more receptive after feeling that we had heard their concerns.

Communicating and institutionalizing the work. To communicate the specifics of the framework to faculty and students and help maintain momentum, focus, and energy, the university has created two new positions, a dean of undergraduate learning and an executive director of the university’s new Center for Teaching Excellence and Innovation. Together, these two faculty members manage the ongoing implementation work, network with deans’ offices across campus to offer targeted support, and provide professional development opportunities for faculty. In addition, the dean of undergraduate learning has established a committee of faculty to work on implementation, generate ideas for support, and serve as informed ambassadors to the different colleges.

We now intend to tag all writing-intensive courses and other high-impact practices in the course catalog so these experiences are more visible to advisors and students. These designations will also be reflected on student transcripts, thus informing potential graduate schools and employers of components of our students’ curricula. Following the model established by Queen’s University in Ontario, Canada, we are working to develop “major maps” that knit together required courses, high-impact practices, career-readiness opportunities, and cocurricular experiences in each of a student’s four years. These major maps will illustrate for advisors, faculty, and students the high-impact elements embedded throughout the four-year experience.

Assessing impact. In launching the Goal 1 framework, we intentionally focused on pedagogy and course design, giving only secondary concern to assessment of related essential learning outcomes. We intended for this emphasis on pedagogy to rapidly generate faculty buy-in and interest—and that decision certainly paid off. However, we recognize the need to assess the impact of our work, including the connections among high-impact practices and essential learning outcomes such as writing and critical thinking. Using our successful Writing Fellows Program as a model, we have developed a Critical Thinking Fellows program composed of fourteen faculty members who are participating in a yearlong faculty development initiative to improve critical thinking in their courses. With the support of funding for curricular innovation, faculty fellows are creating and implementing detailed assessment plans to evaluate their students on outcomes tied to critical thinking. These faculty assessment plans will serve as pilot projects as we work to identify best practices for assessing the effectiveness of high-impact practices, including writing-intensive courses.

Conclusion

Reflecting on our campus-wide effort to create a more distinctive undergraduate experience, we can point to a number of significant accomplishments. Chief among our successes has been the extent to which we have formalized, supported, and elevated conversations about engaged teaching and learning on campus. By infusing high-impact practices, including writing-intensive courses, across the curriculum in all majors and for all students, we are ensuring that the best University of Hartford experiences are available to everyone, not just the highest-performing students. By spreading these experiences across a student’s four years, we are providing scaffolding to help all students, regardless of their previous educational experiences, excel throughout their undergraduate careers and beyond.

In our efforts, we have built upon the university’s existing strengths in teaching and our shared commitment to student growth. Through a multiyear process, we have engaged over half of the full-time faculty in planning, assessment, and faculty development while communicating continually with the campus community about our efforts. Faculty enthusiasm has grown with each year of the initiative. As we move forward, we will continue to invest in professional development opportunities that help faculty design engaging pedagogy and practical strategies for assessing related outcomes. Our effort to ensure engaged learning by embedding writing-intensive courses
and other high-impact practices in the undergraduate curriculum serves to counterbalance the content-oriented emphasis more typical of curricular innovation. This work has the potential to supply the time and incentives necessary for all faculty to develop more effective evidence-based pedagogy.

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

NOTES
5. See Kuh and O’Donnell, Ensuring Quality.
On Being a Teacher

Self-Portrayal in the Classroom

JEFFREY NESTERUK

Like most professors, I have spent years mastering the content and skills of my discipline; as a veteran instructor, I have also spent years contemplating how best to share what I’ve learned with my students. I have come to realize that, in working to expand what my students know and can do, I have also—for better or worse—affected the kinds of individuals they are becoming. But in entering into areas related to personal development—particularly those in which attitudes, values, and aspirations are at stake—I still lack the confidence more readily evident in my conveyance of content and skills. While I’ve come a ways since my novice days of over twenty years ago, I haven’t come as far as I had hoped. I still need to understand—as I suspect others do—the less visible linkages among knowing, doing, and being.¹ I need to consider, as Parker Palmer once asked, “Who is the self that teaches?”²

Knowing, doing, and being

If faculty members wish to contribute to who our students are becoming, we need a better grasp of how being is intertwined with knowing and doing, the more conventional objects of our focus. Our commitment to expanding what our students know (disciplinary content, theories, and models) and can do (critical thinking, ethical reflection, and collaborative work) is, at a philosophic level, uncontroversial. But the relation of such intellectual growth to students’ being remains relatively unexplored.

Once we begin to talk about who students are—their attitudes, values, and aspirations—we enter an uncertain, potentially even inappropriate, terrain. What legitimacy might we bring to such an endeavor? Do our degrees and training give us any special expertise in reflecting upon values or critiquing aspirations?

While these are important, indeed essential, questions, they skirt a fundamental reality: that it is ultimately impossible to contribute substantially to what students know and can do without affecting, in subtle or complex ways, who students are becoming.

Learning to think critically, for instance, inevitably involves scrutinizing and developing previously held assumptions; and altering one’s assumptions can unsettle one’s attitudes, values, or aspirations. Fostering critical thinking in a student can lead the student toward becoming a different person.

It is incumbent upon us as educators to attend closely to who students are becoming as their knowledge increases and their capabilities expand. A better grasp of the links among knowing, doing, and being will assist us in this work.

Creating my character

The formal connections among knowing, doing, and being are part of a rich story about the student-teacher relationship. Every such relationship is unique, but all encompass the distinctiveness of each person and the attitudes, values, and aspirations that emerge from the ongoing interaction between student and teacher. At its best, such interaction changes the student and, just as significantly, the professor.

David Brooks has suggested that we only learn from those we love.³ If this is true, a teacher must become someone lovable, even someone students may want to emulate. I do not mean that students must aspire to their teachers’ career paths or even share our disciplinary passions, but rather that they must desire to see in themselves the qualities we exhibit as we pursue those careers and passions. The qualities that matter most relate to our character, our fundamental way of comporting ourselves in the world.

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My view of the student-teacher relationship is informed by Aristotle’s view of friendship as based on pleasure, utility, and nobility. We may enter into friendships because we enjoy others’ company, finding pleasure in our interaction with them. We might pursue relationships in a utilitarian manner, as when we develop professional contacts. Or we may be attracted to others because of their noble character—because we find them admirable in some way. All three elements are important to the student-teacher relationship, but nobility is the most challenging.

Of course, presenting a noble character doesn’t require us to tell our students everything about ourselves. Make no mistake: teaching is a kind of performing, and the performance must be one that exhibits our best. We must be authentically ourselves, but we also must be admirable—not only the selves that we strive to be, but selves that are worth striving for.

**Portraying myself**

If I examine what it means to present a self worth striving for as a contemporary college professor, what comes to the fore? Such presentation is a complex affair, as I’m continually learning. It requires a mixture of posturing and revealing.

The posturing comes first. In the classroom, I appear more confident and skilled, more knowledgeable and caring, than I actually am. Some of this is relative—students, after all, are beginning an intellectual journey I’ve been on for a while—but it’s also a perception I encourage. It helps establish my authority in the classroom, but more significantly, it suggests to students a model worth emulating. Thus, early on, I am more likely to tell students about my academic successes than about how I forgot my lunch that morning.

At the same time, I am also careful in the first class to say something that offers a glimpse of the imperfect person behind the performance. I might mention that I flunked my first college quiz or was late to a first-semester final because I couldn’t find the room. At first, I offer only a glimpse of my shortcomings, but I build on that information as the semester continues. In short, the nobility I’m after does not mean hiding my flaws.

Prudently exposing one’s shortcomings involves a kind of admirable courage—and at the right time and place, is something to be encouraged. One’s comportment in the world, if it is to be praiseworthy, must ultimately be an integrated affair, involving the whole self.

**Guarding against risks**

The evocative interplay between posturing and revealing is more art than science. Determining what and when to reveal and to whom involves an ongoing series of provisional judgments. Some students need more information; some less. Some classroom dynamics enable revelation; others do not. Some points in our lives make us inclined toward sharing; others less so.
The important thing is to make this interplay part of who we become in the classroom. For being a teacher means presenting a praiseworthy that is always in development. This presentation grounds the moral underpinning of whatever knowledge or skills we wish to provide our students. As Elizabeth Kiss and J. Peter Euben emphasize, “both the character of the teacher and the performative dimension of his or her teaching are central . . . aspects of moral education.”

Such a grounding guards against two risks that arise when we admit and embrace the idea that by teaching, we inevitably affect the persons our students are becoming. The first risk is present whenever we foster critical thinking; as Ruth W. Grant notes, such thinking has the potential to “undermine[e] commitments to social conventions and social authority.” While fostering critical analysis is laudable, it also involves responsibility; we should never callously or casually unsettle a student’s worldview.

The second risk is that a student’s education “will be employed to construct sophisticated rationalizations of self-serving actions and beliefs.” As we are all too aware, “intellectual development can proceed apace without producing corresponding progress in character development.” The potential that we are equipping a student to act in deceptive or harmful ways is an uncomfortable truth of which we should be mindful.

The interplay between posturing and revealing buttresses our ability as teachers to ensure that students remain attuned and responsive to these twin risks. The praiseworthy exhibited by posturing as one’s better self in the classroom is a tacit reminder of the moral responsibilities that students’ newly acquired knowledge and skills entail. Revealing one’s shortcomings is of equal importance, reminding students that the intellectual insights we display in the classroom are part of—indeed, are shaped by—our fallible selves.

**Conclusion**

In the end, the self I present in the classroom reflects the hopes I have for my students. These hopes include the acquisition of knowledge and the development of new capabilities. But such knowledge and capabilities must be informed by a greater attentiveness to character. Who I am as a teacher is present in the persons my students are becoming. That is at once a humbling and hopeful thought.

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

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**NOTES**


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