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EMERGING TRENDS AND KEY DEBATES IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

Lessons on Systemic Reform from the LEAP States Initiative



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This issue of *Peer Review* weaves together many stories of collaboration from authors participating in AAC&U's LEAP States initiative—including perspectives from California, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin. These stories form a rich tapestry about large-scale and generative change in higher education. The LEAP States initiative, one of the strands of work within AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, is a framework for collaboration, transformational change, and educational alignment to raise college learning and attainment within states and state systems.

Through the LEAP State initiative, AAC&U offers practical assistance and materials and provides a national voice for colleges and universities in systems, consortia, states, and regions. This initiative concentrates attention on the evolving demographics of the United States and the mobility of today's college students. Recognizing that in the twenty-first century, students move toward degrees from school to college along many pathways, LEAP emphasizes learning outcomes that are important for all graduates, regardless of where they start and end their studies and how many schools they attend. Helping states reach their objectives for degree attainment, workforce preparation, and engaged citizenship through access to high-quality liberal education for all students is the ultimate goal of LEAP and of the LEAP States initiative.

Institutions in LEAP states and beyond have adapted their own versions of the LEAP essential learning outcomes and invested significantly in high-impact practices that help students achieve the outcomes. See right for a set of lessons learned by those involved in LEAP States' institutions that can help other colleges, universities, and systems who want to greatly improve completion and the quality of student learning.

While these lessons learned from the LEAP States initiative are framed at the state-system level, much of the wisdom shared by this issue's authors will resonate with and can be useful to those in a wide range of institutions. Through similar collaborative efforts, educators and administrators—whether at small private or large public institutions—can create communication channels that allow for meaningful exchanges of ideas toward large- or small-scale educational reform. For as author and activist Helen Keller once noted, “Alone we can do so little; Together we can do so much.”

—SHELLEY JOHNSON CAREY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The LEAP States Initiative and Give Students a Compass: A Tri-State LEAP Partnership for College Learning, General Education, and Underserved Student Success have been made possible in part by grants from State Farm Insurance Companies, Carnegie Corporation of New York, and Lumina Foundation for Education.

Lessons Learned through LEAP States Initiative

1. Use LEAP frameworks (e.g., ELOs, HIPS) as launching pads for intra- and inter-institutional discussions about shared goals and make the discussions ongoing (with both face-to-face and electronic communication networks) and as inclusive as possible (e.g., including faculty, student affairs, students, academic administrators, and outside constituents—trustees, regents, business leaders, civic leaders).
2. Create platforms to put curricular reforms and multiple student success initiatives in dialogue with one another—making their connections transparent to students and outsiders.
3. Work on change both from the top down and the bottom up—through an iterative, dialogic process.
4. Respect institutional cultures even while forging common ground on large aims and outcomes, and on principles to define metrics for success.
5. Work to balance: (a) shared outcomes with design articulation; (b) coherence with student and faculty need to explore curricular choices; (c) focused leadership with broad input from constituencies; (d) HIPS development with a mindful approach to fiscal restraints.
6. Use statewide accountability mandates to take the lead on crafting meaningful assessment plans and collaboration across institutions.
7. Find success in using student learning outcomes and assessment to drive curricular change by connecting with disciplinary faculty cultures.
8. Respect faculty and staff as key to cultural and lasting changes.
9. Keep focus on students—not just on institutional types and inter- and intra-institutional turf issues.
10. Shift publicity and news information from reactive to proactive—from reacting to external accountability mandates to proactively organizing institutional attention to students and faculty and to support for teaching, learning, and meaningful assessment.

Systemic Change for Student Success: Goals and Lessons of the LEAP States Initiative

► **Susan Albertine**, vice president for engagement, inclusion, and success, Association of American Colleges and Universities

How does large-scale collaboration in higher education happen? It takes agency and intention, no doubt. Faculty have to want to organize and do the work for the sake of students. That kind of action means having something worthwhile to share, a core set of ideas that faculty and staff believe in and can own, and key understandings and principles—such as the commitment to make excellence inclusive and consensus on a set of common learning outcomes. It also takes good will and gumption, willingness to work uphill, a bit of serendipity, and a hunch that getting a large number of people to work together to increase student success can be satisfying.

But who would imagine that collaboration to bring change in higher education would come laden with friendship? No one ever thinks that the task of transformational work on the curriculum is easy. No one would ever think it less than stupendously hard to change the way state systems and systems of higher education do their work. People nonetheless keep trying. Five years into the LEAP States initiative, we can celebrate extraordinary good fellowship—and even fun—and we can point to real accomplishment in the continuing effort. We think we are making a difference to the quality of our students' learning.

In this issue of *Peer Review*, we feature what AAC&U's partner LEAP states have done, and more importantly, a set of lessons learned that can help other colleges, universities, and systems who want to scale up completion and quality initiatives (see p. 3).

LIBERAL EDUCATION AND AMERICA'S PROMISE

The LEAP States initiative is part of Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP), the signature initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

LEAP States makes use of resources developed through LEAP as frameworks and catalysts for large-scale, systemic collaboration designed to increase student learning. It supports the participation in LEAP of groups or networks of campuses based on locale—in states, state systems, or regions. The entire LEAP campaign puts student learning at the center, advancing a set of essential learning outcomes (ELOs) that emerged from the field (see page 6). Responsive to the shift in perspective from teaching to learning, the ELOs were developed through LEAP and AAC&U's earlier project Greater Expectations (AAC&U 2002; Barr and Tagg 1995).

In the LEAP States initiative we have learned that student learning and faculty leadership are utterly critical to successful collaboration, whether on a single campus or across a large system. The Campus Action Network (CAN), a connected set of institutions developed as part of LEAP, is composed of more than three

The initiative recognizes the fact that in the twenty-first century, students move or "swirl" toward degrees along many divergent pathways.

hundred campuses that have signed on individually or as part of state systems to work together to advance the goals of LEAP: to articulate high expectations for student achievement of liberal education outcomes, connect educational practices and assessments to those expectations, and ensure that all students reach high levels of achievement of a set of essential learning outcomes. Campuses may participate in both CAN and LEAP States activities.

LEAP is democratic as a matter of principle and as a commitment to advocacy. The campaign seeks to advance liberal education for everyone and to discover evidence that *everyone* is a truly



inclusive term—in this sense, *everyone* includes a diversity of access to quality learning and equitable participation of every racial/ethnic and socioeconomic group in the demographic panorama of the United States. The initiative provides opportunities for faculty to join other campus, system, and community leaders in shared work—*top down* and *bottom up*, together, with a view *from the inside* of systems and campuses, and *from the outside in*. This multidimensional perspective on systemic leadership and the priority of work on the ground with faculty characterizes LEAP States.

LEAP States fosters communication, capacity building, and policy development among and across states and systems. It constructs platforms for campus action and shares the means to advance ELOs in both general education and the major. Through system-based work, the initiative makes the case for large-scale collaboration toward inclusion and success for all students within states, systems, and regions. The initiative recognizes the fact that in the twenty-first century, students move or “swirl” toward degrees along many divergent pathways. To help networks or systems of campuses bring coherence, intentionality, and high-quality liberal education into students’ experience—whatever their pathway may be—is precisely what LEAP States intends. To help states reach their objectives for degree attainment, workforce development, and engaged civic life through access to high-quality liberal education is the ultimate goal of LEAP States. LEAP States agreements are broadly inclusive, voluntary, and nonbinding. In most cases, the state leadership originates in a public higher education system or a coordinating council. A state system or council generally takes the lead in requesting LEAP State status. AAC&U encourages all LEAP States to form partnerships across educational sectors, two- and four-year, public and private, and

to engage P-16, civic, and business leaders. (For more information, see <http://www.aacu.org/leap/states.cfm>.)

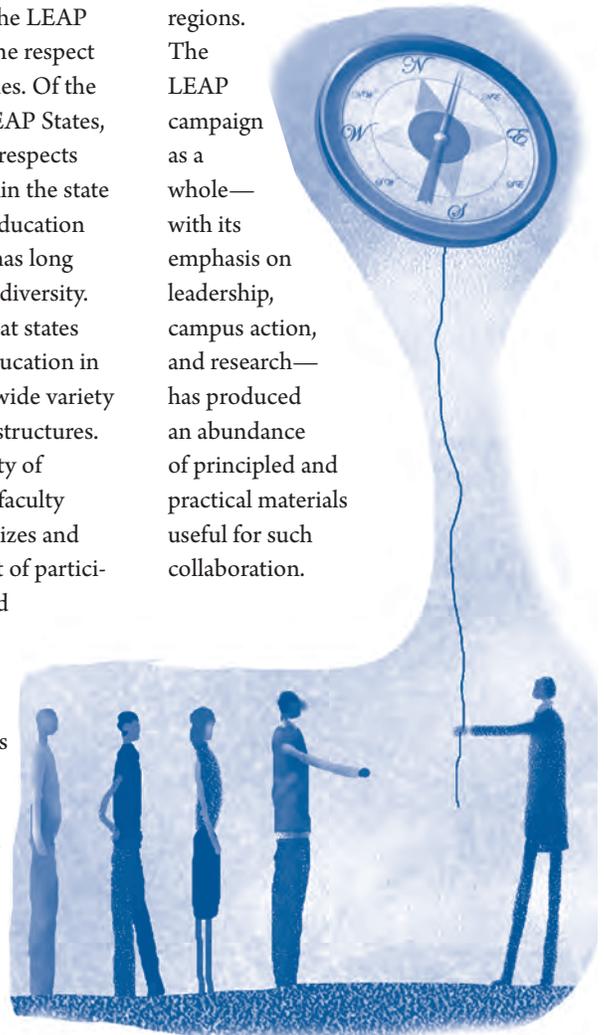
As of January 2011, the following systems have made agreements with AAC&U to work on behalf of their states: the California State University System, the North Dakota University System, the Oregon University System, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, the University of Wisconsin System, and the Utah System of Higher Education.

HONORING CAMPUSES’ IDENTITIES

The LEAP States initiative intends to make it possible for state systems, states, and regions to take advantage of the consensus that has emerged from the LEAP campaign—and at the same time respect and celebrate their own identities. Of the operating principles guiding LEAP States, the principle of alignment that respects the identity of the campus within the state or system comes first. Higher education in the United States, AAC&U has long maintained, is the richer for its diversity. AAC&U likewise recognizes that states organize and support higher education in a wide variety of ways, using a wide variety of governance or coordinating structures. Just as LEAP honors the identity of campuses and the centrality of faculty leadership, LEAP States recognizes and honors the identity and context of participating collaboratives, states, and regions.

The LEAP States initiative builds on a set of principles of excellence. The seven principles of excellence that inform the LEAP campaign emerged through discussion with educators around the country over a period of years (AAC&U 2007; AAC&U 2011). First, LEAP makes the case that campuses—with faculty leadership—can aim high and

make excellence inclusive. This principle envisions equity and excellent learning together and guides people to practice both together. Second, with faculty leadership, campuses can give students a compass, can be more intentional in mapping and remapping the curriculum and giving students the means to navigate through it. They can demonstrate the will to achieve ELOs, to use highly effective and high-impact educational practices (HIPs) to reach the outcomes, and to assess learning as a way to demonstrate that students have achieved the intended outcomes (Kuh 2008; Brownell and Swaner 2010). If campuses can do this work, so too can systems, states, and regions. The LEAP campaign as a whole—with its emphasis on leadership, campus action, and research—has produced an abundance of principled and practical materials useful for such collaboration.



LEAP public leadership and advocacy materials, including employer surveys, are valuable for state and regional work. (For useful related tools, see the LEAP Campus Toolkit at <http://leap.aacu.org/toolkit/>.)

At LEAP forums convened periodically by state leaders, local employers join with educational and civic leaders to address the quality of college learning as it shapes workforce development and degree attainment. For more than a decade, leaders in Utah have hosted annual convenings

of faculty, administrators, and business leaders to discuss the educational imperatives of the twenty-first century. They have now adapted and are using LEAP materials for their own purposes, reflecting their own state context. The University of Wisconsin System's Growth Agenda has also used LEAP in its own way, specifically adapting the ELOs and the practices and principles of inclusive excellence as part of a public campaign for the wellbeing of the state.

PROVIDING RESOURCES TO CAMPUSES

Campus action in LEAP States makes wide and varied use of LEAP materials. Reflecting decades of direct work with campuses, LEAP States has gained credibility because the campaign lifts up the best that AAC&U can discover on the ground. As AAC&U membership employer surveys have demonstrated, LEAP ELOs are widely recognized as the consensus on learning for the twenty-first century. Highly generative activity on campuses has contributed to the LEAP wealth of resources on implementation: learning-centered curricular designs, engaged learning practices and HIPs (Kuh 2008), and assessment principles and tools, including the rubrics developed by faculty through another LEAP initiative called VALUE (Valid Assessment for Learning in Undergraduate Education) (Rhodes 2010). LEAP has prompted an outpouring of extraordinarily applicable work that faculty, staff, and administrators recognize and respect, a body of materials that systems, states, and regions can adapt and adopt for themselves.

Much of the LEAP activity concentrates on aligned work with the LEAP ELOs, HIPs, and assessment in general education. Statewide engagement with LEAP in Virginia is most evident in the activities of the Virginia Assessment Group, where many campuses are working with VALUE rubrics and ELOs. The Oregon University System has organized shared work across campuses through the leadership of a Learning Outcomes and Assessment work group, commissioned by the Provosts' Council. The active and engaged learning that LEAP ELOs recommend has helped to fuel interest in HIPs generally. Growing interest in assessment of learning in HIPs has begun to shape research practices that document student success. Shared vocabulary and shared experience with LEAP on campuses multiplies rapidly through networking into system-level approaches

The Essential Learning Outcomes

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

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

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

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, including

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

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

Personal and Social Responsibility, including

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

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

Integrative and Applied Learning, including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

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

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



to the entire field of work on learning outcomes, HIPs, inclusive excellence, and student success.

LEAP States encourages faculty to engage with student affairs educators and institutional research and assessment staff to document learning beyond the individual course or campus—learning within the state, system, or region. The practice and philosophy of making excellence inclusive likewise requires evidence, disaggregated data that shows learning and engagement across identifiable groups of students, with emphasis on the success of students who have historically been underserved by higher education. LEAP States fosters an interest in equity in systems, in the success of transfer students, first-generation students, underserved students. The initiative is sponsoring work to deepen and develop campus and systemic analyses that can begin with the National Survey of Student Success (NSSE) and Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) data. It is urging faculty to think about the use of VALUE rubrics and electronic portfolios to document learning across institutions and throughout systems. LEAP States has intentionally provided opportunities for faculty across systems to exchange ideas and address challenges related to research on student success.

The LEAP States Initiative provides, in sum,

- A framework for higher-education systems (whether formal entities or collaboratives) to align their programs—system wide and campus wide;
- A national voice for systems, states, and regions within the LEAP campaign;
- Practical advice on large-scale efforts to apply LEAP ELOs and assessment practices such as VALUE;
- A national leadership network for transformational change—models of enabling policy and campus action to make excellence inclusive within and across systems.

In 2005, the University of Wisconsin System became the first system to partner with AAC&U as a LEAP State. Wisconsin has provided valuable lessons and leadership to other systems around the country. In 2008, the California State University and the Oregon University System joined the University of Wisconsin System and AAC&U in the first sponsored project of the LEAP States initiative. Give Students a Compass: A Tri-State LEAP Partnership for College Learning, General Education, and Underserved Student Success (now known as the Compass project) embarked on a voyage of discovery. The Compass project's animating question: How can systems collaborate with campuses to bring about transformational change in the undergraduate experience? How can systems participate as creative and generative catalysts for change?

Beginning with a set of three beta campuses in each of the three systems, the Compass project began to model the potential of LEAP States. The project enabled campuses to collaborate for student success, using LEAP and emphasizing the centrality of HIPs and the priority of making excellence inclusive.

“LEAPING” STATES

In the third year of the project, Compass has become a process that is working systemically, shared and networked among the more than fifty campuses in the three systems. The work has drawn friends, as the essays in this issue of *Peer Review* attest. Colleagues in North Dakota, Utah, and Virginia are “LEAPing” in their own ways, and they are networking with colleagues in California, Oregon, and Wisconsin—as

High-Impact Educational Practices: A Brief Overview

The following teaching and learning practices have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds. These practices take many different forms, depending on learner characteristics and on institutional priorities and contexts. On many campuses, assessment of student involvement in active learning practices such as these has made it possible to assess the practices' contribution to students' cumulative learning. However, on almost all campuses, utilization of active learning practices is unsystematic, to the detriment of student learning. These practices are:

- First-year seminars and experiences
- Common intellectual experiences
- Learning communities
- Writing-intensive courses
- Collaborative assignments and projects
- Undergraduate research
- Diversity/global learning
- Service learning, community-based learning
- Internships
- Capstone courses and projects

These practices were first described as a family of “effective educational practices” in AAC&U's 2007 publication, *College Learning for the New Global Century*. George D. Kuh's *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, also published by AAC&U, presents research on why these practices are effective, which students have access to them, and, finally, what effect they might have on different cohorts of students.

In the 2010 publication, *Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Quality*, authors Jayne E. Brownell and Lynn E. Swaner examine what educational research reveals about five of these practices and explore questions such as: What is the impact on students who participate in these practices? Is the impact the same for both traditional students and those who come from historically underserved student populations? For more information about these publications, see <http://www.aacu.org/publications>.

well as in other states, collaboratives, or regions that are thinking of giving this large-scale change work a try.

Are we moving needles?

Longitudinal assessment is under way in many places throughout the initiative. We believe we will see increased achievement of learning outcomes and completion rates ahead. And the preponderance of evidence coalescing from the initiative thus far points to cogent and practical results on various measures of student success. Arguably the most important discovery of the Compass project: while HIPs are beneficial to all students, a single HIP is not sufficient to support student success (Kuh 2008). HIPs scaffolded throughout the curriculum, so that all students have deep and engaged learning experiences *multiple times*, can and do make a difference. The benefits to underserved students are pronounced. As colleagues active in LEAP join in work to transform learning for all students and to conduct studies that will

provide sufficient evidence to scale, LEAP States continues to make the case, gather the faculty, work from the ground up and from the top down, network and share the results.

People everywhere in the LEAP States initiative know that we are working in an economy of scarcity and through a period of major transformation in higher education. We believe that the creativity unleashed through collaboration can go a long way to address the fact of constrained resources and to test new practices, new tools, and new policies that will help students learn—and learn well. Such new developments as Lumina’s Degree Qualifications Profile, for example, can be beta tested by a learning community of a LEAP State. We hope and trust that together we are finding the means to connect high-quality liberal learning and inclusive excellence as the continuity that endures within the change. ■

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The LEAP Campus Toolkit: Resources and Models for Innovation



The LEAP Campus Toolkit is a new online venue for educators to connect to a community of practice. Including an interactive library of campus examples, research narratives, and assessment instruments, the Toolkit provides a virtual space to learn from the work of colleagues in the AAC&U network and to share your own best work with a national audience. Toolkit Resources range from evaluative rubrics to models for using student data in decision making to examples of high-impact practices for student engagement. The Toolkit allows users to leave comments, share resources with colleagues, and submit examples to be highlighted for other practitioners to use in their work. Visit <http://leap.aacu.org/toolkit>.

The LEAP Campus Toolkit was created with the help of Carnegie Corporation of New York, Lumina Foundation for Education, and MetLife Foundation.



From Pockets of Excellence to an Integrated Coherent Narrative: LEAP Wisconsin at the Midpoint

► **Rebecca Karoff**, special assistant to the senior vice president for academic affairs, University of Wisconsin System

As 2011 begins, the University of Wisconsin (UW) System is just past the halfway point of its participation in Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP). LEAP was announced in January 2005, the same month the UW System agreed to be the pilot system partner. The UW System took pride in its pilot partner status and we touted that designation loudly among our institutions, board of regents, and other policy leaders throughout the state. But at the AAC&U annual meeting in January 2006, one year into the campaign, AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider quite pointedly (albeit nicely) informed me that being the pilot partner wasn't just a title; we were, in fact, expected to deliver. And the message she gave me that January day was inspiring, direct, and, okay, a bit intimidating.

I'd like to use the platform of this issue of *Peer Review* to ask two questions that I hope will be helpful to AAC&U's members, both institutions and individuals, in particular as AAC&U increases the number of states and individual institutions participating in the LEAP initiative with which it is partnering. First, where are we as a system, and what have we accomplished at the end of the first phase of what we now call LEAP Wisconsin? And, second, what are some of the critical factors that need to be in place for this work to succeed at the state system level, to ensure that the *promise* of LEAP is fulfilled?

PHASE I: LOOKING BACK

In 2003, we convened a System Advisory Group on the Liberal Arts (SAGLA). SAGLA was formed to help launch an initiative named The Currency of the Liberal Arts and Sciences: Rethinking Liberal Education in Wisconsin. The Currency Initiative and SAGLA were the work and network that caught

the eye of AAC&U and became LEAP Wisconsin. SAGLA involved both a top-down and bottom-up collaboration among system administrators, and deans, faculty, and other staff from, originally, every UW institution. Above all, the group seemed to meet a need in the UW System: to change the conversation about student success and what universities in the twenty-first century are all about, through intentional, direct discussion and naming of the value and purpose of liberal education.

The conversation began to take hold through a variety of activities and initiatives in the form of both Campus Action and Public Advocacy and Outreach, the avenues for moving LEAP forward proposed by AAC&U. This allowed the work to expand both through and beyond SAGLA, and for leadership to take place at many levels, from faculty and student affairs personnel, to deans, provosts, and chancellors, to System executive leadership, to members of the board of regents, and, because of the unusual public figure who occupied the office, to Wisconsin's now-former Lieutenant Governor, Barbara Lawton.

Six years later, the UW System and institutions have convened scores of discussions, meetings, forums, and conferences focused on LEAP and the role of public higher education—in Wisconsin and beyond—in the twenty-first century. LEAP is a shared conversation throughout the UW System and in all parts of Wisconsin. A partial account of these activities can be found at <http://liberaleducation.uwsa.edu/index.htm>.

Every UW campus is looking at how to redesign curricula around some version of the LEAP essential learning outcomes, and dozens of events have been offered to faculty and staff providing professional development workshops focused on some aspect of LEAP. While there is nobody at the UW System or any of its fifteen institutions who has sole responsibility for working

on LEAP, nor a LEAP-dedicated budget line, the system and many institutions have identified and contributed human and financial resources to advancing the work. Indeed, the dedication of resources to this work has grown considerably, and during a time when the state's investment in public higher education has diminished significantly.

Five years out, we have moved from identifying what might be called institutional pockets of excellence that promote the essential learning outcomes to Wisconsin students and citizens, to building productive communities of practice, advancing the LEAP agenda intentionally, system-wide, and from multiple vantage points. In many circles, LEAP has become the coin of the realm, the *lingua franca* for what higher education in the UW System should be and offer to the residents of the state and beyond. Yet, for all the time, dedication, and creativity that the Phase I work involved—by hundreds of UW System faculty and staff—it turns out that developing shared language and widespread communities of practice was the easy part.

THE REAL GOAL: SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION

Indeed, the midpoint evaluation of our LEAP Wisconsin work asks us to reexamine the question at the root of all our efforts: why are we doing this work? It's easy to marginalize that question, especially in the excitement of ratcheting up activities and generating buy-in to LEAP Wisconsin among the UW System's institutions. The answer is that LEAP is the means to an end—the end being the goal of full participation by America's populace in quality higher education and all that it has to offer, both as a private good for individuals and a public good vital to American civil society and democracy. LEAP helps us ensure that student access and success remain critical measures for

how we gauge progress. Perhaps most importantly, the UW System's participation in LEAP helps ensure that quality and high expectations are a part of every conversation we have on what really matters in college. This last point has become both more challenging and more critical amid the country's economic recession, in general, and Wisconsin's dismal budgetary and changing political environments, in particular.

The answer is also that LEAP—nationally and in Wisconsin—has always

We have moved from identifying what might be called institutional pockets of excellence that promote the essential learning outcomes to Wisconsin students and citizens, to building productive communities of practice, advancing the LEAP agenda intentionally, system-wide, and from multiple vantage points.

been about *systemic transformation*, not just piecemeal change. Pockets of excellence are important; communities of practice still more so as they build capacity and scale up the impact. But the real goal is deep, abiding, structural change. Only then can the goal of full participation in quality higher education—what we call inclusive excellence—be realized. So the UW System's challenge as we enter the second phase of LEAP Wisconsin is to transform the shared language into shared practice, institution- and system-wide, to reach more and more of the students we have and want to enroll (especially those from groups whom we have traditionally left behind), and to provide evidence of that transformation in our students' learning and success.

As 2011 begins, we see signs that the work of LEAP Wisconsin has started

to transform institutions and the entire system, becoming—in some cases—a part of the infrastructure. To mention a few institutional examples: UW–Oshkosh is engaged in ground-breaking, institution-wide liberal education reform led by its chancellor and provost and adopted by its faculty. LEAP at UW–Madison has taken hold in departments, colleges, and student affairs units in ways remarkable for a large, research-intensive university. UW–Whitewater has embarked on an ambitious project, including provost-

underwritten stipends for participants, to make the institution-wide adoption of the LEAP outcomes meaningful throughout all academic and student affairs units.

PUTTING INITIATIVES IN DIALOGUE WITH ONE ANOTHER

As LEAP Wisconsin has progressed, it has become integrated into other large initiatives in the UW System. In 2006, UW System President Kevin Reilly launched the Growth Agenda for Wisconsin, a strategic framework to guide the UW System in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Developed with broad input from constituents throughout the state, the Growth Agenda offers a vision for developing the state's human potential, creating new jobs, and strengthening communities. It calls for a series of actions that will educate more of Wisconsin's population



for life and work in the twenty-first century. Inspired by AAC&U, its first action step was to develop five shared learning goals, modeled on the essential learning outcomes and representing the system's commitment to prepare students to be competent citizens in a knowledge-based, global society.

Another component of the Growth Agenda is *inclusive excellence*, the UW System's emerging strategic framework for its engagement with diversity and equity. Inclusive excellence entails a dual focus on building greater structural diversity and improving the learning environment and institutional culture; comprehensive institutional engagement and commitment; close attentiveness to the student experience; and the joint pursuit of equity and excellence. It is a process, a philosophy, and an end goal, and, after decades of diversity initiatives in the UW System that have failed to yield significant change, many of us at the UW System believe that inclusive excellence has the potential to succeed—finally—in changing business as usual. Again, AAC&U's leadership in providing theoretical and practical guidance on making excellence inclusive has been critical.

Also critical to our embrace of inclusive excellence has been the system's investment in the Equity Scorecard, an action inquiry process developed by Estela Mara Bensimon at the University of Southern California. The Equity Scorecard is a data sense-making tool, a cultural practice, a leadership approach, and a theory of change. The UW System's institutions have conducted or are conducting fine-grained analysis of student data, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, to determine equitable practice in terms of access, enrollment, retention, and completion. The process develops goals and benchmarks towards the achievement of equitable outcomes for students of color. More than any other initiative in

which we have been involved, the Equity Scorecard has helped us learn that transformation cannot be achieved without inquiry and practice informed by *disaggregated* data. It has also led us towards overcoming the inclination to blame the student as the problem to be fixed, and to instill equity—not just in access but also in retention and completion—as the gold standard for measuring student success.

Central to the Growth Agenda—as it is to LEAP and inclusive excellence—is the abiding commitment that more students have access to, persist through, and complete high-quality undergraduate degrees. In 2009, the UW System signed on to the Education Trust/National Association of System Heads initiative Access to Success and, concurrently, identified a second phase of the Growth Agenda—called More Graduates for Wisconsin—establishing the goal to increase the annual number of undergraduate degrees conferred in the UW System by 30 percent by 2025. The UW System is working to cement that commitment through its 2011–13 biennial budget request to the state, which asks for targeted resources to advance the More Graduates goals, including increased funding for the expansion of high-impact practices at UW institutions. On a smaller scale, since 2008, the Office of Academic Affairs has dedicated resources directed at funding institutional proposals to strengthen Growth Agenda priorities, including support for high-impact practices and projects working to close the achievement gap.

I'd like to say that we have coordinated all of this work intentionally from the beginning. We have not. Coordination of this work is difficult; achieving buy-in is difficult. Perhaps the biggest lesson learned from Phase I is that a frame needs to be provided that invites people into the work, and the best way to do this is by putting these various initiatives into dia-

logue with one another. When we do that, the common purpose at the heart of the work becomes evident. LEAP has helped us counter resistance to and cultivate support for More Graduates and inclusive excellence, both of which have been perceived as top-down mandates. There has been a chorus of chancellor and provost voices from throughout the system telling us that the More Graduates work cannot jeopardize quality—in this case *more* must also mean “better-prepared” graduates. Our LEAP work ensures that we are responding, in collaboration with our campus colleagues, to that chorus. We are taking to heart AAC&U's 2010 statement on the quality imperative, which calls access to educational excellence “the equity challenge of our time,” at the same time that it insists that work focused on access and completion cannot come at the expense of quality and the learning essential to full participation in the global society (AAC&U 2010).

GIVE STUDENTS A COMPASS: INTEGRATION AT ITS BEST

The system's work on Give Students a Compass has emerged as the signature component of LEAP Wisconsin and a model for how best to strategically coordinate and integrate the change work at the heart of LEAP. Compass projects at the UW beta sites—UW–Eau Claire, UW–Milwaukee, and UW–Oshkosh—marry LEAP with inclusive excellence. The UW System identified these campuses for the Compass project, in fact, because of the work they were already doing on general education reform and the Equity Scorecard. The project has unfolded differently at each Compass site, in accordance with institutional mission and culture, student demographics, and faculty governance issues. In remarkable ways, UW–Eau Claire, UW–Milwaukee, and UW–Oshkosh are each focusing on particular high-impact practices (HIPs)

and underserved student populations in the effort to meet the curricular redesign goals of the project. And the opportunity to work with colleagues from the California State and the Oregon University Systems has proven invigorating and powerful.

Also exciting is the extent to which the goals of the Compass project have resonated with other UW campuses, providing a frame for the work they are already doing on curricular reform, HIPs, underserved student success, and Inclusive Excellence. At this point in time, every UW campus is engaged in Compass-like work. In November 2010, the system convened over 110 UW educators at an institute sponsored by the Compass project, designed to feature and advance the work in which UW System institutions are engaged. It became clear at the Institute that these projects represent just a fraction of the good work taking place at UW institutions. Recognition of the power of HIPs, when done well, is growing throughout the System. It is also clear that work on HIPs is bringing together academic and student affairs in new collaborations, with greater recognition of the roles and contributions that both entities bring to the table on behalf of students. Within the next few months, a newly developed System website will expand to become a repository for the collection and dissemination of those HIPs offered at UW institutions which have been proven to be especially effective (<http://www.uwsa.edu/vpacad/hips/>).

LOOKING FORWARD

For all the success we have experienced in the first phase, the UW System is not planning to rest on its laurels. In a volatile economy, amid competing priorities for scarce resources, the coin of the realm can lose its value. The work of building capacity—encompassing intentionality,

deeper understanding, visibility, shared responsibility, and leadership—will continue in Phase II. As Wisconsin's former Lieutenant Governor likes to put it, we want more people to become fluent in LEAP.

There are a number of activities underway to strengthen LEAP Wisconsin in Phase II, including renewal of SAGLA, convening a LEAP provosts group, and expansion of Compass work at UW institutions. Our Equity Scorecard work will continue. Phase II must focus on assessment of and accountability for student learning. The UW System is in the process of revising its annual accountability reporting. Beginning in 2009, the report started organizing its goals, benchmarks, and measures around the seven core strategies of the Growth Agenda. Strengthening our evidence and how we communicate it through public advocacy are the other broad areas to rethink in Phase II. This remains a challenge, but one that is best met through the continued and intentional articulation, coordination, and integration of LEAP Wisconsin with the various components of the Growth Agenda, including inclusive excellence and More Graduates. We need to be sure that our practice lives up to our language and that the dialogue we have initiated through LEAP Wisconsin with our constituents results in an integrative, coherent narrative.

At the system level, we stand in awe of what our institutional colleagues have accomplished. We are proud of the extent to which the change we are seeking in the UW System is being effected across institutions and through collaboration between the system and its institutions. The work described above speaks to the symbiotic nature of the potential and progress being achieved through LEAP Wisconsin: movement at the institutional level results in movement at the system level, and vice versa. It is there—in

the crux of that exchange—that LEAP advances both campus and system missions in ways that would not have happened otherwise.

At the heart of the Compass grant is the working hypothesis that state systems can serve as generative catalysts for change, in collaboration with and supported at the campus level. The same hypothesis is at play throughout LEAP and the Growth Agenda for Wisconsin. Through our pilot partner status, the UW System has played a lead role in helping AAC&U understand the potential for transformation that can occur at the system level, scaling up the unit of change from an individual institution to an entire system. As the first pilot partner named by AAC&U in the LEAP Campaign, the UW System was asked to deliver, and it has. Other LEAP states have now been named, and we welcome the opportunity to work with them. As our work on Compass has demonstrated, collaborating across state systems offers inspiration, generates new ideas, and results in the cross-fertilization of best practices and partnerships in ways that are filled with even more potential for systemic change, for meeting successfully that most important equity challenge of the twenty-first century. ■

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Assessment as a Driver of Collegiality and Cooperation in the Commonwealth of Virginia

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With fifteen public four-year institutions, twenty-three community colleges, one junior college, and over thirty-five private colleges and universities, Virginia's higher education system is a model of diversity. In the public sector alone, students may select from small to very large institutions, liberal arts to Research I missions, and vibrant urban to more pastoral suburban and rural campus settings. Virginia's coordinating board, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), provides leadership by focusing on the larger state and system perspective, rather than directing and controlling the daily operation of individual institutions (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission of the Virginia General Assembly 1995), thus further safeguarding the unique mission and character of each college and university.

At first glance, this kind of coordination affords a level of institutional autonomy that would appear to belie statewide efforts like Virginia's participation in AAC&U's LEAP States initiative. However, Virginia's history of engaging in LEAP-like activities—specifically, the assessment of students' achievement of essential learning outcomes—not only predates Virginia's official designation as a LEAP state in 2006, but in fact served as one model that informed and helped to identify the need in the field at the beginning of AAC&U's VALUE rubric project. This article will briefly describe Virginia's engagement in LEAP activities using our own institution, Virginia Tech, as an illustrative example of how insti-

tutions have found their way to LEAP through student learning outcomes assessment. As part of this presentation, we will also discuss Virginia Tech's participation in the Virginia Assessment Group (VAG). We believe that VAG holds great promise as a "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) for LEAP work within the commonwealth, one that may serve as a model for other states interested in creating a collegial, less formal venue for LEAP-related conversation and cooperation among institutions.

Each institution developed a working definition and means of measuring each core competency that aligned with its unique mission, culture, and student body.

ASSESSING CORE COMPETENCIES IN VIRGINIA

As a state, Virginia has required the assessment of student learning since the mid-1980s. Beginning in 1999, Virginia revisited the assessment of student learning under the auspices of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education; the commission's final report delineated six core competencies, "areas of knowledge and skill that supersede majors, disciplines, and institutional missions" (Herndon 2006, 2), for assessment that would be required by all public institutions. These competencies—critical thinking, written communication, oral communica-

tion, quantitative reasoning, scientific reasoning, and information technology literacy—were codified in 2000, with institutions developing and implementing core competency assessment plans beginning in 2001 (Herndon 2006).

From community college to flagship institution, all colleges and universities were required to measure and report the results of students' achievement of these six core competencies to SCHEV; that said, no single definition for the competencies was offered by the commission or Virginia's higher education leaders at the state level. Instead, each institution developed a working definition and means of measuring each core competency that aligned with its unique mission, culture, and student body. In other words, critical thinking core competency assessment at New River Community College was tailored to its particular characteristics, and would appropriately and logically manifest quite differently than assessment efforts at other institutions such as James Madison, Longwood University, or the College of William & Mary. This approach to assessing the six core competencies—which align nicely with several of the LEAP essential learning outcomes—captured the attention of AAC&U. The effort to assess student learning across very different institutional contexts, simultaneously encouraging transparency in the communication of assessment methods and results while avoiding unproductive interinstitutional comparisons of results, encouraged AAC&U to think of assessment tools useful in this context. VALUE was an effort to provide a shared set of expectations across institutional types. In short, Virginia's colleges and universities have a history of engaging in important LEAP work through outcomes assessment, whether they realized it or not.

VIRGINIA TECH'S LEAP JOURNEY

Virginia Tech's own path toward deeper engagement in LEAP-related work through assessment is likely emblematic

of LEAP participation elsewhere in the commonwealth: somewhat circuitous, but productive and ultimately rewarding. As members of the Office of Academic Assessment (OAA) at Virginia Tech, we are responsible for all the work related to student outcomes assessment at the program level, including reporting on our processes and communicating results to constituents external to the university, such as SCHEV and our regional accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges & Universities (SACS). Beginning in 2005, in preparation for reaffirmation of accreditation, OAA began identifying best practices that could shape and improve student learning outcomes assessment at Virginia Tech. AAC&U's LEAP project, with its articulation of the learning outcomes essential to under-

This desire for a collegial venue for cooperation and potential collaboration led us full circle to the Virginia Assessment Group, or VAG.

graduate education for the twenty-first century, caught our attention first. The essential learning outcomes became suggested guideposts for the development of Virginia Tech's quality enhancement plan (QEP), a component of SACS accreditation requirements that requires nothing short of the transformation of student learning or the student learning environment (SACS 2009). In 2008, OAA literally stumbled across the VALUE project at an AAC&U Network for Academic Renewal Working Conference, when a draft of the quantitative reasoning rubric was shared in a session. Immediately recognizing the potential for such rubrics for core competency assessment, OAA became more engaged with the VALUE project as well, with staff serving on a

rubric development team and helping faculty pilot test rubrics within their courses for program assessment purposes.

Simultaneously, OAA worked with Virginia Tech's ePortfolio Initiative to help expand e-portfolio pedagogical practices to include student learning outcomes assessment. Virginia Tech's LEAP work culminated in the use of four learning outcomes embedded in the broader LEAP essential learning outcomes—inquiry and analysis, information literacy, problem solving, and the integration of learning—and their corresponding rubrics as the foundation upon which its QEP, an innovative, academically-grounded first year experience, was built. All the while, we at Virginia Tech had no idea that Virginia held a special designation as a LEAP state through an agreement with

SCHEV. It was not until a lucky search of the AAC&U website that we learned of our "special relationship," and began to explore ways to better communicate with other Virginia institutions on LEAP issues and ideas. This desire for a collegial venue for cooperation and potential collaboration led us full circle to the Virginia Assessment Group, or VAG.

THE VIRGINIA ASSESSMENT GROUP AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR LEAP

VAG is the nation's oldest continuing professional higher education assessment organization (Culver 2010), with members from both public and private institutions. According to its mission, VAG aims to promote quality higher education through assessment and institutional practices



in all commonwealth post-secondary institutions; serve as a network for communication and collaboration among institutions of higher education, state and federal agencies, and accreditation bodies; offer professional development opportunities; and serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas. Others have already characterized VAG as a community of practice (Culver 2010; Herndon 2006); it is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for assessment and learn from one another how to do it better (Wenger 2006), primarily through its annual conference. With this conference, VAG not only provides professional development and networking opportunities, but also promotes the scholarship of assessment by providing a venue for presenting and discussing work in student learning outcomes assessment.

It was at the 2009 VAG conference that Virginia Tech first presented on its work assessing LEAP essential learning outcomes with the VALUE rubrics, a session that spurred multiple interinstitutional conversations about synergies between LEAP, SCHEV core competency assessment, and accreditation. As interest developed, the VAG board invited AAC&U Vice President for Engagement, Inclusion, and Success Susan Albertine to speak at the 2010 conference. As leader of the LEAP States Initiative, Albertine provided the national context for the project, discussed other LEAP States models, and suggested ways VAG and AAC&U could collaborate to shape and promote LEAP work in the commonwealth. In March 2011, representatives from four other Virginia institutions—the College of William and Mary, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Old Dominion University, and Virginia Commonwealth University—joined Virginia Tech at the first LEAP States Summit, where

the Virginia team had a chance to hear from other states, including both successes and challenges experienced while engaging in LEAP work. The LEAP States Summit served as a catalyst for further discussions and has resulted in at least one joint VAG-AAC&U networking opportunity in the spring of 2011.

Though nascent, the conversation between AAC&U and VAG holds great promise for creating significant connections for improving student learning through meaningful assessment of the essential learning outcomes. Through VAG, these connections can spur cooperation between different institutional levels (e.g., community college, master's level institution, liberal arts, Research I) in both the public and private sector. As these multiple relationships mature, it is our hope and expectation that Virginia become a model for the creative and productive exchange of ideas and collaboration as we strive to provide the students in the commonwealth with exceptional undergraduate experiences. ■

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LEAPing in Utah: Lessons Learned along the Way

► **Norm Jones**, professor and chair of history and religious studies; director of general education and curriculum integration, Utah State University; and chair of the Utah Regents' General Education Task Force

Utah's road to LEAP was accidental. We did not set out to be a LEAP state. We set out to create a faculty-led system of articulation and assessment for general education (GE) in the Utah System of Higher Education. Or at least that is what we were doing before the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), with whom we had been working for years, invited us to become the fifth LEAP state.

The catalyst for Utah's system-wide collaboration is the Regents' General Education Task Force. This task force was originally convened in 1992 by Utah's chief academic officers (CAOs) through the Utah System of Higher Education. It was a typical system-based ad hoc group. Its specific charge was to evaluate a proposal by one campus for televised general education courses. But when the task force tackled this issue, it was immediately evident that the system had no way of defining "worth." This realization led to explorations of what GE was accomplishing statewide. A snowball effect ensued, in which success at one venture led to explorations in another. Since 1992, the task force has been charged by Utah's CAOs and the regents with a wide range of work involving statewide collaboration on GE. By the end of the decade, it ceased to be ad hoc and became a standing faculty committee. The committee has the job of overseeing the assessment and articulation of GE in the state. In practice, it acquired the informal mission of serving as a place where faculty can exchange information and ideas and develop a shared perspective on curricular issues.

Once together, faculty representatives from Utah's nine state schools began exploring common goals. Discussion raised the possibility of seeking GE goals that transcended individual institutions. The task force wanted to support distinctive faculty voices and campus missions. How could both similarity and difference be protected? The task force started with the question: "What is an educated person?" Next they explored whether statewide faculty

shared pedagogical values sufficiently to develop a mutual vision of GE. Early on, the task force sent a team to an American Association for Higher Education conference on assessment. There we discovered that we were a complete anomaly, the only state system at a conference geared to campus teams. But we did learn something else important: when faculty get a chance to talk about common issues and values, very productive work gets done. Consequently, we decided to hold our own regional conference, inviting Utah faculty to solve the articulation and assessment questions we were confronting. We believed that if we, as faculty, took the lead we could fulfill our professional responsibility and prevent political interference with the curriculum. We titled the first regional faculty meeting with the question that started our task force work—What Is an Educated Person?

From the beginning, the conference was political because we faced state-mandated assessments, partisan pressures, and public criticisms of our effectiveness. We wished to show our government leaders and the public that we took our job seriously, and that we valued their input. To this end, we began working with an organization of chief executive officers from some of Utah's largest corporations. Their answers to "What is an educated person?" have proved both enlightening and politically useful. For instance, they insisted that students have a well-rounded GE that teaches them communication skills, exposes them to cultural diversity, and fosters other educational outcomes that faculty sometimes fear are devalued outside academe. At the same time, we wished to engage our institutions in the national conversation about higher education reform. One of our earliest keynoters was AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider.

The What Is an Educated Person? conference mixed representatives from all regional institutions—including private ones like Westminster College and Brigham Young University, and some



Idaho schools that transfer large numbers of students to Utah—with business and political leaders. This first conference was so successful that twelve more have followed. In November 2010, the thirteenth conference addressed changing views of GE from the perspectives of business, faculty, and students, in conjunction with the launching of the Utah 2020 plan for increasing access and graduation rates.

The conference was a useful tool to gather information and feedback, but the task force created others, too. In keeping with our commitment to faculty leadership, disciplinary task forces were built around GE categories, such as humanities and life sciences, and charged with defining standards and suggesting appropriate assessment techniques. In 2000, the Regents' Task Force undertook assessment of composition, quantitative literacy, and state-mandated "American Institutions" requirements. These discussions taught us an invaluable lesson—if you wish to use assessment for curricular change, you must do assessment that corresponds to the culture of the faculty in the field.

We then convened "majors' meetings" annually. With Assistant Commissioner for Higher Education Teddi Safman's support, faculty representatives began meeting to make policy for their disciplines. These meetings concentrate on GE issues—common course numbers, articulation, and premajor qualifications—but they foster larger disciplinary discussions. Faculty in the system get to know one another, to share their professional values, and make common cause across all institutional types.

Thus began a conversation with two streams. One followed the worn channel of transfer and articulation: could we create clearer, more intentional pathways through degrees for students? The other followed the rough gully of outcomes: could majors express their degree outcomes in ways that clearly indicated to students and employers

what degrees prepared students to do, understand and know?

Inspired by AAC&U VALUE rubrics and a Bologna-Process-style amendable learning record, we began to dream of a new sort of transcript: an e-portfolio that would begin with the LEAP essential learning outcomes (ELOs), demonstrate work with GE artifacts and evidence from the major, and allow students to add pertinent information. This educational portfolio can present students' skills and accomplishments, and act both as an assessment and an employment tool. Such a portfolio could provide a roadmap for students seeking a path through the thicket of higher education, help us better know students' needs and accomplishments, and

If you wish to use assessment for curricular change, you must do assessment that corresponds to the culture of the faculty in the field.

aid with articulation and transfer. Salt Lake Community College, under the leadership of David Hubert, dean of the school of General and Developmental Education, has launched the e-portfolio for GE.

In 2009, the task force was approached by the Lumina Foundation to join Tuning USA, a faculty-led process linking college degrees to learning objectives, disciplinary outcomes, and workplace relevance. We chose to "tune" history and physics. Asking "What should a student with this degree know, understand, and be able to do?" faculty colleagues worked effectively together, reaching consensus on system-wide outcomes. This ongoing experiment has also led to discussion of the relationship of upper-division degree requirements and GE, internships, high-impact learning practices, and other inputs to a degree.

In 2008, Utah began talking with AAC&U about becoming a LEAP state.

Since the task force is careful to respect curricular autonomy, we asked our nine institutions if they accepted the LEAP ELOs. After the nine GE committees had considered their positions, we could report that we, as a system, endorsed the ELOs and were committed to teaching them. By fall 2009, we were ready, institutionally, to take the leap.

At this point a new ally joined us. In 2010, AAC&U released its employers' survey. At about the same time, the statewide Salt Lake Chamber launched its Utah Prosperity 2020 initiative. Not surprisingly, we discovered that our initiatives to improve liberal education in Utah matched neatly with the chamber's commitment to improving educational quality

and access in Utah. Subsequently, the Salt Lake Chamber cosponsored with the Utah System of Higher Education the launch of LEAP Utah in 2010. This alliance is giving faculty a standing in the political conversation about the future of higher education in Utah.

What have we learned as we evolved into a LEAP state officially committed to creating a twenty-first century liberal education for all Utahans?

FACULTY AND STAFF ARE THE KEY TO CULTURAL CHANGE

We learned quickly that faculty know what they are doing, and that they are often far ahead of their institutional catalogs when it comes to valuing and instituting innovative pedagogies. Moreover, they are perfectly capable of articulating the outcomes in their disciplines. A room full of faculty can—in an hour or so—reach a high level

of congruity about learning outcomes. They also know how to evaluate them. Ask them to build a rubric that expresses the outcomes they strive to teach, allow them to measure outcomes according to the norms of their disciplines, and you will find willing participants.

Advisers and other student services personnel, along with people from the registrar's and assessment offices, should be in the conversation, too. Faculty know what they value; these others know how students behave in a system and can provide important feedback and help with implementation.

STRUCTURES ARE IMPORTANT

The ability to make changes in educational expectations depends on the structural flexibility in the system. In Utah the faculty-led effort at curricular change would have been impossible if the commissioners of higher education had believed that policy was the prerogative of the professionals in their offices and the chief academic officers. Utah's lack of rigidity and hierarchy provides a context in which ideas and information can move easily among faculty and institutions. This is especially important given that hierarchies frequently fail to communicate policy decisions to those who work with students.

However, it is necessary to have structures that validate faculty conversations. We could not do what we are doing in Utah if the commissioner did not exist. The trick is to have structures that encourage and support change in ways that allow those doing the work to do it according to their understandings of the problems.

SHARING IS IMPORTANT

Institutions and disciplines do not stand alone. To establish and assess outcomes in a major, you need all departments in the system to participate. Otherwise, lone departments or faculty leaders lack the necessary affirmation of their colleagues. This takes the conversation back to disciplinary

values, away from pressures from a particular dean or institution. Of course, the deans and institutions have to recognize the validity of disciplinary values. If everyone agrees on the outcomes, has similar rubrics, and accepts that certain artifacts are the appropriate evidence for performance, students can truly move within the state system with ease.

Keeping in mind power structures, you need to approach, inform, and make alliances with those who can help. Medieval kings used to summon "all good men" to parliaments, by which they meant all the powerful. We, too, must include the powerful. We need to be sure that legislators, governor's staffs, chambers of commerce and other employers' organizations, and the general public are aware that the professionals in higher education are minding their own shop.

KEEP FOCUSED ON STUDENTS, NOT INSTITUTIONAL TYPES AND TURF

When they are teaching, faculty belong to larger professional groupings than their campus community. Notwithstanding institutional types, the teachers think about students in their disciplines. Realizing this, and recognizing that conversations about disciplinary pedagogies and assessment are universal, we have always included private institutions and institutions from adjoining states in our meetings. Professionals together inform and support one another, and everyone benefits, no matter where the students are located.

Moreover, by focusing on the professional skills of the faculty, we mitigate institutional pecking orders. We all know that higher education in the US has a tendency to discriminate between faculty at research, comprehensive, two-year, and other sorts of institutions. But when Utah thinks about its common curriculum, it thinks about its students and faculty as a whole. Focusing on students removes institutional barriers, and our professional goals for student success provide common glue in our discussions.

True, some innovations are easier to do in some institutional types—the small classes in some colleges are the envy of faculty at the larger institutions, and the availability of graduate students to help with the grading is the envy of the smaller places—but we are still talking about a common curriculum.

KEEP COMMUNICATING: BUILD AND MAINTAIN A COMMUNITY

If you want to have a living system of innovation and assessment, you have to keep the conversation alive, and you have to be as inclusive as possible. Faculty, administrators, staff, politicians, professional organizations, and all other stakeholders need to be invited into the tent. Our annual Educated Person Conference reaches out to all sorts of groups, while our majors meetings keep the departments in our institutions talking. We get to know our colleagues around the state, a popular and useful thing that makes us feel like we belong.

Utah's efforts to create a higher education community that has the power to change the culture of education in the state is an ongoing effort that has to be maintained. It has been institutionalized, but it does not run itself. But becoming a LEAP state is another sign that what we have been doing may be sustainable. ■





Making Excellence Inclusive in Oregon

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Motivated by institutional strategic planning and impetus from two external drivers—the release of the Spellings Report and revisions to accreditation standards—the Oregon University System (OUS) began discussions in fall 2007 on the complex task of framing student learning expectations and advancing the use of meaningful assessment not only at each of the system’s seven institutions but also across the system. In 2008, following a visit from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), the OUS Provosts’ Council convened the Learning Outcomes and Assessment (LO&A) Task Group, composed of one representative from each of the seven OUS campuses and staff from the Chancellor’s Office.

The LO&A initiative began with a directive to develop a framework for a system-wide approach to the assessment of student learning and accountability for student achievement. The initiative sought to help each institution and the OUS as a whole develop, interpret, and wisely use direct evidence of cumulative student learning, while considering best practices in the use of evidence to meet rising expectations for transparency and accountability.

LO&A began by mapping each university’s general education (GE) learning outcomes and comparing them with AAC&U’s LEAP outcomes. It was clear that although the methods of implementation differed at each institution, the institutions’ outcomes were closely aligned not only with each other but also with the LEAP outcomes. The LO&A concluded that GE in Oregon would be enhanced by joining AAC&U’s national work and requested that OUS be included in the LEAP-States-sponsored project called Give Students a Compass: A Tri-State Partnership for College Learning, General Education, and Underserved Student Success (known as the Compass project).

The partnership fueled LO&A’s institutional reform work, placing the task force at the forefront of national debates. Collaboration with like-minded colleagues from across the nation gave LO&A

the confidence to decline participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability—a program sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) for undergraduate institutions to communicate data about learning outcomes, demographics, and students’ experiences and perceptions of their undergraduate experience. Instead we lobbied for the administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Several OUS campuses have since decided to continue to use NSSE to develop robust longitudinal data on the impact of their students’ engagement in high-impact practices (HIPs), with particular attention to their effects on under-represented students.

LO&A’s efforts to create a plan meaningful to faculty and defensible to a general public were facilitated by creation of an effective bond among group members that fostered trust and allowed frank conversations on difficult issues. This atmosphere allowed us to address the charged issues of assessment, accreditation, and accountability with common goals, despite our seven different institutions and cultures. Effective leadership redirected the conversation from reactive to proactive, from reaction to demands for accountability to external audiences to proactive attention to students and support for teaching, learning, and meaningful assessment.

RAISING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LIBERAL EDUCATION

Fall 2010 marked the end of the first phase of LO&A’s system-wide work, which culminated in a set of recommendations now moving through review in the Provosts’ Council, OUS, and the board. While formal institutional commitments to the LO&A process also concluded, the group has every intention of continuing in its efforts, focusing on specific issues that need more work and fostering a much deeper involvement of faculty.

The leadership, resources, and synergy provided by AAC&U enhanced LO&A’s efforts to raise the significance of liberal educa-

tion across the system. Three of the seven universities in OUS (Southern Oregon University, Eastern Oregon University, and Portland State University) worked closely as Compass project beta sites with AAC&U colleagues in pilot studies while the other four institutions (Western Oregon University, University of Oregon, Oregon Institute of Technology, and Oregon State University) served as “critical friends,” thus ensuring that the work was system-wide, rather than simply site specific.

By design, work associated with the Compass project was deliberately integrated and interwoven into more general academic improvement strategies on each campus, allowing activities to support and enhance one another in a multifaceted approach to student achievement. Through the LO&A initiative, assessment coordinators on each campus enjoy the benefits of coordinated, collaborative effort. They have learned from each other and have developed lasting relationships. LEAP and the Compass project have helped to extend that collaboration to faculty, fostering greater faculty involvement and creating grass-roots pockets of talent, experience, and conviction. The value of LO&A and the Compass project flows from collaboration that creates coherence across campuses and around the system.

COMPASS AT SOU

At Southern Oregon University (SOU), the Compass project had two primary goals: (1) to conduct a mixed-method study of GE to identify underserved students’ experience and discover factors contributing to their success; and (2) to connect essential learning outcomes to documented proficiency levels, using students’ work.

Initial program data showed that the first-year seminar was helping students meet three GE outcomes: improving their writing, thinking, and information literacy skills. What was not clear, however, was whether students were continuing that academic growth throughout their remaining

years at SOU. The Compass team decided to focus part of its study on the required graduation capstones.

The team invited capstone faculty to participate in a yearlong study. The process itself turned out to be transformational and renewing for faculty. One result of the study was the creation of four campus-wide high-impact capstone rubrics for original experimental research, research-based persuasive writing, internships/community-based learning, and oral presentations.

In addition, the Compass project team completed a mixed-method study of first-generation students who persisted beyond the first year. The study required statistical analysis of enrollment data, narrative analysis of institutional policy, and mining of NSSE data. These data were triangulated with student interviews and a survey aligned to NSSE findings. The study revealed unique characteristics of first-generation, low-income students, and identified institutional practices that directly contributed to this population’s success. The SOU Compass project team is now integrating the two studies to create a model for other institutions.

COMPASS AT EOU

The Compass project at Eastern Oregon University (EOU) focused on the establishment of a first-year experience (FYE) high-impact seminar for all students—on campus and online—and articulation of university-wide learning goals with which academic and cocurricular programs could align. This plan enabled systemic communication and data collection, and produced common templates that resulted in remapping of degree program and cocurricular goals and assessment processes.

To address poor retention of first-year students, academic affairs and student affairs partnered on a one-credit extended orientation seminar (EasTrek) for *all* first-year students entering with fewer than thirty credit hours—both on campus and

online. Focus groups of faculty and support services staff designed a curriculum that included three essential ingredients for student success: social engagement, academic engagement, and first-year advising. The seminars are facilitated principally by student affairs educators teamed with faculty mentors. Students have an opportunity to choose from among exploratory, professional, and interest-based seminars. An FYE coordinator provides a point of contact and oversight for a common syllabus and professional development for facilitators. Student course evaluations indicate that students benefit from being informed about the learning environment that supports their success. Retention rates for the 2008 cohort increased by 18 percentage points.

EOU’s GE curriculum revision began in June 2007. The mission, core learning outcomes, and rubrics developed for the GE Core formed the nucleus for curricular transformation. Through the Compass project, the campus had a significant opportunity to develop a phased approach to curricular alignment with degree programs and the cocurriculum. The initiative supported several communication venues that resulted in articulation of University Learning Outcomes—mapped to AAC&U’s LEAP essential learning outcomes—that were assessable and to which all curricula could align. The recent purchase of planning and assessment software will further enhance the university’s capacity to track and document student success. To bring the Compass project to successful completion will require some necessary next steps on leadership, data collection and assessment, and professional development.

COMPASS AT PSU

Portland State University has a history of over fifteen years with a GE program consisting of year-long courses with smaller, twice-weekly mentoring sessions attached. PSU used the Compass project to evaluate a partnership between the residence halls



and the first-year GE courses. They now have over one hundred students sharing on-campus housing and a first-year course. From this program, they have available to share both materials and data on retention.

PSU has also used the Compass project to expand e-portfolio use in the first-year GE course and to analyze the effectiveness of this expansion. A question on e-portfolio work was added to PSU's annual survey of freshmen in the GE program. Student responses were connected to the students' scores on the annual portfolio assessment. Positive results persuaded faculty to increase the use of e-portfolios. PSU also started using Google sites as the e-portfolio platform, which has made e-portfolio creation easier and quicker for students. PSU has also created an e-portfolio gallery (<http://tinyurl.com/33jrbgk>), a step-by-step guide for students (<http://tinyurl.com/394kut4>), and several templates for PSU e-portfolios (<http://tinyurl.com/2whp6sl>).

Finally, Portland State has taken a unique approach to one of its most successful programs—the GE senior capstone, required of almost every graduating student. These award-winning senior capstones were instrumental in initiating the service-learning movement in higher education. Program assessment of senior capstones has been a challenge due to the diversity of the courses and the focus on useful products for the community partners. As a part of their Compass work, PSU decided to use a course portfolio to assess the senior capstone. Participating instructors have shared a portfolio site, a best-practice website, and a rubric for their course portfolios.

These examples illustrate the specific actions generated on the three Compass project beta campuses. What is more difficult to document is the way these inquiries fed into the work of the LO&A and provided additional support for educational improvement on the other four

campuses. The evidence, however, that Compass influenced the whole Oregon University System was best illustrated at the first inter-institutional conference on teaching and learning specifically designed for university faculty. Held in Portland in October 2010, Teaching TALKS: Today's Academic Linking Knowledge and Skills set the tone for dialogue to come. According to a member of the LO&A team:

In my work with my LO&A and AAC&U colleagues I have been challenged to analyze my teaching practice in deep and meaningful ways as we addressed the tensions between accountability and assessment... between compliance and the improvement of the teaching and learning processes. But the greatest value of this work has been in finding like-minded colleagues who share a commitment to deciphering the complexities of teaching and learning.

Conference evaluations issued a strong call for regular meetings of this nature. Specific topics for which there was high demand included the nature and evidence-based effectiveness of HIPs, and methods to institutionalize work on student learning outcomes and assessment. It is important to note that GE reform is a result of faculty action. Providing faculty with continued opportunities to collaborate with like-minded colleagues is critical to sustaining an environment of renewal, both on individual campuses and system-wide.

THE OUS FINAL REPORT

The final report of the LO&A task force was delivered to the OUS Provosts' Council in January 2011. The report makes two recommendations and suggests directions for continuing this work. The first recommendation is the adoption by all OUS campuses of a framework of expectations for the assessment of student learning, and the second is the establishment of an OUS Student Learning Assessment

web page to serve as the public face for transparency, accountability, and accreditation. The Task Group report closes with suggestions, based on the experiences of LO&A in Oregon and in collaboration with Compass project systems in California and Wisconsin, for continuing this work.

Results thus far in Oregon suggest that partnerships in this area may be fostered through

- shared goals for student learning and success for all students emanating from a sustained high-level emphasis infused throughout the individual campus communities;
- flexibility in the means of achieving the goals, respectful of individual institutional cultures, administrative structures, student populations, priorities, and autonomy;
- freedom to attempt innovative practices and fail without fear of reprisal;
- sufficient focus to prevent the dilution of both message and action framed around too many priorities.

As we stated in our October 2010 Compass report, transformation can be messy, but it need not be. First, an institution must begin transformation with a plan that is strategically sound, coherent, sustainable, and has a five- to ten-year horizon. That is, leadership needs to develop a framework that is simple, elegant, and mutable enough to accommodate its mission within a system, its shifting strategic goals over the years, and curriculum designs that meet the evolving needs of its current and potential students. ■

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Putting High-Impact Practices and Inclusive Excellence at the Center of GE Reform: Lessons from the California State University LEAP Initiative

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In 2008 the California State University (CSU) joined the AAC&U's LEAP States initiative and the Compass project (officially known as Give Students a Compass: A Tri-State LEAP Partnership for College Learning, General Education, and Underserved Student Success). That same year, Chancellor Charles B. Reed responded to a request from the CSU Statewide Faculty Senate and issued Executive Order 1033, making the LEAP essential learning outcomes the framework for general education (GE) and assessment of GE in the CSU system. The challenge was obvious: How to organize collaboration in a public university system enrolling more than 400,000 students on twenty-three separate campuses? How to use the Compass project to support the work?

The steering committee for the Compass project invited each CSU to submit a proposal for redesign of its GE curriculum, with an emphasis on high-impact practices (HIPs) and prioritization of inclusive excellence. Interest was keen; evaluating the competing proposals difficult. Ultimately the steering committee chose one campus at each of three phases in the cycle of curricular reform: early, middle, and late. Their individual stories follow, as told by authors from the campuses.

EARLY: SACRAMENTO STATE UNIVERSITY

Our experience is significant for several reasons. First, readiness to participate in general education (GE) reform need not include past participation in reform-minded conferences (we hadn't had the money to send too many to travel too far), widespread local agreement that reform is needed (indeed, we had far more widespread agreement that nothing is wrong), or a strong shared vision of the imperative that we educate our students liberally (our faculty is, to its credit, an army of disciplinarians with terminal degrees from prestigious institutions).

Second, institutional intentionality notwithstanding, the particular faculty who have long been dedicated, passionate advocates for GE on this campus were not convinced that taking away the choices we provide our students is truly the best thing. Many perceived "giving students a compass" as moving toward standardization, external surveillance, and trespass on the curriculum.

Nevertheless, our proposal prevailed despite our dearth of readiness. Fast forward roughly two years, and we have made important inroads into the guts of the GE machine. To date, we have mobilized much of the campus to be aware that our GE with its antiquated design is being updated and transformed.



Our funders—Carnegie and Lumina—wonder how large educational institutions can be made to move, to change, to improve their capacity. If we have learned anything from our experiences, wonder no more. The enactment of what labor leader Joe Hill said as he was led to his death explains the “how”: “Organize.” The one-on-one discussions, the small group “conversations,” the workdays, the receptions, the mini-conferences, the emails, the meetings, the often difficult and emotional talk—these things resulted in the unanimous passage of new Baccalaureate Learning Goals (BALGs) at Sacramento State in November 2009. Now we have a compass and a work plan with a sunset date requiring reconsideration of the GE program.

With the new BALGs in hand, the provost asked that a workgroup design a pilot GE Project for approximately 20 percent of the incoming 2011 freshman class. In accordance with the spirit of the new BALGs, this pilot would make “a coherent and integrated contribution to a student’s total (GE and major) academic experience at Sacramento State, one that is recalled as an important shared experience by future alumni and provides increasingly positive recognition of the University.” In January 2010, the provost called for a twenty-first-century GE that would feature “assessable learning outcomes well connected to our Baccalaureate Learning Goals, affordability, and flexibility for students taking courses and departments planning them and exposure of students to the combined, coordinated, and potentially cross-disciplinary strengths of our best teachers in new substantive and pedagogical structures.” By March, the proposal was developed, reviewed, and submitted to the provost for preliminary approval, then presented to the Senate Executive Committee and the Senate for discussion and debate that continued into fall 2010.

For the first time since the 1980s the curriculum structure was opened up in GE. The students, who had endorsed the first

Senate action regarding the LEAP outcomes and BALGs, added a resolution in support of the GE Pilot, calling for new ways of teaching and learning. The groundwork for the actual resolution took every bit of three years. At this point, faculty by and large support an “experiment” in creating and implementing Academic Learning Collaboratives (ALCs) made up of multiple courses—even though they know it introduces larger-scale transformation and calls for teaching in ways they have not necessarily imagined. When implemented, Sacramento State Studies will enable the institution to assess program-level outcomes and track HIPs (who gets them and what sorts) both back to students and forward to their outcomes.

It would be disingenuous to say that all is well in GE-land. The tensions and discontinuities inherent in our ancient “spoils” system of credits and turf, our tendency as faculty to focus on “the content,” and the hesitancy with which all stakeholders approach the learning needs of our students have made the implementation of our new GE slower than we would have wanted. Despite our lack of readiness back then, despite our passionate tensions that still remain, working with the Compass project has opened the door for change. It’s hard to hold back the tide.

MIDDLE: CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO

California State University, Chico, entered the Compass project determined to redesign its GE program to make its importance more intelligible to students. This decision followed programmatic assessment of GE that documented only modest gains in “skills,” such as writing, oral communications, numeracy, and critical thinking. While course assessment results gave us confidence in the quality of specific courses, it did little to clarify what GE, as a *program*, was contributing to our students’ education.

Informed by national debates on GE, our revising process was positively influenced

by several AAC&U conferences that we attended prior to embarking on redesign. As members of the Compass project, we adapted the LEAP essential learning outcomes to our campus context. Making excellence inclusive (MEI) led us to intentionally design curriculum and pedagogy to serve the needs of underrepresented students.

In the course of the design process competing considerations had to be managed, negotiated, and otherwise reconciled, requiring that we balance:

- outcomes with articulation in the design
- coherence with exploration in the curriculum
- design-team leadership with broad participation
- high-impact practices with severe budgetary pressures

OUTCOMES VERSUS ARTICULATION

To create an outcomes-based, assessable program that reflected our campus values and vision, we adapted LEAP learning outcomes to our context through a consultative process that produced a GE mission statement, strategy, values, and student learning outcomes (SLOs) that defined a distinctive, outcomes-based GE program. Yet CSU, Chico, is part of the larger CSU, which mandates specific distributional requirements in the GE curriculum—in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences—in order to ensure breadth and enhance transferability. Our redesign reconciles these goals through embedding our SLOs in thematically linked pathways that include courses representing all distributional disciplinary areas, allowing us to provide a strong statement of the intellectual principles animating our vision, while making a distinctive program “portable.”

COHERENCE VERSUS EXPLORATION

Campus consultations made it clear that faculty and students value the intellectual exploration afforded by a variety of courses

across the disciplines in GE. On the other hand, for many, coherence is the “holy grail” (Boning 2007). Our solution was to design pathways through the program: sets of courses, representing the disciplinary areas discussed above, that cohere around intellectual themes such as global studies, sustainability, or health and wellness. Students are not required to complete a pathway, but if they complete eighteen units in a pathway they earn a minor in that field of study, e.g., a minor in global studies. This “value added” aspect of GE has been enthusiastically supported by students, and provides a mechanism that makes GE intelligible to all.

TOP-DOWN LEADERSHIP VERSUS BROAD PARTICIPATION

A design team is a relatively small group of people who lead a change process. The design team approach can be contrasted with a broad-based “stakeholder” approach where all interested parties have a place at the table. Recognizing the need for broad participation, the design team members took on multifaceted roles: conveners of conversations, providers of initial ideas, resource people familiar with the literature on GE, and diviners of the campus will. We convened five campus-wide open forums, met with twenty departments, consulted department chairs three times, made several presentations to the provost and deans, surveyed students and alumni, and—adhering closely to the campus governance process—participated in five meetings of the academic senate. In February 2010, the new program received unanimous senate approval, fifteen months after the design team began its work.

This broad-based participatory approach to curriculum development contrasts with the Zemsky and Finney (2010) contention that pathways can be devised relatively quickly and easily with little input or debate. We find this contention untenable, especially as we develop the thematic content of pathways several months after passage of the redesign.

HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES (HIPS) VERSUS BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS

Our redesign occurred during a time of severe budget cuts to California higher education, including the notorious year of furloughs when all personnel suffered a 10 percent pay cut and enforced furlough days when work was not permitted. Our provost’s initial charge to the design team mandated an affordable GE program. Yet we were also committed to *Making Excellence Inclusive* (MEI)—providing



universal access to high-impact practices (Kuh 2008) to engage *all* of our students. We viewed curricular redesign as a golden opportunity for innovative pedagogies to enhance student engagement. Participation in the Compass project enabled us to cite MEI goals, and focus on providing a high-quality education to historically underserved populations—a central aspect of the Chico State and CSU mission. Our design strategically includes HIPS such as writing-intensive courses, civic engagement experiences (like our nationally known town hall meetings), and a GE capstone

experience. These HIPS are strategically placed so that *all* students experience them, both early in their academic careers, when they are most vulnerable to dropping out, and later as culminating experiences.

Participation in the Compass project catalyzed efforts to re-think GE. The design team frequently cited our participation in the Compass project to legitimate our efforts and link them to national discussions. Compass provided guidance, inspiration, intellectual, and financial resources, as well as a clarion call to be true to our values of inclusive “access to excellence” for all students at CSU, Chico.

LATE: SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

Helping students navigate higher education is especially daunting with those who transfer from two- to four-year institutions. They are more likely to be economically disadvantaged, first generation, and/or ethnic minorities. Although community colleges and public four-year institutions in California have common lower-division GE requirements to facilitate transfer, these requirements are typically fragmented into a series of unrelated courses. Findings from the 2010 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) show that transfer students are less likely to engage in HIPS like service-learning, undergraduate research, internships, and study abroad.

San José State University (SJSU) and Evergreen Valley College (EVC) embarked on a joint pilot project designed to facilitate the transfer transition, enhance student success, and increase participation in HIPS. It built on an existing partnership that focused on EVC students before transfer—the Hispanic-Serving Institution Transfer project (www.evc.edu/hsi). The Compass project was intended to bridge both sides of the experience and align institutional messages about GE and liberal education. Our target audience was underserved students planning to transfer to SJSU or another four-year institution, identified through



several EVC programs for low-income students and students of color.

The project combined a second-semester English composition GE course, English 1B, before transfer with peer mentoring, advising, and cocurricular activities before and after transfer. We selected English 1B for strategic reasons: it could incorporate liberal education themes through critical reading and writing assignments; it is typically taken near the time of transfer; and it serves as a gateway course for upper-division GE and writing requirements. It also fit with a successful “writing partners” service-learning model, originally cocreated by SJSU English faculty member Catherine Gabor, which pairs college students and elementary school students through letter exchanges. (See www.writetosucceed.org/Writing_Partners.php.)

Alexandria White, EVC English instructor, was invited to teach the pilot course. Ms. White is a young, first-generation African-American woman who earned her B.A. at another CSU—San Francisco State University—and her M.A. at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She was excited to work across educational levels and institutional boundaries, resonated with the social justice aspect of service-learning, and, as a relatively novice faculty member, had not become “set” in her pedagogical style. Gabor and White jointly adapted the course syllabus.

The first three class meetings were held at EVC, but the remaining classes were held at SJSU to help students acclimate to the much-larger campus. At the first SJSU meeting, they were welcomed with a pizza dinner hosted by Debra David, associate dean of undergraduate studies. Subsequent meetings included campus and library tours, class visits by representatives of academic advising and the career center, and a writing workshop to prepare students for the required SJSU writing skills test. The two peer mentors were both transfer students; one (Robert Corpus, who wrote

the “Reality Check” in this issue) had come from EVC. We wanted the EVC students to feel “at home” and valued at SJSU and to learn about resources and HIPs.

End-of-semester comments written by the EVC students were universally positive. Many said that the service-learning component increased their motivation to engage with course materials.

“The [writing partners] experience was a lot better than I anticipated, and it caused me to take the course, as a whole, more seriously.” The college students gave their partners a glimpse of college life and wanted to prove to them—and to themselves—that they were university-bound. Most felt that the class made them more confident and excited about transferring to SJSU or another four-year institution.

“Not only has this class given me a glimpse of what campus life could be like, it has given me an extra boost of confidence to proceed. I can’t wait!”

“It has motivated me to do better in school now so I can one day transfer to a university like San Jose State.”

White had initially allowed thirty-seven students to enroll, expecting the class size to shrink to twenty to twenty-five students, typical for English 1B classes at EVC. She was surprised and delighted to discover that only two students dropped by the end of the semester. The remaining thirty-five passed the course.

We are cautiously optimistic about its institutionalization, but budget constraints and personnel changes may undermine its long-term continuation. The key faculty, administrators, and staff are convinced of its value, but we plan a more systematic study with comparison English 1B classes at EVC and SJSU to provide stronger assessment evidence. We will also track the progression of the EVC transfer students and their participation in HIPs. The pilot has increased the visibility of issues facing transfer students at both institutions and we are exploring ways to expand our collaboration.

RESULTS AT CSU

In the course of the project, the CSU system has spread the impact of work on these three beta-site campuses in two ways. First, as part of its commitment to Give Students a Compass, the steering committee hosted two statewide conferences, in 2009 and 2010. Leadership from the beta sites brought teams of faculty and students to share their experiences and insights with colleagues throughout the CSU system.

Second, the steering committee itself includes a mix of skills and perspectives:

- a director of institutional research, whose independent analysis of the relationships between HIPs and student success has helped make the argument for broader, system-wide curricular reform;
- a system officer, whose statewide perspective facilitated communication and logistics;
- two representatives from the statewide academic senate, whose roles on key committees and tireless support have given the Compass project the urgency and legitimacy it needed.

In the CSU system, reforming GE, incorporating HIPs, and making excellence inclusive remain works in progress. But the Compass project has accelerated that work, in large part because of the commitment, resourcefulness, and sheer tenacity reflected in the stories collected here. ■

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The North Dakota Story: One State's Path toward Collaboration and LEAP

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The noteworthy feature of North Dakota's collaboration—and its strength—is its successful efforts to create a general education community among all eighteen of the state's institutions of higher education: public, private, and tribal. It is based on fostering connections among institutions of different missions, grounded in the LEAP initiative, and now in the process of becoming formalized as the North Dakota General Education (NDGE) Council.

Our project is the story of several different factors that seemed to coalesce all at once: opportunity, knowledge, trust, and a bit of luck. The opportunity to work together became attractive as we learned more about the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative and the national conversation about undergraduate learning and liberal education. The knowledge came from key leaders who had attended several AAC&U conferences and from a presentation by a member of AAC&U's staff at our second summit. The trust was born of our commitment to respecting each institution's distinct mission. And the luck—well that's the story.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

Today, after a little more than two years of working together, we have a group of college and university educators, joined together to foster a new vision of undergraduate general education (GE) across the state. Although we began with the eleven institutions in the state's public university system, our collaboration quickly expanded to include the five tribal colleges and the two private institutions in North Dakota. At our last meeting (the Fourth General Education Summit, September 2010), we had representa-

tives from all but two of the eighteen North Dakota institutions, and we anticipate that the remaining two schools will participate in the next summit. Creating a group that is truly statewide and all-inclusive will give us the best possible forum for sharing work and solving problems.

For us, this makes a lot of sense. Our state places high value on efficient, smooth movement between institutions. The North Dakota University System (NDUS) has operated under a general education transfer agreement since the early '90s; the tribal and private institutions also pay close attention to it. Because our state is relatively small (population about 650,000) and because we enjoy an exceptionally high rate of college attendance, it is important that all colleges and universities participate in discussions about the kind of undergraduate learning that North Dakota students will take with them as they move to and from our institutions.

The collaboration has enjoyed substantial interest among participants. The main interests have been simple sharing of specifics and problems within GE programs, but discussions have also touched on issues of assessment, transfer, and teaching. Initially, most schools joined to find out "what's happening?" at the other institutions and nationally, but recent sessions have focused on building a more permanent organizational structure. Consequently, the group initiated an effort—ongoing now as of this writing—to establish a permanent council. To do this, we developed a draft constitution, approved it at our last summit, and then forwarded it to the eighteen campuses for their approval. The target is to have the constitution ratified by the April 2011 summit, which will allow us to hold our first official gathering of



the council in fall 2011.

The council will have at least two critical tasks: to foster ongoing discussion and review of the “state of the state” in undergraduate GE, and to promote faculty and staff development so that we improve our capacity to actually offer a smarter, better program on each of our individual campuses. The first task has already started and has been keyed to the LEAP initiative. We asked our participants to go back to their campuses to ascertain institutional commitment to each of the four LEAP essential learning outcomes (ELOs). We invited campuses to focus on the specific, embedded outcomes, programs, and activities within each of the four broad ELOs. We did this to discover in more detail what each campus saw as essential learning for their students. Their responses generally supported the LEAP ELOs, but they varied in degree of support. That is, although a campus might wish to develop teamwork and collaborative learning in their students, the campus might rate their commitment at less than 100 percent because they were not sure how well they could assess learning through teamwork and collaboration.

As work on this task moves forward, we anticipate that there will be substantial support for and commitment to most of the learning activities embedded in the LEAP ELOs. Based on current conversations and reports, we find strong affinity for each of the LEAP ELOs and the undergirding philosophy. We believe that this support and commitment will form the basis of a statewide foundation for the kind of GE that we want. It remains to be seen how this foundation might affect our current programs and our current transfer agreements, but having the council in place will provide a “home” for such discussions to take place. The council discussions will also carry political weight in that its deliberations and agreements will likely offer persuasive proposals to the governing

bodies in the NDUS, the tribal colleges, and the boards of the private institutions. Rather than individual campuses bringing forward competing proposals or work that is isolated from discussion at other campuses (or across the nation), proposals from the council come forward with the benefits of genuine statewide discussion, thoughtful consideration of the various missions of our different campuses, and the approval of a formal body whose job is to be knowledgeable about the nature and purposes of GE.

At the same time, the discussions are also rooted in a commitment and a trust that each individual campus mission will be valued and maintained. Not only is this crucial to a truly all-inclusive participation, but it is also critical to success in shared work. By starting with each campus’s goals and particular challenges, the council’s work will continue to move ahead as a

skills and knowledge—they wanted to share their new thinking. Talking together about these directions led to a proposal to host a statewide presentation on North Dakota’s GE at a statewide arts and humanities conference the following year.

That presentation kicked off interest from more schools and from the state system office. It led to the first-ever meeting of the public state system institutions with a special emphasis on GE. At that meeting, schools shared their programs and current challenges, organizers briefed the group on LEAP and the national conversation, and the state system administration encouraged the group to continue to meet and discuss common issues. Follow-up meetings were expanded to include the state’s tribal colleges and private institutions, and the discussion turned toward creating a formal structure for discussions of GE across all

Discussions are rooted in a commitment and a trust that each individual campus mission will be valued and maintained.

grass-roots effort. Although it may take more time, we believe that, in the long run, this style of working together will provide the kind of staying power that large-scale projects require.

WHERE WE BEGAN

The catalyst for the first meeting of the North Dakota collaboration grew from the 2007 AAC&U Conference on General Education and Assessment, where faculty from different schools were intrigued by the possibility of continuing the conversation among state campuses after the conference. Excited by the new direction that undergraduate learning was taking—from course counting and checklist-based programs to a stronger integrative education aimed at student learning and essential

the institutions.

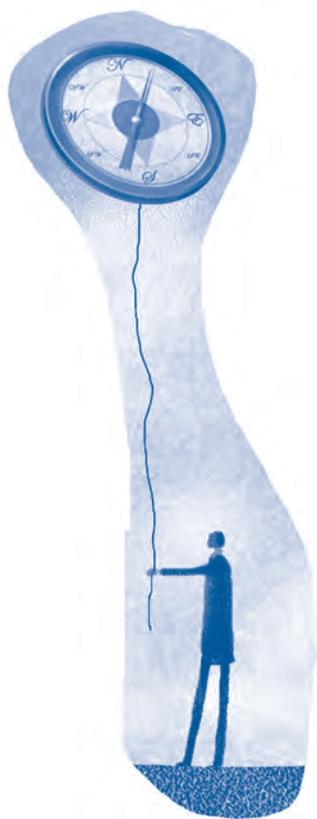
In addition, spurred by study and discussions of the ELOs, the group began to discuss shared commitments. Summit participants returned to their home campuses with a LEAP-based assignment: to share the LEAP ELOs, entertain campus-wide conversations with faculty and administration, and then report back at the next summit. The goal was two-fold. The first was institutional engagement: to trigger campus-by-campus discussions of what general education ought to do in terms of student learning. The second objective was discovery: to ascertain our state’s shared “vision” of undergraduate general education. By asking each campus to report on the ELOs as we describe above, we hoped to locate the core of statewide

agreement. Judging by our summit discussions and by the national consensus (as reported in various AAC&U reports), we feel confident that the eighteen North Dakota institutions will come together with strong commitment for most of the ELOs.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, UNIFIED VISION

North Dakota is a state with a strong populist tradition, which promotes the belief that every voice should get a chance to be heard. With a small population, not only is this practically possible, it's also a basic expectation when people come together.

For a state with a small population, North Dakota has a large number of institutions of higher education. Some have suggested that this is another outgrowth of populist tradition: different needs and different interests lead to different homes



for a wide variety of programs.

These two facts underlie the work of the North Dakota collaboration to date, and they will be formative factors in the work of the NDGEC in the future. The council will need to develop a common vision of a strong, effective general education that can empower students no matter which particular institution(s) they attend. To be effective, the council will uphold the diversity of its many campuses—public two-year and four-year, tribal colleges, research universities, technical colleges, and private institutions.

Speaking from the perspective of one of the state's regional four-year universities, author Andrea Donovan of Minot State University concludes, "The development of a State General Education Council and, eventually, a cohesive system will benefit institutions of all levels for North Dakota. This development helps us address two major concerns: educational quality and transferability. Our council will help with transferability among all the schools in the state and it will also greatly improve the quality of the education of our students by improving the skills needed for the promising twenty-first century individuals who will be the next movers and shakers."

Connecting with both two-year colleges and four-year institutions is a key collaborative feature in the state. Author Brad Tews of North Dakota State College of Science is convinced that "membership in the NDGEC provides a two-year, open enrollment, comprehensive institution which emphasizes career and technical as well as liberal arts curriculums, with many distinct advantages. The adoption of the LEAP outcomes brings institutions of higher education together with a shared set of student learning outcomes that can be adopted within the context of one-of-a-kind curricula. Data collected to support the accomplishment of these outcomes provides transparency and credibility, two

very important benefits for accountability that legislators, parents, students and other stakeholders require."

For author Ryan Pitcher of Bismarck State College, "The benefits of having a state General Education Council are multiple. First and foremost, it provides a voice for tribal and private institutions in North Dakota by including them underneath the same umbrella with the institutions of the NDUS. Secondly, it helps our institutions to start thinking more as a system rather than as a hodge-podge collection of GE courses. This leads to a more specific focus on 'proficiency-based' assessments rather than on a 'knowledge-based' collection of facts."

NEXT STEPS

As this article indicates, the North Dakota story is clearly a work in progress. Ratifying the constitution for the NDGE Council will establish an organizational forum for debate and discussion of the state's GE programs in a way that we have not had. This will allow for substantive decisions about portability, transferability, and assessment (among others). Providing a statewide home for such discussions and decisions will be a major boost for GE and all college learning

The ongoing work over a statewide vision of a "new and improved" GE that is based on essential learning outcomes will also be significant. A strong consensus is already there but needs to be more clearly focused and then agreed upon. As that work moves ahead and as the state "sees" where the new GE is headed, the council will play a leadership role in guiding both individual campuses and the groups of institutions that currently exist.

We think the North Dakota story is one of a great start, a model of inclusive statewide collaboration, and, most importantly, a commitment to future work and development. ■



Assessment of High-Impact Practices: Using Findings to Drive Change in the Compass Project

► **Ashley Finley**, senior director of assessment and research, Association of American Colleges and Universities

The role of assessment in the AAC&U LEAP States' project, Give Students a Compass: A Tri-State LEAP Partnership for College Learning, General Education, and Underserved Student Success (known as the Compass project) necessarily spans and connects inquiry at the campus, system, and national levels. The Compass project provides the opportunity to work across multiple levers of assessment to engage multiple mechanisms for change in states and state systems. It is possible to draw from the campus-level assessment across individual campuses and to scale up by aggregating findings to gain a richer understanding of effective practices and outcomes at the system and national levels. Working in reverse, evidence aggregated at the system and national levels can also be disseminated back to campuses for further development of efforts on the ground level. Therefore, it is possible to develop a substantial and complimentary evidence base of knowledge that flows across multiple tiers of local (campus level), system (what might be considered the "meta level"), and national-level work. Additionally, the engagement of assessment levers that extend beyond campuses while providing broad evidentiary support of campus goals can assist campus leaders in making the case for institutional change.

Below is an example of how evidence can be gathered and strengthened using multiple levers of assessment to facilitate discussion at the campus, system, and national levels. Using campus-level assessment of high-impact practices (HIPs) drawn from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), this article reports on the trends in student participation in HIPs and the associated learning outcomes that were analyzed via the initial aggregation of data at the state system level and, then, ultimately

through the aggregation of system level data to inform national findings. The implications of these amplified effects combined with the distribution of participation rates suggest that campuses in these state systems are expanding first-year programming such that entering students stand to benefit widely from high-impact practices at the start of college.

SCALING-UP: USING CAMPUS-LEVEL DATA TO EXAMINE BROAD TRENDS

In 2009, each campus participating in the NSSE in the California State University System, the University of Wisconsin System, and the Oregon University System provided authorization for

It is possible to draw from the campus-level assessment across individual campuses and to scale up by aggregating findings to gain a richer understanding of effective practices and outcomes at the system and national levels.

NSSE to conduct separate analyses of their 2006/2008 data for the advancement of Compass work. The results combine data from thirty-nine campuses—twenty campuses in the California State University System, thirteen campuses in the University of Wisconsin System, and six campuses in the Oregon University System—with an average estimated response rate of 27 percent. Summary reports from these analyses were given back to the individual campuses, to the system offices, and also shared with AAC&U. Specifically, the NSSE reports focused on participation rates and self-reported outcomes associated with student

involvement in six high-impact practices: learning communities (first year), service learning (both first-year and senior-year experiences), student–faculty research (senior), study abroad (senior), internship (senior year), and senior culminating experience/ senior capstone. However, because these reports did not combine data across all three state systems, the following supplemental analysis was developed to demonstrate a way to analyze national trends. The study examined aggregated system-level data and then examined averages to discern patterns. This supplemental analysis across three state systems provides findings on: (1) *whether and to what degree* HIPs impact students’ self-reported outcomes; (2) *the variation in effects between types of HIPs* on students’ self-reported outcomes; and, finally, (3) *the rate of participation* in HIPs among students from underserved populations compared with students from traditionally more advantaged backgrounds. Underserved student populations refer to students from historically underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities groups, transfer, first-generation, and part-time students.

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES?

First, looking at collective outcome effects for the selected high-impact practices across all three state systems, one finds substantial evidence that these practices have a high degree of positive impact on self-reported outcomes. Nearly every HIP examined is associated with significant gains, as defined by NSSE, in students’ self-reported deep learning: gains in general education, gains in personal and social development, and gains in practical competence. Although study abroad experiences have some significant benefits for student outcomes, relatively speaking, these experiences were not found to be as powerful as other types of HIPs. Table 1 closely mirrors Kuh’s (2007) findings on HIPs, also drawn from NSSE data, including the comparatively small impact of study abroad experiences.

ARE HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES EQUALLY EFFECTIVE?

Second, although high-impact practices are collectively effective, they are not necessarily *uniformly* effective. Because HIPs, as a group, are so convincingly

efficacious, perhaps the more illustrative way to compare the relative impact across different types of HIPs is to examine the *size or magnitude* of effects for particular high-impact practices across student outcomes. Figure 1 indicates that across nearly all of the HIPs examined (except study abroad experiences), these practices have the most sizeable impact on students’ deep learning, followed by students’ gains in personal and social development and gains in practical competence, respectively. Conversely, learning communities, student–faculty research, and service-learning experiences for both first-year students and seniors had the smallest impact on gains in general education. Overall, service-learning experiences demonstrated the greatest impact on each of the four outcomes measured, regardless of whether the student was in the first or senior year.

An overall sample size could not be calculated from the available data. However, the aggregate sample size for each HIP category across state systems could be calculated. Accordingly, the number of students reporting for each HIP is as follows: learning communities=2,357; service learning (FY)=6,237; service

TABLE 1. LEVEL OF STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HIPs ON STUDENT OUTCOME MEASURES (AVERAGES ACROSS CALIFORNIA, OREGON, AND WISCONSIN STATE SYSTEMS DATA)

		DEEP LEARNING	GAINS IN GENERAL EDUCATION	GAINS IN PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	GAINS IN PRACTICAL COMPETENCE
FIRST YEAR	Learning Communities	***	***	**	**
	Service Learning	***	***	***	***
SENIOR	Study Abroad	**	*	**	No Effect
	Student-Fac. Research	***	***	***	***
	Service Learning	***	***	***	***
	Internship	***	***	***	***
	Senior Culminating Experience	***	***	***	***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$



learning (SR)=11,903; student/faculty research=4,059; senior capstone=7,189; internship=11,373; study abroad=3,146.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES?

In terms of race, patterns of relative advantage and disadvantage in HIPs participation are less clear. Figure 2 reflects average participation rates in learning communities and service-learning experiences by race for first-year students across the three state systems; figure 3 reflects average participation rates by race for seniors

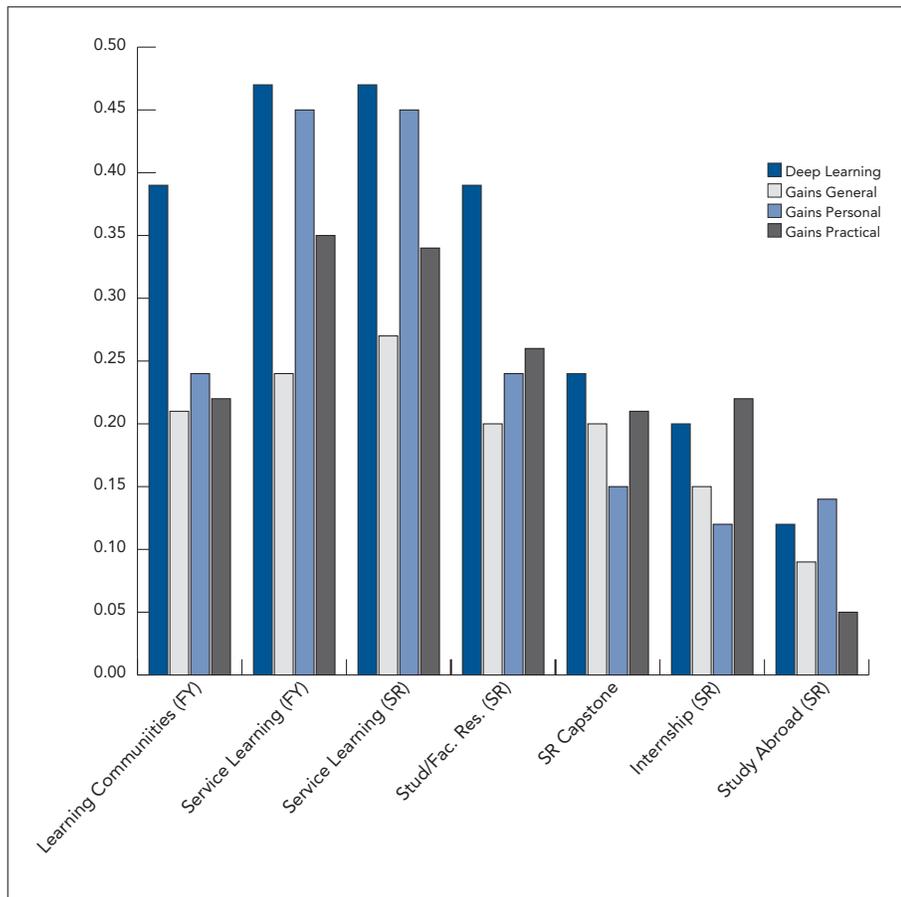
across selected HIPs. Overall, both charts suggest rates of participation, for first-year and senior students, in the selected HIPs do not vary dramatically across racial categories (see figure 2 and figure 3)—or at least not in ways that might be expected. Figure 2 shows nearly identical rates of participation across racial groups for first-year students in learning communities (between 13–17 percent). White students, however, have the *lowest* reported rate of participation in first-year service-learning experiences (32 percent) among groups analyzed; 10 percentage points below

the participation rate of black students. Similarly, the average participation rates for seniors across HIPs analyzed indicate that while white students have among the highest percentages of participation in these HIPs, they are not the highest (see figure 3). In fact, senior Hispanic students report the highest rates of participation among racial categories in three out the five HIPs examined—service learning (55 percent), student/faculty research (20 percent), and internships (54 percent). In contrast, black students have the lowest rates of participation in four of the five HIPs examined, with markedly lower rates of involvement in student/faculty research (10 percent) and study abroad experiences (9 percent).

The lack of consistent patterns of racial difference in HIPs participation across first-year and senior students in this analysis largely echoes results previously reported by Kuh (2008). However, it is instructive to examine the emergent differences in participation by race when moving from first-year to senior students. Across these state systems, first-year students are experiencing HIPs at about the same rate or, as is the case with service learning, students in racial minority groups are experiencing them even more often. But past the first year, familiar trends emerge by the time students are seniors—while the participation of black students falls behind nearly every other group except in service learning. Unexpectedly, senior Hispanic students have comparably high, or higher, levels of participation as white students in several of the HIPs examined.

Based on these findings there is promising news for first-year students given the limited national data on the impact of HIPs on measures of student success for students of color. Using a large, national sample of NSSE data, Kuh (2008) found that engagement in high-impact activities was strongly correlated with increasing

FIGURE 1. SIZE OF EFFECT OF HIPs ON ALL MEASURED OUTCOMES (AVERAGES ACROSS CALIFORNIA, OREGON, AND WISCONSIN STATE SYSTEMS DATA)



An overall sample size could not be calculated from the available data. However, the aggregate sample size for each HIP category across state systems could be calculated. Accordingly, the number of students reporting for each HIP is as follows: learning communities=2,357; service learning (FY)=6,237; service learning (SR)=11,903; student/faculty research=4,059; senior capstone=7,189; internship=11,373; study abroad=3,146.

first- to second-year retention. But Kuh (2008) also found that the likelihood of returning for the second year was *even greater* for Hispanic students participating in these activities, compared to white students. In the same study, Kuh (2008) similarly found that the positive association between participating in high-impact activities and having a higher GPA at the end of the first-year was even *greater* for black students, compared to white students. The implications of these amplified effects, combined with the distribution of participation rates, suggest campuses in these state systems have done a good job of expanding first-year programming such that entering students stand to benefit widely, and equitably, from high-impact practices at the start of college. However, senior year indicators suggest that a

greater breadth of intentionality is warranted to make sure *all* students graduate with similar levels of participation.

USING SYSTEM AND NATIONAL FINDINGS TO MOTIVATE CHANGE ON CAMPUSES

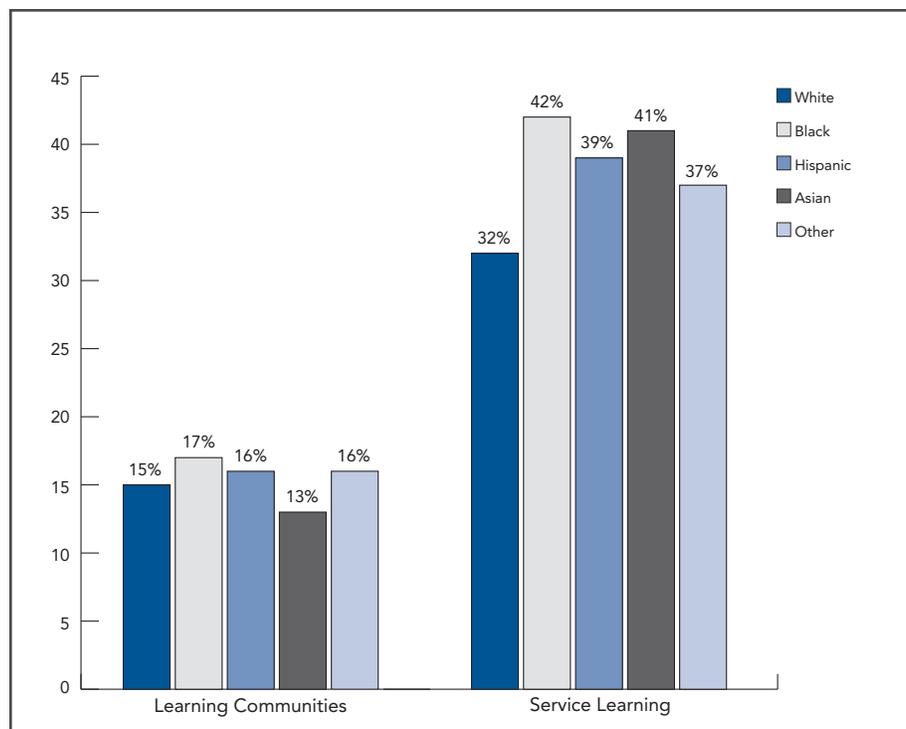
How can the preceding system and national-level analyses be used on campuses to generate knowledge for the advancement of local campus work? As both table 1 and figure 1 indicate, there is strong evidence that HIPs are broadly effective for students as a whole. Yet, figure 2 shows that these effective practices are not reaching the majority of students. If we know these practices are not reaching the majority of students, who are they reaching? Figures 2 and 3 provide a nuanced picture of participation in HIPs

across underserved student populations. Transfer and first-generation students appear to be the most consistently lacking in their participation in HIPs, compared to other underserved groups analyzed, in both their first or senior years. Racial comparisons in HIPs participation suggest a fair degree of equitable participation for students in students' first-year. However, this distribution grows more uneven by the senior year, particularly for black students.

Campuses can help to advance knowledge of participation and access to sources of engaged learning experiences by more fully and more narrowly interrogating NSSE data and other forms of institutional data. This work would provide critical data sources for greater understanding of the ways in which students from all backgrounds are affected by HIPs and the degree to which these practices are inclusive of all students. Specifically, we lack at the national, system, and local campus levels clear knowledge of the rates of students' participation in HIPs. This analysis presents findings for only five selected HIPs; many more exist on campuses, including writing across the curriculum, collaborative projects, and first-year seminars. Additionally, although analyzing HIPs participation rates using NSSE data is useful, it is unclear if students who participated in HIPs are also more likely to respond to NSSE, causing these participation rates across student groups to be *overestimated*. Those on campuses will need to work more intentionally to track and record where HIPs exist on campus, the students involved in those experiences, and how to effectively capture student responses to these experiences.

In addition to participation rates in HIPs, particularly among underserved students, we also lack information on the impact on outcomes for underserved students who engage in HIPs. Though table

FIGURE 2. PARTICIPATION RATES FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS IN SELECTED HIPs BY RACE



Because of the variation in sample sizes across race categories, only a descriptive comparison in participation rates is presented. These data should not be used to make statistical inferences about a generalized population of students participating in HIPs.



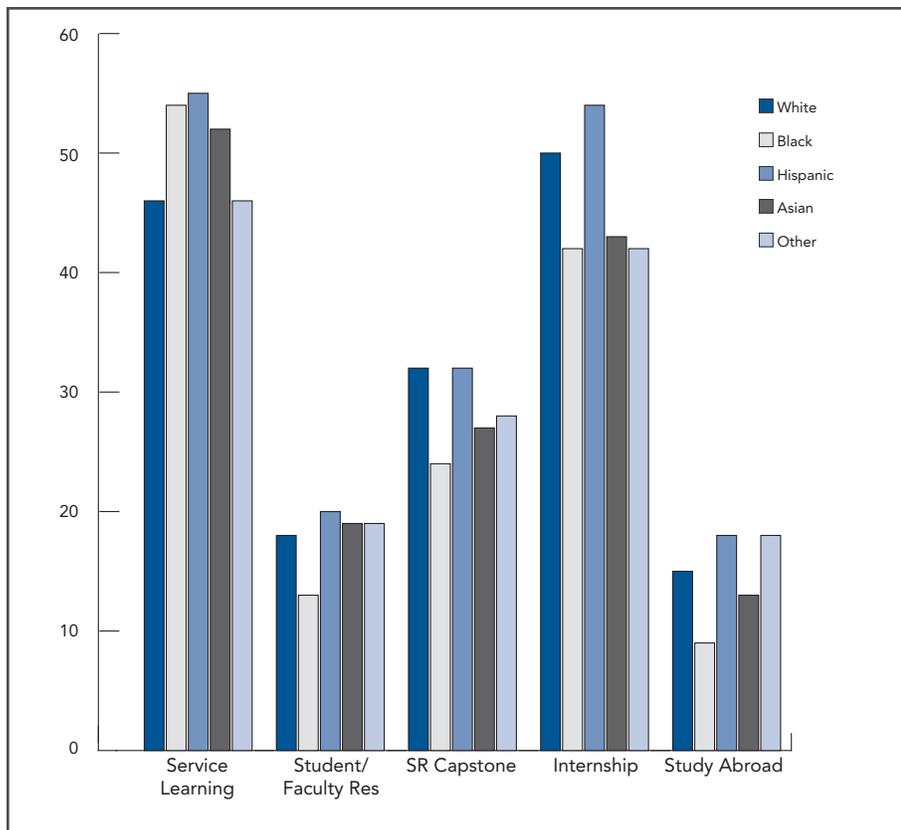
1 and figure 1 illustrate strong effects on student outcomes, these findings assume students are a single, homogenous group. The reality, however, is that the heterogeneity of students across race and ethnicity and socioeconomic class creates different opportunities, paths, and experiences of learning for these students on campuses. To neglect these differences by not disaggregating data is to not just assume students are a single group—it is effectively to assume all students are white, non-transfer, with parents who graduated from college. But the assumption of a white majority, never mind the other descriptors, will soon cease to be the demographic reality of higher education. Assessment must begin now to be more wholly reflective of the success and inclusion of all students.

A final caveat of this research, as with all current research examining HIPs, is that there is no means by which to account for best practices *within* high-impact practices. As indicated by figure 1, though HIPs appear to have widely positive effects on students' self-reported outcomes, the extent or magnitude of these effects does vary across types of HIPs. Even further, however, is the likely degree to which experiences will vary even across the same high-impact practice (e.g. different service learning or undergraduate research experiences). Thus, there is likely to be a difference between delivering HIPs on campus and delivering them *well*. As noted by Kuh (2008), "There is growing evidence that—when done well—[high-impact practices] appear to engage participants at levels that

elevate their performance across multiple engagement and desired outcomes measures" (14). As our collective knowledge of HIPs advances, we will need to look more closely at the qualities that inform Kuh's cautionary three words: "when done well." The integrative and multi-tiered assessment, like that developed through the Compass project, can be a valuable part of this discovery. Through the assembling of data across campuses, systems, and at the national level, multiple constituencies can contribute to the better understanding of how HIPs vary in their impacts on student outcomes and how these results are maximized through effective practices.

It will be a challenge to know all we can about HIPs, what makes them work, for whom, and where. Campuses play a vital role in assessing this work, both through the assessment of students' perceptions of these experiences and through the direct evidence gathered from the products of student learning. But the Compass project demonstrates that campus assessment efforts reach full potential when they are allowed to be shared and aggregated at the system and national levels. At these levels we can build off local practices to better examine the large-scale trends that emerge from bringing lots of data together. By shifting across these levels knowledge can be built faster, more efficiently, and with a greater likelihood of reaching a successful goal. If the journey is to know all we can about student learning—and *which* students are learning—assessment can't be one speed. ■

FIGURE 3. PARTICIPATION RATES (%) FOR SENIORS IN SELECTED HIPs BY RACE



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Kuh, George D. 2008. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Publications from LEAP

Liberal Education & America's Promise



College Learning for the New Global Century

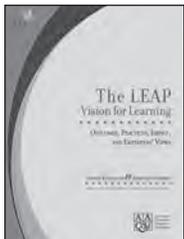
This signature national report clarifies the aims and outcomes of a twenty-first-century college education. It is also a report about the promises we need to make—and keep—to all students who aspire to college educations, especially to those for whom college is a route, perhaps the only possible route, to a better future. This report, based on extensive input both from educators and employers, responds to the new global challenges today's students face. It describes the learning contemporary students need from college, and what it will take to help them achieve it. (2007)



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The LEAP Vision for Learning: Outcomes, Practices, Impact, and Employers' Views

This publication outlines the LEAP vision for learning, bringing together multiple strands of LEAP work. It includes an executive summary of *College Learning for the New Global Century*; summaries of research about high-impact educational practices and learning outcomes; summaries of trends in curricular, assessment, and general education reform; and data about the outcomes that employers value in the college graduates they hire and promote. Suggested for use by advocates of educational reform, committees, boards of trustees, and regents. (2011)

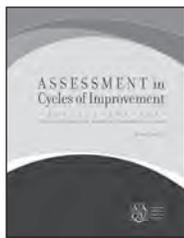


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Assessment in Cycles of Improvement: Faculty Designs for Essential Learning Outcomes

BY ROSS MILLER

This publication features a series of reports on how selected colleges and universities foster and assess student learning in twelve liberal education outcome areas, including writing, quantitative literacy, critical thinking, ethics, intercultural knowledge, and information literacy. (2007)



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Assessing Outcomes and Improving Achievement: Tips and Tools for Using Rubrics

EDITED BY TERREL L. RHODES



This publication provides practical advice on the development and effective use of rubrics to evaluate college student achievement at various levels. It includes rubrics for fifteen liberal learning outcomes developed as part of AAC&U's VALUE project and which can be adapted to reflect the missions, cultures, and practices of individual colleges and universities and their specific programs. The rubrics included in this publication were tested on more than one hundred pilot campuses and include rubrics for outcomes often neglected in other assessment systems. These rubrics were developed by faculty members and academic professionals who articulated what important liberal learning outcomes look like at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of accomplishment. (2010)

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Electronic Portfolios and Student Success: Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Learning

BY HELEN L. CHEN AND TRACY PENNY LIGHT

This publication presents an overview of electronic portfolios and ways individuals and campuses can implement e-portfolios to enhance and assess student learning, recognizing that learning occurs in many places, takes many forms, and is exhibited through many modes of representation. It is organized around eight issues central to implementing an e-portfolio approach: defining learning outcomes; understanding your learners; identifying stakeholders; designing learning activities; including multiple forms of evidence; using rubrics to evaluate e-portfolios; anticipating external uses of evidence; and evaluating the impact of e-portfolios. This work is illustrated through multiple campus case study examples. (2010)

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SUERTE

► **Robert Corpus**, senior student, San José State University

When I first arrived at San José State University (SJSU) as a transfer student from Evergreen Valley College (EVC), I suffered a severe concussion from running head-first into a brick wall of bureaucratic policies and practices. Though I was warned about long papers and heavy reading loads in upper-division classes, no one had warned me about the *system*.

Shortly before the SJSU semester started, I swaggered into an advising office with what I thought was a simple question: Why couldn't I enroll in upper-division classes even though I had completed lower-division GE? I was bounced from building to building and cubicle to cubicle at least five times before arriving back exactly where I started! Eventually my question was answered, but I was very frustrated by the experience.

I heard similar stories from other EVC transfer students; in fact, some of my peers postponed enrolling at SJSU because they could not cope with the bureaucracy and felt that they didn't fit in it. Most were first-generation college students with limited resources, had outside work and/or family obligations, and were overwhelmed by the challenge of navigating through the mazes.

We decided that we needed to take collective action. A group of EVC transfer students made a pact—those who transferred together would stay together!

We organized a support group called SUERTE (Students *U*nited for *E*ducation and *R*etention among *T*ransfers from *E*VC)—Spanish for luck. Our organization focuses on mentoring new transfer students, matching them with members from the same major. The mentors encourage the new students to come to their classes, meet professors, and learn “insider tips” about the department and major.

My peers and I had been fortunate enough to participate in an EVC-to-SJSU transfer project supported by a Title V Hispanic-serving institution grant to increase the number of Latino/Chicano students enrolling at SJSU (www.evc.edu/hsi). The project grew out of a special program initiated by EVC faculty members in 1983 called ENLACE — Spanish for connection (www.evc.edu/enlace)—that includes academic classes in core subjects, counseling, tutoring, and peer mentoring. The Title V grant also supported a five-week counseling class at EVC to familiarize students with SJSU, a workshop on passing an SJSU writing test that is a prerequisite for many upper-division courses, and counselors familiar with the policies of both campuses. The SUERTE founders wanted to continue the sense of community and support developed through our EVC experiences after transferring.

It is SUERTE's long-term goal to embed itself into the DNA of SJSU by

expanding to include transfer students from other community colleges, and by providing a model to inspire students across the country to become part of the solution to system challenges. Peer support is extremely valuable, but additional support from the institution, such as incentives for mentors and a gathering space, is also critical for transfer student success. Elsewhere in this issue, Debra David and Alexandra White describe the SJSU-EVC pilot project that is part of the AAC&U *Compass* project. Dr. David heard about SUERTE soon after the pilot began and invited me to become involved as a peer mentor and as a student consultant. This has also led to a new opportunity to work with the SJSU Student Academic Support Services office on outreach to transfer students.

I passionately believe that students need to become active partners with the university to create programs to promote retention and graduation. Our missing voices can alert faculty and staff to the barriers we face and offer ideas for supporting us. Transfer students are even more invisible than those who arrive as freshmen. Through peer mentoring and through involvement in shaping campus policies and practices, students can develop leadership skills. We are willing and able to take on more responsibility for our own success in exchange for more opportunities! ■



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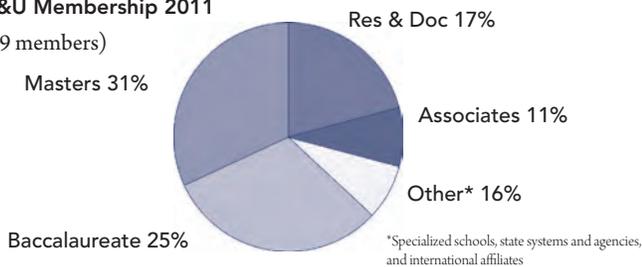
AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,200 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges and universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education at both the national and local levels and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at www.aacu.org.

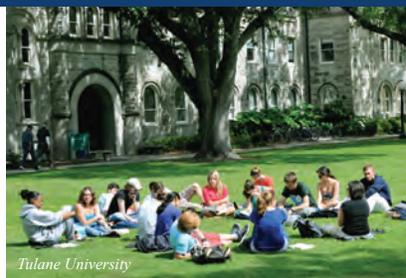
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NETWORK FOR ACADEMIC RENEWAL



AAC&U Working Conferences for 2011–2012

Educating for Personal and Social Responsibility:

A Twenty-First-Century Imperative

Long Beach, California
October 13–15, 2011

Arts & Humanities:

Toward a Flourishing State?

Providence, Rhode Island
November 3–5, 2011

General Education and Assessment:

New Contexts, New Cultures

New Orleans, Louisiana
February 23–25, 2012

Student Success:

Pushing Boundaries, Raising Bars

Seattle, Washington
March 22–24, 2012



Network for Academic Renewal:

Exploring together the latest advances in teaching and learning, faculty roles and leadership, general education and outcomes assessment, diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence, and strategies for student success in undergraduate education.