

Preface

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is pleased to publish this important publication, *Civic Engagement at the Center: Building Democracy through Integrated Cocurricular and Curricular Experiences*, which highlights groundbreaking developmental models for civic learning and socially responsible leadership seeded by the Bonner Foundation over the past fifteen years. There has been an explosion in civic programs on almost every college campus in recent decades. AAC&U applauds those efforts. Yet AAC&U also challenged the field in our *Peer Review* issue on Educating for Citizenship (Spring 2003) to ask how all these myriad civic programs add up. In my own article in that issue, I asked, “Is it possible to create wholeness and purpose where currently—for all the impressive activity—fragmentation and randomness too often rule?”

What I learned later was that the Bonner Foundation in New Jersey had already been working for a decade to bring coherence and purpose through its cocurricular Bonner Scholars and Bonner Leaders programs. Its success in these efforts is most apparent in its four-year cocurricular programs, which, over time and in concert with insights from the field, have come to establish a clearly articulated set of educational goals for each successive year. By 2003, Bonner had already embedded in its model increasingly challenging responsibilities for students each year that tested students’ ability to apply new knowledge and skills to their public work in the community and on campus.

The same year that I posed the question in *Peer Review*, the foundation was in the midst of writing a grant to the Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) to define a comparable civic engagement student developmental model in the curriculum itself. The Bonner Foundation had come to believe that the bifurcation of student and academic affairs worked against students’ civic development. The foundation was determined to bring a purposeful, sequenced inquiry into the curriculum itself that challenged students to learn about dangerous, systemic inequities that threatened democracies. But in this program students were not just to deepen their analytical skills and expand their knowledge; they were to apply that knowledge to find solutions. In a wise move, the Bonner Foundation decided to bring its model and passion into the heart of the academic enterprise—into the everyday courses students came to college to take and into the scholarly work of the faculty.

This publication describes the educational underpinnings of the cocurricular student leadership model that now distinguishes Bonner programs at its seventy-four colleges and universities (see p. x). You will learn about the theory that drives the model, the elements that define the model, and the practices that students undertake to refine their ability to apply their knowledge to everyday challenges. The first three chapters focus on work within the student affairs arena. Chapters four

and five, by contrast, describe the curricular models that emerged as a result of funding by FIPSE to seed civic engagement minors and certificates in academic affairs. Not surprisingly, these curricular models take students out of the classroom and into communities, thus tying together intellectually the too-often-divided options that higher education presents to students. While there has not yet been sufficient time to fully assess the impact of the newly established curricular designs, chapter six does contain the results of a long-term study by Cheryl Keen of the impact on student learning, attitudes, and actions of Bonner's four-year developmental programs that are located in student affairs. A few of those older programs did establish some links with academic courses, but Keen's rich research illuminates best the influence over time of the cocurricular programs. The final chapter gleans insights from practitioners who are seeking to implement strong curricular programs in hopes that their advice might spur other campuses to invest in similar curricular designs for students' civic learning and engagement.

The Bonner Foundation's commitment to student development, learning across differences, and community engagement mirrors fundamental commitments of AAC&U. Those common commitments are most clearly articulated through four AAC&U initiatives since 1993—American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning (1993–2001); Greater Expectations: The Commitment to Quality as a Nation Goes to College (1998–2006); Shared Futures: Global Learning and Social Responsibility (2002–ongoing); and our most recent initiative, Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP): Excellence for Everyone as a Nation Goes to College. The imperative that higher education cannot shirk its obligation to educate students for responsible lives in diverse, unequal, and interdependent worlds is the thread that links all of the past and present AAC&U initiatives.

All of these initiatives, representing the involvement of hundreds of two- and four-year colleges and universities, offer recommendations about aligning institutional structures in order to graduate empowered, informed, and responsible students; developing curricular pathways that accelerate such ends; adopting engaged pedagogies that enhance student learning; and acknowledging the power of deploying diversity both locally and globally, in all its multiplicity, as a resource for excellence and achievement. AAC&U argues that liberal education, newly understood and reinvigorated, is the kind of education that best propels the academy to achieve the new learning demanded of it.

AAC&U's newest LEAP report, *College Learning for the New Global Century*, available on our Web site (www.aacu.org), argues that there is an emerging consensus about essential learning outcomes for college (See Appendix A for full chart). One of the four key pillars of that learning is educating students for personal and social responsibility, which includes civic knowledge and engagement both locally and globally, intercultural knowledge and competence, and ethical reasoning and action.

A second pillar of essential learning outcomes for students is integrative learning, demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems.

AAC&U is especially pleased to publish *Civic Engagement at the Center* because it puts flesh and bones onto what it means to actually create learning environments and experiences that locate these two essential learning outcomes—personal and social responsibility and integrative learning—at the center of a college education. Colleges and universities in the Bonner network are taking leadership in these arenas by offering their higher education colleagues rich and inspiring models to explore in both curricular and cocurricular life.

We hope you enjoy reading this publication and seeing how abstract principles can indeed be translated into delineated, progressively challenging educational experiences for students at our colleges and universities. We applaud the Bonner institutions for showing the multiple pathways to college learning that promise to provide the world with the kind of graduates who can help ensure that democratic, just societies will flourish.

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