

## Foreword

In 2005, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) launched the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, a long-term effort to promote the value of liberal education—for individuals, for a globally connected democracy, and for an economy dependent on innovation and creativity. Through this signature initiative, and in partnership with educators across all sectors of higher education, AAC&U has defined the aims of liberal education in terms of Principles of Excellence and a companion set of Essential Learning Outcomes (see fig. 1). The LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes represent a consensus among educators and employers about the kinds of learning students need as preparation for successful participation in civic life and the global economy.<sup>1</sup>

Higher education has focused much attention on the Essential Learning Outcomes encompassed under the heading *Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World*. A multiplicity of tests and ways to measure student learning in the knowledge category have been developed in disciplines and institutions across the country. However, for many of the outcomes—*Intellectual and Practical Skills*, *Personal and Social Responsibility*, and *Integrative and Applied Learning*—few useful assessments of student learning existed, yet these are hallmark outcomes of a liberal and liberating education. In response, AAC&U conceived and initiated a new approach to assessing these three strands of the Essential Learning Outcomes based upon authentic student work from the curriculum and cocurriculum and rubrics designed to probe the quality of that work.

This new approach, entitled Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education, or VALUE, began in 2007. The first indication that faculty and campuses were intrigued by this new approach came in response to the invitation to participate in rubric development teams: the teams were oversubscribed almost immediately. As the draft rubrics were tested on campuses by faculty and their students, the initial ten volunteer campuses were subsumed in a clamor from many sister institutions that also wanted to try out these new rubrics with their students and faculty and to provide feedback for further rubric development. Ultimately, the rubrics were tested and validated by faculty from more than one hundred institutions.

Since the initial release of the rubrics in 2009, thousands of campuses and individuals in the United States and around the world have used the VALUE rubrics in various ways to meet student learning and assessment needs in their departments, programs, or institutions. Entire university systems and multistate consortia of campuses have adopted the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes and the VALUE rubrics as recommended guides for measuring student learning. In short, the VALUE rubrics have evoked a broad, positive embrace from faculty and institutions.

The VALUE rubrics have now been in use on some campuses long enough to yield questions about using them effectively and to identify challenges and lessons learned through their ongoing use. This third volume in AAC&U's series of VALUE-related publications shares what we are learning about moving students' own work to the center of our

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1. For more information about the LEAP initiative, see [www.aacu.org/leap](http://www.aacu.org/leap).

assessment efforts. It also lifts up the experiences of twelve diverse campuses that are using the VALUE rubrics to gather information on student performance and then using the findings to adjust assignments, pedagogy, and curricula to enhance their students' learning.

We remain indebted to the hundreds of individual faculty, staff, student affairs professionals, and students whose work VALUE truly is. These individuals continue to help test, strengthen, and refine the robust VALUE assessment of authentic student work addressing the Essential Learning Outcomes that both academics and employers agree are critical for civic, personal, and employment success in today's world.

**CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER**

President

Association of American Colleges and Universities

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**Figure 1. LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes<sup>2</sup>**

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*

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2. Reprinted from Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), *College Learning for the New Global Century: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise* (Washington, DC: AAC&U, 2007), 12.