

Liberal Education Takes a New Turn

By Carol Geary Schneider

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On April 1, 2007, *The New York Times Magazine* ran a lengthy cover story on the interest of Chinese leaders in liberal arts education. Readers learned that, even as American policy leaders are nervously eyeing China and other Asian nations—how can we match their academic discipline and achievement orientation in American classrooms?—Chinese leaders are taking their own searching look at the distinctive strengths of American-style liberal education.

A quest for the key to America's historic world leadership in higher education brings interested visitors into a notably confusing aspect of

postsecondary learning: the contested standing of liberal or liberal arts education. Even for Americans, contemporary perspectives on this important educational tradition are conflicted and often contradictory.

COMPETING VIEWS OF LIBERAL EDUCATION

On the one hand, liberal education is the philosophy of choice in the nation's most sought-after colleges and universities. The tens of thousands of students who eagerly apply each year for admission to Harvard, Amherst, the University of Virginia, or Stanford will, if

admitted, receive an education that emphasizes: (1) broad study in the arts and sciences, (2) strong intellectual skills, (3) keen attention to major questions in science and society, and (4) a constant emphasis on personal development and transformational possibilities.

Viewed in this context, liberal education is *the* signature curriculum for elite colleges and universities and for honors programs almost everywhere. As a recent longitudinal analysis concludes, its elite standing became more marked across the course of the twentieth century. Defining liberal arts education as a substantial number of graduates choosing arts and sciences majors, this study found that a liberal arts focus has become increasingly restricted to “selective baccalaureate-granting institutions and other institutions with strong academic profiles, as measured by average SAT/ACT scores.” Students attending “open door” colleges, universities, and community colleges are much more likely to major in the “occupational-professional” fields of study.¹

In American society at large, as this comparative analysis implies, there is widespread indifference to, or even outright dismissal of the liberal education tradition in American society. Liberal education may be our most prized tradition, but the public at large clearly is not flocking to it. What explains this dismissal?

In part, the resistance is connected to the frequently confusing vocabulary of liberal education. Opaque in themselves, the most common terms for liberal education are often used interchangeably in ways that are bewildering even within the academy and even more certainly for the public and students (Table 1).

Another problem is the word “liberal” itself. The term has roots in the Latin word for a free person (*liber*) and the *artes liberales* emerged historically as the education appropriate for free people. In the modern world, and especially in the United States after the American Revolution, liberal education drew on these roots to position itself as the best preparation for self-governance in a free democratic society.

Table 1. Guide to Frequently Confused Terms

Liberal Education: A philosophy of education that empowers individuals, liberates the mind, cultivates intellectual judgment, and fosters ethical and social responsibility.

Liberal Arts: Specific disciplines (humanities, arts, social sciences, and sciences).

Liberal Arts Colleges: An institutional type—usually small and residential—with close interaction between faculty and students; strong focus on liberal arts disciplines.

Artes Liberales: Historically, the medieval basis for the modern liberal arts; the *trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music).

General Education: The part of a liberal education curriculum shared by all students. Provides broad study in the liberal arts and forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities. May also be called “the core curriculum” or “liberal studies.”

But the political battering delivered to all things “liberal” over the past quarter century has even affected an educational tradition that traces its roots to antiquity and that embraces freedom and democracy. As the president of an association whose mission is the advancement of liberal learning, this author is regularly queried: “Why can’t you just invent a new name?”

But the deepest source of resistance to liberal education, even for many college-educated Americans, is its public persona, not politics. For much of the twentieth century, leading proponents of liberal education determinedly described it as “learning for its own sake.” True liberal education, they routinely insisted, is non-vocational to its core. “I could never endorse a statement which described ‘liberal education’ as ‘practical,’” wrote one firm proponent of this view—a liberal arts college president—in an indignant letter to this author.

Observers have internalized these frequently repeated rejections of usefulness.² Asked to write down their own understanding, here’s how

employer and student participants in 11 focus groups, commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), described “liberal education:” an open-ended curriculum with “few institutional constraints” that emphasizes broad but “less marketable” forms of learning. “It’s interesting and pleasurable,” reported a college junior who had his own take on learning for its own sake, “but more for free time not for college.”³

These focus groups rendered a mixed verdict on liberal education. Employers in the focus groups, and in a national survey described below, overwhelmingly endorsed the kinds of capabilities—such as writing, analytical skill, and global knowledge—that a liberal education is supposed to provide. But few employers in the focus groups associated these desired learning outcomes with liberal or liberal arts education per se. Across all 11 focus groups, both employers and students typically regarded liberal education as an option, not a necessity.

Not one participant surmised that leaders in other parts of the world might see liberal education as a competitive American advantage. The Chinese may see us more clearly than Americans can see themselves.

THE SPELLINGS COMMISSION REPORT ERASES LIBERAL EDUCATION

With public perceptions mixed at best, policy leaders have fallen silent on higher education’s signature curricular tradition. In 1947, the President’s Commission on Higher Education, established by Harry Truman, directly addressed liberal education.⁴ The report persuaded states and campuses to require general education in the arts and sciences both in community colleges and in four-year universities. But by 2006, the several iterations of the much-debated report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, established by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, show the policy dismissal of liberal and general education at the national level.⁵

The initial (June 2006) draft of this federal report offered a stinging critique of American higher education. The critique included, among many supposed failings, the widespread neglect of liberal and general education. “Students are often not required to take core subjects foundational to a liberal education,” the June draft complained, citing studies by the conservative American Council of Trustees and Alumni.⁶ General education is in disarray and has become an “orphan” curriculum on many college campuses, the June draft continued.

But the final report of the Spellings Commission, released in September 2006, erased *all* references to liberal education and to general education, its curricular offspring. Nor did the report mention related areas of learning, long basic to American liberal education: history, the humanities, global cultures, the arts, civic learning, ethics, or even the social sciences.

The commission’s recommendations on quality concentrated instead on job readiness in the global economy and on the so-called STEM disciplines: science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The authors, offering a narrow view of what it takes to navigate the global economy, held up only one higher education institution as a model: Neumont University, a small for-profit technology school in Utah. Neumont’s 19 web-listed faculty members did not at the time include anyone qualified to teach in the humanities or social sciences.

Underscoring the contradictions besetting contemporary American attitudes toward liberal education, Margaret Spellings’ daughter was enrolled in one of the nation’s most selective liberal arts colleges at the time the secretary released the commission report.

OFF THE RADAR SCREEN, LIBERAL EDUCATION IS BEING REVISED

What then is the long-term outlook for liberal education? Will it remain highly prized, if only for elites? Or, is it ultimately headed the way of the classics?

The Association of American Colleges and Universities—a major association of nearly 1,200 public and private institutions—rejects both options. The practice of liberal education has changed radically over the centuries. Today, AAC&U contends, this signature American educational tradition is in the midst of another potentially far-reaching change.⁷

Off the radar screen of public, policy, and media attention, AAC&U observes, liberal education is being revised and reinvigorated.⁸ The overarching goal: to serve more effectively the nation's recently included college students, most of whom attend open access rather than highly selective colleges and universities.

Will those changes propel liberal education from the margin back to the main stage? Much depends on understanding what is happening in U.S. higher education, and what is possible. We now describe these emerging changes in liberal education, and the common themes that cut across them.

ENGAGED LEARNING REFORMS LEAD THE REVISION

Across all sectors, the nation's campuses are dotted with a vibrant new generation of innovative curricula, programs, and pedagogies. Table 2 summarizes the most commonly adopted innovations.⁹

This list of innovative practices, widely implemented across a diverse array of institutions, is not exhaustive. Rather, Table 2 singles out potentially “high yield” curricular and pedagogical practices (hereafter “engaged learning reforms”) that show positive educational benefits for participating students, including greater persistence in college and higher levels of academic achievement. Engaged learning reforms, research suggests, especially benefit students from underserved backgrounds and communities.¹⁰

Faculty members will recognize virtually all of these engaged learning reforms. But these innovations are rarely addressed as a group. Each reform is more frequently viewed as a separate educational “movement” with discrete proponents

on campus and in national organizations. Yet despite their separate origins, these reforms feature at least four common elements that, taken together, are changing both the aims and the practices of contemporary liberal education.

First, they are part of a generational effort—faculty-led in all cases—to shift the pedagogical focus from “professing” to “active learning.” Collectively, these engaged learning reforms put the intellectual and/or collaborative work of students at the center of their educational experience. Each requires students to work intensively on assignments and activities intended to develop their intellectual powers and often their collaborative and practical problem-solving skills as well.

Second, these engaged learning reforms either emerged from the arts and sciences disciplines—as was the case with learning communities, writing across the curriculum, the common intellectual experience, “science-as-science-is-done,” and undergraduate research—or are widely embraced across the arts and sciences as well as the career and professional fields. Many liberal arts faculty members offer on-the-ground support for these reforms.

Third, these reforms are “works in progress.” Only a few of these innovations, notably service experiences, internships, and capstone courses and projects, reach a majority of today's college students.¹¹ Far fewer students experience the other reforms, whose occurrence varies considerably within and across institutions.

Fourth, and central to this essay, these movements collectively frame a new vision for liberal education, a revisionist design that is simultaneously analytical and applied, horizon expanding and practical.

LIBERAL EDUCATION REACHES ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

In the twentieth century, liberal education was seen as an intellectual realm unto itself—a form of learning achieved *only* through academic study in selected arts and sciences disciplines. Professional and career fields, with

Table 2. Engaged Learning Reforms

These widely tested teaching and learning innovations show substantial benefits, especially for college students from historically underserved backgrounds. But these practices remain optional rather than expected on most campuses.

First-Year Seminars and Experiences

Many schools now build first-year seminars or programs into the curriculum. These experiences regularly bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff. First-year experiences typically emphasize skills such as critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, and collaborative learning that develop intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with the research of faculty members.

Common Intellectual Experiences

The older idea of a “core” curriculum has evolved into modern forms—a small set of required common courses, for example, or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community (see below). These programs often combine broad themes—technology and society, or global interdependence, for example—with an array of curricular and co-curricular options.

Learning Communities

Learning communities aim to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with “big questions” that matter beyond the classroom. Students work closely with one another and with their professors in two or more linked courses. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some learning communities deliberately link “liberal arts” and “professional courses;” others feature service learning (see below).

Writing-Intensive Courses

These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are encouraged to write for different audiences in different disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice has led to parallel efforts in quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry.

Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one’s own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially students with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from forming study groups

within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

“Science as Science Is Done”/Undergraduate Research

Scientists are reshaping their courses to connect key concepts and questions with early and active student involvement in systematic investigation and research. The goal, strongly supported by the National Science Foundation and the research community, is to involve students with contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from addressing important topics. These reforms are part of a broader movement to provide research experiences for students in all disciplines.

Diversity/Global Learning

Many colleges and universities emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often examine “difficult differences” such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Experiential learning in the community and/or study abroad frequently augment intercultural studies.

Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

These programs use field-based “experiential learning” with community partners as an instructional strategy, and often as a required part of the course. The goal: give students direct experience with issues they study in the formal curriculum and with efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. The programs teach that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

Internships

Internships, another common form of experiential learning, provide students with direct workplace experience—usually related to their career interests—and with supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. Students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member if the internship is taken for “course credit.”

Capstone Courses and Projects

These culminating experiences, sometimes called “senior capstones,” require students to create a project—a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of “best work,” or an artwork exhibit—that integrates and applies what they’ve learned. Capstones are offered in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.

their vocational orientation and emphasis on applied learning, were routinely described as the antithesis of liberal education. As a result, millions of American students are required—to this day—to choose between the “true liberal arts” and the professional fields, just to fill out their college applications.

The revisionist design for liberal education, by contrast, is inclusive rather than exclusive. It emphasizes an *approach to learning* rather than course categories, and gives primary attention to the habits of mind, breadth of perspective, and capabilities the student is developing. The ability of students to apply their knowledge to real problems is one indicator of their achievement level.

Potentially, and on a growing number of campuses, in actual practice, this shift toward an emphasis on capability and competence means that liberal education can be addressed across the entire educational experience, and in professional and career fields as well as the arts and sciences disciplines. Arts and sciences courses remain a necessary component in this new approach to liberal education, because these disciplines foster the broad knowledge of science and society that is still a core element in liberal learning. But study in arts and sciences disciplines does not, by itself, differentiate between liberal and illiberal education.

This revisionist approach holds out the prospect of a liberal education for all college students, not just the smaller number in elite institutions, honors programs, or arts and sciences majors. Will this long-term effort to extend widely the benefits of liberal education succeed? The jury is out. But many faculty members across the nation are now working actively to make liberal education more inclusive and more effective.

DEFINING THEMES IN THE REINVENTION OF LIBERAL EDUCATION

Four major themes stand out in AAC&U’s review of this emerging revision of curricular and pedagogical changes in liberal education

across public and private, large and small, two-year and four-year colleges and universities:

- Cultivating inquiry and intellectual powers;
- Engaging students with “big questions,” contemporary and enduring;
- Fostering civic engagement and social responsibility;
- Teaching students to integrate and apply their learning to “real-world” issues.

The first three themes are best seen as a contemporary restatement of the traditional aims of a liberal or liberal arts education: intellectual and personal development, broad knowledge in the arts and sciences, and societal leadership. Notably, however, the fourth theme—the catalytic difference—breaks decisively with the twentieth century idea that liberal learning is primarily about knowledge for its own sake.

The emphasis on integrative and applied learning implies asking what students can demonstrably do with their knowledge. It links knowledge to judgment, and judgment to choices and action. This new emphasis takes liberal education inexorably out of the ivory tower and into the work of the world.

These defining themes are not inherently restricted to arts and sciences fields or to general education. The professional and career fields claim these goals too, as necessary foundations for career success. Several accrediting agencies for pre-professional college studies already look for evidence of these learning outcomes.

How to help students meet these expectations? This is the context in which the engaged learning reforms take on special importance. Faculty and staff members are using these engaged learning reforms (Table 2) to help students achieve the aims and outcomes of a twenty-first-century liberal education.

CONNECTING THE AIMS OF LIBERAL EDUCATION WITH ENGAGED LEARNING REFORMS

Cultivating Inquiry and Intellectual Powers

The students flocking to American college and

university campuses are diverse in every possible way, including their preparation for college. Many students are working adults who have been away from school for many years; others did not have preparation in school that enables college success. College and university faculties cannot therefore assume that analytical capability will emerge automatically as students take courses. Faculty members are therefore designing engaged learning reforms into online and face-to-face courses to help their students develop stronger analytical and communication skills. These practices are usually front-loaded in first-year experiences and seminars, but also are often honed subsequently “across-the-curriculum.”

The writing-across-the-curriculum movement paved the way by emphasizing the need for writing-intensive courses beyond the first year of college and by integrating writing with advanced learning in the student’s chosen field. Similar efforts are gaining ground in other skill areas, especially quantitative reasoning “across-the-disciplines” and information literacy. Some campuses add ethical reasoning to the list of capabilities that students must practice across the curriculum and within chosen majors.

The undergraduate research movement further contributed to this intensified focus on developing students’ intellectual and analytical capabilities. Especially but not only in the sciences, colleges are involving undergraduates directly in research or creative work, sometimes independently, but frequently as part of a faculty-led team. Many faculty members are changing departmental courses to help students develop the skills and experience needed to become competent researchers.

This heightened emphasis on analysis and investigation teaches students how to make sense of complexity; how to develop, evaluate, and present evidence; and how to apply their learning to new problems and unscripted questions. Potentially, this emphasis helps a broader array of students achieve a fundamental

outcome of a liberal education: the development and thoughtful use of human reason.

Engaging Students with “Big Questions,” Contemporary and Enduring

The “permanent questions,” as some scholars call them, have always been central to the liberal arts tradition. That emphasis remains in place. Self and society, liberty and justice, freedom and social order, science and values, and the human quest for meaning and purpose are still explored in general education courses and in the rest of the curriculum. But many campuses, especially in general education programs, also engage students with urgent questions in the contemporary world: global sustainability, poverty and hunger; HIV/AIDS and other pandemics; globalization and its implications for local cultures; religious commitments and conflicts; and tensions between social order and civil liberties and rights. These explorations frequently go beyond the classroom by including service experiences and/or community-based research and projects.

Many campuses open these “big questions” through first-year experiences and seminars; others address these issues through topically organized learning communities, and/or through common intellectual experiences that may extend across the four years of college. Recently revised general education programs frequently feature advanced, cross-disciplinary capstone courses and assignments that commonly address one or more significant global challenges. The goal: getting seniors to approach these problems with a full range of intellectual skills and cross-disciplinary perspectives.

Fostering Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility

Attention to “big questions” leads directly to questions of personal and social responsibility and choice. Correspondingly, the higher education community is now actively inserting issues of civic engagement and ethical responsibility into the curriculum and the co-curriculum.

Faculty members at every kind of college and university from Hawai'i to Indianapolis to the Bronx provide students, cooperating with peers and community groups, with real-world experiences and rich opportunities to address societal challenges. Service and community-based learning are increasingly woven into the first-year experience, into topically organized learning communities, and sometimes into common intellectual experiences. Some campuses are moving beyond civic challenges and responsibility to the related areas of ethical reasoning and responsibility. Collaborative assignments and projects, face-to-face and online, offer additional opportunities to examine civic and ethical questions.

The diversity and global education movements have developed curricular and co-curricular programs that help students develop both intercultural discernment and the skills needed to collaborate “across boundaries.” Campuses provide students with global experiences, through study abroad and through cross-cultural explorations in the institution’s backyard. Collaborative, intercultural, and community-based learning are the new civic frontiers for this global era of complex and inescapable interdependence.

Teaching Students to Integrate and Apply Their Learning to “Real-World” Issues

College learning, complained critics through much of the last century, has become overly narrow, fragmented, and incoherent. New knowledge emerges in dizzying profusion, but the academy did little to help students construct coherent meaning across disparate topics, fields, frames of reference, and sources of information. Instead, critics claimed, college studies became less integrative as students moved forward. Elizabeth Coleman, president of Bennington College, summed up the prevailing critique a quarter of a century ago:

If a course is entitled “Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud,” it is for freshmen. If it is “Marx and

Freud,” it is for sophomores. If it is “Freud,” it is for juniors and seniors. And if it is “Freud: The Case Studies,” it is a graduate course. . . . I would hope that we could [come to] . . . see that “Freud: The Case Studies” might be a powerful introductory course, just as . . . it is manifestly absurd to de-emphasize the activities of integration and synthesis for seniors.¹²

The need for creative approaches to integration and synthesis has only increased since Coleman’s protest, given the velocity in student enrollment patterns. The majority of students attend more than one college before earning the baccalaureate; concurrent enrollment in multiple institutions, online and face-to-face, is increasingly common. The challenge goes further than integrating learning across courses and levels; the new goal is helping students develop connections in their studies across entirely different institutions.

Many engaged learning reforms respond to this challenge. Some campuses are making integrative learning a twenty-first-century liberal art, practiced again and again, across the educational experience, from first to final year. First-year seminars start with specific problems, as Coleman urged, and go deep rather than wide. This practice helps students see the inherent complexities of a topic early on. Conversely, many institutions now offer learning communities in the early years to teach students how to examine important questions across multiple courses and disciplinary perspectives—and that they should.

Capstone experiences and courses provide students with more opportunities to integrate learning across multiple years of study. The majority of graduating seniors—61 percent in the latest report of the National Survey of Student Engagement—complete a culminating senior-year course or assignment. One reason for the growing popularity of this reform: the conviction that students need better opportunities to pull together the different parts of their learning.

Other engaged learning reforms encourage students to connect their academic studies to real-world experiences and learning. Internships, service learning, and global study abroad each provide opportunities for integration and application. Recent college graduates believe that college studies should give even greater priority to “real-world applications.” Two-thirds of the respondents in a 2006 AAC&U-sponsored survey of college graduates five to ten years out, think colleges should place more emphasis on “the ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings through internships or other hands-on experiences.” A stronger focus on applied learning is their top-ranked priority for change in the undergraduate curriculum.¹³

LIBERAL EDUCATION AND AMERICA’S PROMISE

The curricular and pedagogical developments described above collectively reaffirm traditional aims of liberal education, but also reflect a determination to help more students achieve these outcomes. In addition, these developments give new priority to helping students engage the wider world—intellectually through the choice of course topics, and practically by taking students into off-campus settings through internships, service experiences, community-based research, and global study.

Will these engaged and applied learning reforms remain optional for some students, or will they create a new integrative design for liberal education across the entire educational experience? Will liberal education survive only as the curriculum in elite institutions and programs? Or will it serve the many students who, as they enter college, know almost nothing about it? The outlines of a more intentional, empowering, integrative, and public-spirited design for college learning are in view. But will the promise be fulfilled?

AAC&U recently launched “Liberal Education and America’s Promise” (LEAP), a ten-year initiative designed to accelerate the scope

and pace of the engaged learning reforms and to help more students achieve the benefits of a horizon-expanding liberal education. Resolutely pragmatic, LEAP does not resist or repudiate the employment interests that bring most students to college. Rather, it emphasizes the real-world value of liberal education, and celebrates institutions that help their students discover that value.

Early work on the LEAP initiative shows that higher education will find very strong support from employers—much stronger support than it now enjoys—if it summons the courage and will to invest in designs for liberal education that teach students to apply their intellectual skills to real-world challenges. This conclusion first emerged from numerous discussions with employers. A national AAC&U-commissioned survey of employer views on the learning students need for success in the new global economy confirms the finding.

The survey did not query whether employers wanted more emphasis on “liberal education” as a category. Instead, it asked whether college ought to place “more, the same, or less emphasis” on specific learning outcomes. The results show decided majority support for “more emphasis” on many liberal education outcomes: broad knowledge, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative learning (Table 3).¹⁴

The LEAP survey asked, “How important is it for today’s colleges and universities to provide the type of education described below?” The question then presented employers with a detailed description of the revisionist design for liberal education, minus the headline “liberal:”

This particular approach to a four-year college education provides broad knowledge in a variety of areas of study and more in-depth knowledge in a specific major or field of interest. It also helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as intellectual and practical skills that span all areas of study, such as communication,

analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.¹⁵

Employers strongly endorsed this description; 69 percent answered that is very important to provide this kind of education to today's college students. Three out of four employers (76 percent) would personally recommend this revisionist design for liberal education to a young person they know.

CONCLUSION

The future for liberal education, in sum, will be what the academy chooses to make it. The age-old goals for liberal education—intellectual

development and skills, broad knowledge, and social responsibility—remain important in this new and inclusive design. But contemporary goals have been added, especially integrative learning and the demonstrated ability to use one's knowledge in real-world contexts.

These goals are important to all Americans, not just to a minority.

As proponents have argued for over two centuries, these forms of learning are essential in a self-governing democracy. Employers, the constituency that today's students want to please, strongly endorse the goals of the emerging design for liberal learning. College faculty members already have invented and tested the engaged learning reforms that can help many

Table 3. Percentage of Employers Who Want Colleges to Place “More Emphasis” on Liberal Education Outcomes

	Percent
Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World	
Science and technology	82%
Intercultural knowledge (global issues)	72*
The role of the United States in the world	60
Cultural values and traditions (U.S./global)	53*
Intellectual and Practical Skills	
Intercultural competence (teamwork skills in diverse groups)	76*
Critical thinking and analytic reasoning	73
Written and oral communication	73
Information literacy	70
Creativity and innovation	70
Complex problem solving	64
Quantitative reasoning	60
Personal and Social Responsibility	
Intercultural competence (teamwork skills in diverse groups)	76*
Intercultural knowledge (global issues)	72*
Ethics and values	56
Cultural values and traditions (U.S./global)	53*
Integrative Learning	
Applied knowledge in real-world settings	73

* Three starred items are shown in two learning outcome categories because they apply to both.

more college students successfully achieve these goals. Research results underscore the value of these reforms to students, especially traditionally underserved students.

The choice is ours to make: Is the academy ready to break its current practice of voluntary silence about the importance and benefits of liberal education—to students, to society, and to our global challenges? Are we prepared to move beyond engaged learning reforms that limit these practices to pilot efforts and optional programs?

Are we ready at last, to sound the call and advance the action?

NOTES

¹ Brint et al., 2005.

² Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 2006b, and idem, 2004. Both studies were conducted for AAC&U's LEAP initiative. Focus group participants produced their own written definitions of the term "liberal education" prior to discussing the topic.

³ Unpublished summary and analysis of participants' written definitions of the term "liberal education;" prepared by Nicole DeMarco for AAC&U.

⁴ President's Commission on Higher Education, 1947.

⁵ In September 2005, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced the formation of the commission. See Commission on the Future of Higher Education, June 2006 and idem., September 2006.

⁶ Commission on the Future of Higher Education, June 2006, 14.

⁷ AAC&U has articulated this position through a series of major initiatives and reports, launched in 2000. See Greater Expectations National Panel, 2002; Greater Expectations Project on Accreditation and Assessment, 2004, and National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise, 2007.

⁸ Schneider, 2005.

⁹ This table is adapted from National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise, 2007, Appendix A; research citations in note 53. It was prepared in consultation with George Kuh, Chancellor's Professor, Indiana University and a member of the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise. See also Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005.

¹⁰ Kuh, et al., 2007; Pascarella et al., 2005, 98-99.

¹¹ National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006.

¹² Coleman, 1982, cited in Katz et al., 1988, 16.

¹³ Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2006a.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

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