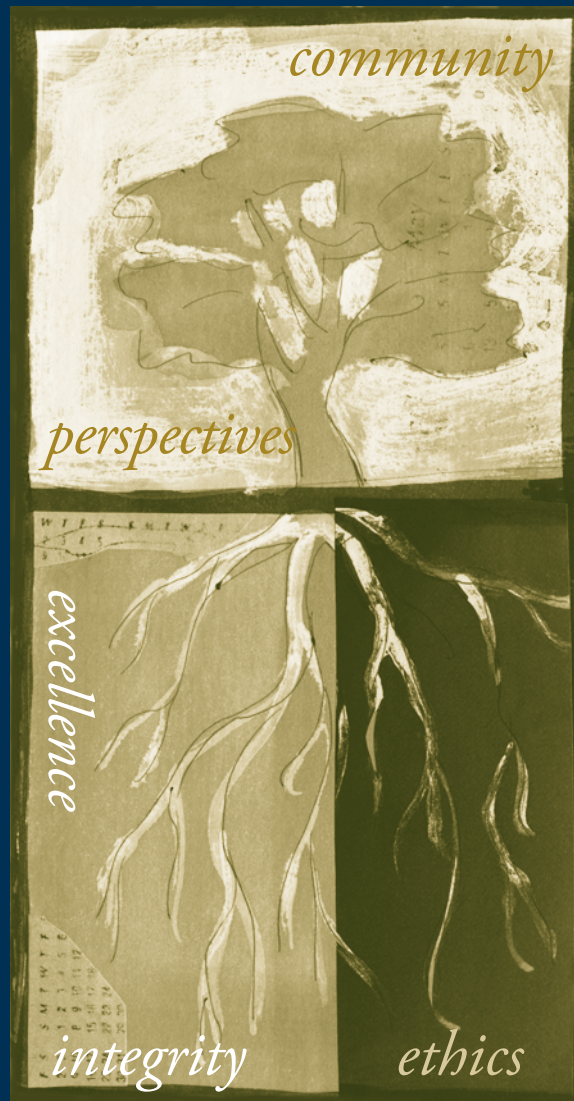


A CALL TO ACTION



CORE COMMITMENTS

Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility

This initiative has been funded by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation.



Association
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We invite all AAC&U members to become partners in this initiative by signing on to this call to action.

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As an educational community strongly committed to the value of a liberal and liberating education, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) calls on its members to test and adopt new ways of engaging students with core questions about their ethical responsibilities to self and others, and about their responsibilities as citizens in a diverse democracy.

In support of that effort, we proudly announce **Core Commitments**—a major initiative on educating students for personal and social responsibility.

Twenty-three institutions have been competitively selected for a Leadership Consortium to deepen, expand, and assess their campus' education for personal and social responsibility.

More information is available at www.aacu.org/core_commitments.

In addition, we invite all AAC&U members to become partners in this initiative by signing on to this call to action.

By signing this call, colleges and universities pledge their own leadership and best efforts in support of a far-reaching reengagement with issues of ethical and civic responsibility.

AAC&U, in turn, pledges to make both visible and influential its members' accomplishments in fostering the ethical and civic outcomes of a contemporary liberal education.

A CALL TO ACTION

The entire history of American higher education is grounded in a deep commitment to educate students to become ethical and moral leaders and citizens. College can and should be a time when students make a commitment to reach for excellence in the use of their talents, take responsibility for the integrity and quality of their work, and engage in meaningful practices that prepare them to fulfill their obligations both as students in an academic community and as responsible citizens.

That commitment, while widely acknowledged in college and university mission statements, has often faltered in practice. In the face of widespread uncertainty about the academy's appropriate role in fostering personal and social responsibility, these issues have been pushed to the edges of the college curriculum, or left mainly to individual student choice.

Too often, a de facto disconnect between student learning and student life tacitly invites students to keep their academic studies separate from the personal exploration that inevitably occurs in college. Because of this disconnect, students may be left to their own devices in addressing personal and interpersonal or ethical and moral challenges they encounter during the college years. Too often, there is a "competing curriculum" both from cultural forces outside the campus and from inside the campus culture that works against the pursuit of excellence, integrity, and a strong sense of responsibility to oneself and others.

The symptoms of this competing culture are all around us. There are alarming and increasing levels of plagiarism, cheating, and stealing; of alcohol and other drug abuse; and of racist, anti-Semitic, and homophobic behavior. Nationally, we also see a rise on campuses in diagnosed student depression and in self-destructive behaviors such as cutting,

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anorexia, bulimia, and suicide attempts. While these pathologies are frequently brought to college from high school, they are then often reinforced by what students find in colleges and universities. Even at the most basic level—time spent on academic work outside of class—the evidence is indisputable that most students do less than half the studying that faculty recommend.

Colleges and universities espouse the pursuit of excellence, integrity, and civic responsibility. Some have already taken active measures to put issues of personal and civic responsibility at the center of their educational programs. But much more needs to be done to help students embrace and achieve these high ideals.

As members of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), we believe that the time is right for a far-reaching and shared commitment to reclaim and revitalize the academy's role in fostering students' development of personal and social responsibility. We further believe that such an effort should be closely tied to an encompassing and substantive vision for students' overall learning in the college years. **Students' values and ethics should not be addressed in isolation from their basic responsibility as learners. Rather, values, ethics, and civic responsibility should be integrally woven into the educational goals that students embrace once they make the decision to become candidates for a college degree.**

At a time when our nation faces ethical and civic challenges of daunting complexity, it is crucial that we return to the core commitments of personal and social responsibility inherent in liberal education.

A true liberal education involves much more than academic growth. It develops a student's personal qualities by cultivating curiosity about new ideas and differing views, honing the discipline to follow intellectual methods to conclusions, strengthening the capacity to accept criticism, increasing tolerance for ambiguity, and fostering commitment to the imperative for honesty. Liberal education also involves developing a student's sense of collective responsibility by helping students learn how to understand the world from others' perspectives—that fundamental capacity that can lead to the recognition and resolution of moral conflict and the resolve to work with others for a greater public good.

We, the college and university presidents who sign this call to action, pledge to provide new leadership to reestablish education for personal and social responsibility as a central goal within American colleges and universities.

In partnership with AAC&U's Core Commitments initiative, we pledge to give particular attention to the following dimensions of personal and social responsibility:

1. **STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE:** developing a strong work ethic and consciously doing one's very best in all aspects of college
2. **CULTIVATING PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** recognizing and acting on a sense of honor, ranging from honesty in relationships to principled engagement in a form academic honor code
3. **CONTRIBUTING TO A LARGER COMMUNITY:** recognizing and acting on one's responsibility to the educational community, and the wider society locally, nationally, and globally
4. **TAKING SERIOUSLY THE PERSPECTIVES OF OTHERS:** recognizing and acting on the obligation to inform one's own judgment; engaging diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning, citizenship, and work
5. **DEVELOPING COMPETENCE IN ETHICAL AND MORAL REASONING:** developing ethical and moral reasoning in ways that incorporate the other four responsibilities and using such reasoning in learning and in life

While these five dimensions do not encompass all aspects of conscience and citizenship, they offer a compelling claim as the initial focus for a widespread reengagement with campus values and ethics. Each of these five shared responsibilities is already widely espoused across the academy. Excellence, integrity, and civic responsibility are fundamental values on every college and university campus. Taking seriously the perspective of others is integrally tied to the academy's commitment to the free pursuit of knowledge and to the cultivation of democratic values and capacities. Ethical and moral reasoning are integral to an honorable and responsible life.

This call to action focuses on reestablishing excellence, integrity, and civic responsibility as central educational goals for student learning in college.

In signing this statement, we agree that, if students are to be more accountable for pursuing excellence, integrity, and responsibility, we as campus leaders must also become more intentional and effective in articulating these expectations for student learning, in creating ongoing opportunities for students to engage and address them, in assessing how well they are acquiring these capacities, and in learning—together as an academic enterprise—from our shared progress.

We will work as a community toward these ends.

Presidents at all AAC&U member institutions are invited to pledge their leadership to reengage with these important issues. Become partners in this Core Commitments initiative by signing the call to action. For more information or to sign on to this call to action, visit:

www.aacu.org/core_commitments

ABOUT AAC&U

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 1,150 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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