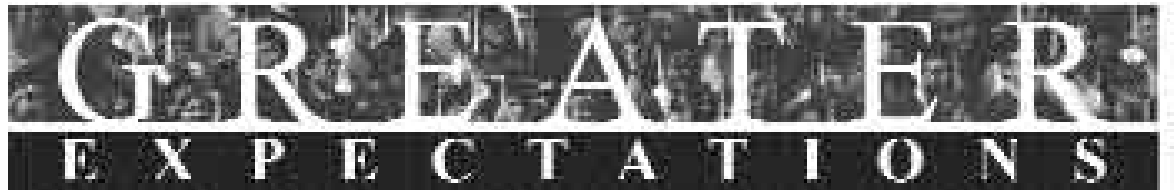




Association  
of American  
Colleges and  
Universities

1818 R Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
202/387-3760  
fax: 202/265-9532  
www.aacu-edu.org



# Project Partners with Accreditors on Assessment and Student Achievement

## WHY CONSIDER ACCREDITATION?

AAC&U’s multi-level initiative, *Greater Expectations: the commitment to quality as a nation goes to college* (GEx), is designed to define the aims of a 21st century undergraduate education and to discover the best strategies for achieving those aims. Accreditation, both regional (of institutions) and specialized (of professional programs), plays a key role in promoting quality improvement in higher education and in assuring the general public that such quality exists.

As accreditors began to rewrite their standards and criteria in the 1990s, and even to rethink the very process of accreditation, they were unknowingly connecting their efforts very closely to the GEx goals. Specialized accreditors, in switching from inputs to outcomes in their criteria, rediscovered that some of the outcomes at the heart of liberal education also are most essential to the education of 21st century professionals. To cope with the emergence of new degree providers, regional accreditors were challenged to reconceptualize their trademark commitment to the centrality of general education. And both types of accreditation struggled to make assessment of student academic achievement a “natural” and embedded part of the teaching-learning process rather than a distracting “add on.”

## HOW DID GEX GET INVOLVED?

AAC&U seized the opportunity to assist specialized accreditors in clarifying the links between liberal

education and professional preparation—and to work with the regional associations to rethink the role of general education in the new context—by organizing its GEx “Project on Accreditation and Assessment” (PAA). PAA brings together representatives of both types of accreditation with the heads of important higher education associations (see page 5 for the project members). John Nichols, an AAC&U Senior Fellow from Saint Joseph’s College in Indiana, functions as the project director.

## HOW DOES PAA LINK WITH GEX?

The accreditors in PAA agreed that the vision of liberal education appropriate to the 21st century requires collaboration between general education (with its liberal arts focus) and the major (or professional program). Previous AAC&U publications, notably *The Challenge of Connecting Learning* (1991) and *Integrity in the College Curriculum* (1985), had argued for such “connectedness” within the undergraduate experience, but here were new proponents. Quality professional education, as well as education for citizenship and for life, requires integration of the outcomes from general education and the major. Robust collegiality among the faculty is the *sine qua non* of such integration. Accreditation and assessment both serve quality, and PAA has discovered a great deal of agreement on how to make them good servants of higher expectations too!

*continued on page 5*

# 1 Mission

*The purposeful vision of the baccalaureate degree in liberal education. Mission expresses the institution's concept of "the educated person" or "qualified professional."*

Liberal education is more than career preparation, although it is excellent for that. In fact, since the 21st century notion of liberal education is that of a collaboration between general education and the major, this species of undergraduate education claims to prepare students for work, for citizenship, and for lifelong learning.

Liberal education frees students from narrowness. It empowers students to make critical judgments about what "experts" tell them. It develops sensitivity to cultures other than one's own. And it enables students to grow, and to continue to grow, in appreciation of the broad range of human intellectual and artistic endeavors.

# 5 Assessment

*Criteria of "good practice" in assessing the performance of seniors in a way that integrates general education and field-specific outcomes. Creative faculty can use the PAA-developed criteria to structure curricula and determine pedagogies effective in moving freshmen to this senior performance level.*

## **"Presumed" from general assessment practice**

1. Institutional mission is the ultimate source of the goals and objectives for assessment of student learning.
2. The implementation of the institution's strategic plan accords high priority to assessment practice that determines the effectiveness with which the institution is achieving its goals and objectives.
3. The institution's constituencies (especially the faculty and administration, but also students, board members, employers of graduates, and the general public) are active advocates (by discussion and promotion) of the assessment plan and the goals and objectives on which it is based.
4. Assessment is continuous, systematic, multi-dimensional, and based on well-defined outcomes for student learning (e.g., Bloom's taxonomy).
5. There is an ongoing, systematic process for using assessment results to improve teaching/learning and to identify areas needing improvement (and ways to do so).

## **Criteria specific to the PAA focus**

1. Assessments are designed to demonstrate successful integration of the major and the general education components of the degree program.
2. There is both formative and summative assessment of student learning.
3. Learning outcomes addressed in assessment are consistent and cumulative, building throughout the educational program in tune with a longitudinal view of student development.
4. Assessment activities arise from and connect to actual student learning experiences, both curricular and co-curricular.
5. Assessments are created, implemented, sustained, and rated collaboratively by faculty responsible for general education and the majors.
6. There are integrative courses and assignments embedded in the curriculum in which (a) students not only master knowledge and skills but practice integration; (b) faculty coach students to make connections between the major and general education; and (c) students are engaged in some culminating activity or product that demonstrates their ability to integrate their undergraduate experiences.

# Outcomes

*Knowledge, abilities, and performances expected of the student who completes such a degree in liberal education. There is so much agreement on these outcomes that PAA claims little originality here.*

## 1. Core proficiencies – in “whatever” course; by the whole faculty

Communication: speaking, listening, writing, reading, visual, artistic

Reasoning: qualitative and quantitative

Information literacy: accessing, evaluating, and using information; skill in determining which sources to consult

Ability to be resourceful, flexible, and adaptable

Ability to apply knowledge appropriately

Developed through... constant practice all across the curriculum

## 2. Inquiry capacities – disciplinary and interdisciplinary; faculty collaboration

Critical thinking Intellectual creativity

Lifelong learning Systemic thinking

Scientific reasoning Historical perspective

Aesthetic appreciation

Developed through... expertise gained in a major  
engagement in various types of disciplinary inquiry  
integrative work in connecting courses and fields

## 3. Orientation & application – proficiencies and capacities exhibited in dealing with...

Self

self-understanding – values

self-assessment – responsibility

Society

individuals (civility)

family, groups

organizations, systems

diversity – cultural and artistic creations

world cultures (can appreciate cultural differences & bridge linguistic barriers)

Natural world

scientific laws & theories

# Pedagogy

*Ways in which faculty and students collaborate within the structures. PAA did not work on this component, judging it to be already well covered in the existing literature.*

# Curriculum



*Principles (“blueprint”) for the design of the degree program’s structures that will be apt to produce the foregoing outcomes—built upon the prime directive of connecting and integrating general education and the major. This section, and the one on Assessment, constitute original contributions from PAA to current educational debates.*

**1. Liberal education in the 21st century is constituted by collaboration between and integration of general education and the major (or professional program).**

This integration is ultimately the work of each student, but it is modeled by faculty, encouraged by the design of the program, and performed in integrative capstone experiences.

Professional and departmental faculty take responsibility for general education outcomes, and general education faculty promote outcomes from the major/professional programs.

**2. Every baccalaureate degree has a general education component.**

A degree is more than a major. General education is, in fact, of central importance.

General education is not the only place to advance liberal education outcomes; faculty in the majors are also responsible for these outcomes (e.g., the “core proficiencies” in the Outcomes).

**3. The general education component of the degree...**

*Is purposeful.* It has a clear rationale that relates to institutional mission, and faculty and students are both well aware of this rationale.

*Is rigorous and coherent enough to achieve the outcomes designated for it.* It has the range and the depth to achieve objectives. The coherence of the general education program and the extent of its collaboration with the majors are important considerations in judging its quality.

*Possesses breadth.* It expands a student’s knowledge and cultivates multi-faceted intellectual growth. It involves Arts & Humanities, Mathematics & Science, and the Social Sciences.

*Fosters depth.* Depth as a goal for general education is best articulated in terms of the institution’s definition of “the educated person.” Such a definition will certainly include higher-order skills and what one accrediting agency terms an ability “to make enlightened judgments outside as well as within [a student’s] academic specialty.”

An essential corporate responsibility for this program should be clear and expressed in sufficient personnel, appointment of an individual in charge, adequate budget, faculty development funding, etc.

**4. The major or professional program has a design that aims both at mastery of one particular field and at preparing students to cope with the intellectual complexity of the 21st century.**

The program takes seriously the necessary partiality of its vision and therefore structures interactions with other disciplines. Among the outcomes for the major are abilities to translate from other disciplines to the home discipline, to critique materials from other disciplines, and to connect learning into syntheses across disciplines. Obviously, semester-by-semester collaboration between general education and the major promotes progress on all of these outcomes.

**5. The institution’s commitment to ongoing quality enhancement requires assessment of student learning in general education, the majors, and in their collaboration.**

Accomplishing this objective involves clear and explicit articulation among institution-specific learning outcomes, curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment methods.

continued from page 1

### WHAT AGENDA DID PAA PURSUE?

Because success in any higher education project depends on clear focus, the group dealt only with (a) undergraduate, (b) baccalaureate, (c) degree programs. PAA members did research, they wrote position papers, they discussed—sometimes in dialogue, sometimes in argument—and they came up with four significant consensus statements.

### WHAT DID PAA ACCOMPLISH?

The centerfold of this Update contains summarized presentations of the PAA consensus on four points, with a fifth one simply acknowledged. The group's position is that clear thinking about 21st century liberal education involves the articulation of all five of these factors, each of which should be seen in active relation to the others.

It is essential to clarify the overall purpose of the degree (its "Mission") and to specify the student achievements it will lead to ("Outcomes"). Only then does it make sense to design the structures and methods that will be apt to produce those achievements ("Curriculum" and "Pedagogy"). Finally, and in the light of the foregoing, one can judge the quality of the results ("Assessment"). The summarized panels on the center pages of the Update will be more expansively discussed, with numerous examples and applications, in a final PAA publication from AAC&U in the summer of 2002. To engage in PAA discussions, access [www.aacu.edu/paa/index.cfm](http://www.aacu.edu/paa/index.cfm) or contact [nichols@saintjoe.edu](mailto:nichols@saintjoe.edu).

### STAFF FOR GREATER EXPECTATIONS

Director: **ANDREA LESKES**, Vice President for Education and Quality Initiatives

#### OFFICE OF EDUCATION AND QUALITY INITIATIVES

Tel: 202/884-7409 • Fax: 202/387-4123

**ROSS MILLER**, Director of Programs

**BARBARA HILL**, Senior Fellow

**DEBORAH YARROW**, Administrative Assistant

### CONTRIBUTING AAC&U STAFF

**ALMA CLAYTON-PEDERSEN**, Vice President for Education and Institutional Renewal

**CARYN MCTIGHE MUSIL**, Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Global Initiatives

**JOHN NICHOLS**, Senior Fellow, and Director of the Project on Accreditation and Assessment

**CAROL SCHNEIDER**, President, AAC&U

**ROBERT SHOENBERG**, Senior Fellow, and Director of the Project on *Greater Expectations* for Student Transfer

**DEBBIE WOLFE**, Program Associate and Assistant Director of the Project on *Greater Expectations* for Student Transfer

### PAA PROJECT MEMBERS

#### REGIONAL ACCREDITORS

**STEPHANIE BANGERT**, Western Association of Schools and Colleges

**JOHN DWYER**, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

**SANDRA ELMAN**, Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges

**JOHN ERICKSON**, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools

**ROBERT FROH**, New England Association of Schools and Colleges

**CECILIA LOPEZ**, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

#### SPECIALIZED ACCREDITORS

**KATHRYN ABERLE**, Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc.

**MILTON BLOOD**, Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business

**MARGARET JACKMAN**, Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education

**GEORGE LUCAS**, American Academy for Liberal Education

**ANTOINETTE MITCHELL**, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

#### HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS

**BARBARA CAMBRIDGE**, American Association for Higher Education

**WILLIAM CRAFT**, American Council of Academic Deans

**JUDITH EATON**, Council for Higher Education Accreditation

**JOAN FISCELLA**, Association for Integrative Studies

**JERRY GAFF**, Association of American Colleges and Universities

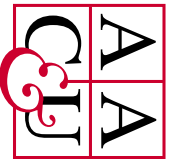
**FRED JANZOW**, Council for Administration of General and Liberal Studies

**B. THOMAS LOWE**, Association for General and Liberal Studies

**PEGGY MAKI**, American Association for Higher Education

**MARY BETH NOWINSKI**, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

**JOAN STANLEY**, American Association of Colleges of Nursing



*Association  
of American  
Colleges and  
Universities*

1818 R Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20009

AAC&U is the leading national association devoted to advancing and strengthening liberal learning for all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Since its founding in 1915, AAC&U's membership has grown to more than 730 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.

For additional information about AAC&U programs and publications, visit [aacu.edu](http://aacu.edu).

Non-Profit Org.  
U. S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 8410  
Washington, DC

For AAC&U membership information, contact Esther Merves, Director for Membership at 202/884-7435, or at [merves@aacu.nw.dc.us](mailto:merves@aacu.nw.dc.us).