

In the late 1980s, the Association of American Colleges (as AAC&U was then known) launched the Project on Liberal Learning, Study-in-depth, and the Arts and Sciences Major, a three-year review of liberal arts and sciences majors within the context of liberal education. As part of the project, task forces appointed by twelve participating learned societies examined four broad issues within their specific fields: faculty responsibility for shaping the major program, organizing principles for structuring study-in-depth, processes for integrating learning, and relations between the major and other parts of the curriculum. The project culminated in the release of the first-ever national report on the undergraduate major, which identified four principles of a well-designed program of focused study: curricular coherence, critical perspectives, connected learning, and inclusiveness.

In Re-Forming the Major, a 1992 project that built on the earlier findings and recommendations, AAC&U worked closely with eight campuses as they set about making needed changes to their arts and sciences majors. The participating departments made significant progress on developing common courses or experiences in every major program and committed themselves to the goal of fostering connected learning. However, the

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project revealed less progress on, and even a certain resistance to, other key goals for reforming undergraduate majors:

seeking and valuing the participation of diverse students, helping students develop a critical perspective on their field through multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary experiences, and providing a coherent sequence of educational experiences. In 2001, the American Sociological Association—a participant in the Project on Liberal Learning, Study-in-depth, and the Arts and Sciences Major—appointed a second task force and, in *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated* (2004), also reported mixed results: “the second Task Force found that though some departments have made great strides toward sequencing within the major, there is still more work to do to enhance the vitality and increase the coherence of sociology programs nationwide.”

And how has liberal education itself changed over the past two decades? Perhaps most significantly, a broad consensus has formed around the notion that specific liberal learning outcomes are essential for all college students, regardless of their major. As a result, liberal education is today increasingly less restricted to colleges of arts and sciences, and outmoded curricular models that had effectively relegated the goals of liberal education to the general education program have begun to give way to new models that focus on students’ cumulative and integrative learning across the entire curriculum—including, importantly, within the context of the major.

Given these related and ongoing developments—the reform of the undergraduate major and the revitalization of liberal education—what is the current relationship between the major and liberal education, and what directions for reform would disciplinary societies recommend today? In 2006, the Teagle Foundation funded six disciplinary working groups to examine these questions. The groups have now all presented their findings in white papers, and AAC&U is pleased to publish here abridgments of these important and illuminating reports.—DAVID TRITELLI

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