

CAMPAIGN FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF LIBERAL LEARNING
COMMUNITY/CAMPUS DIALOGUE
SOUTHERN OREGON UNIVERSITY
OCTOBER 16, 2002

INTRODUCTION

The Oregon Community Campus Dialogue brought 400 participants from various sectors of Southern Oregon to address and listen to ideas about the role that liberal education should, can and will play in this 21st century. SOU sponsored the dialogue on its campus, with Rogue community College and Oregon Institute of Technology as co-hosts

With initial guidance and inspiration from the Association of American Colleges & Universities' Presidents' CALL, SOU invited leaders from corporate, government, cultural, public school, health care, university administration and faculty perspectives to offer their thoughts prior to small group discussions around key questions.

Setting the context for this gathering, one of many held across the nation this past fall, the AAC&U noted the following:

As educational leaders and presidents of colleges and universities, large and small, public and private, two-year and four-year, we call on our colleagues around the country to ensure that every college student experiences the full benefits of a twenty-first century liberal education.

Especially since September 2001, Americans have been catapulted into a powerful sense of engagement with peoples, places, histories, and ideologies that many of us previously knew only dimly. Our entire society is now caught up in quests for deepened understanding, and in re-examinations of the most basic questions about social trust, civic duty, international justice, world cultures, and sustainable health.

While much in our present situation is unprecedented, our intense need for both knowledge and wisdom also reminds us of essential truths that we have long known, but recently neglected.

Chief among these is the Jeffersonian recognition that democracy depends for its vitality upon education, while education serves democracy best when it prepares us for just the kinds of questions we face now: questions about the wider world, about our own values, and about difficult choices we must make both as human beings and citizens.

Speakers from various sectors provided brief perspectives about liberal education for contemporary society. They included: Patsy Smullin, president and owner of California Oregon Broadcasting, Inc.; John Dellenback, former Oregon congressman; Libby Appel, artistic director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival; Roy Vinyard, president and CEO of Asante Health System; Dr. Steven Wiseley, superintendent of Medford School district; Dave Frohnmayer, president of the University of Oregon; and Ernest Ettlich, emeritus professor from SOU. Kathie Olsen served as moderator.

The Oregon Dialogue was opened by SOU President Elisabeth Zinser, followed by welcoming remarks by Ashland Mayor Alan DeBoer, OIT President Martha Dow and RCC President Rick Levine.

Debra Humphreys, vice president for communications and public affairs for the AAC&U, delivered a keynote speech summarizing the recent report of the AAC&U entitled “Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a nation Goes to College.”

THE REMARKS & SPEECHES

(Each bulleted point is a statement, direct or paraphrased, made by the speaker.)

SOU President Elisabeth Zinser (Welcome, overview, remarks)

- Welcomed the speakers, moderator, participants, and summarized the outline of the Dialogue as planned.
- Cited the AAC&U’s three initiatives: Greater Expectations, the Presidents’ CALL, and the campus/community dialogues.
- The common goal of the Dialogue is to explore together what learners need for life and work in the 21st Century and how we can raise the bar and support achievement in such learning through shared responsibilities in and around higher education.
- Our aim is to empower and create intentional, informed, engaged, and responsible learners, guided by talented and knowledgeable educator-scholars.
- We used to ask, *what is expected of the educated person?* While this remains a vital question, today’s complex world requires that we ask also, and even more so – *what is expected of the modern learner?* Is it insight – the capacity to

recognize nature's laws, rhythms, and processes – and judgment – an understanding of moral imperatives and how they are grounded in human experience and in reality? What else is expected? How will you answer this and other questions posed to you today?

- Zinser challenged participants to recall the moments when they were truly engaged and intentional learners, and to recall the guides who made a difference in helping them learn.
- What brought us here today at the deepest level is our hope that education provides continuous journeys in learning of the kinds that create for each learner, and thus for a learning society, the opportunity to live with ourselves and our actions.
- Our goal is to explore a new vision for learning in the 21st Century, grounded in a desire to help men and women find themselves and their relationships to the world with intentionality, dignity, and knowledge.
- When men and women find themselves through meaningful learning and act upon it responsibly, our society and world cannot help but be sustainable, livable, and progressive.

Ashland Mayor Alan DeBoer (Welcome)

Alan DeBoer, a native of Ashland, welcomed those attending and acknowledged the vital impact that higher education, in collaboration with the community, has on the welfare of this entire region.

OIT President Martha Dow (Welcome)

- Noted the great opportunity this dialogue is to partner with RCC and SOU.
- Addressed the often-held perception that a liberal education and a technical education have very little or no common ground.
- This is wrong, as the two can come together to enable the student to come away with a sense of who they are, what their role is in society.
- “Technology is a performing art.”

RCC President Rick Levine (Welcome)

- The cooperation between community colleges and 4-year institutions is vital in enabling students to transfer seamlessly from one to the other.
- RCC graduates have higher GPAs than other students at the universities in Oregon.
- The articulation agreements allowing community college students to transfer their credits into the universities are important to the success of these students.
- RCC, in cooperation with other institutions of higher education, continues to find solutions to the challenge of the rapidly changing economy.

Kathie Olsen, Moderator

- In short remarks, Kathie Olsen noted how fortunate it is, in this time of budgetary woes, to be able to stand back and look at the big picture.
- She provided an overview of the format of the panel presentations and introduced the speakers. Biographies were provided in handouts for all participants.

Debra Humphreys, Vice President for Communications and Public Affairs for the AACU

- Thanks for support and involvement of people and institutions.
- Provided a brief overview of the Greater Expectations Report (see the report on the AAC&U Website or in hard copy).
- Expressed a deep belief in the power of education to change lives and a deep commitment to providing education to all who want it,
- Education can open doors, but access without quality is hollow.
- This is a turning point in higher education, one in which we need to make choices about the kind of education we will be offering.
- These choices will shape the quality of our society.

- Knowledge is expanding exponentially and college has become what high school was a century ago, but the current rate of participation is unacceptable.
- The public understands the need for education as a preparation for work, but may not understand the type of education needed for jobs not even here now.
- The vision of Greater Expectations is based on the truth that general knowledge has a greater shelf life than specific knowledge.
- A sense of ethics and responsibility is vital to this educational process.
- We need to know our history and the world beyond our borders if we are going to be able to engage in active citizenship.
- Education is a lifetime endeavor, offering joy and fulfillment, as well as economic well being.

COBI President and Owner Patsy Smullin

- In the TV business, the interconnection between what is happening in the world and the ability to communicate it to an audience is dependent on more than just a good reader with a pretty face.
- Also necessary is a mind that is aware of history, culture, art, and science – literally all of the disciplines taught in an institution of higher education with a focus on liberal education.
- There is no discipline of study that is not, in one way or another, a part of the vital information that the media communicates.
- Challenged those present to watch any newscast – local or national – in which some knowledge of the world and its various complexities is not an essential part of the background for that story.
- The success of her company, not only in terms of communication, but also as a business, she said, depends on her staff members' knowledge of the communities served.
- It is impossible to obtain that knowledge without knowing what questions to ask, and impossible to know what questions to ask without a liberal background.

- Pretty faces are wonderful on TV, but we don't need the pretty face as much as we need the beautiful mind – a curious mind made rich and effective through its experience with higher education.

John Dellenbeck, Former Oregon Congressman

(This was one of John Dellenbeck's last public appearances before his death in December, 2002. He spoke with the honesty and insight that he has shown throughout his life.)

- Governmental service is in need of truly competent people to serve.
- It is critically important in our nation that we address our challenges with vision – that vision expressed in the Greater Expectations report does a good job of addressing those needs.
- More than just the usual stakeholders in education must become involved if we are to succeed.
- Government at all levels must help out.
- Not all students will be able to meet the standards of excellence we are setting. They too must have opportunities to overcome their backgrounds or other harmful factors. We must answer just how we will deal with these students.
- Inertia is engrained in much of education. We must find ways to overcome it.
- We must work to coordinate the efforts of K-12 and higher education.
- The financial challenge must be addressed.
- We have a preoccupation with materialism, and must also look to morals, ethics and spirituality.

Libby Appel, Artistic Director Oregon Shakespeare Festival

- Spent 20 years as a teacher and is inspired by the report.
- We need to find ways to live in responsible ways in a dramatically changing world.

- Taught drama in a professional arts school and wondered how those who did not make acting a profession would use the skills learned there. Came to a liberal arts college and had students with interests from all professional areas of study taking acting classes, knowing they would learn how to communicate on many levels, work together with diverse partners, and interpret literature for themselves and others.
- Became aware of the depth of this discipline, and how it was teaching students about themselves.
- Einstein said that imagination is more important than information.
- Susan Sontag said that art and thought are what lasts.

Roy Vinyard, president and CEO of Asante Health System

- As CEO of one of the largest health care providers in the Rogue Valley, Roy Vinyard addressed the challenge of finding employees capable of adapting to the rapidly changing technology that lays at the heart of much of our health care system today.
- In education for health care workers he sees:
 - Too much of an emphasis today on knowing facts and figures that have a short shelf life.
 - Lack of connection to coursework
 - Little emphasis on broader subjects
 - Little “town and gown” connection
 - Little flexibility for later life learning opportunities.
 - While there is a global shortage of healthcare workers, little is being done to adequately prepare them.
 - They often come with poor social skills and bedside manner.
- I want a resilient professional, capable of adapting to constant change, who embraces change and sees it as an opportunity.

- I want someone who can work symbiotically with others.
- One size does not fit all in education.
- The qualities of a learner laid out in the Greater Expectations report are just what he wants in a health care worker.

Dr. Steven Wiseley, Superintendent of Medford School District

- As superintendent for 18 years of one of the larger school districts in the state, Dr. Wiseley addressed the importance of partnership between all levels of education. This seamless flow from K-12 to higher education is vital to assuring that education really meets the needs of the students and society at large.
- We are not in competition, we can and should work together as a team. Quality learning at the lower levels can connect with quality learning in higher education.
- A main goal of education is to teach learners to learn.
- Learning can be fun and enjoyable.
- Education communities are like families and must be seamless in what we offer from K-12 on through to terminal degrees.
- The purpose of education is to help people become good, caring, compassionate people.

University of Oregon President Dave Frohnmayer

- Knowledge is built on other knowledge. Think about what you know and don't know, and about how profoundly all knowledge is built upon one thing – knowledge. This knowledge is the basis for our society's advances and progress, is best found in the tradition of the liberal education.
- Citing examples from history, literature, science and common cultural backgrounds, he noted that few would have any understanding of current events and social happenings without a common understanding offered by a liberal education.

- The university has, in some ways, replaced the church as a source of authority. That knowledge upon which we live our lives, as well as the knowledge upon which we find our vision for humanity and society, is hammered out here and shaped into the ideas that form the superstructure of our society.
- Though we live in an age of specialization, that specialization is built on the framework of a broad understanding of the world.
- In some ways we are called upon to be all things to all people, which is both a danger and a challenge.
- We always must keep in mind that our goal is the unrestricted pursuit of knowledge.
- We must prepare people who can understand argumentation and choices, understand context, understand words and numbers, and understand how to work in collaboration with others.
- We must prepare students who are able to understand identity – “know thyself.”
- We must prepare men and women who become active citizens and understand the vital necessity of the ethical life.
- As educators at a university, we transform lives through knowledge.
- Colleges and universities of America must do the thing they do best – offer the invaluable liberal education to a society deeply in need of all it teaches.

Ernest Ettlich, Emeritus Professor from SOU.

- In a speech worthy of his expertise in rhetoric, Professor Ettlich spoke eloquently to the need to redefine the liberal arts for our time, while not losing the vital connection with its meaningful past.
- With a focus on the essential skills for the citizen to live well and productively, Ettlich emphasized the need to redefine what students need to learn in the face of dramatic changes in the world, and specifically in light of two profound shifts.

- The first is an intellectual paradigm shift that can account for both the regularity and the uniqueness in individuals and communities – the possibility of universals as well as uniqueness.
- This new paradigm and the shift to it will not be without intellectual and personal struggle, but must be entered into by higher education, he said.
- The second is an information technology shift more profound than that produced by the printing press and mass production. More powerful and diverse electronic communication and information processing have changed how we live and work with nearly every tool now having one or more imbedded computers aiding in monitoring and control.
- This pervasive presence of ever more powerful and portable computers, he said, has had an impact in the halls of the academy too.
- It is time to move past the trivium and quadrivium to a new context formed by the likes of Einstein and Hawking, while not discarding the hard learned lessons of the past – the importance of reflective patience in scholarship.

SUMMARY OF SPEECHES

Though speakers came from differing perspectives, their views about needs and expectations were amazingly congruent.

There was nearly unanimous agreement that the ability to adapt to the changing world was more important than any specific knowledge gained – that even in technical professions, a liberal education was key to being able to make those adaptations.

Most speakers agreed with the point made by Ernest Ettlich, that:

“The old paradigm seems inadequate for this new challenge--just read the postmodern critiques, rife as they may be with their own shortcomings. That shift has been emerging through more than 40 years of increasingly tumultuous debate and yet has but begun. No one can predict the final dimensions of the new *episteme* which will dominate human life and thought in the next centuries even as have the enlightenment and scientific revolution for the last two.”

All made points addressing the rapid and seemingly geometric growth in technology – a growth, as Etllich also noted, “more profound than that produced by the printing press and mass production.”

It is a technology that breaks down old barriers, puts up new ones, creates new communities and enables communication in ways unimaginable a few years ago.

It is both a tool for and a challenge to education, opening teaching and learning possibilities that can strengthen and/or totally alter higher education as we know it.

Each speaker agreed with the CALL statement that a liberal education, though presenting itself in various forms, aims to develop intellectual and ethical judgment; expand cultural, societal and scientific horizons; cultivate democratic and global knowledge and engagement; and prepare students for work in a dynamic and rapidly evolving economy.

Though we live in an age of specialization such as history has not seen, that specialization is built on the framework of a broad understanding of the world – the universe - such that:

- those who strive their entire lives to make discoveries in the laboratory, understand the impact of their discoveries across national and cultural lines;
- those who learn new approaches to marketing a product, understand also that culture and beliefs can have an impact on use and acceptance;
- those who puzzle over the right word to complete a line of poetry, are able to find a perfect metaphor for their line in the science and technology of the times.

While we aim for all who enter our centers of knowledge to leave with knowledge that will find them employment, we are not simply utilitarian job training centers – we are more.

K-12 and higher education at all levels must work together to assure seamless and meaningful continuity.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Following the guest presentations, the audience broke into several groups to discuss the following questions related to liberal learning. Each group had a facilitator and was limited to an hour-long discussion.

The Community-Campus Dialogue Questions for Small Group Discussions

- 1) What does “liberal learning” mean to you in relation to that expressed in the *Greater Expectations Report*? (See reverse side for paraphrased portion)
 - A shift from traditional to applied focus.
 - Move toward student-centered / “intentional” model.
 - Enrichment / Appreciation of a breadth of experience/knowledge.
 - Draw from diverse voices / sources of knowledge.

- 2) What are the most important learning outcomes of a college education for students of the 21st century? Are these outcomes understood, valued and advocated in our communities and society (business, government, civic)? On campuses close to home and in post-secondary education across the Nation? By local public schools and systems?
 - Ability to draw links from one area and apply to another.
 - Creative / Analytic Thinking
 - Sense of Community
 - Well-rounded / Adaptive
 - Acquisition of second language

- 3) Are the outcomes you’ve identified congruent with the aims of liberal learning being discussed today? What obstacles impede achievement of these aims? What are the most promising opportunities, practices, and innovations?
 - Need to begin process before college.
 - Address need for diverse teaching tools.
 - Address diverse learning styles.
 - Society’s value of individualism.
 - What training/education do faculty need to better address liberal education goals? What do they already have that is under-utilized?
 - How do we show “relevance” for students to maximize motivation?
 - Cultural egocentrism.
 - How to better allocate resources (particularly non-\$\$)

- Need to master one's own cultural tools while attempting to broaden perspectives (e.g., the English language)
- 4) What changes are needed to enable colleges and universities with various missions to better achieve these aims?
- Need to begin the process before college.
 - Access wider variety of teaching methods.
 - Need to be more creative with learning opportunities, especially experiential learning.
 - Recognize local resources for learning opportunities (e.g., what native culture can teach)
 - Need more connection between K-12 and higher education
 - Need to re-think core values from a nontraditional perspective.
- 5) What can colleges/universities and communities do together to build consensus and public understanding of what matters in college education for the 21st century? What would build greater understanding and progress on our campuses?
- Need to begin process earlier – public education, primary/secondary education.
 - Draw from other than Western, traditional perspectives.
 - Increase use of service learning in communities.
 - Increase use of community-based experiential learning with local community needs.
 - Need for more cross-national, cross-cultural diversity.

PANEL DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS - SUMMARY

- Liberal learning encompasses more than the disciplines studied, it also includes critical thinking and the ability to understand other points of view brought to the table. It is not just a set of courses, but a way of learning and thinking.
- There's a gap between elementary school and high school to prepare students for becoming liberal learners. We need to teach them to love to learn.
- Mixed opinion on whether gifted students are being served best or sacrificed to the needs of the less gifted.

- There are no real answers to life's challenges in books – book learning is only a tool to show that there are many ways to get to the answer and that there are often many answers.
- Liberal learning is synergistic; it brings things together to make something larger than the sum of the parts.
- Liberal learning – that informed knowledge base that comes through this education – is a vital part of citizenship. It not only helps us to make informed decisions as voters and participants in government, but also helps us wade through the incredible information-overload we experience.
- The business community point of view is that liberal learning means more to the people inside academia than to people outside of the educational system. The community doesn't really care. The programs that are offered are how you attract students.
- Over the last 20-25 years there has been a disassociation between the major institutions of our society (higher ed., religious, cultural), perhaps because we don't feel that we can make a change or have an effect on the outcome of that institution. Liberal learning speaks to all the pieces of our lives and society, and we should grasp onto it in order to re-associate ourselves with these institutions.
- Do we do a “bait and switch,” offering them what they need to get a good job and then give them high and lofty ideals instead?
- Not all people learn in the same way, at the same speed, in the same environments. Can all people learn to the same level? Data suggest that if you set the bar at a certain level, the student will reach it. Attitudes of K-12 educators too often hold that a large majority of students cannot learn to a college level. We're writing them off. On the other hand, many students just want to be entertained.
- While we speak highly of liberal learning and a liberal education, the fact is that those who teach in these areas are the lowest paid in higher education. We need our society to support this learning.
- Many pressures from parents and society – to get a job, to be able to buy things, to declare a major – work against the idea of liberal learning.
- Behind it all, funding or the lack of it is a key to providing the education necessary to achieve all of these high goals. Communities should work hard so

that citizens understand the value of a higher education, and not just for the sake of getting a job.

- “Lifelong learning”: Sometimes comes out more as a cliché than the creation of a culture for learning. I hope I create an atmosphere in my classroom where my students say “I love learning.” We want to make it fun. If passion is generated for the liberal arts tradition, we feel it in our classes for liberal learning.
- Liberal learning doesn’t start in college. K-3 lays the foundation: spelling arithmetic. From that point on, you need to be taught how to read, think and process information; how to evaluate information.
- The outcomes of critical thinking and ethical decision making, are hard to measure. We keep taking what we can quantify to the legislature even though those measurements may not be part of the larger issue or expectation.
- We must change the professional degrees in higher education. They should include more liberal education. Professionals end up being the teachers in higher education and the educators are not trained to teach in multiple ways.
- There is a disconnect between teaching and research. We need people who can teach, we need people to do research, and we ask that people be able to do both. That’s asking a lot.
- Creating more connections between student learning and research can enrich liberal and professional learning.
- Reestablishing liberal learning is not the same – should not be the same – as reestablishing the “ivory tower’ of higher education.
- The role of liberal learning, especially service and community learning, within all aspects of the university needs to be defined, e.g. professional programs, teaching and learning.
- Everyone -- from teachers and students to state legislators and business people -- need to understand that changes in our society mean that we cannot just aim a student to a specific vocation, but need to broaden the student’s learning to adapt to complex and unpredictable changes that will occur in their futures.
- Students need to be “hooked” on some element within the university in order to succeed. To do this, students’ perceptions and input need to be included in the process of defining liberal learning. The vast wasteland of the senior year in high school should be redirected to assist in the process.

- As important as assessment is, the intractable problem is that assessment systems must be built accurately.

OVERALL SUMMARY

Somewhat surprisingly considering the varied professional and educational backgrounds, speakers and dialogue participants agreed that the primary goal of a liberal education is to prepare students for the changing world they will encounter in the decades to come.

A liberal education is exactly what is needed because it offers a background context for understanding the widely diverse people, cultures, and challenges that most people will be living and working with.

With this understanding must come a corresponding sense of personal responsibility, ethics, and morals, an understanding that moves beyond 'knowing to live' to 'living to know'.

All professions, -- from the highly technical to the largely people-based fields, -- need men and women grounded in what a liberal education can offer.

John Dellenback raised the issue of funding – an area that was not addressed to a strong degree. Participants welcomed the opportunity to stand back and look at the broader picture. But it is a broader picture that surely will grow narrow without a serious focus on funding challenges.

The vision of Greater Expectations can be accomplished, to the good of our nation and world, with continued commitment to its goals and means of achieving them (including funding).