



## This issue of *Peer Review* was planned in concert

with AAC&U's upcoming Network for Academic Renewal meeting "General Education and Assessment: Creating Shared Responsibility for Learning Across the Curriculum," which will be held in February. The tracks for that meeting are organized around a particular set of questions about the aims of general education; the assessment of student gains in learning; signature programs; engagement and leadership; and shared ownership and responsibility. The articles in this issue also explore these questions, and we hope the issue will serve as a useful complement.

The larger theme of creating shared responsibility across the curriculum is rooted not just in the upcoming meeting or a single issue of *Peer Review*, however. It is also key to several recommendations in AAC&U's 2002 report, *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*. That report describes liberal education outcomes that are important for all college students, regardless of their area of specialization. The importance of these outcomes—and of the larger vision of a New Academy founded upon their achievement—derives, in part, from their practicality; they reflect the multiple kinds of learning graduates actually will use in discharging their responsibilities as citizens of a diverse and globally-interconnected democracy; as active participants in a dynamic, knowledge-based economy; as lifelong learners seeking after personal fulfillment. The report makes clear that achieving these outcomes for all students will depend on multiple stakeholders taking shared responsibility for this new vision for learning.

While this will not be easy, the good news is that there is widespread consensus about the importance of these learning goals. *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree*, a recent report from the Greater Expectations Project on Accreditation and Assessment, documents this emerging consensus among accreditors and other higher education leaders about the liberal learning outcomes essential for all college students. Moreover, through the Presidents' Campaign for the Advancement of Liberal Learning (CALL), sponsored by AAC&U, more than 525 college and university presidents have exhorted their "colleagues around the country to ensure that every college student experiences the full benefits of a twenty-first century liberal education." In endorsing the *Greater Expectations* vision, the Presidents' CALL provides further evidence of consensus about the kind of learning all students need now: "The approach to higher learning that best serves individuals, our globally engaged democracy, and an innovating economy is liberal education. Liberal education comes in many shapes and forms in the contemporary academy, but in every one of those forms, its aims include: developing intellectual and ethical judg-

ment; expanding cultural, societal and scientific horizons; cultivating democratic and global knowledge and engagement; and preparation for work in a dynamic and rapidly evolving economy."

The *Greater Expectations* report heralds the advent of a New Academy animated by this remarkable unity of purpose. In itself, however, the academy's corporate commitment to providing all students with such a practical liberal education—while of doubtless significance—would not ensure success. This commitment must be articulated through the diversity of institutional types and missions characteristic of American higher education.

In striving to meet these greater expectations, individual institutions confront several challenges. Because complex liberal learning outcomes must be developed across the curriculum, creating curricular coherence is chief among these challenges. Hence, a key recommendation made in the *Greater Expectations* report: college curricula ought to integrate general education and study in the major, including preprofessional programs. Campus leaders must work to create a shared sense of responsibility for achieving student learning goals, and they must distribute responsibility for assessing that achievement.

They must, for example, work to consolidate the gains already made through a range of successful innovations—from learning communities to capstone experiences, from freshman seminars to service-learning projects. This involves working to ensure a coherent educational experience for all students through purposeful integration. In short, institutions must not allow successful innovations to languish at the margins of the academy, thus effectively restricting access to the powerful forms of learning achieved through these innovative practices.

AAC&U works with colleges and universities across the country as they undertake reform efforts to enact the vision of the New Academy in institution-specific ways, in ways that simultaneously respect the diversity of mission and build on the cross-institutional commitment to the broad goals of liberal education. Because it is focused on outcomes rather than on disciplines, and because it draws from the perspectives of a range of stakeholders, the *Greater Expectations* framework is an especially useful resource for campuses at various stages of reform. It is our hope that this issue of *Peer Review* will be used similarly to enable and advance discussions about the aims, purposes, and best practices of a twenty-first century liberal education. —**DAVID TRITELLI**

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