

While I often take my work home with me, recently I have had work-related matters greet me at my front door.

Every day this month, stacks of letters and brochures from a variety of colleges and universities have arrived in the mail for my son Adam, a high school sophomore. In addition to these mailings, he has also received well over sixty e-mail messages from college admissions offices. Adam took the PSATs last fall and he received his scores early this year. Judging from the timing of the mail he has received, Adam's information also was given to a number of institutions who deemed him to be a potential candidate for admission to their schools. It has been exciting for him to review the correspondence. For the first time, he can envision himself as a college student. However, I wonder if these schools are missing an important opportunity. These targeted mailings could provide Adam and his fellow students who are contemplating college choices early in their high school years with the chance to take academic inventories of where they are and where they want to go. **The recruitment materials could help students assess their own progress in preparing to achieve the essential learning outcomes of a liberal education—the world's premier design for college learning.** Unfortunately, none of the correspondents have offered this type of measuring stick for college preparation. Instead, the recruitment materials have focused on what is available for admitted students, often emphasizing school location and other non-academic features of the campus.

There is no question that adequate preparation is key for successful transitions from high school to college learning. But how prepared is the typical student when he or she arrives on campus the first year? In a series of focus groups conducted for the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) by the Peter D. Hart Associates with several groups of rising college juniors and seniors at public and private institutions, participants spoke of their hopes, goals, concerns, and expectations regarding college. When asked about their freshman year, many students recollected that they felt unprepared and unaware of what to expect of college. A number of those questioned who had expo-

sure to college-level courses while in high school indicated that they felt “unprepared for the demands of some college classes, despite having taken AP classes in that field of study.”

This year, the National Leadership Council for AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative released a report called *College Learning for the New Global Century*. The LEAP report identifies the essential aims, learning outcomes, and guiding principles—including seven Principles of Excellence—for a twenty-first-century college education. The Principles of Excellence are “informed by a generation of innovation and scholarly research on effective practices in teaching, learning, and curriculum [and] offer both challenging standards and flexible guidance for an era of educational reform and renewal.” The second guiding principle, “Give Students a Compass,” is especially meaningful in this discussion of student preparation. A compass that allows students to find their academic bearings and gives them a sense of what they are aiming for—as high school sophomores or college seniors—also would empower them to make smart educational decisions throughout their academic careers.

This edition of *Peer Review* addresses the topic of student preparation and two equally important factors that are essential for student progress—motivation and achievement. The issue features a range of articles that explore the relationship between these three determinants and relevant promising practices. As the cover of this edition illustrates, the undergraduate path is filled with choices. As students create their courses of study, their preparation, motivation, and achievements throughout their education will allow them make the most of their journeys to commencement and all of their future endeavors.

—SHELLEY JOHNSON CAREY

To read more about the new LEAP report, see page 26 in this issue of Peer Review. To listen to the podcast of the AAC&U plenary “Taking the Lead on What Matters in College: Principles of Excellence for the New Global Century,” go to www.aacu.org/Podcast/AM07_podcasts.cfm.