LEAP for Instructors: Using AAC&U Resources for Effective Course Design

LEAP for Instructors is a set of resources specifically designed for Non-Tenure Track (NTT) faculty. In partnership with the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success, AAC&U recognizes the centrality of faculty who work on term contracts to general education. With this new series of resources related to AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative, we hope to produce value in two ways: by advocating on behalf of NTT faculty to encourage institutional administrators to provide robust teaching and learning resources, and to place practical tools for teaching and learning directly into the hands of NTT faculty. We intend to provide more opportunities for NTT faculty to benefit professionally as they make the most of the time they have with their students and approach their courses in high-impact ways.

LEAP is AAC&U’s signature centennial advocacy, campus action and research initiative that champions the importance of a twenty-first century liberal education—for a nation dependent on economic creativity and democratic vitality. Hundreds of campuses and a dozen state systems and consortia, including both public and private and two-year and four-year institutions, are using LEAP frameworks, resources, and research to guide their work. LEAP responds to the changing demands of the 21st century—demands for more college-educated workers who are more engaged and informed citizens. LEAP helps colleges and universities to meet these demands by defining and advancing a contemporary vision for liberal education outcomes and practices that can help all students succeed.

The LEAP initiative embraces a 21st-century definition of liberal education and promotes:

- **Essential Learning Outcomes**—as a guiding vision and national benchmarks for college learning and liberal education in the 21st century
- **High-Impact Educational Practices**—that help students achieve essential learning outcomes
- **Authentic Assessments**—probing whether students can apply their learning to complex problems and real-world challenges
- **Inclusive Excellence**—to ensure that every student gets the benefits of an engaged and practical liberal education.

LEAP for Instructors provides a primer for applying some key LEAP components—AAC&U’s Essential Learning Outcomes, high-impact practices, and VALUE rubrics—to course design and teaching. This guide will first provide a basic introduction to LEAP materials as an entree to a number of case studies and sample assignments or syllabi shared by faculty who are working or have worked as part-time instructors. The materials are intended for peer-mentoring—showing how instructors are using ELOs, HIPs, VALUE rubrics, or other pedagogical practices to align their...
teaching intention with their students’ experience and outcomes. We hope these examples will inspire and inform your own efforts to offer a high-quality educational experience for your students.

This guide is the first step in building a set of tools that instructors may adapt and adopt for themselves. **We invite all instructors and administrators who use or review this guide to provide feedback and to submit their own stories that demonstrate engagement at the individual or institutional level with LEAP principles or practices. Contributions may be emailed to Susan Albertine at Albertine@aacu.org.** We also hope that you will share these resources with your colleagues and use them to begin or continue conversations with your peers.

As these conversations occur and begin to involve other leaders across your campus, we encourage you and your allies on campus to consult the [resources and discussion guides](#) created by the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success. These tools have been designed to help campus leaders address the challenges related to changing faculty roles in an informed and productive way.

**The Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs)**

Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first century challenges by gaining:

1. **Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world**, through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts.

2. **Intellectual and practical skills**
   - Inquiry and analysis
   - Critical and creative thinking
   - Written and oral communication
   - Quantitative literacy
   - Information literacy
   - Teamwork and problem solving

3. **Personal and Social Responsibility**
   - Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
   - Intercultural knowledge and competence
   - Ethical reasoning and action
   - Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
   - Global learning

4. **Integrative and applied learning**, with a focus on synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

These [ELOs](#) can be assessed using the VALUE rubrics explained below.

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**What is AAC&U?** *Founded in 1915*, AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. More than 1,300 colleges and universities of all types are members. The membership is committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students and to supporting all educators in this work.

**What is AAC&U’s history of work with faculty?** Since 1915 AAC&U has been a national leader of efforts to define academic freedom and tenure. The original AAC joined AAUP in producing the 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. The association has achieved a century of work with faculty. See “**Toward the Next Century of Leadership: A Future Faculty Model**,” *Peer Review, Summer 2013, Vol. 15, No. 3*.

**What has AAC&U done in partnership to advance the success of NTT faculty?** AAC&U is co-sponsor of the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success ([thechangingfaculty.org](http://thechangingfaculty.org)). Through this partnership, AAC&U intends to address the many broad and specific issues of the 21st-century faculty and their changing roles. The association is intentionally including NTT faculty in our work with membership campuses and our sponsored projects.
**Assessment: VALUE Rubrics**
The VALUE: Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education project provides needed tools to assess students’ own authentic work, produced across their diverse learning pathways and institutions, to determine whether and how well they are progressing toward graduation-level achievement in learning outcomes that both employers and faculty consider essential. The VALUE rubrics are being used to help institutions demonstrate, share, and assess student accomplishment of progressively more advanced and integrative learning. The rubrics can be translated into the concepts, language, and contexts of specific disciplines, programs, and courses, thereby facilitating classroom, program, and institutional assessment for learning improvement and reporting. The sixteen rubrics, which correspond to the above ELOs, are available at no cost [here](#).

**High-Impact Practices**
These teaching and learning practices have been widely tested and have been shown to increase rates of retention and engagement for students from varying backgrounds. They can take many different forms, depending on learner characteristics and on institutional priorities and contexts. This primer focuses on high-impact practices that are most applicable to faculty on term contracts. A full list can be viewed [here](#).

1. **Writing-Intensive Courses** emphasizing writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines.

2. **Collaborative Assignments and Projects** that help students learn to work and solve problems in the company of others, as well as to sharpen their own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

3. **Undergraduate Research** for students in all disciplines. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.

4. **Service Learning/Community-Based Learning** should give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element is the opportunity students have to both apply what they

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are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences.

5. Diversity/Global Learning may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often exploring “difficult differences” such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community.

6. Internships provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field.

Inclusive Excellence
In embracing a diversity of ideas and experiences, liberal education likewise embraces a diversity of people, for the opportunity to learn with and from diverse peers is also a critical element of educational excellence. This commitment to diversity and equity in all their forms is what AAC&U means by inclusive excellence. Access to a high-quality postsecondary education and a liberal education should be a real possibility for all American high school graduates. Higher education can and should build the skills, knowledge, and social and intellectual capital that students and society need to create thriving communities. AAC&U believes that working conditions for NTT faculty are limiting our efforts to achieve inclusive excellence. The association recommends that campus leaders treat NTT faculty as essential partners in making excellence inclusive.

What does AAC&U say about NTT faculty and inclusive excellence?
“The continued increase in contingent faculty appointments is an ‘elephant in the room’ for American higher education, threatening the future of scholarly community and putting at grave risk AAC&U’s commitment to high-quality liberal education and inclusive excellence for all” (From AAC&U’s 2013 – 2017 Strategic Plan).

As the Delphi Project has maintained, the quality of teaching by NTT faculty and their commitment to learning are not the issue. Faculty working on part-time and short-term contracts are limited by their working conditions and constrained in their efforts to teach effectively.

LEAP for Instructors Case Studies
1. Rebecca Dolinsky, instructor – Private, four-year college – Writing intensive course and diversity learning using ELOs and VALUE rubrics
2. Roseann Berg, instructor – Community college – Collaborative assignments
3. Mary Carney, director for the center of teaching, learning, and leadership – Public, four-year university
4. (Coming Soon) Kathy Wentrack, former instructor and current tenure-track professor – Community college – Integrative learning and collaborative assignments