



Bringing Quality and Equity Together

*AAC&U's Centennial
Exploration of Liberal
Education and the
Equity Imperative*

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Quality College Learning: The Equity Challenge of Our Time

In a Challenging Global Environment, the Connections among Social Prosperity, Individual Flourishing, and Liberal Learning Are Essential and Compelling

As AAC&U looks to its second century, the need for big-picture inquiry-rich college learning has never been more evident. Economic prosperity, democratic vitality, and global progress all depend on the continued advance of new knowledge, on the full development of human talent from all sectors of society, and on all citizens' capacity and commitment to connect knowledge responsibly with the world's urgent challenges—economic, ethical, political, intercultural, environmental. In a complex and volatile world, **Americans need more—and more cosmopolitan—liberal learning, not less.**

A Liberal and Life-Enhancing College Education Is Especially Important to Low-Income Students, Who Too Often Are Steered in Exactly the Opposite Direction

Whatever their backgrounds, and especially if they want to succeed in their careers, all college students need and deserve the opportunity to gain broad knowledge about science, society, cultures, and values; to develop sought-after analytical and communication skills; and to pursue personal and career development, reflection, and hands-on experiences in working to solve problems with people and communities whose perspectives are different from their own. This is the heart of AAC&U's mission: **to make the most empowering forms of learning expected for all college students, not just for the most fortunate among them.**

AAC&U's Centennial Year Exploration of Liberal Education and the Equity Imperative

Guided by AAC&U's expanded mission to advance both liberal education and inclusive excellence, and concerned by the continuing tendency to guide less advantaged students toward narrow and blinkered college programs, AAC&U and its members have devoted the Centennial Year to a "deep dive" exploration of the **most promising strategies for bringing quality liberal learning and equity-minded educational practice together, with unwavering attention to the needs and lives of the nation's underserved learners.**

Informed by this rich, year-long exploration of ways to braid equity and quality together, we are pleased to report an **emerging "convergence" around the concept of....**

Guided Pathways, Connected Learning: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Increasing Underserved College Student Success in Quality Liberal Learning—AND for Making Excellence Inclusive

The concept of "guided learning pathways" draws together in a coherent and comprehensive framework the most powerful reform agendas of the 21st century: purpose-driven and public-spirited liberal learning outcomes, high-impact educational practices, and the value and importance of students' hands-on, inquiry-driven applied learning projects. The guided learning pathway strategy is anchored in rich evidence about "what works," both for students who have been systemically underserved at all levels of the nation's educational system and for all 21st-century learners. It provides a roadmap for institutions that want to respond to AAC&U's LEAP Challenge by preparing all their students to successfully complete "signature work"—applied learning projects that both develop and demonstrate students' capacity to apply their liberal education to complex questions and new settings.

See page 3 for a set of prompts for building equity-minded guided learning pathways to a liberal and liberating education.

We also invite you to make full use of the additional AAC&U resources—on diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence—that we list on the final page of this folio.

As AAC&U's landmark Centennial Year comes to a close, I want to thank the thousands of faculty members, presidents, academic leaders, and diversity/equity scholars who contributed in so many ways to AAC&U's ongoing efforts to provide expanded access to quality learning for underserved college students. Higher education is richer for your leadership.



Carol Geary Schneider
President, AAC&U
(through June 30, 2016)

Designing Guided Learning Pathways for Quality and Inclusive Excellence

*** With Equity and Belonging as Paramount Values, Institutions Meld High Touch and High Tech to Support and Monitor Student Engagement and Progress, Giving Special Attention to Frequent or Systemic Barriers and Challenges**

Build an intentional and welcoming community so that every student feels known, respected, supported, and savvy about where to find help.

High touch: Provide mentoring and individualized degree plans to connect degree program pathways (and developmental education, if needed) with students' own goals, lives, and emerging interests.

High tech: Deploy data analytics to provide timely information about student progress and problems and to address systemic disparities or barriers.

*** Faculty Define and Programs Address Essential Learning Outcomes—Across Systems and Within Institutions**

Enable a constant curricular and cocurricular focus on the most important purposes of college learning, preparing students to tackle complex questions—economic, democratic, and personal.

Connect the curriculum visibly with the wider world and students' own questions and career hopes, while providing clarity, direction, and progress points or “markers” for students.

*** Sequence Programs, Courses, and Well-Designed Assignments to Foster Essential Learning Outcomes**

Map LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes across all courses and requirements in both general education and majors, at progressively more challenging levels, from initial courses to final studies. Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile provides helpful prompts for designing programs that foster high-quality learning. **See www.luminafoundation.org/DQP.**

Provide multiple on-ramps for students in transition and/or who need supplemental work.

Where relevant, use digital tools to free time for student/faculty work on projects.

*** Ensure All Students Participate Frequently in High-Impact or Active Learning Practices, from First to Final Year**

Shift the focus from passive listening and rote assessments to students' own *effortful engagement* with questions, problems, and projects, including community- or work-based projects.

Ensure students' *constant practice* of LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes such as analytic inquiry, engaging diverse perspectives, collaborative problem-solving, ethical inquiry, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, communication skills, etc.

*** Ensure All Students Complete Applied Learning Projects—Connected to Program and Student Goals**

Connect college learning with open or unscripted questions important to the student and to society.

Prepare and enable students to become self-directed learners.

Embrace AAC&U's LEAP Challenge, which invites higher education to make students' “signature work” a catalyst for their integrative and applied learning. **See www.aacu.org/LEAP-Challenge.**

*** Students' Own Work—Including Their Applied Learning Projects—Provides the Primary Evidence of Their Progress toward Degree-Level Learning and Educational Achievement**

Reduce the emphasis on assessments that are disconnected by design from the actual program of study; shift our focus to students' own best work. Use AAC&U's LEAP VALUE rubrics to track student progress on key learning outcomes and monitor equity of learning. **See www.aacu.org/VALUE.**

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Diversity, Democracy, and Inclusive Excellence

Resources for Campus Leaders and Faculty

AAC&U's Board of Directors has affirmed AAC&U's commitment to diversity and equity as educational priorities in an **official statement**: "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 we mean by inclusive excellence."

Today, students of color are leading protests across US higher education, mobilizing to highlight and resist the persistence of discriminatory actions in society and the legacies of discrimination on campus. These students, together with many faculty, staff, and students from all backgrounds, are rightly calling for new commitment and comprehensive action to ensure that higher education will provide inclusive, respectful, and supportive environments for learners from communities that are today—and that have always been—systemically underserved, not just in higher education, but at all levels of the United States educational system. Many protestors also are asking that higher education take action in working to redress the deepening divides that now characterize our democracy.

That work begins with a searching look at where we are now, both as a society and in our own institutions, and with a commitment to reversing the corrosive legacies of discrimination, marginalization, stigmatization, and violence in our society. These legacies disfigure democracy. And too often they work, insidiously and counterproductively, to create limiting rather than supportive climates for deep learning on campus.

As educational leaders mobilize to address these questions in their own institutional contexts, we recommend the following resources as catalysts for self-study and productive change. Mindful that higher learning necessarily deals—by definition—with difficult and often contested societal questions, we particularly call attention to the AAC&U Board of Directors official statement on **"Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility."**

Recommended AAC&U Resources:

- *America's Unmet Promise: The Imperative for Equity in Higher Education*
- *Step Up & Lead for Equity: What Higher Education Can Do to Reverse Our Deepening Divides* *
- *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: A Campus Guide for Self-Study and Planning* *
- *Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility* *
- *A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy's Future (especially chapters IV and V)* *
- *The Drama of Diversity and Democracy: Higher Education and American Commitments* *
(Second Edition 2011)

*These resources are available online at www.aacu.org/publications/free-web

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