The History of Faculty in AAC&U
A Personal Essay

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Distinguished Fellow,
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Cover photo, courtesy of Michele Stinson, shows the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ headquarters in Washington, DC.
Author’s Prologue

I was inspired to write this history of faculty within the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) because of my long relationship with the organization, which began in 1975. At that time, I came from the University of California–Berkeley to what was then the Association of American Colleges (AAC) to direct a three-year funded project. Surprisingly, I spent the rest of my career there, except for seven years in campus administration. I have now been intimately involved in this association for forty-six years, including two and a half decades in a leadership capacity.

During this time, I have worked with five presidents, each with various agendas and personal styles. These include Frederick W. Ness (1969–78), Mark H. Curtis (1978–85), Paula P. Brownlee (1990–98), Carol Geary Schneider (1998–2016), and Lynn Pasquerella (2016–present), missing only John W. Chandler (1985–90). AAC&U (which changed its name from AAC in 1995) has developed a heavy emphasis on involving faculty members from colleges and universities in its programming, events, and publications. I have led, participated in, and observed a broad array of major initiatives involving faculty members as both leaders and participants.

Having been on the staff in several capacities, it occurred to me that my perspectives might provide a useful history of AAC&U’s organizational changes over the past forty years. Rather than writing a traditional scholarly history, I wrote this volume as a personal essay for several reasons. First, I am not a professional historian and do not presume to adhere to the norms of that discipline. Second, the historical records of many aspects of AAC&U are spotty or nonexistent. Leaders of many organizations assume that the history of matters in their areas of responsibility began when they started their job and that records before they arrived are not highly valued. I have been dependent on the information that has been preserved and is available to AAC&U’s staff. Most of the data included in my essay were current through 2019. Finally, this manuscript is not comprehensive. Rather, I have focused on the developments that I consider to be most important or that signaled new directions for the association.

I deliberately chose to focus on the theme of the expanding faculty involvement in AAC&U. When I arrived, AAC was widely viewed as a “president’s club.” Faculty were conspicuous by their absence. Over the years, the association grew in size, stature, and influence, necessarily including more diverse individuals in its work—especially faculty members.

Since this is a personal essay, the reader should know a bit of my own history that influences my perspectives. I arrived at AAC in 1975 to direct the Project on Institutional Renewal through the Improvement of Teaching for the Society for Values in Higher Education (SVHE), a group of former Danforth and Kent Fellowship recipients. At that time, Samuel Magill was a senior executive at AAC, as well as a member of the board of directors at SVHE, and he provided support, friendship, and supervision. I rented space from AAC because of the compatibility of its mission and
the purposes of my project; AAC promised stimulating and congenial colleagues committed to improving college education. After that project ended in 1978, I wrote a proposal for another three-year Project on General Education Models for SVHE, and when it was funded, I remained at AAC to direct it from 1978 to 1981. I was subsequently hired by AAC to assist with its Project on Redefining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees. In 1983, I accepted a job as dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Hamline University and later served as Hamline’s interim president.

I returned to AAC in 1991 to direct the Project on Strong Foundations for General Education, funded by the Lilly Endowment. Soon after, I was named vice president and created the Network for Academic Renewal, which began a series of conferences that continue to this day for faculty members and administrators on a variety of vital academic topics. From 1993 until my retirement in 2003, I directed a family of four projects dealing with innovations in the graduate school preparation of faculty members under the Preparing Future Faculty initiative. After my retirement, I continued to speak, write, and consult for AAC&U, although with decreasing frequency, on such topics as faculty development, curriculum reform, and preparing future faculty. Currently, I enjoy the honorific title of distinguished fellow at the association.

Over the years, AAC&U has become a significant leader of American postsecondary education, developing practical ideas and innovative educational approaches to improve the education of students, especially in the tradition of liberal education. The programs typically have been devised and implemented in dialogue with faculty members and academic administrators at institutions of all types: two-year and four-year, public and private, liberal arts and research intensive. AAC&U staff developed innovative ideas, gained financial support from different funding sources, fostered innovations on campuses, involved hundreds of faculty members, assessed results, and publicized the most promising practices. When I served on the AAC&U staff, I knew the leaders of these initiatives personally, read or wrote the reports, and was a participant or observer in virtually all the changes.

This essay is a complement to a forthcoming publication written by Carol Geary Schneider, president emerita of AAC&U, which describes a “new vision” of liberal education and transformation of this organization to promote it over three decades. Her publication discusses a new definition of liberal learning, an emphasis on systematic change, and new coalitions for substantial educational change. My essay, which was written around the same time, is compatible with hers, as faculty are essential to implementing any definition, systematic change, and coalition for educational change. Together, both tell the story of adapting liberal education to the contemporary world. To ensure minimal overlap, we each focused on different aspects of liberal education. While she focuses on initiatives that collectively built a new vision for liberal education, my focus is on the expanding role of faculty members in the life of the association. The two essays may best be viewed as complementary reports, as faculty are the ones who primarily implement reforms of liberal education.

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I want to express my appreciation to my many friends and colleagues at AAC&U who graciously gathered what data were available, provided me with information about their various activities, and shared valuable comments on earlier versions of this manuscript. I also want to thank Presidents Lynn Pasquerella and Carol Geary Schneider, as well as their senior colleagues, for their encouragement and support. David Tritelli, my friend and editor of an early draft of this manuscript, gave me wise and helpful advice. Ben Dedman did a superb job of editing the final manuscript and making it more readable.

Of course, I am responsible for the substance, conclusions, and judgments included in this manuscript, which are my responsibility alone and do not represent the views of AAC&U.

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Washington, DC
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Early Years of Faculty Involvement

The Association of American Colleges was founded in 1915 after the Council of Church Boards of Education assembled a group of 150 college presidents to consider how the colleges could respond to several challenges. First, the Morrill Act of 1862 gave incentives for every state to create a college to teach branches of knowledge in agriculture and the mechanical arts, and these competing institutions proved popular with citizens and students. Large numbers of the new universities were supported by taxes, allowing them to charge lower tuition than the private colleges. Further, other competing institutions, such as Johns Hopkins University and the University of Chicago, emphasized science and the creation of new knowledge as dynamic alternatives to the fixed classical curriculum still employed by many liberal arts colleges. Finally, many colleges that featured study of traditional liberal arts subjects were little more than high schools and needed to raise their own standards in order to justify their claims of providing a “higher education.” The presidents approved the creation of the Association of American Colleges to help address these concerns. To be eligible for membership, institutions had to require at least fourteen Carnegie units for admission and 120 semester hours for graduation.2

This new association of colleges and presidents shared common concerns about the central, if not exclusive, role of the liberal arts in college education. In these matters, the members agreed to operate according to the principles of “inclusiveness and interhelpfulness.”3 The policy was to welcome institutions committed to the liberal arts that were open to sharing ideas about how to increase both the quality and efficiency among the members. Although membership contained some large, public, and technical institutions, AAC was relatively homogeneous and included mostly small, private, and religiously affiliated colleges. In fact, AAC was often mistakenly referred to as an association of small liberal arts colleges as recently as the 1970s.

The two main means of communication among association members were an annual meeting and a quarterly journal, the Bulletin (later renamed Liberal Education). Both were directed largely to an internal audience of the association’s membership. When I became associated with AAC in 1975, it was regarded largely as a “president’s club,” with the president or his designee attending the annual meeting and receiving the journal containing presidents’ speeches and a record of official business. Most of the helpful ideas came from the leadership of member campuses, and their perspectives were understandably from their own institutions. The primary role of AAC staff was to spread the best ideas and practices related to educational quality and efficiency among the whole membership.4

For more than sixty years, faculty members were conspicuous by their absence from the activities of the association. One major exception was a decades-long collaboration with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) on principles of “managing faculty, from
initial appointments and long-term contracts to shared governance and disciplinary actions.” In 1940, AAC formally endorsed the *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. This document defined the basic contractual relationship between faculty members and their institutions that became the norm at colleges and universities around the country. The statement was about the faculty, but it was not a proposal put forth by faculty from AAC institutions. However, faculty leaders and administrators on most campuses across the country eventually became strong defenders of academic freedom and tenure, citing the principles contained in this seminal document.

The federal role in higher education began to grow after World War II. AAC originally opposed federal involvement in higher education, because members at private institutions feared the prospect of federal control. Despite AAC’s conservative stance, the federal government provided a growing amount of funding for student financial aid, research, and educational improvement. Responsive to the interests of its members at private institutions, AAC provided a home office for the Federation of State Associations of Independent Colleges and Universities to do lobbying and provide federal relationships. Subsequently, as might have been expected, a rift grew between AAC’s private and public member institutions as the tax-supported members became concerned about paying dues to support the fundraising of their private competitors. After all, the available funds were limited, and access to them was regarded as a zero-sum game. Why, the public members asked, should they support institutions competing with them for limited funds? As was the custom for resolving such disputes, AAC leaders appointed a special commission chaired by Edgar Carlson, head of the Minnesota Private College Council, to address the issue. The commission recommended the establishment of a separate national voice for the independent sector.

In 1976, the membership took two key actions recommended by the Carlson commission. First, it endorsed the creation of a new organization to advance the interests of private institutions, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU). To that end, AAC agreed to provide both staff and financial assistance to help NAICU become self-supporting. This was a significant commitment that seriously stretched the limited resources of AAC. The second action was to focus the mission of AAC on the promotion of “humane and liberal education” at all kinds of colleges and universities, public and private, large and small. To support this change, the board allowed member institutions to appoint two of their staff members, typically the president and chief academic officer, as official representatives. The board saw this action as conferring “constitutional status” on academic officers.

After the restructuring, AAC leaders realized that faculty members must be involved in discussions about designing and implementing liberal education programs for students because neither presidents nor academic vice presidents were primarily responsible for designing and implementing academic programs. That was the responsibility of the faculty, and faculty involvement in AAC activities would be essential.
Because the AAC membership was still drawn heavily, although not exclusively, from small private liberal arts colleges (many of them financially fragile), large numbers of members were faced with a difficult choice: should they be members in both NAICU and AAC, two similar Washington associations, which many regarded a wasteful duplication? If not, which would it be—the one devoted to advancing their financial and lobbying interests or the one focused on liberal learning? Although AAC’s mission was focused on fostering liberal and humane education, the precise nature of that education remained ill-defined. AAC also retained all other purposes not explicitly given to NAICU. As one AAC board member snidely observed, “I have never been particularly attracted to leftovers.” To complicate matters more for AAC, the association kept its dues down to encourage current member institutions to retain their membership. That decision, along with the association’s substantial financial contribution to assist the startup of NAICU, caused it to budget for a deficit during the transition.7

The choice faced by small private colleges was made more difficult by a national economic recession during the 1970s that led the public to emphasize the practical importance of vocational education, fostering the view that liberal education was impractical, irrelevant, and a luxury that many could not afford. A small army of consultants spread through the small liberal arts colleges, urging them to add new vocational programs in such areas as business, accounting, medical technology, and a host of other “practical” studies. Many colleges took this route, mostly to keep their enrollment high enough to ensure their survival.

Several AAC board members, who were presidents of member institutions, held a series of regional meetings with presidents from other colleges to urge them to remain members of AAC. Theodore Lockwood, who was about to assume the board chairmanship, noted, one “meeting registered a despondency on the part of many as to the likelihood of survival of an AAC devoted to liberal learning.”8

Leaders of the “new AAC” recognized that the association had to offer a series of useful programs if it was to serve its mission, grow its membership, and remain solvent. The AAC board assembled a Committee on Program Development that considered several alternative directions. Some board members argued for a focus on the “prophetic role” of colleges and universities that emphasized the basic purposes of education. “In a fragmented, overspecialized, demoralized society, we need to address ourselves to the humane elements of all education,” one board member said. Another board member argued that AAC “might act as an R & D [research and development] body for all of higher education.”9 The board cited my project housed at AAC as an example of how the association could solve both educational and financial problems by securing funded projects that brought resources that could both support staff salaries and gain overhead to strengthen the budget.

Other committee members favored an emphasis on a “priestly mission” that provided services to assist presidents, deans, and department chairs to improve their “internal academic
management.” Although some thought both themes could be combined, “several expressed doubt that they could be held in balance,” fearing that the demands of practical operations with financial implications would “absorb staff time and energies” and little would be left to nourish the “soul of learning.”

During this difficult time, AAC was fortunate to receive support from major philanthropic foundations, including the Ford Foundation, Exxon Education Foundation, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation. Both their grants and their confidence in the new AAC were extremely valuable to the association.

In the end, the board launched an aggressive membership recruitment effort, and AAC developed several services for members, both current and prospective. Specifically, AAC decided to

- hold a series of regional workshops for administrators to address managerial and financial issues;
- partner with the National Endowment for the Humanities to schedule briefings for humanities faculty and academic administrators to promote its funding opportunities;
- help campuses expand their offerings by planning forums on topics such as the liberal arts in professional programs and lifelong learning;
- create the Federal Resources Advisory Services to inform academic leaders at all types of member institutions about government funding possibilities;
- establish the Quality in Liberal Learning (QUILL) program to provide small grants for faculty members to devise new, innovative courses;
- house a grant-funded project to assess the impacts of recently created faculty development programs; and
- secure funding to support the Academic Collective Bargaining Information Service, which addressed concerns about the rapid unionization of faculty on college campuses.

It turned out that most members stayed with AAC. Part of the reason was the answer given to the question “What would be lost if AAC failed?” The answer offered by Stephen Bailey, president of the American Council on Education, was that American higher education would “lose its soul of learning” if AAC failed. Yet, membership did decline from 719 institutions at the end of 1974 to 579 in 1977. During the 1977–78 academic year, conditions started to improve as a result of a concerted membership drive.

It soon became obvious that neither presidents nor academic officers could deliver programs in support of liberal education without the help of faculty. After all, presidents and academic officers do not design curricula, teach courses, or provide direct academic services to students in the pursuit of liberal education. If AAC was to achieve its mission of advancing liberal
education, it would have to speak to the faculty—and involve faculty members in shaping its programs and its rhetoric—far more than had been done previously. Over the following decades, AAC began a series of programs that involved faculty members, typically in collaboration with academic administrators, for the benefit of the education of their students. The remainder of this essay is the story of that evolution.
Summary of Changes Since 1976

During the past four and a half decades, AAC has transformed into the contemporary AAC&U. The changes came incrementally, as nobody could have envisioned what would transpire after the major restructuring in 1976. Indeed, as we have seen, the future of AAC was bleak in the 1970s. But over time, a new, more vibrant organization emerged to unpack the meaning of liberal education. Part of this meaning became clear as AAC&U specified essential student learning goals or—in current parlance—learning outcomes. These outcomes include

- knowledge of human cultures through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts;
- intellectual skills such as critical and creative thinking, inquiry and analysis, and written and oral communications;
- personal and social responsibility including civic knowledge and engagement and ethical reasoning and action; and
- integrative and applied learning, including synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies.12

Once campuses agreed on learning goals and publicized them in their literature, faculty could design courses to meet the outcomes, and students could see the purposes of their studies. When AAC&U redefined its mission to include inclusive excellence in 2012, it helped institutions apply this expanded concept of liberal education more equitably to a more diverse student population. Each of these refinements involved an action agenda that AAC&U could embrace, and each involved the central role of faculty. It was no coincidence that the new association was one in which faculty came to play a crucial role. Table 1 summarizes the transformation from the old AAC into today’s AAC&U that will be discussed in future pages.

Table 1. Summary of Changes Leading to More Faculty Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Association of American Colleges (AAC)</td>
<td>Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&amp;U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation as an association of colleges and presidents</td>
<td>Reputation as a leading educational research and development center that collaborates with institutions in educational innovations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small and largely homogeneous membership</td>
<td>Large and heterogeneous membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A “presidents’ club”</strong></td>
<td>Involves various stakeholders, including chief academic officers, faculty members, campus staff, policymakers, researchers, employers, and the public—as well as presidents</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional focus</strong></td>
<td>Focus on student learning outcomes and strategies to achieve them</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Liberal education spoken of in quasi-religious terms</strong></td>
<td>Liberal education operationalized so it can be assessed and improved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liberal education assumed to be the study of liberal arts and sciences disciplines</strong></td>
<td>Liberal education widely recognized as involving the integration and application of broad knowledge and skills for all students regardless of major or intended career</td>
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<td><strong>Small agenda: sharing ideas to improve education and efficiency at member institutions</strong></td>
<td>Large agenda: providing “a new vision for learning,” realizing “America’s promise,” and achieving “inclusive excellence”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Few, small, and infrequent meetings and conferences</strong></td>
<td>Meetings and conferences held frequently with large numbers of participants to serve many purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emphasis on rhetoric, with little research</strong></td>
<td>Emphasis on analysis and empirical research, as well as rhetoric</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Small budgets, with revenue largely comprising member dues and annual meeting fees</strong></td>
<td>Large budgets, with revenue mostly from dues, grants, and fees from an expanded list of meetings, conferences, institutes, and publications</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Communication via one dry academic journal</strong></td>
<td>Communication via several engaging print and electronic formats</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Primarily an internal audience for members</strong></td>
<td>Multiple audiences both internal and external, including campus leaders, faculty, policymakers, and the general public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small AAC staff to aid communication among members</strong></td>
<td>Large AAC&amp;U staff skilled in identifying emerging problems, involving leaders on and off campus in innovations, and securing funding</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Modest influence</strong></td>
<td>Significant campus and national impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Involves few faculty, with little emphasis on issues central to faculty</strong></td>
<td>Involves many faculty in various roles, with emphasis on academic issues affecting teaching, learning, and institutional success</td>
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The Annual Meeting

The annual meeting is AAC&U’s only continuous gathering of members since its founding, in good times and bad. The attendance at the meeting generally mirrors the changing fortunes of the membership, both in size and composition. After the restructuring of 1976, attendance dropped precipitously to between 250 and 300, in my recollection (no exact figures are available). At annual meetings in the late 1970s, more than one friend asked me, “Will this be AAC’s last meeting?”

During those days, Carol Geary Schneider, then an executive vice president, and I would regularly review the meetings and lament that more academic leaders were not a part of the intellectually and educationally exciting dialogues. We would unfavorably compare the attendance of AAC’s annual meeting with that of our sister organization in Washington, DC, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), which also focused on teaching and learning issues and routinely drew a larger attendance. We would dream of reaching comparable numbers.

Over the years, annual meeting planners took several steps to increase the event’s attractiveness, particularly to faculty members. Specifically, the planners

- chose timely and relevant themes that were interesting to an academic audience, such as “The Academy in Transition” (1998) and “Changing Students in a Changing World” (2002);
- added pre- and post-conference workshops to give participants hands-on experiences with topics such as using technology or creating learning communities;
- added a preconference symposium on special topics to appeal to particular academic audiences (e.g., “Integrating the Sciences, Arts, and Humanities” in 2011);
- actively solicited proposals from faculty members and other campus leaders to increase the range of issues and recruit new session leaders;
- added more sessions led by faculty members, which (since they were on the program) allowed them to receive financial support from their institutions for travel expenses;
- encouraged teams of faculty members to attend by providing discounts for multiple attendees from the same institution;
- encouraged related organizations, many involving significant numbers of faculty members, to hold meetings in conjunction with the annual meeting; and
- reached out to groups previously aligned with AAHE, especially after it closed its doors in 2005, including the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education, the Association for the Study of Higher Education, and individuals involved in AAHE forums on assessment and on faculty roles and rewards.
In addition, AAC strengthened its relationship with the American Conference of Academic Deans (ACAD) by inviting it to hold its annual meeting in conjunction with AAC’s own annual meeting. ACAD members were academic leaders such as current and former deans, provosts, academic vice presidents, and associate and assistant deans committed to the ideals of liberal education. AAC provided a part-time staff person to manage ACAD’s affairs, and the president of ACAD was invited to serve on the AAC&U board. Several deans attending the ACAD meeting have brought one or more faculty leaders with them to attend the AAC&U annual meeting.

The recent growth in annual meeting attendance was aided by the unfortunate demise of AAHE in 2005 and the drift of their members to the AAC&U sphere of influence. I heard many comments immediately after that time that the loss of AAHE left AAC&U as the “only game in town.”

Attendance grew as a result of these strategies and changes, especially among faculty members, finally topping one thousand in 2002 with a total of 1,070. Attendance rose above 1,500 in 2008 with 1,685 and above 2,000 in 2011 with 2,074. In 2020, the attendance for the AAC&U annual meeting set a record of 2,267.

Despite the best-laid plans of AAC&U’s staff, attendance at the annual meeting also reflects larger events in the general society. For example, in 2007, the annual meeting was scheduled for New Orleans, which had been severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. The storm caused an estimated 1,833 deaths and was the most destructive natural disaster in US history, and, even a year and a half later, the city had not recovered. Attendance dropped 26 percent from the prior year. Similarly, when the Great Recession squeezed campus budgets before the 2009 meeting in Seattle, attendance went down 22 percent. Despite these occasional disruptions, attendance has been trending upward as a result of the many creative steps that have appealed especially to faculty members.

Recently, I have heard more comments that the annual meeting is a “must-attend meeting,” with its focus on a wide range of educational issues and the involvement of a variety of higher education institutions, their administrators and faculty members, and many national and regional leaders.

Over the decades, there has been a significant change in the role of faculty members on campuses. In the 1980s and early 1990s, faculty varied by discipline, rank, and whether they were tenured. A few were chairs of their departments. But in almost all cases, full-time faculty members taught courses, advised students, and collectively oversaw academic programs.

In recent years, faculty roles have proliferated. As institutions adopted new curricula to foster student learning outcomes, they have created faculty leadership positions, usually on a part-time basis, to administer portions of their educational programs. These new roles include directors of general education programs, core courses, written or oral communication, first-year experiences, service learning, internships, diversity, student success, undergraduate research, senior seminars,
learning communities, assessment, and faculty development, among others. While most of the individuals who perform these various functions are faculty members, they are also part-time administrators. When asked to self-identify themselves, such people may choose their administrative title or their faculty discipline or rank. But the reality is that the annual meeting attracts faculty members with all of these different responsibilities and professional identities.

According to self-designations given on registration forms, faculty only made up 18 percent of attendees at the 2018 annual meeting. Chief executive or chief academic officers constituted another 12 percent. But given the proliferation of faculty roles, many of the other attendees—including directors, deans, and chairs of special programs—were also faculty members. There can be no doubt that the involvement of faculty is one reason the annual meeting has grown so much in recent years and why it has developed a primary emphasis on academic issues.

The annual meeting also has increased its appeal to a broad swath of higher education. For example, 40 percent of the 1,862 attendees (not including AAC&U staff) at the 2019 annual meeting were from public institutions, 27 percent were from private nonreligious institutions, and 17 percent were from religiously affiliated institutions. Participants came from a variety of institutions that granted associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees. Today, nobody would mistake the annual meeting for a gathering of small private liberal arts colleges.

Since AAC&U is an institutional membership organization, its leaders took special steps to make the meeting attractive to presidents and keep a core group involved. To that end, the association created the Presidents’ Trust, which is composed of presidents representing all sectors of higher education. Members of the trust “are committed to advocating for the vision, values, and practices that connect liberal education with the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, a global workforce, and thriving communities.” The annual meeting program includes a special “president’s track” that deals with topics of particular interest to presidents, including sessions on funding possibilities, public policy issues, and administrative issues. This special track gives presidents an opportunity to “let their hair down” and share their experiences and ideas with their counterparts from other institutions.

Sponsorships by for-profit or nonprofit organizations are common wherever large numbers of individuals gather for conferences. For years, the annual meeting was so small that it did not generate much interest among potential corporate sponsors. Indeed, when the idea of attracting sponsors was first raised, I recall that several members of AAC&U’s senior staff and board were appalled, as if money would make their work on liberal education somehow less pure. But when the attendance grew, AAC&U was able to attract organizations—such as testing companies or book and news publishers with a focus on higher education—to sponsor events or put up tables to display their wares.

With attendance increasing at the annual meeting and various other association conferences and institutes, President Lynn Pasquerella and Andrew Flagel, former vice president for
advancement and member engagement, saw an opportunity to expand the marketing of sponsorships. In 2019, forty-two organizations paid to sponsor the annual meeting, and many participants interacted with the exhibits and talked to representatives. Several exhibitors told me that they were happy with the exposure and interest they were finding. Like other organizations with large meetings, AAC&U could make money from organizations that simply wanted to be associated with them and to market products or services.
Major Funded Projects

Over the decades, the philanthropic community has turned its attention to access and the quality of higher education. Several major foundations and government agencies provided support for projects, usually lasting three years or less, that were focused on improving the quality of education. AAC&U was able to form relationships with both private and government funding sources to promote valuable educational innovations.

Typically, these projects have supported leaders at both AAC&U and higher education institutions as they thought through important issues, devised practical educational innovations, implemented those innovations on a variety of campuses, and assessed the outcomes. By allowing AAC&U staff to assess outcomes of efforts to improve students’ education, funded projects have become a primary source for developing intellectual capital within the association. Below are highlights of selected AAC and AAC&U projects.

Gender Diversity: The Project on the Status and Education of Women (PSEW)
The first major project of the reconstituted AAC was actually created before its 1976 restructuring. Designed and directed by Bernice “Bunny” Sandler in 1971, the Project on the Status and Education of Women (PSEW) was the first office for women at a higher education association in Washington, DC, and it became a major resource for campuses fashioning policies and practices to promote gender equity.

After receiving her doctorate in 1969 and conducting several job searches, Sandler found that she was unable to get a faculty position either at her university or elsewhere. Seeking to understand why, she was told, “You come on too strong for a woman.” Sandler could accept the “too strong” comment, but “for a woman” was clearly discriminatory. At another university, a male interviewer told her that he didn’t hire women because they stayed home too often with sick children. An employment agency reviewed her credentials and dismissed her as “just a housewife who went back to school.”

Incensed at the injustice of gender discrimination in faculty hiring practices, Sandler became an activist and articulate advocate for a level playing field. She and her colleagues at PSEW conducted research and coordinated a massive letter-writing campaign to congressional leaders that culminated in the 1972 passage of Title IX, which prohibited gender discrimination in postsecondary education. Title IX made colleges and universities vulnerable for two major reasons. First, women students were becoming much more prevalent on campuses, and to keep enrollment up, those new students needed to feel welcomed. Also, institutions were at risk of lawsuits if they failed to establish policies to protect women, especially students and faculty.
At first, Sandler operated PSEW to help academic institutions establish policies that both protected women students and limited legal risks. But the project soon moved more directly into the realm of faculty when PSEW published a series of papers on the “chilly climate” that women students faced in the classroom and beyond. The first paper focused on the classroom and described how (1) some teachers made disparaging remarks about women in general and particularly about their intellectual abilities and academic seriousness; (2) men were called on more frequently than women, and their comments tended to count for more; and (3) women were more likely than men to be interrupted by peers and teachers. These subtle and not-so-subtle behaviors, often not recognized by teachers and often done by both male and female teachers alike, created a more difficult learning environment for women students. If women were to continue attending colleges and universities in large numbers, the faculty had to do their part by creating a more hospitable learning climate. Eventually, several short, popular essays were published under the “chilly climate” series, including on topics such as out-of-class practices, academic mentoring for women students and faculty, and strategies to aid the success of women faculty members.

The “women’s project,” as it came to be known, positioned AAC to be recognized as an early “feminist” organization. In 1971, it began publishing the journal *On Campus with Women*, which contained a wealth of resources concerning research and practices to support women. PSEW became an important national pillar of the women’s movement sweeping the country, as AAC joined several court cases to increase opportunities for women. It also partnered with other programs, including one at the American Council on Education that identified and helped recruit women as university presidents and other high administrative positions. Sandler received many awards and honors for her pioneering work promoting women on campuses, whether as students, faculty members, or administrators. Recognizing her long and influential fight to improve the standing of women in higher education, the *New York Times* dubbed her the “Godmother of Title IX.” Bunny passed away in 2019 at age 90.

This work remains relevant, as colleges and universities today are again being criticized for lacking policies for handling sexual assault cases. The US Department of Justice has made efforts to require universities to respond quickly and equitably to complaints of sexual violence. It is discouraging to me that after several decades of movements nationally and on campuses to improve policies and the academic culture, sexual violence remains a large problem.

Despite the widespread influence of PSEW, the AAC board eventually urged that the project give greater attention to activities more closely aligned with liberal learning, the core mission of AAC. The board noted that PSEW did not connect its work directly to the educational program and did little to assist the rise of women’s studies programs in the curriculum. But the existing staff resisted what it saw as interference from the board.

In 1991, Caryn McTighe Musil, former executive director of the National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA), joined AAC to complete an assessment of the impacts of women’s studies
courses that she had started while at NWSA. The study found that students had their minds opened by studying women’s issues sympathetically and analytically, often for the first time. Students also learned to sharpen their critical thinking capacities in discussions of gender issues. Such learning gave many women students greater confidence in their academic abilities and more determination to defend their views.

Because of her work at NWSA, Musil was ideally suited to respond to the call within AAC that PSEW give greater attention to the curriculum, especially the growing scholarship on women in all walks of life. Musil was named the director of PSEW, which she piloted until 2012, making it the longest-running project or program in AAC&U’s history. When Musil was named PSEW director in 1992, the office was renamed the Program (not project) on the Status and Education of Women, signifying that it had become an ongoing activity supported in part by the AAC&U budget. The program included a periodical (On Campus with Women), funded projects, and leadership in various national women’s coalitions.

In addition to running the women’s office, Musil also acted as associate director of AAC&U’s new initiative, American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning, and the office she would later run as senior vice president continued AAC&U’s commitment to an expansive notion of diversity (including everything from racial, ethnic, and class diversity to religious, sexual identity, and cultural diversity). She also expanded this focus on diversity to include education in global learning, social responsibility, and civic engagement. Faculty became more and more interested in these topics, especially as they and their students became more diverse. PSEW continued as a valuable resource for women’s education, and one of its legacies is a well-attended women’s leadership breakfast at the annual meeting.

**General Education Models**

Another group of influential projects focused on general education. The need to improve the quality of undergraduate general education came to national attention after colleges and universities relaxed curricular requirements as a result of student protests during the 1960s and ’70s. Many institutions had standardized their college degrees at 120 credit hours, comprising both a major and a number of required courses to provide breadth in various disciplines. Students were told to take one or two courses from long lists of classes in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. In reality, most general education courses were introductory courses designed for students expecting to major in that field, not for the larger number of nonmajors. Most of those courses were offered as large lecture classes of passive students taught by less-experienced teachers or, at research universities, by graduate teaching assistants. Students were frequently evaluated by multiple-choice tests that emphasized memorized data from textbooks or teachers’ lectures. These general education programs amounted to a hodgepodge of disconnected courses often taken by students for their convenience rather than for their educational value, turning the curriculum into a
marketplace. And the students knew it. They protested that many of their courses, especially required courses in the liberal arts and sciences, were irrelevant, impractical, and poorly taught. And they demanded the relaxation of such requirements or the elimination of them altogether.

In 1977, the confluence of three separate events created national awareness that general education had become a serious academic problem. First, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching declared that “general education is a disaster area” lacking purpose and coherence. That same year, Ernest Boyer, the US commissioner of education, and his assistant, Martin Kaplan, published *Educating for Survival*, offering an example of a modern core curriculum and arguing for common learning among students to strengthen social bonds among citizens. Finally, the Harvard College Task Force on the Core Curriculum issued a report calling for a new course of study for all its undergraduates, including new general education requirements. These three events coalesced to create national concern that general education was in trouble and needed to become revitalized at institutions across the country.

During these years as campus reviews of general education were widespread, I received dozens of telephone calls from professors I had never met. The conversations began something like this: “I have just been appointed to chair a faculty committee to review and revise general education, and I am not sure how to proceed. Can you tell me everything I need to know about leading this review?” This leadership from AAC was destined to grow over the coming years with many other projects, a few of which are discussed below.

AAC’s first major project in this area was the Project on General Education Models (GEM), which I directed for the Society for Values in Higher Education while still a tenant at AAC from 1978–81. The project worked with fourteen diverse institutions and their faculties to review and revise their general education programs. There was a rising chorus of requests from faculty groups on campuses about what they could do to strengthen general education, and AAC and the GEM project strengthened their relationship when members of the project wrote and AAC published *General Education: Issues and Resources*, a guide to the literature, issues, and illustrative programs in general education. In addition, Arthur Levine (who had helped draft *Missions of the College Curriculum* for Carnegie in 1977) and I designed and conducted a series of three-day workshops on general education for faculty members and administrators around the country. AAC cosponsored, marketed, and supported these workshops, which did much to establish its position as a leader in general education reform. Even as liberal education was losing its appeal amid the growth of new professional and career majors, there was strong support for all students to learn to write well, think logically, and learn the basics of mathematics, sciences, the humanities, and the social sciences. In other words, a broad general education should be provided for all students, regardless of major or intended career, and these subjects should be taught in an engaging way. This work paved the way for general education to become a staple for AAC and AAC&U programs for decades to come.
The GEM project provided a natural laboratory for observing the effectiveness of various procedures for conducting an institution-wide review and revision of general education. Conventional wisdom held that it was more difficult to change an institution’s curriculum than to move a cemetery, and numerous institutional reviews had failed to produce curriculum revisions that faculty would approve. I was able to draw on the work of the institutions in the project as well as that of other institutions to devise a list of strategies, often not obvious, that had proved effective. Based on what I learned, I wrote a short essay, “Avoiding the Potholes: Strategies for Reforming General Education.” That little article proved to be the most useful document I ever published. It sought to help leaders of review committees and task forces recognize the importance of academic politics in curricular reform. It also offered several ways to engage faculty and departments as they navigated toward the approval of a new, more rigorous, and more engaging curriculum. Later, this document was a resource provided to teams attending the AAC Institute on General Education. In 2009, Paul Gaston, a friend of mine and a long-term colleague on the staff of the institute, updated it with my (modest) assistance as *Revising the Curriculum—and Avoiding the Potholes.*

During this period, I recall being invited to meet with the AAC board to discuss this emergence of general education and the implications for AAC’s mission of liberal education. Traditionally, liberal education had meant students attained a major in one of the liberal arts disciplines in addition to receiving a broad general education. Did strengthening general education undermine this tradition, or was it a means to revitalize it among students who were increasingly choosing to major in one of the growing professional fields? Virginia Smith and John Maguire, who both chaired the AAC board at different times, strongly supported the emphasis on general education and the new approaches to strengthen this central part of undergraduate education. Subsequently, AAC became a national leader for the renewal of general education and worked actively with faculty at all kinds of campuses across the country to enhance their curricula.

I left AAC in 1983 to become dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Hamline University, where I was able to lead the faculty to develop a new distinctive, coherent, and engaging general education program called “the Hamline Plan” that helped renew that fine institution. Subsequently, I wrote another book, *New Life for the College Curriculum*, that described the widespread development of revised general education programs and demonstrated the benefits of these programs for the education of students, the renewal of faculty, and the strengthening of institutions. Later, I directed a three-year, grant-funded project to identify the ways institutions with strong general education programs could sustain them over time. With the support of Paula Brownlee and Carol Geary Schneider, this grant brought me back to AAC in 1991. That project selected fourteen diverse institutions with strong and distinctive general education programs and guided them to reach an agreement on principles that undergirded their success. The report from that project, *Strong Foundations: Twelve Principles for Effective General Education Programs*, was...
published by AAC in 1994, providing valuable guidance for faculty leaders in this area and further entrenching AAC’s leadership position in this field.\textsuperscript{27}

**Redefining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees**

Starting in 1982, AAC President Mark Curtis led another early project designed to improve the quality of college education, Redefining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees. Whereas the GEM project was conducted by a tenant of AAC, Curtis wrote the proposal for the project, secured funding, and chaired a blue-ribbon advisory committee that he assembled. This project was his baby.

The final report of this project, *Integrity in the College Curriculum*, was released at the AAC annual meeting in 1985 and became an instant hit. It was drafted by a subcommittee of three faculty members from the advisory committee—Frederick Rudolph from Williams College, Charles Muscatine from the University of California–Berkeley, and Jonathan Z. Smith from the University of Chicago. It made a big splash. Writing on the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Integrity*, Carol Geary Schneider called it “a sweeping and incisive critique of curricular practice throughout higher education” and said it “framed a broad agenda for education and change.”\textsuperscript{28} Summing up this agenda, Schneider said the report called for academic leaders to

- “revive . . . faculty (responsibility) as a whole for the curriculum as a whole”;
- “foster for every student, whatever the choice of major, a ‘minimum required curriculum (of) intellectual, aesthetic, and philosophic experiences, . . . methods and processes, modes of access to understanding and judgment, that should inform all study’”;
- “restructure college majors to foster study-in-depth, interdisciplinary learning, and stress the inherent limitations of any disciplinary framework”;
- “assess in new ways both program effectiveness and the quality of student learning”; and
- “broaden and deepen graduate students’ and faculty members’ preparation for the profession of college teaching.”\textsuperscript{29}

Schneider reported that, in the decade following the report’s release, more than two dozen AAC projects, involving several hundred institutions and thousands of faculty members, put these recommendations into practice. General education to improve the quality of undergraduate education was the primary focus for most of this work.
The Academic Major

The first question a college student typically receives from family and friends is “What’s your major?” A student’s coursework is shaped largely by the demands of his or her major, and students generally have been satisfied with their course of study. The same Missions of the College Curriculum report that declared general education a “disaster area” proclaimed the major “a success story.” But beginning in the 1980s, this view began to change as criticisms of majors emerged. To respond to this shift, AAC launched another group of projects focused on the academic major.

Critics expressed concern about the growth in the amount of time that majors consumed in the curriculum and the overemphasis on specialization in college education, especially in the growing professional fields. In addition, a movement was launched to reform teacher education and to replace the education major with one in the arts or sciences to ensure that future teachers knew their subjects well. AAC commissioned a study of graduating students’ transcripts, in which Robert Zemsky found a lack of structure and coherent purpose in many departmental curricula. In a different grant project, AAC staff worked with fifty-four departments at eighteen institutions that reviewed each other’s curricula and found a disturbing pattern: departments lacked specific goals for student learning, there was an absence of clear curricular structure, and students experienced fragmented, not integrative, learning. It sounded a lot like the criticisms that had been levied at general education years before.

It is hard for a national organization like AAC to address issues in the major. One reason is that majors have always been assumed to be the exclusive domain of the department and its members. The common refrain used to keep outsiders from interfering with majors is that “only a physicist knows what a physicist should know.” Another reason external groups find it difficult to address majors is that there are so many possible specializations, each with defined content, structure, methods, and culture. This proliferation requires a unique analysis for each major. One way AAC solved this problem was by partnering with twelve disciplinary societies across the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences to review concentrated study in their fields. This project, conducted from 1988 to 1991, analyzed issues in majors and developed guidelines for programs in several popular fields of specialization.

The analyses produced several general findings that were published as The Challenge of Connected Learning in 1991. This report argued that the major should serve as a “home” for learning and a “community of peers with whom students can undertake collaborative inquiries and a faculty charged to care about students’ intellectual and personal explorations as well as their maturation.” In other words, each major should be a learning community in which each student can find both support and challenge.

Schneider summarized recommendations that emerged from several related projects on the major and urged changes away from the too-common practice of students taking “courses in no
particular order towards no clearly stated goal.”33 She also outlined good practices, coming from additional projects, that all majors should include

- “departmental clarity about the intellectual capacities, the ways of thinking and reasoning, and core conceptual knowledge to be developed through the major”;
- “a core course or course sequence that introduces these approaches in a purposeful way”;
- a “provision in mid-level courses for practicing and developing at least some of the intellectual skills and modes of expression introduced in the introductory courses”;
- “culminating projects or studies that foster and demonstrate a reasonable level of sophistication in using the field’s approaches to solve problems”; and
- “involvement throughout the course of study with a community of peers and mentors who provide feedback on each student’s work and alternative ways of addressing comparable issues.”

Each of the disciplinary societies issued its own report to its members with guidelines for reviewing their curriculum and suggestions for improvement in that particular major. These discipline-specific reports reached untold numbers of disciplinary faculty members, far more than AAC even knew about. Eventually, the AAC staff heard from departments that reviewed their major and made changes recommended by their disciplinary society without ever being aware that AAC was involved.

**Combining Quality and Diversity**

After the success of work focused on *either* quality or diversity, AAC saw the value of combining *both* quality and diversity agendas in subsequent projects. Accordingly, another family of projects grew out of AAC’s pioneering work on improving the education of women and raising the quality of the undergraduate curriculum. It was a natural progression, especially as the nation’s undergraduate students were populating the campuses in greater numbers and increasing diversity.

Increasing access to higher education had become a major focus of public policy after World War II, starting with returning veterans supported by the GI Bill. With the expansion of state-supported institutions and growing community college systems, higher education came to serve larger numbers of what K. Patricia Cross called “new students.”34 These came in many varieties: women students, first-generation students whose families had little experience with the realities of college, students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds, and adult students with a variety of family and work responsibilities.

At the same time, faculty were producing new scholarship about the lives of people in cultures outside the academic mainstream, which was dominated by White males. In a trenchant
analysis, Elizabeth Minnich declared that without including perspectives of various cultural groups, one is left with “partial knowledge” about literature, history, and philosophy (for example). Member institutions were creating new programs of study in women’s studies, African American studies, Hispanic studies, Asian studies, and global studies. American higher education was becoming more and more aware of the multiplicity of cultures and the need to give legitimacy to new research and publication about different peoples. AAC leaders recognized that the faculty at member institutions—largely made up of White males—needed greater knowledge about diversity and more sophistication in teaching their subjects to diverse students throughout the academy. And clearly, more diverse faculty needed to be added to the teaching staffs.

AAC answered the call to better educate a more diverse student body with another grant-funded project, Engaging Cultural Legacies. Contemplating the general education “reform movement” that had been sweeping the country, Carol Geary Schneider observed how cultural multiplicity and complexity had emerged as organizing themes in many newly revised core curricula. Started in 1990, the initial project evolved to support fifty-four “planning institutions” that would work with eleven “resource institutions” (which already had effective programs) to plan and implement new core courses on various aspects of multiculturalism. This grant launched a decade of work on various aspects of diversity in the curriculum.

After Caryn McTighe Musil joined the AAC staff in 1991 to complete three publications on women’s studies, she began working closely with Schneider to guide AAC’s agenda on diversity and liberal learning. In a ten-year initiative (started in 1993) titled American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning, AAC launched a series of projects that fostered new conceptual frameworks, institutional change designs, curriculum and faculty development initiatives, campus/community partnerships exploring legacies of race, and a massive public communication project culminating in the launch of AAC&U’s quarterly Diversity Digest (which eventually became Diversity & Democracy). The Curriculum and Faculty Development project, which involved 120 campuses over three years, was the largest project of the initiative. The campus teams were composed primarily of faculty members who attended six- to ten-day summer seminars to study new scholarship on diversity and democracy, explore effective pedagogies, and think strategically about how to embed the learning in the curriculum, primarily in general education. All of the initiative’s projects involved multiple institutions with teams of faculty and institutional leaders that examined current curricular offerings, studied the new scholarship through faculty development activities, infused the study of other peoples and cultures into the curriculum, and created more equitable and inclusive institutional policies and procedures.

The irony of two White women, Schneider and Musil, leading a charge for diversity and multicultural education was not lost on them. Accordingly, their first act was to create a national advisory board to oversee the project, with people of color making up a majority of the board. The board published three monographs in 1995 that set the conceptual frameworks for all the other
projects in American Commitments. In this respect, these projects signaled the transformational possibilities that most campuses aspired to, even as they continued to have a predominantly White male faculty. As more people of color became involved in AAC projects, many attended the annual meeting and expressed surprise that an association committed to diversity had so few minorities in attendance—noticeably fewer than in the association’s own diversity projects.

Many campuses attempted to recruit more minority faculty so that the teaching staff would look more like their student bodies. But over and over I heard campus leaders say, “We cannot find qualified candidates in our faculty searches.” In reality, such campus searches were not done with the sensitivity and sophistication needed to attract minority candidates. This is why AAC commissioned Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner to write *Diversifying the Faculty: A Guidebook for Search Committees* in 2002. This volume was designed to help prepare members of faculty search committees to both attract applicants from minority groups and convert them into hires—and hopefully into long-term, successful professors.

These projects combining diversity and quality developed a newsletter, *Diversity Digest*, that was housed at AAC and used to communicate information about educating for diversity to a growing audience of interested individuals, largely faculty members and academic administrators. *Diversity Digest* included new research reports, innovative campus programs, and public policy issues. This publication transformed into a quarterly journal published in print and on the AAC&U website, which eventually led to the quarterly *Diversity & Democracy*.

This work also brought a more diverse group of leaders onto the AAC senior staff, enriching the dialogues and activities of the association. Joann Stevens was AAC’s first African American vice president, heading the communications office. Alma Clayton-Pedersen joined the association as the first African American senior staff member in a project or program office. Having directed a “bridge program” at Vanderbilt University designed to help minority students succeed, she knew the importance of student affairs staff in aiding the successful transition of students of color. One of her contributions to AAC was to bring student affairs professionals into dialogue with the faculty and academic affairs offices so that academic programs could reach beyond the curriculum to include purposeful cocurricular elements. Gwendolyn Dungy also brought expertise in student affairs and helped broaden many projects to include actions to improve student engagement outside of class that contributed to the achievement of desired student learning outcomes. Dungy was elected president of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and brought that group into the orbit of AAC.

Through American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning, more—and more diverse—faculty continued to become involved in the work of AAC. The most widespread report on this project, *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*, was drafted by Andrea Leskes and members of a distinguished national panel chaired by Judith Ramaley. The report featured several analyses on
• the changing conditions in the country that were making college education more important as a path to successful careers and knowledgeable citizenship;
• the kinds of learning that students need in order to succeed;
• the barriers in colleges and universities that impede learning and strategies to overcome those barriers;
• a set of good practices in providing a high-quality education; and
• a plea for academics, including the faculty as a whole, to accept their share of the responsibility for implementing the new vision.

This project solidified prior work by combining both diversity and quality as priorities. It advocated for greater access for students that had been underrepresented on America’s campuses and practices that were more welcoming of them. American Commitments also articulated a quality agenda that could be realized through broad general education and a coherent and engaging major. Diversity had become a new reality, and Americans were groping for new ways to think and talk about both the country’s emotionally laden history of slavery and racial prejudice as well as its growing population of immigrants from Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Colleges were actively recruiting “new students” and adopting new programs of multiculturalism, although not without controversy or some resentment for special treatment.

Eventually, AAC&U staff—with approval of the board of directors—revised the association’s mission statement in 2012 to affirm its focus on “making liberal education and inclusive excellence the foundation for institutional purpose and educational practice in higher education.” This helped to advance the discussion beyond earlier arguments within higher education that attention to diversity and inclusion within mission statements could dumb down the rigor of “serious” education. AAC’s work, through many projects over many years, reversed the argument by proclaiming that diverse views and experiences enriched education for all.

American Commitments ushered in other key foci of AAC work: civic engagement and social justice. By connecting diversity to the basic principles of democracy, it raised issues related to equity and justice in the United States as well as around the world. Once injustices and social needs were identified, campuses could encourage students to become more engaged in their local communities, allowing them to better understand abstract academic issues and to use their learning to help solve real-world problems. This emphasis has given rise to service learning, community-based learning, internships, civic education, and similar opportunities to connect learning to the solution of practical problems. Of course, these learning experiences for students required that faculty members reach beyond the familiar classroom, connect with local leaders of
organizations that were willing to work with students, and share the responsibility for student learning with others off campus.

Global Learning

Global learning is another arena that was a natural extension of AAC’s prior work with diversity and quality that involved other groups of faculty with international interests. Joseph Johnston Jr. and his colleague Jane Spalding originally pioneered this initiative with two types of projects. The first type concerned institutions that had established exemplary programs to give students worldwide perspectives and first-hand knowledge of other cultures. In *Beyond Borders: Profiles in International Education*, Johnston and Richard J. Edelstein provided a strong educational rationale for students to become more knowledgeable and experienced with other countries and cultures. It included fifteen profiles of institutions that had successfully begun to meet this challenge, including lessons learned about the implementation of their programs.

The second type of AAC project included international delegations of campus presidents and academic leaders as they learned about international universities with which they might establish cooperative academic programs. The programs included possible research collaborations, faculty exchanges, and student exchanges. A noteworthy early travel program was to the former Soviet Union shortly after it broke up in December 1991, becoming one of the first international conferences with former Soviet states that was not organized through Moscow. Reports of the difficulty of partnering with educational leaders with little experience in collaborating were both enlightening and humorous. Johnston reported how their partners agreed to lead sessions designed to be dialogues among equals, but leaders ended up making long-winded speeches (a trait not limited to academics in that region). And the international partners wanted to issue a concluding statement before it had been devised by the group, having learned well the lessons about how to succeed in an authoritarian culture.

One of the important byproducts of this global initiative was its role in changing the name of the association from AAC to AAC&U. During a strategic planning process under President Paula Brownlee, Johnston argued that the name Association of American Colleges had neither currency nor respect abroad where postsecondary institutions were called “universities.” Further, many member institutions had been elevating their own names from college to university. If AAC were to continue to work with international institutions—and keep up with the realities of its own members—it needed to change its name by adding “and Universities” to AAC. The board accepted the proposal, and AAC officially changed its name to AAC&U in 1995.

The global portfolio of projects was added to Musil’s responsibilities in 2001, when she began—with help from her colleague Kevin Hovland—a number of initiatives under the Shared Futures: Global Learning and Social Responsibility project. Deeply influenced by previous work on US diversity and democracy, Hovland and Musil designed a new project on Liberal Education and
Global Citizenship. Globalization had been reshaping identity, economics, culture, and politics for some time, but higher education defined global learning almost exclusively in terms of study abroad and learning a language. Trying to argue that students could develop a global consciousness and sense of responsibility to the world without leaving the country, Musil first directed a project that involved twenty teams of faculty who sought to infuse global issues into the majors at their institutions. Although significant progress was made in most places, it became apparent that students generally did not know enough about global issues to infuse them into advanced courses in the sophisticated ways faculty members had hoped. The second project, therefore, involved sixteen teams seeking to infuse global perspectives into general education courses where prior knowledge was not assumed. While the project was much more successful at this level, an obvious omission was faculty in the sciences, who tended to think that science was already international by definition and therefore didn’t participate in proportion to their numbers. To remedy this situation, another project, supported by the US Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, offered incentives to add science faculty to those same teams to produce more comprehensive campus global programs. In addition to several publications on assessing global learning in individuals, courses, and departments, Musil directed another project in 2012–13 that added global learning as the sixteenth rubric in AAC&U’s VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) project.

Preparing Future Faculty
Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) was another family of projects spanning the decade from 1993 to 2003 that sought to improve the preparation of doctoral students desiring to become college professors. This initiative addressed the mismatch between graduate studies focused on developing the capacity to conduct original research in a specialty and the expectations of newly hired faculty to primarily teach undergraduate students with varying levels of knowledge and interest. Robert Schwartz and his colleague Ellen Wert, both at the Pew Charitable Trusts, initiated the project when they requested a meeting with AAC&U President Paula P. Brownlee along with me, Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) President Jules LaPidus, and one of LaPidus’s colleagues. They proposed a three-way partnership among AAC, CGS, and Pew to foster innovations in the graduate preparation of future faculty members to improve undergraduate education. They suggested the creation of clusters of institutions that brought the “producers” of PhDs (graduate research universities represented by CGS) together with the “consumers” (the several diverse types of undergraduate institutions, represented by AAC, that hire new PhDs) to discuss what was needed in new faculty. All of us expected that the answer would be more than specialized knowledge of an academic specialty and the capacity to conduct original research. We thought that a diversity of hiring institutions would want new faculty to have a track record of effectively teaching their subject matter, embrace the missions of their institutions, understand the needs of students at their types
of institutions, and be prepared to make a contribution to the educational program from the day they start working.

As Schwartz and Wert expressed interest in reforming the culture of graduate preparation, they said that Pew could offer the prospect of a three-year grant of up to $2 million. They also offered the possibility of additional grants to follow. That was serious money that, combined with the prospect of more to come, could cement the collaboration. When LaPidus said that CGS was not equipped to manage such a large grant, Brownlee volunteered that AAC was experienced with sizable grants and would be willing to serve as the fiscal agent.

The proposal built on the previous work of AAC projects, including one involving the University of Chicago and Knox College and a similar project at Syracuse University. Originally, the grant called for five awards of $200,000 to each of five clusters of diverse institutions to develop academic programs that would provide aspiring academics with exposure to faculty life at (for example) a liberal arts college, a regional state university, and a community college. We issued a request for proposals in spring 1994 hoping that we would receive five good proposals. We were delighted to receive dozens of proposals from doctorate-producing universities with more than a hundred diverse partner institutions. Wert and I immediately redesigned the plan to award grants of $170,000 to five clusters and grants of $10,000 to twelve other clusters that would allow them to participate in the conversations and meetings of the group. We were surprised to learn that despite the unequal funding, all seventeen clusters led by the doctoral-producing universities came to function as equals. Each developed an innovative program and eagerly invested their own resources to implement it and supplement grant funds as needed.

The basic principles behind the project were quite simple:

1. Doctoral students should learn about the full range of faculty responsibilities—teaching, research, and service.
2. Students should learn about the academic profession through exposure to the broad range of institutions that may become their professional homes.
3. Just as students benefit from a research mentor, so should future faculty have multiple mentors to acquire their teaching and service repertoire.
4. Future faculty should be equipped for the changes taking place in teaching and in classrooms, including active, collaborative, and technological learning.
5. These new experiences should not be an “add-on” but be carefully integrated into existing doctoral programs.

CGS staffed Preparing Future Faculty through its dean-in-residence program, in which a graduate dean spent a year at CGS on leave from his or her home university. Howard Anderson from Michigan State University was the first dean in residence to work on the project, and he
helped me prepare materials for the call for proposals and assisted with the application review process. Anne Pruitt from the Ohio State University succeeded him, and she and I were codirectors of PFF during the remainder of its life.

True to their word, the Pew Charitable Trusts provided a second three-year grant that allowed PFF to both further institutionalize PFF at existing clusters and to recruit new ones. A third and fourth project followed when we determined that although the students and faculty who participated were enthusiastic about their experiences, relatively few graduate faculty had become involved. We decided that we could reach more faculty members by working through their disciplinary societies. With additional grants secured with the help of our Pew colleagues, we coordinated with disciplinary societies, six in the humanities and social sciences and then five in the natural sciences and mathematics. Each society created its own departmental clusters at diverse institutions, and they also supported the PFF programs and featured their work in their conferences and publications. By 2003, when the formal national program ended, more than four thousand PhD students had completed a PFF program. Additionally, the enterprise had stimulated the establishment of similar programs at other institutions.

Multiple evaluations of the PFF programs were extremely positive, including an independent assessment by Sharon Goldsmith and her colleagues. Graduate students reported learning a great deal about the profession, the roles of faculty in diverse institutions, and the complexities of teaching and learning. In one survey, 98 percent of participants reported they would recommend their PFF program to others. They also reported that their expertise helped PFF participants become more successful in the job search and to get off to a good start in their first positions. Graduate faculty reported that their students in these new programs were better equipped to become new faculty members than their peers who were not involved in PFF. Partner faculty enjoyed the opportunity to learn from talented advanced doctoral students and to mentor them about teaching their students and about the values and culture of their institutions. The new programs appeared to be a winner among all constituencies.

However, despite the overwhelming evidence of PFF being a better preparation for the professoriate, and the fact that most PFF programs continued after their external funding ended, PFF had not found a place within mainstream US higher education. But it is gratifying that despite the termination of the national program, many universities have continued their PFF programs, and others have developed their own. AAC&U has continued to feature future faculty at its annual meeting, largely through the K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Awards. Annually, approximately two hundred applications are received for the award, which provides funding for graduate students to attend the AAC&U annual meeting and acquire a larger national perspective about postsecondary education. About seven to ten students have been selected annually for the opportunity to learn about a host of issues facing higher education and to participate in a featured session of their own. As the late L. Lee Knefelkamp, a senior fellow at AAC&U who had read applications since the
program started, pointed out repeatedly, these applications “have PFF footprints all over them.” In short, PFF has brought the resources of AAC&U to the attention of thousands of graduate students and new faculty members, helping to cement its influence with a new generation of faculty members.

**Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP)**

Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) was one of AAC&U’s most comprehensive initiatives. It was a long-term public advocacy and campus action initiative designed to promote a twenty-first-century liberal education that provides valuable benefits for both students and society. LEAP built on many previous projects, utilized nearly all of AAC&U’s expertise, pulled together everything that the association had learned about improving undergraduate education, and addressed several target audiences (including campus leaders, teaching faculty, state systems, and national policymakers). Seemingly a “capstone project” for the association, it was designed to bring all the resources of AAC&U together. Because of the broad scope and length of this initiative, it was conceived and directed out of the president’s office under Carol Geary Schneider. Launched in 2005, LEAP

- identified “essential learning outcomes” for students;
- summarized a set of “principles of excellence” that include both high standards and flexible guidance for an era of reform and renewal;
- publicized “high-impact practices” shown by educational research to be more powerful means for students to learn essential outcomes than traditional classroom lectures;
- emphasized “authentic” assessments that evaluate whether students can apply their learning to “complex problems and real-world challenges”; and
- promoted “inclusive excellence” to ensure that all students receive the benefits of an engaged liberal education—whatever their major field of study.

AAC&U has refined its list of “essential learning outcomes” and publicized them widely. They now serve as a useful template for many institutions, often with minor modifications:

- *Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world*, including the sciences, mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts.
- *Intellectual and practical skills*, including inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative and information literacy, teamwork, and problem solving.
- *Personal and social responsibility*, including civic knowledge and engagement, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning, and skills for lifelong learning.
• Integrative and applied learning, including synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized study.

Carol Geary Schneider’s new book Making Liberal Education Inclusive: The Roots and Reach of the LEAP Framework for College Learning looks at the intellectual history of these essential learning outcomes from 1982 to 2006 and explains previous iterations of this list.38 Perhaps the most important thing to note is that these desired outcomes were derived from the work of countless campus leadership groups primarily composed of faculty members. The outcomes were not devised by Schneider nor others on the association staff.

Once a set of desired learning outcomes was determined, two important consequences followed. First, educational research could be conducted to learn what kind of educational practices are most likely to produce these results. George Kuh and colleagues at Indiana University Bloomington, who were managing the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), partnered with AAC&U to identify what they called “high-impact practices” because those practices were associated with several measures of student success. High-impact practices include first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning or community-based learning, internships, capstone courses or projects, and ePortfolios.43 Many of these practices involve active approaches to teaching and learning or emphasize learning beyond the classroom. They also require teachers to develop new pedagogical approaches and often to work collaboratively with others. The payoff for these practices is significant, as they have been linked not only to AAC&U’s essential learning outcomes but also to greater persistence and higher rates of graduation.44

LEAP operated on several levels. It had a Campus Action Network that included hundreds of diverse colleges and universities. Susan Albertine, a vice president with AAC&U, worked with ten state systems and other groups of institutions to encourage support for campus initiatives. LEAP offered summer institutes for campus teams consisting mostly of faculty to develop plans and strategies to improve their educational programs. AAC&U commissioned research on employers, which included several surveys that show the importance of the essential learning outcomes on students’ future work and careers. It also included a significant public advocacy component, including a Presidents’ Trust with scores of campus executives signing on to publicly support this initiative and engage the public in support of a contemporary liberal education for all students.

Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE)
A consequence of identifying a set of valued learning goals is that they could be assessed to determine the extent to which students were actually learning what faculty expected. For decades, colleges and universities have faced pressure for accountability amid public skepticism about
whether students are learning what they need for the contemporary world. The academy has responded to these concerns by moving to assess student learning, an effort driven originally by accrediting associations and the federal government. Accrediting organizations, as a condition for their approval by the federal government, were required to include provisions for the assessment of student learning. Accordingly, individual institutions established assessment programs that allow them to comply with this mandate.

Many campus assessment programs, although gathering data to meet the requirements for accreditation, did not generate information about learning that was useful to faculty members or students. It was often done by an office of institutional research that was removed from the curriculum and teaching. Standardized tests were often used that did not (1) reflect the intentions of the particular curriculum or the faculty, (2) employ pre- and post-activity measures that would allow educators to identify changes in a student’s learning, or (3) give feedback connected to action steps that might improve teaching and learning or the operation of educational programs. In short, faculty had come to believe, quite rightly, that assessment was something done to them by an external force rather than something done for them to help them improve their performance and that of their students.

To correct these problems and develop more useful assessments, AAC&U turned to Terrel Rhodes, a long-term faculty member from Portland State University experienced with educational innovation. As an AAC&U vice president, he developed and led AAC&U’s Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) project from its inception in 2007 until his retirement in 2021. The goal of VALUE was to develop authentic assessments of several of the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes and to do it in a way that focused on student learning and its improvement. This meant that the work was done by faculty for faculty.

The first step was to recruit teams of faculty members from a variety of institutions to develop and test rubrics—templates that were transparent enough that groups of faculty from different disciplines could agree on the extent to which students achieved various outcomes such as critical thinking or the integration of knowledge. Although the first project design called for ten campuses to assemble teams of faculty to devise the rubrics, the project was oversubscribed from the start. Eventually, more than one hundred institutions arranged for faculty teams to test the rubrics with colleagues and students. The rubrics allowed faculty members to determine how well their students were progressing in the learning of several essential learning goals. They also were helpful for students, who were better able to understand what they were expected to learn—and thus could direct their efforts toward desired outcomes. Since the rubrics were released in 2009, they have been downloaded hundreds of thousands of times across the country as well as abroad. In the United States, the VALUE rubrics were downloaded more than 427,000 times from 2014 to 2019 by people from at least 2,258 higher education institutions or organizations.45
One of the benefits of the rubrics is that they are a valuable way to start a conversation among faculty members about what is most important for students to learn. Often this leads to useful dialogues about different ways to deal with common problems for teachers, such as how to draw out quiet students, control those who tend to dominate discussions, open minds of those who seem closed, and make valuable assignments for students to do outside of class. Proponents of assessment had always sought innovative approaches to engage faculty in discussions about improving student learning, and these rubrics were a congenial and effective way for that to happen.

Another benefit of the rubrics is their potential to assess student learning over time, across campus programs, and even across institutions. Today's student body is more mobile than previous ones, often taking courses at multiple institutions and transferring credits among them. By focusing on what students learn rather than where they learn, these rubrics are useful in assessing learning for the growing number of students who accumulate credits at more than one institution.

This focus on student learning, wherever it occurs, led naturally to the concept of electronic portfolios. That is, once faculty and students were able to identify and assess student learning, wherever it may occur, it raised the question about how to summarize that learning and to present it to others in useful formats. Rhodes summarizes the benefits of ePortfolios, as they came to be known, as a means for students to reflect systematically on their own learning; for faculty to represent and evaluate multimodal ways for students to demonstrate their learning through text, performance, and visual or audio media; and for institutions and programs to assess, document, and share student learning through the curriculum and co-curriculum.46

The advance of technology lowers costs and increases flexibility for using ePortfolios, which contributed to their greater use. They have become a useful mechanism for assessing student learning and communicating it to various constituencies. Faculty can document the extent of student learning, campus leaders can improve their programs, academics can counter charges that students are not learning, and institutions can identify where better outcomes are needed.

**Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL)**

The term “liberal education” was popularized by John Henry Cardinal Newman, a British cleric, and it has always emphasized literature, history, and philosophy to the neglect of science, thereby making it more appealing to humanists than to scientists. So it was at AAC, which attracted a disproportionate number of humanists and social scientists and fewer natural scientists and mathematicians to serve as board members, staff, authors of publications, or participants in project activities.
To help remedy this situation, AAC&U in 2010 merged with Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL), a premier, long-standing organization focused on the improvement of teaching and learning in the STEM disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Founded in 1989 and directed by Jeanne Narum until it was permanently housed at AAC&U, PKAL operated primarily as a grassroots alliance run by scientists for scientists. At AAC&U, Narum was succeeded by Dr. Susan Elrod, who led PKAL in its commitment to redressing the near-total reliance on traditional methods of instruction in undergraduate science education—lecturing, reading texts, and memorization for examinations—which can be self-defeating. As such, PKAL sought to empower STEM faculty to develop more effective evidence-based practices in teaching and learning, which generally favor more active engagement and inquiry. This goal is in the nation’s interest, as various national policy organizations have asserted that the United States needs to significantly increase the number of STEM baccalaureates in order to remain globally competitive in science and technology.

Since 2012, PKAL has been led by Dr. Kelly Mack. Through her efforts, PKAL has maintained focus on its long-term goal of empowering STEM faculty to actively and critically reform undergraduate STEM education through professional development and through a culturally responsive lens. Through the PKAL STEM Leadership Institute, for example, PKAL now focuses on building the capacity of STEM faculty to lead change in their departments and institutions, address systems of power and privilege within higher education, develop and sustain cross-disciplinary collaborations, and steer institutional transformation. A recent report to the AAC&U board in 2019 vowed to incorporate guiding principles of AAC&U’s strategic plan—democracy, equity, and innovation—into STEM higher education.

PKAL has now become well integrated into the AAC&U programmatic framework. It has expanded its regional networks, and its current structure of networks currently serves seven geographical regions, including Puerto Rico. Collectively, PKAL annually convenes hundreds of STEM faculty and administrators to share cutting-edge, culturally responsive practices in undergraduate STEM teaching and research. PKAL has also planned and operated an annual conference attended by about six hundred STEM faculty and administrators, conducted annual STEM Leadership Institutes with increasing numbers and diversity of attendees, published seminal articles related to STEM reform in AAC&U’s major journals, organized STEM-focused sessions at AAC&U’s annual meeting, and assumed responsibility for the robust STEM Central website with an expanded cadre of users. Over the years, PKAL launched several new and important projects within the higher education STEM community on achieving gender equity and teaching to increase diversity and equity; identified successful leadership styles in Historically Black Colleges and Universities to increase the participation of historically marginalized groups in STEM; and encouraged critical inquiry-based reform methods to foster collaborations among faculty to enhance learning.

PKAL has also collaborated with a number of related initiatives such as the Coalition for the Reform of Undergraduate STEM Education, Partnership for Undergraduate Life Sciences Education,
and the Disciplinary Society and Education Association Project. More recently, collaborators include the Center for the Advancement of STEM Leadership and the Center for Culturally Relevant Evaluation and Assessment. In all these ways, PKAL has brought large numbers of new groups of faculty members in STEM disciplines into the orbit of AAC&U for mutual enrichment and influence.

**Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Campus Centers**

AAC&U’s Office for Diversity, Equity, and Student Success, led by Vice President Tia Brown McNair, launched the Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) Campus Centers project in 2017 by selecting ten colleges and universities around the country to help “to prepare the next generation of strategic leaders and thinkers to break down racial hierarchies and dismantle the belief in the hierarchy of human value.” As of 2021, twenty-nine institutions have been selected to host TRHT Campus Centers. Led by faculty and staff members at the home institution, each center is implementing its own set of ambitious initiatives meant to build community and to change narratives both on their campuses and in their local communities.

A foundational element of the TRHT framework is the racial healing circle, in which “racial healing practitioners encourage (but do not force) participants to share stories in pairs, using tailored prompts and questions that elicit stories of empowerment and agency,” writes Gail C. Christopher, architect of the TRHT framework. Developed by Christopher and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, TRHT is a national, community-based process that includes five central components: narrative change, racial healing and relationship building, separation, law, and economy.

The TRHT Campus Centers have goals to develop and implement a visionary plan; create a positive narrative about race in the community; promote racial healing activities on campus and in the community; erase structural barriers to equal treatment and opportunity within the economic, legal, educational, and residential components of the community; identify and examine current realities of race relations in their community and the local history that has led to these realities; envision what their community will look, feel, and be like when the belief in a racial hierarchy has been jettisoned; and pinpoint key leverage points for change, including key stakeholders and others who must be engaged.

With initial funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and additional funding from Newman’s Own Foundation and Papa John’s Foundation, AAC&U hopes to facilitate the creation of 150 centers in the coming years.

This initiative, like many other AAC&U projects, is timely as racial justice, structural racism, and police reform became national issues in 2020. Addressing these topics effectively requires difficult and respectful conversations about emotionally charged views and experiences with race—precisely the kind of dialogue that may be facilitated by racial healing circles.
Summer Institutes for Teams of Faculty

AAC&U’s numerous grant-funded projects have generated a wide range of information and useful resources that can serve as valuable assistance to faculty members as they consider how to improve their own teaching with diverse students. The resources can also give guidance for any chair or faculty leader who seeks to improve their own department, a wide range of educational programs, or even their institution as a whole. However, as valuable as the projects have been for faculty at participating institutions, they were not always sufficient to change institutional practices. Seldom can a single individual, regardless of position, bring about institutional change. That typically requires leadership of a group.

By the early 1990s, several members of the AAC board and staff had attended long workshops conducted by the Danforth Foundation and Lilly Endowment in which faculty teams worked collaboratively for a week or more to develop plans to improve the quality of education on their own campuses. They urged AAC to develop similar intensive, weeklong, residential institutes for teams composed largely of faculty members to develop plans for improving important parts of their educational programs.

Joseph Johnston planned and conducted the first AAC Institute on General Education in partnership with the University of North Carolina at Asheville in 1991. Locating the institute on a campus signaled the academic importance of the enterprise while also keeping the expenses down when compared to a hotel. Billed as the Asheville Institute on General Education, Johnston and his colleagues recruited an impressive staff of national experts, of which I was fortunate to be included, and invited institutions to apply to participate. The teams consisted primarily of five members, including faculty members with influence regarding general education and an academic administrator expected to support the work of the team. To ensure institutional support, the first institute required that the institution’s president and a member of the board of trustees attend for the first day and a half. Twenty diverse institutions were accepted, and Johnston decided to videotape the major speeches and panel discussions so that they could be distributed to institutions beyond the few in attendance. He secured a grant and a partnership with North Carolina Public Television to create a one-hour video. Everything seemed set to launch the institute.

In general, the institute was very successful. A variety of institutions applied and paid the stipend, including room and board for the teams. The teams found that spending several days with a single focus was much more conducive to developing agreement on a plan for improving general education than the usual meeting on campus for an hour or two each week. Also, they reported that they greatly benefitted from consultations with the institute’s staff and conversations with members of other teams. Faculty members reported that the institute helped them to learn more about the issues, bond with their colleagues, and acquire more effective strategies to hold
dialogues with their colleagues back on their campus. Despite doing a great deal of work, virtually all reported enjoying their week and gaining both personal and professional renewal. At the conclusion of the institute, the teams all gathered to share reports on their proposals for change.

But this initial effort was not without problems, the first one being logistics. While planners assumed that the team members would sleep in campus dorms, they decided it would be inappropriate to house presidents and board members there, so these individuals were accommodated at the luxurious Grove Park Inn nearby. The first day, teams were bused to the Grove Park for a “happy hour,” where the faculty were able to see the grand furnishings lavished on their leaders compared to their own spartan dorm rooms. The next morning, when buses brought their presidents and board members to the campus for institute sessions, there was grousing and even outright complaints among the faculty members. The displeasure of the faculty was amplified when they were given instructions to hold their questions so they would not interrupt the videotaping of the plenary speakers. The institute staff quickly learned that the presidents and board members were a distraction to the work of the teams and determined that in the future, presidents must be treated either as equal parts of the team or not be present at all. Eventually, they also learned that the attraction of preserving the essence of speakers on tape was illusive, as there was little demand for the videotapes.

Other lessons were learned after the teams returned home and presented their carefully prepared, substantive proposals for curricular change to their colleagues. Rather than embracing the proposals, their colleagues did what faculty always do: they asked critical questions and rejected many of the proposals because they had not had an opportunity to participate in formulating them. Rather than earning the appreciation of their colleagues for their efforts, the teams were criticized for having gone to the mountaintop to develop a plan to impose on the faculty. The faculty on campus demanded to be involved in making any plans for curricular change, especially if the plans affected them or their department. This experience led planners of future institutes to emphasize the importance of academic politics in devising the plans, and they included strategies for securing faculty approval for proposals in the institute curriculum. Further, teams were urged not to develop firm substantive plans for the faculty to approve. Rather, they were asked to develop action plans that would involve faculty in campus forums to voice their views, provide for possible changes to the content of their proposals, and plan for a longer process than many had originally expected.

The Asheville Institute was repeated annually through 2003, when it was renamed the AAC&U Institute on General Education and held on different campuses. In 2009, a second focus on assessment was added to the title after Terrel Rhodes, director of AAC&U’s VALUE initiative, assumed responsibility for the institute. The Institute on General Education and Assessment, the longest-running institute at AAC&U, held its twenty-ninth session in 2019. Because of strong
demand, this institute continued to increase the number of institutions that could participate. As expected, the institute participants were predominantly faculty members.

The growth of this institute provided a model for institutes on other topics, with a reasonable expectation that institutions would send teams of largely faculty members to work on other parts of the academic program. A second topical institute was launched when the AAC&U staff decided that academic departments were critical organizational units that could either resist institution-wide educational changes or facilitate them. In order to focus on the importance of departmental faculty and to enlist their support for educational reforms, an Institute on Engaging Departments was developed. From the start, this institute struggled with poor participation, partly because campus leaders had started to view the institute as a way to solve difficult campus problems within or between departments. Departments were reluctant to admit that they had any problems, and administrators saw little value in singling out a specific department to be “fixed.” Also, funding for supporting teams typically came from a limited pot of institutional funds, and administrators found it difficult to justify expenditures for one or two departments when there would not be similar support for others.

These difficulties were overcome when AAC&U launched a project on integrative learning, which evolved to become the Institute on Integrative Learning and Departments, which brought together topics such as engaged learning, learning communities, and civic engagement that were inherently interdepartmental.

Another popular institute, the Institute on Greater Expectations, drew from a project with that name and focused on student learning by fostering collaborations between student affairs professionals and faculty. After George Kuh and his research team published data revealing that certain curricular practices had greater impact on student learning than others,49 this institute was essentially rebranded to become the Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success. In 2018, the Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success served 228 participants.

These institutes have become a major resource for faculty members as they carry out their expanded responsibilities for academic programs. They also are a major source of funding for AAC&U (see the section on finances on page 52). But because of the amount of time demanded of the AAC&U staff, the number of institutes has been limited to a small number.
When I returned to AAC in 1991 to direct the project on Strong Foundations for General Education after several years in campus administration, AAC was operating a panoply of impressive national projects that involved faculty members, a new summer institute on general education, and, of course, the annual meeting. But the reality was that there were no programs available for individual academics to come together between annual meetings. The projects had meetings, but they were not open to nonparticipants; the summer institute could accommodate only teams at a few institutions; and relatively few faculty members attended the annual meeting.

Carol Geary Schneider, who was executive vice president at the time, and I discussed ways to involve more people from institutions—especially faculty members—throughout the year. We were concerned that the overall AAC program focused heavily on national projects that typically enjoyed no more than three years of grant support, and when the funding ended, so too did the program and its visibility at AAC. Ironically, the end of a project was precisely the time when many campus leaders knew the most about the project’s topic and when project participants had learned to become articulate advocates for how to secure faculty approval and institutional support for their innovations. In short, many individuals were capable of serving as consultants to other institutions. To bring these resources together, make them available to other academics, and provide a new income stream to AAC, we developed a plan for short “state of the field” conferences on various educational topics.

When I asked several academic administrators what they would like to see in a new series of “short courses,” the most common response was that they wanted opportunities for their faculty to participate in the national conversation about academic reform and renewal. And yes, they said they would support travel and fees for their faculty to attend such meetings. Armed with this information, Schneider and I asked President Brownlee to support the creation of a series of open-to-all working conferences. Brownlee agreed to try them for a while if my assistant and I would provide virtually all the needed resources. Ralph Lundgren, our program officer at the Lilly Endowment, agreed that I could spend a modest amount of my time for this purpose.

In 1993, the first Network for Academic Renewal (NAR) conferences were offered and drew small groups of participants. The first conference was on general education and was held at California State University–San Jose. It attracted only a few dozen paying participants. Other early conferences were on academic leadership, new approaches to teaching and learning, and strengthening academic majors, each of which attracted no more than fifty individuals. It was not a very auspicious beginning, but it was a start, and we would learn and grow as we went.

Originally, I thought of these meetings as regional working conferences in which institutions within driving distance could afford to send individuals or groups of faculty members to learn from
a small staff of academic leaders. But it soon became apparent that, although these conferences were offered at locations around the country, individuals were willing to travel long distances if the issue was important to them or their institutions. For example, I recall that a leader from the University of Puerto Rico–Rio Piedras traveled to Rochester, New York, in the depth of winter to attend a conference on the academic major because the topic was relevant to her university.

At first, these conferences were planned and operated by me and Audrey Jones, my assistant, with little support from other parts of AAC. These conferences were regarded as a gamble, though a low-risk one, because so little had been invested. We were not at all sure that if we built it, they would come. This changed in 1998 when we offered a conference on the topic of Diversity and Learning that was planned and operated by Caryn McTighe Musil’s office, which had been developing the association’s diversity agenda through several national projects. With more resources from grants, a larger staff experienced with the topic, and a large national network to market the event, this conference attracted several hundred participants, a quantum leap above any of the previous meetings, and it caught the attention of AAC&U leadership. This conference demonstrated the ability of the network to be self-supporting—if it offered sufficiently attractive programs. Larger conferences called for larger investments of both staff and money from the association, but, of course, a larger fee income could justify the greater investments. Eventually, conference planners added a local planning group and issued an open call for proposals, both of which broadened the appeal of these conferences and helped to build attendance, especially among faculty members.

The network conferences soon became a staple of AAC&U’s offerings, with several staff members involved in planning, marketing, registering, and supporting attendees. The network eventually developed a great deal of organizational support, sometimes from more than fifteen staff members across several AAC&U offices. Indeed, the demand for these conferences has been so great that the number each year was limited to four to make them manageable for the staff.

Over the next two decades, these conferences proved to be winners for AAC&U, its members, and the academy in general. The best evidence for the value of the conferences is the attendance. In 2018, the attendance of General Education and Assessment was 727; Diversity, Learning, and Student Success was 761; Global Engagement and Spaces of Practice was 440; and Transforming STEM Higher Education was 848. The total for the year was 2,776, more than the annual meeting, which itself had grown substantially. Of course, this was a major contribution to the AAC&U budget, a source that was entirely absent before the 1990s.

Furthermore, network conferences drew large numbers of faculty members as planners, session leaders, and participants, just as was intended. And whereas the annual meeting typically had drawn a minority of participants from the faculty, attendees at the network conferences were predominantly faculty members. The network and the institutes combined to dramatically increase the number of faculty members actively engaged in the work of AAC&U.
Communications

Just as the nature of AAC&U has changed to reflect a greater importance of faculty in the life of the association, so also has its various communications vehicles changed. These changes reflect, in part, the changes in technology in the communications industry as a whole. Print has been supplemented in virtually all organizations with email, websites, webinars, blogs, social media, and more. The changes at AAC&U also reflect the expansion of the audiences it has sought to reach—including faculty—as well as changing priorities and accomplishments.

One way to glimpse the changes in the role and character of communications at AAC&U is in the changing titles of the individuals in charge of this function. When I arrived at AAC in 1975, Eric Wormald, an erudite Englishman, was the association’s only vice president, and he edited Liberal Education as one part of his job. Following his retirement in 1977, he was succeeded by individuals with the title of director who were charged with functions variably described as publications, communications, institutional relations, and public information. The title was eventually elevated again to vice president, and when Debra Humphreys left in 2016, her title was senior vice president for academic policy and public engagement. She presided over a full-time staff of ten who were responsible for an array of print and electronic communications. The audience had expanded from administrators and faculty members on member campuses to include various other academic organizations, businesses hiring recent graduates, public policymakers, and the general public, among others. David Tritelli became the next vice president for communications and public affairs in 2019.

Liberal Education

Until recently, the association published three quarterly journals. In fall 2020, AAC&U relaunched its journal Liberal Education as a magazine that also incorporates the themes of AAC&U’s now-retired journals, Diversity & Democracy and Peer Review. Liberal Education is the oldest continuous publication of the association. A quarterly flagship publication originally called the Bulletin, early volumes contained a record of the annual meeting and the business of the association, including reports to the board and board decisions. It also contained speeches by presidents of member campuses that were rich with flowery rhetoric but weak in specific actions, strategic plans, or practical steps to implement their ideas. In 1959, its name was changed to Liberal Education, reflecting the association’s core mission, although little else was altered. It continued as a small publication, alternately gray, brown, or beige. Called a “journal,” it was sized similarly to other academic journals at the time. When Eric Wormald edited Liberal Education, he was determined that that the content be accurate and grammatically correct. But it was dull, dry, abstract, and unconnected to action agendas that might improve education. It might have been Exhibit A in the
case made by critics of liberal education in that it was old-fashioned, beholden to the past, and not very useful. When the journal was increased to magazine size in 1987, it did little to alter its substance and address the criticisms.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, professional communications in the fast-growing field of higher education were revolutionized by three national events: the creation of the Chronicle of Higher Education as a weekly newspaper; Allen Jossey-Bass’s founding of a publishing company bearing his name to publish scholarly and research books in the higher education field; and the establishment of Change Magazine as a magazine of ideas about higher education. These new national communication vehicles made Liberal Education seem even more out of date, irrelevant, and, frankly, embarrassing.

As late as the mid-1980s and early ’90s, Carol Geary Schneider and I lamented the poverty of this journal and kept prodding those responsible to include more interesting, forward-looking, action-oriented, or simply useful articles. This was a period of vigorous debate about tradition and change in higher education—new students, new campuses, educational innovations, new research—but one would not know it by reading the journal.

I remember that Joann Stevens, a relatively new vice president at AAC in charge of communications, was excited about securing approval for a few changes within Liberal Education. As part of the strategic planning process, she developed a new logo, and the cover included the logo as well as a broad stripe—both bright red! I recall that Stevens was almost ecstatic with the new logo and color on the cover because both were controversial and visible changes. Unfortunately, not much was changed inside. Soon thereafter, Bridget Puzon became the editor and added a new section on innovative practice to highlight exemplary campus programs. This new section was called “Praxis,” a stodgy old-fashioned term for program innovations. But a broader array of topics and authors was gradually included, and eventually Liberal Education became the nationally significant magazine of ideas and new practices that it is today.

Liberal Education came to express the voices of a variety of academics and others who are working to enrich liberal learning in undergraduate education. Many of the authors come from the association’s many projects and spoke about the experiences that they have had—mostly positive—in implementing new ideas and initiatives. David Tritelli, who succeeded Puzon as editor of the journal, continued to make Liberal Education into a modern journal. It eventually began to cover a wide range of topics on teaching, learning, curriculum, assessment, leadership, and institutional change. Today, in its new form as a magazine, each issue provides the latest and best thinking about liberal learning and highlights good practices at all types of colleges and universities. Editors-in-chief Christen Aragoni and Emily Schuster, who conducted the redesign and relaunch of the magazine, currently lead the team producing Liberal Education. Like AAC&U’s other two quarterlies were, Liberal Education is aided by a panel of experts on an editorial advisory board who offer advice about topics, content, and possible writers.
Peer Review

Tiring of trying unsuccessfully to jazz up *Liberal Education* to our satisfaction, Schneider and I argued that we should have an alternative publication, a shorter and less expensive one than *Liberal Education*—perhaps a newsletter that was more contemporary, innovative, and action-oriented. Finally, in 1998, *Peer Review* came into being under the editorship of Rafael Heller, a young editor full of ideas and energy. It was exactly what I had hoped for, a quarterly briefing on emerging trends and key debates in undergraduate education. Each issue focused on a specific topic, contained analyses justifying new approaches, and included descriptions of illustrative innovations, examples of how campuses made the changes, and observations about major—and mostly positive—consequences. This was just the kind of publication that would embrace a more exciting AAC&U with its new name, improved *Liberal Education*, and emphasis on innovation and change.

The title was chosen primarily because the peer review process has long been the academy’s means of ensuring high quality in research, teaching, programs, accreditation, and the awarding of grants. With this quarterly, AAC&U not only invokes this standard of quality (even though the journal itself is not peer reviewed) but also embraced a more inclusive definition of a peer. Traditionally, a peer has been someone with the same specialized knowledge in some academic discipline who could evaluate the work of others in the same field. But here the term embraced a larger, interdisciplinary view in which faculty members across different specializations could come together to discuss the nature of a rigorous, innovative education and establish campus-wide programs for undergraduates. *Peer Review* brought together a broad range of contributors and readers to emphasize programs that were inherently interdepartmental, such as writing across the curriculum, interdisciplinary core courses, learning communities, diversity education, and service learning. It aimed to be a meeting ground in which different faculty members and campus leaders could learn from one another’s best efforts.

Shelley Johnson Carey guided this quarterly from 2004 until 2019. Each issue of *Peer Review* focused on a particular theme, allowing a more fulsome discussion of particular types of campus reform than would be appropriate for *Liberal Education*. Topical issues in 2018 included “The LEAP Challenge: Engaging in Capstones and Signature Work”; “Reforming General Education as If It Matters—Because It Does”; “A Decade of VALUE”; and “Global Learning: Crossing Majors, Borders, and Backyards.”

Diversity & Democracy

AAC&U’s third quarterly dates back to AAC’s pioneering work on the Project on the Status and Education of Women and its reporting through *Diversity Digest*. Originally launched in 1996 in partnership with DiversityWeb, and with funding from the Ford Foundation, *Diversity Digest* had
featured AAC&U’s work on diversity for years. AAC&U had always countered misinformation in the
media about how colleges and universities were addressing issues of diversity and equity in higher
ing. Diversity Digest was intended to build the capacity of educators committed to campus
diversity and to tell the story of the educational benefits of diversity and social engagement.
Diversity Digest was rebranded as Diversity & Democracy in 2007, when it also connected with the
work AAC&U was doing on civic engagement and social justice. Kathryn Peltier Campbell served as
its editor until 2017, when she was succeeded by Emily Schuster.

Diversity & Democracy gives life to AAC&U’s Statement on Liberal Learning: “By its nature,
. . . liberal learning is global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that
characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms
is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility, for nothing less will equip us to
understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives.” Diversity & Democracy features opinion, research, and exemplary practices to assist practitioners in creating learning opportunities for all
students to learn the importance of diversity and engage in activities to improve communities.

The expansion of AAC&U’s communications strategy has resulted in more articles authored
and read by faculty. Print copies of Liberal Education are distributed to approximately 8,500
individuals. The recipients include a certain number of representatives (dependent on the size of
the institution and their type of membership) from each member institution; paid subscriptions;
participants at select meetings or conferences; and copies to contributors. These distributions were
buttressed by bulk orders of individual articles, primarily for distribution to large numbers of faculty
members and other staff at single institutions. Liberal Education is posted online, and
approximately 80,000 people receive announcements of the online version by email.

Other Online Resources
Of course, electronic media became an essential element of modern communications. AAC&U’s
website contains a great deal of valuable information about meetings, projects, membership,
publications, staff, and more. An electronic newsletter, AAC&U News, is published monthly, with an
e-mail subscription of more than 50,000. Webinars are offered throughout the year, and AAC&U
became active on social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook. In sum,
communications in the modern AAC&U is a long way from the dull, gray journal that it had been
known for in earlier times.

The communications office is larger, has developed a broader array of communication
venues, and reaches more diverse audiences. Chief among the audiences are faculty members who
are campus leaders, as well as others who need to support faculty in making educational
improvements, including state system officers, campus administrators, philanthropists, government
officials, and the general public.
Informal Activities

As a result of involvement in AAC&U activities, some faculty members, after broadening their own perspectives and learning a great deal about larger institutional and/or national matters, seek opportunities to advance their careers. AAC&U staff have counseled and advised many faculty members about a range of career issues and served as references for their applications for promotions at their own institutions or for new positions elsewhere. Some faculty members have discovered that they have administrative skills and would like to move into positions of academic administration. Indeed, the Academic Search and Consultation Service was created in 1978 by Frederick Ness after his term as president of AAC precisely to help institutions hire the right individuals. While the focus initially was on recruiting and hiring presidents, it subsequently expanded to recruit chief academic officers and deans. Under the leadership of Ness and his colleague, Ronald Stead, this office became perhaps the most respected search firm in the country for presidential and senior academic positions. I recall meeting with many faculty members and deans who would visit me to discuss educational and career issues and then meet in another AAC office with Ness or Stead to discuss their opportunities in senior administration. Of course, my colleagues in the search firm often would seek me out after the person left to solicit my opinions and informal recommendations. Originally housed at AAC, the firm eventually became independent and moved to larger quarters. Most recently, it was incorporated into the Association of Governing Boards, the professional association for boards of trustees. It still serves the long-term interests of faculty members who, later in their careers, want to move into senior administrative positions, often with the support of AAC&U senior staff.

Further, AAC&U offers selected faculty members and academic administrators who have been involved in its activities an unpaid appointment as a senior fellow, with access to a part-time office and an opportunity to work on one of its meetings or on an activity harmonious to its work. Often these are individuals going through a career transition and find themselves without other affiliations. Increasingly, these are recently retired individuals who want to continue working on activities related to AAC&U priorities. As of 2019, there were twenty-eight senior fellows or scholars, fifteen of whom were designated as distinguished fellows.

Historically, the fellows have performed a wide range of functions at AAC&U. For example, Robert Shoenberg, from the University of Maryland, helped write several proposals for funded projects and authored the popular guide, *Why Do I Have to Take This Course?* Elizabeth Minnich, author of the award-winning book *Transforming Knowledge*, has provided advice for many AAC&U activities that draw not only on her extensive experience as a faculty member and administrator but from her writing, speaking, consulting, and board memberships. Donald Harward, after his presidency at Bates College, brought a funded project, Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP), to
AAC&U to advance initiatives to engage students in applying their knowledge to help solve real-world problems. Now led by David Scobey, BTtoP recently relocated to Elon University. Eugene Rice, after directing the Forum on Faculty Roles and Rewards at AAHE, continues to speak and write about the broader definition of scholarship, including the scholarship of discovery, integration, application, and teaching; he contributes to the new scholarship of engagement, all of which more fully captures what faculty actually do. Ann Ferren helped provide leadership for the project on Faculty Leadership for Integrative Liberal Learning and various AAC&U institutes. These fellows and scholars are genuine national treasures whose temporary, part-time, and usually unpaid appointments have expanded the staff and enriched the AAC&U programs of central value to faculty.

Another form of activity that has had impact related to the faculty is the experience that young staff members gained at AAC&U, often while studying for an advanced degree before going on to make important contributions of their own. One example is Michelle Cooper, the second president of the Institute for Higher Education Policy, a think tank in Washington. She left AAC&U and became the leader of this private firm that specializes in student access and success, diversity and equity, and college affordability and financial aid issues. In 2021, she joined the administration of President Joe Biden as deputy assistant secretary in the Office of Postsecondary Education at the US Department of Education.

Another example is Maria Maisto, who worked at AAC&U while completing her doctorate in English at the University of Maryland. As an adjunct teacher, she had become aware of the poor pay, lack of benefits, and hard work involved in part-time faculty life. While she was on the AAC&U staff, she and I had several conversations about how to get her department and/or university to create a Preparing Future Faculty program. After she earned a PhD, she decided to form an organization to advocate for faculty members working on part-time or term contracts. Contingent faculty have now become the largest portion of the country’s faculty, and Maisto founded and directed the New Faculty Majority, an organization that advocates for the interests of contingent faculty. The New Faculty Majority is a force for supporting these young faculty at a time when a college education has become more important for students seeking access to a middle-class life, and when faculty bear the extra burden of employing active, collaborative, technological, and engaged methods of teaching and learning. Of course, there are many other examples of staff members who have developed knowledge and skill while at AAC&U and moved on to successful careers elsewhere.
Benefits for Faculty

As professionals, faculty members typically continue to enjoy learning, aspire to be effective, and continually develop their repertoire of professional capacities. The vast majority are moved primarily by inherent motivation to do a good job. Most are involved in their disciplinary societies to keep up with recent research and contribute to the advancement of scholarship in their specialties. Typically, they are attracted to AAC&U to expand their horizons beyond their disciplines.

Having read thousands of assessments of meetings, talked with untold numbers of faculty members, and had discussions with many AAC&U staff members, I have observed a long list of benefits that faculty members have derived from involvement in AAC&U activities:

- learning more about the topic(s) of meetings, projects, or institutes
- developing new instructional skills and capacities
- developing broader institutional perspectives and knowledge
- learning about other types of institutions
- learning about external supports for teaching and learning, including federal and state policymakers, accrediting agencies, testing services, and educational associations
- becoming familiar with philanthropic organizations that support colleges and universities
- enhancing leadership abilities
- learning more about colleagues and becoming part of a community of scholars
- developing a national network of colleagues and educational resources
- gaining professional and personal renewal
- helping to strengthen their institutions
- gaining opportunities to make presentations at meetings and to publish articles
- building up their professional résumé beyond publications and presentations
- getting opportunities for career advancement, promotions, or new positions

I personally regard AAC&U as a premier organization devoted to promoting the best in undergraduate education. Like it has for many faculty, AAC&U has allowed me to learn a great deal about the academic profession. It has also provided me an excellent platform for a career advocating for improving the quality of undergraduate education and strengthening institutions. In the process of helping others through my work at AAC&U, I received respect and recognition that I never originally imagined. I know scores of others across the country who would affirm the same benefits.

In sum, AAC&U involvement has helped faculty members gain a greater sense of satisfaction with their professional work, career, and institution. This satisfaction comes from realizing that one
is a better teacher, adviser, and educator for students; a good citizen creating a stronger institution and community; and a contributor in enhancing the stature of the academic profession.
Membership

As AAC evolved into a more comprehensive organization over the years, its member institutions grew in both number and diversity. As more individuals, often deans and faculty members, became involved in AAC&U activities and experienced the benefits, they encouraged their institutions to become members. But there is more to the story. Faculty didn’t just discover AAC&U; after 1976, their involvement was actively sought. Top administrators on campuses wanted to engage faculty to enhance the institution’s liberal education programs. Inevitably, this meant faculty attended AAC&U meetings, read its literature, and held discussions among leaders of the shared governance organizations on campus. Increasingly, faculty leaders found that their institutions were attempting to reform general education or increase the diversity of students, for example, and they turned to AAC&U for resources and assistance to do those jobs better. In any event, faculty involvement and membership developed hand in hand.

In addition, the association made a series of strategic decisions that welcomed new members into the fold. First, in the 1976 restructuring, AAC changed its constitution bylaws to include a mission to “enhance and promote humane and liberating learning.” At that time, liberal education had been assumed to mainly involve study in the liberal arts and sciences. Accordingly, membership was primarily restricted to liberal arts colleges and colleges of arts and sciences in larger universities. But in the 1970s, a president of a large university that emphasized faculty research as well as a range of professional educational programs confessed in an AAC board meeting, “I can’t use the term liberal education on my campus.” The term simply did not speak to a large number of the faculty in professional fields, and his rural community was conservative and not supportive of anything “liberal.”

I recall vigorous discussions with the board about the value of continuing to use the term liberal education or finding some other language that both spoke to the traditional as well as the more modern parts of the academy. But nobody could come up with better language. This issue continued to bedevil the association for many years. One thing that eventually worked was identifying liberal education in terms of student outcomes, not bodies of knowledge or specific courses. This shift was apparent in the 1985 publication Integrity in the College Curriculum, in which the authors spoke of a “minimum required curriculum” and specified a set of skills rather than just an accumulation of knowledge. The skills included “inquiry, abstract logical thinking, [and] critical analysis”—a set of skills that could be learned in many disciplines, not just philosophy, political theory, biology, or literature. If students could master skills of thinking and communication, for example, in disciplines beyond the traditional liberal arts, they could also learn them in educational programs in settings other than liberal arts colleges. Thus, the membership could be open to other kinds of institutions.
At the same time, the *Integrity* publication focused on baccalaureate degrees and used language that was off-putting to many kinds of colleges and universities. For example, community colleges were focused on associate’s degrees, and with their large numbers of part-time students and those who would drop in and drop out, coherence was problematic. But when some funded projects identified the phenomenon of “student swirl”—students who accumulate academic credit in two or more institutions—and the importance of identifying “alternative curricular pathways” to facilitate the transfer of credit, this language spoke to two-year institutions. So too did surveys of employers which reported that communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and the ability to work in teams were valued in most workplaces.

During the mid-1990s, I recall a board meeting in which the president of a Wisconsin community college argued vigorously that there should be more community colleges in the membership. He stated the fact that many more students were taking their first two years in a community college and transferring to a four-year college to complete their degrees. He and others eventually agreed to mount a campaign to recruit more community colleges. This resulted in an increase in membership for two-year colleges.

As of 2020, there were more than 1,200 AAC&U members. This was the accomplishment of multiple initiatives over many years. In addition, the membership in 2020 was composed of the following Carnegie classifications:

- Master’s: 29%
- Baccalaureate: 22%
- Research and Doctorate: 18%
- Associate’s: 9%
- Other: 22%

Today, the membership is much larger and more diverse than ever. One might say that it is larger because it is more diverse—and more welcoming to more segments of postsecondary education, including faculty.

The growth in the number of master’s degree institutions, the largest percentage of the current membership, was probably due to a growing number of baccalaureate colleges that began to offer master’s degrees. This was part of the general trend for institutions seeking to enhance their reputations by increasing the level of degree they offered and changing their names from “college” to “university.”

It is interesting that the fastest-growing category in the past few years is “other.” Fully 18 percent of the membership is composed of specialized schools, state systems and agencies, and international affiliates. Many of these memberships are the result of involving leaders and their organizations in various projects and meetings. For example, one project invited State Higher
Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) to participate in activities and to meet at the annual meeting. The LEAP projects involved state systems as key participants, and global projects involved universities abroad. For example, in 2012, I was named a Fulbright Senior Specialist in Hong Kong to assist its colleges and universities in developing mandated new general education programs. After learning about the richness of AAC&U resources and seeing their value to their own institutions, several of the universities decided to become members.

The practice of encouraging various other small organizations to meet at the annual meeting or become a visible presence there played an important role in encouraging membership. For example, the 2019 annual meeting included leadership meetings for the Change Magazine board, an Imagining America program meeting, and receptions for groups such as the Harvard University School of Education.

At least some of the increased membership can be traced to Dennis Renner, AAC&U’s director of membership from 2005 to 2019, who became a visible presence at a membership table at AAC&U meetings. Prior to that, it may have been regarded as a bit forward to actively seek new members. But Renner was very welcoming of discussions about membership, armed with a candy dish and warm smile.
The argument that I have been making in this essay is that AAC&U’s programs (annual meetings, short conferences, and institutes), by focusing largely on faculty and academic issues, generated more members and more engagement from those members with the association’s resources. As a result of this increase in membership and engagement, I have contended that the income from meetings and member dues has translated into more money for the association to do its good work. It is time to test that proposition.

In the 1970s, AAC’s income was mostly from member dues and attendance at the annual meeting, supplemented by grants from a few national foundations that wanted to see AAC succeed with its new mission focused on liberal education. The grants provided salary offsets for staff to do the work of the grants and reimbursement for indirect costs.

Member dues were set according to the size of institutional enrollments and budgets; larger and wealthier institutions paid more. The policy was to keep dues as low as possible, because every time the board considered an increase, it was met with arguments that several smaller institutions could not afford to pay more. The board invariably decided to keep dues low in order to retain membership rather than raise dues. This also meant that dues increases were made only infrequently and modestly.

In 1976, AAC had only one funded project that had little impact on the budget or program, Change in Liberal Education, which was directed by Francis Wuest and sponsored by five educational associations. The report, *Renewing Liberal Education: A Primer*, drew much national attention but had little impact. A review by Annette Atkins pointed out that, in the spirit of the times, the publication assumed that the new was better than the old, and it overemphasized process at the expense of outcomes. Further, many of the institutions selected as participants were often new, small, and innovative colleges, whose reforms were not easily transferable to mainstream institutions.

In the 1970s and ’80s, as higher education began to grow in importance and size, it attracted increased interest from the federal government as well as the private philanthropic community. Funding officers had ideas about how to improve both access and quality of education, and they increasingly looked to AAC to provide national leadership for various initiatives. The AAC leadership developed personal relationships with funding officers and developed proposals that would gain favor from their organizations. As AAC’s leaders gradually developed a portfolio of funded projects, they learned that AAC could do well financially by doing well educationally. By 1998, the revenue from direct grants was $2,521,343, more than half the total revenue. Although AAC was successful in attracting grants, ironically, that very success meant that it became dangerously dependent on external funding to run its affairs.
This heavy reliance on grants to do the work of the association is why the senior staff agreed that we needed to generate additional income streams in order to keep control of our own agenda and not to turn it into the agendas of various foundations. Although the available historical data assembled by Chiffon Haggins, AAC&U director of finance, go back only to 1998, they illustrate the improvement in the association’s financial condition since then. In 1998, revenue from direct and indirect receipts from grants and dues accounted for about 82 percent of the total revenue of a little over $5 million. Only 14 percent of the revenue came from meetings, conferences, institutes, or publications.

That same year, the income from the recently created Network for Academic Renewal conferences amounted to a modest $140,768, about enough to cover its expenses. But it was on a growth trajectory. In 2003, the income generated by the network meetings, $425,605, first surpassed that from the annual meeting, $358,008. By 2018, the income from network meetings—$1,041,015—exceeded a million dollars.

The association also began to draw income from additional sources. In 2019, the Institute on General Education brought in $322,790; the Institute on High-Impact Practices generated $425,200; the Institute on Integrative Learning and Signature Work yielded $403,484; and the Teaching to Increase Diversity and Equity in STEM (TIDES) Institute earned $211,500. The PKAL Leadership Institute contributed $251,500, and the Institute on Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation added $283,940. It is clear that the institutes were generating significant amounts of income for AAC&U—a total of $1,898,414 in 2019. Combined, the Network for Academic Renewal meetings and the institutes generated $3,248,437, a major contribution to the total revenue.

It is interesting that there were no gifts recorded until 2005, when Caryn McTighe Musil led a chorus of senior staff saying that the association needed additional revenue streams. A number of AAC&U staff made personal contributions, and a few senior staff members wrote personal letters and made direct requests from friends and colleagues who had benefitted from their involvement with AAC. During this time, the first of several development officers, Candace Kupta, was appointed to help secure private gifts. AAC&U’s receipt of gifts grew to $427,711 in 2009, which was 4.5 percent of the total income. Although contributions continued, their percentage of total income dropped to one percent in 2019.

In 2018, Andrew Flagel, former vice president for advancement and member engagement, brought a broader vision and new energy to this work, arranging for many corporate sponsorships for the January annual meeting and for other meetings and institutes. In 2018, sponsorships amounted to $134,175 and 1.1 percent of the total revenue, which jumped the following year to $402,032 or 2.7 percent of overall revenues. In 2019, the combination of gifts and sponsorships produced $553,686, which was 3.7 percent of overall income, a significant amount of income for the association.
In 2019, the total revenue had climbed to $14,898,725. Of this total, most income (92 percent) came from member dues (36 percent), grants (29 percent), and various meetings, conferences, and institutes (27 percent).

Clearly, AAC&U has a broader and more balanced income base. In addition to the association’s expertise in securing nationally significant grants and contracts, AAC&U also developed the ability to stage a variety of meetings, conferences, and institutes that would allow it to be, to a greater extent, in control of its own future. In short, AAC&U has experienced a financial transformation that matches the programmatic transformation that was the subject of the previous pages of this essay. The strategy of involving more faculty members in the work of the association had clearly paid good dividends, both programmatically and financially.
Leadership of AAC&U

Many presidents provided valuable leadership for the transformation of AAC&U from a small, inward-looking “presidents’ club” to the current dynamic national organization advocating for a contemporary vision of liberal education for not only a diverse membership of colleges and universities but also for a more robust democracy.

Frederic W. Ness (1969–78) guided AAC through the difficult process of midwifing the establishment of NAICU and setting the direction for the restructured AAC. Mark H. Curtis (1978–85) secured funding for the Project on the Meaning and Purposes of Baccalaureate Degrees and presided over the beginning of a series of new programs to support liberal learning. John W. Chandler (1985–90) inherited a large change agenda from *Integrity in the College Curriculum* and set in motion long-term work on general education, arts and sciences majors, the preparation of future faculty, and faculty-friendly ways to assess student learning. He also secured funding for multiple initiatives on liberal learning in a range of professional fields, including business, engineering, and teacher education. He put AAC on a more secure financial footing and, most importantly, hired Carol Geary Schneider as vice president in 1987 and promoted her to executive vice president the following year.

Paula Brownlee (1990–98) was the first woman selected to head a major Washington educational association, and she and Schneider worked closely for nearly a decade to expand long-term change initiatives, grow attendance at meetings, increase membership, and give AAC&U greater national influence. Notably, it was during Brownlee’s tenure that AAC became a partner with the Ford Foundation, where Edgar Beckham spearheaded a decade-long effort to make engagement with diversity an integral part of college learning. AAC became both a “voice and a force” (in Brownlee’s words), assisting institutions to create a more supportive environment for diverse students and a curriculum that challenged both majority and minority students to learn together.

But it was Carol Geary Schneider (1998–2016) who was largely responsible for the transformation that is the subject of this essay. Part of her influence is due to her long service: twenty-eight years, including ten as vice president and eighteen as president, which gave her a long time to leave her mark. During recent years, the United States has developed a love affair with short-term perspectives. In the corporate world, the focus is on quarterly results, and in political life there has been a push for term limits throughout federal and state legislatures. Technology has focused on bringing the fastest information into the office, living room, and virtually all of modern life. However, the value of long-term service can be seen in the cumulative work of Schneider.

It was by no means simply longevity that led to her success. Schneider possessed the ability to integrate many elements in the education of students, the vision to relate liberal education to...
national agendas, the people skills to support and guide senior colleagues as well as rank-and-file staff, and a relentless determination to make these commitments become realized in AAC&U.

But the transformation of AAC was not only the doing of presidents alone. Until 2005, there was no development office at AAC, and the vice presidents de facto were—and are today—development officers. That is, they were charged with identifying educational problems on campuses, using their imaginations and campus knowledge to conceptualize possible improvements, identify interest from a program officer at a foundation or government agency, write a persuasive proposal, and then implement a typically complicated activity involving multiple institutions and hundreds of individuals. The projects, conferences, and institutes were the primary responsibilities of AAC’s vice presidents and program officers, and frequently they represented highlights of their careers: their “own babies.” Not incidentally, the projects largely funded significant portions of their own salaries as well as those of their staffs.

In addition, senior staff below the rank of vice president were largely responsible for managing central activities, including organizing the annual meeting, directing the institutes and network meetings, editing the quarterlies, operating the website, and supporting the whole organization with modern technology. And there were those who did marketing, recruited members, managed the finances, conducted human resources, kept up the facilities, and ensured the railroad ran on time.

Finally, the leaders of all projects, meetings, institutes, and other activities almost always included enthusiastic and able folks from campuses. No significant activity took place at AAC&U without the active involvement of campus leaders. They included those in various roles, such as presidents and chief academic officers; staff in academic administration, student affairs, and centers for teaching and learning; and, of course, many faculty members across the academic disciplines. Typically, all worked together for the good of the whole.

The need for program officers to raise funds for their own projects as well as salaries for themselves and staff often resulted in their offices operating essentially like “silos” independent of other AAC&U offices. More than one president sought to bring the various offices closer together by cajoling their leaders to work together and even by budgeting a portion of the grants to fund common support services. This tendency toward separatism in the programs continued until Schneider was named president in 1998. She came to the presidency determined to create structures and budget practices that would support staff collaboration and the development of a shared common mission. Over time, the silo mentality gradually changed. Schneider possessed the understanding of how to build an organization, including membership, finance, personnel, and the maintenance of the office building and equipment, and she brought these various functions into greater harmony.

During her eighteen-year tenure as president, Schneider ran a more coherent and powerful association that kept the centripetal forces under control as the association remained focused on
the aims and practices of modern liberal education. AAC&U consistently expanded programs connecting liberal learning with student interests and societal needs, helping it to grow more influential in the academy. The president’s office also came to play a much more active role in writing proposals and securing funding for projects. During Schneider’s term, AAC&U established a development office that was charged to secure new sources of funds, including gifts from individuals and private family foundations. The association became less dependent on external funds and better able to set its own agenda.

The downside of this strong centralized management style, however, was a tendency toward micromanagement. When the staff would discuss a new idea, someone would invariably ask, “What does Carol think?” Personally, whenever I needed to get some help from other departments, I would invoke her name and say, “Carol wants this done.” When I was setting up the Network for Academic Renewal in 1993, I needed assistance from several offices that were not used to working together—and certainly not used to taking directions from me. For example, in designing a brochure, I needed help from publications; another office kept the mailing labels; the printing operation was another fiefdom; and finances had to handle the registration fees. Recognizing my frustration at the lack of cooperation from other offices, Schneider, as executive vice president, advised me to “hover” over every request for another office rather than assume that they would do what they had agreed in a timely manner. It was excellent advice.

When Lynn Pasquerella became president in 2016, she inherited a large, respected, nationally influential association. She brought an impressive background to the position, as she had attended a community college, graduated from a state university, earned a doctorate at a research university, and served both as a faculty member in philosophy and academic administrator at a public university, provost at the University of Hartford, and president of Mount Holyoke College. All of this varied experience gives her personal knowledge of quality and diversity in major sites of higher education.

As is typical of new presidents, Pasquerella orchestrated a new strategic plan for 2018–22, culminating from “a comprehensive, integrative planning process that engaged a wide variety of stakeholders, members, and constituents.” The plan articulates “a commitment to advancing quality and equity in undergraduate education and promoting the value of a liberal education as integral to preparing students for work, life, and global citizenship.” The plan establishes four goals:

- Champion faculty-engaged, evidence-based, sustainable models and strategies for promoting quality in undergraduate education.
- Advance equity across higher education in service to academic excellence and social justice.
- Lead institutions and communities in articulating and demonstrating the value of liberal education for work, life, global citizenship, and democracy.
Catalyze reform in higher education to emphasize discovery and innovation as fundamental aspects of a liberal education.\textsuperscript{59}

AAC&U wasted no time in starting to carry out this plan. During Pasquerella’s first three years, the annual meeting enjoyed greater attendance and more corporate sponsorships than ever before. Increased attendance was also achieved in the Network for Academic Renewal conferences and summer institutes. The quarterly publications continued to produce timely, useful, and insightful issues, and the website, electronic newsletter, and various other communications continued to make AAC&U a visible and influential national association. Not incidentally, the income from these activities continued to grow.

In addition, AAC&U launched new initiatives. With significant support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, AAC&U’s Office for Diversity, Equity, and Student Success, led by Vice President Tia Brown McNair, launched its Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Campus Centers project. It initially involved ten diverse institutions in 2017, increasing to twenty-nine by 2021. There is a grand expectation of creating a total of 150 campus centers in a decade. These centers aim to engage members of campus and local communities in dialogues to create new narratives and break down belief in racial hierarchies.

Another project, Purposeful Pathways: Faculty Planning for Curricular Coherence, was funded by the Teagle Foundation as part of AAC&U’s LEAP initiative. Part of a collaborative effort led by AAC&U Vice Presidents Tia Brown McNair and Dawn Michele Whitehead and Assistant Vice President Kate Drezek McConnell, it supports campus teams at four institutions as they engage in ambitious curricular changes driven by the belief that purposeful pathways created by faculty can guide students to higher levels of learning, intellectual skills development, and practical knowledge. These newly designed guided learning pathways engage students in high-impact practices that will help them achieve learning outcomes critical for life, work, and productive citizenship.\textsuperscript{60}

AAC&U’s new leadership is clearly focused on continuing the commitment to inclusive excellence and involving faculty in the broad array of AAC&U activities and initiatives.
The Future

In this essay, I have demonstrated that the transformation from AAC to AAC&U that began four and a half decades ago could not have been foreseen. It was the evolution of numerous academic, social, cultural, and economic events and the contributions of countless individuals.

As the finishing touches were being made to this manuscript, higher education was being transformed again, this time by the COVID-19 pandemic. Large portions of the worldwide economy had been shut down to prevent the spread of the virus and had led to a global downturn. In spring 2020, many college and universities shifted their instruction to virtual formats to protect the health of their students. Recruitment for the fall semester was disrupted, as institutions did not know whether they could offer the usual in-person classes or would require virtual instruction. With this uncertainty, many current students planned to delay their return to campus, and other potential members of the fall freshman class chose to take a gap year. Many campuses provided refunds for tuition, room, meal payments, and other fees, and some were forced to furlough faculty or staff. In short, the pandemic created significantly more financial pressures for colleges and universities that were already short of funds.

AAC&U has had to make similar accommodations. It had planned a series of conferences and institutes during spring and summer 2020, all of which were held virtually with reduced fees. It also offered an extensive series of free webinars on a range of pressing issues concerning management of institutions during a time of crisis and transition.61

It appears that postsecondary education is again facing one of its periodic times of extraordinary stress. I will conclude this essay with an analysis of a few challenges and opportunities facing AAC&U.

- By late 2020, growth in the national and global economy had slowed, and the COVID-19 pandemic had produced drastic economic consequences that could continue for years. A weak economy translates into smaller institutional budgets, and tighter budgets have always forced colleges and universities to trim expenses. Memberships in organizations like AAC&U, and travel to their meetings, are convenient targets for budget reductions.
- It is unclear if the current business plans of higher education institutions are sustainable. During recent years, larger amounts of the costs have been shifted to students, larger numbers of college graduates have accumulated significant loan debt, and higher student loan debt is becoming a serious national problem, not just for graduates but for the national economy. Many in the public have come to believe that colleges and universities are not worth the high cost of attendance.
• Higher education has lost the trust of much of the public. Despite ample research showing the career benefits of a liberal education, many people are concerned that students, especially in the liberal arts and sciences, are not learning what they need for either their careers or a life of democratic citizenship. This loss of trust has increased in a “post-truth” era in which both knowledge and expertise are repeatedly denigrated. If knowledge and expertise are not respected, what is the value of colleges and universities?
• Colleges and universities are portrayed by some leaders as bastions of liberal politics led by professors who are said to brainwash innocent students.
• Demographic changes are expected to reduce the number of high school graduates in the coming years, causing more competition to fill college classrooms, increased pressure on institutional budgets, and threats to the survival of some colleges.

The combination of these factors has already caused several institutions to close, and others have resorted to drastic survival strategies—such as lowering tuition and cutting programs or staff positions, especially of administrative staff and faculty—in attempts to lower costs and attract more students. I suspect that more colleges and universities may struggle with finances in coming years.

Yet, in these uncertain times, one thing seems certain. Whatever the future brings, the best way to confront it is with a high-quality education. Knowledge, expertise, and continual learning are among the best ways for future generations to succeed in difficult times.

Over the past several decades, AAC&U has established a solid national, even international, reputation as a blue-ribbon organization. It has earned a great deal of goodwill among national leaders. It has helped campus leaders to analyze the world’s most pressing problems and threats, identify alternative strategies to solve the problems, support experimentation with alternative solutions, and publicize promising innovations. As a bumper sticker said when I was but a baby professor, “If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.”

AAC&U has faced similar threats in the past, and today—with its large and diverse membership, array of valuable programs, and strong finances—it is in a stronger position than ever to confront them. To a greater extent than before, AAC&U holds its destiny in its own hands.
Notes

4 Eisenmann, “Making Better Colleges.”
5 Eisenmann, “Making Better Colleges.”
8 Theodore Lockwood, letter to Frederick Ness, November 20, 1975.
9 AAC (Association of American Colleges), minutes from meeting of the board of representatives, March 18, 1976.
10 AAC board minutes, March 18, 1976.
11 Association of American Colleges, minutes from the meeting of the Board of Directors, January 11–12, 1975, and November 11, 1977.
13 Figures courtesy of Suzanne Hyers, former director of AAC&U’s annual meetings. These figures include members of AAC&U’s staff, with more than forty employees as of 2020.
14 Personal correspondence with Amy Cooper, director of the annual meeting, July 16, 2020.
16 Correspondence with Kevin Finkelstein, former AAC&U manager of database services, August 19, 2020.
19 This work was grant funded by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education through the US Department of Education. For more information, see Caryn McTighe Musil, The Courage to Question: Women’s Studies and Student Learning (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges, 1991).


Schneider, “Challenge and Response,” 2.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Missions of the College Curriculum*.


During that same strategic planning process, Bridget Puzon, editor of *Liberal Education*, and I headed a group charged with developing proposals for involving the faculty. I recall arguing for a special focus on faculty members who were being asked by various AAC&U projects to shoulder heavier responsibilities for the education of their students. Puzon and I argued that the faculty faced rising expectations while at the same time experiencing a thinning of the ranks. Full-time, tenure-track positions were being changed into part-time or term-contract appointments, making it difficult for the remaining faculty to develop the competence and have the time for more individualized, collaborative, engaged approaches to teaching and learning. Even though we were not successful in creating a special focus on the faculty in the plan, the association has continued to emphasize the importance of the faculty and support for their continuous development in its work.


Carol Geary Schneider, *Making Liberal Education Inclusive*.

ePortfolios were designated the eleventh high-impact practice in 2018. For more information, see “High-Impact Practices,” Association of American Colleges and Universities, accessed June 15, 2020, https://www.aacu.org/node/4084.


Correspondence from Sasa Tang, AAC&U research and assessment analyst, September 20, 2019.


50 Personal correspondence with Karen Kalla, former director of the Network for Academic Renewal conferences.


52 Personal correspondence with Carrie Johnson, former AAC&U assistant director of marketing and media relations, September 13, 2019.


Jerry G. Gaff is a forward-looking strategic thinker who has been at the leading edge of major innovations in higher education throughout his career. This personal essay reflects his deep knowledge about how higher education organizations function and can make changes to better achieve their missions.

He has authored two dozen books, including *The Cluster College*, *Toward Faculty Renewal*, *General Education Today*, *The Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum*, and *Building the Faculty We Need*. These volumes present the lessons he and his colleagues learned in their cooperative efforts to help students develop critical thinking and social awareness, improve faculty members’ teaching and keep them engaged in their work, and create or enhance a variety of educational programs.

From 1964 to 1967, Gaff held his first role in higher education as a faculty member at Raymond College at the University of the Pacific. The Raymond faculty implemented a host of
student-centered innovations and researched the effectiveness of Raymond and other experimental colleges. Later, as a faculty member at the University of California–Berkeley, he conducted research on the effects that faculty members have on their students.

In 1975, he joined the Association of American Colleges (AAC) to direct a project that created new faculty development programs at sixteen diverse institutions. Later, he directed projects that helped diverse colleges and universities make their general education programs more coherent, engaging, rigorous, and focused on solving real-world problems.

Starting in 1983, Gaff served as dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Hamline University and later served as the university’s interim president. He led the faculty to adopt the Hamline Plan, which defined the core of the university’s educational programs and led to growth in the size of the student body. He returned to AAC in 1991 to lead a grant-funded project to help institutions sustain effective general education reforms. From 1993 to 2003, he partnered with the Council of Graduate Schools to help graduate schools revise degree programs to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives needed to teach undergraduate students.

In 2012, Gaff was named a Fulbright senior specialist in Hong Kong, where he helped public and private universities develop new general education programs that had been mandated by local authorities.

Gaff graduated from DePauw University and earned a PhD in psychology at Syracuse University. He has received honorary doctorate degrees and national awards for his work in academic leadership, general education, and preparing future faculty. The Association for General and Liberal Studies presents the Jerry G. Gaff Award annually to a faculty member for outstanding leadership and teaching in general and liberal education.
About AAC&U

AAC&U is the leading national association dedicated to advancing the vitality and public standing of liberal education by making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in undergraduate education in service to democracy. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,000 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges, community colleges, research universities, and comprehensive universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, faculty, and staff engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Through a broad range of activities, AAC&U reinforces the collective commitment to liberal education at the national, local, and global levels. Its high-quality programs, publications, research, meetings, institutes, public outreach efforts, and campus-based projects help individual institutions ensure that the quality of student learning is central to their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges. Information about AAC&U can be found at www.aacu.org.