America’s Global Future: Are College Students Prepared?

Dear Colleagues:

To mark the centennial anniversary of our founding, AAC&U is devoting the entire year to a far-reaching exploration of the current and future connections between global flourishing, both for individuals and for society, and what we call the “equity imperative”: the need to provide an empowering liberal education to that “new majority” of Americans who see college as their best hope for a better future.

This year-long exploration begins with this Centennial Symposium—America’s Global Future: Are College Students Prepared?

Responding directly to the widespread hope that higher learning will fuel individual career success, societal creativity, and economic innovation, the Centennial Symposium probes the kind of college learning that best prepares graduates for a complex and globally engaged society. The symposium turns a spotlight on the most promising new directions for higher education—those that combine the “big-picture thinking” of a cosmopolitan liberal education with students’ development of sought-after skills, real-world experience in putting knowledge to work, and preparation both for career success and civic participation.

In dialogue with a remarkable set of national leaders and educators, symposium participants will explore the central educational questions of our time, including:

- What do our students need from their college studies in order to contribute and thrive in the twenty-first-century economy? In a globally engaged democracy? In a world beset by major challenges in virtually every sphere of life?

- What does American society need from higher education as we respond to the new realities—exhilarating and daunting—of global interdependence, demographic transformation, and fiscal constraint? To an economy increasingly driven by innovation? To the emerging potential of this digital era?

- How do we ensure that we are providing the most empowering forms of education to all college students, whatever their backgrounds, chosen majors, and career priorities?

- How do we work with critical partners—employers, trustees, policy and community leaders—both to ensure educational integrity and to encourage new creativity as we seek to make higher education more inclusive, more digitally inventive, and more engaged with the wider society?

Through this Centennial Symposium and a series of Centennial Forums to be held across the country in 2015, we will explore with our members the most promising efforts to make liberal education more inclusive, more purposeful, more digitally adept, and more transparently engaged with the world’s most pressing issues—global, societal, civic, ethical, and economic.

We warmly welcome you to the Centennial Symposium and to AAC&U’s next era of work on liberal education, the equity imperative and Americans’ global future.

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