Communicating Effectively About the Value(s) of General Education

General Education and Assessment Workshop
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Liberal Education & America’s Promise

Excellence for Everyone as a Nation Goes to College

“A COLLABORATION BETWEEN EDUCATORS, STUDENTS, POLICYMAKERS, AND EMPLOYERS”

CAMPUS ACTION, ADVOCACY, and RESEARCH
**LEAP Areas of Work**

- **Public Advocacy/Communication**—leadership through National Leadership Council, Presidents’ Trust, and work in selected LEAP states to make the case for liberal education and importance of essential learning outcomes

- **Campus Action**—technical assistance and networking to support campus efforts to increase all students’ achievement of essential learning outcomes and to communicate more effectively about liberal education

- **Authentic Evidence**—reports on public opinion, high-impact practices that lead to essential learning outcomes, assessment approaches that deepen student learning and periodic reports of national data on student achievement
Why Make Communications a Priority

- Intentionality and coherence of educational experience

- Lack of awareness about what really matters in college—especially among first-generation students and their families

- General education outcomes more important than ever, but less well-understood than ever

- Slipping public confidence in higher education
Slipping Public Confidence and Definitions of “the problem that needs solving”

• In 2009, 60% agreed that “colleges today are like most businesses and care more about the bottom line than about making sure students have a good educational experience.” (up from 52% in 2007). (Public Agenda)

• In 2009, 70% said students shouldered a great deal or a lot of the blame for low graduation rates. (AP/Stanford)
The Communications Challenges

External challenge (public, prospective students, parents)

• What is a “good educational experience”?
• What are the essential elements of a good education?
• Why is general education essential to having a “good educational experience”?

Internal challenge (current students, faculty, colleagues)

• How does general education fit into the larger goals of institution?
• How are we collectively providing an integrative quality education?
• How does general education connect with the major?
• How is quality general education related to increasing student success?
Narrow Learning is Not Enough

The LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes

• Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
  Focused on engagement with big questions, enduring and contemporary

• Intellectual and Practical Skills
  Practiced extensively across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more
  challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

• Personal and Social Responsibility
  Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world
  challenges

• Integrative Learning
  Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to
  new settings and complex problems
Main LEAP Messages

• There is an emerging consensus about the essential learning outcomes students need for success—and an engaged liberal education provides these outcomes.

• We must raise levels of student achievement of these outcomes to meet the demands of a volatile economy and globally interdependent world.

• College is not only about professional success; the future of our democracy and our shared futures depends on a more informed, engaged, and globally aware citizenry.
General Communications Tips

• Communicating messages about aims of education—everyone’s responsibility

• Students receive messages from multiple sources (Web sites, syllabi, faculty, advisors, career counselors)

• Messages are more effective if tailored to one’s audience—different entry points

• Multiple messages must be consistent, repeated, and reinforced in multiple settings

• Communicating messages that just aren’t true rarely succeeds!
Know Your Audience: LEAP/AAC&U Research

- Focus groups with college-bound high school students, advanced college students, employers (2004-06; 2012)


- National survey—AAC&U member CAOs (2009)

- National survey—AAC&U member presidents (2011; co-sponsored by Gates Fdn; unpublished)

- Focus groups with policy influencers (2011)

- Analysis of Census data on professional trajectories of graduates (2014)
Common Misperceptions

• What are some common misperceptions your current and/or prospective students have about general education?

• What do parents think of general education?

• What do faculty not centrally involved in general education think about it?
Know Your Environment: What are the Competing Narratives

• National and local media stories: “college isn’t worth the money;” “liberal arts not good preparation for success in getting a job”

• Internal mixed messages from advisors, other faculty, etc.: “get your gen ed requirements out of the way;” “what’s really important is our discipline, our standards for evidence;” “gen ed courses don’t prepare students to succeed in our discipline.”
Competing Narrative with False Dichotomy: The Aims of College Are…

...provide a broad, well-rounded education that enables discovery of interests and abilities to help students realize their full potential in life

“I’m thinking that if I realize my full potential, and discover that here, and have a broad range of appreciating who people are and cultures outside my own, then I will be okay. [The] second will come from the first.”

Student, California State University System

...provide students with specific career knowledge and skills to help them realize their full potential in the workforce

“I worry that if I go through this great diverse education, but I can’t go out and find a decent paying wage at the end of it, then, while I may be a better person for it, I’m still basically [out of luck].”

Student, Oregon University System
What Else Do Students Think?
Selected Focus Group Findings

• High-school students feel uninformed about the college curriculum and uncertain of its demands.

• Students are focused on choice of major rather than what they will learn across the full curricula; long-term professional success is paramount goal.

• Students lack understanding of liberal and general education.

• Once informed of definition of liberal education, student embrace the concept, but complain that reality not living up to ideal.
Other Student Views:
Top Attributes for Desired Employment

1. Opportunity for personal development
2. Job security
3. Good insurance benefits
4. Friendly co-workers
5. High-starting salary
6. Chance to improve the community
7. Recognition for performance
8. Location close to home
9. Opportunity for advancement
10. Diversity

Source: NACE 2011 Student Survey; 50,000 college students; 20,000 graduating seniors
Other Student Views:
What 2010 high school graduates say

What is most important to you in a job or career?

1. Work that I find interesting or care about (59%)
2. Work that helps other people (28%)
3. Job that pays bills while I have fun outside work (28%)
4. Job security (19%)
5. Making a lot of money (18%)
6. Being able to work with my hands (9%)
7. Being my own boss (6%)

Source: “One Year Out” Hart Research Associates for College Board (summer 2011)
Outcomes of College: Student Views

• The outcomes of college that HS and college students think are most important:
  maturity, time management, work habits, self-discipline, teamwork.

• The outcomes students think are least important:
  values, cultural diversity, science, American history and culture, computer skills, global awareness, civic engagement.

• Students don’t connect outcomes to the curriculum.

• Long-term professional success overwhelmingly primary reason to go to college
Criticisms of General Education

• Timing of general education requirements = less chance of connection to major.
• Limited options for fulfilling requirements.
• Don’t connect general education to important broad learning outcomes.
• General education classes are sometimes duplicative of what is learned in high school and are too elementary.
• Concern expressed more by career-oriented students.
Pyramid or Hourglass: Gen Ed and the Major

How can the design of general education (if effectively communicated) help integrate general education and the major?

How can design of general education (if effectively communicated) help build support across departments and programs?
One Gen Ed Design Model

- Discipline requirements
- Skill requirements
- Intro to Major
- Major requirements
- Capstones
Different Gen Ed Model

Breadth-Depth-Breadth

• Initial Gen Ed Courses May Be Disciplinary or Interdisciplinary.
• Major courses focus on in-depth knowledge and application of skills
• Multiple opportunities to use multiple disciplines as lens on problem-solving
• Capstones deliberately designed for integrating across disciplines and reflecting on connections.
“[Employers] generally are...frustrated with their inability to find ‘360 degree people’ who have both the specific job/technical skills and the broader skills (communication and problem-solving skills, work ethic, and ability to work with others) necessary to promise greater success for both the individual and the employer.”

### Employers Prioritize Innovation and Transferable Skills

Percentage of employers who agree “somewhat” or “strongly” with each statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our company puts a priority on hiring people with the intellectual and interpersonal skills that will help them contribute to innovation in the workplace.</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates’ demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whatever their major, all students should have experience in solving problems with colleagues whose views are different from their own.</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Employers Want Both Broad Knowledge and Specific Skills

Which of the following ranges of knowledge and skills are more important for recent graduates who want to pursue advancement and long-term career success at your company?

- Knowledge and skills that apply to a specific field or position (16%)
- A range of knowledge and skills that apply to a range of fields or positions (29%)
- Both field-specific knowledge and skills and a broad range of knowledge and skills (55%)

Messages That Work

• Liberal education outcomes are key to success in today’s global economy and for responsible citizenship.
• Narrow training is not enough.
• Students must gain broad knowledge and have multiple opportunities to hone skills over time and in real-world settings.
• General education is an essential part of providing students these outcomes and opportunities.
Messages That Work

• Liberal Education outcomes are important because students are likely to change jobs multiple times.

• Liberal education introduces students to multiple perspectives and develops their own independent critical judgment.

• Students needn’t choose either a liberal education or preparation for professional success—both forms of education can be pursued together in mutually reinforcing ways.
Some Additional Data to Make the Case for Humanities and Social Sciences

How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment: A Report on Earnings and Long-Term Career Paths
by Debra Humphreys and Patrick Kelly
Source: *How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment*. 2013
Short-term vs. Long-term Earnings (2010-11)

Source: How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment. 2013
Planning Exercise

Group A (students and parents)

Group B (faculty and other colleagues)

Goal: develop elements of communications plan:

• 2-3 main messages
• Primary and secondary message carriers
• 2-3 venues for delivering messages
• Optional: additional research to inform effective communications
Strategies for Making the Case

• Focus on the outcomes of a good liberal education and their value in the knowledge-based, global economy
• Use data (employers; alumni; field trends) that demonstrate that employers want broadly educated, responsible graduates
• Note the common set of skills and knowledge needed for work and citizenship
• Real-world experience matters: provide students with real-world applied learning, but also help them translate those experiences into skills and capacities employers can understand
Ways to Get the Message Out

• Wisconsin Student Essay Contest
• Student Focus Groups
• Op-Eds, blogs, speeches
• Orientation and advising
• Alumni magazines and events
• Use LEAP tools—campus tool kit; speeches, surveys; student brochures
• Web sites--www.stolaf.edu/offices/ir-e/generaled/requirements
Civic and Economic Messages Can Be Effective Together

- A flourishing economy requires the same skills that support citizenship. Civic and democratic learning opportunities (e.g. service learning, community-based research, courses on US history, diversity, and global issues) provide broad skills and knowledge that are useful both for success in the workplace and to prepare students to be active and engaged citizens.
Civic and Economic Messages Can Be Effective Together

- Colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to model and teach respectful democratic dialogue and problem solving.

- There is a civic dimension to every field of study, including career and technical fields, as well as to every workplace. Industries and services have ethical and social responsibilities of their own.
The Return on Investing in a St. Olaf Education

The value of a St. Olaf education can be measured in many different ways — some tangible, some not.

Change is the one constancy in the world of today's graduates. They will likely change jobs and even careers several times, as knowledge and technology continue to expand at an accelerating pace. The breadth of knowledge and experience that St. Olaf offers prepares students to be critical thinkers and learners who are able to adapt and prosper in a complex future. And the strong liberal arts education our students receive provides a path to financial independence, professional accomplishment, and personal fulfillment.

St. Olaf graduates carry with them a mindset and toolset of skills that are critical to future success:

- the ability to write clear prose
- quantitative reasoning
- knowing how to ask the right questions to solve problems
- working productively in groups
- learning in community with others
- functioning in a multicultural environment
- appreciating the arts.

As a result, St. Olaf graduates are in high demand among employers and graduate schools across the nation. Recent surveys of the classes of 2011 and 2012 one year after their graduation demonstrate the broad range of success our graduates experience.

These results stem from a rigorous academic program that focuses on engaging students in high-impact educational experiences, including hands-on undergraduate research, internships, volunteerism, civic engagement, study abroad, and learning communities such as the Conversations offerings — all of which are accompanied by close faculty-student interaction.

The links in the left column of this page provide further detail on the success of our graduates and academic program.
Liberal Education & Effective Practice

Become a leader, collaborator, and creative thinker poised to solve the most daunting challenges of our time. Develop focused skills to make immediate contributions to the workplace, and build broad capacities—from critical thinking to self-directedness—valued in any industry. Turn your talents and passions into a rewarding career—and lead a life that’s full, fulfilling, and impactful.

Enrolling at Clark University means joining a smart, talented, passionate, and driven community. It means embracing the chance to explore the world in all its complexity—in order to transform it for the better. And it means jumping into a challenging, dynamic, life-changing experience called LEEP (Liberal Education and Effective Practice).

LEEP is Clark University’s pioneering model of education that combines a robust liberal arts experience with authentic engagement in the world and workplace.

Learn more about Clark students’ LEEP experiences.

The LEEP Learning Model
Students will benefit from an aligned and integrated set of educational experiences:

URL: http://www.clarku.edu/leep/
Making the Case for Liberal Education: Responding to Challenges
Communicating Commitment to Liberal Education: A Self-Study
Guide for Institutions
www.aacu.org/leap/LEAP_Resources

Why Do I Have To Take This Course? A Student Guide to making
Smart Educational Choices (see section on “Becoming a Citizen of
the World”)

What Will I Learn in College? What You Need to Know Now to Get
Ready for College Success
(available in print; bulk prices available)

What is a Liberal Education? and Why is it Important to My Future?
(available in bulk; 500 minimum order)
www.aacu.org/leap/students
www.aacu.org/leap

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Public Opinion About Higher Education

• In 2004, 93% of Americans viewed higher education institutions as one of the most valuable resources to the US. Public ranked colleges as high as military and churches. (Chronicle of Higher Education)

• In 2009, 55% of Americans viewed higher education as absolutely essential to success, up from 31% in 2000. (Public Agenda)

• In 2010, 87% of Hispanics agreed that a college education is important for a person to get ahead in life. (Univision/AP)

• 86% of college graduates say their schooling has been a good investment. (Pew Research Study, 2012)

BUT

• In 2009, 60% agreed that “colleges today are like most businesses and care more about the bottom line than about making sure students have a good educational experience. (up from 52% in 2007). (Public Agenda, 2009)

• In 2012 study, 57% of Americans say that “colleges fail to provide students with good value for money spent.” (Pew Research Study, 2012)

• In 2009, 70% said students shouldered a great deal or a lot of the blame for low graduation rates. (AP/Stanford)
The Essential Learning Outcomes

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

**Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**
- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
  
  *Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring*

**Intellectual and Practical Skills, including**
- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving
  
  *Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance*

**Personal and Social Responsibility, including**
- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
  
  *Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges*

**Integrative and Applied Learning, including**
- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies
  
  *Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems*

Note: This listing was developed through a multiyear dialogue with hundreds of colleges and universities about needed goals for student learning; analysis of a long series of recommendations and reports from the business community; and analysis of the accreditation requirements for engineering, business, nursing, and teacher education. The findings are documented in previous publications of the Association of American Colleges and Universities: College Learning for the New Global Century (2007) and The LEAP Vision for Learning (2011). For more information, see www.aacu.org/leap.
**Liberal and Liberal Arts Education: A Guide to Frequently Confused Terms**

**LIBERAL EDUCATION:** An approach to college learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. This approach emphasizes broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g., science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth achievement in a specific field of interest. It helps students develop a sense of social responsibility; strong intellectual and practical skills that span all major fields of study, such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills; and the demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.

**LIBERAL ARTS:** Specific disciplines (i.e., the humanities, sciences, and social sciences).

**LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE:** A particular type of institution—often small, often residential—that facilitates close interaction between faculty and students, and whose curriculum is grounded in the liberal arts disciplines.

**ARTES LIBERALES:** The historical basis for the modern liberal arts, consisting of the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music).

**GENERAL EDUCATION:** The part of a liberal education curriculum that is shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing essential intellectual, civic, and practical capacities. General education can take many forms, and increasingly includes introductory, advanced, and integrative forms of learning.

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2. According to a 2013 survey conducted by Hart Research Associates on behalf of AAC&U, 74 percent of employers would recommend this educational approach to college-bound students. For a full report on the survey and its complete findings, see www.aacu.org/leap.
**Volunteered Definitions of Liberal Education from Focus Groups**

Recurring Themes in Written Answers to the Question: WHAT DOES THE TERM "LIBERAL EDUCATION" MEAN TO YOU?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School Seniors or Rising Seniors Focus Groups (4)</th>
<th>College Juniors and Seniors Focus Groups (4)</th>
<th>Senior Executives Involved in Hiring Focus Groups (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unsure/Never heard of</td>
<td>Liberal Arts—defined as selected disciplines (e.g. arts, humanities)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts—type of college</td>
<td>Broad, well-rounded education</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Freedom to choose courses with few institutional constraints</td>
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<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>Political/&quot;liberal&quot;/counter-cultural</td>
<td>Political/&quot;liberal&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political/&quot;liberal&quot;</td>
<td>Impractical, less marketable</td>
<td>Impractical, less marketable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impractical, less marketable</td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>Waste of time</td>
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</table>

Based on responses from four separate focus groups (VA, WI, OR & IN)  
Based on responses from four separate focus groups (VA, WI, OR & IN)  
Based on responses from three separate focus groups (VA, WI & GA)

These comments were provided by focus groups conducted on behalf of AAC&U's LEAP initiative by Peter D. Hart Research Associates. Content analysis was done by AAC&U.
Volunteered Definitions of Liberal Education from Focus Groups

Question: WHAT DOES THE TERM "LIBERAL EDUCATION" MEAN TO YOU?

Liberal education is a free education. It's the type of learning where you don't have to learn about what you want to go into, but where you can learn other things.

It's creating your own degree and paving the way for yourself. You learn more than just what the books can give you. You are independent.

Liberal equals political.

It's a waste of time. It's like high school...There can be fun classes...You don't take them seriously.

It brings up both liberal arts, which, to me, means a broad education not involving the hard sciences. It also means a politically liberal education, which is the way a lot of colleges are.

It's maybe something to do with politics.


It's education with choices. You have the freedom to gain knowledge.

They are small private schools. There's a greater focus or education in the arts, such as the liberal arts or language arts.

A liberal education is focusing on a choice. There are a variety of classes that may or may not be specific to a certain subject. It's a general education.

It's politically correct. Everything is right or okay. There is no wrong answer. All points of view are brought to the table or class.

It is broad, encompasses a little bit of everything. I think people who go into this are a little unsure of what they want to do. For me, this would not be the type of education I want.

It is an education that requires the student to participate in studies not necessarily related to the major in order to give them a well-rounded education.

I'm not sure at all what a liberal education could mean. I don't have a clear definition of liberal.

I do not remember learning of it, but I think it may mean being on your own and choosing everything you are doing in your education.

It is education directed toward understanding alternative methods, most often political in nature. A liberal education would be the opposite of a conservative education. Conservative education focuses on a more individualistic approach to problem-solving, while liberal would focus more on a more communal approach to problem-solving.

Literature, writing, and art. It's about freethinking, but it's not very important for today's most popular careers. It will give you more knowledge, but won't make you smarter.

It's easier to get into. There are broader classes and arts classes.

It becomes general information, and it's not really important.

It's politically correct. Everything is right or okay. There is no wrong answer.
Other Student Views
Top Attributes for Desired Employment

- Opportunity for personal development
- Job security
- Good insurance benefits
- Friendly co-workers
- High-starting salary
- Chance to improve the community
- Recognition for performance
- Location close to home
- Opportunity for advancement
- Diversity

Source: NACE 2011 Student Survey; 50,000 college students; 20,000 graduating seniors

What 2010 High School Graduates Say is Most Important in a Job or Career

- Work that I find interesting or care about (59%)
- Work that helps other people (28%)
- Job that pays bills while I have fun outside work (28%)
- Job security (19%)
- Making a lot of money (18%)
- Being able to work with my hands (9%)
- Being my own boss (6%)

Source: “One Year Out” Hart Research Associates for College Board (Summer, 2011)
Most Important Outcomes:  (Rank Ordered)

★ Maturity and ability to succeed on one’s own
★ Time-management skills
★ Strong work habits
★ Self-discipline
★ Teamwork skills and ability to get along with different types of people

Middle Tier Outcomes:  (Rank Ordered)

★ Tangible business skills and specific expertise in field of focus
★ Critical thinking skills
★ Communication skills
★ Problem-solving skills and analytical ability
★ Exposure to business world
★ Leadership skills

Least Valued Outcomes:  (In Declining Rank Order)

★ Values, principles, ethics
★ Tolerance and respect for different cultural backgrounds
★ Competency in computer skills
★ Expanded cultural and global awareness and sensitivity
★ Civic responsibility and orientation to public service

From AAC&U commissioned student focus groups of college-bound high school seniors and college juniors and seniors conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates August, 2004.
ANOTHER TAKE: WISCONSIN

STUDENTS’ VIEWS OF IMPORTANT COLLEGE OUTCOMES
(HIGH SCHOOL RISING SENIORS; COLLEGE RISING JUNIORS AND SENIORS)

Most Important Outcomes: (Rank Ordered)

★ Maturity and ability to succeed on one’s own
★ Tangible business skills and specific expertise in field of focus
★ Strong work habits
★ Teamwork skills and ability to get along with different types of people
★ Self-discipline

Middle Tier Outcomes: (Rank Ordered)

★ Communication skills
★ Critical thinking skills
★ Time-management skills
★ Values, principles, ethics
★ Knowledge and respect for people of different cultural backgrounds
★ Exposure to business world
★ Leadership skills

Least Valued Outcomes: (In Declining Rank Order)

★ Community involvement and civic engagement
★ Competency in computer skills
★ Expanded knowledge of cultures outside the U.S.
★ Expanded knowledge of American history and culture
★ Expanded understanding of science and its relation to other fields

* Items in bold represent new categories not included in earlier student focus groups

From AAC&U commissioned student focus groups of college-bound high school seniors and college juniors and seniors conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates March, 2005.
What Do Employers Say?

“[Employers] generally are...frustrated with their inability to find ‘360 degree people’ who have both the specific job/technical skills and the broader skills, (communication and problem-solving skills, work ethic, and ability to work with others), necessary to promise greater success for both the individual and the employer.”


Selected Findings from Employer Surveys

How important is it for colleges and universities to provide the type of education described below?

This particular approach to a four-year college education provides both broad knowledge in a variety of areas of study and more in-depth knowledge in a specific major or field of interest. It also helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as intellectual and practical skills that span all areas of study, such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.

- 94% Say Fairly or Very Important

- 74% Would Recommend This Kind of Education to a Young Person They Know

________________________________________________________________________________________

93% of employers surveyed agree that “candidates’ demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.”

Source: It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success (AAC&U and Hart Research Associates, 2013)
Key Findings from 2013 Survey of Employers

- **Innovation a Priority**: 95% of employers say they give hiring preference to college graduates with skills that enable them to contribute to innovation in the workplace.

- **It Takes More than a Major**: 93% of employers say that a demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than a candidate's undergraduate major. More than 75% want higher education to place more emphasis on critical thinking, complex problem solving, written and oral communication, and applied knowledge.

- **Broad Learning is Expected**: 80% of employers agree that, regardless of their major, all college students should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences.

- **Students Need Liberal and Applied Learning**: Employers strongly endorse educational practices that involve students in active, effortful work—practices including collaborative problem solving, research, internships, senior projects, and community engagements.

- **E-Portfolios Would Add Value**: 83% of employers say an electronic portfolio would be useful to indicate that job applicants have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

**Employer Priorities and Consensus on College Learning Outcomes**

**Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**

- Broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences  
- Global issues and knowledge about societies and cultures outside the US  
- Knowledge about science and technology  

**Intellectual and Practical Skills**

- Critical thinking and analytic reasoning  
- Complex problem solving  
- Written and oral communication  
- Information literacy  
- Innovation and creativity  
- Teamwork skills in diverse groups  
- Quantitative reasoning  

**Personal and Social Responsibility**

- Problem solving in diverse settings  
- Ethical issues/public debates important in their field  
- Civic knowledge, skills, and judgment essential for contributing to the community and to our democratic society  
- Ethical decision making  

**Integrative and Applied Learning**

- Direct experiences with community problem solving  
- Applied knowledge in real-world settings

**Notes:**

- ■ indicates percentage of employers who "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" that, "regardless of a student's chosen field of study," every student should attain this area of knowledge or skill.
- ★ indicates percentage of employers who say they want colleges/universities to "place more emphasis" on this area of knowledge/skill.

Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement
Messages that Resonate

Focus Group Messages That Resonated the Most:

The heart of a vibrant democracy is educated, engaged citizens who are able to make choices for their families, their communities, and our democracy. America’s colleges and universities can and should play a key role in this.

Informed and respectful civic discourse is essential if the nation is going to solve its many economic, social, and political problems. Colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to model and teach respectful democratic dialogue and problem solving. Higher education should provide all college students with the knowledge and skills to be engaged in productive ways in rebuilding the fabric of American society.

There is a civic dimension to every field of study, including career and technical fields, as well as to every workplace. Industries and services have ethical and social responsibilities of their own. Workers at all levels need to anticipate the civic implications of their choices and actions, and it is important to be able to look at all sides of an issue and take seriously positions with which you may disagree.

A flourishing economy requires the same skills that support citizenship. Civic and democratic learning opportunities (e.g. service learning, community-based research, courses on US history, diversity, and global issues) provide broad skills and knowledge that are useful both for success in the workplace and to prepare students to be active and engaged citizens.

Messages Picked Up by Reporters and Commentators after Release of A Crucible Moment

We are in a civic recession.

Civic skills are the same as workplace success skills.

21st century civic learning should include both knowledge and real-world experience and problem-solving.

Civic learning needs to be pervasive rather than peripheral.

Civic Learning is non-partisan—a way beyond our divisions.

NOTE: While LEAP civic learning messages resonate with reporters—once they engage with the topic—this issue is definitely not a top concern of either trade publications or major media. Outreach to national media outlets continues, but there is not broad interest in the topic and reporters’ perception of the public is that they don’t really care about this—other issues like rising tuition, access, the value proposition, possibilities of online learning, etc. are perceived as far more important than this.

AAC&U commissioned Hart Research Associates to conduct two focus groups in Washington, DC, both held in early December, 2011. One session involved Republican-leaning policy influencers and another session involved Democratic-leaning policy influencers (individuals who work in government, think tanks, trade associations, and advocacy groups, with a focus on a variety of policy issues and disciplines). These sessions were undertaken to understand thoughts and opinions surrounding the need to increase levels of civic knowledge and engagement in the United States today. The discussions explored the degree to which low levels of civic knowledge among Americans is a concern, and whether higher education can and should play a role in bolstering civic engagement.
Messages That Work

- Liberal education outcomes are key to success in today’s global economy and for responsible citizenship.
- Narrow training is not enough.
- Students must gain broad knowledge and have multiple opportunities to hone skills over time and in real-world settings.
- General education is an essential part of providing students these outcomes and opportunities.
- Liberal education outcomes are important because students are likely to change jobs multiple times.
- Liberal education introduces students to multiple perspectives and develops their own independent critical judgment.
- Students needn’t choose either a liberal education or preparation for professional success—both forms of education can be pursued together in mutually reinforcing ways.

Strategies for Making the Case

- Focus on the outcomes of a good liberal education (including general education) and their value in the knowledge-based, global economy.
- Use data (employers; alumni; field trends) that demonstrate that employers want broadly educated, responsible graduates.
- Note the common set of skills and knowledge needed for work and citizenship.
- Real-world experience matters: provide students with real-world applied learning, but also help them translate those experiences into skills and capacities employers can understand.
- For faculty, begin with discussion of their own goals for their own courses—then move to what they need their students to bring into their classes in terms of skills and knowledge to succeed. Then move to what they hope their students will take to the next course or experience.
Liberal Education & America’s Promise (LEAP)

Student Resources

What Is a Liberal Education? And Why Is It Important to My Future?
A brochure for prospective and current college students

This brochure serves as an introduction to what a liberal education is—and why it is important to all college students. Based on research findings from the LEAP initiative, it provides a contemporary definition of the term “liberal education,” discusses the most important outcomes of college, and features the perspectives of recent graduates and employers. Ideal for use in first-year and transfer student orientation, first-year seminars, academic advising, admissions, and career counseling. (2011)

The LEAP Student Brochure is available for bulk purchase only in increments of 200 copies. See website for pricing and discounts.

Why Do I Have to Take This Course? A Student Guide to Making Smart Educational Choices
BY ROBERT SHOENBERG

This practical guide, written for undergraduate students, is intended to take some of the mystery out of curricular requirements and educate students about what really matters in college—the broad learning outcomes developed over the entire course of their undergraduate years. (2005)

$12 members/$20 nonmembers

What Will I Learn in College? What You Need to Know Now to Get Ready for College Success
BY ROBERT SHOENBERG

This publication is a short guide to college learning designed specifically for the college-bound high school student. It presents, in a concise and compelling way, a picture of college learning that will help students understand what will be expected of them and guides them to seek out high school experiences. The guide also features Advice from Campus—candid recommendations from contemporary college students about how to prepare for college success. (2008)

$12 members/$20 nonmembers

It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success

This new report prepared for AAC&U by Hart Research Associates describes the findings of a national survey of business and nonprofit leaders fielded in early 2013. Part of the LEAP series of employer surveys, this report describes the outcomes and practices that employers believe will best prepare students for success in the global economy. It features employer views on which learning outcomes are most important for long-term success, and which educational practices and disciplines employers believe all students should experience in college. The full report and slide deck are free and available for download at: www.aacu.org/leap/public_opinion_research.cfm.

Also available at www.aacu.org:

- Employer perspectives on the most important outcomes of college
- YouTube videos exploring the value of a liberal education in today’s world and highlighting innovative campus practices to advance liberal education outcomes
- Focus group discussion guide to explore students’ attitudes toward liberal education
- Student articles and quotes about the value of a liberal education
- PowerPoint slide presentations with data making the "economic" and "civic" case for liberal education

To learn more, visit WWW.AACU.ORG/LEAP
Liberal Arts Graduates and Employment
Setting the Record Straight
How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment, the new report from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, provides a much-needed corrective to claims that most liberal arts graduates—those with a degree in a humanities, arts, or social science field—are unemployed and unemployable. Based on an analysis of US Census and other economic data, the report presents a broad view of the employment outcomes of college education—not only for recent graduates, but also for more mature and experienced workers. The report also presents a comparison of employment and salary outcomes for liberal arts graduates and those with a degree in science, mathematics, engineering, or a professional or preprofessional field.

Finally, the report tracks the success rates of liberal arts majors and documents how society benefits from liberal arts graduates’ inclination to pursue careers in education and social services professions. Presented below are selected findings from the report.

Employers Want All Students to Study the Liberal Arts and Sciences

4 out of 5 employers agree that all students should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences.

It Takes More than a Major to Succeed

93% of employers agree that candidates’ demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.

Employers Want Both Broad Knowledge and Specific Skills

Which of the following ranges of knowledge and skills are more important for recent graduates who want to pursue advancement and long-term career success at your company?

- Knowledge and skills that apply to a specific field or position
- A range of knowledge and skills that apply to a range of fields or positions
- Both field-specific knowledge and skills and a broad range of knowledge and skills

- Knowledge and skills that apply to a specific field or position: 16%
- A range of knowledge and skills that apply to a range of fields or positions: 55%
- Both field-specific knowledge and skills and a broad range of knowledge and skills: 29%
Top 15 Professions of Liberal Arts Graduates

Elementary and Middle School Teachers
Lawyers, Judges, Magistrates
Managers
Postsecondary Teachers
Chief Executives and Legislators
Education Administrators
Social Workers
Secondary School Teachers
Counselors
Sales Representatives
Clergy
Retail Sales Supervisors
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants
Accountants and Auditors
Marketing and Sales Managers

Drivers of US Intellectual Capital: More Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Attain Advanced Degrees

Graduate School Earnings Bump: Advanced Degrees Significantly Increase Earnings

All citations and sources for data can be found in How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment; see www.aacu.org.
About AAC&U and NCHEMS

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. 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 1,300 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, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education and inclusive excellence at both the national and local levels, and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges. Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found online at www.aacu.org.

Through its more than forty years of service to higher education, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) has been committed to bridging the gap between research and practice by placing the latest concepts and tools in the hands of higher education policy makers and administrators. Since its founding, NCHEMS has received widespread acclaim for developing practical responses to the strategic issues facing leaders of higher education institutions and agencies. With project support from multiple foundations, NCHEMS develops information and policy tools targeted at policy makers and institutional leaders that can help them set strategic directions and evaluate their effectiveness. NCHEMS also delivers research-based expertise, practical experience, information, and a range of management tools that can help institutions and higher education systems and states improve both their efficiency and their effectiveness. A particular hallmark of what we do is identifying and analyzing data drawn from multiple sources to help solve specific policy and strategic problems.

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The selected findings presented in this brochure are drawn from How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment by Debra Humphreys and Patrick Kelly (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2014). The report was made possible with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Spencer Foundation, and the Teagle Foundation. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed here or in the full report do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Spencer Foundation, or the Teagle Foundation.

To download a copy of this brochure or to order copies of the full report, visit www.aacu.org, e-mail pub_desk@aacu.org, or call 202-387-3760.

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