AAC&U WEBINAR

Strategies for Communicating the Importance of Liberal Education

Thursday, March 29, 2018
Livestreaming at 2 p.m. ET
Moderator
C. Edward Watson
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AAC&U

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Upcoming AAC&U Webinars

www.aacu.org/events/webinar

Redesigning Majors: Disciplinary Knowledge, Civic Learning, and Public Responsibility
April 3 - 1:00 pm ET

A Vision for Equity: Campus-Based Strategies for Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence
April 19 - 3:00 pm ET

Signature Work from First Year to Capstone: Scaffolding throughout the Curriculum
April 27 - 2:00 pm ET
What we will do today

- Look at definitions of liberal education
- Explore common criticisms of liberal education
- Consider what is behind this criticism
- Develop strategies for communicating the importance of liberal education
Liberal education

Empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and cultivates social responsibility and a strong sense of ethics and values.

Making the Case for Liberal Education (AAC&U 2006)
Those who have a liberal education

William Cronon

• They listen and they hear.
• They read and they understand.
• They can talk with anyone.
• They can write clearly and persuasively and movingly.
• They can solve a wide variety of puzzles and problems.
• They respect rigor not so much for its own sake but as a way of seeking truth.
• They practice humility, tolerance, and self-criticism.
• They understand how to get things done in the world.
• They nurture and empower the people around them.
• They have the power and the wisdom, the generosity and the freedom to connect.
Do we need to speak out?

"The humanities and the university do need defenders, and the way to defend the humanities is to practice them. ... Scholarship has built institutions before and will do so again. Universities have declined and come to flourish once more. The humanities, which predate the university and may well survive it, will endure — even if there is no case to defend them."

Justin Stover, All Souls College, Oxford, and University of Edinburgh, writing in The Chronicle of Higher Education
Google Books Ngram Viewer

Graph these comma-separated phrases: "liberal education"
between 1800 and 2000 from the corpus English with smoothing of 3

Search lots of books

Replaced "liberal education" with "liberal education" to match how we processed the books.

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Universities ought to have skin in the game. When a student shows up, they ought to say, 'Hey, that psych major deal, that philosophy major thing, that's great. It's important to have liberal arts ... but realize, you're going to be working at Chick-fil-A.'

• Jeb Bush, former Florida governor
"Discussions about great works of literature can be held just as easily in coffee shops as in stadium-riser classrooms—perhaps more easily. Nor is there any reason to believe that there is some great advantage to concentrating the study of those works in the few years immediately after high school—or that our study of them must engage us full-time. The traditional association of liberal arts education and four-year colleges was already becoming an anachronism before the rise of the World Wide Web. It is now a crumbling fossil."

*Andrew J. Coulson, Cato Institute*
"Employers are realizing, increasingly, that the B.A. is a terrible source of information. It is such a noisy signal. There's so little content to it. They need good evidence of what the kids know. I think there's real potential out there – only potential, but I think in the natural course of events it will happen – that the B.A. is going to be undermined by evidence of what the kids know."

- Charles Murray, author of Real Education, Cato Institute podcast
Since 2015, sharp rise in share of Republicans saying colleges have a negative effect on the country

% who say colleges and universities have a ____ effect on the way things are going in the country

Among Rep/Lean Rep

- Positive: 58
- Negative: 32

Among Dem/Lean Dem

- Positive: 72
- Negative: 19

Note: Don’t know/Other responses not shown.
Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Wide partisan gaps, across education groups, on college’s main purpose

% saying the main purpose of college should be...

Among all adults
- Rep/Lean Rep: 28% Personal growth, 58% Specific skills
- Dem/Lean Dem: 42% Personal growth, 43% Specific skills

Among high school or less
- Rep/Lean Rep: 25% Personal growth, 63% Specific skills
- Dem/Lean Dem: 37% Personal growth, 51% Specific skills

Among some college
- Rep/Lean Rep: 27% Personal growth, 59% Specific skills
- Dem/Lean Dem: 40% Personal growth, 43% Specific skills

Among college grad+
- Rep/Lean Rep: 35% Personal growth, 50% Specific skills
- Dem/Lean Dem: 51% Personal growth, 33% Specific skills

Notes: “Some college” includes those with a two-year associate degree. Don’t know/ Other responses not shown.
Source: Survey conducted May 25-June 29, 2016.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
What is happening?

Process:
- Exploration
- Research
- Guided study
- Deep reading
- Discussion and debate
- Challenging of ideas and assumptions
- Exposure to new ideas
- Creativity
- Maturation
- Independent decision-making

Product:
- Campus amenities
- Sports teams
- Diploma
- Education as investment
- University brand

Promise:
- An investment in the future
- Deeper thinkers
- Better problem solvers
- Ability to keep learning
- Better leaders for a democratic society
- Connection to a larger community
- Alumni network
- Lasting resource

https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2013/07/18/colleges-need-emphasize-learning-over-credentials-essay
What is happening?

**Product**
- Student as customer
- Campus amenities
- Sports teams
- Campus ‘experience’
- Education as investment
- University brand
- Status
- Diploma

**Promise**
- An investment for the future
- Deeper thinkers
- Better problem solvers
- Ability to keep learning
- Future leaders for a democratic society
- Connection to a larger community
- Lasting resource

https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2013/07/18/colleges-need-emphasize-learning-over-credentials-essay
Process =

* teaching, learning and doing*

- Exploring ideas and challenging assumptions
- Researching, verifying and writing
- Pursuing guided study
- Reading deeply and critically
- Discussing and analyzing
- Building community
- Trying new things
- Struggling with structured and unstructured problems
- Synthesizing and creating
- Honing creativity
- Maturing
- Practicing independent decision-making

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What can we do?

Create a strategy

• **Audience**: Whom do you want to reach?
• **Purpose**: What is your goal?
• **Strategy**: How will you reach your goal?
What can we do?

Answer some questions

• How do you define liberal education?
• What makes your department, program, school or university unique?
• What is your audience?
• How can you best reach that audience?
What can we do?

Tell our story

• What is your story?
• Create a core message.
  • Soundbite
  • Elevator speech

• Create sub-elements that reinforce and add depth to that core message.
• Emphasize why and how rather than what.
Core message

Donors

Public

Legislators

Parents

Students

Administrators

Colleagues

Secondary message and evidence

Secondary message and evidence

Secondary message and evidence

Secondary message and evidence

Secondary message and evidence

Secondary message and evidence

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Audience: Conservative Donor

Key Focus: Effective communication in multiple modes

Frame: "Investment = Best Yield"

The liberal arts yields effective communication in multiple modes, which is core to successful:

- Messaging
- Interaction
- Negotiation
- Innovation
- Collaboration
- Creative problem-solving
- Sales + Marketing
- Global Perspective
- Diverse audiences + cultures
Responding to Liberal Education is not Real World

Liberal Education builds workplace skills:
- Adaptability/flexibility
- Communicative skills
- Evaluative skills/analysis
- Interpersonal skills & diverse pops.
- Ethics
- Fosters curiosity

Messag: Change is a constant
Liberal Education is as valuable as productivity means to create & negotiate change.
What can we do?

- **Talk about liberal education**
  - To prospective students and families who visit campus
  - To donors and employers
  - To your current students

- **Write about your teaching**
  - University publications
  - Blogs and social media
  - Local, regional and national media

- **Get your communications department interested**
  - Colleges and universities rarely write about teaching and learning. Why?

- **Reach out to local media**
  - Class projects
  - Service learning
  - Class visitors
What can we do?

Format for an op-ed piece

• Headline
  • How liberal education is leading us into the future
  • 10 job skills at the core of liberal education
• Opening: Liberal education has taken a beating over the last 20 years.
  • Follow with a few paragraphs that explain that point and explain why what you have to say is important.
• Bulleted paragraphs. Then move into a series of bulleted paragraphs that support your argument, explain what liberal education is and why it is important.
• End with a memorable point.
What can we do?

Let's start a movement!

#ThisIsLiberalEducation
#WeNeedLiberalEducation
#LiberalEducationMatters

Get students to help!

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Share your stories

https://aacu.org/liberal-education-news-watch
Takeaways

1. Let’s tell our story. We have let others define us.

2. Focus on what makes your school or department unique?

3. Create a core message and several supporting messages you can adapt for multiple audiences.

4. Emphasize the process of education but provide concrete examples.

5. Use multiple channels.
Questions?
AAC&amp;U Resources

www.aacu.org/leap/making-the-case

Communicating Commitment to Liberal Education

Making the Case for Liberal Education

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Strategies for Communicating the Importance of Liberal Education
AAC&U Resources

www.aacu.org/leap/student-resources
Strategies for Communicating the Importance of Liberal Education

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