

自由な学術の教育を活性化するための一考察：米国の観点から

Ideas for Replenishing Liberal Education: Perspectives from the United States

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ABSTRACT

While many promising ideas for advancing liberal education may be found in the extant literature, this scholarship suffers from three major limitations: one, it is replete with universal solutions that do not account for diverse institutional contexts; two, its focus is unbalanced, giving inordinate attention to curricular content over curricular change processes; and three, it is largely ahistorical. Nested in this context, this essay puts forth three touchstones for guiding meaningful change and innovation in liberal education reform, beginning with cultivating a movement for transformational change, continuing with exploring promising definitions and practices, and concluding with experimenting with curricular models and adapting them in light of formative assessment.

自由な学術の教育を促進するにはどうすべきか。有力なアイデアは、現存の文献にも多数見いだされ

るが、しかしリベラルアーツ教育論には三つの大きな弱点がつきまとっている。第一に、リベラルアーツ教育論は、個々の大学の多様な事情を抜きにした、万能な解決策で満ちあふれている。第二に、リベラルアーツ教育論は、カリキュラムの変容過程に比して、カリキュラムの内容の方を法外に重視することで、焦点の中心がズレている。第三に、リベラルアーツ教育論は、歴史的な試みに無頓着である。こうした事情を踏まえて構築された本論は、自由な学術の教育の改革において、有意義な改善と革新とを導くための、三つの試金石を提示する。第一は、変容的な改善という運動を奨励すること。続いては、将来性のある定義や実践を探求し続けること、そして最後に、形成的な評価に照らして、カリキュラム・モデルを実験し、改造してゆくことである。

1. Introduction

There have been numerous calls for the reform of liberal learning in the United States (Conrad and Wyer, 1980)—especially since the Harvard Committee published General Education in a Free Society in 1945. The number and volume of voices and initiatives have resonated in recent years—owing not least to the American Association of Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U) efforts to promote the “quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education.”¹ Built upon a rich history of ideas regarding liberal education, the current work of organizations like AAC&U and scores of colleges and universities engaged in reform has cultivated widespread agreement in the United States that there is a compelling need for replenishing liberal education in our institutions of higher learning. It is a propitious time for reflecting on major change and innovation in liberal education in colleges and universities in the United States and throughout the world.

Notwithstanding the widely-recognized need for reform in liberal education, individual postsecondary institutions in the United States and elsewhere continue to struggle with defining and giving expression to liberal education within the context of their institutions—and, no less, with both initiating and successfully implementing proposed changes. As a case in point, in 2002

Harvard University initiated a major review of its undergraduate curriculum. Fueled in part by the notion that Harvard should take stock of its undergraduate program in light of globalization and the increasing importance of science, several faculty committees advanced curriculum recommendations that de-emphasized the role of the humanities and advanced such objectives as “to further flexibility for intellectual exploration and opportunities for cross-disciplinary study” (Lewis, 2006, p.3)—recommendations that, albeit with a touch of irony, have thus far not disturbed the hegemony of the 32 academic departments at Harvard that provide the coursework for undergraduate students. As of this writing, most observers of this latest Harvard initiative have viewed it as an unmitigated failure to initiate, much less implement, meaningful change in undergraduate education. As Harry Lewis, a former dean of Harvard College stated in his recent book entitled Excellence Without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education:

The bottom line was that nothing in Harvard’s curriculum was held to be more important for Harvard students to learn than anything else. Like a mother of quarreling children, Harvard looked at its thirty-two academic departments and their countless subspecialties and declared that they

were all loved equally. The president, having failed to stamp his plan on the Faculty's thinking, withdrew from the process entirely. The professors who carried out the review proposed instead a curriculum with no meaningful expectations at all, a formula they hoped would please their students and avoid academic turf wars among themselves. Early signs are that the flaccid curriculum toward which Harvard was moving in early 2006 will be ignored. (2006, p. 3)

Like Harvard, many colleges and universities are choosing to address the daunting challenge of successfully bringing about meaningful institution-wide change and innovation. While many promising ideas have been advanced in the literature, the contemporary literature on liberal education suffers from three major limitations. For one, many ideas are advanced as "universal solutions" for enriching liberal learning—ideas that, in turn, may or may not be relevant for institutions within the context of their mission, history, culture, and key stakeholders (including those who ultimately will influence whether proposed changes will be successfully implemented). For another, most of the literature on reform in liberal education focuses exclusively on the content of curricular change and innovation without taking into consideration that successful reform must be anchored in change processes that ensure that proposed reforms not only are introduced but also successfully implemented. For still another, much of the contemporary literature is ahistorical: it ignores the robust historical literature on liberal education that addresses both the substance of liberal education and ideas for successfully bringing about change and innovation.

Consonant with addressing these limitations, the intent of this paper is to provide institutions of higher learning with some ideas to consider in addressing change and innovation in liberal education—ideas about alternative conceptualizations of liberal education and potentially promising practices as well as ideas for successfully initiating and implementing meaningful change. Specifically, we advance three touchstones to guide institutional change and innovation—touchstones that bring together historic and contemporary ideas regarding substantive change and innovation in liberal education with strategies for successfully bringing about change.

2. Touchstone One: Develop and Nurture a Movement for Transformational Change

While President of Princeton University, Woodrow Wilson is reported to have said on more than one occasion that reforming a college curriculum is as "difficult as moving a graveyard." Nowhere is the challenge of reform more striking than in the area of liberal education, where faculty resistance to change is often anchored in unswerving disciplinary orientations and vested interests masked under the rubric of the "common good." In turn, most curriculum change in liberal education in the United States has consisted of "add-ons" such as new elective courses in ethnic and women's studies courses or a new requirement in non-Western culture that may or may not challenge the conventional wisdom of Western Civilization.

Standing in sharp contrast, a "transformed curriculum" begins with a (re)defining of the core purpose(s) of education and, in turn, incorporates new knowledge and scholarship, revisits the organization of the curriculum, explores promising innovations in teaching and learning,

and incorporates assessment practices that can help to ensure that the transformed curriculum is continuously replenished. In turn, a “transformed curriculum” requires a transformational change process—one that not only leads to the initiation of change but helps to ensure that reform is successfully implemented by those stakeholders—faculty chief among them—who give expression to the curriculum in their everyday commitments and behaviors.

Especially in the last three decades, there have been scores of studies on strategies for bringing about successful curriculum change and innovation in higher education, including reform in general education. Two conventional models of institutional change in higher education have been advanced in the literature: the “planned change model” and the “political model.” As its name suggests, the “planned change” model is anchored in the premise that organizational change can be intentional and rational—and, in turn, it emphasizes the application of behavioral science knowledge regarding such strategies as informational exchange among stakeholders and rewards for participants (Bennis, Benne, and Chin, 1962; Lindquist, 1978). In sharp contrast, the “political model”—which was developed and applied to higher education initially by Baldrige (1971)—emphasizes the centrality of political maneuvering among vested interest groups as central to the change process. To illustrate the latter, Conrad (1978) conducted a major study of change in general education programs and developed a grounded theory of change that knits together political concepts and processes linking pressures for change and policy decisions to change: conflict and interest group pressures followed by power exertion, administrative leadership, faculty leadership exercised through interest group advocacy, and compromises negotiated through administrative leadership.

Along with these two conventional models and associated strategies for change, various scholars have advanced numerous other strategies for change—such as “creating a climate for change” and “communicating effectively” (Conrad, 1980; Toombs and Tierney, 1991).

While there is compelling empirical evidence that these models and strategies can provide valuable insight regarding the initiation phase of the change process—that is, contributing to a decision to change liberal education—there is little evidence that either a “planned change model” (organizational) or a “political model” is effective in implementing curriculum change in ways that eventually result in a “transformed curriculum.” For both a planned change and a political model suggest that organizations such as colleges and universities are essentially organized around “power” and, in turn, the focus of the change process is on persuading the “power-holders” as against inviting key stakeholders such as faculty and administrators to invest in meaningful reform that ultimately transforms the curriculum from deeply-rooted innovations in curriculum organization to teaching and learning practices within individual liberal arts courses.

In contrast to most of the extant literature, Parker Palmer (1992) has proposed a model—what he labels a “movement approach” to educational reform—one that holds considerable promise for advancing “transformational change” in the liberal arts curriculum. Anchored in the notion that the genius of movement is paradoxical because it abandons “the logic of organizations in order to gather the power necessary to rewrite the logic of the organizations” (p. 12), Palmer advances four overlapping stages in successful movements. The first stage, which he refers to as “choosing integrity,” is when isolated individuals make a decision to cease leading “divided lives” in which they inwardly feel one way but outwardly

respond in another. That is, individuals create change from the “inside out” by first changing themselves, setting in motion a change process that is anchored in individuals who decide individually, then collectivity, to cease from denying their own integrity. The second stage, “corporate support,” is when individuals who are committed to a path of integrity in their college or university begin to find one another and develop mutually reinforcing relationships. Gradually, albeit with intentionality and a willingness to risk, individuals (faculty and/or administrators) come together—in effect, informal support groups—to discuss the possibility of shared curriculum reform agendas. The third stage, “going public,” is launched when individuals begin to translate their shared private concerns into public forums. (In developing his argument, Parker Palmer refers to how African-Americans in the Civil Rights Movement initially met in small groups and then began to find a shared agenda that they gave expression to in a public voice—in open letters and essays, in songs and sermons and speeches.) In turn, expressing a public voice in the academy allows a growing movement that is even more fundamental than political change: it is a movement that creates cultural change—that wellspring of a mass movement that invites public discourse regarding such innovations as “collaborative learning.” The last and fourth stage is labeled “alternative rewards.” Whereas the first three stages are sustained by individuals finding personal reward in living their own values in the workplace, the last stage embraces a more “systematic pattern of alternative rewards” that, if the movement reaches full expression, leads to fundamental change and innovation in the curriculum. For as more and more people committed to change find their “place” in their everyday professional lives, the movement writ large is fueled by people who find deep satisfaction in living professional lives in a way that honors

their own integrity. In the end, widespread and meaningful curriculum reform begins to take place when faculty who implement curriculum reform maintain fidelity to it in their everyday teaching and learning and, no less, continue to find reward through their continuous renewal and revisioning of liberal learning in forms and images that the movement has inspired.

3. Touchstone Two: Explore Potentially Promising Definitions and Practices

Deliberation over the meaning of “liberal education” and how it should be given expression in college and university curricula is arguably one of the most enduring hallmarks of higher education discourse (Brick and McGrath, 1971; Greene, Wriston, and Dighton, 1943; Kimball, 1986; Wegener, 1978; Wriston, 1937; Van Doren, 1943). Indeed, reformulating the stated aims and curricular practices of liberal education is an activity for which we seem to have an unending reservoir of energy, curiosity, and, perhaps, stubbornness (Martin, 1982). Contemporary higher education discourse provides no exception. The recent upsurge in discussion about liberal education has once again fueled a search for universal definitions and solutions. While laudable, this search is surely futile and, ultimately, confounding for institutions committed to the replenishment of liberal education. Looking to an external source for the answer fails to recognize that meaningful change at the local level requires a concerted effort beginning and ending at the local level.

The AAC&U’s approach is one of many “grass-roots”—yet well-funded—initiatives on the American higher education landscape which seeks to change institutions from the outside-in. Whether the AAC&U’s work will lead to major reform in liberal education across the country remains an

empirical question. This question notwithstanding, the AAC&U and other like-minded organizations and institutions can be credited with having prompted a bevy of abstract ideas and general models which may be given consideration for application in local contexts. More critically, also remaining is the question of what individual institutions ought to make of an assortment of ideas and practices that at once provide inspiration and pressure for colleges and universities attempting to make sense of liberal education for themselves and, ostensibly and ultimately, for others in the increasingly complex and competitive higher education market.

In this section we draw from the extant literature a series of potential promising conceptualizations and practices of liberal education. To begin, we advance three conceptualizations of liberal education – “knowledge-based,” “competence-based,” and “problem-based” – which constitute foundational perspectives for liberal education. Not mutually-exclusive (indeed, they are often in practice mutually inclusive), these conceptualizations are heuristic devices which subsume the motives, aims, values, and organizing principles undergirding the myriad purposes of liberal education, past and present. To complement these three conceptualizations, we then put forth a compilation of forms in which liberal education has been implemented. With an emphasis on recent “innovations,” we identify two *domains* of promising practices – *organization* and *teaching and learning* – which at once give expression to and prompt reflection on the “how-to’s” of liberal education. As a whole, the three conceptualizations and two practical domains of promising practices in liberal education herein serve as a touchstone for institutions engaged in a review of what others have done and are doing so that they may determine the best course of action for themselves.

3.1 Conceptualizations of Liberal Education

Knowledge-Based. A knowledge-based conceptualization of liberal education is arguably the most enduring, well-known, and common among the three conceptualizations of liberal education advanced here. While a knowledge-based conceptualization is often considered to be synonymous with a “classical,” “traditional,” or “Western” conceptualization of liberal education for historical reasons, the conceptualization of liberal education we offer here is not necessarily defined through adherence to these or related terms. Put simply, our conceptualization is centered around the following question: What should students know—what awareness of, appreciation of, familiarity with, and fluency in certain bodies of knowledge—in order to be considered liberally educated? The response to this question may well be, as has often been the case, the development of a classical, traditional, or Western-centric curriculum (Cheyney, 1989; Nussbaum, 1997). However, it may just as well be antithetical to or even critical of these approaches. In addition to variations in actual content knowledge, knowledge-based conceptualizations of liberal education may also vary with respect to their flexibility (such as the extent to which students may choose which courses to take). To illustrate several knowledge-based conceptualizations of liberal education, brief descriptions of two programs of study are instructive.

St. John’s College, with campuses in Annapolis, Maryland, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, is well-known for its knowledge-based conceptualization of liberal education. All students at St. John’s enroll in the same courses—there are neither majors nor a distribution requirement nor departments—over the course of four years, all constitutive of its single baccalaureate degree (Bachelor of Arts). All students engage in four years of seminar, four

years of language, four years of math, three years of laboratory science, and one year of music, all through study of “the great books,” a series of volumes read in chronological order, beginning with Homer in the freshman year and concluding with Melville in the senior year. With respect to content knowledge, the St. John’s curriculum is decidedly – and some might say, unapologetically – focused on Western intellectual history and thought.

In contrast, yet equally representative of the knowledge-based conceptualization of liberal education in the U.S., is the liberal education curriculum of our home institution, the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin (UW-Madison). Rather than the singular path available to students at St. John’s, UW-Madison undergraduates have access to over 100 distinct fields of study and may piece together a baccalaureate degree program which is wholly unique in comparison to that of their peers. The UW-Madison liberal education program is given expression and structure through its general education and major requirements. In addition to fulfilling requirements for their respective major areas of study, all UW-Madison students are required to satisfy core general education requirements in communication, quantitative reasoning, natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, and ethnic studies. Given its flexible requirements, the liberal education program at UW-Madison varies with each individual student. Nevertheless, given that its liberal education program is animated by what it requires students to do – the yardstick of any liberal education program – and the fact that its requirements largely begin and end with drawing from receptacles of knowledge, the UW-Madison relies upon, like St. John’s College and the majority of other American colleges and universities, a principally knowledge-based conceptualization of liberal education.

Competence-Based. With knowledge-based conceptualizations of liberal education recognizable by a curricular adherence to receptacles of knowledge – with varying degrees of precision in their definition and structure – we characterize competence-based conceptualizations of liberal education by a curricular adherence to sets of intellectual and practical skills and dispositions. To be sure, any college and university which espouses the value of a liberal education is likely to identify the skills and dispositions it assumes its students will develop. Fewer are instances when those skills and dispositions animate the core of the institution’s conceptualization of liberal education – that is, when they are the basis for its liberal education philosophy and the curriculum through which that philosophy is enacted.

To forestall a potential misinterpretation of the distinction between knowledge-based and competence-based conceptualizations of liberal education, we turn again to our home institution’s liberal education program. To be sure, the general education requirements for the baccalaureate degree at UW-Madison include “competency in communication” and “competency in using the modes of thought characteristic of the major areas of knowledge.”² One might be inclined to interpret these categories of requirements to reflect a competence-based conceptualization of liberal education—they do, yet only in a rhetorical sense. Upon further inspection, it is evident that students may fulfill these requirements by taking one or two courses from a list of dozens, the majority of which are clearly knowledge-based (e.g., Introduction to Folklore, General Ecology). Further confounding is the fact that students may be exempt from these requirements by scoring at certain levels on achievement exams. Put another way, a competence-based conceptualization of liberal education ought to satisfy two criteria: (1) It must

be part and parcel of both the philosophy of the program and what students – all students – must do to engage it, and (2) Students must be aware that they’re engaging a competence-based liberal education program (though it need not be labeled as such, a point we will return to shortly) and they must actively demonstrate those competencies as a part of engaging it. Though less common, competence-based conceptualizations of liberal education are on the rise. The program of one institution in particular – Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin – is a prototypical exemplar for institutions interested in competence-based liberal education.

Alverno’s “ability-based curriculum” has been a center of attention on the landscape of American higher education for over three decades. Alverno, a four-year women’s Catholic college, exemplifies what we contend is the dual character—the development of competencies as an unequivocal philosophical foundation and a clear practical aim—of competence-based liberal education. In their own words, the faculty at Alverno “have designed a curriculum that requires students to make connections between the ideas they are studying and their own lives as individuals, citizens, and professionals. The faculty see the classroom not as a place to pass on information, but as a place for students to practice the kinds of thinking and doing they will need in their lives.”³ To these ends, students and faculty together engage in a process termed “assessment-as-learning,” whereby a specific set of abilities—communication, analysis, problem-solving, valuing in decision-making, social interaction, developing a global perspective, effective citizenship, and aesthetic engagement⁴—is assessed in each course and in cross-course summative assessments. Assessment of competencies is fully integrated in its curriculum, so much so that, rather than receiving a traditional grade for each course, students receive a

numeric rating (1 through 6) on each of the eight abilities. The result of such an all-encompassing assessment regimen is a competence-based conceptualization of liberal education that has been infused into Alverno’s environment in countless ways, including not least the vernacular discourse. On a personal note, in a visit to Alverno two years ago, we overheard professors and students alike referring to “4’s in communication” and “3’s in social interaction,” in hallway conversation. A liberal education program brought to life so vividly makes a lasting impression.

Problem-Based. “Every curriculum represents a choice as to how to approach the education of students. The particular approach chosen by the developers of a curriculum stems in part from how they formulate the problem to which they are responding” (Posner, ASHE Reader, p.5) In this light, all curriculum may be viewed as “problem-based” in some way. Here we have a different understanding of how a curriculum may be problem-based: Like a competence-based conceptualization of liberal education where the aims and objectives of the program are explicit, a problem-based liberal education program is one in which the curriculum is explicitly put forth as a solution to an explicated problem. More specifically, in this conceptualization, the tenets of a liberal education are cast as endemic to the solution of the problem. In this section we highlight two exemplars – one uncommon yet fitting, the other well-known yet, perhaps, surprising – which illuminate the contours of a problem-based conceptualization of liberal education.

Many philosophies and practices of liberal education claim the development of “future leaders” as a goal. Taking this claim to a new level, the Jepson School at the University of Richmond (Richmond, Virginia) “was founded to fill a significant void in higher education”⁵ and, by

extension, a significant void in society: a lack of leaders with “the knowledge, ability and conviction to drive change and positively impact the world.” Through a study of the intellectual history of leadership, leadership theory, philosophy of leadership (particularly ethics), and “real-world situations,” the degree in leadership studies from the Jepson School – considered to be an extension of the University’s liberal education curriculum engaged by all students – is intended to equip students with “a base of knowledge and conceptual tools to support the exercise of leadership in all settings” (e.g., private, non-profit, and governmental organizations).

Another institution casts its liberal education program in a similar light: “Graduates anticipate and respond effectively to the uncertainties of a changing technological, social, political, and economic world.”⁶ A leadership program of a more focused variety, the academic program at the United States Military Academy at West Point “affords cadets a broad liberal education designed to develop versatile, creative, and critical thinkers who can craft effective and ethical responses to the challenges that will confront them throughout their careers.” A liberal education is commonly regarded as an education which can provide preparation for an array of post-graduate vocations and studies. That said, it is imprudent to limit the value of liberal education to such general trajectories. The curriculum at West Point, save for its rigorous physical education program and the frequency with which its students come into contact with firearms and other weapons, is very much like any other liberal education program. For our purposes, what makes it distinct is its grounding and intention to solve an explicit problem, namely, leadership in the armed forces and, of course, beyond. Any proponents of liberal education would likely claim that its purpose is to prepare students for effectively facing the uncertainties of a changing

world: the distinction here is that the students and faculty at West Point – and at the Jepson School of Leadership Studies, for that matter – know in explicitly shared terms that such problems await and how liberal education can contribute to their amelioration.

In conclusion, when looking to other institutions for guidance and inspiration regarding conceptualizations of liberal education, the definitions and examples included in this section underscore several points of importance. One, while not mutually exclusive categories, the conceptualizations of liberal education presented here are best thought of as indications of where energy is directed, leaving room for one or both of the other conceptualizations to play supplementary roles. For example, it is our experience that most institutions, such as our own, have predominantly knowledge-based conceptualizations of liberal education which are enhanced by competence-based and problem-based elements. Two, while liberal education is certainly not an ideology-free term, it ought not be considered to be based on a universal and exclusive ideological platform. Contrary to much of the popular rhetoric in circles of higher learning, a knowledge-based conceptualization is not implicitly a bad thing (normatively, ethically, or otherwise) and even the armed forces can foster a robust conceptualization of liberal education. And three, it is important to think of conceptualizations of liberal education pragmatically, for consistency between the concept and practice of liberal education is critical. Next, we explore this third point in greater detail in an explication of promising practical domains of liberal education.

3.2 Practical Domains of Liberal Education

Throughout this paper we contend that there are no universal solutions for replenishing liberal education. By the same token, we contend

that there are also no particulars so notable that they warrant universal attention. Rather, striking a chord in between the universal and the particular, we maintain that there are critical modes of practice endemic to the replenishment of liberal education. In this section we provide sketches of such “practical domains” – in other words, circumscribed areas of work which have cross-institutional relevance – related to liberal education. In so doing, we intend to highlight promising areas of liberal education reform at the institutional level. These practical domains appear consistently appear in the literature in two major strands: the *organization* of liberal education and liberal education *teaching and learning*.

Organization. In Communicating Commitment to Liberal Education: A Self-Study Guide for Institutions (AAC&U, 2006), seven practical domains are outlined for the purposes of organizing an institutional “intentionality audit” so that institutions may “determine how professed goals are aligned with actual practices” (p. 2):

- Mission and Leadership: Making an explicit commitment to “liberal education”
- Admissions and Outreach: Communicating “liberal education” to prospective students
- Faculty: Infusing commitment in communications with and by professors
- Curriculum: Embedding and connecting “liberal education” messages in curricular structures and requirements
- Assessment: Developing and enacting a culture of evidence supporting the advancement of liberal education and liberal learning outcomes
- External Relations: Communicating commitment to “liberal education” with surrounding communities and external stakeholders
- Web Sites: Ensuring institutional web pages reflect and amplify institutional commitment to “liberal education”

This guide by the AAC&U provides numerous suggestions for those charged with leading liberal education reforms at colleges and universities of all shapes and sizes. Indeed, we echo here their urging of attention to people, texts, and activities—all of which are undeniably important—when engaged in replenishing liberal education at the institutional level. At the same time, our endorsement comes with one important caveat: There is a fine line between *communicating* commitment to liberal education and *demonstrating* commitment to liberal education, and weight ought to be given to the latter, even if at the expense of the former.

From our perspective, this AAC&U report – representative of its overarching initiative in many respects – is infatuated with the terminology of liberal education, perhaps to a fault. Among its dozens of “questions to consider” are several prompts which advocate putting the phrase “liberal education” front and center in institutional efforts to reform liberal education. For example:

- “Does the mission statement include an explicit commitment to providing a liberal education for all students?”
- “Do admissions materials actually use the term ‘liberal education’ to describe [student learning] outcomes?”
- “Are learning goals and the institution’s commitment to liberal education made clear on course syllabi?”
- “Is the term ‘liberal education’ or the phrase ‘liberal learning outcomes’ used on the home page and in all the various other sections of the site dealing with academics and requirements?”

This fixation on the words “liberal education” both underscores and belies the fact that influencing the discourse of an organization is an important part of the purposive development of an organization: while recognizing that it is important for college and university communities to rally around complex ideas given expression through

simple language, the insistence that “liberal education” necessarily needs to be pervasive in order for liberal education to be replenished ignores the fact that language, too, ought to be locally constructed. Put simply, “liberal education” may not be the best language to describe and promote liberal education’s history, values, and norms at any given campus. Indeed, calls for “liberal education” may militate against from the potential for replenishing liberal education in local contexts, either by causing an ideological distraction or by diverting inordinate attention to campus rhetoric. We applaud and support the AAC&U’s efforts, yet we wonder if their allegiance to their national campaign for “liberal education” may come at the expense of ongoing replenishment of liberal education within colleges and universities—which we encourage faculty to take full responsibility for within their courses.

Teaching and Learning. Concurrent with—though not always linked to—the recent concern with replenishing liberal education in the U.S. has been a host of movements and reform initiatives which seek to redefine substantially teaching practices and learning experiences at colleges and universities. Innovations geared toward making each more effective abound, and those which focus on making teaching and learning more *connected* and *integrated* can no doubt contribute significantly to the advancement of liberal learning. In this section we provide a snapshot of three current arenas of innovation—*experiential education*, *collaborative education*, and *interdisciplinary education*—which can greatly enhance teaching and learning for liberal education at American colleges and universities. Briefly, we describe each arena and provide two exemplars which represent these forms of innovation in liberal education. Before proceeding, however, a stipulation is in order. It is important to emphasize that none of these arenas of innovation

are necessarily new. They may be new ideas which fit contemporary circumstances, but they are not new *practices*. Rather, experiential education, collaborative education, and interdisciplinary education—each of which has historical antecedents—are widely-considered to be promising remedies to liberal education gone awry.

Experiential education is a form of teaching and learning which emphasizes the importance of “doing” – that is, directly engaging in inquiry, experimentation, observation of cause and effect, and inference of physical, moral, and theoretical implications rather than simply speaking, hearing, and reading about such phenomena and perspectives. A principal assumption of experiential education is that not only do students learn *more* when they engage learning in this way, but they also *connect* what they learn to real-world challenges and opportunities and *integrate* their learning with their past—and their future—learning.

“Service learning” is a form of experiential education that has gained a significant amount of momentum at colleges and universities over the past two decades. While volunteering in various forms of community service has been a valued characteristic of the undergraduate experience for generations, it has been institutionalized in the emergence of service learning, in which academic study is integrated with community service. In plain terms, students concurrently engage in learning the subject matter of a particular course while engaging in community service for a minimum number of hours per week—and the two experiences are mutually reinforcing, each building upon and extending the learning in the other. For example, a student may volunteer at a homeless shelter while enrolled in an introductory sociology course and, in so doing, learn about theories and experiences related to socioeconomic class. These experiences are sometimes organized

entirely by the professor of the service learning course, yet more often they are facilitated in a partnership between the professor, the community agency, and a campus office staffed by service learning professionals who serve as liaisons and provide expertise with respect to both the classroom (such as modification of the syllabus and pedagogy) and the service experience (such as setting up the parameters for student volunteers in collaboration with the community partners, ensuring the experience is academically relevant and appropriate for student development).

“Study abroad” is another form of experiential education which involves students engaging in learning outside the classroom. In some cases it simply involves study at an institution outside the student’s home country, but more often study abroad also involves coordinated learning experiences outside the classroom in the destination country. Teaching and learning in study abroad programs is organized in a variety of ways. A student may simply independently enroll in courses at a foreign institution, or a student may do so in a cohort of students and a professor(s) from their home institution. Whatever its form, the potential for study abroad to enhance liberal learning is profound. Based on assumption that interactions with another culture will not only provide students with an understanding of that other culture but change their understandings of their own culture as well, study abroad has become increasingly popular as an enhancement to liberal learning as advocates of liberal education have become increasingly concerned with globalization and the preparation of students to be citizens of the world.

Collaborative education--an emphasis on teaching and learning with others—may be viewed as a form of experiential education, yet its advancement in recent years warrants it separate treatment as an arena of innovation in

liberal education. Counter to the overwhelming ideology of individualism that has sustained the higher learning in America for the better part of the last three centuries, collaborative education is at once concerned with breaking down norms of competitiveness and isolation and enhancing student learning. The cornerstone of collaborative education is the notion that people can learn with greater precision and understanding when engaged in learning with others.

“Learning communities” are an innovation in teaching and learning which represent well the principles of collaborative education. Over the past ten years, the concept of learning communities has been incisively defined and nationally promoted by the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. Learning communities are defined by the Washington Center’s National Resource Center on Learning Communities in the following way:

In higher education, curricular learning communities are classes that are linked or clustered during an academic term, often around an interdisciplinary theme, and enroll a common cohort of students. A variety of approaches are used to build these learning communities, with all intended to restructure the students’ time, credit, and learning experiences to build community among students, between students and their teachers, and among faculty members and disciplines.⁷

That the Washington Center defines learning communities in such structural terms is both instructive and restrictive. While it is valuable to think about how a learning community, as it were, may be achieved through such modifications to the time and space of faculty, students, classrooms, and courses, we contend that the principles of

a learning community are more important with respect to replenishing liberal education. Indeed, a learning community may be conceptualized within the parameters of a single course with a single instructor so long as it is characterized by the explicit goal of enhancing teaching and learning using collaborative education – more specifically, the formation of community – as a means to an end. That is, the achievement of a sense of community shouldn't be viewed as the primary objective, but as a way in which the outcomes of liberal education are enhanced. Such outcomes – best defined at the local level – may include, for example, enhancement of knowledge and skills through fostering empathy and appreciation for others' experiences and perspectives.

“Community-based research” is a form of collaborative education – and arguably a specific form of a learning community – that has developed momentum along with the service learning reform movement, particularly at research universities. This arena of innovation is based upon a centuries-old problem faced by the “ivory tower,” namely, the challenge of leveraging the expertise of institutions of higher education for the direct benefit of their surrounding communities. In community-based research, university experts and members of a community come together to identify a research problem and, once identified, they engage in the research process by way of a collaborative partnership where the relative strength of the faculty and the community members mutually reinforce one another. While community-based research may involve only faculty and community members, it has become increasingly common for students to be a part of the research team, often in the context of a course (i.e., like the service learning model). For example, students and faculty involved in a marketing methodology course may partner with a community health organization in order

to identify what marketing strategies are most effective in reaching a particular population of individuals (such as senior citizens). As a form of teaching and learning, community-based research advances liberal education by making explicit the importance of many tenets of liberal learning, not least critical listening and thinking, creativity, deployment and testing of knowledge, and, ultimately, problem-solving.

Interdisciplinary education, like experiential and collaborative education, is a reaction to historical developments in college and university teaching and learning. In many respects, interdisciplinary education has been advanced as a corrective to the primacy of the disciplines – that is, with disciplinary study having become so specialized in the 20th century, interdisciplinary education transcends the boundaries of disciplinary “silos” by drawing from two or more disciplines in the pursuit of a common educational goal. With one of the common tenets of liberal education being the cultivation of a breadth of knowledge and cognitive skills, it is clear that the rigidity of the disciplines may work against liberal learning. Interdisciplinary teaching and learning can advance liberal learning by enabling a focus on problems and topics that any single discipline is unable – or unwilling – to approach effectively, as the following two arenas of innovation demonstrate.

“Problem-based learning” is an approach to education which places the pursuit of a solution to a problem as the primary aim of teaching and learning, above and beyond the advancement of any single discipline. While problem-based learning may be pursued within the confines of a single discipline, it is more often found to be interdisciplinary in nature given that real-world problems seldom come in tidy discipline-based forms. Liberal education is enriched through problem-based learning because it necessarily requires the integration and connection

of knowledge in real-world simulations and situations.

“Area studies,” “gender studies,” and “ethnic studies” are also prominent forms of interdisciplinary teaching and learning which can cultivate the advancement of liberal education. As organized areas of study which are concerned with topics – be it geographic or cultural regions (area studies), social constructions of sex (gender studies), or the intersection of individuals and society with race, nationality, and culture (ethnic studies) – rather than enhancement of a discipline, these institutionalized forms of teaching and learning support one of liberal education’s most common and critical aims: building the capacity for individuals to understand and communicate responsibly across geographic, cultural, and socially constructed boundaries.

4. Touchstone Three: Experiment with and Then Adapt Promising Innovations in Light of Formative Assessment

In the United States, the classic approach to change and innovation in liberal education has been uncompromisingly straightforward: once an innovation (such as service-learning) has received widespread national attention, scores of colleges and universities uncritically adopt the innovation at their institution. While such innovations can serve a powerful rhetorical purpose, simply adopting an innovation is often accompanied by major limitations. For one, such innovations may not be appropriate, at least without modification, for institutions within the context of their history, mission, culture, and predispositions of key stakeholders such as faculty. For another, such innovations may be little more than “boutique” innovations that fall short of enhancing the liberal learning of all undergraduate students. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for example,

there are myriad pockets of innovations aimed at enhancing liberal education—such as service-learning and “undergraduate research”—that are not required of all students and, in turn, relatively few students benefit from these innovations.

Rather than uncritically adopting promising innovations, we suggest that institutions serious about reform in liberal education should “experiment” with potentially promising innovations and, after engaging in formative assessment, adopt them and continue to modify them or discontinue them over time in the light of ongoing assessment. In this context, “formative assessment” refers to evaluating innovations in light of their intended aims or, to put it another way, exploring the efficacy of innovative practices in terms of fostering desired learning experiences and, in turn, the intended learning outcomes. To that end, there are a wide range of both traditional and non-traditional approaches and techniques to provide a foundation for considering if the innovations being proposed should be adopted, modified, or discontinued.

Traditional assessment practices—ranging from tests, homework, problem sets, final examinations, and the like—are well-known and widely practiced. Much less widely-known but promising non-traditional practices are mentioned here to suggest the range of approaches that could be used in eliciting feedback on specific innovations in liberal education. Among many others, student journals, collaborative testing, student writing, portfolios, open-ended problems, and self-assessment are approaches to assessment that merit consideration. [For an overview of alternative assessments of student learning, see Conrad, Kwako, and Gislason (2003)].

In summary, experimenting with promising innovations and then adapting them as appropriate in light of ongoing assessment can provide an infinitely more robust foundation for genuine

reform in liberal education than uncritically adopting “boutique” innovations without adapting them to the conceptualizations and specific needs of institutions.

5. A Concluding Note

No single vision of liberal education—not one—has dominated the landscape of the higher learning throughout the world. Rather, from the ancient Greeks to the 21st century, scores of alternative visions and practices have been advocated under the banner of liberal learning. Surely it is the journey, the continuing search for “ideas for replenishing liberal learning” rather than a single ideal-type, that should guide us as we continue to reflect on liberal education in our colleges and universities. As Bishop Mandell Creighton is reported to have said: “The one real object of education is to have a man in the condition of continually asking questions.”

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Notes

- 1 <http://www.aacu.org/about/index.cfm>
- 2 <http://www.wisc.edu/pubs/ug/10lettsci/ugstudy.html#obj>
- 3 http://www.alverno.edu/about_alverno/about_lib_arts.html
- 4 http://www.alverno.edu/about_alverno/ability.html
- 5 <http://oncampus.richmond.edu/leadership/>
- 6 <http://www.dean.usma.edu/support/aad/EFAOCW.pdf>
- 7 <http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/lcfaq.htm>