

# Eliciting and Assessing Our Students' Best Work

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# LEAP AT A GLANCE

(2005-2015)

## AAC&U's LEAP INITIATIVE

- LEAP is a long-term effort to clarify the aims, best practices and social benefits of liberal education.
- Through LEAP, AAC&U is working to make liberal education a resource for ALL students, not just the fortunate few.

## GOALS

- Focus reform on the essential learning outcomes all students need;
- Challenge the belief that students must choose **either** a liberal education **or** a practical education by advancing designs for college learning that blend broad **and** applied learning;
- Highlight and counter current practices that steer some students to narrow educational tracks while the most advantaged students reap the full benefits of a broad liberal education;
- Help **all** college and college-bound students understand, prepare for, and achieve essential learning outcomes;
- Document national and state progress in student achievement of student learning outcomes.

## LEAP PROMOTES

- **Essential Learning Outcomes** – a guiding vision and national benchmarks for college learning and liberal education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
- **High Impact Practices** – helping students achieve the essential learning outcomes;
- **Inclusive Excellence** – challenging higher education to provide the most powerful forms of learning to all students, with special attention to first-generation and underserved communities;
- **Authentic Assessments** – probing whether students can apply their learning to complex problems and real-world challenges

## AREAS OF WORK

### Campus Action

- LEAP strategies for deepening and assessing student learning
- LEAP Campus Action Network and workshops (325 two- and four-year institutions – public and private – and organizational partners);
- LEAP initiatives in Partner States – Wisconsin, Virginia, Oregon, Utah, North Dakota, CSU System; eight other states seeking inclusion
- Summer institutes for campus teams working on outcomes in general education, departmental majors, assessment, and institutional change to make excellence inclusive;
- Partnerships with national, regional and scholarly associations, and with Project Kaleidoscope, a leader in STEM reform.

### Public Advocacy

- LEAP National Leadership Council – speaking/writing/influencing/endorsing;
- Presidents' Trust – connecting college learning with public priorities – economic and civic;
- Public opinion research – employers; recent graduates; students.

### Authentic Evidence

- LEAP VALUE project – new resources and rubrics for deepening, assessing and reporting student learning;
- College Learning Reports—prepared in concert with research agencies—on students' achievement of essential learning outcomes and their participation in high impact forms of learning.

# AAC&U Member Institutions’ Learning Outcomes for All Students



## ★ Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

• Humanities	92%
• Sciences	91%
• Social Sciences	90%
• Global/World Cultures	87%
• Mathematics	87%
• Diversity in the United States	73%
• United States History	49%
• Languages Other Than English	42%
• Sustainability	24%

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## ★ Intellectual and Practical Skills

• Writing skills	99%
• Critical Thinking	95%
• Quantitative Reasoning	91%
• Oral Communication	88%
• Intercultural Skills	79%*
• Information Literacy	76%
• Research skills	65%

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## ★ Personal and Social Responsibility

• Intercultural Skills	79%*
• Ethical Reasoning	75%
• Civic Engagement	68%

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## ★ Integrative Learning

• Application of Learning	66%
• Integration of Learning	63%

Note: Nearly 80% of AAC&U member institutions surveyed reported that they had a common set of learning outcomes for all students. Percentages cited above are the percentage of those with campus-wide goals reporting that this outcome is one of the learning goals they have for all students. This data was generated as part of AAC&U’s initiative, Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP). The four categories of learning outcomes correspond to a set of “Essential Learning Outcomes” developed as part of LEAP. See [www.aacu.org/leap](http://www.aacu.org/leap) and *Learning and Assessment: Trends in Undergraduate Education—A Survey Among Members of the Association of American Colleges and Universities* (AAC&U and Hart Research Associates, 2009).

\* The starred items are shown in two learning outcome categories because they apply to both.

# 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:

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## ★ 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*

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## ★ 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*

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## ★ 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*

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## ★ 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: *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (2002), *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree* (2004), and *College Learning for the New Global Century* (2007). For further information, see [www.aacu.org/leap](http://www.aacu.org/leap).

# Percentage of Employers Who Want Colleges to “Place More Emphasis” on Essential Learning Outcomes



## ★ Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

• Science and technology	70%
• Global issues	67%*
• The role of the United States in the world	57%
• Cultural diversity in the United States and other countries	57%
• Civic knowledge, participation, and engagement	52%*

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## ★ Intellectual and Practical Skills

• Written and oral communication	89%
• Critical thinking and analytic reasoning	81%
• Complex problem solving	75%
• Teamwork skills in diverse groups	71%*
• Creativity and innovation	70%
• Information literacy	68%
• Quantitative reasoning	63%

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## ★ Personal and Social Responsibility

• Ethical decision making	75%
• Intercultural competence (teamwork in diverse groups)	71%*
• Intercultural knowledge (global issues)	67%*
• Civic knowledge, participation, and engagement	52%*

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## ★ Integrative and Applied Learning

• Applied knowledge in real-world settings	79%
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Note: These findings are taken from *Raising the Bar: Employers' Views on College Learning in the Wake of the Economic Downturn*, a survey of employers conducted for AAC&U by Hart Research Associates and published in 2010. For a full report on this survey and related employer findings, see [www.aacu.org/leap](http://www.aacu.org/leap).

\*Starred items are shown in multiple learning outcome categories because they apply to more than one.

# High-Impact Educational Practices



These widely tested teaching and learning innovations show substantial educational benefits, especially for college students from historically underserved backgrounds. But these practices remain optional rather than expected on most campuses

## First-Year Seminars and Experiences

Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members' own research.

## Common Intellectual Experiences

The older idea of a "core" curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community (see below). These programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and cocurricular options for students.

## Learning Communities

The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with "big questions" that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link "liberal arts" and "professional courses"; others feature service learning.

## Writing-Intensive Courses

These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice "across the curriculum" has led to parallel efforts in such areas as quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry.

## Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

## Undergraduate Research

Many colleges and universities are now providing research experiences for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, has been most prominently used in science disciplines. With strong support from the National Science Foundation and the research community, scientists are reshaping their courses to connect key concepts and questions with students' early and active involvement in systematic investigation and research. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.

## Diversity/Global Learning

Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often explore "difficult differences" such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad.

## Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

In these programs, field-based "experiential learning" with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both *apply* what they are learning in real-world settings and *reflect* in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

## Internships

Internships are another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for course credit, students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member.

## Capstone Courses and Projects

Whether they're called "senior capstones" or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they've learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of "best work," or an exhibit of artwork. Capstones are offered both in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.



## High Impact Practices and the Goals of Liberal Education

### Fostering Broad Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Natural World

Common Intellectual Experiences (exploring contested questions in history, cultures, science and society)

Learning Communities (multiple courses linked to a “big question”)

Diversity, Civic and Global Learning

Inquiry Based Learning in Science

### Strengthening Intellectual and Practical Skills

First Year Seminars and Experiences

Writing-Intensive Courses (across the curriculum)

Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Undergraduate Research

Service and Community-Based Learning

Internships

### Deepening Personal and Social Responsibility

Common Intellectual Experiences (exploring contested questions in history, cultures, science and society)

Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Diversity, Civic and Global Learning

Service and Community-Based Learning

### → Practicing Integrative and Applied Learning

Learning Communities (multiple courses linked to a “big question” or topic)

Service and Community-Based learning

Undergraduate Research

Internships

Capstone Projects and Culminating Experiences

**FOSTERING INTENTIONAL AND INTEGRATIVE LEARNING**  
**ANONYMOUS COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**  
(major requirement – 36 credit hours)

**All students are required to maintain a history portfolio. Each portfolio will include three items from the 100-200 level, three from the 300-400 level, and the required senior research paper. This ensures that all students develop essential historical skills, whatever sequence of courses they take.**

Course Sequence	Courses at this Level Should Include Practice in the Following:
<p><i>100 Level</i>  World History  U.S. History to 1865  Western Civilization to 1660</p>	<p>Historical Essay  Documentary Analysis  Abstract of document or article</p>
<p><i>200 level</i>  U.S. History since 1865 – or Western Civilization since 1660 or a 200-Level Elective  Global Field Survey-Level Course (e.g., African history)  Historical Methods and Materials</p>	<p>Documentary analysis using multiple genres of source materials  Numerical Analysis (Assessment of data, charts, and tables)  Graphic Analysis (Assessment of artifacts, maps, and blueprints)</p>
<p><i>300 Level</i>  <b>Proseminar in Historical Research</b> (Required)  Global Field Upper-Level Course  Free Elective</p>	<p>Historical Abstract of a Journal Article  <b>Research Proposal</b>  Library/Online Research Exercises  Bibliographic Essays/Literature Review  Scholarly Book Review  Peer Evaluation</p>
<p><i>400 Level</i>  Free Elective  Free Elective  <b>Capstone Seminar</b> (Required)</p>	<p>Periodic and Literature Review  Research paper in field related to history  Historical Fiction (Optional)  Video (Optional)  <b>Capstone Seminar Research Paper</b> (Required)</p>