I am grateful to the Westmont Institute for Liberal Arts for the opportunity to provide an update on the global learning activities at the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Global learning cuts across all of AAC&U program offices, but it is primarily located in the office of Diversity, Equity and Global Initiatives. In that office we define the term “global” to fit our particular mission, to reflect the association’s long-term advocacy of liberal education, and to translate well into concrete institutional and curricular practice. Similar attempts to define global learning are occurring on campuses across the country and around the world; consequently, conversations such as we have enjoyed this weekend can only help us sharpen our thinking.

**Greater Expectations: Coherence and Intentionality**

I would like to frame our discussion of global learning with three concepts from AAC&U’s Greater Expectations initiative. Greater Expectations articulates the aims of a 21st century liberal education while identifying campus practices and innovative models that improve learning for all undergraduate students. It emphasizes the closely related notions of “intentionality,” “coherence,” and “purposeful pathways.”
Intentionality aligns action with desired aims; it is necessary in all arenas of education but is most relevant for us as applied to curricular design. Coherence implies a logical sequence of coursework and other educational experiences that foster cumulative learning over time. In order to insure coherence, faculty must collectively reflect upon how such learning experiences fit together from the student perspective. Finally, courses and curricula that are both intentional and coherent represent “purposeful pathways” to important learning goals. (See http://www.greaterexpectations.org/.)

This framework suggests several important and useful questions: How intentional are colleges and universities in creating opportunities for global learning? Is our rhetoric about the importance of global learning for the 21st century aligned with curricular designs—both in the major and in general education? How can we use our commitments to global learning to increase coherence in undergraduate education? What might purposeful pathways to global learning look like?

Defining Global

All of these questions hinge upon what we mean by global. Five years ago, when AAC&U began to design a major initiative around global learning—what would become Shared Futures: Global Learning and Social Responsibility—we found that the term global was usually understood as a synonym for international. When institutions used global this way, they usually sought ways to develop better study abroad programs;
increase the numbers of international students on campus; raise the visibility for the study of foreign languages; increase opportunities for faculty to develop international ties; and finally, reflect an international perspective in the curriculum. When we asked deans and chief academic officers to describe global learning on their campuses, these were the programs and strategies they thought to share.

Of course, these are worthwhile goals, but they did not adequately reflect the traditions and commitments of AAC&U’s ongoing work with diversity and equity, nor did they seem to move the academy toward a more robust understanding of liberal education. Consequently, to move forward in defining global learning, we found it useful to look back into our own institutional history.

In articulating global learning in the context of Shared Futures, we needed to clarify the deep foundations upon which our global agenda stood and the role we felt global learning could play in a broader renewal of liberal education—a renewal reflected in strengthened civic education, diversity education, inquiry-based learning, integrative learning, and a host of similar efforts to improve the quality of undergraduate education. And we needed to do this within the context of the history of liberal education reform at AAC&U over the last 15 years. This brief history highlights the differences and continuities that have brought us to our current understanding of global learning.

In 1990, AAC&U launched a major effort to revitalize general education core curricula. The Project on Engaging Cultural Legacies: Shaping Core Curricula in the Humanities
brought together 63 institutions eager to broaden notions of a “common cultural heritage”
as traditionally manifested in core Western civilization courses. This represented a
collective effort on the part of participating schools to update the “master narrative” of
core curricula to better reflect the plurality of cultures around the world and, increasingly,
within the United States. Participating institutions asked students to “see diversity—in
both culture and perspective—as an integral dimension of any intellectually rigorous
encounter with either ‘Western’ or ‘world’ civilizations.” Difference and multiplicity
became organizing principles for new curricula. In the creation of new courses and the
selection of core texts, faculty placed “new emphasis on multiplicity, cultural pluralism,
and cultural interaction—both as subjects in themselves and as resources to help
undergraduates grasp the texture of the world they inhabit” (Schmitz, v-vi).

Designers of curricula acknowledged that Western civilization neither asks nor answers
all important questions regarding culture. Participating institutions took the first steps in
translating this conviction into the curriculum by requiring that undergraduates complete
either broad world civilization survey courses or comparative courses organized around
broad interdisciplinary themes. In the most ambitious of these efforts (and they were on
the whole quite ambitious), the dynamic interplay of cultures and civilizations—
interaction, sharing, clash, and conflict—replaced what had functioned as the organizing
narrative of earlier generations of courses—“a view of history as the evolution of human
freedom” from Athens through Rome, England, and to the United States (Schmitz, vii).
The United States and Western Europe were de-centered in this curriculum; neatness and
order gave way to mixing and complexity.
But one aspect of Engaging Cultural Legacies remained underdeveloped. More of the world was being taught, but students were seldom asked to engage in the meanings and responsibilities of citizenship in that world. In addition, two thirds of the new curricula did not address how these cultural legacies shaped—and continue to shape—the United States. AAC&U’s next signature initiative, American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning (1993–2001), was designed, in part, as a corrective to that situation. American Commitments called upon the academy to embrace its social responsibility to teach diversity as a strand in civic preparation. The novelty of this call lay in the decision to encourage curricular conversations about democracy and social justice that gave sufficient attention to cultural, ethnic/racial, religious, and gender differences and that recognized that differences often involve profound inequalities. In this way the initiative raised fundamental questions that appealed to the intellectual traditions of the academy while also summoning its moral authority.

An American Commitments panel of distinguished scholars and educational leaders clearly identified the issues at stake:

What does it mean to be an American? What is the meaning of American democracy? How does a commitment to justice frame our responses to the persistence of unequal power and large pockets of political, economic, cultural, and educational disadvantage in this society?
These are questions of principle with which this society must struggle. But they are also questions that cannot be adequately addressed unless we as a citizenry have an accurate understanding of our nation’s long history with diversity.

(AAC&U, 6)

These are not simply intellectual questions, the panel argued, they are “integrally related to unsolved issues of social difference and societal marginalization.” “Failing or fearing to define as public questions the connections between difference and inequality,” the panel insisted, “we make too little progress as a nation with answers sufficient to live by” (AAC&U, 6–7).

The same must certainly be said about global learning for an emerging world of interdependence and inequality. In fact, similar questions form the heart of the Shared Futures initiative: What does it mean to be a citizen in today’s evolving global context? And how should one act in the face of large unsolved global problems?

Such questions link Engaging Cultural Legacies, American Commitments and Shared Futures. As Grant Cornwell and Eve Stoddard wrote in *Globalizing Knowledge: Connecting International and Intercultural Studies*, “The nature of the world today is such, that U.S. and global realities, whether economic, cultural, political, environmental, or social, interpenetrate and mutually define each other to the degree that isolating U.S. studies from international studies is increasingly impractical” (Cornwell and Stoddard, viii). AAC&U’s Shared Futures initiative is, in part, an effort to follow the advice of
Cornwell and Stoddard and to insist that global learning address both the United States and the world as it builds upon the important lessons of previous efforts to foreground questions of citizenship and social responsibility as integral components of liberal learning.

Scanning Liberal Arts Colleges

As AAC&U was exploring ways to translate this foundational work into new ways to think about global learning, we were fortunate to have the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to conduct a scan of global learning practices in liberal arts colleges. We looked at mission statements from one hundred liberal arts colleges and searched the websites of a sample of those schools to locate examples of global learning.

We found that:

- Nearly half of liberal arts colleges include in their mission statements commitments to prepare graduates to thrive in a future characterized by global interdependence.

- While the aspiration to global learning was clear in the mission statements, the curricular practices associated with this aim were often much less encompassing.
In most cases, the use of global language in mission statements appeared to be of relatively recent vintage. The statements tended to use “global” more often than “international” and often linked global with diversity and multiculturalism. Institutions highlighted “interdependence” in their mission statements and talked about global learning within the context of responsible citizenship, social justice, and leadership.

A closer look showed that:

- Global awareness requirements within general education are overwhelmingly satisfied by a single non-western culture distribution course, avoiding interdependence as an object of study itself, thus reinforcing a fractured view of the global community.

- When domestic (U.S.) diversity requirements and global awareness requirements are both part of general education programs, they are commonly treated as discrete, unlinked units, reinforcing the idea that the United States somehow stands outside of global analysis.

- There is little evidence that students are provided with multiple, robust, interdisciplinary learning opportunities at increasing levels of intellectual challenge to ensure that students acquire the global learning professed in the mission statement.
Science is largely missing as a site for global learning.

Additionally, the research showed that:

- Global learning is overwhelmingly understood in cultural terms rather than through other frames such as economic disparities, environmental sustainability, health and HIV/AIDS, security, or human rights.

- Global learning is often defined as a desired outcome of general education, but it is neither utilized as a framework for the design of coherent, integrative general education curricula nor as a way to link general education and learning in the majors.

- While social responsibility and civic engagement are often mentioned as markers of students successfully prepared for global interdependence, such learning outcomes are poorly defined and not well integrated into global components of the curriculum.

- There is a deep-seated belief—on campus and in the public—that global education is primarily external, and necessarily achieved through study abroad. Yet, the vast majority of students across all sectors in higher education either lacks access to or chooses to forgo high quality study abroad opportunities.
**Shared Futures Guiding Principles: Connecting Aspirations and Practice**

Colleges and universities are striving to close this demonstrated gap between their global learning aspirations and existing curricular designs. They are searching for solid learning objectives and outcomes as foundations upon which to construct such curricula. The Shared Futures initiative is designed to coordinate and facilitate transformation of the major and general education while encouraging institutions to look to liberal education for useful and appropriate language and practices for reform.

The Shared Futures initiative is guided by the following principles:

A 21st Century liberal education must provide students with the knowledge and commitment to be socially responsible citizens in a diverse democracy and increasingly interconnected world.

Colleges and universities committed to liberal education have important civic responsibilities to their communities, their nation, and the larger world.

Liberal education should help students:

- gain a deep, comparative knowledge of the world’s peoples and problems.
• analyze global issues and events through inquiry and inform themselves about the historical, geographical, cultural, political, economic, scientific, and religious contexts within which these issues must be understood and choices made.

• recognize that citizenship in a nation is only one factor in understanding the world.

• recognize similarities and differences in and among cultures and the multiple perspectives, values, and identities they engender. They will recognize that this is true both for themselves and for others.

• sustain difficult conversations in the face of highly emotional and perhaps uncongenial differences.

• understand—and perhaps redefine—democratic principles and practices within a global context.

• gain opportunities to engage in practical work with fundamental issues that affect communities not yet well served by their societies.

• translate global learning into ethical and reflective practice, mindful of the consequences of their actions in a locally diverse and globally heterogeneous community.

• recognize the impact of global issues on their own lives, and believe that their own actions, both individually and collaboratively, can in turn influence the world.

Global Learning and Purposeful Pathways
While Shared Futures advocates for deeper knowledge and understanding of the world, at the same time it calls for transformation of undergraduate education. By moving global learning goals out of the one or two multicultural course requirements and spreading responsibility for these outcomes across the curriculum, we can increase student engagement as well as the coherence and integrity of the undergraduate curriculum.

In 1998, Carol Geary Schneider and Robert Shoenberg wrote the inaugural essay for a new series of AAC&U publications: The Academy in Transition. In that essay, *Contemporary Understandings of Liberal Education*, the authors sought to place examples of higher education’s transformation within the broader context of core values of education and the “kinds of learning students need to negotiate a rapidly transforming world.” The authors identified five key learning goals implicit in contemporary campus efforts to reconceive both their degree requirements and their undergraduate curricula:

1. acquiring intellectual skills or capacities

2. understanding multiple modes of inquiry and approaches to knowledge

3. developing societal, civic, and global knowledge

4. gaining self-knowledge and grounded values

5. concentrating and integrating learning (Schneider and Shoenberg, 7)
Global learning, as we have defined it above and in the Shared Futures initiative, focuses on questions of diversity, identity, citizenship, and responsible action. It challenges students to explore the relational nature of their identities—identities that are variously shaped by the currents of power and privilege, both within a multicultural United States democracy and within an interconnected and unequal world. Global learning asks students to apply their developing analytical skills and ethical judgment to concrete problems in the world around them, and to connect theory with the insights gained from practice.

In Shared Futures, AAC&U argues that to successfully engage our students with such large, unscripted, global questions requires more than a single course or even a collection of related courses. It should be the overarching goal of a well-designed curriculum. In fact, it should be a primary characteristic of a liberal education. Recall that in *Contemporary Understanding of Liberal Education*, “global knowledge” was found in one of the five goals. The Shared Futures initiative contends that, for our students to be liberally educated for the 21st century, “global learning” must inform *all* of the five goals: acquiring intellectual skills or capacities; understanding multiple modes of inquiry and approaches to knowledge; developing societal, civic, and global knowledge; gaining self-knowledge and grounded values; and concentrating and integrating learning.
Global learning, at its best, strives to bring coherence within and between the two pillars of undergraduate education: general education and the major. AAC&U has completed one curriculum and faculty development project focused on the major with the support of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). In that project, Liberal Education and Global Citizenship: The Arts of Democracy, 11 institutions created opportunities for students to revisit the issues of global change that they had previously studied in general education courses. Currently, 16 additional institutions are using global learning goals to assess and redesign their general education curricula. That project, Shared Futures: General Education for Global Learning, is funded by the Henry Luce Foundation.

Taken together, these projects have begun to rewrite the narrative of undergraduate education as they raise new questions about what kinds of knowledge and skills all students need to thrive in today’s world. In the process, they are also revitalizing liberal education as they support interdisciplinary work, integrative learning, quantitative literacy across the curriculum, undergraduate research, attention to diversity and pluralism, civic engagement, and social responsibility within an undergraduate curriculum broadly organized around global learning and liberal education. Similar efforts can be found throughout the academy. Global learning represents a timely opportunity to rethink liberal education. We should think big.
Works Cited


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