

**Liberal Education and the Learning All Students Need:
The Intellectual Origins of AAC&U's Essential Learning Outcomes
1982 – 2006**

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A Note to Readers

In dialogue with the AAC&U Board of Directors and with President Lynn Pasquerella, I agreed to write a history of AAC&U that will examine the last quarter of AAC&U's first century. The intended history, due in January 2019, will complement a study of AAC's first seventy-five years that was written by former AAC President Mark Curtis and released in 1988. I also agreed, with President Pasquella, to write an intellectual history of the Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) that now guide AAC&U's ongoing LEAP initiative, Liberal Education and America's Promise.

The present paper—the promised intellectual history of the ELOs— includes far more institutional history than I initially intended. It covers the period from 1982 through 2006 when the ELOs text was finalized. Parts of it will be included in the larger AAC&U history I will deliver in January, 2019. The complete history will extend through 2015 and include LEAP, which is only “launched” in the present narrative.

Busy readers may, if you wish, limit yourselves to the Preface and Part III for a much pithier explanation of the liberal education priorities embedded in the ELOs. However, as the text of Part III seeks to explain, every phrase in the ELOs was drawn from one or more of AAC&U's many initiatives, enacted from 1982 through the 2005 launch of LEAP, on the purposes and practices of a contemporary liberal education. Those initiatives drew from an astonishingly wide array of advisors—scholar/teachers, seasoned educational leaders, presidents from all sectors, policy leaders in state systems, employers, accreditors, and of course, AAC&U's highly committed board members, talented senior fellows, and creative staff. Together, in the period described, these leaders decisively revised AAC's core premises about the meaning and inclusiveness of liberal education.

I have sought to explain, to the best of my ability, the creative energy that flowed, from many sources, into AAC&U's transformative leadership for liberal education and inclusive excellence. For the first part of this report, I consulted with Jerry Gaff, who was part of two highly influential AAC reports on the purposes of college learning, described in these pages, that were completed before I joined the AAC staff in late 1987. The remainder of the report presents my own interpretation of major developments and themes in AAC&U's decidedly revisionist approach to liberal learning. Other participants in that same history would have written different accounts.

Where conversations or developments are referenced from 1988 on, I took part in them. In a few places, I have put quotation marks around remembered conversations; the actual dialogue is, of course, a paraphrase.

I have not followed the usual AAC&U style guide. Where a major AAC/AAC&U report on liberal learning is cited, I have put the page citations in the text, so that interested readers may readily consult the cited reports for themselves. Because many of the notes elaborate on points made in the narrative, I created footnotes rather than end notes.

In writing this history—which addresses only AAC&U work on the aims of liberal learning—I have been conscious throughout of all the other rich and important AAC&U work that was not included in this history, but which also contributed to AAC&U's dynamism and reach. I apologize to colleagues, past and present, for the many, many omissions. I also am conscious throughout of how fortunate I was personally to work with the wonderful leaders and colleagues whose work is described in this report. I hope this intellectual/institutional history will both shed light on the leadership this association has long provided, and also raise useful questions about where AAC&U may go in the future.



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