

1998 AAHE RESEARCH FORUM

Taking Learning Seriously
A Research Agenda for Learning

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Colleges and universities have an essential role in creating a renewed vision for learning, and enhancing the teaching that supports it. Concepts such as involvement in learning, lifelong learning, collaborative learning, assessment-as-learning, distributed learning, and service learning have pointed the way to new definitions. However, who learners are—and the what, where, how and preparation for learning—is continually changing. In the *14th annual AAHE Research Forum*, AAHE members considered how *Taking Learning Seriously* involves students, faculty and staff, and institutions.

What questions might shape our scholarship? For example, what does it mean to engage students in inquiry, meaning-making, and deep learning—the perspectives and tools that transfer to work and civic roles in college and beyond? How might faculty and staff organize for learning, and what institutional structures are needed to support new commitments? What is effective learning from a student’s perspective? What are desired competences for learning and how do we assess them? This research agenda is devoted to asking these and other questions about *Taking Learning Seriously*.

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What is the Purpose of the Research Forum? The AAHE Research Forum is convened annually to involve individuals committed to research and scholarship in higher education. The Forum stimulates educators' involvement in creating a research agenda that speaks to current educational concerns. Each year's agenda is developed around the conference theme. Thus, educators and other scholars can continually rely on the Forum agenda as an up-to-date source of common research questions that flow from the year's most central educational issues. The Forum enables educators to provide leadership and support for themselves as scholars and for other researchers who share educators' interests, who speak clearly to educators about their findings, and who actively respond to educators' most pressing questions.

Since 1985, the AAHE Research Forum has provided leadership from educators for bridging the gap between research and practice, and has enabled educators and other scholars to define the kinds of contexts that need to be reshaped within colleges and universities for research findings to benefit students.

Why AAHE? AAHE has traditionally brought together a wide range of interested educators, and has been successful in defining current issues that stimulate a broad spectrum of higher education constituencies. A recent survey shows the AAHE annual conference to be the most stimulating meeting of its kind. There are other forums where research results are presented and discussed, but many of them are not regularly attended by or directed toward higher education administrators and educators. AAHE membership has the desire and potential to stimulate research among its members, and to engage the research community in continual dialogue about research questions and findings that directly relate to educational practices for governance, for teaching and learning, and for student development.

What is the Forum Process and Product?

1. **The invitational Pre-conference session.** Educators (selected from conference experts) generate research questions on topics that emerge as central to the conference theme through a specially designed group process. Experts on each topic serve as group leaders and synthesizers. Each topic group reviews the current issues around their topic and dialogues with those who currently, or are likely to, research the year's agenda. Questions are synthesized in each group, and session leaders edit and prepare them that evening for distribution at the All Conference Session. For the 1998 agenda, 30 conference presenters who work in one of six topic areas generated questions for the agenda on March 21.
2. **The All Conference Forum and panel.** Forum leaders bring the questions generated in the pre-conference session to the attention of the conference membership and involve the larger audience in discussion of issues and research questions in their own settings. Forum leaders also elicit discussion of research questions by a panel comprised of experts on the year's conference theme. The 1998 theme was *Taking Learning Seriously*. The panelists were **Peter Henschel**, Executive Director of the Institute for Research on Learning, and **Lee Shulman**, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Group discussions on each topic follow the panel and allow for more focused critique and discussion of the pre-conference questions. Experts on the topics serve as leaders and synthesizers in each group. In 1998, 85 persons attended this session and participated in the topic groups, for a two sessions total of 115 individual contributors to the final agenda.

3. **The research agenda and its dissemination.** Following the session, Forum leaders edit and integrate questions from topic group syntheses and individual work sheets for a final agenda. Thus, AAHE's annual research agenda is a timely, collaborative product of interactive, on-the-spot discussion. It is another way of knowing about the professional interests of a wide range of educators. The research agenda is a product of a process that captures and articulates the informal conversation that occurs at AAHE meetings about what should be researched. Conference presenters generate research questions on emerging topics in higher education, elicit questions from their colleagues, and then synthesize all questions. Dissemination and discussion of the agenda with researchers follows.

4. **Dissemination.** The agenda is disseminated to all contributors; participants are credited. Advisors to the Research Forum process and other associations/groups in higher education also receive the agenda. The history and rationale for the American Association for Higher Education Research Forum as described in M. Mentkowski and A. W. Chickering, "Linking Educators and Researchers in Setting a Research Agenda for Undergraduate Education," *The Review of Higher Education*, 1987, 11(2), 137–160. The 1987 agenda, *The Classroom Researcher's Research Agenda*; the 1988 agenda, *Improving the Odds for Student Achievement: A Research Agenda*; the 1990 agenda, *The Future of the Professoriate: A Look in the Mirror*; the 1991 agenda, *Achieving the Promise in Diversity: A Research Agenda to Inform the Issues*; the 1993 agenda; *Reinventing Community: A Research Agenda to Create Common Purposes, Build Commitment, and Sustain Improvement*; the 1994 agenda, *A Research Agenda for Envisioning the 21st Century Academic Workplace Through Responsive Academic Citizenship*; the 1995 agenda; *The Engaged Campus: Creating a Research Agenda to Serve Societies's Needs*; the 1996 agenda; *Crossing Boundaries: Creating a Research Agenda Toward Productive Learning and Community Renewal*; the 1997 agenda; *Learning, Teaching, and Technology: A Research Agenda for the Way We Work*; and the 1998 agenda; *Taking Learning Seriously* are available from Marcia Mentkowski, Alverno College, 3401 South 39th Street, P.O. Box 343922, Milwaukee, WI 53234-3922; Phone: (414) 382-6265; Email: marcia.mentkowski@alverno.edu; the Agenda is also available at: www.aahe.org.

1998 RESEARCH FORUM LEADERS

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FOREWORD

The national AAHE Conference gave us a rich array of over 100 sessions on the theme of *Taking Learning Seriously*. This theme nudges us to ask a rather basic question: why is *this* the moment in time at which we are renewing our commitment to taking learning seriously?

Is it that we educators are ready to hear corporate and government constituencies as they ask for a better match between the demands of the workplace and traditional approaches to curricula and teaching methods? Are our universities reaching for ways to respond to the public's insistence on accountability and their expectation that college graduates will be competent to drive our international competitiveness *and* to solve our social problems?

Lee Shulman spoke at the conference about the potential for new knowledge based on the scholarship of teaching; is this insight, together with new insights from neuroscience, cognitive science, anthropology and other social sciences, beginning to have an impact on our desire to understand powerful learning strategies and on our willingness to try them?

Is the ever-expanding range of difference in the college population—in age, race, gender, class, disability, culture—leading us to seek new ways of effectively meeting diverse individual needs? At the conference, Peter Henschel mentioned virtual and on-line communities as rapidly becoming a significant part of student lives. Is the influence of these communities opening a new set of crucial questions about how students learn over time and distance? Or is it simply, as Peter Henschel also noted, that the need for changed practice is desperate and the time is short?

The speakers and the conference process at the 1998 AAHE Research Forum have given us an opportunity to distill the issues and ideas underlying the conference theme into a set of questions which have resulted in the Agenda for Research on Learning.

LEARNING ABOUT LEARNING

Higher education's renewed interest in learning is prompted, in part, by an increasingly visible misalignment between the demands of learning in the modern world and conventional approaches to curricula and pedagogy. If a new paradigm for learning is emerging, what are different sets of questions about learning that are stimulated by these new perspectives? What do the "newer" disciplines—cognitive science and the neurosciences, anthropology, evolutionary biology, workplace studies—add to our understandings about college level learning, its outcomes, and curricular and pedagogical approaches to foster deep learning? What can we learn about learning from the viewpoints of younger learners and of older learners? Assuming that we are in the differentiation stage in our understanding of learning, what difference might it make to educational practitioners to be aware of developing lines of inquiry about learning? What are higher education's goals for integrating learning about learning to inform educational practices, faculty roles and responsibilities, and other institutional arrangements to support and reward learning?

On Environments for Learning

What are the characteristics of institutions that have focused on learning about learning?

How do we structure the environment—using knowledge about physiological changes, developmental stages, and motivational strategies—so that students embrace learning?

What role does students' ability to create a learning environment play in learning?

Do students' abilities to create the learning environment enhance their level of learning?

On Students' Orientation to Learning

How do student perceptions/expectations of learning help or hinder learning?

How do students learn to make connections between the disciplines?

What is the role of students' motivation with regard to the depth of learning and transfer of learning?

On Strategies for Learning

Are some learning strategies counter-productive in some disciplines?

What learning strategies are effective for achieving long-term learning (content/behavioral change) across the semesters (or years)?

How do we as teachers determine what the students already know, what schemas they bring to the classroom?

How can developmental information be used to design appropriate learning strategies?

What are best practices of adult learning from the corporate world?

How do experiences outside the classroom influence and integrate with classroom learning?

What assessment strategies should be used to determine the effectiveness of learning strategies?

What are the mechanisms that allow the transfer of information across disciplines?

How can we best facilitate students' transfer of knowledge?

How can we create the contextual relationships across disciplines in our teaching so that learning across contexts can be achieved?

Are there foundational components of good teaching and learning practice?

On Inquiry about Learning

How do we readily access available knowledge about learning to inform classroom practice? How do we best use this knowledge?

How can we learn about what is being learned about learning?

What forums for learning about learning might be most effective?

What frameworks can we use to clarify or reinterpret the research that already exists?

What accounts for individual differences in learning?

Can we create a learning taxonomy?

How does assessing learning about learning connect to how we teach?

In what ways can what we know about learning be put into effective practice?

How can we educate young professionals about the processes of learning?

How can practitioners put ideas about learning into practice without having to become experts on learning theory, educational psychology?

What is known about how students transfer knowledge?

What are perspectives on learning from other cultures?

What is the European contribution to research on learning that we want to include in ours?

How do institutions outside of academia characterize learning?

POWERFUL LEARNING STRATEGIES

Higher education is increasingly looking to learning strategies that engage learners as active inquirers and co-constructors of their own knowledge. These purposes involve complex processes, such as taking multiple perspectives and participating in authentic dialogue. These purposes and processes occur in varied settings influenced by a range of differences that, to name a few, include age, race, gender, class, other cultural factors, learning style and preferences, educational background.

What are some of the powerful strategies that can help foster such learning goals, purposes, and processes? What do some of the “in favor” strategies offer: collaborative and cooperative learning, experiential learning, problem-based learning, case method? How might any of these strategies couple with other more traditional teaching strategies for best results? What learning contexts are best suited for what kinds of learning strategies? How do we know, and how do we gauge the outcomes? How can students be taught to become masterful agents of learning strategies that are powerful for them?

On Faculty Engagement

How can we engage or interest faculty in exploring new learning strategies? How can we provide opportunities for faculty to learn these strategies?

How does the instructor’s presence, enthusiasm, and ability to engage students relate to students’ interest in the subject? How might these factors relate to retention efforts?

How do we turn faculty away from negative incentives and toward acknowledging the need to adopt powerful strategies for learning?

How do you get those using less than powerful strategies to incorporate the more powerful ones?

How can the barriers to adoption of powerful learning strategies be lowered? Can powerful learning strategies be implemented in incremental stages to lower the risk of change for faculty?

How might powerful learning strategies, once decided upon, get disseminated and implemented globally?

What is the best way to document powerful learning strategies in order to convert more teacher-centered faculty to endorse, support, and possibly implement more innovative learning strategies?

What is the best way for instructors in a variety of disciplines to share powerful learning strategies that could be incorporated in all classes?

Do cooperative learning strategies offer some particularly ready access and interest potential for faculty to learn new approaches to teaching?

Might creating opportunities for mentoring colleagues in the development of strategies that work encourage their spread?

What incentives and resources are available for faculty to develop and learn powerful learning strategies?

On Campus-Wide Engagement

How can we implement powerful collaborations between and among faculty, librarians, student services professionals, and students? How can we document collaborative practices to inform others?

How can a campus climate be created that is supportive, including financially and emotionally, of new learning strategies?

How can we make change happen at all levels (faculty, administration, students)?

What are the economic costs involved in retraining faculty and related activities?

On Student Learning

How can we empower students to develop higher level critical thinking skills?

How can we help students better understand and apply theories, principles, and concepts in ways that are meaningful to them?

Can we generate exemplary problems that foster student learning in new and different ways?

What role does self-assessment play in fostering deep learning?

How does self-assessment affect students' sense of competence in their learning?

What learning strategies do students perceive as most useful for them to master? What are the benefits?

How do we understand generational differences in learning?

On a Variety of Strategies

What are the elements of a powerful learning strategy? From the learner's perspective? From the instructor's perspective?

How can we provide opportunities for learning strategies to prove themselves? In the classroom? In the research arena?

How can various learning strategies be used to address different abilities of our students? Can we reach all students?

How does an instructor build on the personal experiences of students to foster learning?

What are effective and expedient ways to share data with colleagues?

Do alternative instructional strategies have the desired effects on student skills and attitudes?

How do we assess (a) when a learning strategy does not work in an institution, and (b) how to adjust for it?

What is the “right” balance between these strategies and other more traditional strategies?

Can all strategies for learning be equally used and applied across the disciplines?

How do we measure learning in ways appropriate to each different strategy?

What is different about an “inside-out” strategy vs. an “outside-in” strategy?

How can we best use stories about successful learning to study learning itself?

On Information Literacy

How can information literacy instruction be effectively integrated into individual courses and across the curriculum?

What do we mean by “information literacy?” How does it connect to the disciplines?

On Distance Learning

Does distance learning provide equitable access to learning? What improvements are needed?

What learning needs of students are served through distance education? What needs are not well served?

ORGANIZING FOR LEARNING

A nineteenth century educator would be surprisingly comfortable waking up in a later twentieth-century college or university. Although interdisciplinary centers and thematic institutes take up the borderlands, the departmental structure of colleges is quite intact. Although there is growing discussion of student learning outcomes, forty three-credit courses which meet for three hours a week over fifteen weeks still translate into an undergraduate degree on most campuses. And although the computer labs may be busy at 2 a.m., the rows of chairs facing a lectern and blackboard at the front of a classroom still dominate the landscape of universities.

If the educator asked why there was such remarkable continued stability in the major elements of organizational structure of American colleges in a society dramatically changed in so many other ways, would we mention administrative efficiency, the need for ready transferability of credits among colleges, and faculty comfort with “professing,” or would we look with new eyes at alternative ways of organizing for student learning?

Does a physical campus have the same meaning as an environment for learning as it has over our history, or does cyberspace define a new paradigm for learning communities? Are departments, clustered into Colleges, the best way to organize for student learning? Rather, might interdisciplinary units model the overlap between disciplines that often leads to the creation of new knowledge? Could the three-credit course give way to intensive one-month courses, thematic semesters encompassing a number of faculty and students working together in multidisciplinary teams, or individualized modules that can be completed slowly or quickly by students with different strengths and needs? Should competences rather than seat time determine length of time to degree? How might high schools and colleges work together collaboratively so that the transition of prepared students from one level to another is seamless? If faculty define ways in which they, as a group, provide expert mentorship, could the faculty role move beyond individual specialization? What research is essential to help campus leaders create the forms of higher education that can serve students best in the twenty-first century?

On Indicators of Learning and Learning Environments

What are the essential elements of being organized for learning?

What are measurable indicators to gauge whether we are organized for learning?

How do we know that organizational learning has occurred? What are the indicators?

What competencies should students develop? How are these competencies best developed and measured?

What are the results from those institutions that have put the learner at the center? How can they demonstrate the results?

What do today’s students really need from general education? What should be the goals or objectives of general education?

What are the histories of innovative ideas or initiatives? What has happened to a representative set of individual or group initiatives? What can we learn from these experiences regarding resistance, obstructions, nurturing, and growth?

On Faculty Motivation and Preparation

Besides the usual renewal time, what are other incentives/motivation for faculty to focus on student learning? What incentives/rewards are most effective to change faculty behavior toward organizing for learning?

How can faculty create a learner-centered environment when they are not a product of this environment? How do they organize this environment when they do not have the experience base?

What type of information do faculty need in order to be more responsive to changing student needs and interests?

How do we prepare faculty to know more about learning theory and design and its relationship to curriculum theory and design?

What motivates faculty to be open to measuring learning and working to improve it?

How is new thinking about learning incorporated in faculty teaching for learning?

What is the faculty experience in transformation to a learner-centered model?

Beyond faculty development grants or support, how can a focus on learning be promoted?

On Learning Communities

What types of communities foster learning? What are their characteristics? How are they sustained?

In putting the learner at the center, how do faculty, departments, students, and disciplines organize to achieve learning communities?

What knowledge do we need to have in order to accomplish innovative change for learning (e.g., faculty investment and training, sharing within the institution about innovations, and alternative incentives that actually motivate faculty)?

Does creating a learning organization lead to a learning culture?

Does a learning culture require an environment where doing something innovative is encouraged?

How can we become “boundary spanners” (i.e., crossing interdisciplinary and other lines)?

Institutional Structures

Where in the history of higher education are there illustrations of institutions being organized for learning?

How do current structures lend themselves to learning? How do they impede learning?

What can be learned about organizing for learning from alternate organizations such as corporate universities and virtual universities?

What are the institutional barriers which prevent faculty from better organizing for learning? How can funding organizations best support the idea of organizing for learning? How can they support campuses in making this profound change?

What benefits of the traditional institution might we lose if higher education is organized to focus on the learner? For example, what might be the impact on credits, semester, disciplines?

How do physical structures (in the classroom, in a building, in the institution) facilitate learning?

How does one infuse or promote acceptance of innovative practice across disciplines?

What are the costs (e.g., faculty time) of implementing innovative practice?

On Dissemination

What factors inhibit innovation from spreading more easily across campus and across campuses?

How can those programs/colleges/departments/ institutions that *have* organized for learning have a louder voice and more impact?

How can pockets of innovation become campus-wide practices? How do we best get information to faculty?

What are effective mechanisms on a campus to share successful innovations?

By collecting stories on how innovation is encouraged and rewarded, can we promote an awareness and encouragement of innovation?

LEARNING THAT IS INDIVIDUAL AND INCLUSIVE

American higher education has become known for a special vitality stemming from the variety of students who come to college. Women now make up over half the college student population in the country, and students from every racial, ethnic, and religious group are pursuing higher education in greater numbers. In no other country do adults at any stage of their lives feel free to come into and out of higher education to follow their needs and dreams. No disability, work schedule, or learning preference keeps people from looking for, and finding, an appropriate environment for learning.

However, most American colleges have used anecdote and local experience rather than data and research to determine how to accommodate the diversity of students. What do we need to know to plan more knowledgeably for pedagogies and learning environments that are inclusive of the range of students but which also serve individual student needs?

Educators are identifying a number of pedagogies which have the potential for serving the individual needs of a wide range of students. Collaborative learning and experiential learning, including service-learning, are among the most prominent, giving students an opportunity to work in groups and to create new knowledge based on experience and reflection on that experience. Undergraduate research opportunities, which encourage students to organize questions and discover how to solve unstructured problems, have moved from the sciences throughout the curriculum. Thematically-based learning communities help students move across disciplinary boundaries and find connections. What all these pedagogies have in common is that they are student-centered, starting from the premise that guiding by expert faculty can help students develop strategies for learning not just in class but throughout life. How do we identify what these pedagogies have in common and how are they distinct? Do certain pedagogies work particularly well with certain college constituencies? How do we assure that students have some knowledge in common although they are meeting individual needs? What learning environments, on- and off-campus, are especially appropriate for the various pedagogies?

On the Learner as Individual

What does it mean to focus on the learner as a unique individual?

How do we develop ourselves as faculty to inform each other about strategies for learning that are individual and inclusive?

What are the individual differences that influence the learning environment for students in remedial and developmental programs?

What is the negative impact on students of individual and communal assumptions that are played out in power structures?

On Creating Learning Environments

How do we create a learning environment with shared decision making? How should students be included in the course development process?

How do we develop a curriculum that is inclusive of the diversity of student learners? How do we as faculty become better able to create and to respond to diversity within curriculum?

How can self-reflection on the part of faculty help to create a more inclusive and individualized environment?

What constitutes an on-campus learning environment? How is it different due to technology (e.g., distance learning)? What constitutes an off-campus learning environment?

What legitimate reasons are there to assert that college-level learning can only occur in institutionally defined contexts?

How does out-of-the classroom learning contribute to a rich individualized and inclusive learning environment?

What does it mean to establish a tone and climate that is safe for learning for individuals, that is also inclusive?

Who do we engage students in the degree mapping process so that they understand the value of self-directed learning?

What environments support individual inclusive learning from the perspective of the student?

How do faculty-student relationships impact learning? What is there about the interaction of faculty and student that facilitates learning? That impedes learning?

How do we tailor learning to adjust to the academic, personal, and social attributes of the individual learner?

How can graduate education be modified to reinforce pedagogy that creates a more inclusive and individualized learning environment?

On Learning Styles

What does it mean to consider learning styles? personality types? cultural background? age? gender? Which of all of these individual differences accounts for the most variance within a group of learners such that we as faculty can use this knowledge to maximize learning in a large group? How do we prioritize? How do we develop a hierarchy of variables so we attend to the most important ones?

On Teaching Strategies

How do we involve students in individual learning projects that form a partnership between the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and experiential learning?

How do teaching methods differ and how can we use these to respond to the diverse learning styles and learning needs of students? What array of teaching methods respond to the individual needs of students entering higher education institutions? (E.g., independent studies with directed readings, internships, discussions, etc.)

What techniques can students use to make the most out of their learning environments? To make them individualized and inclusive?

On Pedagogy and Technology

What is the relationship between technology and pedagogy? Who is driving the use of technology to create learning communities—the technology or the faculty?

What are the purposes for connecting learners through technology? How do we avoid the problems that may accrue from using technology just because it is there, and rather, continue to explore the pedagogical reasons?

How can technology be used to better connect faculty and students on geographically separated campuses?

On Resources, Standards, and Measures

What are the leading indicators of teachers and students for success with different communication technologies (e.g., synchronous vs. asynchronous)?

How do we measure the intangible benefits (e.g., student satisfaction with the university, student development) of higher education when learning takes place through technology?

What resources are needed for campuses to develop communities aided by technology?

What standards of technological reliability and dependability are needed to insure broad access and use of technology by a community of learners (faculty and students)? How should resources be allocated?

The “technology revolution” is expected to expand the mental ability of individuals just as the industrial revolution expanded their muscle power. How can we begin to assess this?

DISCIPLINES AS FRAMEWORKS FOR LEARNING

The purpose of undergraduate learning is to ensure that students develop the understanding and abilities they need in order to respond to and shape the world in which they live. Tim Riordan, in “The Nature of Teaching,” argues that an essential component of scholarly activity in this context is the transformation of our disciplines into learning processes that allow students to participate in the making of meaning in the classroom. It requires not only that we understand the essential concepts, issues, and methods of the disciplines we teach, but also that we have a sense of how our disciplines relate to one another so that we can help students see the connections.

Riordan further argues that approaching disciplines as frameworks for student learning requires that we think about our disciplines in the context of teaching. We must forge a relationship between disciplinary study and our experience of teaching the particular groups of students we work with in our classrooms. The very act of classroom teaching is an interactive, dynamic process in which students and teachers are discovering and constructing knowledge as we proceed.

How can we help students to use the disciplines they study to reflect on their own lives? What kinds of experiences will engage students in understanding and using these disciplines? How can we assist students in making connections between an academic discipline and their own experiences? What do we do to get a sense of how students are changing because they are studying a discipline? How will we know not just whether students understand the ideas they are studying, but also how they respond to them?

How do disciplines affect the design of assessment? What must students be able to do in order to demonstrate that they have grasped and can apply key concepts and methods of a discipline? How do we clearly articulate expectations of what students should be able to do because they have studied a discipline? What kinds of assessment strategies are most appropriate to a discipline and will help to determine whether students have indeed developed the abilities the discipline has to offer?

On Disciplinary Learning as a Basis for All Learning

In light of the popularity of interdisciplinary work, can a student connect the disciplines without first knowing one of them? How important is it to have a base within one of the disciplines? What is the value of memorization and rote learning, for the development of creative and critical thinking?

What is the value of not only teaching but professing a discipline, being inspirational, being passionate, in an age of distance learning, competency assessment? How does the discipline serve as a means to sparking the passion, or enabling the student to “find his/her intellectual home?”

Does an emphasis on disciplinary learning result in ignoring empathy or affect as an element of education?

How can a passion for the discipline best be kindled in the beginning student?

On the Goals of Disciplinary Learning

Does an emphasis on competence and competencies, rather than disciplinary knowledge, turn our institutions away from education which enables people to become creative or learn to think, rather than education for training?

To what degree and in what ways do we incorporate the impact of the pervasive “visual society” or the media, on how people think and what they think? How do we incorporate the more visually-oriented learners into the structure of disciplinary education, from facilities to course planning?

What is the balance between the amount of content that needs to be covered in the disciplines and the amount of time necessary to make sure that different ways of teaching and learning are taking place?

Is there another way to translate interdisciplinary study so that is not seen as non-disciplinary?

How can we learn from other disciplines the pedagogies that will enhance learning in our own disciplines?

What is the framework of a discipline? How do we teach students about it in ways that are meaningful to them?

To what degree can we, as faculty, agree on a common disciplinary framework?

How do disciplinary expectations differ for the major and the non-major?

Is recruiting students to a major, focusing their learning on the major, and graduating them in the major healthy for our students?

How can subjective goals like “developing passion” be assessed?

How can we meaningfully assess our discipline-based general education courses?

How might redefining general education courses to be more goal- and outcomes-oriented enhance the goals of disciplinary learning?

What is the impact of content vs. inquiry-based instruction on learning within disciplinary frameworks?

What is the value of discipline frameworks to our understanding of ourselves and the world around us?

In what ways might team teaching enhance students appreciation of the distinctiveness of disciplines?

On Crossing the Boundaries of Disciplinary Learning

Different disciplines have different frameworks—How can we articulate them?

Are there points of intersection between different frameworks utilized by different disciplines?

Do frameworks bias our views? If so, how do we overcome this bias?

How can colleges integrate a variety of frameworks?

How might understanding how controversies are settled in a discipline other than one's own broaden the purposes of disciplinary learning?

What are the intersections of the basic disciplines? How can the overlap(s) be used to further learning?

In what ways does involving students in professional societies, writing across the curriculum, technology across the curriculum, etc., enhance crossing the disciplinary boundaries?

How do we lessen the discomfort of faculty with teaching in the general education curriculum because it is “outside my discipline?”

LEARNING AND COMPETENCE

In an age of information and structural change, learning—and the capacity to learn—is itself a commodity and an ideal. From many public sectors, we are experiencing heightened expectations for higher education to better address economic and civic concerns. Once valued as an intrinsic and unquestioned good, higher education is increasingly a matter of public economic policy, with expected payoffs in the capacity of our nation to meet global competition and to improve “society.” What is distinctive—and competitive—about learning in higher education? What is distinctive—and contributing—about higher learning to our democracy?

One emerging connection between economic and civic concerns is the link between higher learning and performance—often captured in the concept of competence. If we define a competence as a conceptual model for performing what we know, what models of competence are developed—however implicitly—in different educational settings? How are they learned? How do such models guide further learning? For example, support for service learning initiatives demonstrate the historic linkage of higher education and civic contribution. Yet, public confidence in the civic competence of our graduates suffers. Why? In the face of complex civic needs, a concept of competence that assists individuals to construct their work performance along side their civic contributions may serve to enhance both spheres. What develops such integrated skills that can apply across volunteer and paid employment settings?

Another challenge is to link understanding about higher learning to definitions of emerging competences needed in the workplace. Some businesses see themselves as learning organizations, with employees expected to meet the civic abilities of collaboration, self-directedness, and communication. What research is needed to reflect this shift in the curriculum? For example, with both greater autonomy and interdependence for workers, developed habits of mind and heart are becoming as necessary as the corresponding skills in thinking and relating to others. At the same time, specialized knowledge and the ability to use it, keep it up-to-date, and connected to tacit learning remain important in many contexts. Do these new expectations mean “new” learning? If so, what kind?

Still another challenge is to confront the demand for greater speed and responsiveness that is paradoxically accompanied by a demand for long-term thinking. In the context of fast moving change, systems thinking requires that we step back from the presenting problem, to patterns of problems and their causes. How do students learn systems thinking? How does one develop and use this “competence”?

How might higher learning *extend* one’s competence model, not just concretely, but as distinct processes that link monitoring one’s goals to progress in meeting them? Self-direction in learning can imply self-direction in action. How do graduates use such internalized competence models and frameworks for self-assessing their own performance?

On Defining Competence

What is “competence?” Clearly we have to go beyond competence defined only as skill. What makes for competence in addition to skill? self-perceptions? attitudes? metacognitive models for thinking? metacognitive models for performing?

How do learners discover the qualities and levels of their competence and act on that information to improve?

Are there distinctions in defining competence for professional, liberal arts, and humanities programs?

How are competencies defined and articulated so that they are incorporated into the course syllabi and measured accordingly?

How do we reach a consensus regarding competencies among faculty from different disciplines?

Can faculty articulate critical elements of discipline-based competencies?

On Learning and Competence

How does one learn to be competent? Learning to be competent may be different from learning “to know.” If so, what are the differences? For example, is “learning to know” different from “learning to perform?” From “learning to improve?” From “learning to learn?”

Learning for competence means demonstration, but also practice, self-assessment. It means to retry and to retool, to evaluate one’s own work. What are the ways learners apply that kind of assessment and judgment? What is the basis for judgment? How do learners internalize the criteria for effective and even outstanding performance so they can judge their own work and use that judgment to improve, and then to learn further? How does “learning to perform” become a model for further learning?

What can we learn from an artist’s model of learning? When one sees an artist’s work, one “knows” it stands out in particular ways. What does this tell us about how artists evaluate their own work?

How might learners develop self awareness in how they integrate what they know and are able to do, and then, how might they demonstrate that they are competent? How do we assist learners to develop “competence” in empathy, citizenship, creativity, tolerance? civility? respect for each other and for the environment? passion for learning? How does one learn, for example, to become a caring teacher? Can outcomes such as empathy and caring be learned? How might learners demonstrate these learning outcomes in their work, their personal, and their civic roles? What might it mean for higher education to “certify” these outcomes? Can we “certify” lifelong learners?

What competences emerge from interdisciplinary areas? What are adequate ways to measure the kinds of conceptual complexity expected in interdisciplinary work?

Are higher education faculty responsible for such learning outcomes? At what point do faculty become concerned that they are stepping outside the boundaries of their expertise? Do faculty teach values? Should they? How are values learned in higher education?

If such outcomes are part of higher education’s responsibility, what are the implications for advising? for other student support services?

What is the relationship of articulated learning objectives and expected competencies to students' educational purposes and motivation, particularly in light of a discipline's or profession's standards for evidence of competence?

How do competencies change as students grow and develop?

Does mastery learning lead to "minimums becoming maximums?"

Is it okay to have students achieve different competencies in one area—depending on individual needs?

On Assessing Competence

How do we fairly and equitably measure the competence of our graduates?

What are best methods for assessing student learning in an authentic way?

How do we balance subjective and objective assessment?

How can assessment data be utilized effectively to improve the teaching/learning process?

How can competencies be sufficiently defined and assessed so that we feel confident accepting various sources of learning?

How does assessment influence expected competencies?

On the Culture for Learning

How do faculty in higher education develop this kind of curriculum, with this broader definition of competence, for students who are essentially from a different learning culture? When faculty are from a different learning culture? When there is a clash between these learning cultures?

How much of a learning community or community of practice is necessary to achieve competence? How much or what types of interaction would promote competence?

On Preparing Competent Professionals

How do we prepare "competent" professionals? For example, the question goes beyond "can teachers meet standards," but also "can their students?"

How might student competence become more public, so faculty can "know" they are competent?

How do we move from the seat-time, credit model to "demonstrated competence" as a basis for a degree? for licensure? for certification? for self-discovery? Should we?

What would this mean for faculty approaches to teaching the disciplines? For what students learn? What are the implications for moving from "credit hours" to "credit for demonstrated learning outcomes or competences?"

Suppose a series of competences are “required” and then assessed for licensure. What kinds of competence should be so assessed? If licensure and certification are “protections” for the public, what does it mean to develop professional competence that goes beyond basic competence?

How does course performance relate to professional competence?

On Bridging the Gap between Higher Education and Society

How might we bridge the gap between knowledge and its use in society? What are the mechanisms for bridging? Are higher education institutions organized to do this? If not, how do we best connect with societal expectations?

What about “underprepared” students? How are they our responsibility?

How do we take “learning” from the college or university to use it in the workplace? (E.g., what kind of partnerships do we need between colleges of education and schools?)

How can students’ reasons for learning and expectations of learning be brought in line with competencies the world and the academy expect of them? How can academy expectations influence and be influenced by “the real world?”

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