

1999 AAHE RESEARCH FORUM

Organizing for Learning
A Research Agenda

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Colleges and universities have an essential role in creating a renewed vision for learning, and enhancing the organizational structures that support it. The aim of organizing for learning may have profound implications for the academic culture and organizational systems of our institutions. Strategies and solutions for achieving this aim are further complicated by a growing competitor base outside of higher education and by other external forces. What opportunities for new learning and professional development will faculty, staff and administrators need in order to lead and manage changes in the academic culture and the organizational systems of the institution and to forge strategic alliances with other constituencies? In the 15th annual AAHE Research Forum, AAHE members consider how *Organizing for Learning* involves institutions, faculty and staff, and students.

What questions might shape our scholarship? For example, how can deep learning be promoted for all students, while simultaneously keeping constant the academy's core values and reaching out with new pedagogies, teaching technologies, organizational strategies and structures, and partners? AAHE President Margaret Miller frames the core values as commitments to access, quality, diversity, liberal learning, free inquiry, and community. How are these values embodied in alternative pedagogies and structures—e.g., service learning, learning communities, problem-based learning? And, how might these alternative approaches engage students in the kind of deep learning that better equips them to function in a complex, interdependent world? Following a panel discussion, participants will work in small groups to create a research agenda—given their issues and settings—via several conference themes.

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What is the Purpose of the Research Forum? Involvement and critique from educators in dialogue with researchers is a critical element for achieving clarity about what research will benefit educational policy and practice. 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 researchers 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 those 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 researchers 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 at which research results are presented and discussed, but many of them are not regularly attended by or directed toward higher education administrators and faculty. 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 for distribution at the All Conference session. For the 1999 agenda, 49 conference presenters who work in one of the three topic areas generated questions on March 20.
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 1999 theme was *Organizing for Learning*. The panelist was Frank Newman, President of the Education Commission of the States. 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 1999, 34 persons participated in the topic group discussions, for a two session total of 83 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 and the 1986 Research Agenda are 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, Volume 11, No. 2. The 1987 agenda, "*The Classroom Researcher's Research Agenda*;" the 1988 agenda, "*A Research Agenda in Support of Our Highest Calling*;" the 1989 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 1992 agenda, "*Reclaiming the Public Trust: A Research Agenda to Explore the Validity of the Criticisms*;" 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: A Research Agenda to Serve Society's Needs*;" the 1996 agenda, "*Crossing Boundaries: A Research Agenda Toward Productive Learning and Community Renewal*;" the 1997 agenda, "*Learning, Teaching, and Technology: Framing a Research Agenda for the Way We Work*;" the 1998 agenda, "*Taking Learning Seriously: A Research Agenda for Learning*," and the "*Organizing for Learning: A Research Agenda*" are available from Marcia Mentkowski, Office of Research and Evaluation, Alverno College, 3400 South 43rd Street, P.O. Box 343922, Milwaukee, WI 53234-3922; Phone: 414-382-6263; Email: marcia.mentkowski@alverno.edu; the Agenda is also available at www.aahe.org.

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FOREWORD

When we think of the topic “Organizing for Learning,” we must ask, as Parker Palmer at his opening plenary session, “Don't we know how to do that yet?” Of course, we think we do, although one can remember a quote from Patricia Cross, who, in an article on pedagogy, noted that a faculty member from the University of Bologna would feel very comfortable in the typical college classroom of today, where a professor professes and the students listen. But the nature of higher education IS changing very quickly, so we have to organize for learning yet once again. We are in a competitive environment with virtual universities offering competition across the country and community colleges wishing to offer four-year degrees in our communities. There are new pedagogies and new structures, from service—learning to smart classrooms. The effective institution of 1985 is not going to be the effective institution of 2005. And even if WE think we are effective, accrediting organizations and state legislatures are asking for accountability on THEIR terms, not ours.

The speakers and the conference process at the 1999 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 following Agenda for research on how we “Organize for Learning.”

ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGIES AND STRUCTURES

Common wisdom now suggests that students learn through engagement with real problems and issues in an active social environment. We know that students learn best and most deeply when their minds, hearts, and hands are engaged in their studies. Deep learning is the kind of learning that embodies not only knowing about the subject under study but that engages learners in knowing something about themselves and the world in which they interact.

What pedagogies best promote deep learning? Our repertoire of successful approaches now includes service learning, collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and learning communities. Technology is offering new ways to teach students across a wide spectrum of subject matters. What helps and what hinders those who try to use the most effective means to enable student learning? How does the changing make-up of student populations affect this?

Deep learning is also an iterative and cumulative process that must be supported by structures, policies, and practices that promote active learning across the curriculum and institution wide. How will the innovations in structures, policies and practices first be identified, and then recreated, supported, and rewarded?

On Research on Pedagogies and Learning

What *are* alternative pedagogies? What makes them alternative?

What is the impact of alternative pedagogies on student learning? Is covering the curriculum the primary goal?

Do alternative pedagogies look different in different disciplines? How can disciplines make use of pedagogical research?

What is deep learning? Where is it happening? How does deep learning transfer?

How can we design learning experiences that engage students? What forms of engagement contribute to deep learning?

How is deep learning different in the disciplines and for different student populations--how do we know it happens?

How can deep learning be measured? How do we assess? What processes contribute to it?

How do we measure the effectiveness of new approaches to learning? Is the academy at risk if it uses only self-referencing, subjective, and impressionistic measures to evaluate learning strategies?

What are the possibilities/limitations of web-based learning? Technology-infused learning? Asynchronous learning?

What additional research do we need to perform in order to better delineate the value of specific pedagogies in each of the various contexts and purposes of teaching and learning?

How can we devise new measures of learning, both quantitative and qualitative and longitudinal and performance-based, or revise the weighting of existing measures in order to assess the new outcomes envisioned by the new pedagogies?

Are some alternative pedagogies more appropriate for some types/groups of students than others, such as for students of different cultures, racial/ethnic groups, genders, ages?

How can we construct compelling cases for deep learning as a primary agenda for higher education?

On Learning Outcomes

What do we already know about the relative value of the new process-based pedagogies (active learning, collaborative learning, cooperative learning, interactive learning, learning communities, problem-based learning, reflective learning, etc.) over the older content-based (“coverage”) pedagogies in fostering specific learning outcomes, and how can we put this knowledge to good use in higher-education reform, including not only teaching but also assessment, curriculum design, faculty development, reward structure, etc.?

What do we want students to become? And how will we know that they have arrived? What is an educated person?

What do we want to happen to our students while they are with us and after they leave?

How do we define success in learning? What are we trying to achieve? (e.g., Are engagement and curiosity legitimate goals?)

Are there ways to directly develop learners so that their ability to participate in learning environments utilizing multiple learning strategies is maximized?

What longitudinal evidence is there for the learning outcomes desired by the learning paradigm shift?

On Institutional Structures to Support Pedagogy

How do the values of the institution influence our approaches to teaching? What do we really value?

What is the relationship between the civic mission of the institution and fostering community on campus? How do we address issues of access and diversity within this mission?

What obstacles, risks, and threats present themselves to advocates of new pedagogies? What institutional structures, decision processes, and reform strategies provide the most favorable basis for the successful adoption of new pedagogies by individual faculty and by entire academic units?

What are the barriers and divisions that prevent effective practice and how do we break them down? How can collaboration lead to integration?

What research measures of learning will convince administrators, faculty, and students to adopt multiple pedagogies in order to foster deep learning? What data will sway them?

How do we “sell” deep learning to students, other faculty, and especially administrators?

How do we structure ourselves so students and learning are central for all?

How can we address the role of higher education in the K–20 continuum? What are the rewards for faculty to work with schools?

How have faculty/students/administration begun to examine the gaps between theory and practice? How do they engage paradox and ambiguity as sites for deep learning?

Many faculty members are convinced that current practices work well. How can concerned faculty set up a clearinghouse for “alternative” pedagogies?

Can the personnel procedures change to support deep learning?

What do “traditional” universities need to do to provide the students the skills and knowledge of the future?

How can technology assist in new types of learning?

How can we all be more accountable to our students?

How can we develop high expectations from students on the one hand, and on the other provide the care, support, and time to allow them to grow and develop at their own speed?

LEADING THE EFFECTIVE INSTITUTION

Institutions are examining their missions and structures to determine how to save what they value while making the changes necessary to ensure institutional effectiveness. But what does effectiveness mean in institutional terms? What sort of a strategic vision will enhance commitment to mission and values but identify new organizational structures?

Where does responsibility for leading effectively reside? Is it in administrative structures that are flat and nimble? Is it in faculty advocacy for change? Is it in new planning, assessment, and improvement practices jointly managed by faculty, administration, and trustees?

What role do new pedagogies and an innovative, interdisciplinary curriculum play in institutional effectiveness? How can assessment of student learning outcomes provide information for institutional change?

On Responsive Leadership

How do leaders create and maintain a campus environment for effectiveness?

What is an effective leader in the effective organization?

What are the various leadership centers in the academy and how is leadership bestowed on each entity? e.g. faculty, students, presidents, etc.

In time of transition, how do administrators move institutions forward to shared goals of quality, growth, and civility?

How does an institution create one vision from a multiplicity of perspectives and constituencies?

How do effective institutions appreciate and include the various voices in the leadership equation? How do effective leaders incorporate external views and communities in a campus vision?

How are leaders responding to the issues of diversity in higher education institutions and higher education associations?

How can we redefine leadership to include creating community?

What are traits of an effective leader? What are necessary leadership qualities? Can they be learned?

How does an effective leader promote globalization of the curriculum?
How are technology decisions made?

On Accountability and Rewards

Does accountability lead to an effective institution?

How do effective institutions show accountability?

How does the effective institution inform/educate and invite participation in the assessment process?

How does the effective institution hold faculty accountable for student learning outcomes? Who leads this charge?

What is the role of accrediting organizations in assuring institutional effectiveness?

Are accreditation agencies (disciplinary, state, regulatory, etc.) really agents for change?

What does an institution value and how does the institution reward those values? To what extent are resources linked to responsibility?

If we need to improve, who will link budgetary issues to questions and plans for change? How can we achieve alignment so that student affairs, academic affairs, business affairs, human resources, etc., all support institutional priorities and values?

What role does the reward structure play in the effective institution?

What are examples of institutions that reward what they value?

On Indicators of Effectiveness

What are effective institutions? What does that mean? Are we in control of that definition?

What are the indicators of an effective institution? What is the higher education “gold standard” of effectiveness?

What characteristics of effectiveness do we already possess?

What is the influence of missions and values on program and budget decisions?

What is the relationship of the curriculum to the institutional mission, values, and institutional effectiveness?

In what ways can the effective institution engage all of its constituents in the leadership and responsibility processes?

How does the effective institution develop all human resources?

What are characteristics of leaders that encourage participation? How is a culture that fosters a responsibility for participation created?

How does the effective institution affect society, especially with regard to issues of diversity and inclusiveness?

Is an effective institution inclusive of race, class, gender in curriculum and in its community?
Should higher education aspire to being socially useful?

On Preparation for Leadership

How are effective leaders identified, trained, and mentored as future leaders for the academy?

How do we identify leaders who would benefit from more mentoring/development?

How do we identify potential leaders and support their growth and development?

What is the future of the professoriate? How do we assure that the “best and the brightest” find careers in higher education?

What is the responsibility of current leaders to develop future leaders? Should leaders be evaluated on their effectiveness in this area?

What does the effective institution invest in faculty development, rewards, etc.?

Are there leadership traits that can be identified and transferred to various types of higher education institutions?

What theoretical framework can be used to define, evaluate, and educate academic leaders?

THE COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Colleges are being challenged by new entities involved in the delivery of postsecondary education and by plans emanating from community institutions. Proprietary institutions and virtual universities are changing the meaning of a college education. Locally, competition exists between public and private institutions, and among community colleges, four-year colleges, comprehensive universities, and research universities, all trying to climb out of their Carnegie classification boxes.

How can institutions respond to such competition? Is it through more careful definition of their distinctive roles and identification of their niche in the educational environment? Is it through clear responses to pressures from politicians, parents, and corporations? Is it through effective collaboration with other higher education institutions? Will we recognize institutions of higher education twenty years from now, or will they have changed in essential ways?

On Market Pressures

Is the competitive market forcing market segmentation of educational institutions? How, and in what ways? How are colleges and universities determining what their market is and/or how to change and focus it?

What roles will partnerships play in helping universities address the competitive market, e.g., corporations, K–12, alternative providers, other universities, etc?

What can traditional educational institutions learn from proprietary institutions about the competitive marketplace?

In what ways are faculty within different segments of education aware of these competitive pressures? In what ways should they be?

In response to the international/global competitive market, are university graduates gaining the skills to be effective employees, active members of society, lifelong learners, or able to face change effectively? What skills do we want our graduates to have?

On Student Choices

What are the profiles of students who are attracted to different kinds of higher education offerings?

What considerations influence students' choices?

How important is deep learning, and to what extent does deep learning occur in the new competitive environment?

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