

2003 AAHE Research Forum

Good Work in Challenging Times
A Research Agenda

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The Research Forum has been a steadfast part of AAHE’s national conference since 1984. This year the Forum involves individuals committed to collaborative scholarship on “good work” in teaching and learning-centered contexts. There, faculty roles include fostering deep and durable learning—in their unique disciplinary styles—toward student leadership and democratic commitments.

Conference presenters met before a general session to generate a preliminary set of research questions around these and other topics. In the general session, two panelists addressed questions that led to lively and intellectually challenging small-group discussions among educational practitioners about the scholarship of “good work.” In this way, session participants were involved in creating a research agenda—to be disseminated broadly—based on 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) generated research questions on topics that emerged as central to the conference theme through a specially designed group process. Experts on each topic served as group leaders and synthesizers. Each topic group reviewed the current issues around their topic and discussed with those who currently, or are likely to, research the year's agenda. Questions were synthesized in each group, and session leaders edited and prepared them for distribution at the All-Conference session.
- 2. The All-Conference Forum and Panel.** Forum leaders brought the questions generated in the pre-conference session to the attention of the conference membership and involved the larger audience in discussion of issues and research questions in their own settings. Forum leaders also elicited discussion of research questions by a panel comprised of experts on the year's conference theme. Our panelists were: *Milton Hakel*, Ohio Board of Regents Eminent Scholar in Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Bowling Green State University; and *Diane Halpern*, Professor of Psychology, Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children, Claremont McKenna College. Group discussions on each topic followed the panel and allowed for more focused critique and discussion of the pre-conference questions. Experts on the topics served as leaders and synthesizers in each group.

3. **The Research Agenda and Its Dissemination.** Following the session, forum leaders edited and integrated questions from topic group syntheses and individual work sheets for a final agenda. The agenda is disseminated to all contributors; participants are credited. Other associations/groups in higher education also receive the agenda. The history and rationale for the American Association for Higher Education Research Forum 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, 11(2), 137–160.
4. **Dissemination.** The agenda is disseminated to all contributors; participants are credited. Other associations/groups in higher education also receive the agenda. The history and rationale for the American Association for Higher Education Research Forum 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, 11(2), 137–160. 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: A Research Agenda for the Way We Work*,” the 1998 agenda, “*Taking Learning Seriously: A Research Agenda for Learning*,” the 1999 agenda, “*Organizing for Learning: A Research Agenda*,” the 2000 agenda, “*Diversity and Learning: A Research Agenda*,” the March, 2001 agenda, “*Private Gain and Public Good: Creating a Research Agenda for Achieving Balance*,” the June, 2001 agenda, “*Enacting a Scholarship of Assessment: A Research Agenda*,” the March, 2002 agenda, “*Learning in Context: Who are our Students? How do they Learn? A Research Agenda*,” and the June, 2002 agenda, “*Supporting a Shared Commitment to Assessment: A Research Agenda*” are available from Marcia Mentkowski, Educational Research and Evaluation, Alverno College, 3400 South 43rd Street, P.O. Box 343922, Milwaukee, WI 53234-3922.

2003 RESEARCH FORUM LEADERS

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FOREWORD

It's interesting that although the conference title is "Good work in Challenging Times," we're all much more comfortable identifying the challenges than the good work. Howard Gardner spent lots of time discussing misalignment, macro-forces, and market forces. Session after session has tried to answer questions about the ways organizations need to change, faculty need to change, teaching and learning need to change to meet the challenges of this century.

Even our research agenda is filled with questions about how we will meet our challenges:

1. What types of changes need to take place in an institution in order to develop more learning-centered contexts? How do you achieve an institutional focus on changing the learning environment? How can change that is happening at the department level be institutionalized in holistic, integrated, and coherent ways?
2. What graduate training is appropriate to prepare the next generation of faculty?
3. What changes would be required in faculty culture and reward structures to promote their identification with deep and durable learning?
4. What infrastructures/physical spaces/built environments are most supportive of student engagement?
5. How can we support the needs of learners and the needs of those they serve if they are at cross-purposes or if the connections between service and academic outcomes are not clear?
6. Are disciplines different in the ways they try to teach students to acquire an identity as "experts" in the field? Is "helping students to think like a lawyer" different from "helping students to think like a chemist" or "helping students to think like a musician" and if so, how does that challenge our understanding of the scholarship of teaching and learning?

Diane Halpern and Milt Hakel have, however given us a new metaphor for starting at the other end of the problem of doing good work in challenging times. "Being present at the creation" gives us a chance to think about we could create if we knew, like God, we would not fail. How do we ask research questions that don't constrain us and carry the seeds of our own destruction? How do we ask questions that respect our traditions that work well and that move them forward? How can we identify, honor, and implement new models, frameworks, roles, processes?

We hope you will help us find the new questions which will determine the new answers.

GOOD WORK IN LEARNING-CENTERED CONTEXTS

A serious consideration of good work in faculty performance asks us to recognize the realms of expertise that intersect in colleges and universities, the structure and cultures that enable the quality of the work that is carried out, and the diverse benefits to the broader society. But to direct that consideration to a learning-centered environment both sharpens the focus on teaching and learning and opens it up to the multitude of perspectives informed by learning research. Good teaching is joined by good assessment, advising and mentorship, as well as by research on pedagogy and curriculum. To see educational practice as work where the notion of quality spans subject expertise, the learning of students, and social responsibility creates a complex picture of educator career paths and commitments to the public good. Simultaneously, institutions also become structures that enhance good work. They can enable faculty work, develop academic citizenship, take responsibility for graduates and their future contributions, and guide the campus through its development as an institution of learning.

How does this regard for a more complicated notion of the good work of education provide faculty with a clearer understanding on career pathways and development? While ethical dimensions can become objects of study, how do they pervade the work of good teaching and the obligations teachers assume? What roles can graduate programs play in preparing future faculty? How are the roles of those who supervise and support faculty affected by this regard and how does this contribute to academic leadership overall?

On Characteristics of Learning-Centered Contexts

What constitutes a learning-centered environment? Are there many kinds or fundamentally just one?

How many institutions are actually doing this kind of work and can we use these as models?

What is research in a learning-centered context? How can faculty integrate teaching and research in creating environments for student learning?

How do we address these issues across undergraduate and graduate programs? What are ways in which disciplinary or interdisciplinary graduate training can encourage the kinds of teacher/learners we are trying to produce?

On Creating Learning-Centered Contexts

What types of changes need to take place in an institution in order to develop more learning-centered contexts? How do you achieve an institutional focus on changing the learning environment? How can change that is happening at the department level be institutionalized in holistic, integrated, and coherent ways?

Does higher education desire and value learning-centered contexts enough to make them happen, especially since immense, systematic change is sometimes needed to bring them about?

How is “good work” defined within the tenure/promotion process?

Is good work that focuses on learning-centered contexts actually valued in our institutions, especially in promotion and tenure and other reward systems? What are the ways in which institutions can create environments where teaching, learning/scholarship, and citizenship are truly equally important?

If we set up a system of competencies and outcomes that students are required to exhibit, would that help learning-centeredness begin to happen from the inside out or from the bottom up?

Can faculty development help bring about these kinds of changes?

How can administrators, faculty, and staff maintain a vision of good work for themselves as well as students in financially trying times?

DISCIPLINARY STYLES IN THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

To prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st century, college and university instructors are finding that doing “good work” in the classroom means taking an informed and scholarly approach to teaching and learning. Yet as faculty members begin to explore their teaching practice and the character and depth of student learning that result (or do not) from that practice, it is becoming apparent that one size does not fit all. Teaching and learning are not the same across the disciplines and for good or for ill, scholars of teaching must address field-specific issues if they are going to be heard in their own disciplines, and they must speak in a language their colleagues understand.

What are the critical issues today in teaching and learning in the different disciplines? What resources—literature, methods, forums, and support—do different disciplines bring to the scholarship of teaching and learning? What are the obstacles in the different fields? And, since growth in knowledge also comes at the borders of disciplinary imagination, how open are the various fields to ideas from others on teaching and learning? How can we best foster interdisciplinary communication, collaboration, and intellectual exchange?

On Exploring Disciplinary Differences

Are the perceptions that there are differences between disciplines real? Are the differences as deep as they seem? Are there differences within disciplines, i.e. between beginning and advanced students? What are the implications?

How is teaching studied differently across disciplines? Are there different assumptions about learning in different disciplines? What ways of knowing are allowed into the scholarship of teaching and learning across disciplines?

Are disciplines different in the ways they try to teach students to acquire an identity as “experts” in the field? Is “helping students to think like a lawyer” different from “helping students to think like a chemist” or “helping students to think like a musician” and if so, how does that challenge our understanding of the scholarship of teaching and learning?

Are there differences in the scholarship of teaching and learning in disciplines that require a high degree of performance as opposed to those that don’t?

Can we expect the same level of rigor to be applied to the scholarship of teaching and learning in our disciplines as to our research in disciplinary contexts?

To what extent do faculty believe that “if you don’t understand my content, don’t touch my teaching”?

On Finding Common Ground

Can we work with and through the variety or vocabularies and differences in terminology about teaching and learning among the various disciplines, recognizing where there are great commonalities even though the terms are different?

Can a common vocabulary for the scholarship of teaching and learning be developed or should unique understandings be continued due to uniqueness of disciplines?

Are there distinctive contributions in each discipline that we can bring to conversations to learn from each other?

Is there a common understanding across disciplines to the question “What is learning?”

How open are fields or disciplines to the ideas of other disciplines? How can openness be fostered? What’s lost and what’s gained when we translate and adapt concepts and methods from one field to another?

Can national higher education associations and disciplinary associations work together to improve communication across fields?

Do interdisciplinary programs/faculty have different understandings of teaching and learning than their disciplinary counterparts?

CHANGING FACULTY ROLES

Just as universities are facing difficult fiscal constraints, faculty are also being asked to do more with less. Technology is changing the way in which faculty are structuring curricula, interacting with students, and sharing resources with colleagues. Whether in “smart” classrooms, their own offices, or in their homes, faculty are spending more time on the computer and less in face-to-face engagement with students. Whether using commercial software for classroom management, designing web pages for their courses, or even grading papers on-line, faculty are often struggling to learn what they need to know to give students access to the best information and most transforming educational experiences.

Even without mastering the changing technological infrastructure, faculty are being called on to use sets of skills they may never have had to gain in graduate school: mentoring students engaged in service-learning, interacting with business, public sector, and non-profit partners in new collaborative ventures, serving on ever more complex committees, and doing research in new ways.

How is it possible to do good work when faculty feel as if they are running just to catch up with new knowledge and new skills? How can universities help faculty meet the challenges new technology and new skills require? Can changes in workload, student class enrollment, and course collaboration with colleagues help faculty do good work?

On Changing Faculty Characteristics

Given the mix of individuals involved in the multitude of different tasks associated with the formal faculty, who is a faculty member and how does he/she get supported?

What is the changing demographic of the faculty member and what are the implications?

What graduate training is appropriate to prepare the next generation of faculty?

On Changing Faculty Roles

What are the different roles that faculty may have five years from now if we continue on the trajectory of unbundling current faculty roles?

How would unbundling the faculty role change the rank and tenure process?

How do faculty roles change over the course of a career and how should the reward system take this into account?

What do disciplinary associations/communities contribute to defining faculty roles?

What faculty roles support democratic processes and pedagogies?

If deep and durable learning takes place over time, what changes in course structure need to be developed, and what new roles do faculty need to play?

On the Changing Nature of Faculty Work

How can technology help faculty address their changing work? How do faculty attitudes affect the value placed on technology as “good work?”

What are the skills, knowledge, attitudes and support required for faculty to change the learning environment, and how do we develop the necessary structures?

How do different types of colleges and universities define scholarship? How can we find out how it is assessed and valued in the promotion and tenure processes?

How is the quality of instruction articulated and what criteria constitute quality work in the changing world of higher education (for example, technology, teaching)?

How should we reward interdisciplinary work?

PEDAGOGY FOR DEEP AND DURABLE LEARNING

As educators committed to doing good, we aim to engender deep and durable learning among all learners. So, how do we apply what is known about learning to achieve this goal? This is surely not as simple as admonishing educators to assemble conventional wisdom about learning and work hard to implement it in their practices. Teaching to support learning becomes ever more challenging as educators grapple with the complexities of learning in multiple contexts, teach complex subject matter online, orient their teaching to articulated learning outcomes, and serve as mentors/advisors to diverse learners. The growing literature on learning has emphasized the critical interactions between models of learning and educational practice. What pedagogical philosophies and strategies are best suited to mediate learning in today's challenging learning environments? How can teachers learn to better align learning outcomes, subject matter, and assessment of student learning in their courses?

As educators, we may also need to re-examine our own processes of learning around the issue of pedagogy. As we reflect on what it means to be a teacher, how can we learn from our own experience as teachers and learners? What forms of reflection are most effective at eliciting usable insights about teaching and learning? How might our efforts in the scholarship of teaching support deep learning in our students? What strategies have been most powerful? How might we be more effective in creating environments that foster deep learning and more creative in using strategies that reach our diverse learners? What pedagogical principles and practices characterize deep and durable learning?

On Outcomes and Assessment

What is deep and durable learning? What kinds of learning outcomes, both performance- and product-based, does it embrace?

How can deep and durable learning be assessed? What assistance do faculty need to conduct analyses of learning for this purpose? Are there diagnostics, either disciplinary or interdisciplinary, that would support this assessment?

How do we begin a paradigm shift from surface learning to deep learning?

What outcomes assessment strategies promote faculty development in facilitating the deep learning of students?

Is locally generated assessment data more persuasive (at some points) than data developed from outside the institution?

On Student Learning

What is already known about what "deep learning" is? What do we already know about definitions, assessment, and fostering deep and durable learning? Do we value what is already there?

What personal learning management strategies would help students achieve deep and durable learning? E.g., to what extent does being a reflective learner enable learning?

What is the relationship between learning processes and outcomes with respect to deep and durable learning?

On Faculty Issues

What changes would be required in faculty culture and reward structures to promote their identification with deep and durable learning?

What characteristics of pedagogy are associated with deep and durable learning?

How might we redefine the roles of faculty to reflect new realities and necessities, such as expertise in technology, so that faculty can enable deep and durable learning?

Do differentiated faculty loads allow for greater valuing of teaching?

How can faculty concern for pedagogy be fostered?

Does the growing diversity of faculty have implications for deep and durable learning?

What do we know about how institutional change can be achieved?

FOSTERING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Twenty-first century campuses are places that abound in opportunities from within the curriculum and the physical campus, and also from attention to student interests and concerns. Both help students have life-defining experiences and help campuses build on the commitments and energies of their students. In this atmosphere, engagement by individual students in their learning becomes a complicated topic. Such engagement touches not only on structural concerns like retention and campus finances, but also on the distribution of engagement across the multiple threads of the student experience. Learners' academic engagement is central to educational practice, but we know that this engagement can extend far beyond the classroom. It requires a broader sense of how faculty and professional staff interact with students. The social and cultural factors that give meaning to education also affect which experiences of campus life engage students in both academic life and personal growth. It can happen in a protected environment where learning is valued and there are resources for activities and social interaction. But it also seems necessary to create a campus of opportunities for social and cultural activism with a conscious ethic of community, combined with opportunities for students to experience engaged citizenship in an ethnically diverse and democratic collaboration.

Given a prevailing push for more engaged campuses and increased opportunities for student engagement, what are the issues that can help higher education develop a broader understanding of student engagement? For example, what helps individual campuses make decisions about their own resources and students? How have faculty practices and scholarship contributed to understanding ways to foster student engagement? What do we know about relationships between engagement and learning that will help in pedagogy and program development? How can learning programs be constructed at multiple levels to support students in their development of agency? And how is a concern for student engagement shared across the faculty?

On Faculty Responsibilities

How much responsibility should faculty bear for fostering student engagement?

What pedagogies lead to deep or shallow approaches to learning?

How can we engage multiple learning styles?

How do we assess the impact of student engagement on learning?

How do we get students to engage critical societal and ethical issues?

What types of faculty development are needed to foster student engagement?

On Environmental Factors

How do we create institutional conditions that empower student learning?

Can innovative first-year courses help engage students in whole enterprise of higher education?

How does technology affect student engagement?

What infrastructures/physical spaces/built environments are most supportive of student engagement?

On Student Needs and Responsibilities

How much responsibility should students take for their own engagement?

How do changing student demographics, including the increasing number of older students and of students with work and family responsibilities, affect curriculum, pedagogy and therefore student engagement?

How can we encourage students to spend more time on their studies, and how does that bear on the amounts and kinds of student employment?

How does student engagement address three critical questions about learning: What? (activities or facts), So what? (meaning and motivation), Now what? (application and critique)

How do we formulate, expand, and focus student goals to increase their engagement?

ACADEMIC WORK, LEARNING, AND DEMOCRATIC COMMITMENTS

These days, campuses often ask students to engage in service-learning activities which they support as a way of helping students understand their democratic commitments. However, many of these activities reside undigested in and out of courses because faculty do not understand how to integrate students' work in the community with their academic work and learning. Students often say that their work in the community has been transformative but cannot describe what the transformation entails or how the transformation relates to their in-class academic work and learning. Campus-wide discussions of the relationship of colleges to the communities in which they reside, to the ways in which those relationships can support democratic commitments of students, faculty, and staff, and to the ways in which these commitments can become an integral part of student learning may help clarify and sustain good academic work.

How can faculty and professional staff forward the work of integrating social and academic work? How can disciplinary associations, academic departments, and groups of disciplinary faculty help design curriculum to integrate good academic work with democratic commitments? How can students be encouraged to develop their capacities to assess their own out-of-class learning and to make it meaningful to their in-class learning?

On Best Practices

What are the best practices for civic education in colleges and universities?

In what disciplines and constituencies is service learning related to academic work and democratic commitments well established?

How can we fine-tune our service learning programs so that they address civic engagement and democratic commitments?

How can we embed service learning and student leadership in college and K–12 curricula?

How can we support the needs of learners and the needs of those they serve if they are at cross-purposes or if the connections between service and academic outcomes are not clear?

What are the characteristics of those higher education institutions that value democratic processes?

Is there a model of a college that uses democratic processes? Can old disciplines teach disciplines that are new at democratic processes?

Where are student voices heard? At what level? At what kind of college? How can we make better use of student expertise in the classroom and the campus?

What can different kinds of research contribute to discussions about civic education?

On Encouraging Change

How do we develop/prepare/educate the current and emerging professoriate to foster academic work and learning that are tied to democratic commitments?

How do we assess student success in achieving deep and sustained learning for democratic commitments?

How can we rethink democratic processes and pedagogies in the classroom?

How can we further democratize the institution, specially the governance structures?

To what extent can we enhance our undergraduate research program and rewards for student leadership? Co-curricular transcript program, leadership honors?

What is the role of accreditation associations, learned societies, and disciplinary organizations in fostering democratic processes?

Leadership and Learning

Helping students learn to lead is a worthy goal in these challenging times for higher education. Student leadership may take various forms, exercised in various contexts. We need student leadership to help create community that sustains learning. We need student leadership to help enhance the curriculum—within disciplines, across disciplines, and in service learning. We need student leadership to embellish partnerships within the institution and between the institution and its various constituents.

What role models exist for students in the institution? What models might guide students in developing their leadership abilities? How might students see themselves as active agents of change—for their institutions, for their peers, and for themselves?

On Student Needs

How do students respond to campus change?

What kinds of leadership opportunities are created by student activism and/or external events?

Where in universities are students demonstrating leadership? In what specific ways are students providing leadership within various contexts of university life?

How are students decision-makers on campuses—in all contexts?

How do we encourage students to put leadership theory into practice?

How do we help students understand the ramifications of their leadership choices?

On Administrative Responses

What kinds of collaborative leadership can we enact to model leadership skills to students?

How can faculty learn leadership from students?

What kinds of mentoring opportunities for students and faculty do we provide?

How do we translate vision and enthusiasm at the top and bottom to those in the middle who may be resistant to change?

How do we work across disciplines in order to become more student learning-centered?
What leadership development opportunities need to be created on campuses for all constituencies— students, faculty, staff, and administrators?

How do we respond when student leadership goes in unanticipated and uncomfortable directions?

Where do we find current examples of students who are playing important roles in making decisions? What are characteristic of these kinds of institutions?

How can we translate what's already known about student leadership to larger constituencies and then use?

How do colleges and universities use student expertise, i.e. from cultural background, life experience, work experience in relationship to student leadership?

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