

2004 AAHE Research Forum

**Rethinking the Role of Research  
in Higher Education  
Creating a Research Agenda**

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The Research Forum has been a steadfast part of AAHE’s national conference since 1985. This year the Forum involved individuals committed to collaborative scholarship on the future of the academy in our changing societal and cultural times. The dialogue between researchers and educators is essential in clarifying research agendas for the future. Through two interactive sessions, the 2004 Research Forum generated this research agenda. In this way, session participants were involved in creating the 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. 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 forum 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: *Philip C. Candy*, National Health Science University & Institute, and *Donald Polkinghorne*, Fahmy Attallah and Donna Attallah Chair in humanistic psychology, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California. Group discussions on each topic followed the panel and allowed for more focused critique of pre-conference questions.

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. Last year’s agenda was published in *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 2003, 2(3), 313–328.

#### **Prior Agendas:**

- *The Classroom Researcher's Research Agenda*, 1987
- *A Research Agenda in Support of Our Highest Calling*, 1988
- *Improving the Odds for Student Achievement: A Research Agenda*, 1989
- *The Future of the Professoriate: A Look in the Mirror*, 1990
- *Achieving the Promise in Diversity: A Research Agenda to Inform the Issues*, 1991
- *Reclaiming the Public Trust: A Research Agenda to Explore the Validity of the Criticisms*, 1992
- *Reinventing Community: A Research Agenda to Create Common Purposes, Build Commitment, and Sustain Improvement*, 1993
- *A Research Agenda for Envisioning the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Academic Workplace Through Responsive Academic Citizenship*, 1994
- *The Engaged Campus: A Research Agenda to Serve Society's Needs*, 1995
- *Crossing Boundaries: A Research Agenda Toward Productive Learning and Community Renewal*, 1996
- *Learning, Teaching, and Technology: A Research Agenda for the Way We Work*, 1997
- *Taking Learning Seriously: A Research Agenda for Learning*, 1998
- *Organizing for Learning: A Research Agenda*, 1999
- *Diversity and Learning: A Research Agenda*, 2000
- *Private Gain and Public Good: A Research Agenda for Achieving Balance*, March, 2001
- *Enacting a Scholarship of Assessment: A Research Agenda*; June, 2001
- *Learning in Context: Who are our Students? How do they Learn? A Research Agenda*; March, 2002
- *Supporting a Shared Commitment to Assessment: A Research Agenda*, June 2002
- *Good Work in Challenging Times: A Research Agenda*, March 2003
- *A Richer and More Coherent Set of Assessment Practices: A Research Agenda*. June 2003

Previous agendas are available from Marcia Mentkowski, Educational Research and Evaluation, Alverno College, 3400 South 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, P.O. Box 343922, Milwaukee, WI 53234-3922.

## **2004 RESEARCH FORUM LEADERS**

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## DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

A characteristic of democracy, according to Dewey, is “conjoint communicated experience.” Given that a pluralistic democracy exists within our higher education system, locating mutual interests and aims in the widening differences among the various constituencies is a growing challenge. Teaching and learning exist in a complex of organizational and social structures in which curriculum and administrative practices interact within multilayered relationships on campus and across local and national communities. The meanings of educational concerns like accountability, student engagement, and assessment of learning outcomes are complicated and enriched through direct and increasingly diverse participation in teaching and learning. Current higher education structures and administrative responsibilities may not be up to the tasks ahead; transformations may be necessary to ensure that teaching and learning broadly support pluralism, civil discourse, and civic engagement for the next generations.

Given a prevailing push for 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 are these decisions encountered in practice as well as at the levels of policies and principles? As an association and as institutions dedicated to continuous learning and growth, how can we engage in dialogue that values the complex differences among us on our way to finding areas of collaboration? What avenues of inquiry will direct us toward democratic transformations in teaching and learning?

### Student Success

What issues prevent us from helping every student to succeed and achieve? How can we use what we already know? How can we do qualitative and quantitative research on assessment, on-line instruction, non-traditional students, or predictors of success?

How can the faculty reward system be brought into alignment with the things we know help students to succeed? What structures help or hinder alignment?

What is the role of internationalization of the curriculum (study abroad and home campus internationalization) in engagement? What are the contributions and changes of student perspectives wrought by internationalization, study abroad, or service-learning? What is it about these experiences that cause a “shift” in student perspective? What access, equity, and stratification issues do these experiences raise?

If we have research that suggests best teaching and learning practices, why doesn't this research inform practice?

Can we attach a monetary value to success in learning for the institution and for society? Can a business model be used to define a higher education return on investment?

How can we assign value more generally to the development of human capital? How can value be assigned to civic skills, human development, and human development in a social environment that is hostile to investment in human capital? Can we illuminate the loss when there is not investment? How can we develop a social capital index? Who do we need to bring together (interdisciplinary teams, economists, higher education people, etc.) to do analyses?

### **On Faculty and Administrative Roles in Promoting Effective Teaching and Learning**

What can be done about the disparate perspectives of faculty and administrators who may operate from different modes of analysis? For example, administrators may operate on a capitalistic model of the whole institution, while faculty may operate on an individual entrepreneur model or a utopian model.

How can both faculty culture and administrative culture be changed? How can we deal with failures of leadership imagination?

What kinds of research inform what kinds of questions? How can higher education scholarship inform campus leadership? How can the research and scholarship produced in higher education programs of graduate schools of education be applied in other areas?

How can we transform the social/political environment within which we work, helping all constituencies to have a more complex view of education that will promote a notion of accountability that actually supports education instead of undermining it?

How do we think out of the box to restructure learning environments and learning institutions in ways that operate from a set of values?

The scheduling of education is an engagement and retention challenge (the 10-2 and not on Friday paradigm). How can we take back control of the schedule? What is the impact of our campus culture schedule paradigm on student engagement?

Engagement is about attendance as well as pedagogy. As a precursor to engagement, what standard or consistent expectations should we hold for student attendance, and how should they be enforced? What are the policies, means of policy enforcement, or pedagogical techniques which help attendance not to be a problem?

What campus policies work against engagement? What are pedagogies that are effectively linked (as shown by research) to student engagement across disciplines (e.g., lectures, discussion sections, service-learning, field-based learning)?

What is the relationship between classroom assessment and engaged pedagogies?

### **On Democratic Institutions**

How do higher education institutions, faculty, administrators, and researchers acknowledge, quantify, and value the contributions of community partners to the educational enterprise?

What is it that we are doing that needs to be done but that isn't democratic? Whose definition of democracy are we using? If we are trying to transform institutions, what exactly are we trying to transform? Where are we in the process?

What is the current state of teaching and learning? Is it autocratic since we are seeking democratic transformation? What if the classroom is democratic but the administration is not?

What administrative structures, roles, and rewards are in synch with the enumerated "democratic transformations" and engagement goals? Which are out of synch?

What is it about the higher education environment that fosters a culture of intractability to change?

How can we focus research on the various subcultures of higher education? (e.g., student, faculty, administrator, staff). Are there sub-cultural perspectives on teaching and learning? For instance, would there be different answers to the question of what constitutes "good" teaching among the subcultures? To what extent do the interests and perspectives of the subcultures of the academy function together to facilitate good teaching and learning?

To what extent is the academy integrated (socially, physically, intellectually, etc.)? To what extent is it fragmented (and isolated)? What impact does this have on teaching, learning, and other aspects of higher education?

How do we move issues of costs and equity into institutional policy changes? How are faculty benefits distributed equitably?

## EXPANDING DIVERSITY

Always present in our institutions of higher learning, diversity is expanding in various forms. Socially constructed factors of difference—e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, religion—are constant challenges. How might we enhance our ability to confront difference, agree on mutual areas of interest and concern, and establish authentic aims? As higher education moves into the global age, how do we address local, national, and international perspectives and needs? As a major institution in a lifelong learning society, how might higher education provide better access, more relevant curriculum, and more effective pedagogy for young and mature learners, for full-time and part-time students, for different language and cultural communities, and for on-line and on-campus learners? What is the proper balance between preparing students to meet their professional ambitions and instilling skills and habits of mind of liberal learning? To add to the complexities, among these various categories of learners are individuals with learning difficulties and wide ranges of preparation and social access. What knowledge bases, resources, and strategies are needed to diagnose and attend to a range of learning needs? In most institutions, the make-up of the faculty and administration does not represent the diversity of the student body—what is sought and how might it be attained?

### On Recognizing Multiple Forms of Diversity

How do we enlist and inspire a broader range of faculty to become involved and skilled in developing multicultural processes in classrooms in a contested world?

What responsibilities do institutions of higher education bear for intervening in the social, economic, and political processes when they determine which students make it to their campuses? What responsibilities do they bear for the quality of K–12 public education, or the workings of the criminal justice system?

What does “diversity” mean for those who are confined to prisons? How is access developed for individuals who are confined? Whose responsibility is it? Should there be a prison division of higher education? Might “confinement” be labeled a disability, so that higher education in prisons becomes a societal responsibility rather than a volunteer exercise for the “haves” to understand the “have nots?”

Given that funds for prisons are increasing and funds for higher education are decreasing, how does higher education create budget balance by intervening in K–12 and in educating prisoners?

What is the purpose of higher education? Is higher education a public good that should be universally accessible?

How can higher education engage in social transformation as opposed to social reproduction and maintenance?

How do we recruit and retain a diverse faculty and staff that represents the diversity of the student body?

How can higher education embrace diversity and transform itself in order to adapt and change to accommodate students, as opposed to placing the burden on students to adapt to the institution?

Given the highly charged political environment around the topic of diversity, how do we bring together various efforts on campus so that faculty and students work effectively, dialogue effectively, and engage the diversity on campus?

How do we decide what kinds of interventions to make in stimulating multiple perspectives and also in ways to create a positive atmosphere for difficult dialogues? How do we develop a reward system that reinforces those who work in this area? How can we coach and reward faculty who tackle difficult issues of diversity?

What does it mean to acknowledge the voices of underrepresented people (e.g., in course evaluations, in prison art shows)?

### **On Library Services**

What role do library services play in serving those with diverse needs, bringing them in and helping them become literate in new information in forms relevant to diverse populations?

How do we address the digital divide, the information haves and have nots?

What role does information literacy play in helping diverse populations find, critically evaluate, and use information to solve a problem or address a research need?

Admitting a diverse population is not enough; students need tools to access learning. How do we transform institutions so that they change in response to those admitted?

What does it mean to provide access and voice to students who are beginners in information literacy?

### **On Social Structures**

How might society change the social structures that expect members of various groups to do the same things members of their group have always done? What are the political ramifications?

How do we build the bridge to cosmopolitanism that encompasses the cosmopolitanism of populations not traditionally a part of higher education?

What are the values of our society underlying the ideological shifts in our society that provide for broader access?

How do we avoid the temptation in budget-limited times to revert to “the way it’s been done” as cheapest and easiest and thus limiting innovations for budgetary reasons?

## DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

Not so long ago, having a computer on a faculty member's desk was a sign of work in the disciplines of business, the sciences, mathematics, or computer science. Now, with a computer on the desk of virtually every faculty member, they are expected to know how to use to Internet resources to enhance coursework, how to use course management software, and how to communicate with faculty, staff, and students on- and off-campus. However, this explosion of technology to all faculty has brought problems as well as many successes. There is still a digital divide, not only among students, but between students and faculty as well. Faculty often find themselves asking student aides to explain how to use technology, and they are often bemused by cell phones that take photos and provide text messaging, PDA's that answer calls and synchronize with home and office computers, software that allows faculty to customize how to alert students to changes in course content, and so on.

What does keeping up with technology mean today that it did not mean a few years ago? How does this shape the experience of faculty life? And what will it mean for faculty roles in the future? How do faculty learn to use available technologies to give students improved opportunities to expand their intellectual horizons? And how do digital or web-based applications lead to a new understanding of principled educational practices and even potentially new educational commitments?

In addition to changing the ways faculty teach and do research, can they understand how information and communications technology can make it possible to respond effectively to community needs? Similarly, how can digital opportunities effectively lead to new working relationships between faculty members and a range of civic and professional communities?

### On Digital Learning and Change

What do people do when no one is telling them what to do? How can adult learners be self-directed? How can the technology be transformative, rather than just repeating what we already do in ways that are only marginally more effective or less effective?

How do we identify "truth" within information in a digital age, when it is easy to get all sorts of "information" on the Internet? What can we learn from digital learning that will strengthen all of higher education?

What is digital literacy? Is it possible to be technologically fluent in math and all thumbs when it comes to something else?

How has the balance of power changed with the advent of technology? Is it in the nature of technology to create disabilities?

What is overlooked about the role of communication in technology?

How does technology amplify human capacity, if not change human capacity?

How does technology change community? Can technology itself create a change in the academic culture?

Should we be more explicit in our faculty position descriptions to raise issues of technological competence? How aggressively should technology issues be taken up in faculty orientation? Do you raise explicit expectations for technology use in advertising for faculty? How do we assure that new faculty know how to use technology effectively in their teaching?

Do faculty know how to use technology equally in both research and teaching? Can technology be used as a mediator between teaching and research? How does this differ from one discipline to another?

Technology has the capacity to bridge different types of scholarship. How do these different forms work together, and how could a digital environment enable communities of practice that are made up of individuals who are invested in various forms of scholarship?

Is there an art to using e-mail effectively? How can e-mail be used effectively in large lectures?

How do we maintain courseware as we develop it?

What do we need to do differently to be more successful?

Boyer's scholarship of interaction seems most influenced by technology. What about the other scholarships?

Does technology change the role of the professor?

Large numbers of faculty are retiring, and a new generation is coming into the academy who are assumed to be technologically savvy. Does new blood mean that the "gap" between students and faculty will go away? If not, how do we design professional development for faculty?

Can digital/technology offer a way to improve the tenure track time demands or does it worsen it?

Are publications in digital journals as "respected" in faculty evaluations as printed texts?

How does changing the environment by the addition of technology change student behavior?

How can we use technology to better understand our students?

How has technology allowed for "doing things differently, not better"? What could we do now with modules, between institutions, and in specialty issues?

Does the administrative use of technologies change the teaching/learning dynamic?

Nursing/medicine have been early users of technology. Can other disciplines learn from them?

What's the impact of MIT's open courseware? For example, looking at the Linux model, how can we learn from that community?

Research on power shows that there are some institutions that can exert more influence than others in a digital environment. While the Internet is tearing down boundaries, we in higher education institutions continue to make our own separations that preserve the current power structure. How might we redefine who is the expert?

Since anyone can give an illusion of being an authority over the Internet, how do we define expertise?

### **On Students and Technology**

What can we learn about our students in a traditional sense from their work in a digital environment?

How do students behave in a digital environment that is different from the way they behave in a traditional environment? What do we need to know about this, and what should we do about it?

What will technologies allow us to do that we didn't do before? How can students explore their own understandings of technology (i.e., dynamic modeling, visualization, etc.)?

## THE FUTURE OF THE ACADEMY

The academy is undergoing a generational transformation, as large numbers of faculty hired in the 1960's and early 1970's retire and newer faculty are propelled into positions of leadership. Their ideas about the current problems of traditional administrative hierarchies and academic disciplines may well lead to new definitions of scholarship, teaching, and service. These will, in turn, affect the opportunities and challenges for continued development of senior faculty. For all faculty, the challenges of global transformations, new digital environments, and an increasingly diverse society must mean a rethinking of their own roles.

How can faculty find the resources to allow them to make good decisions about new administrative structures and disciplinary roles? How will a continuing articulation of faculty life and roles be used in the recruitment and preparation of future faculty? How will these opportunities become part of post tenure review and the continued development of senior faculty?

How will information and communications technologies change the configuration of the academy of the future? Can collaboration between faculty at different institutions result in new ways of thinking about the academy of the future? And how will developing relationships between campuses in an educational system create new educational opportunities?

### On Relevance

To what extent can relationships with external constituencies (i.e., business, private, public) begin to enhance higher education's focus on relevancy and responsiveness, ensure diversity, encourage resource streams and answer calls for engagement?

### On Restructuring

How might higher education institutions restructure to better serve their constituencies?

What roles should faculty and administrators play in the restructuring?

How do institutions achieve a balance between educating professionals and educating citizens?

What is our responsibility in creating the next generation of faculty?

What is the return of AAHE's investment in the roles and rewards conversation? What is the effect? What are the next steps/questions? How can AAHE engage in this conversation beyond the converted and link with discipline associations?

What is the concept of community in higher education?

It is my understanding that our culture will change more in the next 25 years than we have seen in the last 100 years. If this is indeed the case, what are the implications for higher education? Is higher education truly ready for these changes?

Has higher education laid the appropriate framework for capacity building to occur?

Are institutions of higher education looking at change from a traditional or futuristic perspective? What role does true open, honest, and engaging dialogue play throughout this discussion?

Can higher education adequately assess systems throughout the change process without implementing focused and purposeful conversation at every level? Can honest democratic transformation really occur without open and honest dialogue at every segment of the organization?

How can an institution create an environment where authentic, open, and honest dialogue can occur?

### **On Relationships**

What relationships will define the academy?

How can we aid in defining the faculty professionals as reflective practitioners beyond the confines of our disciplines?

How can we value/recognize the changes occurring in faculty's roles and responsibilities? How do we incorporate adjuncts/part-time faculty into our campus cultures?

How can we define/redefine the evaluation process of faculty based on their changing roles?

### **On Resources**

What will the interconnections/boundaries be among public, private, and for-profit institutions?

What is the importance of investing in faculty learning?

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