



AAHE
RESEARCH
FORUM

Mapping Decades of Change

**American Association
for Higher Education**

MAPPING DECADES OF CHANGE

...surveying themes for developing perspectives

A decade of AAHE conference *themes*, reflected in Forum agendas, maps the landscape of *educational reform* and the gradual transforming of the *undergraduate experience*. An initial focus on the student's learning broadened to include *teaching*. Taking teaching seriously led to self assessment, exploring faculty roles and rewards, and then reframing the *professoriate*. Simultaneously, we engaged two parallel themes: our concern for *student achievement* and our growing awareness of the lack of *public trust* apparent in an increasingly vocal critique about higher education's effectiveness. Our focus on student needs expanded to include taking responsibility for student learning outcomes. Efforts to adapt curriculum led to institutional restructuring.

Gradually, the apparent fragmentation of the disciplines and curricula gave way to envisioning how teaching, learning, and assessment could be connected, and knowledge and abilities could be taught across the curriculum. It then seemed imperative to *reinvent community* where we could begin the tasks of joining disparate aspects of the undergraduate experience, shaping coherent curricula, and bringing departments together—through general education or the major—around outcomes such as critical thinking. These connections became indispensable to continuously inform and *sustain improvement* on campus and to *serve society's needs*.

As we crossed boundaries through interaction among many voices—faculty, college personnel, administrators, members of state and national agencies, colleagues from other associations, experts from different schools of thought—we became more aware of the need to be more inclusive of *diversity* at many levels across the academy: students, faculty, curriculum, services, cultures, experiences, and perspectives. We explored the benefits of embracing diversity while preserving the *common purposes* that grounded our academic culture. As we considered perspectives outside the academy, we renewed our commitments to graduating students who could contribute effectively in work and civic life. Our search for quality in the processes and outcomes of education gradually linked us to national and societal education goals. This brought us to reconsider the way we work as an avenue to improving quality and to recasting the *academic workplace*. Our new commitments yielded new forms of academic service as responsibilities of *academic citizenship* and an *engaged campus*.

...tracing topics for connections

Analyzing the *themes* and *topics* that framed Forum conversations shows us grappling with the issues of the day. We reflected on our practice, returned to topics with renewed energy, and invited others to shake up our thinking. Diverse topics promoted connections. The discourse shifted back and forth—from teaching to learning to assessment; from general education to the major to institutional context to community. We probed these relationships for clues to restructuring curriculum (“teaching for learning,” “writing across the curriculum”). We weighed student perspectives and expectations. Students' voluntary service to the community through campus compacts fortified service as an integral part of student learning and demonstrating citizenship. Encompassing community initiated new images and program restructuring to better meet our educational mission there.

We questioned how to become more responsive and responsible for student outcomes. Assessment was a “topic” at first. It quickly became central to building public trust as we pondered the call for new evidence and using it to improve. We wondered how to connect assessment across levels: student, classroom, curriculum, state, and national. Linking inputs, interventions, and learning outcomes meant connecting teachers with student needs, institutions with their missions, and public expectations with new standards. The “topic” of minority degree achievement fostered explorations of cultural and global diversity and inclusiveness as fundamental to all aspects of the academy: teaching to student differences and for diversity, engaging in curricular debate, dealing with conflict as a catalyst on campus. We returned to asking how institutions could be collaborative and embrace cultural diversity and global interdependence as necessary conditions for learning.

The usual probing of effective teaching strategies became an intense self-evaluation and exploration of professionalism, first by characterizing the faculty: future demographics, diversity, development, careers, time, and productivity. Then the conversation returned to involvement in teaching and dimensions of the faculty role: teacher, learner, assessor, service provider, scholar. It turned to collaborating across schools, colleges, and graduate schools to prepare college teachers. Ultimately it included a redefinition of scholarship and creating a “knowing” community where faculty could recommit to the professoriate’s value and ethical base and its moral compact with students, institutions, and society.

...charting questions for emerging insights

As we connected *topics* to broaden and deepen the range of issues, we engaged in more complex discussions. Presenters and participants showed an unusual impatience for talk about definitions and moved quickly to get beyond the hot topic and a set of buzz words to scout out the ambiguities and disconfirming evidence in areas that had high priority for improving educational quality. We often gravitated to the conflicts among purposes, perspectives, and even persons to probe new ways of thinking about a problem. Thus, the trail of agenda *questions* reflects new awareness, expertise, and experience. New questions, recycled through earlier ones, prompted a more sophisticated level of understanding. Connections between theory, practice, and improvement became more explicit. New *insights* emerged over time.

The example of *student learning* is illustrative. The questions reveal a language of learning that communicates the struggle to enhance student involvement in learning: “active and sustained learning,” “lifelong learning,” “experiential learning,” “teaching for learning,” “learning-centered pedagogy”, “assessment-as-learning,” “cooperative and collaborative learning,” “voluntary and service learning.” A focus on what to learn led to identifying learning outcomes such as critical thinking and exploring students’ epistemology through “ways of knowing” and “temporary understandings” as shaped by disciplinary inquiry.

Linking assessment to learning brought insight to how student development could walk hand in hand with holding students to expectations, and clarified how standards could give meaning to degrees. Attention to learning habits, strategies, conditions, and climate led to creating learning communities. Technology became not only a support for learning but integral to learning productivity and effectiveness. As faculty, administrators, and advisors broadened the contexts for learning, they took up new responsibilities for developing coherent curricula where student learning is a central focus.

...evolving the role of research and inquiry

AAHE members began the Research Forum to link educators and researchers in setting a research agenda for undergraduate education reform. It gradually evolved into an ongoing colloquium for clarifying the ideas driving reform, and for deepening, challenging, and sustaining them. Our initial goal of bridging the gap between research and practice evolved into a mode of collaborative inquiry: an interactive process to elicit diverse perspectives through dialogue and debate, and then to search for common ground across disciplines and settings in postsecondary education.

Throughout, we used the fundamental language of inquiry: *questioning*. Thus, creating an annual research agenda of topics and questions became a way to discipline ourselves to be systematic, and to immediately document our common interests in what should be researched. We learned to use the agenda as a communication tool for influencing the direction of scholarship in teaching and learning.

As we practiced taking responsibility for generating and owning research questions, methods, interpretations, and implications for use, the purpose and meaning of research and inquiry changed. For example, we extended the definitions of *research* to include various kinds of *inquiry*—broadened by the disciplines and expanded by the “scholarship of teaching” toward “classroom research” and “practitioner-based inquiry” for immediately improving teaching for learning.

A dialogue around new ideas and information, shaped by critique and judgment about what was important and what we already knew, became a place to make a difference together. Year by year, we built a growing understanding about effective education for diverse students in many settings.

The AAHE Research Forum is an **action seminar institutionalized in an annual conference**. Presenters and participants join their diverse perspectives, have difficult dialogues about contemporary educational problems, and generate new directions for research. The Forum is a way of knowing that captures informal and anticipatory conversations about emerging themes. It stimulates inquiry across the membership, and enables educators to exercise judgment about new ideas in higher education.

What

The Forum enables individuals and groups to generate and transform new knowledge and put it to work across their fields of influence. It sustains a culture of inquiry and reflection that renews and encourages critique, and puts research in the service of learning.

Why

At an **invitational pre-conference seminar**, conference presenters and others with expertise and experience in the conference theme discuss the issues and formulate questions. At an **all-conference session**, presenters and participants, stimulated by a panel and the presenters' prior questions, continue the dialogue in topic groups and elaborate and refine the questions for a research agenda.

How

AAHE's annual meeting brings together a wide range of interested educators with continued success in defining current issues that stimulate a broad spectrum of higher education constituencies. Through the Research Forum, the AAHE membership engages in ongoing inquiry that connects new ideas, questions, findings, and practices in higher education.

Where

Participants

Presenters and participants drawn from a wide range of institutions—and others invited to challenge us—have contributed to the Research Forum. Of these, about 2,200 created twenty-four research agendas and are credited there.

Panelists

- 1985 Alexander Astin, Arthur Chickering, George Keller, Marcia Mentkowski
- 1986 Arthur Chickering, K. Patricia Cross, Peter Ewell, Robert McCabe, Marcia Mentkowski, L. Jackson Newell, Joan Stark
- 1987 K. Patricia Cross, Wilbert McKeachie
- 1988 Harlan Cleveland, K. Patricia Cross
- 1989 K. Patricia Cross, Lee Shulman
- 1990 Eugene Rice, Donald Schön
- 1991 J. Herman Blake, Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich
- 1992 Helen S. Astin, Frank Newman
- 1993 Parker Palmer
- 1994 Lauren Resnick, Robert Zemsky
- 1995 Ernest Boyer, William Geoghegan
- 1996 Robert Sexton, Mary Walshok
- 1997 Edward (Ned) Hallowell, Diana Laurillard
- 1998 Peter Henschel, Lee Shulman
- 1999 Frank Newman
- 2000 Clifford Adelman, Marcia Mentkowski
- Spring 2001 John DiBiaggio, Marcia Mentkowski, Edward Zlotkowski
- Summer 2001 Trudy Banta, George Kuh
- Spring 2002 Randy Bass, Adrianna Kezar
- Summer 2002 Peter Gray
- Spring 2003 Milton Hakel, Diane Halpern
- Summer 2003 Peggy Maki
- Spring 2004 Philip Candy, Donald Polkinghorne
- Summer 2004 Robert Mundhenk
- 2005 Clara Lovett, Marcia Mentkowski

Forum Organizers

Alexander Astin, 1985

Arthur W. Chickering, 1985–1992, 1994, 1996–1998

K. Patricia Cross, 1988–1994

Diane Dean, 2005

Lee Grugel, 1995–1996

Mary Taylor Huber, 2003–2004

Joan Leitzel, 1996

Peggy Maki, 2001

Catherine Marienau, 1988–2005

Marcia Mentkowski, 1985–2005

Judith Reisetter Hart, 1997–2005

Terrell Rhodes, 2003–2004

William Rickards, 2004

Glen Rogers, 2001–2004

Sharon Rubin, 1997–2005

Barbara Leigh Smith, 1995

M. Stephen Straight, 2005

Kathleen Taylor, 2000

Charles White, 2001–2002

AAHE Partners

Lou Albert, 1985–1998

Russ Edgerton, 1985–1997

Margaret Miller, 1997–1999

Kathleen Curry Santora, 1999

Yolanda Moses, 2000–2003

Clara Lovett, 2003–2005

Associations

Other associations have adapted the Research Forum concept:

American Association of Colleges and Universities

American Educational Research Association, Division I

American Educational Research Association, Division J

Midwest Practitioners Research Forum

National Society for Experiential Education

American College Personnel Association

Council for the Advancement and Support of Education

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning

American Association of State Colleges and Universities Association for Institutional Research

Dissemination

Research agendas, articles, and other associations' research agendas are distributed to the AAHE membership, to AERA and AIR memberships at annual meetings, and upon request from:

Alverno College
Educational Research and Evaluation
PO Box 343922
Milwaukee, WI, 53234-3922

Phone: 414-382-6263

Fax: 414-382-6332

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Themes & Agendas

- 1985 The AAHE Research Forum: Developing An Agenda to Re-examine the Undergraduate Experience
- 1986 Developing a Research Agenda That Contributes to Reform
- 1987 Taking Teaching Seriously: The Classroom Researcher's Research Agenda
- 1988 A Research Agenda in Support of Our Highest Calling
- 1989 Improving the Odds for Student Achievement: A Research Agenda
- 1990 The Future of the Professoriate: A Look in the Mirror
- 1991 Achieving the Promise in Diversity: A Research Agenda to Inform the Issues
- 1992 Reclaiming the Public Trust: A Research Agenda to Explore the Validity of the Criticisms
- 1993 Reinventing Community: A Research Agenda to Create Common Purposes, Build Community, Sustain Improvement
- 1994 Envisioning the 21st Century Academic Workplace Through Responsive Academic Citizenship: A Research Agenda
- 1995 The Engaged Campus: Creating A Research Agenda to Serve Society's Needs
- 1996 Crossing Boundaries: A Research Agenda Toward Productive Learning and Community Renewal
- 1997 Learning, Teaching, and Technology: A Research Agenda for the Way We Work
- 1998 Taking Learning Seriously: A Research Agenda for Learning
- 1999 Organizing for Learning: A Research Agenda for Learning
- 2000 Diversity and Learning: A Research Agenda
- Spring 2001 Private Gain and Public Good: Creating a Research Agenda for Achieving Balance
- Summer 2001 Enacting a Scholarship of Assessment: A Research Agenda
- Spring 2002 Learning in Context: Who are our Students: How do they Learn?
A Research Agenda
- Summer 2002 Supporting a Shared Commitment to Assessment: A Research Agenda
- Spring 2003 Good Work in Challenging Times: A Research Agenda
- Summer 2003 A Richer and More Coherent Set of Assessment Practices: A Research Agenda
- Spring 2004 Rethinking the Role of Research in Higher Education: A Research Agenda
- Summer 2004 Connecting Assessment that Supports Learning to Multiple Stakeholders:
A Research Agenda
- 2005 Innovation and Action for Success in Challenging Times: A Research Agenda for Higher Education