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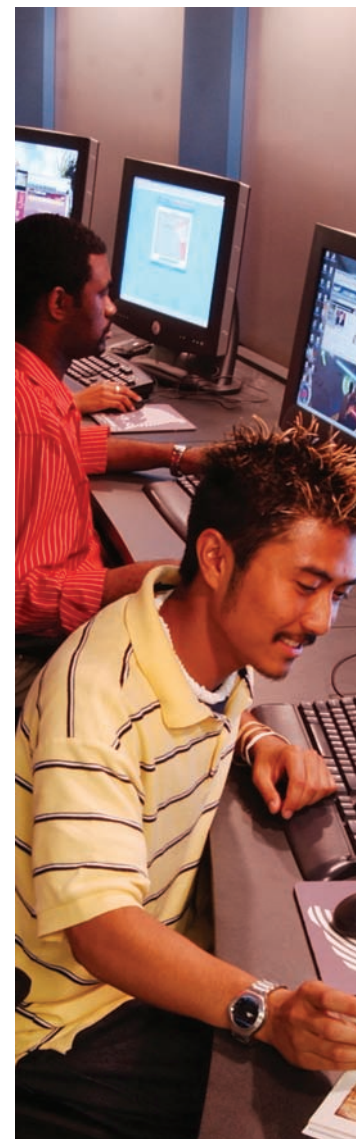
**From the Editor**

## A Liberal and Liberating Education for All

This newsletter reports on evolving work at AAC&U to make excellence inclusive. It foregrounds equity and sets our new work in the context of our evolving understanding of student learning and student success. We emphasize equity as a matter of social justice and responsibility. Changing student demographics are visible on many campuses, and continued change is ahead for all. The majority of college students in the future will be from racial/ethnic groups historically underserved by higher education institutions—including students who identify as Latino, African American, Southeast Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American. More and more students are now and will continue to be from low-income families and to be the first in their families to attend college. These students will continue to transfer between institutions and to gather credits from multiple sources, in face-to-face, hybrid, or online courses. These changes need not be framed in terms of deficits and deficiencies. Instead, they bring opportunities for institutions to tap into potential, to realize the assets and talents that the new majority brings, to address and reduce historical disparities in education. Emphasis on equity helps us understand how to prepare the future citizenry, the future leadership of our country, and to give next generations the means to excel through liberal and liberating education.

Building on AAC&U work over the past decade to raise the priority of making excellence inclusive in national projects and on member campuses, we are now focused on forging new understandings of equity and equitable practice. We work to discover emerging practices developed by our member institutions, and we lift up and share the best we can find. We are developing robust new platforms for sharing campus tools and resources through the LEAP Campus Toolkit—a campus-focused source of models and creative practices. And we are developing new projects that will allow us to join our members in discovery of ever richer knowledge and experience with high-impact practices and student success.

**Susan Albertine**



Georgia State University

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## New Research on Underserved Student Learning

# TG Grant Supports Project on High-Impact Practices

Any discussion of student success must address the critical topic of quality in the learning experiences of students traditionally underserved in higher education. The twin goals of increasing completion rates and boosting achievement levels for this growing student population are both essential to the development of the highly skilled workforce and engaged citizenry we need. At this point, however, we have too little data on how to address these twin challenges.

This fall, AAC&U's Making Excellence Inclusive initiative will launch a new research project, funded by TG, to inves-

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### ***Considering the potential benefits of these types of engaged educational practices, why have we not looked more closely at the students who may benefit the most from them?***

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tigate the impact of integrative, engaged learning opportunities on traditionally underrepresented populations—specifically low-income, first-generation, and minority students. The project will gather and examine data from state university systems in California, Oregon, and Wisconsin.

A body of scholarship has identified a statistical link between specific learning practices and increased retention, persistence, and graduation rates, as well as increased achievement of some key learning outcomes.<sup>1</sup> These classroom experiences, or high-impact practices, typically combine components of out-of-classroom learning with high levels of interaction among students, faculty, and peers. Such experi-



California State University San Marcos

ences have been found not only to be beneficial for students overall, but emerging evidence suggests they are even more impactful for students from traditionally underrepresented populations.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, research is still limited, especially on the impact of specific practices on underserved students. For example, current scholarship does not indicate what makes these high-impact practices effective in encouraging underrepresented students to stay at an institution and complete their degrees. Considering the potential benefits of these types of engaged educational practices, why have we not looked more closely at the students who may benefit the most from them? This lack of knowledge about learning and skill development, specifically among underserved students, represents a gap in our understanding of student success. Furthermore, educators agree that degree completion alone will not give graduates jobs in a competitive global environment. By connecting retention to higher levels of student learning, we can find the way to educate far more students in the United States for this challenging century.

Using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), AAC&U has gathered student-level data on engaged learning from thirty-eight participating institutions

in the California State University System, the University of Wisconsin System, and the Oregon University System. AAC&U will conduct an analysis using these data; gather supplemental data through focus groups with traditionally underrepresented students on nine campuses across the three state systems; discuss preliminary findings with system administrators and faculty leaders to identify strategies to improve student learning; and publish findings and recommendations for national impact.

This research project is an extension of another AAC&U project, Give Students a Compass: A Tri-State LEAP Partnership for College Learning, General Education, and Underserved Student Success. The principal investigators are Susan Albertine, vice president for engagement, inclusion, and success; Tia Brown McNair, senior director for student success; and Ashley Finley, senior director of assessment and research.

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<sup>1</sup> Brownell and Swaner. 2010. *Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion and Quality*.

<sup>2</sup> Kuh. 2008. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*.

## Making Excellence Inclusive

# An Evolving Framework for Student Success

By Susan Albertine and Tia McNair

In 2002, AAC&U launched Making Excellence Inclusive (MEI) as a new signature initiative. This initiative links two critical commitments: the commitment to diversity and equity and the commitment to high-quality liberal education. It seeks, in short, to advance an equitable vision for liberal education, emphasizing the value of such an education within and across the diverse and evolving populations of students in the United States.



In developing the guiding principles for the initiative, AAC&U intended that the definition of “Inclusive Excellence” be “flexible and ‘localized’ by a campus while also retaining basic principles to guide a national movement and to connect campuses in these efforts.”<sup>1</sup> As such, MEI has been a catalyst for institutional change with a chameleon-like ability to adjust to the social and cultural environment of an institution or a system of institutions.

Nine years later, the primary elements of MEI are even more relevant—and necessary—in an increasingly diverse and globalizing society that continues to struggle with intolerance and persistent educational inequities. In addition, the imminent changes in demographics in the United States—including changes that invert our definitions of “majority” and “minority” status of groups—are challenging us at every turn. The overall speed of change—encompassing globalization, technological advances, and shifts in population—has surpassed the academy’s own pace of change and its widespread adoption of policies and practices that address educational inequities.

Our evolving framework for student success at AAC&U includes a recommitment to the core principles of diversity and inclusion, with an explicit emphasis on equity and excellence in student learning. That is the meaning of inclusive excellence in the second decade of the twenty-first century. That is the critical need of a changing, pluralistic democracy.

### GREATER EXPECTATIONS

Making Excellence Inclusive builds on several earlier major AAC&U initiatives—most notably, Greater Expectations and American Commitments—and ties together the association’s long-standing interests in educational quality in the undergraduate curriculum, in diversity and civic engagement, and in preparing faculty to deepen students’ learning.

### PRIMARY ELEMENTS OF MEI

1) A focus on student intellectual and social development. Academically, MEI seeks to ensure that every student receives the best possible course of study for the context in which the education is offered.

2) A purposeful development and utilization of organizational resources to enhance student learning. Institutionally, MEI facilitates deep, sustained cross-sector or cross-unit collaboration and invites each member of the campus community to contribute to student learning and psychosocial development.



Hamilton College

3) Attention to the cultural differences learners bring to educational experiences, and how that diversity can enhance the enterprise. In the classroom, campus, and beyond, MEI works to establish an environment that challenges each student to achieve academically at high levels.

4) A welcoming community that engages all of its diversity in the service of student and organizational learning. Structurally, MEI attends to both campus and community cultures.<sup>2</sup>

### EQUITY AND EQUITY-MINDEDNESS

Implicit in these four primary elements is the priority of equity—the critical importance of action for equity as we seek to provide high-quality education for all students. Such a priority means acknowledging, not ignoring, the power of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class as elements of identity that continue to influence access to quality education. Seeking inclusive excellence calls for us to examine

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# Evolving Framework

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institutional policies, procedures, and data as well as to address individual and collective beliefs and prejudices. It asks us to cultivate equity-mindedness.

Our understanding of equity-mindedness has been influenced by the work of Estela Mara Bensimon and Alicia Dowd of the Center for Urban Education, University of Southern California. Bensimon and Dowd define “equity-mindedness” as an awareness of and willingness to address issues concerning equity where they arise in one’s life. This practice means social thinking and inquiry into presence, opportunity, and proportional participation of persons from groups historically underrepresented or underserved. In institutional contexts, such practice may inform leadership and community citizenship at all levels.<sup>3</sup>

“Equity-minded practitioners” are willing to engage in the necessary and sometimes difficult conversations and decision making that can lead to transformational change for student learning and achievement. If, for example, African American students compose 10 percent of the student population, do they participate proportionally in such high-impact practices as undergraduate research? Are they as engaged learners as their peers? How do the experiences shape their interactions with faculty? What are their success rates in achieving various student learning outcomes? Such an approach opens doors to discussion of pressing societal matters as they emerge in campus life and culture.

## A RENEWED DEDICATION

So, how do the concepts of equity and “equity-mindedness” shape our evolving framework for student success at AAC&U?

The core principles of Making Excel-

lence Inclusive, embraced and implemented by colleagues in the higher education community, will remain central to our inclusion efforts. However, an enhanced focus on equity in student success will be a principal component of our guiding vision for MEI.

Equity in learning—the balance and connection among diversity, equity, and excellence—is the hallmark of AAC&U’s commitment to a liberal and liberating education for all students. AAC&U’s commitment to equity leads us to foster broad-based leadership within individual institutions and across states and systems, welcoming all types of institutions to collaborate for student success. It addresses the vision of a quality education and genuine, grounded assessment as institutional and statewide/systemic priorities. It commits us to challenge the stratification of access to liberal education and to chart purposeful

pathways for all students from school to college and beyond.

As we develop new projects focused on MEI, we emphasize equity in learning and encourage the development of equity-minded practitioners, while advocating for diversity and inclusion. For us, and for many of you, diversity, equity, inclusion, and excellence are parts of the whole and are central to any conversation about student success. We look forward to working with you as we facilitate an ever-more-purposeful level of inquiry among AAC&U members.

<sup>1</sup> Clayton-Pederson, Alma, and Caryn McTighe Musil. 2005. Introduction to *Toward a Model of Inclusive Excellence and Change in Postsecondary Institutions*, edited by D.A. Williams, J. B. Berger, and S.A. McClendon. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Center for Urban Education. [http://cue.usc.edu/equity\\_model/](http://cue.usc.edu/equity_model/)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

## MEI Core Principles

### ❖ Diversity

Individual differences (e.g., personality, learning styles, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations).

### ❖ Inclusion

The active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions.

### ❖ Equity

The creation of opportunities for historically underrepresented populations to have equal access and equitable outcomes through educational programs that are capable of closing the gaps in student achievement.

### ❖ Equity-mindedness

A demonstrated awareness of and willingness to address equity issues among institutional leaders and staff.<sup>4</sup>

## Evidence-Based Decisions for Equity

How do we make excellence inclusive at our home institutions? We learn from the success stories of colleagues across the country. San José State University, Evergreen Valley College, Southern Oregon University, and University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh provide these narratives that can guide evidence-based decision making to approach equity on any campus.

*These campus profiles were prepared with guidance from: Carleen Vandezande, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh; Debra David, California State University Chancellor's Office; Keith Aytch, Evergreen Valley College; Kay Sagmiller and Amy Belcastro, Southern Oregon University.*

### **San José State University and Evergreen Valley College**

### **Streamlining Transfer for Success**

San José State University (SJSU) partnered with Evergreen Valley College (EVC), one of its top two-year transfer feeders, on a pilot project designed to improve transfer student success. They wanted to reach first-generation students, low-income students, and those from underrepresented ethnic groups in the transfer class. The project aimed to close gaps through multiple goals: to introduce students to university culture and resources; to engage them in high-impact practices; and to focus on the value of liberal education. The pilot introduced new, high-impact sections of English IB, a second-level college composition class,

lege were only half as likely as SJSU students to pass the writing test on the first attempt.

The pilot sections were introduced at EVC, but they were held at SJSU beginning in the fourth week of the semester. In addition to the usual assignments, students exchanged letters with sixth-graders at a low-performing school through a “Writing Partners” service-learning program.



San José State University

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***Students in the “Writing Partners” service-learning program were less likely to drop than other sections and much more likely to pass the common final. The activity increased their engagement, self-esteem as role models, and appreciation of the power of writing.***

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offered at both SJSU and EVC, that meets a general education requirement. The course was chosen because it lends itself well to writing on educational themes, and it is required before students can take a writing skills test that serves as a gateway to upper-division courses at SJSU. According to institutional evidence, students who completed English IB at a community col-

The special sections also included campus and library tours, guest speakers, and peer mentoring by successful transfer students.

After offering the pilot class twice, initial evidence has been encouraging. Students in the special sections were less likely to drop the class than other EVC English IB sections (90 percent vs. 82 percent) and much more likely to pass the

common final (92 percent vs. 71 percent). Students reported that the letter exchange increased their engagement, self-esteem as role models, and appreciation of the power of writing. They agreed that being on the SJSU campus enhanced their motivation to transfer. Project leaders plan to examine student records to determine if these students are representative and track how they perform over time. The project has generated conversations about other ways for SJSU to partner with community colleges to improve transfer student success.

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## Southern Oregon University

### Serving First-Generation College Students

Southern Oregon University made the discovery in 2008 that 33 percent of its first-time, full-time degree-seeking students were not persisting beyond the first year. The literature suggests first-generation college students (FGCS) and low-income students are at risk to persist past their first year. In 2009, faculty member Amy Belcastro conducted a comprehensive mixed-method study, exploring institutional policies and practices that support or hinder the success of FGCS. The study combined analysis of academic, demographic, and enrollment data; a comprehensive review of institutional policy and practices; and FGCS interviews. Much to Belcastro's surprise, she found SOU's FGCS were out-persisting and out-performing their continuing-generation college student peers.

This counter-intuitive finding illuminated specific high-impact practices that support FGCS success. FGCS at SOU consistently demonstrate unique characteristics that prepare them to persevere through

challenges. Specific institutional policies and practices directly contribute to the persistence of FGCS. Retained students were active in student clubs and centers and used these networks informally to gather information about maneuvering

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***Publicizing the specific institutional activities that directly contribute to the persistence of first-generation college students has helped to preserve and expand SOU's most effective practices.***

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through the university culture. This finding has helped to preserve SOU's student centers and clubs, despite repeated financial cuts to the Oregon University System. Additionally, academic and student affairs have increased the explicit communication to answer key questions that first-generation, low income students ask: What is general education and why is it required? Why must incoming students enroll in a first-year seminar? What is an advisor and why is he or she important?

As a result of Belcastro's study, SOU

became interested to know whether all graduating students had equitable access and comparable success in capstones. All faculty who taught capstone classes were invited to participate in a year-long study group of capstone requirements and final products. The process itself turned out to be a unique professional development experience for study group members. Faculty discussed what requirements were distinctive to disciplines and which were universal, and then they designed campus-wide high-impact capstone rubrics for original experimental research, research-based persuasive writing, and internships or community-based-learning capstones. Capstone professors in all disciplines were asked to incorporate the rubrics into the design of their courses and capstone requirements during the 2011-2012 academic year. In spring 2012, capstone professors will gather to share and review students' work at the university's annual celebration of research and the arts.

Publicizing the specific institutional activities that directly contribute to the persistence of first-generation college students has helped to preserve and expand SOU's most effective practices.



University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

## The University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

### Disaggregating Data to Create Pathways

The University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh issues an annual report, informed by the Center for Urban Education (CUE) Equity Scorecard™, which provides disaggregated data about underserved students in terms of several performance measures. The report is shared with faculty, academic learning support staff, and administrators both to inform them and to influence their planning. As the success data are examined and mapped across specific student activities, the university works to change practices and programs to ameliorate inequities in student success.

For example, data in the 2010 report indicated a pattern of inequity in the low numbers of students of color and transfer students who participate in the University Honors Program (UHP). In 2009-2010, only 4 percent of the participants in the UHP were students of color, compared to an 8 percent population in the total student body. Similarly, only 8 percent of participants in the UHP were transfer students, whereas transfer students made up around 40 percent of the entire stu-

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# Evidence for Equity

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dent body. The Compass Project team worked with the director of the UHP to examine the program's practices and policies and their impact on underserved students, especially transfer students. As a result, with the support of the provost, the program created a new pathway to entry for transfer students, thus expanding the number and diversity of the participants in the UHP. Future research will continue to track

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growth of underserved students in this program, leading to a comparison of academic performance with peers not participating in the program.

The university also uses equity-based data collection processes and analyses to track and disaggregate by ethnicity the frequency of grades of D, F, or W in gateway or 100/200 level courses. Faculty and other campus-wide academic learning support offices review these data, and they develop action plans to respond accordingly. The Center for Academic Resources uses the data to identify course sections to target for Supplemental Instruction (SI) and tutoring. Resulting data show that students not attending SI sessions receive a course letter grade at least one grade lower than do students who participate in SI for at least ten review sessions.

Reflective practice and action research can be designed to yield evidence that faculty and other campus leaders need. Success in work to make excellence inclusive results when people answer their own assessment questions and address issues that are meaningful to the community.

## Launching the LEAP Campus Toolkit

# A Living Library of Resources— The Destination for Innovation

*By Caleb Ward*

Colleges and universities nationwide grapple with common challenges: clearly defining student learning goals and ensuring that they are addressed

effectively in the curriculum; making high-impact learning opportunities available to all students, especially the most underserved; measuring and increasing student success. On campuses and in system offices all over the country, faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs professionals are generating groundbreaking strategies to overcome the many obstacles to meeting these challenges. The LEAP Campus Toolkit is a powerful new AAC&U project designed to enable these scattered educators to bring together their stories and access innovations from others in the field.



designed to enable these scattered educators to bring together their stories and access innovations from others in the field.

At its heart, the Toolkit is a living library, collecting examples of campus work, narratives of successful decision making and implementation, and tools for measuring learning and efficacy. Each resource is submitted by an educator or other thought leader in the field, and it is collaboratively refined into a visual form that is engaging, concise, and directly actionable for a reader seeking to pursue a similar effort on her or his own campus. Users are easily able to comment on and discuss the content, share the most useful resources with colleagues, and submit their own examples to be highlighted in the library.

By creating this twenty-first-century online community of practice, AAC&U aims to connect individuals with ideas, opening channels for communication and exchange among those addressing similar contemporary challenges for liberal education. This work continues and pushes forward the work advanced by those involved in AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative. It brings together the insights from various LEAP networks and communities to share and learn from the best practices in the field.

With an emphasis on user engagement and exploration, the Toolkit makes available a rich array of practical resources, while maintaining an aesthetic of collaborative, self-guided learning that is often missing from traditional web sites and link clearinghouses. We think this will make it a valuable new destination for educators seeking to learn from the work of colleagues and to share their best work with a national audience.

To get started, access the Toolkit at <http://leap.aacu.org/toolkit>.

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The LEAP Campus Toolkit was created with the help of Carnegie Corporation of New York, Lumina Foundation for Education, and MetLife Foundation. Don't forget to have fun!



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AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,250 member institutions, including accredited public and private colleges and universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education at both the national and local levels and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org).

**Making Excellence Inclusive (MEI)** is AAC&U's guiding principle for access, student success, and high-quality learning. It is designed to help colleges and universities integrate diversity, equity, and educational quality efforts into their missions and institutional operations. The action of making excellence inclusive requires that we uncover inequities in student success, identify effective educational practices, and build such practices organically for sustained institutional change. If your institution is striving for inclusive excellence, share your work with us by writing to Caleb Ward at [ward@aacu.org](mailto:ward@aacu.org). Perhaps your best efforts can help guide other campuses toward this national goal.

# Network for Academic Renewal

## 2011-2012 Conference Schedule

AAC&U invites educators to join us in our working conferences to examine innovative ideas and practices in undergraduate education with colleagues from diverse institutions across the country. Visit [www.aacu.org/meetings](http://www.aacu.org/meetings) for online conference registration, proposal submission, past conference resources, and future programs.

*November 3-5, 2011 • Providence, Rhode Island*  
**Arts & Humanities: Toward a Flourishing State?**

*February 23-25, 2012 • New Orleans, Louisiana*  
**General Education and Assessment:  
New Contexts, New Cultures**

*March 22-24, 2012 • Seattle, Washington*  
**Student Success: Pushing Boundaries, Raising Bars**

*October 18-20, 2012 • Baltimore, Maryland*  
**Diversity, Learning, and Inclusive Excellence**



Humboldt State University

For more information visit [www.aacu.org/meetings](http://www.aacu.org/meetings) or contact Karen Kalla, [kalla@aacu.org](mailto:kalla@aacu.org).