

TRENDS IN THE
LIBERAL ARTS CORE:
A VISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

A NATIONWIDE COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE GENERAL
EDUCATION IN UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



THE AMERICAN ACADEMY
FOR LIBERAL EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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&
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Overview

The American Academy for Liberal Education (AALE), in cooperation with approximately seventy public and private colleges and universities across the nation, is in the midst of a three-year project to examine the impact that factors, such as an increase in professional degree programs and the growth of specialized accreditation, have had on undergraduate general education requirements and the liberal arts core during the past two decades. Results of this assessment will be used by the cooperating institutions (and made available to other colleges and universities) for the purposes of conducting institutional self-studies for accreditation. The results will also be used to develop appropriate strategic planning to cope with these changes in degree programs (and thus strengthen their liberal arts and general education core requirements). Finally, this study will lead to new strategies for initiating assessment of student learning (including each institution's "value-added" contribution to its graduates) in the liberal arts.

In December, 1999, AALE completed a detailed examination of changes that have occurred to the general education requirements during the past two decades at the representative, national cross-section of institutions that have consented to participate in this project. Site visits conducted by AALE project staff with designated faculty and administrators of a smaller focus group of cooperating institutions are now taking place. These permit us to identify some of the more prominent forces and pressures on

undergraduate education revealed by our examination of institutional data, and allow each institution to better understand its own position and experience in the context of relevant national norms. Causal factors ranging from rising costs and diminishing resources to “consumer concerns” of students and parents that such investment yield a concrete practical dividend (such as certainty of employment), along with proliferation of departments and majors and competition for resources, all contribute to the shaping of general education and to the spectacular increase in professional degree programs within the undergraduate curriculum.

Most significantly, enhanced understanding of the complex forces affecting the role and function of liberal education emerging from this FIPSE project is being used by AALE in assisting individual participating institutions to evaluate their core curriculum, develop assessment procedures for student learning appropriate to the liberal arts, and improve the training and preparation of accreditation site visitor teams for the evaluation of liberal arts programs and general education core requirements.

FIPSE

LIST OF PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

Research Universities

Boston University
Georgetown University
Howard University
Oregon State University*
Rice University
Temple University
Tulane University
University of Iowa*
University of Maryland
— College Park*
University of Miami
University of North Carolina
— Chapel Hill*
University of South Carolina
— Columbia*

Doctoral Universities

Ball State University*
Baylor University
College of William & Mary*
Fordham University
Indiana University
— Purdue University (Indianapolis)*
Miami University of Ohio*
Middle Tennessee State
University*
Northern Arizona University*
Portland State University*
University of San Francisco

Masters Colleges/Universities

Assumption College
Brooklyn College — CUNY*
Carthage College
Florida A&M University*
Grambling State University*
Hampton University
Hood College
St. Michael's College
Samford University
Seattle University
Tusculum College
University of Central Arkansas*
University of Nebraska
— Kearney*
University of North Alabama*

Baccalaureate Colleges

Augustana College
Bard College
Birmingham-Southern College
Bryn Mawr College
Carleton College
Centre College
Colorado College
Connecticut College
Dakota State University*
Dickinson College
Eckerd College
Freed-Hardeman University

Furman University
Goucher College
Grinnell College
Hampden-Sydney College
Lewis and Clark College
Ramapo College of New Jersey*
Reed College
Rhodes College
Skidmore College
Thomas Aquinas College
University of Dallas
University of North Carolina
— Asheville*
University of the South
Wabash College
Washington & Jefferson College
Washington and Lee University
Williams College
Wofford College