

A NEW MODEL
FOR
ACCREDITATION IN THE LIBERAL ARTS



Developed with the support of
THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS
&
THE JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION

PDF TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview.....	5
AALE Educational Effectiveness Protocols.....	12
Part I. AALE Eligibility Requirements.....	13
Part II. AALE Education Standards.....	17
Part III. Student Achievement.....	20
A. Effective Reasoning.....	21
B. Breadth and Depth of Learning.....	23
C. The Inclination to Inquire.....	26
D. Civic Arts.....	28
Part IV. Institutional Performance.....	30
Appendix.....	32
Part I. Student Achievement.....	32
A. Effective Reasoning.....	32
B. Breadth and Depth of Learning.....	33
C. The Inclination to Inquire.....	34
D. Civic Arts.....	34
Part II. Institutional Excellence.....	35

National Project Design Committee

Barbara Cambridge, Director of Assessment and Quality, American Association for Higher Education

John Chandler, President emeritus, Williams College

Peter T. Ewell, Senior Associate, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

Timothy Fuller, Dean of the College and Faculty, Colorado College

Jerry Gaff, Vice President, American Association of Colleges & Universities; and Director, Network for Academic Renewal

David Green, Senior Research Scientist, Institute for Education and Social Policy, New York University

Ruth Mitchell, Principal Partner, The Education Trust

Jonathan Monroe, Director, J.S. Knight Writing Program, Cornell University

Lee Shulman, Professor of Education, Center for Educational Research, Stanford University; and President, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Conrad Snowden, former Associate Provost, Princeton University

Grant Wiggins, President and Director of Programs, Center on Learning Assessment and School Structure

Robert Zemsky, Director, Institute for Research on Higher Education, University of Pennsylvania

AALE Staff Participants

Jeffrey Wallin, President

George Lucas, Jr., Accreditation Reform Project Director

John Harris, AALE Director of Accreditation; Associate Provost, Samford University; and Chairman, National Project Design Committee

Francis DuVinage, Associate Director, Accreditation

Thomas Suh, Research & Policy Analyst

Institutional Participants and AALE Faculty Fellows

Bryn Mawr College, Dr. Clark McCauley, Professor of Political Science

Portland State University, Dr. Amy Driscoll, Director of Assessment &
University-Community Partnerships

Ramapo College of New Jersey, Dr. Mark Howenstein, Professor of Law
and Society

Samford University, Dr. David Dedo, Director, Writing Across the
Curriculum Project

Tusculum College, Dr. John Reiff, Director, Competency Assessment
Center and Service Learning Program

Special Consultants

Claude Rawson, Professor of English Literature, Yale University

Sheldon Rothblatt, Professor of the History of the University, University of
California-Berkeley

Robert Scott, President, Ramapo College of New Jersey

Overview of AALE's Educational Effectiveness Accreditation Project

Since its founding in 1992 as the nation's only specialized accreditor of liberal arts institutions and programs, the American Academy for Liberal Education has sought to achieve the twin goals of strengthening liberal education and of providing the public with sound assurance of institutional excellence and integrity. For the past four years, and with the support of The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Academy has been engaged in a project that promises to advance both these aims significantly by transforming conventional approaches to institutional and programmatic accreditation.

Phase One

The first phase of this project is now complete. With the cooperation of a select group of colleges and universities and distinguished experts in higher education, the Academy has developed and tested an innovative performance-based accreditation process. This new process places reliable, substantive documentary evidence of student learning in the liberal arts, as well as of sound institutional performance in service of liberal education, at the center of the accreditation review. These new performance-based accreditation guidelines are designed to help institutions develop procedures for collecting and evaluating evidence of student achievement and of sound institutional practices, and then to enable them to use this information as a basis for ongoing institutional improvement as well as for institutional or programmatic accreditation.

Together with this performance-based model of educational and accreditation assessment, AALE has developed a new procedure for assessing the impact of an institution's organizational, pedagogical, and financial practices on student learning. Among other aims, this procedure seeks to highlight institutional policies for allocating resources to the key elements of a successful program in the liberal arts, including curriculum design and implementation and faculty development. The centerpiece of this process is a groundbreaking tool for compiling and analyzing institutional data portfolios. AALE's **Key Performance Indicators (KPI) Institutional Profile Form** efficiently and painlessly addresses questions of institutional integrity and fiscal probity that have heretofore dominated the conventional accreditation process. This

advanced diagnostic instrument enables institutional research and finance officers to provide essential and well-defined data in an extremely convenient and efficient manner. The **KPI** software package then converts that raw institutional data into quantitative measures of institutional stability, integrity, and performance that are far more reliable and revealing than those produced by conventional methods.

Phase Two

Phase Two of this project is already underway with renewed support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts. This second phase will streamline the implementation of AALE's new accreditation instruments by thoroughly reconceiving the peer review process that is vital to assuring institutional quality and integrity.

Phase Two begins with the development of a detailed plan for transforming the conventional model of peer review into a comprehensive academic audit of the educational and institutional assessment materials developed through AALE's Educational Effectiveness accreditation process. This revised peer review model will enable future site visitors to focus squarely on an institution's procedures for continuous monitoring and improvement of both educational and institutional effectiveness. To reap the full benefits of this new model for performance-based accreditation and peer review, Phase Two will culminate with the development of a new and comprehensive approach to the selection and training of peer review teams. This new approach will thoroughly prepare select groups of "academic auditors" to evaluate the array of evidence concerning an institution's educational and organizational performance generated by AALE's Educational Effectiveness accreditation process.

Project Conception and Development

In 1996 the American Academy for Liberal Education (AALE) began assembling a distinguished and broadly representative advisory committee to consider the question, "What are the learning goals implicit in the idea of a liberal education?" With financial backing from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, AALE convened a National Project Design Committee (NPDC) and charged this body with the task of reconceiving liberal arts education assessment with this question as their starting point and touchstone.

Members of the NPDC then surveyed the recent literature on assessment (to which many of them had made substantial contributions) and examined closely a number of innovative projects underway at institutions across the country. Throughout this process they asked themselves whether the methods, standards, and practices under study were well-suited to the assessment of the learning goals of a liberal education. From these researches and discussion emerged a set of clearly-defined learning goals appropriate to the promises and demands of a truly liberal education. These learning goals were intended to be especially useful to institutions developing internal standards and procedures for assessing their own educational performance, standards and procedures which could then serve as the basis for a radically redesigned accreditation review process.

As a first step towards such a radical revision of accreditation practices the NPDC used its learning goals set as the basis for what was provisionally called a “learning matrix.” This spreadsheet-based evaluative instrument was designed to allow all the educationally relevant features of institutional life and organization to be efficiently and uniformly assessed and recorded. After review by several independent education experts, a set of accreditation protocols based on this learning matrix was developed and readied for limited-scale field testing.

For this purpose the Academy established partnerships with five institutions, selected both for their diversity and because each was already engaged in compiling and evaluating evidence of student achievement in the liberal arts education. At each institution a faculty member was designated as “AALE Fellow in Accreditation” to study these learning-goal-based protocols, and then to develop an institutional response. Participating institutions were, in alphabetical order, Bryn Mawr College, Portland State University, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Samford University, and Tusculum College.

During the summer of 1998, AALE staff collaborated with the five faculty fellows as they prepared reports correlating their unique institutional assessment programs and cultures to the parameters of the experimental accreditation model and its standardized “learning matrix.” As a vital part of this effort the faculty fellows also made preparations for “mini-site-visits” to be conducted by AALE staff at summer’s end, assembling representative portfolios of archived student work and collecting evidence of sound pedagogical practice in assigning and evaluating student work, as well as of sound institutional learning assessment policies and practices.

The Academy's Executive Director then led small staff teams in visits to participating institutions to examine and discuss the materials assembled. During these "mini site-visits" the standardized "learning matrix" was used to gauge the heuristic value of the evidence presented, as well as to ensure uniform assessment procedures.

In October of 1998 AALE brought together the National Project Design Committee with the five faculty fellows in order to discuss comprehensively the results of their work. These meetings produced a wide-ranging exchange of ideas concerning different approaches to assessing learning and institutional performance, as well as numerous proposals for streamlining the entire institutional self-study and site visit procedures.

Most importantly, a strong consensus emerged regarding the advantages of an accreditation process squarely focused on student and institutional performance. This clear preference for performance-based accreditation led to a number of dramatic enhancements to the provisional procedures devised and tested over the preceding months. The most significant of these enhancements was a decision to abandon the spreadsheet-based and graphical "learning-matrix" in favor of a refined version of the original learning goals set. This new set of goals would be supplemented by a standardized template of highly focused yet flexible questions designed to elicit clear and meaningful narrative descriptions of key aspects of an institution's performance-assessment principles and practices. Participants agreed that this approach, akin to an invitation to reflection, dialogue, and accurate self-appraisal, would be better suited to the assessment of the complex aims, methods, and substance of a liberal education than a rigid checklist. They also agreed that this approach would better encourage the development of institutional cultures of on-going self-appraisal and self-improvement, while also bringing out more clearly the depth and comprehensiveness of a performance-based approach to educational and institutional assessment.

The Final Year of Phase One

In the months following the October 1998 NPDC meeting AALE staff fully revised the new accreditation protocols, readying them for their first field trial. Representatives of the Academy also made two public presentations of the proposed reforms, first at the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), and then at the annual Assessment Forum of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE).

At this point one of AALE's five partner institutions from the preceding summer, Tusculum College, decided that it would undertake the first full-fledged accreditation review under the new accreditation protocols. Accordingly, Tusculum's accreditation committee prepared a self-study that focused strongly on its documented evidence of student competency performance, as well as on good institutional practices in support of undergraduate liberal education. A peer review team led by NPDC member and Colorado College dean Timothy Fuller conducted a full accreditation site visit in late September, 1999. After a thorough review of the application materials and self-study prepared under AALE's new protocols, and on the strength of the site-team's first hand examination of the college's learning outcomes programs and procedures, AALE's Council of Scholars recommended that the Board of Trustees grant full accreditation to the Residential College at Tusculum. This was duly granted in November of 1999, marking the first accreditation of an undergraduate liberal arts program under AALE's learning outcomes accreditation protocols.

Based on the experience gained during the Tusculum College accreditation review and site visit, AALE staff further refined the new procedures. These are presented below as Parts III "Student Achievement" and IV "Institutional Performance" of AALE's new Educational Effectiveness Accreditation Protocols.

Key Performance Indicators

In parallel with the development of the Educational Effectiveness protocols, and as an important complement to that work, the AALE National Project Design Committee deemed it necessary to address a wide range of long-standing concerns about the adequacy and reliability of quantitative institutional and financial information collected and reviewed through the accreditation process. Under the direction of AALE Director of Accreditation John Harris, a KPI team was assembled and asked to design a portfolio of institutional data that would streamline the process of routine accreditation oversight. The KPI team's goals were to limit the overall data set to essential items; to provide precise operational definitions for all items requested; to make maximum use of institutional information already available in refereed or audited format; and, finally, to develop a data processing algorithm that would convert raw information into precise and useful "dashboard indicators"

of institutional performance.

This effort has resulted in the development of an advanced and comprehensive quantitative reporting instrument, the KPI Institutional Profile Form. Institutional research and finance officers are asked to supply a limited and clearly defined set of readily available statistics on admissions, enrollment, and financial matters, together with copies of their most recent externally audited financial statement. Working closely with Moody's Investor Services, Inc., the KPI team has designed a spreadsheet algorithm to analyze and interpret these institutional statistics, producing a range of approximately 25 essential "dashboard indicators" of institutional performance that greatly enhance an accrediting agency's ability to provide on-going assurance of institutional soundness, or to pinpoint areas of concern as they arise from year to year. Completion of this concise and efficient KPI questionnaire is now required of all applicants for AALE accreditation and of all AALE member institutions on an annual basis. As a result of this initiative, what previously had been one of the central and most time-consuming aspects of the accreditation process has been reduced to a routine reporting requirement, while considerably increasing the reliability and heuristic value of the information gathered.

A New Model for Accreditation Peer Review - The Academic Audit

When used together as a comprehensive instrument for accreditation review, AALE's innovative Educational Effectiveness protocols and KPI Data Collection System provide an unprecedented cross-sectional view of a liberal arts institution's inner workings and performance. The qualitative and quantitative reports and data assembled through this process can then become the basis for what Dr. Fred Harclerod first termed an "academic audit." In an "academic audit" each critical aspect of an institution's educational performance is viewed as a part that must always be related and referred to the whole. Evidence of student performance archived and evaluated by the institution leads to questions about individual courses and the curriculum in general; examination of the curriculum, and of degree and co-curricular programs, lead to questions about institutional priorities in the allocation of financial and other resources to the various aspects of an undergraduate educational experience; and examination of an institution's financial priorities and resource allocations lead, in turn, to questions about the long-term sustainability and viability of its educational programs and mission.

As should be evident, these new accreditation instruments are primarily heuristic rather than prescriptive; while maintaining a rigorous analytical focus on student learning in the core areas of the liberal arts, they seek to generate an on-going and substantive dialogue between an institution's stakeholders and the peer review accreditation team.

This re-conception of the peer review process calls for a similarly revised approach to the selection and training of peer reviewers themselves. The United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which has pioneered academic audits as a means of ensuring institutional quality, may serve in many respects as a model for site visitor recruitment and training in this country. An integral element of PhaseTwo of AALE's Educational Effectiveness Accreditation Project will be to develop a program for recruiting and training yearly cadres of expert auditors, each of whom will then be retained and appropriately compensated for a three-year term. In this way a stable roster of trained and experienced academic auditors will be established, and a steady influx of new talent assured. Individual academic audit teams will regularly comprise a mixture of new and experienced personnel in each of the three critical areas of peer review: administration, faculty and curriculum, and student services.

In addition, and in keeping with its dedication to excellence in undergraduate teaching and learning, AALE proposes to include on each team of academic auditors at least one present or former fellow of the Carnegie Endowment for Teaching program. The Carnegie program stresses excellence in teaching as a valuable component of academic scholarship, fully commensurate with research and publishing at the highest levels. Fellows are selected both for demonstrated excellence in undergraduate classroom teaching, and for their commitment to developing and disseminating effective teaching methods and approaches.

AALE Educational Effectiveness Accreditation Protocols

Procedure for Seeking AALE Accreditation or Preaccreditation Under the Educational Effectiveness Protocols

1. Applicant institutions intending to use AALE's Educational Effectiveness protocols as a basis for accreditation should first complete and submit an application for Accreditation or Preaccreditation (as appropriate) and an Institutional Profile Form (included in the respective application packets).
2. Members of the institution's self-study steering committee should prepare a brief narrative ascertaining that the eligibility requirements listed in Part I have been satisfied through completion of the respective application packets, and provide brief responses to those requirements not addressed through the application.
3. Members of the institution's self-study steering committee should then prepare a thorough yet concise narrative addressing the institution's conformity to AALE's Education Standards as listed in Part II.
4. Finally, the institution's self-study committee should prepare a thorough yet concise report ensuring that the institution's embedded assessment procedures adequately address and routinely archive evidence of student work and other pertinent information that satisfy the educational and institutional goals as outlined in Parts III (**Student Achievement**) and IV (**Institutional Performance**) of AALE's Educational Effectiveness Accreditation protocols.

Part I. AALE Eligibility Requirements

All institutions applying for accreditation or preaccreditation must meet AALE's eligibility requirements. As indicated below, these requirements should be addressed by providing the information and documentation requested in the respective application forms.

A. Institutional Agreements and Administrative Structure

1. The institution or program must attest to:
 - a) its commitment and intent to comply with the criteria of the Academy, either current or as these may be modified hereafter, consistent with the policies and procedures of the Academy;
 - b) its understanding and agreement that the Academy may, at its discretion, make known to any agency or member of the public that may request such information, the nature of any action, positive or negative, regarding its status with the Academy;
 - c) its agreement to disclose to the Academy, at anytime, all such information as the Academy may require to carry out its evaluating and accrediting functions; and
 - d) its agreement to refrain from making any promotional use of its application for Accreditation or Preaccreditation prior to the actual granting of an accreditation status.

Eligibility requirement (A.1) should be addressed by completing the Institutional Agreement Form included in application form.

2. The institution has a charter and formal authority from the appropriate government agency to confer degrees, certificates, or diplomas in the jurisdiction(s) in which the institution operates.

Eligibility requirement (A.2) should be addressed by providing the information and/or documentation requested in item (6) of the application form.

3. The institution has an active, policy-making governing board of at least five members, which has the authority and duty to ensure that the institution achieves its mission. The presiding

officer of the board, along with a majority of the other voting members, must have no contractual, employment, personal, or family financial interests in the institution.

Eligibility requirement (A.3) should be addressed by providing the information and/or documentation requested in items (4) and (5) of the application form.

4. The institution has a chief executive officer whose primary responsibility is to the institution. The chief executive officer cannot be the presiding officer of the board.

Eligibility requirement (A.4) should be addressed by providing the information and/or documentation requested in item (2) of the application form.

B. Published Information

5. The institution has published admissions and retention policies consistent with its educational programs and objectives.

Eligibility requirement (B.5) should be addressed by providing the information and/or documentation requested in items (13), (14), and (16) of the application form.

6. The institution or program has a clearly defined and published mission statement that includes a commitment to liberal education and that is appropriate to an institution of higher learning.

Eligibility requirement (B.6) should be addressed by providing the information and/or documentation requested in item (10) of the application form.

7. The institution or program publishes accurate information that fairly describes a) its educational programs; b) its policies and procedures directly affecting students; c) its charges and refund policies; d) the academic credentials of faculty members and administrators.

Eligibility requirement (B.7) should be addressed by providing the information and/or documentation requested in items (14), (15), (16) and (17) of the application form.

C. Operation, Faculty, and Educational Effectiveness

8. Institutions applying for Accreditation or **Preaccreditation** must be in operation and have students enrolled in degree programs at the time of the site evaluation visit.

Eligibility requirement (C.8) should be addressed by providing the information and/or documentation requested in item (14) of the application form.

9. In each major field there must be competent faculty with a minimum of at least one full-time faculty member in that field with responsibility for oversight and coordination.

Eligibility requirement (C.9) should be addressed by providing the information and/or documentation requested in item (19) of the application form.

10. The institution has regular, campus or program-wide procedures for collecting, evaluating, and archiving evidence of student achievement in liberal learning.

Eligibility requirement (C.10) should be addressed by providing the information and/or documentation requested in item (20) of the application form.

D. Financial Resources and Auditing

11. The institution has established a financial base adequate to support activities consistent with its mission.

Eligibility requirement (D.11) should be addressed by completing the AALE Institutional Profile Form included in the application packet.

12. The institution has an audited financial statement made within the year prior to the evaluation team's visit.

Eligibility requirement (D.12) should be addressed by providing the information and/or documentation requested in the application form, or in the case of new institutions, by providing the information and materials specified.

13. The institution has a default rate under the Federal Stafford Loan or Federal Supplemental Loans for Students Program that is less than 25%, and which has not increased significantly in relation to its rate from the previous year.

Where applicable, eligibility requirement (D.13) should be addressed by completing the AALE Institutional Profile Form included in the application packet.

14. All institutions applying for Accreditation or Preaccreditation must submit the eligibility documents specified below.

Please note that all of these documents are requested through the application form.

- (a) Evidence of degree-granting authority.
- (b) Copies of the Articles of Incorporation and/or the legal charter.
- (c) Current copy of the course catalogue.
- (d) Current copy of the faculty/staff handbook.
- (e) Current copy of the student handbook.
- (f) Copies of the two most recent externally audited financial statements, including management letters.

In place of the required audited financial statements and management letters, newly established institutions may submit a special report that includes either statements of positive assurance by an independent certified public accountant or an appropriate governmental auditing agency as to the material accuracy of current funds, expenditure classifications and amounts in accordance with generally accepted principles of institutional accounting, and the current fund balance sheet. In addition, an institution must demonstrate financial responsibility in accordance with United States Department of Education Regulations. All financial statements must conform with NACUBO and AICPA standards.

Part II. AALE Education Standards

Taken as a whole, AALE's **Education Standards** seek to delineate the leading characteristics of an institution ideally dedicated to creating, supporting, and continually enhancing a rich learning environment for all associated with it - students, faculty, and staff alike.

- Education Standard One focuses attention on an institutions' mission statement, which communicates to its members and to the general public its distinctive approach to formulating and implementing an education in the liberal arts and sciences.
- Standards Three and Four bring to the fore the centrality of teachers and of teaching in the life of a liberal arts institution or program.
- Standards Two and Five through Eight describe the elements of a comprehensive liberal arts curriculum, and the conditions of intellectual freedom, inquiry, and civility essential to excellence in liberal learning and teaching.
- Standards Nine Through Eleven call attention to an institution's admissions requirements for prospective students, as well as to the kind and quality of work expected from those who undertake its program of study.
- Standard Twelve identifies an institution's library - its principal repository and nexus for knowledge and information of all kinds - as essential to the successful fulfillment of its mission.

Standard One

The institution's mission statement reflects the importance and centrality of liberal education and states the institution's purposes and goals in a manner that corresponds to the way in which the curriculum is actually organized and taught.

Standard Two

Liberty of thought and freedom of speech are supported and protected, bound only by such rules of civility and order as to facilitate intellectual inquiry and the search for truth.

Standard Three

The importance of teaching is featured, supported, and rewarded in the life of the institution or program.

Standard Four

The institution defines and enforces academic entrance requirements that ensure students are prepared to take the required college-level general education courses.

Standard Five

The baccalaureate requirements in the liberal arts and sciences call for not less than a third of the student's course work to be taken within the general education requirement, except when equivalent attainment is proven by examination.

Standard Six

The general education requirement ensures a basic knowledge of mathematics and the physical and biological sciences, including laboratory experience, intermediate knowledge of at least one foreign language, the study of literature and literary classics, the political, philosophical and cultural history of Western civilization, and the foundations and principles of American society. Variations from this norm are allowable in cases where the outstanding character of other elements of the general education program assures substantial compliance with these standards.

Standard Seven

The institution evaluates progress in learning the elements of general education taught under Standard Six, and ascertains how well it meets the educational goals it has set for itself, either by means of a general examination or some academic equivalent.

Standard Eight

The curriculum's prerequisite structure, as defined and enforced, ensures an orderly progression from elementary to advanced levels of knowledge, and the course definitions in the catalogue distinguish clearly among those considered fundamental (either to a general education or to mastery of a major), those less so, and those that belong to specialized subjects.

Standard Nine

Students write substantial essays during every stage of progress as undergraduates, and thereby demonstrate their proficiency in written English.

Standard Ten

Regular faculty members, including senior ones, teach introductory general education courses, as well as introductory courses within majors, and are regularly engaged in academic counseling.

Standard Eleven

Class size is appropriate to subject matter, level of instruction, and need for class discussion.

Standard Twelve

The library and other information sources are adequate to the demands of its programs.

Part III. Student Achievement

AALE's Educational Effectiveness Accreditation Protocols place the intellectual virtues or attributes central to liberal education at the focus of the assessment process. For this reason, they do not prescribe specific methods for assessing student performance, but seek to define several key aspects of intellectual achievement in liberal learning, and to suggest clear indicators or criteria of their achievement. These aspects and indicators of intellectual achievement should be recognizable across a broad spectrum of liberal education models, and are intended to enable institutions to develop self-studies that reflect the distinctive qualities of their education programs as well as of their approaches to educational assessment.

Institutions preparing self-studies for accreditation under **AALE's** Educational Effectiveness Accreditation Protocols should be prepared to describe and document their normal procedures for collecting and evaluating clear evidence of student achievement in the following areas:

Effective Reasoning

Breadth and Depth of Learning

The Inclination to Inquire

A fourth area of achievement, **Civic Arts**, is also defined for those institutions that include the virtues of citizenship or civic engagement among their principal aims of education.

Concise descriptions follow for these aspects of achievement, along with suggested lines of inquiry and investigation in each of four areas: Curriculum, Teaching, Learning, and Student Life. These suggested lines of inquiry and investigation are intended to facilitate the process of developing a self-study. They are not exhaustive, and should be adapted in consultation with **AALE** to reflect the particular character of an institution's educational and assessment programs. An Appendix with illustrative cases and examples of assessment programs and procedures is included.

A. Effective Reasoning

The formation of thoughtful and intellectually autonomous persons is a central aim of liberal education. For this reason general education and major programs in the liberal arts will always seek to develop their students' ability to recognize and think clearly about important issues and questions. The ability to reason effectively includes certain foundational skills or abilities (e.g., fluency in reading, writing, and oral communication, mastery of the basic principles of logical, mathematical, and scientific reasoning), as well as higher-order capacities for formulating, analyzing, and integrating arguments and information. Aspects of effective reasoning that institutions might seek to foster and document through student performance assessment may include:

- Demonstrated attainment of the necessary foundational abilities for effective reasoning - e.g., fluency in reading, writing, and oral communication, and mastery of the basic principles of logical, mathematical, and scientific reasoning - during the first year of coursework.
- The ability to frame reasonable arguments, to support them with relevant evidence, and to anticipate likely counter-arguments, along with the complementary ability to analyze arguments rationally, to evaluate the evidence supporting them, and to frame reasonable and persuasive counter-arguments.
- The ability to recognize and evaluate new information, to integrate that information into existing frameworks of knowledge, and to modify those frameworks as necessary or appropriate.
- The ability to identify and apply standards of intellectual rigor or precision appropriate to different kinds of subject matter.
- The ability to engage in reasoned and sustained discussions of important issues or questions.
- The ability to elucidate orally and in writing different or opposing perspectives evenhandedly and dispassionately.

Effective Reasoning - Areas for inquiry and investigation

- **Curriculum:** Do program and course descriptions, syllabi, and study guides consistently frame development of students' reasoning abilities as principal objectives? Is the curriculum designed to ensure that students attain and demonstrate the necessary foundational abilities in effective reasoning - fluency in reading, writing, and oral communication - during their first year of coursework? Are course readings and requirements, especially in those courses that form part of an institution's core or general education, systematically designed to foster development of these abilities? How are programs and courses monitored and evaluated for their success in developing students' abilities to reason effectively?
- **Teaching:** What institutional or collegial procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate, and improve the effectiveness of teaching in developing students' ability to reason effectively? Is classroom discussion sufficiently encouraged, monitored, and evaluated for its contribution to the formation of students' reasoning abilities? What methods and practices do faculty regularly employ to encourage and enable their students to develop the ability to reason effectively?
- **Learning:** What institutional or curricular policies and procedures are in place for monitoring and documenting student progress in the various elements of effective reasoning? How are standards formulated for gauging student achievement? How are students apprized of these standards, of their progress in meeting them, and of the steps they might take to enhance their progress, or to redress deficiencies? How is evidence of student achievement archived and made available to outside evaluators, potential employers, or graduate admissions offices?
- **Student Life:** What institutional resources or policies are in place for encouraging and assisting activities beyond the classroom (student-led publications, conferences, performances, special interest organizations, etc.) that are likely or expressly designed to help students develop and demonstrate their ability to reason effectively?

B. Breadth and Depth of Learning

A liberally educated person should possess a rich fund of meaningful knowledge, as well as the ability to compare and integrate different or new areas of knowledge in fruitful ways. AALE's Education Standards set the basis for the development of broad and deep learning by requiring that an institution's general education curriculum impart a broad foundational knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences, while ensuring that students experience the depth of learning that comes from a sustained, progressive exploration of the distinct modes of inquiry belonging to one or more of the major disciplines. Through such studies or their equivalents, students acquire the ability to relate disparate parts of the curriculum to one another, as well as to integrate knowledge gained across different fields of study. Aspects of the depth and breadth of liberal learning that institutions might seek to foster and document through student performance assessment may include:

- A familiarity with the essential knowledge, principles, and methods proper to each of the various elements of the general education curriculum. These elements should include, but are not limited to, mathematics and the physical and biological sciences (including laboratory experience), intermediate knowledge of at least one foreign language, the study of literature and literary classics, the political, philosophical and cultural history of Western civilization, and the foundations and principles of American society.
- The ability to relate the different elements of the general education curriculum to one another in cogent and significant ways.
- A thorough grasp of the basic knowledge, principles, or methods proper to one or more of the major disciplines.
- The ability to relate and integrate the knowledge, principles, and methods of study and analysis acquired in the student's major field with the knowledge gained in the general education curriculum.
- A broad understanding of the political and historical foundations of American government and society, together with a habit of bringing relevant knowledge of past thought and events to bear on contemporary questions.

- An ability to discuss the salient works and issues of Western political and cultural history, together with a habit of bringing relevant knowledge of past thought and events to bear on contemporary questions. The ability to communicate effectively in an appropriate foreign or non-native language is a natural gateway to such studies.
- A basic appreciation for the salient features of the political and cultural history of at least one non-Western (or in the case of students of non-Western origin, at least one non-native) culture, along with the ability to relate that history to the student's own native culture in intellectually cogent and significant ways. The ability to communicate effectively in an appropriate foreign or non-native language is an ideal complement to such cross-cultural or comparative learning.
- A substantial acquaintance with the various areas and salient issues of scientific and technological knowledge and research, along with a basic understanding of the ethical, philosophical, and cultural implications of scientific and technological research and development. This study should include a substantial experience with laboratory principles and methods.

Breadth and Depth of Learning - Areas for inquiry and investigation

- **Curriculum:** Is the curriculum designed to encourage and foster the ability to relate and integrate the knowledge and methods of study and analysis gained in its different parts? Are courses and programs designed so as to facilitate comparative or cooperative projects between different areas of learning, e.g., between the sciences and humanities? Does the curriculum feature interdisciplinary or crossdisciplinary courses or programs which provide examples of the ways the materials and methods of various disciplines can be related, compared, or integrated with one another?
- **Teaching:** Do faculty from different disciplines, or with different areas of knowledge cooperate in ways that exemplify fruitful relations that are possible between specialists in disparate fields of learning? Does the faculty effectively encourage and enable students to relate, compare, and integrate knowledge across

different disciplines or areas of study, or between general education and major field courses and programs?

- **Learning:** What institutional or curricular policies and procedures are in place for developing, monitoring, and documenting the depth and breadth of student learning? What are the standards for gauging student achievement in relating, comparing, and integrating knowledge across different areas and fields of study? How are students apprized of these standards, of their progress in meeting them, and of the steps they can take to enhance their progress or redress deficiencies? How is evidence of student achievement made available to outside evaluators, potential employers, or graduate admissions offices?
- **Student Life:** What institutional resources or policies are in place for encouraging and assisting activities beyond the classroom (student-led publications, conferences, performances, special interest organizations, etc.) that are likely or expressly designed to develop students' ability to relate, compare, and integrate in meaningful ways the knowledge gained through their coursework or by other means (service learning programs, study abroad, internships, etc.)?

C. The Inclination to Inquire

An education in the liberal arts is more than the mere accumulation of knowledge and skills. It seeks to foster students' ability and desire for seeking out and acquiring important knowledge and skills, both for their own sake and for the good they contribute to our common and individual lives. For this reason, a settled disposition for asking incisive and insightful questions, and for pursuing enriching and useful skills is perhaps the surest sign of a liberally educated mind. Aspects of the inclination to inquire that institutions might seek to foster and to document through student performance assessment may include:

- The development of a reflective and inquisitive turn of mind, one that never passively accepts or thoughtlessly rejects the judgments and information put to it by authorities, by peer groups, by conventional wisdom, or by the habit of its own convictions.
- An ability to question and assess one's own knowledge, abilities, and performance accurately and without self-deception.
- The ability to recognize areas of ignorance or technical weakness, along with the willingness and initiative to seek out and acquire relevant knowledge and training.
- The ability to bring to bear the knowledge and skills acquired in academic pursuits to important issues, questions, and endeavors outside the academy, and the disposition to seek out new knowledge and skills in and beyond the classroom.
- The development of a personally significant and continually examined perspective on the historically and philosophically significant answers to the question, "What is the good life?"

The Inclination to Inquire - Areas for inquiry and investigation

- **Curriculum:** Is the curriculum designed to encourage and foster individual and cooperative inquiry? Are courses and programs designed to help students learn to become active inquirers

and participants in the search for knowledge, rather than passive consumers of information? Are institutional resources and curricular offerings (both in general education and major programs) sufficient to allow students to pursue their intellectual inquiries in intellectually cogent and significant ways?

- **Teaching:** What institutional or collegial procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate, and improve the effectiveness of teaching in developing an inclination to inquire in students? Does the faculty regularly use teaching methods and styles designed or likely to encourage students' intellectual inquisitiveness and independence? Do teachers exemplify for their students the challenges and rewards of a life motivated by the love of inquiry for its own sake, and for the good it contributes to self and society?
- **Learning:** What institutional or curricular policies and procedures are in place for monitoring and documenting students' intellectual enterprise? How are standards formulated for gauging student achievement in this area? How are students apprized of these standards, of their progress in meeting them, and of the steps they might take to enhance their progress, or to redress deficiencies? How are students encouraged or enabled to engage in frank intellectual self-assessment? How are the results of these self-assessments used to frame new intellectual pursuits and challenges for students? How is evidence of intellectual enterprise archived and made available to outside evaluators, potential employers, or graduate admissions offices?
- **Student Life:** What institutional resources or policies are in place for encouraging and assisting activities beyond the classroom (student-led publications, conferences, performances, special interest organizations, etc.) that are likely or expressly designed to develop thoughtful and inquisitive dispositions? Do student and alumni surveys indicate that their educational experience has enabled or encouraged them to extend their pursuits of meaningful knowledge and skills beyond the classroom or the academy?

D. Civic Arts

Many liberal arts institutions hold the view that in addition to fostering a love of learning for its own sake, a truly liberal education should directly promote the development of the civic arts or virtues in its student and practitioners. The terms “civic arts” or “civic virtue” defy summary description, and may include a host of qualities intellectual, moral, and practical. For this reason, it is especially important that each institution describe clearly and succinctly the way it construes these terms, as well as the ways it seeks to integrate that understanding with the undergraduate curriculum as well as with campus life more generally. It is particularly important that institutions specify the ways they communicate these aims and understandings to students, faculty, and administrative staff. Though no brief listing could pretend to be either comprehensive or uncontroversial, examples of the awareness and practice of the civic arts and virtues that an institution might seek to foster and to document through student performance assessment may include:

- A thoughtful grasp of the principles and history of liberal and democratic institutions and government, as well as of their practical workings.
- A proven willingness to take up the responsibilities and privileges of liberal and democratic citizenship on campus, in one’s immediate community, or in larger circles of human society.
- An active and abiding interest in studying and working to advance practically the principles of civic virtue or excellence on campus, in one’s immediate communities, as well as in larger and more distant circles of human society.
- The development of a personally significant and continually examined perspective on the historically and philosophically significant answers to the questions, “What is the common good?” and “What is the best social order?”

Civic Arts - Areas for inquiry and investigation

- **Curriculum:** Is the curriculum designed to impart an understanding of the various philosophically and historically significant

conceptions of the common good? Is the curriculum designed to encourage and foster knowledge of the principles and history of civic life, and its privileges and responsibilities? Are courses and programs designed to help students learn both to reason well about the common good, and to become more active participants in the common or democratic life of their various communities? What curricular resources are in place to provide students with opportunities to put their studies of the civic arts into practice?

- **Teaching:** How does the faculty encourage and foster understanding and respect for the duties and privileges of citizenship in their students, both in the classroom and beyond? How do the faculty exemplify for their students an appreciation for, and dedication to the virtues and responsibilities appropriate to our common life?
- **Learning:** What institutional or curricular policies and procedures are in place for monitoring and documenting students' understanding and demonstration of the civic virtues? How are standards formulated for gauging student achievement in this area? How are students apprized of these standards, of their progress in meeting them, and of the steps they might take to enhance their progress, or to redress deficiencies? How is evidence of civic virtue archived and made available to outside evaluators, potential employers, or graduate admissions offices?
- **Student Life:** What institutional resources or policies are in place for encouraging and assisting activities beyond the classroom (student-led activities, publications, conferences, special interest organizations, etc.) that are likely or expressly designed to develop the civic virtues? What institutional policies or resources are in place for encouraging or arranging student internships, work-study programs, or foreign exchanges that promote public-spirited activities and virtues? What evidence is there of student participation in community based or public-spirited activities on and off campus? Do student and alumni surveys indicate that their educational experience has enabled or encouraged them to practice the civic arts or virtues beyond the academy?

Part IV. Institutional Performance

The **Institutional Excellence** component of AALE's Educational Effectiveness Accreditation Protocols is intended for use by institutions that have adopted, or wish to adopt regular programs for institutional self-assessment to promote and assure excellence in all aspects of their operation.

Institutions applying for AALE accreditation under these protocols should describe and document their normal self-assessment procedures. Aspects of institutional excellence that an institution must document through self-assessment include:

- Ongoing assessment of its general education and major program curricula that reliably establishes the extent to which those programs meet the institution's fundamental educational mission and aims.
- Ongoing assessment of degrees offered, residency requirements, number of credit hours required for each degree, minimum acceptable grade point average, and allowable time frames for degree completion.
- Ongoing assessment of correspondence between program length and degree awarded, and between credit hours awarded and clock hours of instructional time, including lectures, laboratory, and other learning experiences.
- Ongoing assessment of policies and standards for faculty recruitment, promotion, and performance that reliably establishes the extent to which the faculty teaching and development contributes toward fulfillment of the institution's fundamental educational mission and aims.
- Ongoing assessment of student achievement that reliably establishes the extent to which student learning meets the institution's fundamental educational mission and aims.
- Ongoing assessment of the extent to which institutionally supported or sponsored aspects of student life and services

contribute to the fulfillment of the institution's educational mission and aims. Aspects of student life and services considered should include, but are not limited to, co-curricular activities, housing and food services (where these are provided), health services, campus safety, and career and post-graduate advising, information, and placement services.

- Ongoing assessment of the extent to which the institution's academic resources (libraries, laboratories, learning facilities, etc.) support fulfillment of the institution's fundamental undergraduate educational mission and aims.
- Ongoing assessment of the extent to which the institution's financial resources are directed towards fulfillment of the institution's fundamental undergraduate educational mission and aims.

Other aspects of excellence an institution might wish to foster and document through self-assessment may include:

- Apart from internal programs and procedures for self-assessment, what outside benchmarks or evaluators of student, faculty, and institutional performance are routinely consulted? How are the results of outside benchmark comparisons or evaluations communicated to the appropriate parties, and what procedures are in place to assure that these results receive practical attention when necessary?

**Appendix to
AALE Educational Effectiveness Accreditation Protocols:**

**Illustrative Examples of Student Learning
Outcomes Programs and Documentation**

Part I. Student Achievement

A. Effective Reasoning

A private liberal arts college requires its seniors to undertake a year-long integrative capstone project in the major, in tandem with a year-long capstone seminar exploring the salient issues of each student's major discipline in its wider professional, political, social, and philosophical contexts. The projects are expected to employ knowledge and competencies (such as quantitative reasoning, field study or laboratory expertise, foreign languages) acquired in coursework throughout a student's undergraduate career. Projects are submitted to a faculty committee including at least one scholar in the student's major discipline from outside the institution, and at least one drawn from a department or program other than the student's major discipline. These projects, and the committee's written evaluations of them, are systematically archived. Throughout the archives exemplary as well as of adequate and unsatisfactory projects are clearly identified. During an "academic audit," accreditation site visitors can look over these archived projects at random to gauge institutional standards for excellent as well as for deficient performance in the capstone program. From these judgments the auditors can then work backwards to questions about a particular student's overall performance and coursework, about his or her major discipline, about the quality of teaching in major and general education programs, as well as other critical factors affecting the learning environment at the institution.

The main campus of a major, state-supported system of higher education has adopted a "Critical Thinking" component linking the General Education program with each academic department or major. Each department or major is required to offer a critical reasoning course focused upon methodologies of the discipline, demonstrating how the quest for valid knowledge in a particular field relates to the problem of acquiring valid knowledge generally and synthesizing discoveries and methodological approaches across several disciplines. Student projects focus on developing reasoning skills that permit

understanding and communication across a wide spectrum of disciplines. The projects are archived as an essential component of a learning outcomes portfolio that is reviewed by panels of faculty members from various departments throughout the university prior to a student's graduation. These portfolios collectively provide evidence of the institution's expectations and standards for student achievement.

B. Breadth and Depth of Learning

An assessment-based liberal arts general education program documents levels of student achievement in mathematics, the sciences, foreign language, writing (at introductory and advanced levels), as well as in civic learning and practice. Students select examples of their coursework (e.g., examinations, essays, projects) to submit in fulfillment of these learning competencies. The student's course instructor evaluates the chosen examples for suitability, then endorses (or rejects) the student's claim to achievement. The student work along with the faculty endorsement are then reviewed by a faculty committee drawn from a variety of departments. This committee is responsible for evaluating both the student's work and the course instructor's endorsement, thus providing an independent review of the student's claim to achievement as well as of each instructor's standards of learning achievement. Each step in this process is documented and then archived at a central campus location. Upon graduation, students receive a portfolio documenting their accomplishments along with their degree. These archived portfolios would provide academic auditors with clear and well-documented evidence of student achievement at all levels of performance, which they can use to gauge the institution's overall standards for learning and achievement in the liberal arts.

A small, church-supported liberal arts college requires all freshmen to take a course on Western Heritage in Global Perspective. Faculty from all departments are required to teach in this course on a rotating basis. The course is designed to be team-taught, and introduces students to the broad traditions of western culture as well as to the range of expertise represented on the college's faculty. Individual units (e.g. "Images in Art") stress comparative perspectives: the history of landscape painting in European art, for example, is contrasted to the three traditional schools of Chinese painting ("Figure," "Flower and Bird," "Mountain and Water"), illustrating the variety of ways in which the universal fascination with nature finds unique cultural expressions in different parts of

the world. Students come to see faculty as more than disciplinary experts as they struggle in common to master new and challenging areas of knowledge, and the course itself provides a common fund of intellectual experience for students and faculty alike.

C. The Inclination to Inquire

A publicly-supported liberal arts college's mission statement describes the inculcation of a "lifelong desire to inquire and learn" in its students as one of the institution's leading educational objectives. In support of this objective, the college sponsors annual summer alumni seminars, establishes free interactive internet-based versions of its courses for alumni, and promotes and supports a nationwide network of alumni who host seminars, lectures, reading and study groups in their regions. Evidence of the impact of this program is abundant in unsolicited letters written to the alumni office, in responses to the institution's biennial alumni surveys, in articles written and published by alumni in the college's scholarly alumni journal, and most importantly, in the documentable record of success and intellectual achievement of the institution's alumni over the decades. Academic auditors are able to sample extensive evidence of these on-going courses, activities, testimonials, institutional research reports, and examine for themselves these indicators of success in the attainment of the elusive goal of promoting an ethic of life-long learning.

D. Civic Arts

An undergraduate college of arts and sciences within a large, private, denominationally-affiliated university requires each student to engage in a carefully designed service learning project. The project provides an opportunity to integrate aspects of the classroom learning with elements of good citizenship, cultivating habits of public service and commitment to community welfare. Extensive records of such projects are maintained by the institution, both as examples for subsequent students of what a community service or service learning project might consist of, and for purposes of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the program itself. These records include descriptions of the projects, written evaluations of student work stemming from their projects, transcripts of evaluation interviews, as well as documentary evidence (e.g. exhibits, photos, journals) of the work undertaken and of results achieved. Academic auditors can then sample this cross-sectional evidence of

the effectiveness of the institution's service learning program, as well as of individual student initiative and achievement in civic or community service.

The undergraduate College of Arts and Sciences at a large state university regularly sponsors "model U. N. Conferences" for regional high school students, and annually hosts a well-known week-long foreign affairs conference that brings to the campus distinguished academic and political figures in international relations. The institution maintains documentary records of these events, including videotapes of workshops, lectures, student discussions, and other public events. Auditors examining the institution's co-curricular learning environment can use such materials to evaluate its success in developing a campus-wide learning environment, and in encouraging its students to apply their skills and talents in engaging the broader community.

Part II. Institutional Excellence

A regional liberal arts college sponsors an annual humanities symposium which is coordinated with course offerings throughout the college. An overarching theme is articulated (e.g., cultural pluralism and inter-cultural exchanges), and an appropriate major work of literature, philosophy, or history is chosen as a common reading to be integrated into course syllabi across the curriculum. Public lectures, art exhibitions, films, and other events are scheduled throughout the semester to illustrate different aspects of this theme and the chosen text from the standpoint of multiple modes of disciplinary inquiry. Students write term papers and undertake other projects focusing on the annual theme, drawing together their learning experiences across the curriculum. The best of the essays and projects are evaluated by a faculty interdisciplinary committee, including several of the outside guests and lecturers invited over the course of the year. Awards are given for outstanding student scholarship and achievement. The course syllabi, student work, prize essays, and other aspects of the program are routinely archived electronically on the institution's Humanities Center web site for wider community dissemination, for use in planning and improving subsequent years' symposia, as well as to provide documentary evidence of the appropriate use of external funding resources for the program. These easily viewed electronic archives can be used by academic auditors during a "virtual" accreditation site visit, as evidence of institutional effectiveness in encouraging a campus-wide learning-centered environment.

A private liberal arts university in the southeast undertakes the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award process, focusing on the new “Education Criteria for Performance Excellence.” The process demands commitment and coherence among the various goals, practices, and activities in each of seven specified areas of achievement. In addition, data providing evidence of this coherence is required, and is submitted to a peer review evaluation team of judges. The process is extremely demanding, and the results suggest myriad ways of enhancing academic effectiveness by strengthening academic programs and student support services. This process yields a wide range of institutional research, data, and planning information that can then serve as the basis for an institutional-performance based accreditation review. Indeed, the very fact that the institution committed itself to this rigorous process stands as evidence of its commitment to institutional excellence.