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Presidents' Campaign for the Advancement of Liberal Learning (CALL)

Carol Schneider

Association Of American Colleges And Universities

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With this Presidents' Campaign for the Advancement of Liberal Learning (CALL) and the forthcoming Greater Expectations National Panel report on the learning students need in the 21st century, AAC&U is urging, in effect, an "honors" education for all students. AAC&U released the following statement in January 2002. As of June 2002, over 415 campus presidents and ten higher education organizations have signed on in support of the Presidents' CALL. AAC&U welcomes additional signatories.

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Presidents' Campaign for the Advancement of Liberal Learning (CALL)

CAROL SCHNEIDER

PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

As educational leaders and presidents of colleges and universities, large and small, public and private, two-year and four-year, we call on our colleagues around the country to ensure that every college student experiences the full benefits of a twenty-first century liberal education.

Especially since September 2001, Americans have been catapulted into a powerful sense of engagement with peoples, places, histories, and ideologies that many of us previously knew only dimly. Our entire society is now caught up in quests for deepened understanding, and in re-examinations of the most basic questions about social trust, civic duty, international justice, world cultures, and sustainable health.

While much in our present situation is unprecedented, our intense need for both knowledge and wisdom also reminds us of essential truths that we have long known, but recently neglected.

Chief among these is the Jeffersonian recognition that democracy depends for its vitality upon education, while education serves democracy best when it prepares us for just the kinds of questions we face now: questions about the wider world, about our own values, and about difficult choices we must make as both human beings and citizens.

Our new hunger for deepened understanding, however, finds Americans standing at an educational crossroads. For the first time in our own or any nation's history, the

great majority of Americans not only desire higher education for themselves and their children, but actually enroll in some form of postsecondary education. We have become the first nation to encourage near-universal participation in higher learning.

Yet even as students of all ages flock to college, many of them are not enrolled in the kind of studies that will prepare them well for the challenges of our turbulent and interdependent world.

The approach to higher learning that best serves individuals, our globally engaged democracy, and an innovating economy is *liberal education*. Liberal education comes in many shapes and forms in the contemporary academy, but in every one of those forms, its aims include:

- developing intellectual and ethical judgment;
- expanding cultural, societal and scientific horizons;
- cultivating democratic and global knowledge and engagement; and
- preparation for work in a dynamic and rapidly evolving economy.

In recent years, however, public attention has focused mainly on the last of these aims. Both public policy and popular culture have strongly encouraged students to view college learning as work preparation exclusively. This trend has been reinforced by the new practice of describing students as consumers who should study in college only what they want to learn, even when their preferences may leave them largely unprepared for the complex challenges they will face in their lives, as human beings and as citizens.

Many college students continue to seek, nonetheless, both the intrinsic and the societal benefits of a wide-ranging and liberal education. When they do, they find that a strong liberal education significantly expands their economic opportunities, while also fostering intellectual resilience, civic capacity and knowledge of the wider world.

Growing numbers of college students, however, never experience the richness of a liberal education. Misled by the public equation of college learning with job preparation alone, they view the liberal arts and sciences as, at best, a luxury, and at worst, a set of obstacles to be gotten out of the way before moving on to job-related studies. Or they choose postsecondary programs and institutions that omit liberal education altogether. As a result, these students—the majority of whom come from less advantaged backgrounds—gain much less from college than they deserve and our society requires.

The college and university presidents who sign this CALL pledge ourselves to help build public understanding that what matters most in college—for every student—is the successful experience of a *liberal education*. With the Association of American Colleges and Universities, we agree that:

liberal learning is not confined to particular fields of study. What matters in liberal education is substantial content, rigorous methodology and an active engagement with the societal, ethical and practical implications of our learning. The spirit and value of liberal learning are equally relevant to all forms of higher education and to all students.

CAROL SCHNEIDER

In this spirit, we commit ourselves:

- to reclaim the language of liberal education in our writing and speaking;
- to help all our constituents understand the purposes and the benefits of liberal education;
- to take steps to ensure that our own educational programs address all the aims of liberal education, including intellectual and ethical development, knowledge of science, culture and society, and preparation for all the dimensions of a full life;
- to examine, in dialogues with our campuses and neighboring communities, ways of strengthening the quality of liberal education from school through college, so that every student graduates strongly prepared for the complexities and challenges of our interdependent world.

We urge all college and university presidents to join us.

SIGNATORIES

Current and former members of the AAC&U Board of Directors and other college and university presidents and educational leaders. A full list is available at www.aacu-edu.org.

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The author may be contacted at:

Association of American Colleges & Universities
(AAC&U)
1818 R Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

cgs@aacu.org
202-884-7401
202-265-9532 (fax)

