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Statement on Liberal Learning

A truly liberal education is one that prepares us to live responsible, productive, and creative lives in a dramatically changing world. It is an education that fosters a well-grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward lifelong learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions. Liberal education requires that we understand the foundations of knowledge and inquiry about nature, culture and society; that we master core skills of perception, analysis, and expression; that we cultivate a respect for truth; that we recognize the importance of historical and cultural context; and that we explore connections among formal learning, citizenship, and service to our communities.

We experience the benefits of liberal learning by pursuing intellectual work that is honest, challenging, and significant, and by preparing ourselves to use knowledge and power in responsible ways. 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.

Because liberal learning aims to free us from the constraints of ignorance, sectarianism, and myopia, it prizes curiosity and seeks to expand the boundaries of human knowledge. By its nature, therefore, liberal learning is global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility, for nothing less will equip us to understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives.

The ability to think, to learn, and to express oneself both rigorously and creatively, the capacity to understand ideas and issues in context, the commitment to live in society, and the yearning for truth are fundamental features of our humanity. In centering education upon these qualities, liberal learning is society's best investment in our shared future.

Adopted by the Board of Directors of the Association of American Colleges & Universities, October 1998

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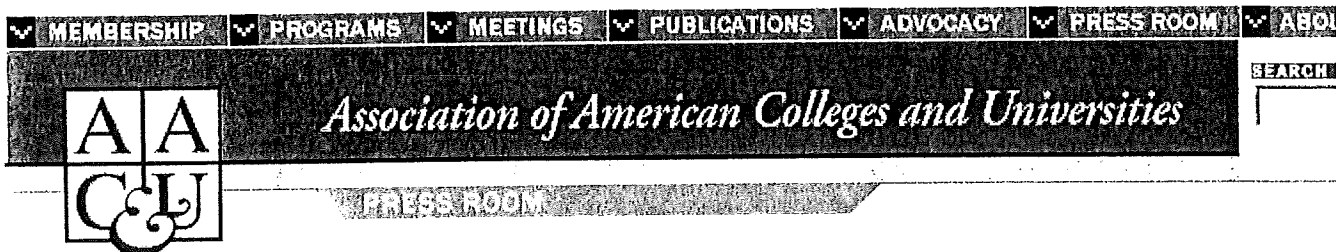
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What is Liberal Education?

Liberal education has always set the standard for educational excellence in American higher education. While the content of a liberal education--in terms of courses and requirements--has changed over time, throughout AAC&U's 90-year history liberal education has been a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with core knowledge and transferable skills and cultivates social responsibility and a strong sense of ethics and values. Characterized by challenging encounters with important issues, a liberal education prepares graduates both for socially valued work and for civic leadership in their society. It usually includes a general education curriculum that provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and ways of knowing, along with more in-depth study in at least one field or area of concentration.

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AAC&U Statement on Liberal Learning

Statement on Liberal Learning approved by the AAC&U board of directors (1998)

Often-Confused Terms About Liberal Education

Liberal education

A philosophy of education that empowers individuals, liberates the mind from ignorance, and cultivates social responsibility. Characterized by challenging encounters with important issues, and more a way of studying than a specific course or field of study, liberal education can be achieved at all types of colleges and universities. "General Education" (cf. below) and an expectation of in-depth study in at least one field normally comprise liberal education.

Liberal arts

Specific disciplines (the humanities, social sciences, and sciences).

Liberal arts colleges

A particular institutional type—often small, often residential—that facilitates close interaction between faculty and students, while grounding its curriculum in the liberal arts disciplines.

- MEDIA & PRESS SOURCES**
- Press Release Sources
 - What is Liberal Education?
 - Preparing for an Expectation of Education in a World of Common Making an Inclusive Taking Responsibility for the Quality of Student's Education

Artes Liberales

Historically, the basis for the modern liberal arts; the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) and the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric).

General Education

The part of a liberal education curriculum shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities.

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