

The Integration of the Humanities and Arts with Sciences, Engineering, and
Medicine in Higher Education: *Branches from the Same Tree*

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It is no secret that American higher education is under siege, with public confidence in the academy in rapid decline. Just six years ago, a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center showed that 60% of Americans viewed colleges and universities as having a positive effect on the direction of the country, and 84% of college graduates said the expense of going to college was a good investment. Last year, the same poll reported a majority of Republicans and Republican-leaning individuals, 58%, were convinced not only that higher education no longer has a positive impact on our society, but that it has a negative influence.

The latest poll, taken in July, indicates that the partisan divide has closed, yet not in the way we would hope. Sixty-one percent of Americans, Democrats and Republicans alike, now believe that higher education is headed in the wrong direction. Concerns range from the high costs of college and the belief that colleges and universities are bastions of liberal progressivism, filled with faculty who are brainwashing a generation of snowflakes that melt at the slightest abrasion of their sensibilities, to the belief that institutions of higher education are failing to provide students with twenty-first-century skills.

A false-crisis narrative has been fueled by politicians who have gone so far as to advocate for their state workforce needs by proposing legislation that would base funding for public colleges and universities exclusively on job acquisition for college graduates or stripping out so-called frills, such as “the search for truth,” “public service,” and “improving the human condition” from their university system’s mission statements. A liberal arts education, they would have us believe, is reserved for those within the ivory tower, reflecting a willful disconnect from the practical matters of everyday life. This positioning fosters the image of a liberal education as a self-indulgent luxury—an image that has led to the excising of humanities programs, especially in public institutions, in favor of vocational and pre-professional programs that are regarded as singularly responding to demands for economic opportunity.

Talk of higher education as a public good, of investing in society through education, and of “promoting the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the *several pursuits and professions in life*,” has been replaced by talk of a return on investment—tuition in exchange for jobs. The narrow focus on earning power undoubtedly makes it easier for state legislatures and taxpayers to justify defunding higher education.

When the board of directors of AAC&U expanded the organization’s mission in 2012 to embrace inclusive excellence as inextricably linked to liberal education, the goal was to signal a commitment to the ideal that access to educational excellence for all students — not just the privileged—is essential not only for a thriving economy but, more importantly, for democracy. Democracy cannot flourish in a nation divided into haves and have nots. Therefore, the positing of a false dichotomy between a liberal education and preparation for work and life, is both dangerous to our democratic future and obscures the reality that colleges and universities continue to represent powerful institutional forces in catalyzing individual and societal transformation.

During the past year, the Association of American Colleges and Universities has been engaged in implementing a comprehensive, integrative strategic plan centered on restoring public trust in the promise of liberal education and inclusive excellence. Launched at our 2018 annual meeting held at the end of January in Washington, DC, the plan seeks to create an ascendant narrative that contests accusations of irrelevancy and illegitimacy leveled against higher education, in general, and liberal education, in particular. Moreover, it serves as a collective call to action to make visible the transformative power of colleges and universities, and for those of us who believe that higher education is inextricably linked to the mission of educating for democracy, the work seems more urgent than ever.

This urgency is enhanced by the reality that we are living in an ostensibly post-truth era, characterized by the denial of authoritative knowledge and the disdain of experts, and in which rational inquiry built on evidence has all but been abandoned. In fact, one of the most challenging cultural barriers contributing to the growing economic segregation in higher education is a rhetoric-for-hire in which the art of persuasion has been replaced by incivility and misinformation. Arising from an entire industry designed to sway public opinion, rhetoric-for-hire has given rise to widespread anti-intellectualism and a rejection of experts in the US, Canada and much of Europe, as exemplified during the Brexit campaign. This trend signals the extent to which the marketplace of ideas is at risk of falling prey to those who have the resources to control the shaping of public opinion and policies. In this arena, asserted claims become orthodoxy regardless of the absence of evidence and in the face of enduring questions.

Yet, in these days of wide-spread skepticism regarding the value-added of a college education, I am concerned that we are eroding democratic access to the more substantive avenues by which learning enriches us all. We are impeding access not only to the public purpose of higher education, but access to its personal purpose, as well. By the personal purpose of higher education, I mean engendering the capacity to grapple with and respond to the most fundamental questions of human existence. My own experience is illustrative.

Among the courses I signed up for during my first semester of college was an American Literature class. There weren't many students in that class: most enrolled in courses that more easily translated into better jobs—or any job at all. One evening my professor arranged for us to see a Hartford performance of “All the Way Home,” a Pulitzer Prize winning play by Tad Mosel. I had never attended a professional production before, and Hartford was a world away—known only to me as the place my father traveled nightly on a third-shift bus to work at Pratt and Whitney. I remember piling into a car with my classmates, dressed in a blue velveteen jumpsuit (it was the 70s after all). And when the lights dimmed, I was transported. In the dark, perhaps especially in the dark, I felt part of something important. Surrounded by classmates, I stared ahead at the stage and waited for what I could not yet see.

After the play, our class went for Chinese food and talked. The performance had raised so many big questions about faith, grief, and trust. We discussed the last act when a wife mourns her husband's unexpected death. “I hope he loved being,” she said, recognizing the possibility the he never realized his own strength and potential. What that evening taught me, and why I remember it after all these years, is that we all have a right to experience “being.” We are all entitled to live in our strength. We all deserve opportunities to find our best and most authentic selves.

A liberal education can be a guide to such personal enrichment, but when we imply that the only outcome disenfranchised students care about is money, we run the risk of circumscribing their futures, both personally, and in the public domain. Indeed, positing employability as the lone metric for determining higher education's value precludes a consideration of the ways in which the illumination of human consciousness through literature, philosophy, music and the arts allows us to flourish fully as human beings, enriching our experiences as individuals and as members of a community.

While the liberal education for all campaign is derided by skeptics as elitist, the real danger of elitism comes from a failure to recognize the disparate impact of such rhetoric on those who are already the most marginalized and disenfranchised members of society. The notion that we need more welders and fewer philosophers, that we should train more engineers than art historians, more people in business and industry than in anthropology and that only those at prestigious institutions should be able to take out loans to study religion, gender studies, or the classics runs the risk of enhancing inequity by perpetuating what Thomas Jefferson referred to as an unnatural aristocracy. For this reason, we need to be vigilant in rebutting charges leveled against the liberal arts and sciences and to recognize those charges for what they are: collusion in the growth of an intellectual oligarchy

in which only the very richest and most prestigious institutions preserve access to the liberal arts traditions.

To restore public trust in higher education and destabilize the cultural attitudes at the basis of proposals that devalue liberal education, we need reframe the narrative, highlighting the fact that in the global knowledge economy, employer demand for graduates with a liberal education is growing. This was part of the impetus behind AAC&U's most recent round of employer research, "Fulfilling the American Dream: Liberal Education and the Future of Work." The survey, conducted on behalf of AAC&U by Hart Research Associates, included the perspectives of both business executives and hiring managers, with the goal of assessing the extent to which each group believes that a college education is important and worthwhile, identifying the learning outcomes they believe are most important for success in today's economy, and discerning how prepared these different audiences perceive recent college graduates to be in these areas.

The 501 business executives at private sector and nonprofit organizations and 500 hiring managers, whose current job responsibilities include recruiting, interviewing, and hiring new employees, express higher satisfaction with colleges and universities than does the American public as a whole. Sixty-three percent noted having either "a lot of confidence" or "a great deal of confidence" in American higher education. Business executives and hiring managers also agree

upon the value of college, maintaining it is an essential and worthwhile investment of time and money. In addition to the potential for increased earnings, both executives and hiring managers cited the benefits of the accumulation of knowledge, the development of critical and analytical skills, and the pursuit of a goals as especially meaningful.

Further, consistent with findings from six earlier surveys commissioned by AAC&U as part of its ongoing Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, employers overwhelmingly endorse broad learning and cross-cutting skills as the best preparation for long-term career success. The college learning outcomes that executives and managers rate as most important are oral communication, critical thinking, ethical judgment, working effectively in teams, written communication, and the real-world application of skills and knowledge. They also rated highly the skills of locating, organizing and evaluating information from multiple sources, analyzing complex problems, working with people from different backgrounds, being innovative and creative, and staying current on technologies.

Internships and apprenticeships were deemed particularly valuable, with 93 percent of executives and 94 percent of hiring managers indicating that they would be more likely to hire a recent graduate who has held an internship or apprenticeship with a company or organization. Similarly, employers at nonprofits

say they are much more likely to hire recent graduates who have community-based or service learning experience. This is not surprising given that only 33 percent of executives and 39 percent of hiring managers believe that recent graduates are “very well prepared” to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings. When it comes to evaluating job candidates, only 51 percent of executives and 48 percent of hiring managers found transcripts useful. Instead, they called for ePortfolios of recent graduates’ college work as a more reliable tool for vetting candidates.

Thus, the dominant narrative that one’s undergraduate major is all that matters and that only some majors will prepare students for success in the workplace doesn’t match the reality. A student’s undergraduate experience, and how well the experience advances critical learning outcomes, is what matters most, with 80 percent of employers agreeing that all students need a strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences. In a globally interdependent, multicultural world, it is precisely because employers place a premium on innovation in response to rapid change that they emphasize these student experiences rather than narrow technical training.

How can the findings of this study inform curriculum development? Beyond bridging the gap between curriculum and workforce needs, colleges and universities must take into account that there is no longer a consensus about the value of a college degree. The focus is not on the credential but instead on

competencies. Therefore, the emphasis of the curriculum should be on learning outcomes (knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, integrative and applied learning) as necessary for all students' intellectual, civic, personal, and professional development and for success in a global economy. Assignments should make clear the relationships among areas of knowledge, ensuring that students do not see academic disciplines as separate and disconnected silos of learning, but rather as varied approaches to the same enlightened end. A liberal education for the 21st century mandates the acceleration of integrative, high-impact learning opportunities that engage every student in solving unscripted, real-world problems across all types of institutions, within the context of the workforce, not apart from it.

This conclusion was validated in a report, *Branches of the Same Tree*, issued at the end of May by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. I served on the committee, a project of the Board of Higher Education and the Workforce, which was directed to examine whether the integration of arts and humanities with science, engineering, math and medicine can improve learning outcomes for all students. The title of the report was taken from a quote by Albert Einstein, who in a letter written in 1937 amidst the backdrop of burgeoning fascist power in central Europe, expressed consternation over “the dangerous implications

of living in a society, where long-established foundations of knowledge were corrupted, manipulated, and coerced by political forces.” Einstein maintained that “all religions, arts, and sciences are branches from the same tree” (9).

The report found the need to “achieve more effective forms of capacity building for twenty-first century workers and citizens,” through the acquisition of broad-based skills from across all disciplines “that can be flexibly deployed in different work environments across a lifetime.” It concludes that “In a world where science and technology are major drivers of social change, historical, ethical, aesthetic, and cultural competencies are more critical than ever. At the same time, the complex and often technical nature of contemporary issues in democratic governance demands that well-educated citizens have an appreciation of the nature of technical knowledge and of its historical, cultural, and political roles in American democracy” (54). For, “truly robust knowledge depends on the capacity to recognize the critical limitations of particular ways of knowing,” and “to achieve the social relations appropriate to an inclusive and democratic society” (54).

Throughout my career, I have witnessed first-hand the benefits of the type of integrative learning advocated in *Branches From the Same Tree*. For years, I taught medical ethics at the University of Rhode Island and at the Brown Medical School. Each semester, I began my section on death and the meaning of life by asking my pre-med and medical students to give me the name, or any information

really, about their maternal great-great-grandmothers. I taught 4 sections a semester--large classes of 120 students-- and yet, not once, did anyone have the information. I said, "Here is a woman responsible for your very existence and yet you can't even tell me her name. Is there any hope 150 years from now, that anyone will know anything about you, and if not, does your life now really matter?" It was a cruel thing to do, especially in the fall, as darkness descended early, and students were preparing for the holiday break. When asked about my own view, which I almost never revealed, I talked about meaning in my life coming from service and baseball, referring to an article by philosopher Morris Raphael Cohen, who recounted the Jewish American immigrant experience with the sport, proposing it provided a mystic unity with something larger than themselves.

My point with the exercise was to reinforce that the science they were studying can help us discover the causes and treatments of diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, but it cannot help us to decide how to live one's life in the face of such diagnoses, determine whether there can ever be meaning in life given the inevitability of death, or speak to the experience of a mystic unity.

I attempted to provide a broader context for the significance of moving beyond narrow technical training and promoting this type of integrative learning a few weeks ago in a piece I did for *Inside Higher Ed* called "Escaping Westworld."

In it, I talk about a commentary in *The Atlantic* written by Henry Kissinger in relation to the dystopian television series *Westworld* and the recent video game “Detroit: Become Human,” in which robots gain consciousness. Lamenting that “in every way human society is unprepared for the rise of artificial intelligence,” Kissinger describes his concern as arising from his discovery three years ago and subsequent fascination with machines that could train themselves, exceeding the skills of their human programmers, to master the strategy game “Go.” As a historian, he wondered “what would be the impact on history of self-learning machines—machines that acquired knowledge by processes particular to themselves, and applied that knowledge to ends for which they may be no category of human understanding, ultimately asking, “How will we manage AI, improve it, or at the very least prevent it from doing harm, culminating in the most ominous concern: that AI, by mastering certain competencies more rapidly and definitively than human, could over time diminish human competence and the human condition itself as it turns into data?” (13).

In the future, we will not be able to continue to side-step the ethical and policy issues inevitably tethered to the use of technology. While Kissinger briefly entertains science fiction scenarios like the ones in *Westworld* and “Detroit: Become Human,” where AI turns on its creators, he is much more focused on the capacity of AI to develop slight deviations from humans that could cascade into

catastrophic departures. The potential for catastrophe he cites is amplified by the fact that AI can be expected to make mistakes at a faster and greater magnitude than humans and optimize situations in ways that differ from human optimization, leading to the question, “What will become of human consciousness if our own explanatory power is surpassed by AI, and societies are no longer able to interpret the world they inhabit in terms that are meaningful to them?” Kissinger notes that “The Enlightenment started with essentially philosophical insights spread by a new technology,” in that case, the spawn of the printing press. He maintains, however, that “Our period is moving in the opposite direction, it has generated a potentially dominating technology in search of a guiding philosophy” (14). Therefore, the former statesman makes a forceful plea for the creation of a national vision exploring the transformation of the human condition that has been prompted by AI—one which connects the rise of technology to the humanistic traditions.

So how have we arrived at this point, and how do we best prepare students for the future, escaping a Westworld-like existence in which “violent delights have violent ends?” Understanding the dangers of creating a hegemony of one tradition over others and an exaggerated trust in the efficacy of the methods of natural science to all areas of investigation, nearly five decades ago, Paul Feyerabend warned against a lapse on the part of scientists into scientism in his book *Against Method*. Scientism is a doctrine according to which all genuine knowledge is

scientific knowledge, reifying the scientific method as the only legitimate form of inquiry.

Despite Feyerabend's admonition, science's success in explaining the world has led to a cultural misappropriation that has conflated science with scientism. The profound societal impact of this conflation has led astrophysicist Adam Frank to challenge defenders of scientism by calling for a clarification of how scientism manifests itself in order to "help us understand the damage it does to the real project that lies ahead of us: building space for the full spectrum of human beings in a culture fully shaped by science."

Taking up Frank's charge to consider how scientism manifests itself, and especially how the metaphysics of consciousness offers the tools necessary for building the space to which he refers, we need to ask, "What would we lose, if anything, by reducing all learning and engagement to practices only rooted in the sciences?"

This is precisely the question we need to be asking in designing a curriculum for the 21st century. As Feyerabend reminds us, true scientists are not scientific—they possess a much more nuanced and complex understanding that sensibilities cannot be granted through scientific practices. Science is a tool for investigating metaphysical and epistemological claims. But, there is also value that comes from

reflecting on experiences in a manner that arouses the very sensibilities that enable us to deal with the metaphysics of being human and conscious of living in the world.

The liberal education we offer to our students is a sensibility rather than a group of subjects. Good critics of literature can bring us into a sphere of experience that combines allusions to the past with what is happening in the world right now. Like philosophers, artists, and historians, they are capable of speaking to a universality of experience, and it is unnecessary to measure how many people were illuminated to understand the impact of what they offer. In the end, it is this phenomenological engagement with the liberal arts that is incapable of being translated through scientism.

The future of liberal education will require developing a deeper-level understanding across subject areas, connecting knowledge to experience, and adopting a holistic approach to evidence-based problem solving that incorporates diverse, sometimes contradictory points of view. On this model, disciplinary work remains foundational, but students are provided with faculty-guided practice connecting their disciplines with others, with the co-curriculum, and with the needs of society, across the curriculum, from their first-to final-semester. Integrative learning and thematic pathways that address grand challenges across disciplines and within the major, requiring students to integrate and apply their knowledge to

new problems is one of the best approaches to cultivating the perception, intellectual agility, and creative thinking necessary students to thrive in a globally-interdependent, innovation-fueled economy. Yet, it also recognizes that decision making must be grounded in the ethical principles of respect for persons, justice, and beneficence.

The ability to engage and learn from experiences different from one's own and to understand how one's place in the world both informs and limits one's knowledge is essential to the crucial capacity to understand the interrelationships between multiple perspectives, including personal, social, cultural, disciplinary, environmental, local and global. This understanding is pivotal for bridging cultural divides, necessary for working collaboratively to achieve our shared objectives around solving the world's most pressing problems—all the more reason colleges and universities need to redouble our focus on world citizenship and the interdependence of all human beings and communities as the foundation for education. Understanding that anger, hostility, and pity each carry the risk of creating barriers to humanistic identification, facilitating humanizing identification, finding commonality among individuals with radically different perspectives and offering a starting point for collective social transformation carries new import.

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum offers a compelling defense of this type of global education for the future. She observes:

One of the greatest barriers to rational deliberation in politics is the unexamined feeling that one's own current preferences and ways are neutral and natural. An education that takes national boundaries as morally salient too often reinforces this kind of irrationality, by lending to what is an accident of history a false air of moral weight and glory. (Nussbaum 1994)

Nussbaum argues that placing a community of human beings above national boundaries will bring us closer to solving global problems that require international cooperation, but it will necessitate the revision of curricula in support of the recognition of a shared future and the fostering of global dialogue grounded in the geography, ecology, traditions and values of others. It is one in which our deliberations are, first and foremost, “deliberations about human problems of people in particular concrete situations, not problems growing out of a national identity that is altogether unlike that of others” and in which students not only “recognize humanity wherever” it is encountered, but also “understand humanity in all its ‘strange’ guises” (Nussbaum 1994). When every human being becomes part of our community of dialogue and concern, and our political deliberations are grounded in that common human bond, it becomes more difficult to be dismissive of the well-being of others and easier to denounce ignorance and bigotry.

In addition, if we are to contest the widespread perception that colleges and universities are out of touch with the needs of society, those of us championing liberal education must use whatever modes of engagement are available to us to connect the work being done in the academy with people's lives—radio, television, videos, tweets, blogs, theater, hip-hop. For example, Anna Deavere Smith, founder and director of Harvard's Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue, uses documentary theater to demonstrate this capacity while confronting some of the most pressing social issues of the day. In her linguistic ethnography and one-woman show "Talk to Me: Listening Between the Lines," Smith places herself in "other people's words" in the way that one might place oneself in another's shoes. Her objective has been to "reignite our collective imagination about what it's like to be the 'other person'" and to "show the empathetic soul of American identities whose words wait and create change." A riff on John Cage's notion that "We only hear what listen for," Smith insists, "If there is any hope for us, it lies in relearning to tell the truth and hear it, in reclaiming ourselves as a listening space." By doing so, we will prove false humorist Mark Twain's assertion that "All schools, all colleges, have two great functions: to confer, and to conceal, valuable knowledge" (Twain 1908).

If we relinquish the opportunities that would extend our reach and leave these channels of communication to the media moguls, public discourse will

continue to decline, and academicians will lose the chance to engender a true sense of wonder purely for the sake of didacticism. Unfortunately, we are at a point in our history when the professional structures of academic scholarship, with its tendency to neglect teaching excellence, outreach, civic engagement and public intellectualism, are alienated from a more widespread humanistic comportment to life—and thus from the very purpose of a liberal education. Until we change both the curricula and the reward systems within the academy, structural impediments will continue to marginalize the critical work of those dedicated to providing the broadest access to higher education through humanistic practice—practice that reaches beyond the gates.

Moreover, if academics rely exclusively on the mechanics of arcane study to get out our message, failing to utilize the most vibrant vectors for helping citizens to cope with humanistic questions, scholarly pursuits as anything more than an ossified depository of ancient curiosity will die. Individuals will still thirst for humanistic guidance in seeking answers to their questions and compass points for their endeavors, but the academy as an institution will become nothing more than self-referential, as the frames of humanistic practice disappear forever.

Of course, the higher education landscape needs and feeds upon specialization, and I would certainly not recommend abandoning technical and intricate research as a foundation for addressing questions and fueling endeavors.

But, such activity should be measured in humanistic terms—not by eliminating scholarship, but by broadening what we value as an expression of that mastery. And yet at present, we go so far as to discourage pre-tenured faculty from focusing too much on teaching and service. Activities engaging actual, questioning human beings, whether in the classroom or in the community, drop out of professional focus. Academic institutions, with the help of disciplinary societies, should actively reconsider pathways to recruitment, tenure and promotion, placing scholarship into reasonable balance with humanistic modes of activity in the classroom and beyond.

The discussion around skills versus content, the meaningfulness and usefulness of the pragmatic liberal arts, the primary purpose of education as fostering life-long learning, and the need to provide our students with opportunities to reflect on why they are being asked to do the work required of them, in order to be able to tell a story about how those experiences are transferrable, must be placed in conversation with discussions around how we assess students, train and reward future faculty and demonstrate success.

As a dean, your leadership is more critical than ever. The attack on the humanities and arts has caused retrenchment of faculty in these areas. During a period calling for a re-envisioning and renewal within the liberal arts, many faculty are fearfully guarding course sections to preserve teaching loads, secure students,

and protect their disciplines. Given the looming prospect of monumental change, there is an inclination to hold even tighter to what is known. Thinking about how to thrive in this environment is often thwarted by attention to survival. Institutional change for meaningful integration of disciplines and support of the liberal arts and sciences will necessitate more than just faculty engagement or involvement; it will require faculty ownership of the vision.

Deans must not only advocate for a liberal education built on broad and complex skills across disciplines, but also help faculty understand what a *liberal education* is and the dangers of institutional structures that encourage forcing students to make unnecessary choices between the liberal arts and professions. Doing so will require interrogating the equity equation on your campuses. Who is underserved? Who is at risk? Who lacks access to the most enriching experiences? Deans need to help faculty understand that addressing these questions is not an indictment on their teaching. Rather, it is a signal of commitment to inclusion and responsibility for the success of all students.

In addition, reinforcing the civic ideals of your college or university by supporting faculty professional development to link disciplinary content with social issues, big questions, and wicked problems is essential. The pathway to innovation runs through real- world applications that take on actual civic issues. It is in this context that students are most likely to see themselves, to feel the material

is personal, rather than merely academic. And we would do well to remember that the connective webs for these civic linkages are endemic within our institutional missions. The language you find there may or may not be inspiring, it may be old, it may be vague, but it is usually a start.

All of this will require making space for faculty to lead. Whenever possible, move their work, and them, to the center of the conversation. Recognize pockets of creativity and inspiration where they exist and emphasize scaling of what faculty have developed, as opposed to whole new initiatives. As you engage faculty leadership, consider what you can do to ensure the equitable representation of voices and perspectives across the institution. How might you leverage your position to support the leadership of colleagues that may, like many students, feel marginalized or underrepresented across strategic conversations? How might you orchestrate diverse collaborations across divisions and disciplines? And what can you do to, even in small ways, publicly and privately to celebrate and reward the hard work that faculty are doing?

Finally, as leaders of the academy, it is time for us to insert ourselves into the public discourse and debates over public policy. Whether discussing the motives behind Nike's controversial decision to use Colin Kaepernick's image in its thirtieth anniversary of the "Just Do It!" campaign or the long-term implications of the Senate hearings regarding the latest Supreme Court nominee, academics

must collectively reaffirm the role that a liberal education plays in discerning the truth; the ways in which it serves as a catalyst for interrogating the sources of narratives, including history, evidence and facts; the ways in which a liberal education promotes an understanding that the world is a collection of interdependent yet inequitable systems; the ways in which it expands knowledge of human interactions, privilege and stratification; and the ways in which higher education fosters equity and justice, locally and globally.

In my inaugural message to the AAC&U community when I was appointed president, I referenced a letter written in May of 1863 by Emily Dickinson to two of her cousins. In a nation enmeshed in the Civil War, she confessed “I must keep ‘gas’ burning to light the danger up, so I could distinguish it.” The poet’s words reflect her unflinching pursuit of the truth, and the need she felt to move beyond her own narrow viewing point. Dickinson wanted to “light the danger up”—not turn away from it. She sought to look at what others either could not or did not want to see. In the midst of national dissension and uncertainty, she strove to use every ounce of her being in the process of discovery—perhaps understanding that deliberative democracy, especially in times of crisis, relies on the creation of a critical public culture that foments reasoned debate and independent thought.

One hundred years later, during the 1963 March on Washington, in a nation still divided, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “We are now faced with the fact that

tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there 'is' such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.”

Paying attention to the object lessons of both Dickinson and King is more critical than ever. We need to light up the danger and illuminate the transformative power of a liberal education. At the same time, we need to face the fierce urgency of now, recognizing that higher education and its graduates must play a leadership role in fulfilling the promise of liberal education for all.

Thank you.