The LEAP report was released by the National Leadership Council on January 10, 2007, and shared with the AAC&U community at a special plenary session at the 2007 annual meeting in New Orleans. The National Leadership Council is the public voice of the LEAP campaign, and includes members of the business, educational, civic, and philanthropic communities. Following is the executive summary of the LEAP report.

College Learning for the New Global Century is a report about the aims and outcomes of a twenty-first-century college education. It is also a report about the promises we need to make—and keep—to all students who aspire to a college education, especially to those for whom college is a route, perhaps the only possible route, to a better future.

With college education more important than ever before, both to individual opportunity and to American prosperity, policy attention has turned to a new set of priorities: the expansion of access, the reduction of costs, and accountability for student success.

These issues are important, but something equally important has been left off the table. Across all the discussion of access, affordability, and even accountability, there has been a near-total public and policy silence about what contemporary college graduates need to know and be able to do.

This report fills that void. It builds from the recognition, already widely shared, that in a demanding economic and international environment, Americans will need further learning beyond high school.

The LEAP report takes that recognition to the next level, asking: What kinds of learning? To what ends? Beyond access to college, how should Americans define “success” in college achievement?

Preparing students for twenty-first-century realities

In recent years, the ground has shifted for Americans in virtually every important sphere of life—economic, global, cross-cultural, environmental, civic. The world is being dramatically reshaped by scientific and technological innovations, global interdependence, cross-cultural encounters, and changes in the balance of economic and political power.

Only a few years ago, Americans envisioned a future in which this nation would be the
New Global Century
world’s only superpower. Today, it is clear that the United States—and individual Americans—will be challenged to engage in unprecedented ways with the global community, collaboratively and competitively.

These waves of dislocating change will only intensify. The world in which today’s students will make choices and compose lives is one of disruption rather than certainty, and of interdependence rather than insularity. This volatility also applies to careers. Studies show that Americans already change jobs ten times in the two decades after they turn eighteen, with such change even more frequent for younger workers.

Taking stock of these developments, educators and employers have begun to reach similar conclusions—an emerging consensus—about the kinds of learning Americans need from college. The recommendations in this report are informed by the views of employers, by new standards in a number of the professions, and by a multiyear dialogue with hundreds of colleges, community colleges, and universities about the aims and best practices for a twenty-first-century education.

Across all these centers of dialogue, a new vision for learning is coming into view. The goal of this report is to move from off-camera analysis to public priorities and action.

What matters in college?
American college students already know that they want a degree. The challenge is to help students become highly intentional about the forms of learning and accomplishment that the degree should represent.

The LEAP National Leadership Council calls on American society to give new priority to a set of educational outcomes that all students need from higher learning, outcomes that are closely calibrated with the challenges of a complex and volatile world.

Keyed to work, life, and citizenship, the essential learning outcomes recommended in this report (see sidebar) are important for all students and should be fostered and developed

The Essential Learning Outcomes
Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
• Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, including
• Inquiry and analysis
• Critical and creative thinking
• Written and oral communication
• Quantitative literacy
• Information literacy
• Teamwork and problem solving
Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

Personal and Social Responsibility, including
• Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
• Intercultural knowledge and competence
• Ethical reasoning and action
• Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

Integrative Learning, including
• Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies
Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems
across the entire educational experience, and in the context of students’ major fields. These outcomes provide a new framework to guide students’ cumulative progress—as well as curricular alignment—from school through college.

The LEAP National Leadership Council does not call for a “one-size-fits-all” curriculum. The recommended learning outcomes can and should be achieved through many different programs of study and in all collegiate institutions, including colleges, community colleges and technical institutes, and universities, both public and private.

**Liberal education and American capability**
The essential learning outcomes are important for a globally engaged democracy, for a dynamic, innovation-fueled economy, and for the development of individual capability. A course of study that helps students develop these capacities is best described as a liberal—and liberating—education.

Reflecting the traditions of American higher education since the founding, the term “liberal education” headlines the kinds of learning needed for a free society and for the full development of human talent. Liberal education has always been this nation’s signature educational tradition, and this report builds on its core values: expanding horizons, building understanding of the wider world, honing analytical and communication skills, and fostering responsibilities beyond self.

However, in a deliberate break with the academic categories developed in the twentieth century, the LEAP National Leadership Council disputes the idea that liberal education is achieved only through studies in arts and sciences disciplines. It also challenges the conventional view that liberal education is, by definition, “nonvocational.”

The council defines liberal education for the twenty-first century as a comprehensive set of aims and outcomes that are essential for all students because they are important to all fields of endeavor. Today, in an economy that is dependent on innovation and global savvy, these outcomes have become the keys to economic vitality and individual opportunity. They are the foundations for American success in all fields—from technology and the sciences to communications and the creative arts.

The LEAP National Leadership Council recommends, therefore, that the essential aims and outcomes be emphasized across every field of college study, whether the field is conventionally considered one of the arts and sciences disciplines or whether it is one of the professional and technical fields (business, engineering, education, health, the performing arts, etc.) in which the majority of college students currently major. General education plays a role, but it is not possible to squeeze all these important aims into the general education program alone. The majors must address them as well.

In the last century, higher education divided educational programs into two opposed categories—an elite curriculum emphasizing liberal arts education “for its own sake” and a more applied set of programs emphasizing preparation for work. Today, the practices are changing but the old Ivory Tower view of liberal education lingers. It is time to retire it.

This outmoded view is seriously out of touch with innovations on campus, which increasingly foster real-world experience and applications in all disciplines. But it is especially injurious to first-generation students who, the evidence shows, are the most likely to enroll in narrower programs that provide job training but do not emphasize the broader outcomes of a twenty-first-century education. To serve American society well, colleges, universities, and community colleges must take active steps to make liberal education inclusive.

The LEAP National Leadership Council calls, therefore, for vigorous new efforts to help students discover the connections between the essential learning outcomes and the lives they hope to live. The goal—starting in school
and continuing through college—should be to provide the most empowering forms of learning for all college students, not just some of them.

**A new framework for excellence**

The LEAP National Leadership Council recommends, in sum, an education that intentionally fosters, across multiple fields of study, wide-ranging knowledge of science, cultures, and society; high-level intellectual and practical skills; an active commitment to personal and social responsibility; and the demonstrated ability to apply learning to complex problems and challenges.

The council further calls on educators to help students become “intentional learners” who focus, across ascending levels of study and diverse academic programs, on achieving the essential learning outcomes. But to help students do this, educational communities will also have to become far more intentional themselves—both about the kinds of learning students need, and about effective educational practices that help students learn to integrate and apply their learning.

In a society as diverse as the United States, there can be no “one-size-fits-all” design for learning that serves all students and all areas of study. The diversity that characterizes American higher education remains a source of vitality and strength.

Yet all educational institutions and all fields of study also share in a common obligation to prepare their graduates as fully as possible for the real-world demands of work, citizenship, and life in a complex and fast-changing society. In this context, there is great value in a broadly defined educational framework that provides both a shared sense of the aims of education and strong emphasis on effective practices that help students achieve these aims.

To highlight these shared responsibilities, the council urges a new compact, between educators and American society, to adopt and achieve new Principles of Excellence (see sidebar).

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**The Principles of Excellence**

**Principle One**

**Aim High—and Make Excellence Inclusive**

Make the Essential Learning Outcomes a Framework for the Entire Educational Experience, Connecting School, College, Work, and Life

**Principle Two**

**Give Students a Compass**

Focus Each Student’s Plan of Study on Achieving the Essential Learning Outcomes—and Assess Progress

**Principle Three**

**Teach the Arts of Inquiry and Innovation**

Immerse All Students in Analysis, Discovery, Problem Solving, and Communication, Beginning in School and Advancing in College

**Principle Four**

**Engage the Big Questions**

Teach through the Curriculum to Far-Reaching Issues—Contemporary and Enduring—in Science and Society, Cultures and Values, Global Interdependence, the Changing Economy, and Human Dignity and Freedom

**Principle Five**

**Connect Knowledge with Choices and Action**

Prepare Students for Citizenship and Work through Engaged and Guided Learning on “Real-World” Problems

**Principle Six**

**Foster Civic, Intercultural, and Ethical Learning**

Emphasize Personal and Social Responsibility, in Every Field of Study

**Principle Seven**

**Assess Students’ Ability to Apply Learning to Complex Problems**

Use Assessment to Deepen Learning and to Establish a Culture of Shared Purpose and Continuous Improvement
Informed by a generation of innovation and by scholarly research on effective practices in teaching, learning, and curriculum, the Principles of Excellence offer both challenging standards and flexible guidance for an era of educational reform and renewal.

The principles can be applied by any college, community college, or university. They are intended to influence practice across the disciplines as well as in general education programs.

But the principles and the recommendations that accompany them also provide a framework for shared efforts, between school and college, to develop more purposeful pathways for student learning over time. Collectively, they shift the focus—at all levels of education—from course categories and titles to the quality and level of work students are actually expected to accomplish.

Taken together, the Principles of Excellence underscore the need to teach students how to integrate and apply their learning—across multiple levels of schooling and across disparate fields of study. The Principles of Excellence call for a far-reaching shift in the focus of schooling from accumulating course credits to building real-world capabilities.

A time for leadership and action

The Principles of Excellence build from an era of innovation that is already well under way. As higher education has reached out to serve an ever wider and more diverse set of students, there has been widespread experimentation to develop more effective educational practices and to determine “what works” with today’s college students.

Some of these innovations are so well established that research is already emerging about their effectiveness. The report provides a guide to tested and effective educational practices.

To date, however, these active and engaged forms of learning have served only a fraction of students. New research suggests that the benefits are especially significant for students who start farther behind. But often, these students are not the ones actually participating in the high-impact practice.

With campus experimentation already well advanced—on every one of the Principles of Excellence—it is time to move from “pilot efforts” to more comprehensive commitments. The United States comprehensively transformed its designs for learning, at all levels, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Now, as we enter the new global century, Americans need to mobilize again to advance a contemporary set of goals, guiding principles, and practices that will prepare all college students—not just the fortunate few—for twenty-first-century realities.

What it will take

- **Make the Principles of Excellence a priority on campus**

  Colleges, community colleges, and universities stand at the center. Many have already implemented pilot programs that address the vision for learning outlined in this report. The goal now should be to move from partial efforts to a comprehensive focus on students’ cumulative accomplishment over time, and across different parts of their educational experience.

  The LEAP report describes steps that each institution can take to scale up its efforts and focus campus-wide attention both on aims of education and on intentional practice to help students achieve the intended learning (see p. 38).

- **Form coalitions, across sectors, for all students’ long-term interests**

  While the value of strong educational leadership on campus cannot be overstated, raising the quality of student learning across the board will require concerted and collective action at all levels of education.

  The barriers to higher achievement are systemic, and no institution can overcome them on its own. Leaders at all levels will need to work together to build public and student understanding about what matters in college and to
establish higher operative standards across the board for college readiness and college achievement.

■ Build principled and determined leadership
While everyone has a role to play, three forms of enabling leadership will be absolutely essential to champion and advance the work of raising student achievement across the board.

1. High-profile advocacy from presidents, trustees, school leaders, and employers. These leaders, more than any others, are in a position to build public understanding of what matters in a twenty-first-century education. They should vigorously champion and support the essential learning outcomes with the public and in their outreach to students and families. And, they should make the essential learning outcomes a driving priority for their institutions and communities.

2. Curricular leadership from knowledgeable scholars and teachers. While recognized leaders can make higher achievement a priority, faculty and teachers who work directly with students are the only ones who can make it actually happen. At all levels—nationally, regionally, and locally—they will need to take the lead in developing guidelines, curricula, and assignments that connect rich content with students’ progressive mastery of essential skills and capabilities. Equally important, those responsible for educating future teachers and future faculty must work to ensure that they are well prepared to help students achieve the intended learning.

3. Policy leadership at multiple levels to support and reward a new framework for educational excellence. Leaders in state systems and schools, in accreditation agencies, in P–16 initiatives, and in educational associations need to act together to set priorities and establish policies that focus on the essential learning outcomes. As they adopt new standards for assessment and accountability, they need to ensure that these standards are designed to foster cumulative accomplishment and
integrative learning over time. And, they need to create an environment that both supports and rewards faculty, teacher, and staff investments in more powerful forms of learning.

■ Put employers in direct dialogue with students
Students are flocking to college in order to expand their career opportunities. They need to hear now from their future employers—at career fairs, on campus Web sites, and even through podcasts on their iPods—that narrow learning will limit rather than expand their options. When both senior executives and campus recruiters underscore the value of the essential learning outcomes, students will have strong incentives to work steadily toward their achievement.

■ Reclaim the connections between liberal education and democratic freedom
The essential learning outcomes and the Principles of Excellence are important to the economy, certainly. But they are also important to American democracy.

As Americans mobilize determined leadership for educational reform, we need to put the future of democracy at the center of our efforts. An educational program that is indifferent to democratic aspirations, principles, and values will ultimately deplete them. But a democracy united around a shared commitment to educate students for active citizenship will be this nation’s best investment in a shared future.

Liberal Education and America’s Promise
With this report, the LEAP National Leadership Council urges a comprehensive commitment, not just to prepare all students for college, but to provide the most powerful forms of learning for all who enroll in college.

Working together, with determination, creativity, and a larger sense of purpose, Americans can fulfill the promise of a liberating college education—for every student and for America’s future.