

Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) – The Next Era of Work

**Conversation with Council of
Colleges of Arts & Sciences (CCAS)
Board of Directors**

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LEAP AT A GLANCE

Launched in 2005, Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) is a national public advocacy and campus action initiative of the **Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U)**. LEAP champions the importance of a twenty-first-century liberal education—for individual students and for a nation dependent on economic creativity and democratic vitality. Through LEAP, hundreds of campuses are making far-reaching educational changes to help all their students—whatever their chosen field of study—acquire the broad knowledge, higher order capacities, and real world experience they need to thrive both in the economy and in a globally engaged democracy.

LEAP asks core questions about the learning students most need from college; listens and responds as employers make the case that today's workers need to be better prepared for a global economy; and focuses on education for knowledgeable citizenship, as well as careers.

LEAP PROMOTES

- **Essential Learning Outcomes**—the learning outcomes essential for success in life and work in the 21st century. These outcomes include: 1) broad knowledge of culture, science and society, as well as competence in specific fields; 2) intellectual and practical skills, such as inquiry and analysis; critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; quantitative literacy; information literacy; teamwork and problem-solving; 3) studies and experiences related to democratic and global citizenship and intercultural competence; and 4) integrative, applied and adaptive learning.
- **High-Impact Educational Practices (HIPs)**—ways of engaging and challenging students—such as first year programs; intensive writing, collaborative assignments, undergraduate research, internships, and major projects that help students achieve essential learning outcomes.
- **Authentic Assessments**—using students' own work and faculty-validated rubrics, probing whether individual students have developed essential capacities, and can apply their learning to complex problems and real-world challenges.
- **Inclusive Excellence**—to ensure that all students at every kind of institution benefit from a deep, hands-on, and practical education that prepares them for success in work, life, and citizenship.

AREAS OF WORK

Campus Action

- Faculty-led strategies for deepening and assessing student learning;
- LEAP Campus Action Network (350 two- and four-year institutions – private and public – and organizational partners);
- LEAP Partner States and Consortia – California State University System, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin; COPLAC; NAC&U; LEAP Texas; several other states seeking inclusion;
- Summer institutes for campus teams working on outcomes in general education, arts and science learning, integrative learning and departments, assessment and institutional change to make excellence inclusive;
- Partnership with Project Kaleidoscope to advance STEM reform.

Authentic Evidence

- LEAP VALUE project – nationally validated rubrics for assessing students and reporting on 16 essential learning outcomes that are integral to a liberal education;
- Reports—prepared in concert with research agencies—on students' achievement of essential learning outcomes and their participation in high impact forms of learning;
- Employer research on competencies and experiences students need for success in the workplace.

Public Advocacy

- LEAP advocacy seeks to spark public debate about the college learning outcomes essential for all students; to create more informed public support for higher education and for changes to improve quality; and to challenge the belief that students must choose either a broad education or a practical education.
- Policy engagement and advocacy in LEAP States (see above).
- LEAP Presidents' Trust – connecting LEAP with public and local priorities – economic and civic

Degree Qualifications Profile

**A template of proficiencies required for the award of college degrees at the associate, bachelor's, and master's levels*

Knowledge

At each degree level, every college student should demonstrate proficiency in using both specialized knowledge from at least one field **and** broad, integrative knowledge from arts and sciences fields. **Both kinds of knowledge** should be pursued from first to final year, providing opportunities for **integration across fields and application to complex problems**—in the student's area of emphasis, in out-of-school settings, and in civil society.

Broad and Integrative Knowledge

Key areas include the sciences, social sciences, humanities, arts, and global, intercultural and democratic learning.

In **each area**, students:

- Learn key concepts and methods of inquiry
- Examine significant debates and questions
- Make evidence-based arguments

In **addition**, at each degree level, students:

- Produce work that integrates concepts and methods from at least two fields

Specialized Knowledge

Students demonstrate depth of knowledge in a field and produce field-appropriate applications drawing on both major field and, at the B.A. level and beyond, other fields. Students learn:

- Discipline and field-specific knowledge
- Purposes, methods, and limitations of field
- Applied skills in field
- Integrative skills and methods drawing from multiple fields and disciplines.

Intellectual Skills

Students **hone and integrate intellectual skills across the curriculum**, applying those skills both to complex challenges within major fields and to broad, integrative problem-solving challenges. Skills include:

- Analytic inquiry
- Use of information resources
- Engaging diverse perspectives
- Ethical reasoning
- Quantitative fluency
- Communication fluency

Civic and Global Learning

Students acquire knowledge required for responsible citizenship both from their formal studies (see knowledge and skills, above) and from community-based learning, and **demonstrate their ability to integrate both forms of learning in analyzing and addressing significant public problems and questions, both in civic and global contexts**. Civic learning may be demonstrated through: research, collaborative projects and/or field-based assignments.

Applied and Collaborative Learning

Students demonstrate their ability to **integrate and apply their learning** (see knowledge and skills, above) in complex projects and assignments, including collaborative efforts, that may include: research, projects, practicums, internships, work assignments, performances, and creative tasks.

*A draft second edition of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) was released for preview at AAC&U's 2014 Annual Meeting. DQP 2.0 is informed by feedback from faculty and leaders from hundreds of colleges, universities and community colleges that worked with the "beta" version of the DQP which was published in January, 2011. Following further discussion with the field, the second edition of the DQP will be officially released in the fall of 2014. The Degree Qualifications Profile is available for download at http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/The_Degree_Qualifications_Profile.pdf.

LEAP Innovations in the Making: AAC&U's New GEMs and VALUE/Multi-State Initiatives

Both GEMS and VALUE are supported by a major grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. They represent large-scale, systematic efforts to 1) provide “design principles” for high-quality 21st-century learning; and 2) create authentic and educationally meaningful strategies for assessing and reporting student achievement on outcomes that most consider “essential.” **They also seek to marry the aims of liberal education with the opportunities presented by digital learning innovations and with evidence on “what works” for first generation learners.**

General Education Maps and Markers (GEMs) draws upon AAC&U's longstanding work in liberal education to develop an adaptive and proficiency-based framework for general education. It seeks to help all students, and especially those who have been traditionally underserved by higher education, engage in deep, problem-centered inquiry and learn how to apply knowledge, skills and ethical responsibility to complex problems and challenges.

Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) is being done in partnership with a Multi-state Collaborative involving nine state systems, with SHEEO and with a set of private institutions. VALUE is piloting a broad-scale effort to use students' authentic work and AAC&U's LEAP VALUE rubrics as the best evidence of students' college learning.

The GEMs Project: Goals and Contexts

GEMs is keyed to the proficiencies that have been broadly articulated through Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) and in the Degree Qualification Profile (DQP). GEMs will help students develop the adaptive, cross-cutting, inquiry-based capacities necessary for economic, civic and personal flourishing.

In partnership with a broad spectrum of public and private institutions, GEMs will map DQP proficiencies across student learning experiences and develop pathways for a holistic, cornerstone-to-capstone focus on high-impact practices, inquiry- and problem-centered projects, and increasing levels of challenge. Along these intentional pathways, students will demonstrate their accomplishments through work on signature assignments and projects.

Three interconnected working groups, on **Design/Leadership, Equity Research, and Digital Resources**, will research and recommend best practices for making general education a catalyst for achieving high quality learning and successful degree completion as well.

By aligning general education purposes and pathways, GEMs seeks to ensure that all students, particularly today's mobile and diverse students, continuously engage in problem-centered learning in every institution they attend, enabling speedier progress toward degree attainment and producing the needed levels of learning.

GEMs will draw directly on pioneering work across the entire AAC&U community of colleges, universities and community colleges.

The VALUE/Multi-State Project: Goals and Contexts

The VALUE initiative is part of a long-term effort by AAC&U to create a sea change in 21st-century approaches to assessment. The key idea is that today's students need to deal—at work and in life—with “non-standard” or unscripted problems and questions. Therefore, assessments should evaluate their work on such problems, rather than report student achievement on questions with known right answers.

The long-term VALUE goal is to develop an ongoing national platform for making students *authentic* curricular work a core component in assessment and accountability practices and eventually to markedly raise the level of student achievement. Through the new Gates-funded initiative, AAC&U will work with SHEEO, nine state systems, and over 70 participating private and public institutions to:

- Create a national platform—an online database—for collecting and evaluating samples of student work, using LEAP VALUE rubrics;
- Develop shared protocols and methods for determining students' level of proficiency on key learning outcomes, based on their work, at acceptable standards of reliability and validity;
- Focus initially on students' achievement in **communication, quantitative reasoning** and, in some cases, **critical thinking** as well. AAC&U will further work with some institutions to address other VALUE rubrics, such as ethical reasoning, information literacy and civic learning;
- Develop a cadre of faculty prepared to use rubrics in assessing student work; test and recommended practices for engaging the entire faculty with needed improvements in the quality of student achievement.

The new project builds on a significant foundation of prior work. With earlier funding, AAC&U developed **VALUE rubrics or scoring guides for 16 essential learning outcomes**, including all the intellectual skills addressed in the DQP. Hundreds of campuses already are using these rubrics to base assessment on students' own work (rather than standardized tests).

Recently, with leadership from Massachusetts, a LEAP state partner, and from the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), 9 states agreed to pilot-test the use of VALUE rubrics and student work in developing a shared framework for assessment and accountability. The 9 states have formed a “**Multi-State Collaborative**” which has already worked extensively on such issues as methods, data management, faculty engagement and external communications. The Multi-State Collaborative is a key partner in this VALUE effort. The 9 participating states are CT, IN, KY, MA, MN, MO, RI, OR, and UT. Four are official LEAP partner state systems.

In addition, **Minnesota has created a private-public partnership** that will explore ways to work across private/public institution lines and build employer and philanthropic interest in the VALUE assessment strategy and results.

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To learn more about the Gates grant please read the GEMs/VALUE press release http://www.aacu.org/press_room/press_releases/2013/gatesgrant.cfm. To learn more about the VALUE rubrics, visit www.aacu.org and search for VALUE rubrics.

DQP Design Elements and Their Application to General Education

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The Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) is a profile, not a curriculum. It provides **design elements and/or recommended practices** to be mapped across specific curricula—both general education programs and major programs.

The DQP sets a new direction for U.S. higher education in the following way: “The student, not the institution, is the primary reference point. The DQP describes what students should know and be able to do as they progress through progressively higher levels of postsecondary study.” (DQP 2.0, 4)

The DQP anticipates and recommends that students will pursue many different pathways as they work to meet the “qualifications” for the degree. It further affirms that faculty—and only faculty—are the appropriate experts to “fill in” the profile with explicit descriptions of the content, concepts, methods, and assignments students should complete for different programs of study.

GEMs will recommend ways that faculty can apply DQP proficiencies and principles to cornerstone-to-capstone redesigns for 21st century general education. GEMs will not attempt to describe the specific knowledge that students ought to attain in different parts of the general education curriculum. GEMs will, however, suggest ways that widely endorsed categories of general education knowledge can be integrated with the specific DQP proficiencies to create purposeful, portable, and empowering forms of learning.

GEMs and LEAP: GEMs responds directly to four priorities that many campuses, state systems, and policy makers have set for general education:

- 1) Fostering students’ development of essential intellectual skills “across-the-curriculum and co-curriculum”;
- 2) Mapping “high impact practices” into the expected curricular and general education pathways;
- 3) Assessing whether students have developed the requisite capacity to apply their knowledge and skill to complex problems; and
- 4) Aligning these broad expectations across institutions and degree levels so that students can progress and transfer smoothly from one campus and level to another.

The first three are explicit LEAP priorities and the fourth is entirely congruent with LEAP.

GEMs seeks to assist those who are working on these priorities by showing how DQP and LEAP principles can guide a 21st century “re-set” for general education.

DQP Areas of Learning: The DQP outlines 5 required Areas of Learning for 3 degree levels: associate, bachelor’s, and master’s.

The DQP does not accept the traditional distinction between transfer associate’s degrees and “terminal” associate’s degrees. It assumes that many students in both kinds of programs will want and need to pursue baccalaureate degrees and that all need proficiencies basic to further learning. Accordingly, the **required areas of learning apply to all associate degrees, not just transfer degrees. By endorsing applied learning at all degree levels, the DQP seeks to remove a common barrier to student transfer for students who complete certificates and other applied programs. The DQP also recognizes that many learners acquire key proficiencies outside the classroom.**

The 5 required Areas of Learning—Broad and Integrative Knowledge, Specialized Knowledge, Intellectual Skills, Collaborative and Applied Learning, and Civic and Global Learning—are described separately. **BUT, all 5 component elements are intended to be integrated within the overall course of study. The 5 component parts are NOT intended as discrete, isolated parts of undergraduate learning.**

The DQP honors distinctive institutional missions and encourages special mission institutions—e.g., religious-affiliated or arts-intensive campuses—to connect the DQP proficiencies with their specific emphases and to add additional areas of learning as well.

Here is what the DQP recommends for “mapping” general education programs and pathways:

Cornerstone to Capstone:

- 1) The DQP recognizes and honors higher education’s strong commitment (see p. 2 of Primer) to broad learning across the **humanities, arts, sciences, and social sciences** (hereafter, **CORE FIELDS**). It also acknowledges the near-universal educator view that broad learning should centrally address “**civic, intercultural, global and scientific**” learning. (DQP 2.0, 18)
- 2) The DQP further affirms that students should communicate in a second language. (23)
- 3) Building from the evidence of campus trends, the **DQP explicitly rejects the idea that general education should be finished in the first two years**. Rather, it calls for a first-to-final year approach and says: “broad and integrative knowledge, at all degree levels, should **build larger, cumulative contexts** for students’ specialized...[learning, i.e., majors and their] applied learning, and for their engagement with civic, intercultural, global and scientific issues...” i.e., **issues they will encounter as citizens**. (18)

Proficiency and Problem-Centered Inquiry:

- 4) The DQP calls on educators to involve students “in the **inquiry practices** of core fields,” preparing students to discover and explore “concepts and questions that bridge multiple fields of study.” (18)
- 5) The DQP explicitly and repeatedly guides students toward both individual and collaborative work on **problems, projects, performances, practicums, research, creative endeavors, and capstone work**. Its approach to problems includes contested public problems.
- 6) The DQP, in sum, foregrounds “**problem-centered inquiry and learning**.”

Design “Specs” for AA-Level General Education Courses:

- 7) The DQP provides “**specs**” for any course or learning experience in a “**core field**” that “**counts**” toward **general education at the associate’s level**. These recommendations are intended to lay a foundation for helping students engage and **explore significant questions and problems**. (18) Specifically, at the associate’s level, general education courses/experiences should help students:
 - a. Learn **how existing knowledge or practice is advanced, tested and revised** in EACH core field studied;
 - b. Learn about **key debates or problems in EACH core field studied**;
 - c. **Use recognized methods of EACH core field studied**, including the **gathering and evaluation of evidence**, in the execution of analytical, practical, or creative tasks.
- 8) In addition, the DQP calls for **associates’ level students to have at least one experience of integrative, problem-centered cross-disciplinary analysis and investigation**.

General Education, Majors, and BA-Level Work:

- 9) Beyond the associate level, the descriptors for general education call for **integrative, problem-centered inquiry and analysis in the later years of college**, while the descriptors for specialized knowledge or **majors** also call for students to use theories, methods, and scholarship from at **least two fields in executing a substantial piece of work**.
- 10) As the DQP matrix shows, the DQP calls for students to **practice and demonstrate ALL 6 intellectual skills both in general studies, specialized studies and in civic/global and applied/collaborative studies**. To achieve this expectation, all programs will need to identify which parts of the curriculum and co-curriculum foster, practice, and help students demonstrate the specific intellectual skills.

HOW GEMs Moves Beyond the DQP design elements: The DQP focuses on general principles for program design and lays a foundation for assessing students’ authentic work as the best evidence of their progress. But GEMs will further address **issues related to under-served student success in general education and ways that digital platforms and strategies can be used to help students personalize their learning and successfully achieve DQP proficiencies**.

Putting it Together: The Matrix

The DQP as a Prompt for Integrative Learning

Intellectual skills should be practiced *across* the educational experience and demonstrated in the context of both broad and specialized studies; in civic and global learning; and in applied and collaborative learning. This matrix suggests how the *DQP* can be used for assignment planning and for assessment of students' achievement of degree-level proficiencies. To complete the matrix, program faculty should decide where and how in their programs students will practice key intellectual skills and take part in applied learning tasks and assignments—an exercise that should also inform curriculum development and improvement, as well as assessment.

Intellectual Skills	DEGREE-LEVEL PROFICIENCIES				
	Specialized Knowledge	Broad and Integrative Knowledge	Applied and Collaborative Learning	Civic and Global Learning	Institution Specific Emphases ^o
Analytic Inquiry					
Use of information resources					
Engaging diverse perspectives					
Ethical reasoning					
Quantitative fluency					
Communicative fluency					
Program-specific intellectual skills					

^o E.g., religious, artistic, technological, scientific, etc.

Adapted from: DQP 2.0 (draft released by Lumina Foundation January 2014).