

Liberal Arts Illuminated

Reframing the Narrative:
Leadership Toward Inclusive Excellence

liberal arts } Illuminated



Keynote Addresses



Brandon Busteed
Senior partner and global head
of Public Sector at Gallup



Rich Karlgaard
Publisher and global futurist
of Forbes Media



Dr. Adam Weinberg
President of Denison University



Dr. Freeman Hrabowski
President of University of
Maryland, Baltimore County



Dr. Lynn Pasquerella
President of Association of
American Colleges & Universities

Conference Presenters



Dr. Randy Bass
Vice provost for education and
professor of English at Georgetown
University and executive director of
Georgetown's Center for New Design
in Learning and Scholarship



Mary Brainerd
Former president and chief
executive officer of HealthPartners



Dr. Tia Brown McNair
Vice president in the Office of
Diversity, Equity, and Student
Success at Association of American
Colleges & Universities



Paul Cerkvenik
President of the Minnesota
Private College Council and
Minnesota Private College Fund



Dr. Nathan Grawe
Professor of economics at
Carleton College



Dr. Amy K. Hamlin
Director of the Evaleen Neufeld
Initiative in the Liberal Arts and
the Alberta Huber, CSJ, Endowed
Chair in the Liberal Arts at
St. Catherine University



Dr. Michael Hemesath
President of Saint John's University



Dr. Mary Dana Hinton
President of the
College of Saint Benedict



Dr. Kristen Hodge-Clark
Director of research for the
Association of Governing Boards
of Universities and Colleges



Dr. Jillian Kinzie
Associate director at Center
for Postsecondary Research
and the National Survey of
Student Engagement Institute,
Indiana University



Dr. L. Lee Knefelkamp
Professor of psychology and
education, Teachers College,
Columbia University



Dr. Lucie Lapovsky
Principal of Lapovsky Consulting



Dr. Barbara May
Academic dean at the
College of Saint Benedict and
Saint John's University



Jon McGee
Vice president for planning
and strategy at the
College of Saint Benedict and
Saint John's University



Amit Mrig
Co-founder of Academic Impressions



Dr. Joretta Nelson
Senior vice president and
owner of Credo



Noah Silverman
Senior director of Learning and
Partnerships at Interfaith Youth Core



Dr. Jay Simmons
President of Simpson College



Dr. Buffy Smith
Professor of sociology and associate
dean of Dougherty Family College,
University of St. Thomas



Mary Thompson
Managing director at G100
and former journalist

Table of Contents

- 2 Message From the Co-Hosts
- 3 Leadership Toward an Inclusive Curriculum
- 6 Leadership Toward Positive Outcomes for All Students
- 9 Leadership Toward a New Economic Model in Higher Education
- 12 Leadership Toward a New Public Narrative
- 15 Leadership in Action
- 17 References
- 18 Poetic Parting Words From Our Experts

Editor

Dana Drazenovich

Assistant Editors

Margaret Arnold
Tammy Moore

Contributors

Mike Killeen
Greg Skoog

Photographer

Ali Jungels '18

Contact

College of Saint Benedict
37 South College Avenue
St. Joseph, MN 56374-2099

☎ 320-363-5465

Saint John's University

P.O. Box 2000
Collegeville, MN 56321

☎ 320-363-2882

Message From the Co-Hosts

Reframing the Narrative: Leadership Toward Inclusive Excellence

Liberal Arts Illuminated, “Reframing the Narrative: Leadership Toward Inclusive Excellence” brought together more than 150 dedicated higher education professionals whose commitment to our critical role in shaping thoughtful, ethical citizens blazes brightly.

Our speakers underscored for us the importance of a liberal arts education in addressing divides within the United States — economic, racial, political and religious — and gave us not just concrete steps for providing educational excellence and inclusivity but powerfully poetic inspiration for doing so.

As the liberal arts inaccurate accusations of elitism and irrelevance, we must focus the narrative back on our importance. We must articulate the work liberal arts colleges do in preparing an educated citizenry and the lessons liberal education provides for creating a more equitable and just world.

Lynn Pasquerella, Association of American Colleges & Universities, challenged us with the words of poet Emily Dickinson, in a letter Dickinson wrote in May 1863, as civil war divided the United States: “I must keep ‘gas’ burning to light the danger up, so I could distinguish it.”

In a time when the value of a liberal arts education, and higher education in general, have come into question, Pasquerella told us, “We need to light up the danger and illuminate the transformative power of a liberal education.”

Pasquerella repeated the words of great civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., who during the March on Washington 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.”

L. Lee Knepfkamp, Columbia University, compared liberal arts to the soaring beauty of great cathedrals, envisioned by architects and enacted by stone masons. Our role is to help all of our students “to realize that they are building cathedrals of their own lives — they’re both the architects and the stone masons — and

that the false dichotomies that are perniciously around them will only get in their way of achieving their vision.”

She called on us to take strong, quick and cohesive action to promote understanding of our indispensable value, and to ensure that students from all backgrounds have access to truly inclusive campuses and educational experiences, now and in the future.

“We need to face the fierce urgency of now and engage in dangerous altruism, recognizing that higher education and its graduates must play a leadership role in jettisoning a belief in a hierarchy of human value and fulfilling the promise of the American dream.”

Liberal Arts Illuminated prepared us to light up the danger. Let us embrace the urgency of now and put our passion into action. We might meet resistance, and the work in front of us might seem daunting, but as Credo’s Joretta Nelson reminded us, “Sometimes all it takes is just clear intention and a first step.”

This publication is designed to synthesize conference content, to present key statistics, to highlight models for success, to provide questions for educators to bring back to our campuses and to share ideas for concrete action steps we can take as we begin the critical work of providing leadership to reframe the narrative about the liberal arts, design inclusive curricula, provide positive outcomes for all students and create a new economic model for higher education.

We thank all of you who shared your ideas, your expertise and your passion, and as you continue your work for the good of the academy, we offer the words of Freeman Hrabowski, University of Maryland, Baltimore County:

“I challenge you to watch your thoughts. They become your words. Watch your words, they become your actions. Watch your actions. They become your habits. Watch your habits. They become your character. Watch your character. It becomes your destiny, dreams and values.

“We believe in the liberal arts absolutely.”



Mary Dana Hinton

Mary Dana Hinton
College of Saint Benedict President



Michael Hemesath

Michael Hemesath
Saint John’s University President



Leadership Toward an Inclusive Curriculum

A truly inclusive curriculum is integrative, asset-based and culturally responsive. It provides deep learning and meaningful connections between learning and work.

An inclusive curriculum becomes part of an institution’s fiber when inclusion is tied to faculty and staff job descriptions, incorporated across disciplines and built around the liberal arts mission that Freeman Hrabowski, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, describes as “changing heads and hearts.”

“When students come to you, are you convinced that by the time they graduate, they have examined self, they’ve examined their values, they’ve learned to talk with people different from themselves, they question some of the assumptions they’ve made about other people from all kinds of diverse backgrounds, and that they have the humility to know that they can always keep learning?”

Embracing complexity

A student’s interpersonal, intellectual and intercultural development are “intrinsically entwined,” says L. Lee Knefelkamp, Columbia University.

“I hope we can keep in mind that as the student discovers the multiple perspectives around them, they will discover that some of those are complementary, some of those are competing — and of course, are really significant issues. Many of those are contradictory, or at least they initially feel contradictory. And how do we help people think about how they experience their own views of knowledge of others and of themselves?”

The curriculum should move students from dualistic either/or thinking to both/and thinking, “an engagement with complexity and with the other in a way that does not villainize the complexity or the other but in fact seeks it out and embraces it,” Knefelkamp says.

Integrating with inclusivity

Education needs to focus on inclusive and integrative excellence that compels students to examine societal issues across disciplines and from various perspectives, says Randy Bass, Georgetown University.

“Issues of equity and diversity in higher education intersect with the goals of disciplinary integration,” the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine’s “Branches from the Same Tree”¹ report explains. It notes that an integrated model can be particularly effective for traditionally underrepresented students.

Inclusive and integrative excellence requires active learning, whole-person outcomes, relationships and mentors, deep engagement and doing work that matters, Bass says. Higher education should prepare students for a labor market centered around “solving unstructured problems, working with new information and carrying out non-routine manual tasks.”

Putting outcomes first

“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,” says Lynn Pasquerella, Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U).

“The emphasis of the curriculum should be on learning outcomes — knowledge of human cultures, 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.”

Bass proposes an inverted design for re-examining curricula.

“If you’re backwardly designing the curriculum from the capacity of the graduate to make a values-based,

difficult decision *in situ*, what does that mean for the capstone, for the fourth year, for the third year, for the second year, for the first year? How do you give people practice in every possible way? How do you redefine what a high-impact practice is based on the ability to make a values-based judgment in conditions of uncertainty?”

“As machines get better at being machines, the primary purpose of higher education has to be helping humans get better at being human.”

– Randy Bass, Georgetown University



Model for Success

Denison University’s “situated learning” programs² provide opportunities for off-campus study in international countries and in local communities. These experiences “amplif[y] campus-based classroom learning by extending it into socio-cultural contexts that help foster integration of the habits of consideration, engagement, and intentionality. This, in turn, engenders the practice of informed and empathetic judgment that is the hallmark of a liberally educated person.”

“It’s not about travel, it’s not about how far we go on an airplane, it’s about the experiences we give our students and the opportunities they have to explore a range of cultures and attributes in ways that help them develop the skills, values and habits of working effectively in global ways,” says Denison President Adam Weinberg.

Weinberg advocates “study away” programs that allow students to experience deep cultural immersion in communities close to campus — in Denison’s case, for example, the college is exploring ways to enhance study away by taking advantage of its close proximity to a growing, vibrant and increasingly international Columbus, Ohio. Weinberg noted, “By taking advantage of the local, in addition to more traditional study abroad, we can give our students multiple deep immersion experiences across their four-year experience.”

Model for Success

Georgetown University launched its Corepathways³ program in fall 2017 to allow students to examine climate change from multiple academic perspectives. Corepathways offers seven-week modules from multiple disciplines:

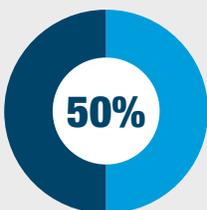
- Environmental sciences
- History
- Humanities
- Philosophy
- Theology

Students can take up to four modules in different disciplines each year to fulfill two core or elective course requirements. Corepathways “facilitates engagement with a complex problem through multiple disciplines,” creates connections between previously disconnected courses and “models and scaffolds integration for students” through:

- Opening session and science tutorial
- Moral imagination exercise
- Role playing policy simulation
- Final interdisciplinary exercise

Ideas for Action

1. Ensure cross-disciplinary readings and assignments disciplines reflect the lived experiences of the diverse scholars they teach. (*Buffy Smith*)
2. Nurture the ability for professors to design cross-disciplinary courses that address diversity-related issues. (*Freeman Hrabowski*)
3. Examine or design your core curriculum to provide students opportunities to take courses in a variety of disciplines that address similar subjects. (*Randy Bass*)
4. Design your curriculum around student outcomes. (*Lynn Pasquerella*)
5. Strive for a curriculum that creates “environments that are safe for students to face the false dichotomies that are in the world around them and particularly in the public discourse today.” (*L. Lee Kniefelkamp*)



Students who took courses that “emphasized learning about other cultures or discussing issues of equity or privilege.”

National Survey of Student Engagement Annual Results 2017⁴

Questions for Campus

1. Why should inclusion be considered when developing and implementing curricula? (*Academic Impressions*)
2. How is an inclusive curriculum developed? (*Academic Impressions*)
3. What steps can be taken to close student outcome gaps? (*Academic Impressions*)
4. What steps can you take to embed inclusion within your curriculum? (*Academic Impressions*)
5. What impact does linking experiential learning and professional development have on the inclusivity of your curriculum? (*Academic Impressions*)
6. What could you do to focus your campus community on the future and broad contexts? Would that be helpful? (*Randy Bass*)
7. Who do you as an institution want to be, and who do you want to create? (*Bass*)

“The fundamental purpose of education is to help people to dream about the possibilities and to understand what’s possible as a human being and to develop a state of, a sense of self in a way that the reading and the thinking and the dreaming can lead to them setting goals and having amazing visions for themselves and reaching and moving toward that vision.”

– Freeman Hrabowski, University of Maryland, Baltimore County



Leadership Toward Positive Outcomes for All Students

Higher education has long been a critical means toward advancing opportunity, but some groups of students still are not fully benefitting.

“College completion rates for those at the lowest socioeconomic rungs continue to lag far behind those of their wealthier peers,” says Lynn Pasquerella, Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U).

The Education Trust’s “State of Higher Education Equity”⁵ reports that 14 percent of black adults and 11 percent of Latino adults have attained a bachelor’s degree, compared with nearly 24 percent of white adults.

“The reality is that even though we think we’re making progress with students of color, specifically with blacks and Latinos in higher education, the gaps are actually getting wider,” says Tia Brown McNair, AAC&U.

Also, first-generation and other groups of traditionally underserved students are less likely to take part in high-impact practices that deepen learning and increase engagement.⁶

Higher education has reached a turning point, says Jillian Kinzie, Indiana University.

“We’re in a position where we have to ensure that all students have high-quality educational experiences that will prepare them for the 21st century. This is the outcome we’re after. This is the outcome we need to assure, and all institutions are responsible for this.”

How can the liberal arts deliver on that goal?

Be explicit about outcomes

“One of the things we need to do around this learning and equity paradigm is to be more explicit, much more explicit, about the outcomes that we’re after in terms of student learning — and these have to be aligned,” Kinzie says. Students, families and employers need to be able to understand those outcomes.

“The second is that we need to keep our focus on proven engaging, inclusive and high-impact practices.”

Being intentional about aligning outcomes helps “students see the

connection between the outcomes that are expressed, that are in the courses, in their curriculum, in their program and in their co-curricular experiences.”

Harness the power of data

“Institutions need to collect, disaggregate, analyze and apply data,” McNair says. “[W]e have to understand our data if we’re going to chart a path forward on what it is we’re supposed to be doing.”

One example would be disaggregating and analyzing data regarding which groups of students take part in and most benefit from particular high-impact practices on your campus. Too often, institutions avoid this type of disaggregation because of small group sizes, failing to recognize that disaggregating the data has more potential to help than to harm minority students.

“It’s not enough just to have information. We have to be thoughtful about what we’re going to do with that information, and that’s exactly what assessment is supposed to help institutions do,” Kinzie says.

Consider the mentorship model

For colleges ready to start transforming into inclusive campuses, Buffy Smith, University of St. Thomas' Dougherty Family College, advocates the mentoring institution model.

A mentoring institution does not just formulate mission, vision, diversity and inclusion statements but lives them, Smith says.

“At a mentoring institution, everyone’s a mentor. Everyone reaps the benefit of mentoring. It’s not just based on your assignment to a particular scholar or junior faculty or staff. It becomes the fabric of who you are that no one will be left behind.”

When scholars are struggling, she notes, it doesn’t matter whether the person who saves them is the president or someone from the physical plant. “They just need help. And the mentoring institution says if you’re the first responder at that time, then that’s your responsibility — to respond.”

[College is a high-risk situation for traditionally underserved students], “potentially holding out a high gain, but often it can be a high-risk and low-gains situation because of the way our campuses are formed and structured, not even intentionally, and that’s the worst part of the sin, unintentionally, in terms of consequences.”

– L. Lee Knefelkamp, Columbia University



Model for Success

A mentoring institution model⁷

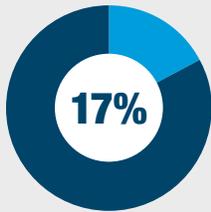
The University of St. Thomas’ Dougherty Family College, a two-year asset-based program for students from under-resourced communities who need more academic preparation, employs a six-part model to mentor students:

1. **A curriculum** with the same core courses as St. Thomas’ four-year baccalaureate program but with more intentionally culturally relevant pedagogy and scaffolded support.
2. **A cohort-based model** to foster identification with the institution and boost retention and graduation rates.
3. **A first-year experience seminar** that helps students master the formal curriculum (note taking, time management, technology, etc.) and the hidden curriculum (unwritten norms and values).
4. **Mentoring by faculty members** who meet one-on-one with each of their assigned 25 students for 30 minutes every other week.
5. **Professional development and paid internships** to connect liberal arts education with real work experience and teach skills like interviewing and networking.
6. **Faculty** who teach culturally responsive pedagogy in addition to having mastery of knowledge in their discipline.



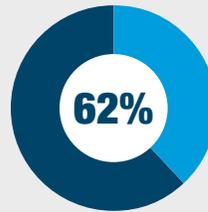
Ideas for Action

1. Listen. “One of the approaches that has made all the difference on my campus is not only using analytics and the quantitative [data]” but also “really taking the time to know our students and to hear their voices as they tell us how they perceive our environment to be.” (*Freeman Hrabowski*)
2. Reward faculty and staff members for being effective teachers and mentors. (*Buffy Smith*)
3. Provide all students with mentors so mentorship extends beyond “the chosen.” (*Smith*)
4. Ensure traditionally underserved students are able to take part in high-impact practices by weaving them into the curriculum and making them accessible. (*Association of American Colleges & Universities*)
5. Disaggregate your institution’s data so you can analyze participation and outcomes of different groups of students. (*Tia Brown McNair*)
6. Identify gaps in student outcomes and adopt practices that address and close those gaps. (*Joretta Nelson*)



Institutions that “are disaggregating their data on how well specific groups of students are achieving key learning outcomes.”

Association of American Colleges & Universities⁸



Six-year certificate and degree completion rate of white students in postsecondary institutions, compared with 63.2% of Asian students, 45.8% of Hispanic students and 38% of black students.

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center⁹

Questions for Campus

1. What are some systematic gaps in student outcomes? *(Academic Impressions)*
2. What role do the liberal arts play in closing those gaps? *(Academic Impressions)*
3. What steps can be taken to close student gaps to improve structures, improve resources and improve people? *(Academic Impressions)*
4. Do we have clarity in our goals and our language? *(Tia Brown McNair)*
5. Do we have shared values? *(McNair)*
6. Do we understand our purpose? *(McNair)*
7. Does our conversation around inclusive excellence and diversity include religious diversity? *(Noah Silverman)*
8. Does our institution, top to bottom, support its students to live and express their religious or non-religious lives freely on our campus? *(Silverman)*





Leadership Toward a New Economic Model in Higher Education

Many higher education institutions face major economic changes and difficult decisions as revenue stagnates, enrollments drop and government funding wanes.

“Today both Moody’s and Standard and Poor’s have placed a negative outlook on the higher education industry based on the expectation that costs will continue to increase faster than revenues, and as we know, many institutions are already operating with deficit budgets,” says Lucie Lapovsky, Lapovsky Consulting.

Still, she adds good news: “I think there is some real hope for schools that are nimble and willing to make changes.”

Some of that hope stems from inclusion.

Prioritizing inclusion

“You hear a lot about the tension between inclusiveness and our mission because inclusiveness often seems like it’s expensive,” says Nathan Grawe, Carleton College. He suggests other narratives.

“First, inclusive excellence can expand your [enrollment] pool.” In addition, focusing on maintaining enrolled students from groups with lower completion rates⁹ presents an opportunity for improving both revenues and student outcomes.

“Inclusive excellence through an attention to mission can raise retention and decrease enrollment pressures,” Grawe says. “When are we as a campus or as an industry going to start taking those kinds of statistics on retention and graduation as the mini-tragedies that they are?”

Resetting pricing

Tuition discounting reached an all-time high in 2017-2018 as the estimated institutional discount rate for first-time, full-time students hit nearly 50 percent.¹⁰

Not only has discounting become financially untenable, but it can thwart inclusive enrollment if initial sticker shock drives away students from middle- and lower-income families.



"I'm astounded at how many schools I'm running into where nobody is a full-pay student, and yet the sticker price continues to go up. That does add confusion," Grawe says.

Simpson College responded to a drop in its Pell-eligible incoming students with the Simpson Promise,¹¹ which provides free first-year tuition to students who meet certain criteria, explains Simpson College President Jay Simmons.

"It's been very encouraging to us. We think that we have found a formula that works for this income group."

Cutting costs

Many institutions are going to have to make excruciating choices about programs to increase efficiency. "We need to make reallocations. We need to be willing to be nimble to do this. So

we need to cut back on our curriculum at many places," Lapovsky says.

Rich Karlgaard, Forbes, emphasizes the need for adaptability, which requires commitment to values and not just cutting corners in the short term and then finding "in the long term you've created rot that rots just about everything."

Grawe calls it "doubling down on your mission." "Who are we and what can we do to more completely fulfill that mission?"

Diversifying revenues

Liberal arts colleges in particular can increase revenue by considering online and hybrid courses, adding programs where student demand is high and expanding their admissions to populations, such as older students and veterans, Lapovsky advises.

Access and inclusivity require putting the student in the middle, she says, "And if we put the student in the middle, these sorts of programs are not anathema to our mission because they're serving students."

She notes that some liberal arts colleges have started offering online summer courses to keep that tuition on campus.

"The schools that I know that are thriving are the ones that are diversifying revenue."

"In a tail wind all you need is a strategy and execution. When the head wind comes, if you haven't invested in values as an institution, as an individual, then you'll find that life gets very shaky."

– Rich Karlgaard, Forbes



Model for Success

Simpson College introduced its Simpson Promise¹¹ in fall 2017 in response to a dramatic drop in Pell-eligible incoming students.

“Our promise to them is that for their first year at Simpson, the Iowa Tuition Grant and the Pell Grant will cover the cost of their tuition,” says President Jay Simmons. Students pay room and board and, for each subsequent year, the margin of the tuition increase.

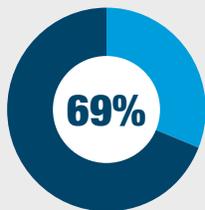
To be eligible, 2018 high school graduates as an example must:

- Be an Iowa resident and a graduate of an Iowa high school (the Iowa Tuition Grant typically covers about \$5,500 per family in income categories of \$60,000 or less).
- Submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) no later than July 1, 2018, and be eligible for federal aid.
- Reside on campus.
- Have a 2016 family adjusted gross income at or below \$60,000.
- Be a full-time, accepted, incoming first-year student for fall 2018.

“So what that has allowed us to do is say to those families, ‘Here is a transparent marker for what your costs will be, so by the time your student is a senior, your tuition fees may be \$6,000 to \$7,000 for you to attend Simpson for your senior year,’” Simmons says.

Ideas for Action

1. Analyze your institution’s data to determine how much you are discounting to individual students and then evaluate your pricing policies to see if a price reset might make sense. (*Lucie Lapovsky*)
2. Work toward increasing retention by disaggregating data to reveal which student groups your institution is losing, and why. (*Nathan Grawe*)
3. Consider pricing strategies, such as guaranteeing the net price for four years, price based on outcomes, or rebates or loan repayment help for unemployed graduates. (*Lapovsky*)
4. Maximize facility use by spreading courses throughout the day and week. (*Lapovsky*)
5. Complete these statements as you make financial decisions for your institutions: We are; we expect; we value; we need. (*Jon McGee*)



Families who eliminated a college from consideration at some point in their selection process because of cost.

Sallie Mae¹²

Questions for Campus

1. What is the current narrative regarding the broken economic model in higher education? (*Academic Impressions*)
2. What are some current myths regarding the broken economic model in higher education? What evidence can help counter those myths? (*Academic Impressions*)
3. What steps can make institutions more accessible and sustainable? (*Academic Impressions*)
4. What key constraints, existing or emerging, are sabotaging your budget? (*Jon McGee*)
5. What key opportunities or choices must we pose to offset the effect of the constraints? (*McGee*)
6. What economic choices have we defined thus far as non-negotiable and what is the process or practice for deciding what is negotiable and what isn't? (*McGee*)



Leadership Toward a New Public Narrative

Research confirms the importance and relevance of a liberal arts education, but the public narrative continues to deride it as elitist and impractical.

“The underlying message is that colleges are too expensive, too difficult to access and don’t teach people 21st century skills,” says Lynn Pasquerella, Association of American Colleges & Universities.

Some critics go so far as to ask, “Does higher education still matter?” “Absolutely,” says Freeman Hrabowski, University of Maryland, Baltimore County. “We must be the first ones to say, with joy, absolutely.”

The stakes are high for the liberal arts in this era of rapidly changing

technology that affects virtually every sector. “We’re living in a very volatile environment,” says Rich Karlgaard, *Forbes*. “Organizations will fail at a faster rate in the years ahead.”

It’s time for us to take the reins.

“In part I think the negative narrative is very much just the disconnect between who we think we are and what we think we’re doing and what it is that the world needs us to be,” says Randy Bass, Georgetown University. “The most important way to address the negative narrative is for us to actually write a narrative about our own future.”

Changing the message

The problem, says Brandon Busteded,

Gallup, stems not from the education liberal arts provides but rather public perception of that education.

“This is a branding issue that we’re facing right now.”

Why? “Anywhere you look in the data, the words ‘liberal’ and ‘arts’ are problematic and don’t resonate.”

He references a 2015 study¹³ that found that high-performance, low-income students who did not apply to liberal arts colleges gave reasons such as “What is a private liberal arts college?” “I don’t like learning useless things” and “I am not liberal.” Former HealthPartners CEO Mary Brainerd finds the term “soft skills” problematic, “Because that’s what employers tend to call the abilities and capabilities that people have when they graduate with a liberal arts education, and I just take a contrary point of view. The abilities people have when they finish a liberal arts degree are actually the most essential skills for being successful in a work environment.” Communication, problem solving, empathizing with differences and working well with people are among those skills.



Righting the false dichotomy

Busteed also asserts that the liberal arts has contributed to the negative narrative by distancing itself from vocational education. “We’ve created a silly, detrimental false dichotomy around either/or.”

He cites the traits employers ranked as most important in LinkedIn’s 2017 U.S. Emerging Jobs Report.¹⁴ “Leadership, communication and collaboration are the top three. Those are suspiciously liberal arts, so the relevance of this is as high as it’s ever been.”

Brainerd points to Princeton University’s goals of teaching students to “read critically, write cogently and think broadly.”¹⁵ “If there’s ever a prescription for the kind of workforce that I know I was interested in building in my organization, it’s people who have those skills and capabilities and far more.”

It’s time to shift to a both/and narrative that emphasizes employability as one of the benefits of a liberal arts education — but not the sole measure of value. “It obscures the reality that colleges and universities continue to represent powerful institutional forces in catalyzing individual and social transformation,” Pasquerella explains.

Focusing on the future

What can liberal arts institutions do to reshape the narrative?

Bass encourages institutions to think deeply about how their curricula are preparing students for the next 30 or 40

“In any other kind of campaign to change a narrative, we do the research: ‘What are the words, what are the stories, what are the ways to reframe old conversations engaging key constituencies in new ways?’ And I’m not sure higher education has actually done that.”

– Mary Brainerd, former HealthPartners CEO



years. “At the student and family level it’s particularly to assure that we have our eye on the future.”

Busteed predicts that pressure to prove return on investment will continue and recommends that the liberal arts starts collecting data that better measures its values. “It’s not just knowing our data but it’s also being imaginative in what kinds of new data we can collect.”

Adam Weinberg, Denison University, advocates an international approach. “Adding a global dimension to the liberal arts would dramatically strengthen our value proposition in every way, shape or form. It is not much of a leap to argue that being globally competent ... opens up endless possibilities for our graduates to add meaning to their lives.”

Finding champions

Allies can help institutions — and the liberal arts in general — communicate with key audiences. “When you’re trying to change a narrative, when you’re trying to get a message out, you need to choose amplifiers to help you with that message,” says Mary Thompson, G100 Network.

Brainerd suggests we ask “Who are the political leaders, who are the other community leaders who are able to bring their voice to the importance of a broader and more liberal education?” She and Bass also point to alumni and trustees as potential grassroots amplifiers.



Model for Success

Credo, a comprehensive higher education consulting firm, provides this model for telling your institutional story:

“Thriving private institutions understand who their students are and how to communicate the right message to them at the right time to draw them closer.”

- Storytelling is focused on student outcomes.
- Market research guides understanding and action around the institutional brand.
- Value proposition drives messaging internally and externally.
- The institutional story is internally and externally shared.

“Your institutional brand exists at the intersection of what constituents want, what’s true about the institution and current market perceptions.”



Model for Success

Engaging college and university trustees as amplifiers of the liberal arts narrative can be powerful. The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) created The Guardians Initiative¹⁶ “to involve college and university trustees in countering growing skepticism about the value of higher education.” The campaign operates with the goal “to create a new force of influential, informed citizens who can speak with independent credibility about the genuine benefits of higher education to individuals and to American society.”

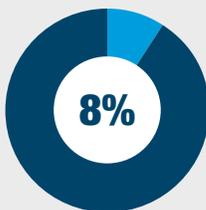
AGB provides information to assist institutions and their boards to get involved in The Guardians Initiative, learn about key issues in higher education, access resources to inform advocacy, support the initiative and remain updated on higher education news.

If you are interested in learning more, call **202-296-8400** or email guardians@agb.org



Ideas for Action

1. Work on formulating clear ways to articulate the capabilities your institution and the liberal arts foster in students. *(Mary Brainerd)*
2. Conduct research to identify key words, stories and other information your institution can employ to craft effective messages. *(Credo)*
3. Consider terminology like “universal education” or other wording that helps to clarify the education your institution provides. *(Brandon Busted)*
4. Connect with your community by sharing your educational capital in middle- and high-school classrooms and other settings. *(Randy Bass)*
5. Cultivate influencers and champions, such as community and business leaders, politicians, alumni and others to assist in delivering your message. *(Brainerd)*
6. Collect specific data about how alumni are using their liberal arts education. *(Bass)*



College admissions directors who strongly agree or agree that prospective students have a good understanding of what the liberal arts offer.

Inside Higher Ed/Gallup Survey of College and University Admissions Directors¹⁷

Questions for Campus

1. What is the impact of the current narrative about higher education on your campus? *(Academic Impressions)*
2. How might you reframe the higher education narrative in your community? *(Academic Impressions)*
3. What words in addition to “liberal arts” can your institution use to describe the education it provides? *(Brandon Busted)*
4. What new kinds of data can your institution collect to better demonstrate value? *(Busted)*
5. Who are the amplifiers who can help you communicate your message? *(Mary Thompson)*
6. How is your institution preparing all students for the future, and how can you communicate that? *(Randy Bass)*



Leadership in Action

The Liberal Arts Illuminated conference evaluation asked attendees how they will continue the strategic conversations started at the conference and what actions will result on their campuses. Here are some of the ways participants plan to actualize their curriculum, positive outcomes for all students and a new economic model, in their own words.

Continuing the conversation

- Immediately after the conference, the faculty director of our Mellon grant asked us all to send her our biggest takeaways from the conference and any ideas for innovations at our institution. Smaller groups will be meeting in the coming weeks to discuss next steps.
- The conversations will continue by being committed to bringing people together on a regular basis, and by looking for grassroots opportunities for change.
- I will continue to read and discuss the topic with colleagues and share the findings with the campus community and external constituents.
- We have already begun discussing how to share the content further.

- As a ‘non-college’ attendee, my take-aways were a little different, but it helped me think through conversations we need to be having as an organization to better educate our students on the value of liberal arts.
- I hope to continue to speak with senior leaders about intersections of conference conversations and the implementation of a new strategic plan.
- Will definitely be having more engaged conversations with our director for inclusive excellence.

Identifying a focus

- The conference gave us context and validation for work we are currently doing in our emerging Integrated General Education Program and ways we discuss our identity. In a liminal period of new administrative and academic structure, programs and a new president, our most useful discussions center around “mentoring” and constraints/tensions, etc. Strategies for addressing these concerns were brainstormed and continued work is expected.

- We will focus on a few aspects: assessment of outcomes and the mentoring ideas.
- We plan to write a strategic initiative for our goal of academic excellence in our strategic plan. The hope is to re-write the narrative of the liberal arts, perhaps renaming them to “Essential Skills,” and embed them throughout the curriculum.
- Continue conversations and data measuring on inclusive excellence as well work on branding.
- We have already been in communication with colleagues about how we will engage our community to “know our data.”
- Will begin by sending follow-up emails to get our “team strategy” straight, and then pushing for step one: asking for accurate campus data.
- Work toward improving current programs in inclusion and diversity. Engage faculty at large in improving the atmosphere of mentoring.
- We will request the necessary data to make informed choices about our curriculum and implore our institutional research department to respond with a strong rationale to their direct supervisor and perhaps the new president (that issue is still being discussed).

Taking specific action

- I am convening a faculty working group: Advocating for the Humanities Across the Disciplines.
- As a trustee, I will follow up with my team to see how our ideas are evolving. I also intend to support and encourage those on the ground piloting change, while sharing with other trustees the efforts being made.

“It takes courageous leadership right now, and it takes courageous leadership at every level.”

– Joretta Nelson, Credo

-
- I plan to write something for our newsletter. In addition, I will share what I've learned with my colleagues and see what, if anything, we could also use for our annual conference next year.
 - We have created a Google doc and assigned tasks. Plan to present to campus a summary and proposal to dig in.
 - Our group from campus already has several meetings and actions in place that have come from this conference.
 - With the group that we brought on campus, we have already set up time to meet again in the following week to set in stone the next step towards distributing our collected data to all faculty/staff and new employees.
 - Our team has a meeting set to develop an online and hard copy document on our data to distribute widely.
 - We are currently preparing a report that we will present to our vice president for academic affairs. We are also hoping to present our suggestions for an action plan to the entire faculty.
 - We will work to weave diversity, equity and inclusion into the fabric of everything we do. Specifically, we will create a team in my school, the school of arts and humanities, consisting of students, faculty and staff to brainstorm and develop an action plan that will move us forward toward our goal.

- We identified a specific action plan for improved data sharing for decision making.
 - We have developed a few projects based on the group work conducted after each speaker. We will start the work with the same group that attended this conference and gather more people as we grow out the action plan.
 - My colleague and I have a list of people to meet with, starting with our office of institutional effectiveness and our plans to get more data about our students and their success.
 - We will share the materials from this conference with colleagues, including other division chairs and deans.
 - I will use some of the worksheets we were given to host discussions about inclusive curricula with my colleagues.
 - Have already written a memo to our vice president of academic affairs identifying tasks and timetable for next two years.
 - We are now writing a strategic initiative grant for a year-long campus forum series focused on refocusing and reimagining the liberal arts on our campus. We are very enthusiastic about the opportunities to reimagine and illuminate the liberal arts at our public campus.
 - We will send a summary to our president and outline action items for him to approve.
- Laying groundwork for the future:**
- We hope to develop an initiative to strengthen liberal arts on our campus.

- We're developing a plan for an initiative that will start with learning and move toward actions that our community is most energized about.
- So many of my team members attended with me that it will become part of our annual operational planning to think about and apply some of the concepts and practices we discussed.
- Encourage the president and senior leadership to attend. Share with that team what was learned.
- We are moving on inclusive excellence through a robust plan for faculty development in the coming year.
- [We] will be meeting to discuss ways we can use liberal arts study to prepare our future students.

“Reframing the narrative is about leadership fearlessly facing discrepant outcomes. Realizing that the data can hurt to examine, but that that's an intentional and necessary experience of pain in order to transition your community to a better place. It's not about being paralyzed or afraid; it's about seeing the humanity behind the data.

“It's not about a budgeting practice. It's about making choices that reflect who we are and to whom we are committed. It's about investing in the difficult soul work of inclusion and the liberal arts. [T]o truly engage the liberal arts as we pursue inclusion we have to ensure the entire community is equipped to lead in this work.”

– Mary Dana Hinton, President
College of Saint Benedict

References

- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). *The Integration of the Humanities and Arts with Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in Higher Education: Branches from the Same Tree*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.
<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24988/the-integration-of-the-humanities-and-arts-with-sciences-engineering-and-medicine-in-higher-education>
- Denison University. (N.D.). *Study Abroad: Off-Campus Opportunities Act as a Catalyst in a Denison Education*. Granville, OH: Denison University.
<https://denison.edu/academics/study-abroad>
- Georgetown University. (N.D.). *Corepathways: Create Your Core*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University.
<http://corepathways.georgetown.edu/>
- National Survey of Student Engagement. (2017). *Engagement Insights: Survey Findings on the Quality of Undergraduate Education Annual Results 2017*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.
http://nsse.indiana.edu/NSSE_2017_Results/pdf/NSSE_2017_Annual_Results.pdf#page=5
- The Education Trust. (2018). *The State of Higher Education Equity*. Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust.
<https://edtrust.org/the-state-of-higher-education-equity/>
- Finley, A. & McNair, T. (2013). *Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement in High-Impact Practices*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges & Universities.
<https://www.aacu.org/assessinghips/report>
- Dougherty Family College. (N.D.) St. Paul, MN: University of St. Thomas.
<https://dfc.stthomas.edu/>
- Hart Research Associates for Association of American Colleges & Universities. (2015). *Bringing Equity and Quality Learning Together: Institutional Priorities for Tracking and Advancing Underserved Students' Success*. Washington, D.C.: AAC&U.
<https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2015AACUEquityReport.pdf>
- Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P., Yuan, X., Nathan, A. & Hwang, Y. (2017). *Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates by Race and Ethnicity – Fall 2010 Cohort* (Signature Report No. 12b). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.
<https://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport12-supplement-2/>
- National Association of College and University Business Officers. (2018). *2017 NACUBO Discounting Study*. Washington, D.C.: NACUBO.
<https://www.nacubo.org/Press-Releases/2018/Average-Freshman-Tuition-Discount-Rate-Nears-50-Percent>
- Simpson College. (N.D.) *The Simpson Promise*. Indianola, Iowa: Simpson College.
<http://simpson.edu/thesimpsonpromise/>
- Sallie Mae. (2018). *2017 How America Pays for College*. Newark, DE: Sallie Mae.
<https://www.salliemae.com/assets/Research/HAP/HowAmericaPaysforCollege2017.pdf>
- Hoxby, C. & Turner, S. *What High-Achieving Low-Income Students Know About College Options*. (2015). American Economic Review, American Economic Association, 105(5), pp. 514-17.
<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.p.20151027>
- LinkedIn. (2017). *LinkedIn's 2017 U.S. Emerging Jobs Report*. Sunnyville, CA: LinkedIn Corporation.
<https://economicgraph.linkedin.com/research/LinkedIns-2017-US-Emerging-Jobs-Report>
- Princeton University. (N.D.). *What Does Liberal Arts Mean?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.
<https://admission.princeton.edu/academics/what-does-liberal-arts-mean>
- Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. (N.D.). *Governing Boards as Advocates: The Guardians Initiative Aims to Reclaim Public Trust in Higher Education*. Washington, D.C.: AGB.
<https://www.agb.org/guardians>
- Jaschik, S. & Lederman, D. (2017). *2017 Survey of College and University Admissions Directors*. Washington, D.C.: Inside Higher Ed & Gallup.
https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/221051/admissions-directors-value-liberal-arts-not-understood.aspx?g_source=HIGHER_EDUCATION&g_medium=topic&g_campaign=tiles

Poetic Parting Words from Our Experts

We need to light up the danger, as Lynn Pasquerella, Association of American Colleges & Universities, so powerfully puts it, and Liberal Arts Illuminated provided us with the opportunity to examine and start addressing the pressures working against us. As our speakers so eloquently reminded us in their own words, and in true liberal arts style, in the words of some great authors and poets, we also have much to celebrate and proclaim.

“Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board. For some, they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of site, never landing, until the watcher turns his head away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.”

- Freeman Hrabowski, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, draws upon Zora Neale Hurston’s “Their Eyes Were Watching God” to remind us of the importance of our work.

“There are two groups in our society: People like us, people who have seen dreams fulfilled, people who are doing so well, whether you are a faculty member, administrator, trustee, donor, whatever, that you’re wanting to help other people’s children, other families. And then there are people who, in the words of Langston Hughes, have seen their dreams deferred,” Hrabowski says.

“The fundamental purpose of education is to help people to dream about the possibilities and to understand what’s possible as a human being and to develop a state of, a sense of self in such a way that the reading and the thinking and the dreaming can lead to them setting goals and having amazing vision for themselves and reaching and moving toward that vision.”

“I too can be a warrior, only my soldiers will be the 26 letters of the alphabet.”

- L. Lee Knefelkamp, Columbia University, cites “Zorba the Greek” author Nikos Kazantzakis to remind us of the transformational power a liberal arts education can have on students — if they can see themselves reflected in the curriculum.

“That is what the curriculum can do. That is what integrative learning can do. That is what real encounters can do — that it’s not just an intellectual victory but an identity victory. It’s an illumination in ways that are quite startling,” she says.

“One of the great things I think we need to ask in this conference and every time we sit down to that blank page that becomes, ultimately, the syllabus, is whose story gets to be told, and who tells the story, and who does the interpretation of the story.”

“More than anything else, being an educated person means being able to see connections that allow one to make sense of the world and act within it in creative ways.

“A liberal arts education is about gaining the power and the wisdom, the generosity and the freedom to connect.

“A liberal education is not something any of us ever achieve; it is not a state. Rather, it is a way of living in the face of our own ignorance, a way of groping toward wisdom in full recognition of our own folly, a way of educating ourselves without any illusion that our educations will ever be complete.

“Education for human freedom is also education for human community. The two cannot exist without each other.

“Liberal education nurtures human freedom in the service of human community, which is to say that in the end it celebrates love.”

- Conference co-host Mary Dana Hinton, College of Saint Benedict, quotes Bill Cronon to describe our collective mission and work together.

“What kept coming up for me, over and over again, is that it really is about being willing to lead — from whatever your position or role or location — in a way that places you in relationship with the students you have the privilege of educating. It’s about leading in such a way that you are willing to see students whom others may want to render invisible. It’s about looking at your syllabus and, with clear eyes, asking, ‘can each student I serve see themselves in this course?’ It’s about a campus community committing to mentoring every person on the campus to serve an institutional commitment to doing better and supporting the marginalized.”

HOSTED BY THE

COLLEGE OF
Saint Benedict  Saint John's
UNIVERSITY

Liberal Arts Illuminated aims to reframe the narrative to highlight the value of the liberal arts in practicing inclusive excellence.



Anne Schmidt Krump
and Paul Krump



COLLEGE OF SAINT BENEDICT

37 South College Avenue
St. Joseph, Minnesota 56374
 320-363-5011

SAINT JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

PO Box 2000 | 2850 Abbey Plaza
Collegeville, Minnesota 56321
 320-363-2011

 FOLLOW US AT:

#whylibarts

www.liberalartsilluminated.com

