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AGLS News

The Newsletter of
the Association for General
and Liberal Studies
WWW.AGLS.ORG
Volume 24 Number 1
Fall 2007



From the President

ASPAs supports strong general and liberal education

On Sunday, Sept. 9, I had the opportunity to address the Association for Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPAs) at the Brown Hotel in Louisville, KY. Immediately prior to my presentation, I listened to a panel of regional accreditors describing some accreditation “disconnections” and “connections” that the regional and specialized accreditors both acknowledge.

Both groups recognize their particular accreditation focus, the regionals’ institution focus versus the specialized accreditors’ program focus, creates some competing and confusing accreditation expectations. Despite these real “disconnections,” both groups are clearly united in their commitment to 21st Century student-learning outcomes.

Hearing this discussion led me to recount an experience I had as Coordinator of General Education at Vincennes University. Many of you know the story: program colleagues sometimes claim specialized accreditation expectations prohibit certain general education improvements. As I told my version of the story, the nodding heads and smiling faces suggested the audience recognized this familiar dodge. I recounted to the group my experience of phoning the specialized accreditors to check these stories. These calls always disproved the claims. This supposed accreditation “disconnection” is more illusion than reality.

The AGLS *Guide to Assessment and Program Review*, the subject of my ASPA presentation, includes several quotes that reveal the accreditors’ shared support of general education learning outcomes. Review

Continued, page 2

2007 AGLS Awards announced

It is a great pleasure to announce the winners of the 2007 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Effective Program Processes. The awards recognize general education program improvement efforts made by institutions employing the concepts and principles found in the AGLS publication *Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Program Review*.

Award applications, including detailed improvement narratives, were submitted through June 15. A distinguished panel of general education experts reviewed the narratives: Jerry Gaff, AAC&U; John Nichols, St. Joseph’s College; Barbara D. Wright, Western Association of Schools and Colleges; Lonnie J. Schaffer, Tidewater Community College; Marge Jackman, Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education; and Stephen Spanghel, The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. I personally want to thank the Awards Committee for taking time in July to read the many excellent applications, submit written reviews, and finalize their decisions via a conference call. The committee selected the following institutions as recipients of the 2007 Awards:

University of North Carolina at Asheville
Eastern Michigan University
Portland State University

UNCA and EMU were recognized for completing comprehensive reviews and implementing significant program improvements. PSU won for the enhancement process it has developed for its capstone program. Award-winning institutions will be recognized at the upcoming AGLS Annual Conference Oct. 19 in Portland, Maine. In a featured plenary following the awards ceremony, institution representatives will discuss key steps to successful program improvement and important lessons learned.

AGLS hopes the awards program will serve two goals: (1) encourage institutional commitment to the principles of student-centered general and liberal education and related continuous quality improvement processes, and (2) provide much-needed examples of recognized innovative program review.

The 2007 award-winning applications and supporting materials, as well as future winning applications, will be housed on the AGLS website so they can be accessed by institutions seeking examples of recognized enhancement efforts. This year’s winning narratives will soon be available for viewing at www.agls.org

Application materials for the 2008 Awards will be available on the AGLS website in April, 2008.

—Mike Gress
AGLS President

From the President, continued

pages 6 and 7 and read the back-cover quote from Marge Jackman for evidence of the support some ASPA members give. Reread the Systems Analysis questions on pages 4 and 5, and notice how many questions assume institution-wide commitment to the goals of general and liberal education.

Following my presentation, several audience members suggested I check their website to read about their support for general education outcomes. Others spoke to me about possible *Guide* presentations at their professional organization meetings, and some said they planned to recommend the *Guide* to

organization members and program faculty. Clearly, John Nichols was correct when he wrote that the regional and specialized accreditors “have become the best friends of general and liberal education in the 21st Century.” By “connecting” in their commitment to general education outcomes, both groups have contributed to a new focus on the merits of these outcomes.

Mike Gress
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From the Executive Director

Recharge your commitment to students and learning

We are heartened to be reminded that we are engaged in essential, timely work. I would encourage everyone to participate in that national conversation, and I appreciate all you do to assist AGLS in that effort.

As I sit here on a Sunday afternoon in mid-September, I am buried by the details of our upcoming meeting in Portland, Maine. In less than five weeks we will gather again from all parts of the nation to discuss all aspects of general and liberal education. We will each return home a little more tired and unfortunately lighter in the wallet, but I hope recharged in our commitment to students and learning.

Last week I learned that our hotel block had sold out, a nice problem to have. All signs point to a larger annual conference, with more presentations and workshops, the appearance of our inaugural Exemplary Program awards, and a renewal of that well-known AGLS collegiality. Thanks to all of you for helping to make this happen. A quick note—our annual conference is guided by our Strategic Plan, a shortened copy of which is provided in this newsletter with the full text available on our website at www.agls.org.

Finally, and then I have to get back to those piles on my desk, I am heartened to see general and liberal education return to the national spotlight in two recent articles: a commentary (“Our Compassless Colleges”) by Peter Berkowitz in the Wall Street Journal (7/5/07) and one by Harry R. Lewis (“A Core Curriculum for Tomorrow’s Citizens”) in The

Chronicle of Higher Education (7/7/07). Our own John Nichols, past president of AGLS, has written a response to the former, which by the time you read this we hope has appeared in the pages of the WSJ. Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities and winner of the 2005 AGLS Joseph Katz Award for Outstanding Leadership in General Education, responded as well. Her letter, which appeared on Sept. 11, can be read on the AAC&U website (www.aacu.org/about/statements/wsj.cfm).

We are heartened to be reminded that we are engaged in essential, timely work. I would encourage everyone to participate in that national conversation, and I appreciate all you do to assist AGLS in that effort.

Looking forward to seeing many of you in Portland, and if not, do plan to join us next September in Asheville, North Carolina.

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Increasing the Value of Volunteerism

Although student volunteerism is an accepted learning program practiced by many colleges, students do not always have an opportunity to discover all of the inherent learning possibilities. This is due to two reasons. First, faculty focus on the educational benefits associated with giving back to society while neglecting the learning elements that can enhance the theories found within a specific course. Second, most colleges' limit the pedagogical elements of the volunteer performance to a single course (the course where the volunteerism is required) and don't implement the experience in future courses.

By coupling the volunteer activity within courses in a major through the implementation of past academic volunteer requirements, students will gain a more profound appreciation of the volunteer effort and gain greater understanding into a discipline. To get students to discover this connectivity, the instructor creates assignments where the student applies the knowledge gained in the volunteer effort to specific course elements.

Regardless of when a student completes the volunteer requirement, instructors start by having students resubmit the written artifacts of the academic work related to the volunteer activity. These may include formal papers, reports, or journals identifying the various tasks that the student completed. As these are reviewed, the instructor looks for activities by the student that may have a direct or indirect association with potential theories that can be applied to the course.

These activities may be informal in nature such as calling on a particular student in class and asking them to apply their volunteer work in order to give greater illumination to a topic. In terms of formal activities (typically in written form and graded), instructors can have the student submit learning papers showing the

connection between theory and the volunteer experience. These may examine how the theory: could be questioned in terms of accuracy, could be refined, or how it may apply in other situations not explored in the literature or class. Another formal application includes the use of a case study. Here students describe a problem they experienced in the volunteer activity and apply various concepts from the course to solve the

This model can also be applied to other academic disciplines such as anthropology, biology, psychology, and sociology to name a few.

problem. In this activity students are required to use three or four theories being learned and apply them to the problem. They would then select the best theory that best addresses the problem while explaining why the others would not be as effective.

Historically, this model has been applied in the business program as its application fits nicely into theories relating to quality, leadership, and strategic decision making. For example, students have developed quality strategies based on the four steps of Total Quality Management. This is examined from the perspective of increasing funding and volunteer personnel within a community. Students have also used Trait Theory, Behavioral Theory, Situational Theory, Transformational Leadership, and Servant Leader to determine what leadership skills could be used

to increase the productivity of the volunteers within the non-profit organization. Synergistic Decision Making, Porter's Generic Competitive Strategies, and Business Ecosystems are examined from the perspective of creating a significant difference between one volunteer organization and another (again, to help in increasing the number of volunteers and funding).

This model can also be applied to other academic disciplines such as anthropology, biology, psychology, and sociology to name a few. In terms of anthropology, functionalism can be applied in relation to looking at the volunteer work environment and the society it serves as a living organism. In applying biology, Darwinism can be examined from the perspective of potential change that was witnessed within the volunteer organization. The personality theories found in psychology (especially those addressing gender communication, learning, and motivation) are very applicable to the clients and co-workers the student may have come into contact with while volunteering. Last, sociological theories of structural-functionalism, symbolic interactionism, role theory, and conflict theory can be applied within the volunteer organization.

Initial results from this model have shown that students have a better understanding of the course material, look at their volunteer work from a new perspective, and are more motivated to complete other forms of volunteer activities as they discover it enhances their career objectives.

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AGLS/AIS Fairfax Conference Article October 2005

From Oblivion to Civic Engagement: Strategies for College Instructors

In a college classroom, oblivion may be seen in students who focus exclusively on the concrete tasks required in the syllabus. This is a problem not just of low level thinking about extrinsic rewards. This is also a problem of the competitive strategy of winning the course for the GPA rather than learning the concepts for wisdom. Instructors may unintentionally encourage this narrowness of perspective by framing syllabi in concrete and individualistic terms—in reasonable response to the demand of students to “Just tell me what I have to do.” This is driven by a desire to limit the scope of the course to a manageable confined list of tasks rather than a component of a larger, integrated understanding of the world (Salovey & Schleuter, 1999). The instructor’s dilemma is one of survival, i.e. avoiding poor course ratings (Boice, 1999), as well as maintaining philosophical integrity (Carter, 1997; Winfree, 2005).

The impatience which sparks thoughtless overreaction and which inspires people to seek oblivion-inducing postures can be mediated by focusing on the value, and even the enjoyment, of the contemplation and preparation steps. Those who would see them as delaying tactics need to consider that without them disaster may loom from a hasty aggressive gesture or a weak effort to appease. Those who are impatient to ‘just DO something!’ rather than plan carefully will be reassured if there is some evidence that decisions are being made and leadership can be relied on to follow through.

By the same logic, failure to follow through, or a tendency to change policy, will undermine confidence in the use of diplomacy to solve conflicts (Deutsch, 1973). Panicky thoughts of disaster will overtake the calm and rational, for the energy of catastrophic thinking can easily cloud the vision of the patient (Gilbert, 1985). Therefore, the thoughtful leader must respect the fears of the short-

sighted by clearly articulating the vision of the long term, expanding horizons, and thereby liberate the blinkered and fearful. If nothing else, the diagram below serves as a vehicle for discourse by providing a common image if not language for appreciating different perspectives.

This model is intended to provide a visual reference for anyone plagued with indecision or characterized by impulsive overreaction. The constant state of mak-

actions and reactions. The full paper addresses the meaningfulness of each component, for instance, oblivion is depicted with a mixed metaphor of a cloud and a thought balloon, indicating its permeable and undefined state. The synthesis reveals that any action may be a result of both impulse and thoughtfulness; any action may in turn trigger areas of oblivion as well as contemplation. The usefulness of this model is to broaden the perspective of others’ motivation for action. By considering the natural state of oblivion regarding others’ perspectives and the fact that emerging from oblivion always presents an option for thought even if it was not habitual, the wise leader can facilitate more thoughtful reactions in others by deliberately avoiding the triggers for passionate overreaction.

Such diagrams may serve a leader responsible for the sustained health of the community—in particular, it may serve the many university faculty and staff who find themselves explaining options and encouraging

choices in their students. By sketching the path and conferring with the members of the group one may determine whether adequate contemplation and preparation has occurred before taking action, or whether the group is paralyzed in one of the stages of contemplation or preparation. The actions may be reconsidered as a series of sub-actions, each of which involves looping back to the larger picture of preparation. Engaging in the more thoughtful path will also render it self-sustaining, resulting in a new identity: one of thoughtfulness and richness of character, and one of a civil society.

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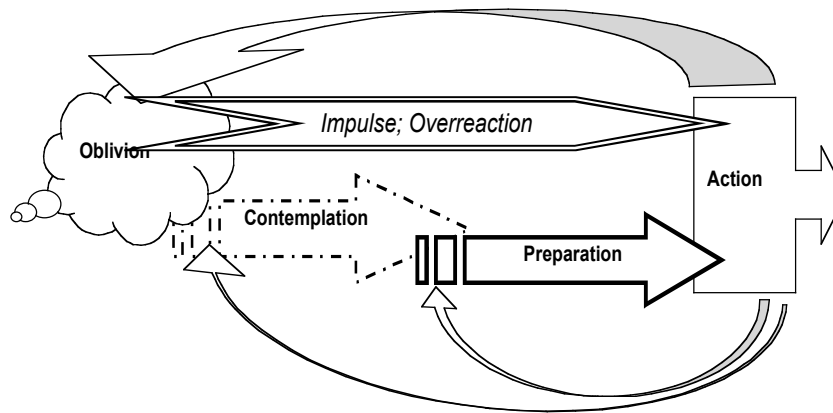


Figure 1. Iconic Organizer for Dynamic Stability. Petersen, N. J. (in press). From oblivion to engagement: Dissolving barriers to thoughtful response. Quick Hits IV for Civic Engagement. University of Indiana Press.

ing decisions will challenge even the most ethical person to do what is right, for there are multiple perspectives and multiple goals to consider. However, the likelihood of making ethical decisions will be increased if the steps of contemplation and preparation are deliberately embraced as necessary to avoid impulsive overreaction. Blindly impulsive responses, whether passive or aggressive, preclude the thoughtful consideration of others’ points of view. Of even greater concern, though, is that the repeated use of an impulsive reactionary path will simply sustain its course, rendering the reactionary ever more oblivious to the effects of the decision. Not only is the decision itself important, but the way we reach the decision is, too, for that way becomes a habitual path less open to new perspectives the more it is used.

These concept maps are ‘iconic organizers’ because they use visual metaphors to conceptualize predictable

AGLS/AIS Fairfax Conference Article October 2005

2003 National Endowment for the Humanities Focus Grant: Building Islamic Studies into the Undergraduate Curriculum

September 11 and our subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have emphasized to all Americans the political necessity of knowing more about the Islamic world. Currently, 1.4 billion people, more than 20% of the world's population, are Muslim. Globally, Islam is growing rapidly and Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the United States. Muslims in North America now number 11 million people. There are over 1,200 mosques in the United States, more than 60% of them founded in the last 25 years. Las Cruces, home to New Mexico State University (NMSU), has its own mosque, recently built to provide a religious home for local Muslims, many of whom study in the agriculture, engineering, and computer science departments. Despite the global importance of Islam and its growing presence in communities in the U.S. it is apparent that U.S. university curricula have often not adequately reflected the existence of the contemporary Islamic world and the rich and diverse history of Islamic cultures and societies.

NMSU is one of the two leading institutions of higher learning in the state of New Mexico, the other being the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. Located in southern New Mexico, NMSU is less than 50 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border. Until recently, the university has tended to focus its attention south, and one of its emphases has been on U.S. borderland studies, including cultural exchanges. This has given the institution a historic mission to promote multicultural understanding and provide opportunities to learn about the cultures of diverse societies in an increasingly complex and interdependent world.

In the aftermath of 9/11, many faculty and students at NMSU expressed their concern about the depth of ignorance in America regarding the religion and cultures of the Islamic world. With no degree programs and few scholars in Islamic Studies, New Mexico, like many other U.S. states, needed an innovative and interdisciplinary program to address the profound need of faculty, students,

and the community for informed knowledge about the Islamic world, past and present.

My 2003 NEH Focus Grant aimed to strengthen the Islam-related content of undergraduate courses across the humanities disciplines at NMSU by building knowledge and understanding of Islam and Muslim societies into the existing undergraduate humanities curriculum and into the development of a new general education course on Islam.

The HFG supported a series of eight faculty development workshops at NMSU during the spring and fall semesters of 2003. The workshops enabled a group of nine committed "core" faculty from the departments of English, Government, History, Languages and Linguistics, the Women's Studies Program, the Honors Program, and the Religious Studies Minor to increase their understanding and knowledge of Islam and Islamic societies through intensive and collaborative study. Each workshop addressed themes and topics relevant to the disciplines and concerns of the core faculty. The workshops were led by nationally prominent visiting scholars. Reading lists for the workshops were made available in advance of each workshop, and all core participants committed to attend all workshops and to do all of the readings for each workshop. Other faculty at NMSU expressed great interest in the HFG and some attended the workshops on an occasional basis.

Workshops were open to other non-core faculty to attend, providing readings were done for the workshop. The workshops involved a morning and an afternoon session, each approximately two hours. Visiting scholars gave presentations in the morning session, and the afternoon sessions were devoted to general discussion and questions. Core faculty took turns leading the discussions. At the end of the year, core participants produced a revised syllabus integrating knowledge gained through the workshops into courses they already teach through the addition of a module on Islam. Core faculty are now teaching these courses. Collectively, the core designed a new general education course for the College of Arts and Sciences

called "Islam and the West: Cultural Contacts, Conflicts, and Exchanges," a team-taught course.

Catalyzed by the NEH Focus Grant, NMSU is now pursuing other opportunities to incorporate Islamic Studies into the curriculum to prepare our students better for the 21st century. Following my application to the Center for International Exchange of Scholars program Contemporary Islam: A Program to Promote Mutual Understanding between East and West, approval has been given for a Fulbright Visiting Specialist from the Muslim world to come to NMSU for the spring semester of 2006.

Additionally, as part of the ongoing efforts to internationalize the NMSU curriculum, NMSU now offers elementary and intermediate Arabic. NMSU has now also an exchange program with Al-Akhawayn University in Irfane, Morocco. For the first time, NMSU now offers its students the opportunity to continue their study of Arabic and of Islamic history and culture in Morocco.

I have designed a website detailing the grant and its activities. The website can be found on the History Department webpage at NMSU (www.nmsu.edu/~histdept/) or on my NMSU webpage. The purpose of making this site available is to help faculty in other institutions work out how they too can incorporate Islamic Studies better into their own teaching. Syllabi, reading lists, bibliographies, workshop descriptions and outlines are available here to give you ideas for how to build Islamic Studies into your own teaching. We believe that our efforts to build Islamic Studies into the undergraduate humanities curriculum at NMSU will provide a replicable model for other universities needing to expand awareness of Islam and Muslim societies. We are very grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for awarding us this Focus Grant!

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AGLS Indianapolis Conference Article October 2007

Science and Religion Taking Each Other Seriously

All 45 required semester hours in general education are offered in team-taught and interdisciplinary courses very evenly spread throughout all eight semesters. This Core program includes a course that focuses on evolution, science literacy and the compatibility of science and religion. Pope John Paul II’s “truth cannot contradict truth” and Stephen Jay Gould’s “non-overlapping magisteria” (NOMA) are our guiding principles.

We begin our discussion with examples of evolution that have been observed:

- Examples of animal population that have undergone natural selection and speciation while being observed over a small number of generations. An excellent example is the population of Sockeye Salmon that have evolved into a new species in Lake Washington over a period of just 42 years.
- Examples of evolved resistance of pathogens to medication and pests to pesticides and the great cost that this has on society.

We follow with a discussion of the fossil record and examples of excellent fossil intermediates such as:

- Archaeopteryx and other fossils showing the transition from dinosaurs to birds
- Fossil whales showing the transition from land mammals to modern whales

With so many examples of evolution to choose from, and with controversy in some communities, it is easy for a teacher to avoid human evolution. We

think that our own evolution is the most important and interesting example for students to study. By avoiding human evolution a student is more likely to dismiss scientific evidence or consider pseudoscientific explanations of our origins. We allow students to examine data on comparative studies between humans and other species showing the genetic, developmental, and anatomical evidence that support the concept that humans and chimpanzees shared a recent common ancestor.

Fifteen to 20 years ago teaching about the fossil record of humans was relatively simple because only about 6 species were well known. As a result, instructors were likely to expect students to learn many details about each species. The names and nicknames of these hominids, such as Lucy, *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus* (Peking Man), Neanderthals, are quite familiar. However since then, a large number of significant fossil finds has increased the number to about 24 species. With such a rich fossil record of human evolution we can no longer expect students to learn many details or even the names of so many species. We suggest focusing the instruction on characteristics at the genus level (*Homo*, *Australopithecus*, *Paranthropus*, *Ardipithecus*) and on changes over time. Many casts of fossil skulls are commercially available, and excellent images are easily found on the internet for examination. We have students record and measure features on

skulls and work out the trends that evolved over a sequence of time.

In addressing why this is important for students to learn we use both classical and contemporary sources. quotes. Saint Augustine on the literal meaning of Genesis and Saint Thomas Aquinas in his Summa wrote about the compatibility of faith and reason and the danger of rejecting our knowledge of the earth in favor of foolish opinions about scripture. Contemporary Episcopalians suggest that limiting the teaching of evolution would undermine our ability to combat disease and the ability of students to understand constantly changing systems.

The topic of human evolution is one that simply demands interdisciplinary teaching and learning. The decision between evolution and “creationism” (contrary positions) is one that must be based on quality work in empirical science; theology and scripture won’t settle it. On the other hand, the decision between creation and materialism (contradictory positions) cannot be settled by science and must be dealt with by philosophical or theological inquiry Our claim is that the topic is adequately (humanly speaking) treated, if and only if both decisions are given first-rate and methodologically self-conscious treatment.

Robert Brodman
 Professor of Biology
 John Nichols
 Professor of Philosophy
 St. Joseph’s College Indiana

Theme: Who Are We? Old, New, and Timeless Answers From Core Texts

ACTC Conference

April 3-6, 2008

Radisson Hotel, Plymouth Harbor, Massachusetts

Plenary Speakers Thurs.–Sat.: Wm. Theodore de Bary, Columbia Univ., author, *Confucian Tradition & Global Education*; Joseph Bottum, editor, *First Things*; Anne Leavitt Dean of Social Sci., Malaspina-Univ. College; Phillip R. Sloan, President ACTC, Univ. of Notre Dame, editor, *Controlling Our Destinies: Historical, Philosophical, Ethical, and Theological Perspectives on the Human Genome Project*. Theophus Smith, Emory

Univ., author, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America*.

To encourage collegial discussion, ACTC papers are short (5 pages, double-spaced), treat one core text of your choice and develop the conference theme. We especially welcome new attendees and will work with you to help place your paper. Please see our website, www.coretexts.org for the full conference announcement and for our online registration.

Registration includes price of six meals (Thursday night reception and dinner, three breakfasts and two lunches), plus admission to all activities, & subvention for published

proceedings of the conference.

ACTC is a professional, liberal arts association dedicated to the use of “world classics or texts of major cultural significance” in undergraduate education. We encourage wide and diverse consideration of texts, pedagogy, and curricula. We do hope that you’ll join us.

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AGLS Mission

AGLS serves colleges and universities by helping students and faculty enjoy the benefits of a liberal education attained through quality general education.

AGLS is a community of learners - faculty, students, administrators, alumni - intent upon improving general and liberal education at two-year and four-year institutions. AGLS identifies and supports the benefits of students' liberal education attained through general education programs. As an advocate, AGLS tracks changes in general education and liberal studies, and sponsors professional activities that promote successful teaching, curricular innovation, and effective learning.

AGLS Goals:

- Promote the Quality and Centrality of General and Liberal Education in the United States and Abroad
- Clarify the Relationship between Assessment and Learning in General and Liberal Education
- Foster a Stronger Relationship between Two-Year and Four-Year Colleges in General and Liberal Education

AGLS appreciates the support of its institutional members

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AGLS Membership

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Institutional Membership Benefits

AGLS has designed this enhanced institutional membership package both to promote an institution's general/liberal studies program and to allow institutions to support individual members at their institutions. Benefits include the following:

- Listing of the member institution in AGLS newsletter, programs, website, and other appropriate publications.
- Hot linking the AGLS website with the program description of the member institution
- Three individual memberships to AGLS, designated by the member institution. Each membership includes a subscription to the *Journal of General Education* and *AGLS News*, as well as access to the AGLS listserv.
- Those same three designated institutional members receive a 20% discount on fall conference registration fees.
- An additional copy of the *Journal of General Education* and three additional copies of *AGLS News*.