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AGLS News

*The Newsletter of
the Association for General
and Liberal Studies*

WWW.BSU.EDU/AGLS

Volume 23 Number 1
Fall 2006



October Conference:

Conference Activities to Reflect New AGLS Mission, Goals

One purpose of a mission statement and related goals is to give focus and direction to an organization's activities. They also enable the organization to measure its progress and success. From the conference theme to the plenary sessions and conference location, the Executive Council and conference planners have deliberately designed the 2006 AGLS Conference to reflect the newly developed mission and goals.

The conference will provide mission-driven activities all three days. The theme, "Alignments and Linkages: Strengthening Curriculum to Improve General Education," was chosen because it reflected the AGLS mission of "helping students and faculty enjoy the benefits of a liberal education attained through quality general education." Session topics represent a range of general education issues: innovative ideas about teaching, assessing and administering general education.

The AGLS goals were considered as plenary speakers and topics were chosen. For instance, Carol Geary Schnieder, AAC&U President and 2005 Katz Award winner, will "promote the quality and centrality of general and liberal education" with her presentation, "Putting Students in the Loop: 21st Century Strategies for General—and Liberal!—Education."

Council members and conference planners are working to "clarify the

relationship between assessment and learning in general education" with the unveiling of the AGLS publication, "Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Program Review." Conference attendees will receive a copy upon check-in, and several sessions are dedicated to the "Guide." Thursday's plenary session will introduce the "Guide," presenting a discussion of the needs and principles that drove its development, plus reports on initial experiences with the "Guide" at three "test" institutions.

A Friday session will begin an effort to push quality general education using the standards and principles found in the "Guide." This working session will result in a draft of a new AGLS program to identify and recognize exemplary general education programs. The Saturday plenary marks another goal-related effort, the goal of "collaborating with regional and professional accrediting bodies." This panel discussion addresses the significance of the "Guide" and will include contributions by Stephen Spangehl, Director of AQIP for the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, and Marge Jackman, Associate Director of the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. John Nichols, lead writer of the "Guide," and Jerry Gaff, AAC&U Senior Scholar, will also participate.

Finally, the goal of fostering "a stronger relationship between two-year and four-year colleges in general and liberal education" is also addressed. The Oct. 19-21 conference, to be held in Indianapolis, IN, is being co-hosted by Ball State (four-year) and Vincennes University (primarily two-year education, now with some four-year degrees). Also, one plenary session being planned will feature the Lumina Foundation for Education's efforts to support community college students. Their "'Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count' is a national initiative to help more community college students succeed." AGLS is truly a "community of learners...intent upon improving general and liberal education," and the Indy location offers numerous opportunities to build that community while experiencing its restaurants and attractions.

More information about the conference and accommodations, the sessions and speakers, and the new mission and goals can be found on the AGLS website: www.bsu.edu/agls. The October weather in Indy should be beautiful, and the AGLS welcome will be, as always, warm.

*Michael Gress
AGLS Vice-President
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NACADA News (see www.nacada.ksu.edu for complete info)

Conference: “Diverse Advising for a Diverse World”

Oct. 18-21, 2006, Indiana Convention Center & The Westin, Indianapolis, IN. Keynote Presentation: “Thinking DEEPLY about Academic Advising and Student Engagement” by George D. Kuh, Chancellor’s Professor and Director, Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University Bloomington.

New publications at the National Conference:

- *Learning Reconsidered 2* – joint publication by NACADA, ACPA, ACUHO-I, ACUI, NACA, NASPA, and NIRSA
- *Foundations of Academic Advising – CD2 Academic Advising Delivery Models*
- *Academic Advising: New Insights for Teaching and Learning in the First Year*. A joint publication by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition and NACADA
- *Pocket Guide – What is Academic Advising?*

Professional Development in San Antonio, TX.

- *Accountability in Academic Advising: Data-driven Decision-making to Promote Institutional Change*, Jan. 25-26, 2007.
- *5th Annual Academic Advising Administrators’ Institute*, Jan. 28-30, 2007.
- *3rd Annual Assessment of Academic Advising Institute*, Jan. 31-Feb. 2, 2007.

AGLS appreciates the support of its institutional members

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University of North Carolina - Asheville
Vincennes University
Wright State University

**See back page for information about
AGLS institutional memberships.**

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AGLS News online:

www.bsu.edu/web/agls/newsletter_archive.html

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

From the Executive Director

As I work feverishly to craft the schedule for our upcoming conference in mid-October, let me take a moment to highlight a few other important notes:

- Congratulations to Steve Bowen, recently voted president-elect by the AGLS membership. Steve, Dean and CEO of Emory University's Oxford College campus, will serve two years as president-elect before assuming the office of president from October 2008-10.

- Welcome to Rob Mauldin, Director of General Education at Shawnee State University, recently elected AGLS secretary, and to Lonnie Schaffer, Associate Vice-President for College Transfer Education at Tidewater Community College, Karyn Sproles, Associate Dean of General Education at James Madison University, and Larry Kaptain, Dean of the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University, elected to serve as Executive Council members for the next two years.

- Finally, thanks to Tom Lowe, Michael Farrall, and Gigi Derballa, outgoing members of the Executive Council. Thanks for all your efforts, ideas, and dedication for the last two years. We wish you all well in the future.

- After a mass national mailing announcing our new mission and goals, 21 national and international colleges and universities have opted to support AGLS as Institutional Members for 2006-2007. We are grateful for their confidence and support. If you and your institution would like to consider such a membership, details can be found at www.bsu.edu/web/agls/institutional_benefits.html.

- By the time you read this, *Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment & Program Review* will be ready for sale. Free copies will be distributed to those who attend this year's conference. Other copies can be ordered from the AGLS website.

- It is not too late to register for this year's conference. Details can be found on the conference website (accessible from our main site www.bsu.edu/agls.) If this year is not possible, plan ahead for next year's meeting in Portland, Me. We hope by then to have fleshed out our

guidelines to recognize exemplary programs, and to be honoring our first model general and liberal education programs.

In late July, local members of the AGLS Executive Council had the chance to hear Harry R. Lewis, former Dean of Harvard College, and author of the recently published book, *Excellence Without a Soul*. Professor Lewis was in Indianapolis as a guest of Beverley Pitts, a past-president of AGLS and currently president of the University of Indianapolis. In a wide-ranging conversation over lunch, Dr. Lewis expanded and elaborated on many of his comments in his new book. Let me leave you with just a flavor of his text, one that goes to the heart of our work with general/liberal education, as well as the administration of such programs and of institutions of higher education as a whole:

The restoration of a new core to undergraduate education, an approach to education that will turn dependent adolescents into wise adults, circles back to the question of leadership. The university's leaders must believe in the process of self-discovery, and they must articulate that belief. They must support and praise faculty and coaches and deans and career counselors and therapists who recognize its importance.

I hope you will be able to join us in Indianapolis October 19-21 to discuss these and other issues so close to our work and to our identities as educators. See you all soon.

Paul W. Ranieri
AGLS Executive Director
Ball State University

Find all the information you need about AGLS activities on our website.

Invitation from ACTC

To All AGLS members:

You are invited to participate in the 13th Annual Conference of the Association for Core Texts and Courses. ACTC is a general, liberal arts association which encourages the use of core texts in common course undergraduate curricula.

We encourage much discussion at our conferences, and our papers are short: 5 pages, double-spaced. This year's conference is in Williamsburg, VA, March 29-April

1. The conference theme will treat the range of core programs from the local to the global. You may register through our website: www.coretexts.org beginning Sept. 15, 2006.

Do join us in Williamsburg, home of this year's 400th Anniversary of Jamestown.

Association for Core Texts and Courses

Exemplary Session Overviews

We invite the presenters of recommended sessions to write up their presentation for publication in this newsletter.

What Can Mission Statements Tell Us About Student Learning and Educational Leadership?

A dialogue between Jack Meacham, SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor, University at Buffalo–SUNY, and Jerry G. Gaff, Senior Scholar, Association of American Colleges and Universities.

BEFORE the October, 2005, AGLS and AIS National Conference presentation:

Jerry: Our goal should be to bring about a great discussion. Let's do our best to encourage those who attend our session to participate.

Jack: Agreed. How about if I begin by briefly describing the survey of student learning goals contained in mission statements for 312 of the colleges and universities listed in The Princeton Review's The Best 331 Colleges. I'll mention that 117 institutions provided from zero to three learning goals, 105 included four to six goals, and 90 had more than 6. The average number of goals was five. Then I'll identify the student learning goals that are most common in these mission statements, although only the first one was found in about half of the mission statements. The rest were in from 16 to 39 percent of the statements:

- liberal education;
- contributing to the community;
- leadership skills;
- social responsibility;
- personal perspectives, values, and moral character;
- ability for critical analysis and logical thinking;
- appreciating diversity;
- imagination and creativity;
- continuing, lifelong learning;
- building communities that acknowledge and respect difference;
- engaged, responsible citizenship in a democratic society; and
- international and global understanding.

I think our audience will be surprised to learn of the learning goals that appear in the mission statements of fewer than 15% of these institutions:

- public speaking abilities;
- writing abilities;
- knowledge and understanding of science;
- knowledge and appreciation of the fine and performing arts;
- engaging with challenging ethical, moral, and human dilemmas;
- working cooperatively with others;
- knowledge and understanding of social and historical phenomena;
- understanding social justice issues;
- mathematical understanding; and
- environmental understanding and sensitivity.

Jerry: Right. What is not included in these institutional mission statements is quite surprising, especially in light of a national report of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree (2004). That report identifies an emerging

“national consensus” of what constitutes a 21st century education. The national consensus highlights important learning goals that are rarely found in these institutional mission statements, such as communication skills, breadth of knowledge, ethics and values, and working together with others.

Jack: OK, I'll include that. Then I'll turn the microphone over to you, to reflect on what these survey data mean for the involvement of members of boards of trustees and campus presidents in establishing and maintaining the educational mission of their institutions. After all, although the mission statement usually is a composite of ideas and recommendations from many campus constituencies, it is “owned” primarily by the president and the board.

Jerry: I'd like to begin by reminding the audience of AAC&U's now-classic report, Integrity in the Curriculum, which called for the faculty as a whole to assume greater responsibility for the curriculum as a whole, and then expand on this idea by emphasizing how the president and board of trustees must act consistently and repeatedly to assure institutional integrity. They must be certain that their organization does what it says and says what it does. It seems essential that the mission statement of any educational institution include a description of the education that is envisioned for its students. Then I'll explicitly ask why there appears to be such a divergence between what is found in the mission statements of these “best” colleges and universities and what AAC&U found to be the national consensus on goals for undergraduate education. And I'll suggest that at least part of the reason may be a lack of educational leadership among presidents, the senior administrators reporting to them, and members of boards of trustees.

Jack: Good. At that point, we'll either have the audience's attention or not. Best to turn things over by introducing a couple of the questions that we prepared last week, such as Who should be involved in setting the goals for student learning? To what extent should faculty and administrations share common responsibility for establishing the goals for students' learning to guide decisions by faculty members (both collectively and individually) about the curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment? Oh yes, at some point, I'll mention our article that will appear in Liberal Education early in 2006.

Note: “Learning Goals in Mission Statements: Implications for Educational Leadership” by Jack Meacham and Jerry G. Gaff appears on pp. 6-13 in the Association of American Colleges and Universities publication Liberal Education Vol.92, No.1 Winter 2006.

AFTER the presentation:

Jerry: That went well, didn't it? I think the discussion could have lasted another half hour or more.

Jack: I overheard so many good ideas when the audience members were discussing among themselves at their tables. I was surprised when someone pointed out that while it had once been common for campus presidents to rise up from among the faculty, now it's more often the case that the life experiences of campus presidents reflect a managerial rather than a learning culture. That's just an example of much that I heard that you and I hadn't anticipated in planning this session.

Exemplary Sessions, continued

Jerry: And we didn't even get to some of the questions that we had hoped to discuss, such as what kind of leadership is needed from the faculty, the academic deans or provosts, the presidents, and the trustees to operate an effective general education program? And how can we encourage and structure more dialogue among the trustees, the president, and the faculty about student learning goals and their assessment?

Jack: Well, these are good questions that can be taken up at the AGLS annual meeting in Indianapolis in October, 2006. Meanwhile, I'll bet a lot of the people who were in our session are clicking on their campus's mission statement for the first time to see what it really says about student learning!

*Jack Meacham, SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor
University at Buffalo—SUNY
Jerry G. Gaff, Senior Scholar
Association of American Colleges and Universities*

My Ishmael and New Challenges to General Education

General Education is usually based on the premise that there are certain standard subjects that students would benefit from learning as part of a college education that transcend their specific career goals. In Daniel Quinn's novel, *My Ishmael* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), a gorilla named Ishmael, who communicates to his students telepathically, argues that one of the problems with contemporary education is that students are kept in school for too long and forced to study things that they do not need to know. He explains that in the so-called primitive societies, young people only learn knowledge necessary for their survival and for their ability to function as an adult in their society. By the age of thirteen or fourteen, they have learned everything that they need to know and undergo a rite of passage that marks their coming into adulthood. Quinn suggests that the main purpose of education in contemporary American society through graduation from college is to keep young people off the job market as a means of regulating the economy. Extrapolating from Quinn's critique of the educational system as a whole, one might conclude that he would also suggest that General Education is a waste of time because it does nothing to prepare people for survival or for a career.

I found Quinn's arguments echoed in a recent essay in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* by Bill Coplin, professor of public affairs at Syracuse University and author of a book entitled *10 Things Employers Want You to Learn in College* (September 3, 2004). Coplin criticizes universities and their professors for false advertising: promoting a college education as an essential prerequisite for career success while offering instead courses taught by professors only interested in their own narrow subjects and expecting students to develop that same interest.

The challenge of *My Ishmael* to General Education is not one to be ignored or rejected, but rather might prove a useful catalyst for reforming General Education in the twenty-first century. The whole premise of Quinn's book is that individuals need to become educated in order to have the insights necessary to make a difference in the world. Instead of sticking with the entrenched defense of knowledge for its own sake or making sure that each academic department retains a stake in General Education, perhaps we could actually make more of an effort to

make General Education more practical. It seems to me that we would be in a better position to defend General Education to our colleagues in professional disciplines, to parents, students, accrediting bodies, and to the general public if we could cater more to aspects of students' lives that would be a bit more practical.

There are other possibilities for responding to Quinn's challenge to General Education. We might consider featuring interactive learning to a greater degree in the General Education curriculum. Can we find a way to allow for more individualized instruction in General Education, catering to student interests in a way that is economically viable without destroying the whole concept of General Education? We could make more of those experiences that students have in common through General Education interdisciplinary experiences. Finally, we might even include in the curriculum such books as *My Ishmael* that would promote student involvement in the discussion about the value of General Education and why they are in college in the first place. General Education would seem to be the best, perhaps the only, place to include such a discussion in the curriculum. Whatever we decide to do, it will take new ideas and approaches to meet the new challenges to General Education in the twenty-first century.

*Kenneth L. Campbell
Associate Dean, Humanities and Social Sciences
Monmouth University*

Exploring Classroom Climate through Interactive Theatre

“STOP!” An AGLS conference participant interrupts the performance. She comes onstage to replace the actor playing the professor of Stats 101, to try out her own strategy for turning a student argument about diversity into a “teachable moment.” The actors playing the students in Stats 101 prepare to respond in character.

This is interactive theatre, in which audience members become active performers, taking advantage of the opportunity to explore multicultural dimensions of teaching in a “safe space” and get feedback from colleagues. The script the University of Missouri-Columbia (MU) troupe performed for AGLS, “Conflict in the Classroom,” portrays a statistics class discussing correlation coefficients, when an argument unexpectedly breaks out. The sample problem, correlating deer kills with weather conditions, provokes one student to question the data because of Indian treaty rights, and another student to accuse the first of prejudice against Native Americans. As the argument grows heated, the instructor quashes it, calling the issues “inappropriate for this class.” The scene ends with a tense silence: the instructor's attempt to move on to another statistics problem failed. After the brief performed scene, the actors stay in character to answer questions from the audience. Then the actors begin to re-enact the scene—but this time audience members replace the instructor and try out their own ideas for handling the situation, as the characters improvise realistic responses.

AGLS conference participant Robert Frankle called the session, “one of the best faculty development exercises I have ever experienced,” noting “I learned a lot about my own teaching as a result of temporarily playing the role of teacher in this staged

Exemplary Sessions, continued

diverse classroom. . . the student actors were superb, so one really did think of them as real students and not as actors playing a part.”

The interactive sketch, “Conflict in the Classroom,” was created by the CRLT Theatre Program at the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) at the University of Michigan. The writing process began with actor participation in workshops that focused on the ways in which student gender, race/ethnicity, and other identity characteristics can unintentionally bias instructor perception of students and classroom dynamics. Different pedagogical approaches to conflict in the classroom were also examined. Actors engaged in a variety of role-plays that depicted situations they had experienced in the classroom or could envision based on workshop discussions. After examining different scenarios, the group formed one sketch that combined reoccurring themes and issues from the role-plays. This final scene was weighed with research on the experiences of University of Michigan students and further developed through previews for CRLT Program Managers.

Founded in 1962, CRLT was the first teaching center in the country, and it provides a comprehensive array of curriculum and instructional development activities. The CRLT Theatre Program consists of a full-time Director and Assistant Director, thirteen actors, and a part-time facilitator. Theatre is applied to programs including workshops on role-playing in the classroom, consultations regarding voice and presentation, and 15 different sketches that use a variety of interactive techniques. Among CRLT’s wide array of services, none has a more positive impact on faculty receptivity to issues of diversity than the CRLT Theatre Program.

MU joined a 3-year multi-campus program sponsored by The American Association for Higher Education and the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. The University of Michigan heads the group focusing on the Scholarship of Multicultural Teaching and Learning and has provided scripts and advice for member campuses researching the effectiveness of interactive theatre for enhancing faculty awareness of multicultural dimensions of teaching. Funding for MU’s theatre troupe to perform at the AGLS conference was provided by the MU Provost.

Jeffrey Steiger, Director, Theatre Program, U. of Michigan
Suzanne Burgoyne, Prof. of Theatre, U. of Missouri-Columbia

Noor Azizan-Gardner, Coor., Chancellor’s Diversity Program, U. of Missouri-Columbia

Interdisciplinary Alternatives in Iran

Note: The authors of this invited paper had planned to present the paper at the AGLS/AIS Conference in Fairfax in October 2005. They were not able to obtain the required documents to come to the United States and present the paper so they were invited to send the paper for publication in AGLS News. We welcome their submission.

Introduction

A short survey of the education system in Iran reveals that the interdisciplinary approach in its modern sense holds either a rather vague status or has not yet taken hold. In contrast, a tra-

ditional fashion of a multidisciplinary teaching system used to operate in Iran prior to modernizing/westernizing the education system at all levels of secular institutes (excluding religious schools). By providing a brief synopsis of traditional multidisciplinary and modern disciplinary approaches in Iran, this summary paper argues that the latter alternative has been less fruitful than the former system.

Traditional multidisciplinary approach

The old-fashioned multidisciplinary approach can be found in the writings of eminent scholars such as Avehina (980-1037) and Nasire Tousi (1201-1274). Their works cover a wide range of subjects including medicine, philosophy, ethics, astronomy, grammar and rhetoric, mathematics, and even housekeeping policy. Such knowledge of different subjects is manifested in some Persian literary works, in which the authors, by employing the relevant technical terms of variant fields, demonstrate their knowledge of different subjects and professions (e.g. San_i’s Mathnavi and Niz_mi’s Makhzan al-asr_r). Interestingly enough, this multidisciplinary method of teaching and learning continued to be the dominant approach in Iran as recently as five score years ago. It can be argued that such an education system had its own applicability and could effectively fulfill the needs of a pre-modernized society.

Modernized disciplinary approach

It was in the middle of the Q_j_rieh period (1800-1925) that Iran encountered the remarkable achievements of western technology and social welfare. It can be considered the turning point to finding ways to modernize Iran. Following this line of thinking, many statesmen including Amir Kabir (1841-1889) believed that the key to achieve this end would be to rule out the old education system and to import the western disciplinary approach. The first modern school, namely D_rolfonoon (the house of skills) was founded as a result of adopting a new education apparatus in order to meet the basic technological needs of Iran. The subjects, contents, and course schedules of this technical school were entirely borrowed from France without any alterations to adapt them to the local context. Such a directive policy of westernizing the education system was more or less maintained and continued afterwards. Apart from a total discontinuation from the earlier multidisciplinary method, the borrowed disciplinary system shows a kind of mismatch with the local context. This is why the disciplinary method in Iran has not led to the types of technological results it aspired to. Furthermore, the failure of disciplinary courses in the area of humanities has been extremely marked in contrast to the hard sciences.

One may argue that the sterility of the pure disciplinary approach rests on two major factors: the immeasurable gap from the earlier system and the mismatch with local educational backgrounds. These two factors are inseparable from each other. At a deeper analysis, it can be argued that the disciplinary approach in the west has been founded on the theoretical and philosophical schools such as empiricism and positivism that prevailed there after the Renaissance. Such philosophical movements also intensified the secularization of their societies. This means that the context in the west was fertile for cultivating a pure disciplinary paradigm. However, Iran had not undergone

AGLS Executive Council

The following is a list of Executive Council members. If you have any issues, concerns or questions you would like taken up by the Executive Council, please contact us. We would like to hear from you.

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2005 Conference Planner

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Exemplary Sessions, continued

such processes before she began establishing a disciplinary system.

Interdisciplinary alternatives

An interdisciplinary approach provides a new paradigm to overcome the sterility of the pure disciplinary method. First of all, this system with its liberal orientation would take into account all diverse aspects of the local context and could integrate properly into those resources and potentials already established in a society. Such an adaptation to local environment eliminates the wrong policy of importing a system alien to the target context. Secondly, interdisciplinary subjects are primarily thematic, and their attempts are thus to find solutions for the existing problems. This, in turn, makes a significant contribution to and enhances the applicability of interdisciplinary studies. The implementation of these two principles of the interdisciplinary approach would lead to a tremendous improvement in

the education system, in particular at the tertiary level, in order to meet local needs.

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