

Greater Expectations

A Report of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)

Available at <http://www.greaterexpectations.org/>.

Summary

In 2002 an AAC&U task force released its Greater Expectations report after studying the needs of students and how the traditional approach of colleges and universities may not adequately serve the large numbers of people now pursuing higher education. Today, about 75% of high school graduates continue their studies and 90% of high school seniors say they expect to attend college. Only about 47% of high school graduates complete college prep courses. Some of the observations and conclusions noted in the report include the following.

- “As college education now becomes commonplace, all students must have the opportunity to achieve the most empowering forms of learning.”
- Today, more jobs require a college education, change is rapid and people need to be able to make informed decisions and employ creative and intellectual skills.
- One problem with universities today is that learning is fragmented around the disciplinary department organizational structure. “Few faculty members teach to collectively owned goals. The student assembles an assortment of courses, each carrying a defined number of credits and assuming a standard time in class. The degree certifies completion of a fixed number of these often disconnected fragments. There is little coherence in curricula or programs, and even less a plan for connected learning.” (p. 16)
- Universities need to educate students to become “intentional learners.” “Becoming such an intentional learner means developing self-awareness about the reason for study, the learning process itself, and how education is used. Intentional learners are integrative thinkers who can see connections in seemingly disparate information and draw on a wide range of knowledge to make decisions. They adapt the skills learned in one situation to problems encountered in another: in a classroom, the workplace, their communities, or their personal lives. As a result, intentional learners succeed even when instability is the only constant.” [see pages 22-24 of the report for a list of what empowered learners excel at - attached]
- “Liberal education” can help students become intentional learners, but must be reinvigorated by making it practical and inclusive, such as by including a range of teaching strategies. The report defines liberal education as “a philosophy of education that empowers individuals, liberates the mind from ignorance, and cultivates social responsibility. Characterized by challenging encounters with important issues, and more a way of studying than specific content, liberal education can occur at all types of colleges and universities. ‘General education’ and an expectation of in-depth study in at least one field normally comprise liberal education.” [page 25]
- What should universities do? The report suggests the following:
 - Examine how well their practices are helping students to become learners.
 - Universities should set “explicit goals for student learning so academic department and general education outcomes can align with them.”

- “Campus leaders place their institution’s vision of liberal education at the center of strategic planning efforts and resource allocation.”
- The focus of the university should be that it is a place where people learn, not where people teach.
- “Graduating intentional learners – empowered, informed, and responsible – calls for curricula designed to further learning goals in a sequential manner across all the college years. Goals for learning, transparent to students and professors, justify the curriculum’s design.”
- Faculty across all disciplines need to “assume collective responsibility for the entire curriculum to ensure every student an enriching liberal education.”
- Make assessment part of the learning process, such as with student portfolios of their work.

See page 42 of the report for a 6-step plan. See page 44 for a summary of today’s education needs. See page 46 – 51 for summary of action plans and how to initiate them.

Why Is This Topic Important to SJSU Now? Some observations and questions

- Our mission is “to enrich the lives of its students, to transmit knowledge to its students along with the necessary skills for applying it in the service of our society, and to expand the base of knowledge through research and scholarship.”
- We’ve added new elements to our curriculum over the past few years, such as MUSE, service learning and more interdisciplinary programs. How have these elements helped our students to become intentional learners, what more is needed at university, college and department levels, as well as through co-curricular activities?
- The quote on the first page of this summary about fragmented learning describes SJSU. What are the detriments of this system to our students? How can we do better?
- The report states (p. 36): “Faculty members on a learning-centered campus make a collective commitment to high quality education. The concept of ‘my work,’ so characteristic of the present educational culture becomes ‘our work,’ with the entire faculty assuming responsibility for the entire curriculum.” Is the current SJSU culture “my work” or “our work”? Few professors could tell you the overall goals of the GE program. How do we move to a culture of “our work”?
- We are engaged in a strategic planning process that will help us better define SJSU to many constituency groups. How might we better explain and shape our curriculum to help students know why they might want to chose SJSU rather than another university?