Athenaeum Remarks: Greater Expectations  
October 26, 2005
When the Greater Expectations panel was convened in the year 2000, we faced a world of rapid and complex socioeconomic change. Many of the forces we examined will shape the educational landscape in ways that we are only just beginning to understand. These changes are affecting the demands being made upon higher education, which is more and more being seen as a private good, not a shared, public good that benefits all citizens. These reflections led us to define our challenge as—

Creating Coherence in an Era of Instability and Rapid Change

Today, I want to talk about what we were thinking about when we undertook our work and what major ideas shaped our thinking. I will make the assumption that you can all read the actual report, which was published in 2002 to learn about how our study of the condition of higher education and our exploration of efforts to bring coherence and integrity to the educational experience turned out. I also will talk about how the ideas generated by our discussions have shaped my own thinking about higher education and how my thinking about education has developed since the report was published.

The condition of higher education at the turn of the century

At the dawn of the 21st century, the educational experience at all stages of an education has become increasingly difficult to characterize. It is no longer safe to assume that we know who the learners are, who the teachers are, what the actual curriculum should be, what pathways students will take to obtain their education and where the most important learning will take place (e.g., in the classroom, in the community, in the workplace). Socioeconomic changes have been so profound that all of the fundamentals are changing: what should be learned, how it should be learned, and when it should be learned. The compact between the teacher and the learner is changing as the responsibility for coherence ceases to rest in the hands of individual institutions or departments or instructors. No longer can individual instructors assume what experiences their students will have had before they enroll in a particular class. Nor is it often the case that education is the central purpose of the lives of our contemporary students.

We knew that our recommendations would need to address the realities of the complex environments in which institutions and their students work. There are many sources of instability that extend throughout the educational process.

At the K-12 level, the very foundation upon which education is built has begun to shift dramatically.

a. the rate of turnover of teachers—who is entering the profession, how long they remain in the profession; age distribution of current teachers (wave of retirement anticipated in this decade)

b. significant variations in the knowledge and experience of teachers—who is teaching out of field; how much professional experience they have had (both knowledge of field and years of experience are correlated with student achievement)

c. patterns of professional and career development—access to intensive professional development, mentoring

d. rates of movement of students from one school to another

e. succession of various reform efforts; sometimes more than one at a time being operative in any given school or district

f. leadership transitions—frequent turnover at principal and superintendent levels; failure of experienced teachers to remain in the profession

g. standards-based curricula coupled with high stakes testing often poorly aligned with what is now known about learning and about what it takes to prepare for college or for high performance workplaces

Similar uncertainties are beginning to reshape postsecondary education.

a. age distribution of current faculty, anticipated wave of retirement in this decade

b. patterns of attendance of students—concurrent enrollments, sequential enrollments, blending of credits from several institutions
c. leadership transitions-growing pressures on campus leadership; changing nature of campus governance and introduction of values and principles from other domains (politics, corporations)

d. failure of transformational change to take hold

e. lack of clarity about what a college graduate needs to know and be able to do--loss of commitment to liberal learning

This pattern of kaleidoscopic shifts in our educational system set the stage for our work. Our recommendations were built upon answers to questions like those that follow:

Q: Where does coherence come from? [the design of the curriculum, the philosophy of education articulated by a campus and its faculty and the goals of an education, the integration of purposes reflected in capstone experiences and community-based learning opportunities and internships/research experiences, the clarity of the expectations signaled by college admission requirements (note 1: currently most admissions standards send the message that the senior year of high school is not necessary since most institutions require only 2-3 years of each subject); (note 2: it dawned on me the other day that we talk about a progressive development of complexity but never take our thinking to the logical next stage of integration, interdisciplinarity and advanced study. As I have heard Carol Schneider of AAC&U say, maybe our trinity (general studies, the major, electives) needs to become a quartet---analytical and practical problem-solving skills; individual and civic responsibility and moral reasoning; exploration of core areas of knowledge; integration and advanced study]  

Q: Who is responsible for maintaining coherence and purpose for individual students? (the student, who must develop an educational plan; the institution that grants the degree; the public coordinating board that defines articulation and transfer policies; the institution that first admits the student to post-secondary work; the counselors who advise students as they prepare for college-level work; other?)

Q: What should be the foundation upon which coherence should be built? (concepts of an educated person; demands of employers; concepts of liberal learning; preparation for citizenship; demands of graduate and professional education; research on human development and the nature of learning; a commonly accepted pattern of increasing complexity and significance of the learning expected at each succeeding stage of an education; roadmaps or educational plans made available to students who then must chart their own course; other?)

Q: What does it take to enable an institution or group of institutions to produce coherence and support sustained high expectations for all students? (Our institutions are changing all the time, but for the most part, these changes do not make a big difference, either because the results are confined to an isolated segment of the organization or because the environment in which the change was initiated was not responsive. As we think about the undergraduate experience, another complex factor is introduced, namely the importance of thinking across traditional boundaries and jurisdictions since change in one institution, even if transformational in character, is no longer enough since many students will obtain their educations from several institutions.

Q: What does genuine transformational change require? To be truly transformational, the results of reform work must (a) alter the culture of the institutions by changing select underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes and products; (b) be deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution; (c) be intentional; (d) occur over a sustained period of time (Eckel, Hill, & Green, 1998) and (e) set up conditions that will promote the expansion of the impact into other educational settings. Given the fact that the responsibility for delivering an undergraduate education no longer rests exclusively in the hands of a single faculty or a single institution, we can anticipate that there will need to be basic changes in who holds the responsibility for certifying that a given individual has completed the requirements for a degree and that appropriate educational goals have been met. It will also be necessary to identify a way in which otherwise disjointed educational experiences can be put together into a plan for a comprehensive undergraduate education that has meaning and purpose both for the individual student and for society-at-large.)

Starting Premises upon which Greater Expectations was built
• Our nation is approaching near universal participation in postsecondary education. Yet mere access to postsecondary education is not enough!
• Participants in higher education vary greatly in preparation, background and expectations and in the quality of the experience they receive and the results they enjoy.
• The patterns of participation in postsecondary education have grown increasingly complex and we can no longer assume that all students will attend a single institution or that they will encounter similar philosophies underlying the curriculum. We cannot even assume that they will follow a curriculum. Some may simply accumulate credits and later attempt to fit their record to the requirements of a degree.
• To ensure that an undergraduate experience has a clear meaning and purpose, we must think beyond institutional lines to consider a larger educational environment and the need to creative coherence by a more explicit declaration of expectations and outcomes that can be embraced by a broader educational community.
• At the same time, we must make sure that our conception of what it means to have a college education is appropriate for the world as it is today. That was the goal of our Greater Expectations Report.
• By stating our expectations clearly and explaining them to our students, we can ensure that students will find some consistency of intent and purpose as they move from one institution to another and will themselves expect more from their education.

Principles that the panel derived from a study of the research base as well as interpretation of the experiences and observations of a number of institutions that participated in the Greater Expectations project as lead institutions.

• The diversity of higher educational institutions and the many different educational aspirations of our students are a national strength.
• In our report on Greater Expectations, we sought to promote high standards without standardization. We have concluded that there are many ways to pursue an undergraduate degree.
• All of these paths must be illuminated by high expectations, attainable by all.
• Powerful learning builds cumulatively and attention must be given to the gradual enhancement of complexity, depth, engagement and responsibility for learning throughout the course of an educational experience from K-12 through undergraduate education, graduate study and the practice of the professions.
• We are not just setting new expectations for undergraduates; this vision must be widely shared and must guide both K-12 and higher education.
• Coherence can be obtained by a broad acceptance of the concepts of the New Academy, interpreted in many ways by our nation’s higher education institutions and made clear to our students, many of whom will study at more than one institution.
• In the increasingly complex educational environment of today, coherence may rest more with the student and his or her educational and career planning than with a curriculum articulated and maintained by the faculty of any one institution but we can greatly increase the quality of the experience of all of our students by embracing the principles of the New Academy.
• At the heart of the curriculum is learning, not teaching, supported by a meaningful relationship among students and instructors in a variety of learning contexts.
• In the New Academy, effective education is supported by clear and explicit intentions reflected in all aspects of the educational experience (general education, the major, co-curricular activities, experiential and classroom learning, etc) and the environment in which learning takes place.

The Key Concept that Emerged: Intentionality
What does it take to develop a clear educational philosophy and expectations and to support that philosophy? For most institutions or most educational communities, transformational change is necessary that is
Deep, affecting underlying culture and values
Institution-wide
Intentional
We proposed a reinvigorated liberal education for all, an education that is both engaging and meaningful to our students and eminently practical. Liberal education is defined by how we approach learning, not by the particular subject matter taught. It is equally possible for a history class not to be a true experience in liberal education and for a course of professional study to truly exemplify what we mean by liberal education. A liberal education is also a practical education and will provide our students with precisely what they need to succeed in the world of the 21st century.

At the heart of our vision of a New Academy is an engaged and practical liberal education for all students, not just those who attend elite institutions or those who major in the traditional arts and sciences.

To meet our expectations, the education we offer our students must prepare them to be intentional learners who are

- empowered through the mastery of intellectual and practical skills
- informed by knowledge about the natural and social worlds and about forms of inquiry basic to these studies
- responsible for their own actions and concerned for the public good.

Each of these concepts was accompanied in our report by a description of how a student can demonstrate their accomplishment. Perhaps the most important point is that all of these qualities can be practiced for a lifetime, allowing each of us to grow continuously in knowledge, in responsibility and in wisdom. The education we propose will continue to enrich the lives of our graduates long after they complete their undergraduate years. It is an endowment.

**Learning in a 21st Century Institution.**

One of the aspects of the report that was less well developed and that is playing a significant role here at WSU as we implement L21 is the importance of modeling the qualities of education put to good use—the concept of a university as a laboratory for exploring coherence, scholarship and citizenship and the qualities of a 21st century education.

What we left relatively unexplored was the question of how to create a setting where each person can do his or her best work and develop as an educated human being, whatever role he or she plays within the organization.

To accomplish these goals, a University must be a true learning organization where change itself is both intentional and a scholarly act.

To accomplish this consistency of behavior, a University community must accomplish four tasks.

1. Instill a discipline of reflection and a culture of evidence, insisting that everyone back up their opinions with real information, not just perceptions.
2. Create new patterns of conversation that encourage and support the involvement of everyone in defining the issues that will be important in building the organization.
3. Adopt a philosophy of experimentation and the active management of reasonable risks.
4. Create new ways to facilitate access to information so that everyone can make informed choices.

According to David Garvin, "a learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, interpreting and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights."

As Peter Senge has written, "over the long run, superior performance depends on superior learning." A true democracy also depends upon superior learning.

In such an organization, the role of leaders and good communicators throughout the organization is

1. to build a shared vision
2. to bring to the surface and explore prevailing mental models
3. to foster more systemic patterns of thinking
4. to model the intellectual virtues, which are "the willingness to explore widely, the ability to test one’s ideas against those of others, the capacity to listen thoughtfully, and the strength to adduce reasons for one’s assertions." (Harry C. Payne, Liberal Education 1996)

This capacity cannot be exercised simply at the top of an organization. It must be widely distributed throughout the organization. Such leaders are opportunity-driven, not resource-driven.
and are therefore more entrepreneurial in behavior and less managerial. (H. Irving Grousbeck,
Christian Science Monitor September 10, 1997)

**Key Ideas**
The Greater Expectations panel drew upon the thinking of a number of scholars. Some of these ideas have had special staying power for me and I will describe the ones that most influence my own thinking today. Other panel members might well cite different sets of ideas, different conversations and different insights. What is important is that serving on the panel was a very special experience and it has had a lasting impact on my own mental landscape.

**Qualities of a Liberally Educated Person**
In describing the qualities of a liberally-educated person, William Cronon talks about the cultivation of talent, the nurturing of growth, and the balance between individual freedom and our responsibility to others and to the communities we serve.

1. They listen and they hear.
2. They read and they understand.
3. They can talk with anyone.
4. They can write clearly and persuasively and movingly.
5. They can solve a wide variety of problems.
6. They respect rigor not so much for its own sake but as a way of seeking truth.
7. They practice humility, tolerance and self-criticism.
8. They have the intellectual range and emotional generosity to be able to step beyond their own experience to acquire and respect perspectives other than their own.
9. They understand how to get things done in the world.
10. They nurture and empower the people around them.
11. They are able to see connections that allow us to make sense of the world and act in creative ways.

**Intellectual Virtues**
In an article entitled "Can or Should a College Teach Virtue?", Harry C. Payne, said that "All learning is for the sake of something beyond the act of learning itself." In many of the future-thinking conversations I have heard in the past several years, this fundamental concept was never mentioned. In order to establish a basis for a lifetime of learning and development, our work must be guided by a set of academic virtues.

- The capacity for determined inquiry and for accountability, whereby no statement is sufficient unto itself but must be open to the work of critical reflection;
- The capacity for argument, for stating reasons, hearing counter-arguments, and patient response;
- The capacity for listening, for truly hearing others out and granting the perspectives of others a provisional grace and a full-hearted understanding;
- The capacity for looking beneath the surface of things to explore the underlying assumptions and values that shape an issue or concern;
- The capacity to explore new ways of thinking, for trying out new maps of learning, new roads to travel;
- The capacity to find compelling words, numbers, lines and movements in whatever domain we choose and to abide by the understanding that the way we express ourselves ought to be the mirror of the best fruits of our thinking. (amended from Payne)

**Communication and Learning**
A decade ago, Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger and Jill Tarule published a study called Women’s Ways of Knowing. In the course of their work together, which they tell engagingly in the Tenth Anniversary edition of the book, the co-authors came to understand that women’s epistemological assumptions were central to their perceptions of themselves and their experience. They opened their book with the following paragraph

"We do not think of the ordinary person as preoccupied with such difficult and profound questions as: What is truth? What is authority? To whom do I listen? What counts for me as evidence? How do I know what I know? Yet to ask ourselves these questions and to reflect on our answers is more than an intellectual exercise, for our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the worlds and ourselves as participants in it. They affect our definitions of ourselves, the way we interact with others, our
public and private personae. Our sense of control over life events, our views of teaching and learning, and our conceptions of morality.”

In their study, they learned that for many women the real and valued lessons of life came not from their academic experiences but from the relationships they formed and the nature of the conversations that they had. Out of this work came five stages of knowing:

1. silence—a reactive, dependent response to authorities in their lives
2. received knowledge—listening to the voices of others and absorbing the views of others
3. subjective knowledge—relying on the inner voice and intuition
4. procedural knowledge—the process of acquiring and using procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge within the system in which one finds oneself
5. constructed knowledge—the process of finding an authentic voice—reflection on how one’s judgments, attitudes and behavior come together to form a morally consistent and authentic position within one’s situation but not necessary entirely shaped by it

Most freshmen of both sexes arrive in college at a very early stage of thinking about themselves as learners. If all goes well, they emerge at a much more advanced stage. I have not been able to find any material on whether gender plays a significant role in this process, but my guess is that it does.

The learning process unfolds as follows:[6]

- What to learn
- How to learn
- How to think
- How to think in context
- How to judge and choose and what moral and ethical principles to apply
- How to live responsibly

**Qualities of an Educated Person in the 21st Century**

An experience as rich and complex as service on the Greater Expectations panel, especially the experience of chairing such a group, sets in motion a process of reflection and attentiveness to new aspects of one’s daily life that causes ideas to recombine in new ways. Here is how I think today about the question of what it means to be educated. From time to time, usually when I am thinking about a talk I am about to give, I go over my mental inventory. When I do that, as I have done for this Athenaeum talk today, I generally discover that my thinking has continued to change since the last time I took stock. Good conversations about important questions have a tendency to build upon one another and will yield unexpected dividends.

A key attribute of an educated person is an on-going love of learning and a curiosity about the world. A love of Learning can develop in many ways and at many different times, stimulated by an inspiring teacher, by a sense of purpose and personal responsibility, by the experience of generating new knowledge, in short by any means that offers the opportunity to be taken seriously by people we respect.

Educated people can find creative and adaptive solutions to newly emerging problems as well as old ones that are ever with us. To prepare our students for life and work in the 21st century, we must provide opportunities for them to learn in the same way that professionals/experts learn. This can be fostered by exploring fields of study in the same way that these fields are actually advanced through discovery, integration, interpretation and application of knowledge. Education must look beyond the classroom to the challenges of the community, the complexities of the workplace and the major issues in the world.[7]

Educated people understand how we know what we know and how to construct a warranted foundation for the claims we make about what is true. To create environments where authentic learning can occur that develops in the same way that our understanding of disciplines and intellectual challenges develops, we must set up new contexts that are not bounded by disciplinary or institutional imperatives, where the scholarly interests of faculty and students are integrated with the realities and urgencies of society and where learning can have consequences for both students and the community (i.e. engaged learning) and/or the fields they study (i.e. undergraduate experiences of research and discovery).

Education carries with it the expectation that educated people use their knowledge and acquire new understanding in a responsible way, mindful of the effects of their actions on others. They
have a moral imagination[8]. Engaged learning exposes students to essential dimensions of the responsible use of power than comes from the generation and application of knowledge. This can prepare students to live and work in a complex and changing world characterized by many different cultural spaces and many significant challenges and uncertainties. Educated people are not trapped in their own place and time. Education must encompass the exploration and understanding of the enduring questions that have been traditionally thought important and how we have thought about those issues in the past as well as an exploration of the future.

Educated people care deeply about the consequences of their actions. The Koyukon people of the Northwest believe that the only way to make knowledge whole is through direct experience with the world[9]. As Richard Nelson in The Island Within expresses it after watching shearwaters sculling up from the clear depths beneath his skiff, “like seagulls or falcons flying under the sea, on the same wings that soar so gracefully in the air.” After they had gone, he thought to himself: “I savor the satisfaction of never having learned this from a book or heard about it from someone else. And so I could discover it for myself, as others have made the same discovery before me. Knowledge gained this way is somehow richer, more exciting and more meaningful that the vicarious, almost symbolic knowledge that comes through books or films or word-of-mouth.” The truly well educated do not live on borrowed knowledge and vicarious experience. They become wise through thoughtful reflection and keen observation. They learn how they fit into a particular place, while not being limited by it. They live productively, creatively and responsibly, always learning, always mindful of others. These are the people I hope we will be able to nurture here. These are the people we will welcome into the company of educated men and women.

[6] Notes from Jackie Weinstock, UVM, 1999
[8] The concept of moral imagination comes from the work of Martha Nussbaum (2004) Liberal Education and Global Community. Change Magazine Winter 2004 p. 42-47. It refers to the capacity “to view with sympathy the situation of people who live at a distance or who look different from ourselves.” (p. 42) It allows us to take seriously the lives of other people and to be concerned about their well-being.