

Editorial: Welcoming IJeP and PEARL to AAC&U

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Beginning with this issue, the *International Journal of ePortfolio* (IJeP) joins the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) as one of its official publications. This change in publication home for the journal coincides with directions set forth in AAC&U's new strategic plan, which emphasizes three cross-cutting areas of focus: building evidence, expanding capacity, and accelerating advocacy and outreach. IJeP and the "Publications on ePortfolio: Archives of the Research Landscape" (PEARL) database, also joining AAC&U this fall, offer mechanisms to address all three cross-cutting areas in regard to ePortfolios, AAC&U's newly recognized eleventh High Impact Practice.

At its fall 2017 meeting, the Board of Directors of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) approved a new five-year strategic plan for the future, entitled "ASPIRE: Advancing Student Performance through Integration, Research, and Excellence." The plan for 2018-2022 is grounded in the organization's mission of promoting "the vitality and public standing of liberal education by making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in undergraduate education in service to democracy."

ASPIRE outlines four strategic goals for immediate implementation:

1. Champion faculty-engaged, evidence-based, sustainable models and strategies for promoting **quality** in undergraduate education;
2. Advance **equity** across higher education in service to academic excellence and social justice;
3. Lead institutions and communities in articulating and demonstrating the **value** of liberal education for work, life, global citizenship, and democracy;
4. Catalyze reform in higher education to emphasize **discovery and innovation** as fundamental aspects of a liberal education.

Each of these goals will be fostered through three cross-cutting areas of focus:

- **Building Evidence** that supports the development of best practices within the higher education community, promotes faculty-led assessment of student learning, and demonstrates the value of AAC&U's work;
- **Expanding Capacity** by enhancing faculty and leadership development, identifying and bringing effective practices to scale, and implementing educational reforms that further the goals of AAC&U and its members; and
- **Accelerating Advocacy and Outreach** by providing tools and resources that help faculty, academic and student affairs leaders, provosts

and presidents champion AAC&U's mission and communicate broadly the value of an equitable, high-quality liberal education.

The arrival at AAC&U of both the *International Journal of ePortfolio* (IJeP) and the Publications on ePortfolio: Archives of the Research Landscape (PEARL) database (<http://eportfolio.aacu.org>), offers an extraordinary opportunity for the enhanced creation and dissemination of research to support every one of the objectives and focal areas detailed above. Indeed, as Jessica Chittum, director of PEARL, reminds us, when we talk about ePortfolios in the context of student success, they are being discussed not as repositories, but as part of the learning process; a facilitator of the learning process and student development; and as a vehicle for whole person education (Chittum, 2017).

At AAC&U, we are convinced that fulfilling the promise of American higher education requires a curriculum that emphasizes the LEAP essential learning outcomes (knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, integrative and applied learning) as necessary for all students' intellectual, civic, personal, and professional development, and for success in a global economy. On this model, disciplinary work remains foundational, but students are engaged in high-impact practices that foster the skills necessary to connect their discipline with others, with the co-curriculum, and with the needs of society in preparation for work, citizenship, and life.

The use of ePortfolio is recognized by AAC&U as a high-impact practice (HIP) that creates unique opportunities for connection and synthesis across courses, semesters, and co-curricular experiences, enabling students to reflect on and construct a cohesive signature learning experience and authentic body of work (Watson, Kuh, Rhodes, Penny Light, & Chen, 2016). We know from George Kuh's (2008) groundbreaking scholarship on high-impact practices that certain types of educational experiences have a more profound effect on students, and that there is a

disparately positive impact on underserved students in relation to self-reported gains, GPA, and retention. Further, within-group comparisons of the relationship between participation in multiple high-impact practices and perceptions of learning indicate significant benefits among first-generation and transfer students that include improvements in deep learning, general education, practical competence, and personal and social development.

The evidence that high-impact practices provide distinctive and compelling benefits illustrates what we refer to as “the equity effects” of HIPS—smaller gaps in perceived learning at higher levels of participation and larger boosts for groups that view their learning less positively in the absence of these practices. Thus, informing pedagogy and broadening the community of ePortfolio practitioners is critical if we are to make strides toward an equity-minded approach to higher education that rejects, once and for all, a deficit perspective that emphasizes what students are missing, and instead adopt asset models offering evidence-based interventions and strategies that build upon students’ distinctive experiences and strengths.

Moreover, encouraging students to reflect on how the academic work they are doing today is creating capacities that will serve them tomorrow, in their employment and as citizens, is crucial in a rapidly-changing world in which the jobs of the future have not yet been invented. As Jeff Selingo highlights in his book, *There is Life After College* (2016), students today who are most successful upon graduation are those who can construct a compelling narrative around the connections between their curriculum and their career aspirations. Yet, only about one-third of the 752 young people Selingo surveyed could do so. Unlike these so-called “sprinters,” most students turn out to be what he refers to as “wanderers” or “stragglers.” They have ill-defined trajectories, are apt to start but not finish college, or may take six or eight years to complete, without any real idea of how their degree connects to their specific career objectives.

There are clear class markers in the categories of students Selingo proposes. Students who cannot afford to take internships and must take jobs unrelated to their career goals so that they can pay off student debt will have a more difficult time than those without college loan burdens and who have had at least one internship. However, even among the latter group, without guidance from professors, the connection between a liberal education and one’s professional aspirations can remain elusive, causing students to question the value of their degrees. For this reason, IJeP’s commitment to providing case studies and best practices regarding applications of ePortfolio for learning, assessment, and professional development supported by the scholarship of teaching and learning practices and research methodologies, alongside PEARL’s interactive,

collaborative archive tool for researchers and practitioners, is more important than ever.

As AAC&U embarks on our next generation of work, we are proud to house IJeP and PEARL. ePortfolio holds the potential to serve as an important mechanism for assisting us in our quest to redress the growing economic and racial segregation in our society and meet our nation’s historic mission of educating for democracy.

References

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LYNN PASQUERELLA, PhD, is President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities. A philosopher whose career has combined teaching and scholarship with local and global engagement, she has continuously demonstrated a deep and abiding commitment to ensuring that all students have access to excellence in liberal education, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Pasquerella is a graduate of Quinebaug Valley Community College, Mount Holyoke College, and Brown University. She joined the faculty of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Rhode Island in 1985, rising rapidly through the ranks to the positions of vice provost for research, vice provost for academic affairs, and dean of the graduate school. In 2008, she was named provost of the University of Hartford. In 2010, she was appointed the eighteenth president of Mount Holyoke College. Pasquerella’s presidency of Mount Holyoke was marked by a robust strategic planning process; outreach to local, regional, and international constituencies; and a commitment to a vibrant campus community. Pasquerella has written extensively on medical ethics, metaphysics, public policy, and the philosophy of law. She serves as senator and vice president of Phi Beta Kappa, as a Trustee of the Lingnan Foundation, and as host of Northeast Public Radio’s *The Academic Minute*.