In 2004, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) published the monograph *Learning Reconsidered*, a policy and position statement that argued for a view of the learning that occurs in higher education as “transformative education:” an interactive melding of traditional academic learning, student development, and identity formation. Two years later, these two organizations joined with five others to produce *Learning Reconsidered 2*, an implementation guide for the principles and recommendations in the first volume. Both of these publications have important implications for higher education policy and practice at multiple levels: classroom, service, division, institution, board, state, and nation. The sixteen recommendations at the end of *Learning Reconsidered* suggest an important new direction for higher education, one that, not coincidentally, other forces, including the Spellings’ Commission, may already be charting, so it is critically important for higher education to consider taking steps toward rethinking the nature of a higher education before those steps are taken for it.

I want to condense and consolidate the sixteen recommendations of *Learning Reconsidered* into a list of seven crucial ones, which I believe higher education must consider and implement in some fashion if it is to serve the best interests of its students and this country. As a group, they refocus our view of higher education from one that is essentially discipline-driven and content-based to one that also focuses on student success and institutional accountability to stakeholders. In so doing, it admittedly sees higher education in a more utilitarian way than the view with which many of us are comfortable, but we can no longer afford to view the academy exclusively in the context of the development and preservation of knowledge. Our allegiance must be at least as much to our students as to our disciplines, and these recommendations can help us to refocus.

I. **Since learning integrates academic learning and student development, and since learning occurs throughout the institution, colleges and universities of every type should commit to the intentional review and strengthening of every institutional structure and resource that can support transformative learning.** That is, colleges and universities should no longer regard learning as something that happens only in classrooms or laboratories. Colleges should re-examine their structure, organization, policies and practices such as the differential status for faculty and
professional staff in order to identify ways to better support learning across the academy.

In *Learning Reconsidered* 2004, the authors melded J. Mezirow & Associates’ idea that “transformative education places the student’s reflective processes at the core of the learning experience” (Mezirow, J. & Associates, 2000) with the assertion that “to support today’s learning outcomes, the focus of education must shift from information transfer to identity development or transformation” (Keeling, 2004, p.10). These ideas support the goals of liberal education and form the philosophical and practical foundation for the contemporary reconsideration of how learning occurs. This stance places learning in a “much larger context that requires consideration of what students know, who they are, what their values and behavior patterns are, and how they see themselves contributing to and participating in the world in which they live” (Keeling, 2004, p.10).

With the national emphasis on accountability occasioned by the Spellings’ Commission and well before that by all regional and some specialized accrediting commissions, every department, division, and individual in the academy must begin to ask and address the questions—“How does what I do and what we, as an institution do to contribute to student learning and ultimate success?” Colleagues in student affairs have used the two editions of *Learning Reconsidered* to initiate conversations across divisional boundaries to discuss what the challenges are and where support may be found in answering these questions. They are speaking candidly with their colleagues about what their roles are and working together to map the intersections where transformative education and learning might occur.

Both the accrediting commissions and the Spellings’ Commission are attempting to shift the conversation about learning from content to outcomes, away from coverage and information dissemination toward student success demonstrated in student performance. In other words, they are attempting a shift away from a paradigm that equates institutional success with what students know, usually as indicated by such indirect and misleading measures as grades and graduation rates, to one that equates it with what students can do with what they know. Further, accrediting commissions in particular are pushing the issue further, asking institutions not only to document the achievement of outcomes but also—and probably more importantly—to use the information they develop to improve learning.

Increasing the probability of student success will demand institutional policies that change academic culture. A culture historically focused primarily on what teaching faculty does will need to become one focused on the impact of what faculty and staff do that adds value and contributes to long-term student success. Changes in institutional culture, policies, and practice will need “to link knowledge about learning to the practice of teaching” (National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 2002, p.13), and to expand the concept of learning to include experiences outside the classroom. Ultimately, “our primary concern [will have to be] to ensure that what is currently known about learning will inform the design of curriculum and other educational practices” (National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 2002, p.13).
Why must this change occur?

Data first introduced to me by Dr. Jane Fried, Professor, Central Connecticut University, in a draft of a paper with the title “Educating the Whole Student: The Humpty Dumpty Dilemma in Student Affairs expressed that “meaningful learning occurs when the whole brain is involved” (Fried, 2002, p.4). Dr. Fried explained that “students must experiment with new ideas and new behavior in an atmosphere that provides an effective balance of challenge and support. They must have opportunities to speak, to listen, to feel, to reflect, to share their ideas with others, to manage conflict and cope with ambiguity” (Fried, 2002, p.4). All of this can occur in the classroom. The part of her argument that involves the entire campus, both faculty and staff, inside and outside the classroom, is her statement that, “New learning must be reinforced in multiple settings and conveyed in multiple modalities. Meaningful learning requires the brain to search for patterns and to bind those patterns with emotional experiences” (Fried, 2002, p.4). While I have advocated the practice of educating the whole student and have encouraged educators to help students relate what they are learning in the classroom to how they live, I was struck by these assertions Dr. Fried made based on research by Caine and Caine, and Zohar and Marshall.

Dr. Fried concluded from the data on brain-based learning that the “brain is not organized to learn anything meaningful by accumulating a collection of facts. The traditional methods of teaching, based on the accumulation of facts and the exclusion of emotions or construction of personal meaning from the conversation, is a meaningless activity in the absence of opportunities to search for patterns that engage the emotions and explore multiple circumstances in which learning can be applied in both concrete and reflective circumstances” (Fried, 2002, p.5). Thus, Dr. Fried argues that the “learning modalities that student affairs professional staff have used to help students ‘develop’ might be powerful teaching methods to help students create meaning in their lives” (Fried, 2002, p.4).

Heeding the data about how learning occurs and working toward transformation rather than information transfer, departmental, divisional and institutional policies must move away from our current—and traditional—fragmented view of instruction and co-curricular experience toward more integration of the tools and resources for teaching and learning across the institution. We must strive to emphasize the integration of classroom learning with student experiences, and vice versa, because we are, as many institutional mission statements claim, shaping the “whole student” and, as Dr. Fried makes eminently clear, the whole student’s learning and development do not occur in convenient segments that reflect the organizational structures of higher education institutions.

Dr. Fried is a strong advocate for the integration of the tools for teaching and learning. She says that the “dilemma is that the dominant teaching/learning paradigm generally does not grant visibility of status to this approach [in which the student’s life experience is brought into the conversation as part of their search for meaning] so conversations about learning process and student engagement among faculty or between faculty and student affairs staff are rare” (Fried, 2002, p.13).
These conclusions lead inevitably to the need for collaboration across the entire institution and especially between academic and student affairs. Adrianna Kezar did a study on the strategies and obstacles to collaboration and found that a “combination of cultural and structural strategies was identified as critical for developing change,” as is the importance of leadership willing to re-imagine culture and structure. “Leadership (senior administrative support) was seen as the most important individual strategy, followed by structural (setting expectations, planning) and cultural strategies (cross-institutional dialogue, generating enthusiasm, creating a common vision, staff development) as important to their process of facilitating collaboration” (Kezar, 2003, p.14).

It is past time for assuming that voluntary collaboration among faculty and staff will be sufficient. Though collaboration is a nice and neighborly thing to do, the data-based premise that transformative learning always occurs in the active context of students’ lives means that college and university presidents and chancellors must call on other administrators, faculty and staff to “commit to the intentional review and strengthening of every institutional structure and resource that can support transformative learning” (Keeling, 2004, p.28). Hoping that staff will voluntarily rally round transformative learning will not create the change that is necessary; changes in institutional policy and practice will.

It is encouraging to note that some two-year colleges are making changes based on data they have gleaned from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CSSE). Bucks County Community College in Newtown, Pennsylvania “made short writing assignments, like two-minute essays on how to apply an academic lesson to real life, a part of courses across the curriculum” (Ashburn, 2006, p.A1). Genesee Community College in Batavia, New York reacted to results of CSSE by bringing in “scholars during the last academic year to talk to its faculty members about how brain research relates to teaching, after officials noted a discrepancy between how much students thought course work relied on memorization and how much instructors thought it did” (Ashburn, 2006, p.A1).

These reactions to data are small steps in the right direction. Bucks County Community College realized that in order for transformative education and learning to occur, students would need to be able to relate academic learning to real life and these examples would have to occur in every course. Genesee Community College understood that faculty would attend to scholars who could teach them something new about how students learn. In both cases, the institutions looked at the “whole student” and attempted to adjust their practice accordingly; in both cases, their focus was on integration, not separation. Finally, and perhaps most important for all of higher education, these changes made integration of learning a deliberate action for both faculty and students. Policies are needed to support and reinforce these kinds of efforts throughout higher education.

II. Claiming that the whole campus is a learning community or that the institution provides transformative learning is not enough; accountability
requires that the institution specify its desired goals and assess its performance in reaching them. Therefore, every post-secondary institution should determine and specify its intended student outcomes and should commit resources to measuring, assessing, and documenting students’ achievement of those outcomes. A major corollary of this requirement is that both academic and student affairs administrators should commit to holding all campus educators accountable for the contributions their learning experiences make to overall student learning outcomes. That corollary should affect policy regarding promotion and tenure for faculty members.

Faculty and student affairs professionals are accepting the fact that assessment must be an integral part of their work. They understand that assessment must provide useful information about learning that can then be used to plan ways to improve learning and to inform stakeholders about institutional effectiveness in producing what an institution’s public statements claim it produces. Traditionally assessment or feedback has been used to change curriculum and pedagogy, but the new message, with policy implications for the entire institution, is that assessment must be considered more broadly. Assessment strategies will be used for continuous improvement and to assure quality, defined in terms of accountability to students as consumers and to external stakeholders such as funders and supporters.

Regardless of the unique mission of the institution, the common mission among all higher education institutions will be to provide evidence of achieving stated outcomes for the long-term, and of using that evidence for continuous improvement. These outcomes should encompass the “whole picture of their [students’] lives,” to borrow a phrase from Martha Nussbaum in her 2001 book titled _Upheavals of Thought_ (2001). External stakeholders want outcomes that will prepare our graduates to compete in Tom Friedman’s flat world.

Institutions can no longer allow a cafeteria approach to learning in which faculty “provide” information taken and digested or not by the student and which students are bored and disengaged in and out of class, as John Merrow described them in the documentary _Declining by Degrees_. In the film, Merrow demonstrates the increasing consumerism of students, the challenges faculty have in “moving their students beyond the simplistic “diploma=\$\$ dollar formula” (Merrow, 2005, [Television Broadcast]). More attention must be paid to strategies that engage students in their learning and reinforce that learning occurs throughout the student’s career and life.

Merrow concludes that “too much is left to chance and too many lives are blighted by our national indifference to what is actually happening on our campuses during the years between admission and graduation” (Merrow, 2005). He says that “serious attention must be paid at a national level” (Merrow, 2005). He goes on to say that “other countries are not standing still. Those that have not surpassed us already in educational attainment levels are clearly visible in the rear-view mirror” (Merrow, 2005).
Merrow made these comments in the May 25th, 2006 online Carnegie Perspectives and there were at least a dozen faculty responses regarding the educational attainment levels of our students and students in other countries. Only one of the responses spoke to the issue of global competition. Many of the responders cited students and parents as the problem. While there is no doubt that student and parent attitudes are part of the problem, it is incumbent upon higher education to recognize that its attitudes, structures, and procedures are a part of the problem as well. These kinds of responses, which simply deflect responsibility for learning to others, can cause external stakeholders and policymakers to think that higher education is indeed out of touch with workforce needs and the possibility of the U.S. losing its competitive edge.

Assessment and measurement of outcomes are key concepts in the accountability movement. Shortly after the Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, received the final report from the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, the Department of Education convened a forum where three accreditation experts spoke. During discussions at the Forum, it was clear that no one wanted to see standardized testing as the only measurement of quality or the only basis for accountability. Though the Secretary assured listeners that any policy focus on student learning outcomes was a shared responsibility, there remains a fear of the “plagues” of “bureaucratization and politicization” described by Margaret A. Miller, director of the National Forum on College-Level Learning (Field, 2006). These “plagues” invariably come into play when there are federal mandates and comparisons across institutions.

While institutions can influence, they cannot determine what kind of policy might be forthcoming from the federal government. However, institutions individually and collectively can establish policies that affect an institution’s culture and priorities—for example, policies that affect tenure and promotion of faculty. Members of the Modern Language Association (MLA) may have opened the door to needed discussions on promotion and tenure across the board. Currently, faculty, particularly those teaching in the humanities, still face tremendous pressures for publishing scholarship, narrowly defined, in order to achieve promotion and tenure. The report calls on the “profession as a whole to develop a more capacious conception of scholarship by rethinking the dominance of the monograph, promoting the scholarly essay, establishing multiple pathways to tenure, and using scholarly portfolios” (Howard, 2006). Further, the report argues for the relevance of tenure criteria to institutional needs and expectations: “Departments and institutions should calibrate expectations for achieving tenure and promotion with institutional values, mission, and practice” (Howard, 2006). It seems obvious that the requirements for promotion and tenure must change as the accountability requirements for the institution change. Departments can no longer function as kingdoms unto themselves. They must begin to review their standards in order to bring them in line with the institution’s mission and values as a whole. In so doing, faculty members will be measured by how well their learning experiences contribute to overall student learning outcomes.

Both faculty and student affairs must align program outcomes with specified institutional goals and become active in assessing the performance of the institution in reaching these
desired goals. Alan E. Guskin and Mary B. Marcy Directors of The Project on the Future of Higher Education at Antioch University worked with a team of outstanding educators to create working papers under the title, Creating a Vital Campus in a Climate of Restricted Resources: 10 Organizing Principles (Guskin & Marcy, 2003). The first three organizing principles were prescient in their focus:

Organizing Principle I: Create a Clear and Coherent Vision of the Future Focused on Student Learning, Quality of Faculty Work-life and Reduced Costs
Organizing Principle II: Transform the Education Delivery System Consistent with Vision of the Future
Organizing Principle III: Transform the Organizational Systems Consistent with Vision of the Future

Each Organizing Principle has suggested transformative actions. The actions Guskin and Marcy suggest for Organizing Principle II are my recommendations as well for preparing faculty, student affairs, and the entire institution to become accountable for student success. These suggested transformative actions are the following:

1. Focus on assessment of institution-wide common learning outcomes as the basis for the undergraduate degree.
2. Restructure the role of faculty to include faculty members and other campus professionals as partners in student learning while integrating technology.
3. Integrate and recognize student learning from all sources.
4. Audit and restructure the curriculum to focus on essential academic programs and curricular offerings.

The first action above is the essential first step in assessing, measuring, and documenting student achievement. The second action holds all educators accountable for their contributions to student learning and success. The third action acknowledges that the whole campus is a learning community. And the fourth action calls for a review of what is currently being done and future actions based on those findings.

III. A key part of accountability is responding to the specific needs of students in the context of the community in which the campus is located and responding to the specific needs of students from a wide variety of circumstances. Student demographics make a difference. Accordingly, all institutions should (1) establish routine ways to hear students’ voices, consult with them, and explore their options; (2) document the nature and quality of students’ experience as learners; and (3) establish services and systems, such as enhanced orientation, first-year transition, and advising programs that help students find clear and flexible pathways to the learning outcomes they seek to develop. Advising is a real focus of this and deserves special attention from every institution.
The twin foci for policy in this section are “context of the community” and “student demographics.” In a 2004 report by The Education Trust titled “A Matter of Degrees: Improving Graduation Rates in Four-Year Colleges and Universities,” the authors note that “Low-income and minority students are far more likely to be educated in under-sourced, under-staffed schools that expect far too little of their students and get little in return” (The Education Trust, 2004, p.5).

While we must acknowledge that students, themselves, play a major role in their own success, the report by The Education Trust supports the view that, “What colleges and universities do matters greatly when it comes to student success” (The Education Trust, 2004, p.5).

Traditionally graduation rates have been used as measures of institutional effectiveness and student success, though they indicate little more than that a student has spent a certain amount of time in a required number of classes; they certainly indicate nothing specific about learning. Furthermore, we know that many students leave institutions voluntarily and not because of grades or otherwise being asked to leave. Unfortunately, one reason they leave is that their expectations of college are not met. In *Promoting Reasonable Expectations*, Thomas Miller noted that “Colleges do not usually ask students what they expect from the experience, but they seem effective at communicating their own expectations of students” (Miller, Bender, & Schuh, 2005, p.244). Miller suggests that colleges should collect information about student expectations on an individual basis and in the aggregate. Academic advising sessions might be the most favorable places to work with students in exploring why they are in college, what they expect to achieve and their aspirations for the future. Research on expectations collected at particular times during students’ college careers can help higher education institutions make appropriate adjustments to ensure student success.

In *Promoting Reasonable Expectations*, Miller emphasizes understanding how students’ expectations compare with what they actually experience. According to Miller, “These matters need consideration across the full range of institutional operations because expectations of students intersect with every aspect of the college, from bill paying, to student activities, to security, to cleanliness of the buildings” (Miller, Bender, & Schuh, 2005, p.244). If student expectations are not met in these areas, there can be serious impacts on how well students learn. The entire campus is the learning community. Environment counts.

**IV. Institutions should acknowledge, support, and integrate the powerful opportunities for transformative learning found across the entire college environment---so policy should support the synthesis of classroom and out-of-classroom learning and of on-campus and community-based learning.** Student affairs professionals and faculty must therefore commit to (1) assessing the campus environment for specific learning experiences in each of the overall student learning outcome categories and (2) identifying and integrating community-based learning.
experiences so commuters, adult learners, graduate students, and part-
time students can create a holistic experience by learning from their total
environment.

In support of this commitment, academic leaders and senior student affairs officers
should collaborate to develop ways to reward the development of experiences that
combine knowledge acquisition and experiential learning, and should support faculty
members and student affairs professionals in redesigning learning opportunities so that
they include both cognitive and developmental components. Some of the best ways to do
this are (1) creating Centers for Teaching and Learning that provide professional
development and support to both faculty members and student affairs professionals and
(2) adopting a partnership model—often realized in a Center—that expects and rewards
collaborations among all campus educators for student learning.

There are many instances of successful collaborations that produce learning, from travel
abroad programs to service learning to course-connected film series, but they tend to be
sporadic on campus; that is, because they occur as a result of voluntary cooperation rather
than of a policy decision or a structural change, they remain essentially anomalous and
peripheral. Even these sporadic examples provide models for cooperation that can and
should be made more centrally a part of institutional culture.

V.  Learning Reconsidered also addresses the need to support the learning
and development of students in graduate and professional programs.
One clear implication is that institutions should identify the needs of
graduate and professional students and develop specific programs and
services to meet those needs. Faculty members, student affairs
professionals, academic administrators, and representative graduate
students should work together to define strategies and resources that will
support the comprehensive, holistic learning of graduate students.

Graduate and professional programs are, by their very nature, designed to train
specialists. They are therefore, at least indirectly, one of the sources of the increasing
fragmentation— isolation into silos—that characterizes higher education and makes it
unable to respond to calls for greater accountability. They are also a source of the
discipline orientation that often prizes research above teaching and publication above
service in institutional decisions on tenure and promotion. They are therefore one of the
reasons why changing culture on campus, from the discipline-oriented, department-based
culture that exists on most campuses to the cross-disciplinary, cross-functional culture
that we need to develop, is so difficult.

If graduate schools are part of the problem, they can become part of the solution, in
several ways. They can model cross-functional behavior, as they often do nowadays with
interdisciplinary dissertation committees, and they can extend this concept to joint efforts
between academic and student affairs emphases. (To be fair, this does happen,
particularly in Schools of Education, but it is clear when the cooperation occurs that it is
a voluntary exception, not the rule.) They can develop curricula that deliberately break
down disciplinary and functional barriers. They can initiate assessment practices that cut
across functional areas. The possibilities are endless, but they must be recognized and
made actual through policy implementation.

VI. A fundamental policy implication of Learning Reconsidered applies to
graduate preparation programs in higher education administration,
student personnel, and student affairs. Administrators and members of
the faculty in those programs must ensure that their curricula will
prepare forward-thinking, confident, and competent educators who
understand learning and how it occurs, have the skills needed for today’s
practice—including the ability to develop, implement, and assess learning
outcomes—and will work effectively with others to make colleges and
universities learning communities in which students develop the
knowledge and skills they need.

As with graduate education in the disciplines, graduate programs in administration,
student personnel, and student affairs need to recognize that they are training
professionals who will have a hand in the learning of the undergraduates they will
eventually serve. Thus it is incumbent upon these programs to see their students as future
teachers as well as managers or providers of services. As with graduate education in the
disciplines, they must make every effort to develop courses and programs that emphasize
the cross-functional nature of administration and student affairs. They must add emphasis
on the assessment of learning, not only of their own programs and courses but also as
essential content of those programs and courses. They must, in other words, help their
graduate students understand that, while their daily work as professionals will only
occasionally take them into the classroom, they are nevertheless teachers every day. They
must learn that producing and facilitating learning is a central part of their jobs, and that
they share responsibility with faculty and other staff for helping students achieve
institutional learning outcomes.

VII. One really significant policy consequence of Learning Reconsidered is that
professional development programs for all educators (including faculty)
cannot be incidental or optional; they must be programmed and
expected. Each institution should provide ongoing professional
development programs that address the changing nature of the student
experience and student learning so that all campus educators can
continuously assess and improve their efforts in enhancing the learning
process.

As institutional and governmental policies on student learning evolve, it is likely that all
staff on campus will need professional development opportunities to help them meet
expectations that did not exist when they were earning their graduate degrees. The special
programs at Bucks County Community College and Genesee Community College, cited
earlier, are two examples of the kind of development opportunities that can help faculty and staff to learn to cooperate, understand issues of student development and engagement, and become fully responsible for student success and institutional effectiveness in a cross-functional way. Institutional culture will not change without serious attention to faculty and student affairs development, so professional development programs are a critical part of the change that needs to occur on campuses across the nation.

The time for debating whether or not institutions should clearly state their learning outcomes is past. The time for assessing the achievement of those outcomes is here. We must recognize that assessing learning, using the evidence to improve processes that produce learning, and sharing responsibility for learning across the campus must be, from today forward, a part of institutional culture and practice. The train, as they say, is leaving the station. It is time to get on board.
References


