



BHEF 2006 Issue Brief

Experts



**Lt. Governor
Barbara Lawton**

The Honorable Barbara Lawton was elected in 2002 as Wisconsin's first female Lt. Governor. As chair of the Wisconsin Arts Board, Lt. Governor Lawton draws the administration's attention to the

central role our arts and cultural sector plays in revitalizing communities and driving growth in a 21st-century economy. Lawton earned her bachelor's degree at Lawrence University and a master's degree in Spanish at University of Wisconsin-Madison.



**Debra
Humphreys**

Debra Humphreys is currently the Vice President for Communications and Public Affairs at the Association of American Colleges and Universities, a position she assumed in January 2001. Previously, she served

as Director of Programs in the Office of Diversity, Equity and Global Initiatives at AAC&U, where she directed programs on women's issues and diversity in higher education. Dr. Humphreys received her B.A. from Williams College and her Ph.D. in English from Rutgers University.

Liberal Education and America's Promise: The Aims and Competencies of a 21st-Century Liberal Education

The outcomes of a liberal education are widely recognized as the foundation for advancing human potential, economic growth and stability, and forming an engaged and productive citizenry. While the importance of these educational outcomes is agreed upon by most corporate and academic leaders, many students do not share the same views. In the spirit of the Forum's "Spanning the Chasm" reports (1997, 1999) that featured a dialogue among corporate and academic leaders regarding the most important college outcomes, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) recently launched the *Liberal Education and America's Promise* campaign (LEAP) that seeks the collaboration of business and industry to ensure that every student understands the value of and has the opportunity to receive a liberal education.

At BHEF's 2006 winter meeting, Debra Humphreys, Vice President of AAC&U, led a conversation about the importance of liberal education and the intended outcomes of LEAP. Lt. Governor Barbara Lawton spoke about efforts in the state of Wisconsin as part of the initial implementation phase of the LEAP campaign. In partnership with AAC&U, the University of Wisconsin system has launched an initiative that will pilot a series of campus action and advocacy efforts that champion the value of a liberal education for all college students as an important means of ensuring Wisconsin's economic future.

QUICK FACT

Fact 1

Corporate and academic leaders agree on the importance of a core set of outcomes of a liberal education.

Fact 2

Students systematically assigned a low value for many of the outcomes most highly valued by corporate and academic leaders.

Fact 1

When asked about the outcomes of a college education, most corporate and academic leaders agree that those outcomes traditionally associated with a liberal education are among the most important. For example, corporate and academic leaders cited a sense of values, principles and ethics; critical thinking and reasoning skills; heightened cultural and global awareness; and Strong writing and oral/Speaking skills as among the most important reasons to pursue a college education. (See Exhibit 1).

Fact 2

High school and college students, however, systematically assigned a low value for many of the outcomes most highly valued by corporate and academic leaders. Students assigned low importance to the set of core outcomes traditionally associated with a liberal education such as a sense of values; tolerance and respect; and cultural and global awareness. Conversely, outcomes such as time management and self-discipline were among the most important outcomes to students; however, they were only thought to be of medium importance to corporate and academic leaders. (See Exhibit 1). The following chart highlights these divergent perceptions.

Exhibit 1

Outcomes of College by Perceived Level of Importance		
Business/Academia	Outcome	Students
HIGH	Sense of values, principles, and ethics	LOW
HIGH	Tolerance and respect for people of other backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and lifestyles	LOW
HIGH	Cultural and global awareness	LOW
HIGH	Civic responsibility	LOW
HIGH	Critical thinking/Reasoning skills	MEDIUM
HIGH	Strong writing and oral/Speaking skills	MEDIUM
HIGH	Ability to solve problems and think analytically	MEDIUM
HIGH	Leadership skills	MEDIUM
HIGH	Teamwork skills	HIGH
MEDIUM	Computer skills	LOW
MEDIUM	Maturity/Self-determination	HIGH
MEDIUM	Time-management	HIGH
MEDIUM	Strong work habits	HIGH
MEDIUM	Self-discipline	HIGH

SOURCE: Peter D. Hart Research Associates, *Summary of Existing Research on Liberal Education Outcomes*: August 2004 and *Key Findings from Focus Groups with Current College Students and High School Seniors in Wisconsin*. (2005).