

The Future

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The essays in this collection provide some insight into what matters most for an educational institution: the expertise, commitment, and energy of its faculty. Through these descriptions of academic program development, we learn about how Lesley University faculty strive to maintain a focus on student engagement and student learning, integrate theory and practice, and connect the university with multiple communities beyond our campus.

Each of these programs, requiring insight, analysis, creativity, and resources were initiated by people who believed passionately in their program's purpose and public benefit. Similar to Edith Lesley, they saw a need and an opportunity—and then collaborated to create something new in response. It is this sense of possibility, this belief in opportunity, and the drive to engage in work that is worthy of our heads and hearts that continues to join all members of this academic community. Perhaps we are most pleased when we learn that our graduates have also created something new—a text, a non-profit organization, a work of art, a product, a service or a piece of software—that positively impacts a particular community. We like to think that our engagement with students as mature learners has had something to do with their success.

We are going to need more creativity in the future if higher education is going to serve well our growing, diverse population. As we engage our students, as we encourage them to keep open minds, seek creative alternatives, critique dominant systems, commit to social justice, and aspire to lives of meaning and impact, we must also encourage ourselves within the academy to do the same. Increasingly, higher education is seen by an increasing number of our fellow citizens as an unattainable place of privilege. We must develop more significant, scalable, and affordable alternatives to the current model of higher education.

We have much to learn from the faculty who have designed new kinds of programs to meet the needs of new kinds of students, both younger and older. We need to develop better models of universities that are more entrepreneurial and less bureaucratic, and that directly involve the faculty not just in the delivery of programs, but in the design of them as well.

Our challenges are great. Two out of three American workers over the age of 24 have no college degree. The K-12 education gap is splitting our society along racial/ethnic and income lines. Our inner city schools are more segregated than ever and teachers at low-performing schools are increasingly seen as the key problem, along with their unions, rather than the impoverished circumstances of their students, their neighborhoods, and the schools themselves.

It is commonplace to think that we can improve student learning outcomes by allowing some students to choose between their public school or a charter school. We have disconnected schools from neighborhoods, and now neighbor from neighbor. We think that programmed teaching to train students to do well on standardized tests is the goal of a school day, and, consistent with that perspective, we have often eliminated the most engaging parts of a student's

school day (physical education, music and art) when students get to move, make sounds, and create.

We think that technology may offer some assistance in teaching and learning. Most schools can't afford sufficient technology for each student, so technology usually reinforces the centrality of the teacher rather than the centrality of the learner. Even as we have made more investments in school technology, student academic performance continues to drop. It may be true that technology is too new and changing too fast for schools to be able to exploit that technology to enhance student learning on a massive scale in poor, underperforming districts.

A university with Lesley's mission and history is obliged to engage these challenges. We must take into account the context of our learners, not just as students at Lesley, but subsequently as alumni with jobs in particular settings. We must be as familiar with those settings as Edith Lesley was with kindergartens through her studies and her experience.

Lesley's programs are now more varied than the kindergarten training of the early 1900's. However, the connection among all these programs has been there since the beginning: a humanistic, postsecondary education that cares about culture, equity, opportunity and justice—and the development of lifelong learners with professional lives who contribute directly to the public good. This mission, as relevant as ever, is what propels Lesley into its second century.