

AALAC Workshop Proposal: Design Thinking and the Liberal Arts

Workshop Organizers

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Workshop Description

Creativity and innovation are essential to any liberal arts education, yet often we struggle to articulate this link into our students' education. Regardless, we often hear from our alumni that once in the workforce, Liberal Arts graduates are considered the most creative people in their place of employment. This is certainly no surprise to faculty, as we witness the power of the creative experiences that the Liberal Arts provide to our students during their four years of College.

Yet, the economic stressors following the great recession have undeniably changed the landscape of Liberal Arts Colleges. Our students respond with anxiety to an ultracompetitive world of high-stakes graduate school admissions and professional recruitment, which sometimes determines their educational path and curricular decisions. Perceptions of high-stakes postgraduate competition discourage some from taking academic and intellectual risks, either within a specific course (by choosing safe topics to work with), or across a student's curriculum (by not venturing into courses in areas far from one's expertise).

We thus are faced with a challenge: How can we foster intellectual risk-taking among our students? How can we articulate the power that a liberal arts education has in expanding our students' creative confidence? And how can we accelerate our students' ability to innovate?

Recently, several Liberal Arts Colleges have examined how to accelerate the creative capacity of our students. We have come up with different initiatives that seek to support students who want to define and solve problems with no obvious or simple answers, and for faculty who want to engage in those challenges with them. Design Thinking has been at the center of these efforts.

In this workshop we propose to bring together faculty and staff from different AALAC institutions to share our experiences in fostering creative confidence using Design Thinking. We will explore ideas to help make our students more comfortable with thriving in an environment of uncertainty, we will model how to incorporate experimentation and iterative prototyping into our syllabi, and discuss how to teach students to fail intelligently.

We propose a one-day workshop on how design thinking can complement our student's liberal arts education, and how design thinking complements how we teach and advise. This workshop will help us learn from each other's efforts as well as create networks and bridges that will allow future collaboration.

Our goal is to share ideas that are working and explore possible synergies from collaboration across schools with an eye toward creating an ecosystem built around Creativity and Design Thinking in our Liberal Arts Colleges.

Dissemination Efforts

We will invite faculty from all 24 AALAC Colleges via e-mail and will follow up using informal networks. We will also design a website with information about the workshop.

Preliminary Program

The conference will take place on March 4, 2016 on the campus of Pomona College in Claremont, California. The program will include a mix of discussions, sharing examples from our campuses, and a Design Thinking workshop.

8 am – 9 am	Breakfast and Introductions
9 am – 10 am	Design Thinking and the Liberal Arts: what do we mean by these terms, and what makes this unique?
10 am – 11 am	Cross-disciplinary Design Thinking Efforts on our Campuses
11 am – 12 pm	Breakout Sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design Thinking in the Humanities• Design Thinking in the Arts• Design Thinking in the Social Sciences• Design Thinking in the Sciences & Engineering
12 pm – 1 pm	Lunch
1 pm – 2:45 pm	DT Workshop: Using Design Thinking for Student Advising
2:45 – 3:45 pm	More Co-curricular Design Thinking Efforts on our Campuses
3:45- 4:45 pm	Using Design Thinking to Accomplish Institutional Change
4:45 – 5:45 pm	How Might We Think About Assessment?
5:45- 6:30 pm	Identifying and Overcoming Barriers to Success: why language matters, or: what's in a name?
6:30 – 8:30 pm	Dinner and Reception

Future Activities

Several AALAC institutions are in the process or have just recently started initiatives to incorporate Design Thinking into the Liberal Arts. Our main goal for this conference is to bring people together so we can learn from our experiences, and perhaps build on the synergies that arise from the diversity of our institutions. The first follow-up to this conference will be the creation of an e-mail distribution list where we can continuously interact with each other, and learn as we all advance in the future. The second follow-up is the aspiration that participants will eventually visit each other's campuses and direct Design

Thinking workshops during these visits. Finally, we will add links of each center's website on the webpage mentioned above in the "Dissemination Efforts" section.