Let me begin by thanking Nelvia Brady for inviting me to participate in your Diversity Lecture Series. I’m honored to be here to help you think through your goals for diversity in the curriculum and how to ensure that Trinity students are prepared for the challenges they will face in the future. As many of you may know, general education reform and diversity in higher education have been high priorities for my association, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, for decades and I certainly applaud your attention to this crucial issue that we believe is essential to a quality education in the 21st century.

I want to begin with a disclaimer. I will be presenting and discussing with you today a lot of research, some models from other campuses, national trends, poll results, and recommendations from various national panels and reports. That can all be useful to your efforts. However, there is no perfect model or off-the-shelf curriculum that I would ever recommend a campus adopt unchanged.

The most important message I can bring to you is that the collective wisdom and consensus of the Trinity faculty and staff should drive whatever curriculum changes or diversity programming you develop. I have learned a bit about Trinity and your goals for diversity from Nelvia in preparation for this talk, but you know more about the mission of this institution and the learning goals that will be most important for your students. These are really the most important things that should guide you.

How many of you are familiar with AAC&U and the work we do?

Some of you may also know a bit about AAC&U, but you may not know that we just celebrated in 2005 our 90th anniversary and we now have more than 1100 institutional members—colleges and universities of every size and type, public, private, 2-year, 4-year, large, small. We have been concerned with the larger purposes of education and specifically with the value of liberal education for approaching a century now. Given that long history, I thought it would be appropriate to begin by quoting a bit from some of our founding leaders and a few other higher education national experts from across our now 90 year history.

So a few quotes from different sources to begin:

I want to begin with a quote from AAC&U’s recently released report, Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College. In that report released in 2002, a national panel of leaders from education, business, policy, and community groups argue that today’s college education must prepare students for the complexity of a diverse and globally interconnected, if fractured, world and it must
prepare students who are self-directed and intentional about their own educational careers. That report argues that in an education that prepares students to be “intentional leaners” “intellectual study connects to personal life, formal education to work, and knowledge to social responsibility. Through understanding the power and implications of education, intentional learners consciously choose to act in ethical and responsible ways. Able to place themselves in the context of a diverse world, these learners draw on difference and commonality to produce a deeper experience of community.”

The Greater Expectations national panel also recommends that all college students today learn the values and histories underlying US democracy, the interrelations within and among global and cross-cultural communities, skills in intercultural communication, understanding of one’s self and one’s multiple identities, and respect for the complex identities of others, their histories and their cultures.

We found it interesting, if a bit startling to juxtapose this contemporary rhetoric about the role of diversity in the curriculum today with excerpts from the opening address by Robert Kelly at AAC&U’s first meeting in 1915. Kelly was president of Earlham College and AAC&U’s first president. In arguing for why a national organization of American colleges devoted to liberal education was needed, he says,

“Many of our citizens are of German, Italian, and Bohemian descent. We have within the limits of our country Puritans, Knickerbockers, Cavaliers, Cowboys, and Hoosiers. We have among us Hebrews and Catholics, Mormons, Mohammadans and Methodists. We have Republicans, Democrats and Socialists. We have indeed a great conglomeration of citizenship, from one point of view; but above all and beyond all we have American citizens. There is such a thing as an American spirit, as the soul of America.”

So, while Kelly’s remarks (and especially the language and vocabulary he uses) are distinctly of his era—1915—they do reveal this concern about diversity from the very beginnings of our association. They also reveal that diversity means different things to different people and in different contexts. For instance, you’ll note that religion, ethnicity, and geography are key diversity issues for Kelley. As I talk to educational leaders around the country today, I would venture to say that most of us tend to think first of race and possibly gender when we hear the word diversity. After some reflection, however, most would also agree that religion, ethnicity and geography remain extremely important elements of identity in today’s society. So, we need to keep in mind that diversity means different things to different people in different contexts. I often hear from people on many campuses—and I heard it from some of you in preparing for this symposium—that “our campus lacks diversity.” And what those who say that usually mean is that our campus isn’t very racially diverse. But remember that not all elements of diversity that influence our identities and how we are treated in our society—and that can be used to advance educational goals—are visible on the surface.

And, however one defines the word diversity, I put before you three overriding questions that I think every college campus needs to grapple with.

How exactly are we to really achieve meaningful inclusion in this era of Greater Expectations?

Why is diversity important in higher education in this context—and in your and your students’ own local, national, and international contexts?
And, finally, what impact does diversity really have on achievement of your own learning goals?

I have titled my talks this morning Making Excellence Inclusive and I mean by that phrase two things. On the one hand, many of us believe that the academy needs not only to increase access to higher education and the diversity of our campuses, but also ensure that all students receive the very best education we can give them. We must ensure even traditionally underrepresented students both access and success in achieving key learning goals important in today’s world.

On the other hand, we also need to change our notions of excellence to be sure that all students, whatever their background or prior learning, learn about issues of diversity, and preferably in diverse settings. If we don’t do this, we are doing a disservice to all our students. And I will be talking a bit this morning about the compelling evidence about the positive educational impact of diversity on a host of key learning outcomes for all students.

So, however we define it, diversity, and, in fact, the reform of general education have been enduring themes in higher education. This is perfectly appropriate. For, as a 1977 document from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching put it, “The curriculum is the major statement any institution makes about itself, about what it can contribute to the intellectual development of students, about what it thinks is important in its teaching service to society.”

And to quote Fred Rudolph, that eminent historian of education, in the same year (1977), “Values change, and so does the curriculum, as the more than 300 years since the founding of Harvard College clearly say. Since that time, long ago, when a peculiarly self-demanding band of alienated Englishmen got themselves a college almost before they had built themselves a privy, change in the course of study has been constant, conscious and unconscious, gradual and sudden, accidental and intentional, uneven and diverse, imaginative and pedestrian.”

So, this is an ongoing conversation nationally. And here and nationally, it won’t end this morning here at Trinity and I am well aware that it didn’t begin this morning either here or elsewhere.

So, to set our discussion in a national context, what are the changes in the general education curriculum that characterize our current era of reform? What are the national trends?

And before I start my slides, I want to say that I have summarized a lot of research in very few words on these slides so I have included in your handouts a list of all my sources for all these various things. Some of these sources are identified on the slides, some findings I’m presenting emerge from so many different studies, I just didn’t have room to list all the studies. If there is a particular finding that you are interested in, I can certainly find you the specific studies either today or when I go back to DC. So, all the studies to which I refer are included in the bibliography on the last pages of the handouts.

In 2000, AAC&U did a number of surveys of our members and of higher education institutions generally and I’m going to do a very quick tour of what we have found about the priorities of colleges and universities in terms of general education reform, and diversity in the curriculum. I, then, will present some highlights of what research is telling us about what difference diversity makes in terms of actual student learning
outcomes—that information will be based on a number of studies done by researchers around the country, not necessarily by AAC&U alone.

So, first slides

Before I summarize the educational research on the impact all these curriculum change and other diversity efforts are having on student learning, I want to share with you a chart for mapping out campus diversity. This chart was developed by Daryl Smith for a book she wrote for AAC&U called Diversity Works: The Emerging Picture of How Students Benefit. I think this schema is particularly useful in several ways: 1) it indicates that campus diversity means different things to different people depending on their jobs and location on campus, (give examples—admissions, faculty, department chair) but also 2) that understanding what diversity means in higher education requires us to look at some very different areas of the academy and sources of data and how they interconnect. The most important part of the chart are the arrows representing the interconnections.

One of the most important findings in the research is that those institutions that have a holistic plan and visible leadership and commitment to addressing issues of diversity seem to have better intergroup relations and diversity outcomes by a variety of measures. So making the connections among one’s various diversity programs—including co-curricular efforts—can have a big impact. For instance, using this chart as a guide, we might ask ourselves what specifically is the relationship between our success at recruiting and retaining a more diverse student body and our efforts to encourage intergroup dialogue on campus, to create an environment free of discrimination against minority students? So, recruitment is related to climate. What is the relation between our efforts to diversify our faculty and diversity in our curriculum? In what ways do the leaders of our institution and the founding documents that describe the institution to the outside world reflect a clear commitment to the value of diversity?

So, let me conclude by quoting a statement AAC&U’s board of directors passed a few years ago on Affirmative Action, Educational Excellence, and the Civic Mission of Higher Education. In part, this statement observes that: “higher education can do its best work when it embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, cultural, and intellectual world….Persuasive research indicates that for all students, engaging diversity on campus and in the curriculum promotes intellectual development, enhances critical thinking, reduces prejudice, improves intergroup relations, and contributes to student academic success and satisfaction. Exploring diversity also produces graduates more likely to engage as informed citizens in remedying unsolved social problems.”

Thank you very much for your time and attention.