First-Year Seminars and Experiences
Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students’ intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members’ own research.

Common Intellectual Experiences
The older idea of a “core” curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link “liberal arts” and “professional courses”; others feature service learning.

Writing-Intensive Courses
These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice “across the curriculum” has led to parallel efforts in such areas as quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry.

Collaborative Assignments and Projects
Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one’s own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

Undergraduate Research
Many colleges and universities are now providing research experiences for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, has been most prominently used in science disciplines. With strong support from the National Science Foundation and the research community, scientists are reshaping their courses to connect key concepts and questions with students’ early and active involvement in systematic investigation and research. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.

Diversity/Global Learning
Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often explore “difficult differences” such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad.

ePortfolios
ePortfolios are the latest addition to AAC&U’s list of high-impact educational practices, and higher education has developed a range of ways to implement them for teaching and learning, programmatic assessment, and career development. ePortfolios enable students to electronically collect their work over time, reflect upon their personal and academic growth, and then share selected items with others, such as professors, advisors, and potential employers. Because collection over time is a key element of the ePortfolio process, employing ePortfolios in collaboration with other high-impact practices provides opportunities for students to make connections between various educational experiences.

Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
In these programs, field-based “experiential learning” with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

Internships
Internships are another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for course credit, students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member.

Capstone Courses and Projects
Whether they’re called “senior capstones” or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they’ve learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of “best work,” or an exhibit of artwork. Capstones are offered both in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.
High-Impact Practices: Eight Key Elements and Examples

**Performance expectations set at appropriately high levels**
Example: A writing- or inquiry-intensive first-year seminar in which assignments, projects, and activities such as multiple short papers, problem sets or projects challenge students to achieve beyond their current ability level as judged by criteria calibrated to students’ pre-college accomplishment evidenced by placement tests or ACT or SAT scores.

**Significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time**
Example: A multiple-part class assignment on which a student works over the course of the academic term, beginning with a synopsis of the problem or issue to be examined and the methods or procedures that will be used, followed subsequently with narrative sections describing the methods, findings, and conclusions which together culminate in a completed paper, demonstration or performance evaluated by an independent third party or faculty supervisor.

**Interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters**
Example: Out-of-class activities in which students in a learning community or first-year seminar come together at least once weekly to attend an enrichment event such as lecture by a visiting dignitary and/or discuss common readings and assignments facilitated by an upper-division peer mentor.

**Experiences with diversity, wherein students are exposed to and must contend with people and circumstances that differ from those with which students are familiar**
Example: A service learning field assignment wherein students work in a setting populated by people from different backgrounds and demographics, such as an assisted living facility or shelter for abused children, which is coupled with class discussions and journaling about the connections between class readings and the field assignment experience.

**Frequent, timely, and constructive feedback**
Example: A student-faculty research project during which students meet with and receive suggestions from the supervising faculty (or staff) member at various points to discuss progress, next steps, and problems encountered and to review the quality of the student’s contributions up to and through the completion of the project.

**Periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning**
Example: Linked courses in a learning community wherein an instructor of one course designs assignments that require students to draw on material covered in one or more of the other linked courses supplemented by a peer preceptor who coordinates student attendance and discussion at relevant campus events, or a capstone course in which students submit a portfolio and explain the relative contributions of the artifacts contained therein that represent the knowledge and proficiencies attained at various points during their program of study.

**Opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications**
Example: An internship, practicum or field placement that requires that students apply the knowledge and skills acquired during their program of study, or supervisor mediated discussions among student workers that encourage students to reflect on and see the connections between their studies and experiences in the work setting.

**Public demonstration of competence**
Example: An oral presentation to classmates of the required capstone seminar product that is evaluated by a faculty member and/or an accomplished practitioner, or a narrative evaluation of an internship, practicum or field placement by the work setting supervisor and/or supervising faculty or staff member.