

Core Missions and Civic Responsibility:
Toward the Engaged Academy

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As the United States moves into the final days of what is now called the “American Century,” calls abound for a renewal of civic engagement and social responsibility. From campus to community leaders, in proposals from educational leaders, foundations, national associations and grass-roots community organizations, a broad consensus seems already to be forming. This consensus points to strategy as well as theme: it argues that we must renew the public sphere, revitalize our associational life, re-invest in those civic activities that are the nursery of citizenship and civic vitality.

Political scientist Benjamin Barber speaks for many in his cogent summary of the challenge that now confronts American society. The first priority for our own as well as new democracies, he writes, must be “the reconstruction of civil society as a framework for the reinvention of democratic citizenship. . .” Civil society, he goes on to explain, is a “mediating third domain between the overgrown but increasingly ineffective state governmental and the metastasizing private market sectors. . .” As such, civil society “needs a habitation; it must become a real place that offers the abstract idea of a public voice a palpable geography somewhere other than in the twin atlases of government and markets.”

Reconstituting civil society has a significance beyond the desirable recovery of connectedness and community. As leaders of a new civil society initiative at Harvard observe in their inaugural text: “Much hard evidence has accumulated that civic engagement and social connectedness are practical conditions for societal, economic and institutional vitality.” The converse is also true. In the absence of civic engagement, healthy community institutions, and norms of mutual reciprocity and trust, social institutions falter and lose their efficacy.

Harvard philosopher Cornel West provides a more impassioned version of this same analysis. Assessing the palpable estrangements across race and class that continue to deface American democracy, West declaims:

As a people--E Pluribus Unum--we are on a slippery slope toward economic strife, social turmoil, and cultural chaos. If we go down, we go down together....The paradox of race in America is that our common destiny is more pronounced and imperiled precisely when our divisions are deeper. . . .

What is to be done?...First, we must admit that the most valuable sources for help, hope, and power consist of ourselves and our common history....Second, we must focus our attention on the public square--the common good that undergirds our national and global destinies. The vitality of any public square ultimately depends on how much we *care* about the quality of our lives together....

Last, the major challenge is the need to generate new leadership....

We need leaders...who can situate themselves within a larger historical narrative of this country and world, who can grasp the complex dynamics of our peoplehood and imagine a future grounded in the best of our past, yet attuned to the frightening obstacles that now perplex us. Our ideals of freedom, democracy, and equality must be invoked to invigorate ail of us, especially the landless, propertyless, and luckless.³

Higher education and the renewal of civic engagement

As this introduction makes clear, the concept of an enlivened public sphere plays a large role in contemporary strategies for reviving civic engagement, leadership and commitment to the solution of public problems. This public sphere in turn is to be animated through the work of mediating institutions which, proponents argue, must provide a meaningful space for public discourse and action.

Mediating institutions are those voluntarily formed organizations--outside both the government and the market sphere-- that represent aspirations for community, for voice and visibility, for actions to pursue an intended good in concert with others. These civic organizations include schools, foundations, voluntary associations, both national and local, religious communities, activist movements and the media. What binds such disparate entities together in a common category is their ethos of voluntarism and social purposefulness. As Dewey famously observed, democracy is among other things a design for "associated living." The mediating institutions that constitute civil society are the spheres in which this associated living is both enacted and tied to goals that matter to discrete communities and to the society as a whole.

While the role of mediating institutions in general has been much discussed in the contemporary literature on civic vitality, there has been surprisingly modest attention to the role that higher education institutions in particular might play in the renewal of civic engagement. There is, of course, a robust and widely encouraged movement in support of community *service* growing both on campus and in the schools. Most who support this movement see it as a primary contribution to the revitalization of our civic life, a point to which we return below. But service learning initiatives consist primarily of organizing opportunities for *students* to develop an ethic and experience of community involvement, frequently as an extracurricular activity. There has been far less attention to potential connections between the *core missions* of colleges and universities as educational institutions and the quality of our civic life.

This paper explores connections between the *core educational missions* of colleges and universities and civic vitality. It revisits one of the most hallowed claims and espoused purposes of our colleges and universities: the expectation that higher learning contributes substantially to learners' preparation for citizenship.

In brief, this paper contends that the higher education community's sense of how it addresses this espoused purpose is in need of enlargement and fundamental reconceptualization as we move forward into a new century. The paper further contends that resources for this renewal are

already multiplying at many colleges and universities, in a set of programs and reforms I describe here as “The Engaged Academy.”

In making this argument that we need an enlarged vision, for which resources are already at hand, I explore four issues: 1) the recent history of higher education’s understanding of the connections between education and civic responsibility; 2) what I suggest is the exhaustion of our most recent approaches; 3) experiments emerging across higher education that embody a new direction; and 4) specific proposals for re-engaging democratic principles and practices.

Part I: Changing Conceptions of Higher Learning and Preparation for Citizenship

Until the early decades of the twentieth century higher learning was limited, in the United States as elsewhere, to an elite of the well-born, the spiritually dedicated and (a small percentage of) the professionally enterprising. From the colonial era through the early twentieth century, higher education’s contribution to civic vitality was indirect, accomplished primarily through the intellectual and moral development of a small but significant group of people who would assume leadership roles, whether in their own communities, the professions, or the society as a whole.

If the pre-twentieth century American academy was essentially indirect in its contribution to the public weal, it was nonetheless forthright about its methods, which mixed together healthy doses of Christian piety and classical culture in the service of individual and public virtue. The classics which dominated study in the colonial and nineteenth century colleges were never understood as an end in themselves; rather, in a tradition that echoed back to the ancient Greco-Roman world, they were viewed as a direct source of moral instruction and character development as well as valuable learning.⁴

In this vein, the discipline of mastering grammatical and linguistic constructions from a bygone era was recommended as much for its beneficial effects upon the wayward will as for the resulting linguistic competence. Moreover, once achieved, knowledge of ancient languages opened to the educated the spiritual truths of the Scriptures as well as the enduring insights of philosophers, epic poets and statesmen. The pre-twentieth century classical curriculum, in short, developed moral fibre even as it fostered mental discipline. Both were viewed as a contribution to the civic health of the young republic.

It is easy to see, when one looks at the colonial and nineteenth century academy, the extent to which essentially Christian values and assumptions were woven into the warp and woof of both educational practice and civic life. What is too easily forgotten is that this vigorous fusion of Christianity and higher learning persisted in intellectual cultures until well into the twentieth century.

Even as the research university began to emerge from the classical college context, many advocates offered a *moral* justification for the significance of the new scientific disciplines -- and of the new curricula to which they gave rise. For centuries, Christians had believed and taught

that the world was governed both by a moral law and by the laws or workings of nature. Human liberty consisted in understanding, and embracing the claims of these laws and in adjusting the heart, will and mind to their requirements. The moral promise of the new physical and social sciences, early proponents argued, was that these disciplines would lead the educated to a deeper understanding of the divine plan and to new capacities to align the heart and will with the intentions of Providence.

Henry King, then president of Oberlin College, depicted this understanding of an intimate connection between scientific disciplines and moral development in a featured presentation to a gathering of college presidents at the 1915 first annual meeting of the then newly formed Association of American Colleges:

[I]f the Christian college is honestly to fulfill the aim of education in this age, it must make possible to its students some personal sharing in the scientific spirit and method...[This] implies wide and patient and systematic study of the facts, and insight into laws--natural, economic, political, social. Without such insight, and the obedience which should follow from it, there can be no true discipline of education. Huxley's definition of education has permanent truth: 'Education is the instruction of the intellect in the laws of nature...and the fashioning of the affections and will into an earnest and loving desire to move in harmony with those laws.'....And this attitude has a genuine moral quality that is unmistakable, and that the Christian college must clearly recognize and distinctly teach."⁵

President King was sufficiently taken with this moral justification for the new scientific disciplines that he repeated Huxley's definition in a 1917 address to the same assembly of presidents.⁶

This fundamentally Christian world view remained deeply embedded in academic culture, not only in the many colleges with denominational origins and/or active affiliations, but in the land grant institutions and new research universities as well. Echoes of this vision resonate even today in assertions that a liberal education does and/or should result in higher levels of character development and ethical insight.

The academic revolution

Nonetheless, as historian Thomas Bender has amply documented, this once confident linkage between Christian values and academic culture was broken after World War II. From 1945 on, the-academy entered into an era of roaring growth and increasing self-assurance about its centrality in a world newly pervaded by the triumphs and terrors of science and technology. In this context, American intellectual culture was cut loose from its Christian ethical moorings and rapidly secularized.'

The increase of knowledge (rather than virtue) became the *raison d'être* of both the research university and the undergraduate college, with knowledge celebrated both as valuable in itself and as a powerful engine of productivity and economic and social progress. A new cosmopolitanism

emerged, founded on Enlightenment values of reason, science, democracy and a presumed universality. American scholars began to focus on “the end of ideology,” the emergence of consensus, value-free analysis and the development of ever-more sophisticated methods of disciplinary inquiry.

An important consequence of these developments in the academy was a move away from overt involvement in civic themes and issues. As Bender observes:

In retrospect it appears that the disciplines were redefined over the course of the half century following the war: from the means to an end they increasingly became an end in themselves, the possession of the scholars who constituted them. To a greater or lesser degree, academics sought some distance from civics. The increasingly professionalized disciplines were embarrassed by moralism and sentiment; they were openly or implicitly drawn to the model of [a secularized] science as a vision of professional maturity.*

Bender might have added that the detachment of the disciplines from civic disputation was also a matter of political prudence, a way of preserving the research academy from external attack and politically motivated assaults on both funding sources and scholarly work.

The academy did not-completely eschew accountability to its espoused civic mission, of course. Following models established at Columbia, Stanford, and the University of Chicago, and consonant with the recommendations of the so-called Harvard “Red Book” on *General Education in a Free Society* (1946), hundreds of campuses developed Western Civilization courses explicitly designed to introduce students to a conception of their inheritance and responsibilities as leaders and citizens in democratic societies. The civic intentions and function of these courses were plainly articulated, at least in the period of their initial establishment.’ While this clarity of purpose tended to erode over time, both for students and faculty members, the civic expectations originally attached to these courses were freshly illuminated in the 1980s by those who fought for their continuation in the curricular struggles dubbed the “culture wars.”

Notably, the civic values explored through twentieth century Western Civilization courses were themselves defined in terms of the very ideals now espoused as universal in the secularized post-World War II conceptions of the university. The value and development of human reason, the worth of the individual, the rule of law, the complementarity of Western, democratic and scientific values and institutions--in short, the substantive themes of an Enlightenment universalism--were the-organizing topics mapped into these general education courses on Western Civilization and thereby imparted to undergraduates as the distinctive legacy of Western culture.”

Education for citizenship was no longer accomplished through an avowedly direct approach to moral and character development. Education for citizenship had rather become education in responsibility for the heritage of Western civilization - and this heritage was itself defined as a universal inheritance, what Irving Kristol terms a “precious legacy,” achieved initially through Western insights, developments and victories but a resource nonetheless, as proponents argued,

for all people.”

Tellingly, however, Western Civilization courses were typically taught outside the boundaries of the departmental disciplines, in the context of a general education widely viewed both by faculty and students as at best preparatory and at worst peripheral to the “real” work of college learning. In a universe where disciplines and departments reigned supreme - and where practical subjects such as business and education themselves aspired to standing as scientific “disciplines,” the study of Western Civilization was indisputably “other.” While the historians of ideas can readily discern clear connections between the themes addressed in these western civilization courses and the animating values of the newly dominant academic disciplines studied in the departments, it would have been the rare undergraduate who could even have discerned, much less critically assessed, these constitutive connections.

In this context, there emerged across the academy two fundamental disconnections between the undergraduate curriculum and concepts of citizen engagement and responsibility. The first disconnection was that between the departmental programs--usually the site of a students’ primary educational allegiances--and the marginalized “civic” content of the general education curriculum. When students studied western values and institutions, they did so outside the realm of and with no direct connections to their chosen fields. Conversely, when students studied in their majors, they were rarely confronted with topics or issues related to their responsibilities as citizens. (The field of education is usually an exception to this generalization.)

Ernest Boyer, speaking for many, vigorously decried the decoupling of academic fields and programs from societal involvement in his 1987 report, *College*: “[I]n many fields, skills have become ends. Scholars are busy sorting, counting, and decoding. We are turning out technicians. But the crisis of our time relates not to technical competence, but to a loss of social and historical perspective, to the disastrous divorce of competence from conscience. . . .”¹²

The second disconnect was that between the actual content of Western Civilization courses and the students’ self-identification as *American* citizens responsible for the policies and practices of a particular set of communities. Characteristically, Western Civilization courses covered Greece, the ancient Israelites, the Roman Empire, the rise of Christianity, medieval and modern Europe. At best they included only a unit or two and frequently no unit at all on American society. The archetypal courses at Stanford, and Chicago did not touch on American society. Thus, in these courses most directly tied to issues of civic values and participation, courses whose fundamental *raison d’être* was knowledge of the sources of democratic values and institutions, instructors left it to the students’ own determination how the study of western civilization related to either the immediate problems or the constitutive practices of American democracy,

Let us bracket for the moment the complaints of contemporary critics that these Western Civilization courses simply dismissed huge portions of the wider world. The perhaps surprising reality is that they also gave short shrift to the complexity of even the American cultural and political landscapes.

Part II: Higher education and democracy's discontents

Given these curricular patterning, few would have claimed by the second half of the twentieth century that curricular content was the *primary* way that post-war colleges and universities prepared students for their roles as American citizens. Rather, the university's primary self-understanding about education and citizenship came to rest on its claims of cultivating in students generalized capacities for leadership, especially intellectual discipline, critical thinking and higher order analytical reasoning.

In a complex world, the academy prepared citizens, not by teaching them about any particular set of issues, but rather by developing minds that would be, as an outcome of higher learning, capable of engaging many issues. This is what you can expect to gain at the university, scholars told entering students. Whatever field you choose, you will learn there a disciplined way of organizing questions and systemically exploring answers. This is the primary outcome of your liberal education: a capacity for disciplined inquiry which will be useful in any and every endeavor you choose.¹³

To what civic endeavors might students apply their newly honed analytical capacities? By the 1960s, the answer to that question was increasingly being left in part to student choice and in part to the co-curriculum.- Some students made no connections; some students invested themselves ardently in such issues as anti-war activity or civil rights or other forms of social action. But for the most part, they made these commitments outside the formal curricular structure.

Thus the curriculum, even that small part of it that engaged with issues of democratic institutions and values, assumed a stance that was simultaneously universalizing--providing an education in the "most important" questions and traditions--and disinterested. Students were taught about the roots of the western heritage and they were encouraged to develop their analytical intelligence. The choice of how, or even whether, to employ knowledge and intellectual skills in the service of democratic society was left entirely to each individual's independent judgement and decision.

A-political intelligence and the procedural republic

In the longer perspective of time, we can see a clear parallel between the academy's postwar emphasis on developing analytical capacities as its primary contribution to civil society and evolving understandings of liberal democracy in the political sphere. Political theorists have described the emergence in the twentieth century of what Michael Sandel terms the "procedural" republic, a republic which views democratic processes as a set of rules by which public decisions are negotiated without regard to the relative merits of competing values and world views that undergird alternative courses of action. This procedural definition of the liberal state contrasts strongly, Sandel argues, with earlier eighteenth and nineteenth century public philosophies which placed strong emphasis on connections between the cultivation of personal virtues and the capacity for self-governance.

The procedural republic, as Sandel observes critically, does not involve itself with issues of civil

values or virtues. Nor does it seek to espouse one version or another of a “good society.” The liberal state, conscious of its responsibilities to a plural citizenry, is neutral on questions of value.“

Rather, the state guarantees the right of each individual to choose freely, without constraint, among competing conceptions of the good. Securing for each person the right to select ends for him or herself is goal of the liberal state and the ultimate expression of political liberty. Thus in contemporary liberal society,

statecraft no longer needs soulcraft, except in a limited domain. Tying freedom to respect for the rights of freely choosing selves...dampen(s) old disputes about how to form the habits of self-rule....[or] about the nature of the good life.... '[T]he problem of setting up a state can be solved even by a nation of devils,' in Kant's memorable words. 'For such a task does not involve the moral improvement of man.“

Instead, the procedural republic interferes in political society only to assure that individuals have fair access to a political and economic sphere, with each envisioned as open markets of freely competing individuals. The state guarantees a sphere of political liberty and action, and within this sphere, individual citizens independently examine alternatives, make choices and take actions.

In the liberal academy, analogously, the point of the educational process is to foster procedural capacities for independent thinking and judging. The academy, like the procedural republic, does not presume to provide judgments on fundamental questions of public values - whether of the good society or the good life. The reigning twentieth century American academic ethos has been so avowedly apolitical, in both the particular and the larger *senses* of political life, that the charge of “politicizing” a subject is a very grave critique indeed.

As we have seen, this education in intellectual skills and higher order capabilities is intended to prepare the individual to analyze issues and make judgments-- in whatever sphere judgments need to be made. But the course of study leaves each learner free to explore on his or her own the applications of analytical intelligence to particular issues, or whether to pursue involvement in social issues and political activity at all.

Democracy's discontents

Holding until the next section of this paper the lively critique of this Ivory Tower ethos which also flourishes in the contemporary academy, let us take the above summary as a broadly accurate description of the *dominant* contemporary conception relationship between academic training and preparation for citizenship. The obvious question to ask is: how well has it worked?

One way to address this question is to ask what the public itself expects of higher education, Does the public perceive a connection between the higher learning in the American academy and preparation for citizenship? Here the evidence is very plain. Study after study shows that broad samples of respondents value higher education almost exclusively for its capacity to provide education for employment and the economic sector. As James Harvey and James Imerwahr

explain in an analysis of national polls and focus groups prepared for the American Council on Education, the public's support for higher education is a mile wide, but only an inch deep. The public (which the authors distinguish from policy elites) esteems education. But the public is essentially unaware of the academy's claim to foster preparation for citizenship. It is not that the public absolutely rejects these claims. It quite simply does not think about them.¹⁶

Even as students of all ages flock to the academy, therefore, they are not looking for, and do not necessarily place high value on the civic commitments still espoused in typical campus mission statements. Alexander Astin's research makes this point very clear. In annual reports issued since the 1960s, he and his analysts have reported a steady decline in first year college students' interest both in political issues and in developing a personal philosophy of life, a value that correlates, he reports, with actual involvement in political activities. Astin is not shy about holding the academy complicit in failing to offer an education that actively challenges these trends by involving students with societal issues. "Most institutions," he concludes incisively, "have simply not put their 'citizenship' and 'service' commitments into practice."

If we move beyond studies of public opinion and student values to the actual state of our civic life, the picture is mixed. Research plainly suggests that higher levels of education correlate with higher levels of civic involvement. But the increasing participation in postsecondary education has not led to a corollary increase in civic activity. Moreover, micro studies show that even college educated people engaged in voluntary associations are much less likely to be involved in civic and political activity.

Across the entire population, college educated and not, confidence in public institutions is in perceptible decline. So too is participation. Robert Putnam reports, "Surveys show sharp declines in many measures of collective political participation, including attending a rally or speech (off 36 percent between 1973 and 1993), attending a meeting on town or school affairs (off 39 percent), or working for a political party (off 56 percent)." Even voting, that most minimal index of involvement, has been on a steady downward trend for years. [T]he weight of available evidence," Putnam contends, "confirms that Americans today are significantly less engaged with their communities than was true a generation ago."¹⁸

Beyond these indices of individual involvement, American society is replete with festering social problems that neither government nor citizens seem prepared to fully address. The list of democracy's discontents grows lengthier with each passing year: tense intergroup relationships, growing divides between rich and poor, decaying inner cities, a school system that systemically fails millions of less well-off students, the persistence of high levels of social violence, the inequalities structured into our system of medical coverage and access to care, the tabloidization and sensationalization of political bibliographies, the perceptible fear that privacy is under assault. Leon Botstein, an historian and president of Bard College, offers a sour but incisive long-term perspective on our present political culture:

There is a certain irony about the quality of the political debate in the United States today.

It has reached its lowest point when the people going to the polls have had the most education; there is an inverse relation between the quality of political discourse and the number of degrees and years of college credit held by Americans. The political debate was better when fewer people had access to school. . . . We would have assumed that with the broadening of education the quality of political debate would improve. Today, the name-calling, inarticulate ugliness, and hypercritical obsession with private lives are incongruous with the efforts of education.”

Arguably, if we juxtapose our nation’s distinctive achievement in producing more college graduates and matriculants than any nation in history with the manifest discontents that pervade American democracy, we must conclude that something is deeply insufficient in the way the academy both conceptualizes and advances its mission of educating students for their responsibilities as citizens.

Cultivating analytical abilities in citizens is certainly important to the health of a political democracy as it is to the modern economy. But it is not, I believe the evidence persuades us, sufficient to the vitality of a healthy and self-correcting civic society.

Part-III: Alternative Courses: Toward the Engaged Academy

It is of course an overstatement in the service of emphasis to suggest that the regime of analytical capacities totally governs the academy’s approach to fostering civic capacity and intelligence. At best, the concepts of value-free and objective inquiry fostered in the disciplines had a very short run before they began to generate vigorous critique and creative opposition. Over time, that opposition has generated not only alternative conceptions of the relations between intellectual culture and the civic sphere but thousands of new initiatives which instantiate strong and potentially productive connections between learning and democratic engagement.

Scholarship for a New Academy

Writing for a panel of scholars advising the Association of American Colleges and Universities on the connections between diversity and democracy, philosopher Elizabeth Minnich observes that a “New Academy” is growing up around the edges--and increasingly within the departments--of the twentieth century university. The new academy was begotten to analyze and address pressing societal needs and issues; its scholars therefore welcome rather than avoid constructive engagement with wider communities and social action. Given this ethos, the New Academy endorses and produces scholarship that seeks not just to describe the world but to make a better world.

“Imagine,” Minnich invites us, as she turns a flashlight on the manifestations of this new academy breaking forth from the more established boundaries of disciplines and disciplinary culture:

Imagine a campus, unlike yours, perhaps, but familiar. At the center are

buildings that house administrative and professionalized disciplines' departmental offices, classrooms, spaces for lectures, plays, dances, and concerts. Many of these are ivy-covered. Near to these are the dormitories, and dotted around them are striking, sparkling new buildings that house programs well supported by the private sector. . .

On the periphery, there are slightly shabby houses now owned by the university. These are often hard to distinguish from the community that has relinquished them, except for discreet... signs in the front yard: Women's Studies, African American Studies, Center for Collaborative Learning, Swedish American Studies, Environmental Studies, Native American Studies, Gay and Lesbian Studies, Peace Studies, Deaf Studies, Multicultural Studies, Hispanic Studies, Ethnic Studies, Labor Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies, Science and The Humanities programs, Asian American Studies, Holocaust Studies, Institute for Technology and Values, Cultural Studies, Center for Research on Teaching and Learning, Continuing Education Center....

The "proper" campus paths do not reach to these buildings. To gain them, one must cross busy streets [leading to the larger community,] and those who work in these programs do so regularly.

Today, many campuses look like that, although some have very few of the newer programs, or do offer them but keep them institutionally very marginal. Others, however, have already reached across their inherited boundaries so well that they have created a tensely exciting, creative mix of people, communities, and programs that led someone to call such campuses 'cauldrons of democracy.'

In the scholarly fields Minnich identifies with the New Academy, active engagement with social issues and challenges is not an awkward addition to the house of knowledge, rather it is foundational to the very mission of these fields and programs. Like the social sciences at the turn of the last century, these new "special studies" have sprung to life specifically to address actively debated questions about human society and the natural world, questions whose resolution will make a significant difference to the quality of both particular communities and our shared democracy.

None of these fields was born in response to generalized calls for civic action and the renewal of the public sphere. But separately and together, I suggest, the scholarly questions and approaches developed by these new fields make them natural educational sites and exemplars for just that renewed engagement with the quality of our public life that leaders on all fronts are urgently advocating.

Review the list that Minnich provides us of the new fields clustered on the boundaries of the old established academy and augment it with your own knowledge of scholarly fields and programs she might plausibly have included. Collectively, these programs are involved with such issues as

social recognition, power and voice; with implicit and often explicit questions for equity and justice-seeking; with social responsibility and accountability for the physical environment and the role of technologies in a rapidly reconfiguring world; with issues of public policy and the difficult tradeoffs between competing goods in both the social and the natural environment. Students who have studied in these new programs have, virtually by definition, probed central issues that confront us all as citizens in a self-determining democracy and in the global community as well. The questions about human society and the natural world that infuse these fields and animate their work are in fact concrete instances of the kinds of problems with which citizens need to be actively engaged.

The same argument could be made, it might be suggested, about virtually any scholarly field, whether “New Academy” as Minnich describes it or “Established Disciplines” as most universities recognize them. The difference is a matter of histories and societal postures. In the established disciplines, as Bender observed,²¹ scholarly methods have evolved from a means to an end to an end in themselves, with the production of knowledge the ultimate goal. The newer fields are no less concerned with knowledge, but they place far more emphasis on using knowledge to advance what they perceive as needed changes in the wider society. The implications for democratic citizenship and activism are powerful.

Learning Communities

These rapidly multiplying scholarly fields and programs share considerable common ground with yet another educational movement that also holds potential significance for new conceptions of the relationship between education and civil society. Hundreds of campuses and thousands of faculty members are now experimenting with the development of academic learning communities, or topically linked sets of courses which students take concurrently with the explicit intention of addressing major themes across the entire course cluster, and from different disciplinary perspectives.²² In my own work with hundreds of campuses, I perceive the current interest in developing learning communities to be one of the most visible and significant national trends.

The idea for this innovation emerged twenty years ago through the efforts of Patrick Hill, then a professor of philosophy at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and now a faculty member at Evergreen State College. The movement took on major steam through the efforts of Barbara Leigh Smith and Jean MacGregor, who for more than a decade led the Washington Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, which made the promulgation of learning communities one of its central priorities. While learning communities are multiplying on every kind of campus and in every part of the country, they are especially predominant in Washington State, thanks to the statewide influence of the Washington Center. Evergreen State College itself has organized its entire curriculum on a learning community model.

The primary impetus for learning communities is integrative learning, an attempt to overcome the fragmentation of learning in the twentieth century university. Patrick Hill has frequently observed that a further goal of the clustered courses is to overcome the “will to totality” that thrives in every disciplinary community.

Yet the themes faculty groups select in developing linked courses frequently have manifest connections to that same ethos of societal analysis and change which animates the New Academy. Learning communities explore such topics as “global hunger,” “social movements,” “American pluralism and the pursuits of justice,” “economy and equity,” “sustainable change,” “heterogeneity and interdependency” and the like. When students take a set of courses explicitly organized around such themes, the result is a miniature version of a program in one of the new societally oriented interdisciplinary studies. Here again students find themselves engaged with fundamental issues of civic aspiration and experience, issues deliberately chosen because they are important both to polity and policy. Once again, the potential implications for an informed and engaged citizenry are notable.

Hands-on Pedagogies

The civic potential of these new fields and programs extends well beyond their subject matter. Befitting their bridging role between the realms of scholarship and action, curricula in virtually all these new fields and programs routinely foster forms of learning that are engaged, action-oriented and “hands-on.” The most popular pedagogical strategies include:

1. **Collaborative inquiry:** students undertake their learning and problem-solving in group settings, both direct and on-line. They may work as a team, both in the classroom and outside it, with the instructor acting as coach as the group takes collective responsibility for defining and addressing a challenging question, problem or task.
3. **Experiential learning:** students learn through direct experience in field settings, with open-ended problems, projects and challenges. The instructor helps the students, either individually or as a group, learn to process their experience, put it in a context of general principle--practical, intellectual and ethical--and rethink their content learning in light of the field experience. The boundaries between theory and practice are blurred, with practice accepted as a legitimate source both of knowledge and challenge to reigning theories.
3. **Service learning:** students become directly involved with societal issues and with groups seeking to solve problems and improve the quality of life for themselves and others. Again, the instructor’s role is to provide social, moral and technical context in order to help students generalize from the particular, connect scholarship with practice, and articulate grounds for commitment and action. Students establish new and reciprocal relationships with community leaders, and come to recognize the legitimacy of experiences and perspectives very different from their own.
4. **Project-based learning:** students organize and deal with unstructured problems, sometimes in concert with other students, and frequently in contact with off-campus groups, organizations and issues. Often making use of educational technologies, students experience the excitement and the usefulness of creating new approaches and solutions, of bridging theory and practice and putting knowledge to work in applied situations.

5. Integrative learning: students are expected to generate links among previously unconnected issues, approaches, sources of knowledge, and/or contexts for practice. Such learning is frequently issue-oriented and multidisciplinary. Frequently it challenges the student to both critique and connect the disparate assumptions and mental models of multiple constituencies and communities, inside and outside the academy.

These hands-on pedagogies are scarcely exclusive to the new scholarly fields and programs, of course, and faculty members who use these pedagogies can now be found in virtually any field. Moreover, the common practice of double appointments in both established departments and “new” programs or fields is quite literally building two-way streets between the activist ethos of the new scholarly fields and the more detached ways of knowing established in older disciplines.

Nonetheless, it is fair to say that these hands-on pedagogies are more frequently and more consistently emphasized in the disciplines and programs of the new academy. In older fields and programs, the new pedagogies may be available but they are still elective. Conversely, in new fields and programs, the hands-on pedagogies are likely to be experienced both in the pedagogical strategies of required courses and even in degree requirements. Analysis of one’s lived and prior experiences is, for example, a common requirement in women’s studies, ethnic studies and in programs oriented toward returning adults. Frequently these expectations are built into the introductory course or orientation. Again, many of the new fields expect students to take part in an internship, course-based service learning, or other forms of direct experience with the subject matter. Hands-on forms of learning tend to be foregrounded simply because they are central to these fields’ fundamental missions of fostering strong and generative connections between scholarly and applied knowledge. As one syllabus for a community-oriented course advises students, “We ask you to reaffirm one central precept, namely, that learning requires a serious commitment to both the subject at hand, and the voices and experiences of those engaged in the course and the community.”²³

Relational learning

As the pedagogical list just cited suggests, a further characteristic of the new fields and programs that has important potential significance for civic engagement is the intrinsically sociable or communal character of their conception of learning. These collaborative models bring to higher education a new kind of dialogue between faculty and student. The goal of the teaching and learning process is not to turn the student into a disciple of the teacher but rather to involve both learners and teachers in the collaborative creation of insights, understandings and capacities for action which no one of them could have achieved independently.

Drawing on the dialogue and insights of a National Panel of scholars guiding AAC&U’s American Commitments initiative, developmental psychologist Lee Knefelkamp and I have termed this approach “relational learning.”²⁴ We depict this model for relational or collaborative learning in figure 2, which weaves together concepts from the work of psychologist David Kolb and of the African-American feminist scholar, Patricia Hill Collins. To emphasize what is most distinctive about this model, we contrast it with David Kolb’s own much-praised model for what he calls

“experiential learning,” given here in figure 1. The core difference between these two models is that figure 1 implicitly presumes an autonomous learner proceeding independently, while figure 2 explicitly presumes that members of a group are learning from and working with one another.

As figure 2 suggests, a relational approach views learning as grounded, not in one individual’s experience of understanding alone, but rather in the joining of multiple and disparate experiences and in collaborative dialogue about the meanings of those experiences. New concepts, frameworks and actions emerge from a serious engagement with the views, experiences and inclinations of others. Concepts are generated, not by one person alone, but by a group of people working through issues together. Because both concepts and applications are socially debated and negotiated, context and consequence are woven into their very fabric. The final test of theory becomes its usefulness in the intrinsically social contexts of actual practice.

In this relational model, the goal of collaboration is not only the refinement of analysis and theory but also the production of purposeful action in all its forms: judgment, decision-making, experimentation, and social effort. Crucially, in this model for learning, no student is left on his or her own to consider whether and how to apply knowledge to contexts of practice and problem solving. Insights, concepts and plans are tested against the demanding standard of their actual utility in winning assent of multiple stakeholders, in solving problems and in producing demonstrable improvement in social practices.

The implications of a relational approach for educating citizens are subtle but significant. Where in the traditional model, as we have seen, the academy works to develop an individual’s analytical intelligence, this newer model develops what we might call collaborative capacities -- for analysis, for action and for learning from the consequences of actions. Students who have significant opportunities to learn in this mode, a mode simultaneously analytic and proactive, internalize crucial skills of citizenship: specifically, the ability and willingness to work in a group to understand what needs to be done, to plan a strategy, implement it--and learn from the results.

Education for pluralism

A relational approach to learning is also by definition a design for learning how to learn across human difference. Even in what may initially seem a homogeneous learning community, the challenge to solve problems collaboratively inevitably plunges the student into the challenges of negotiating diverse perspectives and aspirations. A group that seemed superficially similar will almost inevitably prove to have its own internal complexities.

But more and more campuses and classrooms are manifestly heterogeneous-- in race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, religion, ability and age. And increasingly, faculty members who teach in collaborative, action-oriented programs are deliberately taking heterogeneity into account in designing their strategies for relational learning.

Thus the same pedagogies which prepare students to put knowledge to use also prepare them for pluralism and diversity:

1. Collaborative **learning** helps students gain an appreciation for the differing and complementary strengths that diverse individuals bring to a group;
2. Experiential **learning** and **service/learning** create an intensified awareness of students' own life experiences and those of others;
3. Project-based learning teaches students to work in diverse teams to frame, address, and propose solutions to significant problems.
4. **Multidisciplinary** and integrative learning fosters exploration of the relationships and complementarities among ideas, epistemologies and communities.

In such designs for learning that consciously take diversity into account, each participant may encounter not only diverse and competing concepts but also the frequently passionate convictions of people who care about particular ideas and care about the actual uses to which ideas will be put. Such encounters are any-thing but easy. But they are also essential in an adequate education for life and work in complex and intercultural communities. They teach what is arguably the fundamental learning for social responsibility in our time: the capacity to engage, respect and negotiate the claims of multiple and disparate communities and voices.

A common beginning in such relational pedagogies is exploration of the learner's own sources of ideas, values and commitments. The idea is that the learner needs to bring heightened awareness of his or her own predispositions to purposeful work with those of different orientation. Rather than assume that everyone does or should approach issues in the same way, the student is deliberately prepared to recognize and respect others' perspectives and to take them into account in the learning experience. Education for pluralism does not begin with a presumed commonality. Rather it assumes diverse viewpoints and looks for the commonality that can emerge from mutual respect and engagement.

Reports from campuses show that students involved in such learning experiences begin to make fundamental shifts not only in their sense of respect for and collegiality with classmates different from themselves, but even more crucially, in their fundamental sense of a need for one another's contributions. AAC&U's Diversity Digest reported recently on one such example:

At Queens College in New York, eight students worked on a research project that examined relations among African American and Asian American residents in Brooklyn directly following a boycott of a Korean grocery store by African American residents that made headlines across the country. Students, many of whom were Asian American or African American and from the local community, conducted interviews and found that there was less animosity between the two groups than many assumed after learning about the boycott from the media.

One African American student in the project, Sharon Bradley, expressed her surprise 'at

how many people thought that the boycott incidents were blown out of proportion.’ . . . Another African American student, Mica McCarthy, reported talking to more people who felt the boycotts were justified because of a pattern of ‘lack of respect for black customers.’ She believes that the project gave all of the students deeper insights into multiple perspectives on racial questions. ‘We met and freely discussed the survey results. We argued back and forth. I learned from the Korean students that Korean merchants are not getting rich off these small stores. It helps me to understand that they are being exploited as well.’²⁵

A white student taking part in the project went straight to the civic implications of this kind of learning experience. ‘We discussed every-thing with the black and Korean students,” he noted. These conversations “gave us all broader perspectives on the questions we needed to ask.”

Sue Steiner, Director of Research and Sponsored Programs at California State University-Los Angeles runs similarly diverse and community-based research projects there. She reports that these projects have helped to forge more productive bonds between the university and its neighboring communities. It is not a stretch to suggest that such efforts have also forged a new basis for active citizenship among those who take part in them.²⁶

General Education, Pluralism and Social Responsibility

Tellingly, these same orientations toward pluralism, relational learning and activist pedagogies are beginning to make notable inroads into general education programs. In a 1997 study, AAC&U’s Debra Humphreys reviewed recently revised general education programs at nearly one hundred two- and four-year colleges and universities in every part of the United States.” The list of campuses reviewed ranged from the University of California at Berkeley and San Diego to University of Iowa to the University of Massachusetts at Boston; from Pitzer and Occidental Colleges in California to Olivet College in Michigan to St. Edward’s University in Texas to Hobart and William Smith Colleges in upstate New York. There were numerous community colleges included in the study, again dispersed from coast to coast and across the heartlands.

All the institutions studied were explicitly committed to educating students for pluralism and, not surprisingly, Humphreys found that both newly structured requirements and new course content placed strong emphasis on educating students to understand diverse cultures both in the United States and in the global community. Many of the institutions studied had changed earlier requirements that pointed students toward non-Western societies, usually by adding the expectations that students take courses on both American pluralism and on world cultures and societies.

Humphreys also found a strong emphasis in new general education courses and requirements on examining (and challenging) the roots of prejudice and discrimination. Her study notes that faculty members developing new courses on pluralism are explicitly doing so in order to educate students for social responsibility and involvement.

Humphreys demonstrates that college students in the United States are now studying a new set of topics and issues. These revised general education courses plunge students into the complexities of multiple and intersecting cultures, identity and community, equity and marginalization, power and social stratification, societal aspiration and collective struggles to expand both opportunity and social justice. General education as it appears in these new courses is polycentric rather than monocentric; comparative rather than particularistic; participatory rather than abstract or detached. It introduces students to concepts of justice, not by having them debate philosophical alternatives but rather by confronting them with the unresolved dilemmas that surround what legal scholar Patricia Williams calls “color, culture and caste” in American society.

In these new general education courses, many taught by the same faculty who constitute the programs and departments of the New Academy, students are reading works from and about diverse traditions, considering difficult social issues, examining the sources and histories of prejudicial exclusions and probing competing visions of human community. They are both studying and participating in community-based initiatives. In a number of the courses Humphreys reviewed, the syllabi include pivotal Supreme Court Cases, or sometimes sets of cases that reveal this nation’s historic struggles with the meaning and application of our constitutional principles.

These new themes both respond to and provide resources for the rapidly increasing heterogeneity of American society and American college campuses. On many campuses, the typical general education classroom includes immigrant and international students; students who know racism at first hand; students struggling with the prejudice that still nakedly confronts gays and lesbians. They come from several or even dozens of different ethnic groups and religious communities; some are handicapped; some may represent in the classroom the fast increasing poles of income inequalities that mark this era in American and world history. At many campuses, the majority of the students taking these courses are both older, majority female and employed. With increasing frequency, they are parents or even grandparents as well.

The sheer heterogeneity of the contemporary college classroom ensures diverse and divided perspectives on the new general education topics. And this in turn means that taking these courses can help students develop the knowledge, the inclination and the ability to talk respectfully and productively across difficult difference.

The civic significance of these new courses is both explicit and powerful. Quite intentionally, these courses seek to help students discover and own both roles and responsibilities in the creation of generative intersections among many social traditions, in the nurture of more just and productive social practices, and in the making of healthy, participatory, self-governing communities. Richard Guarasci, Provost at Wagner College, captures this emerging educational ethic succinctly in the syllabus included from his course on Community, Politics, and Service:

What does citizenship mean now? What ought it mean? How does it relate to various perspectives on justice? democracy? community? difference?.. [W]e are attempting to end the...false dualism of separating knowledge from personal experience. The goal of this

course is to reconcile these different realms by joining readings and experience, intellectual development and ethical growth, and our individual academic experience with the unfolding of our own larger autobiographies.”

This is, in short, a new approach to general education: intercultural, dialogical, participatory, relational. Where older Western Civilization courses assumed and prepared students for a unitary world, these new courses presume and prepare students for multiplicity, heterogeneity and complexity.

The breadth and scope of the institutions adopting these new approaches underlines their potential significance for higher learning in a diverse democracy. But there is also emerging evidence from research studies that these new courses are already having a positive effect on students’ civic attitudes. A large national study, for example, found that taking courses on ethnic studies had a positive effect on students’ attitudes toward racial understanding and tolerance. Individual campus studies offer additional evidence. Students who took a new required course on “Self and Community” at Olivet College report that participation in the course made it easier to talk about racial issues and conflicts outside of class. Taking the course also increased student interest in interaction across groups. Similarly, research at the University of Michigan shows that taking a required course on Race and Ethnicity has a positive effect on students’ subsequent interests in equity. Research by Sandy Astin shows a positive correlation between involvement in service learning in college and postcollegiate participation in community activities. While still preliminary, these findings certainly suggest that curricula which include active and experiential involvement with social issues hold real promise for democratic participation.²⁹

IV. Unfinished Designs

Where does this analysis take us? In the argument thus far, we have seen the inherent limitations of the dominant twentieth century approach to education and citizenship and considered the widespread perception that something more is needed. We have also reviewed a broad array of creative innovations, from new scholarly fields to new educational structures to hands-on and relational pedagogies. And we have seen preliminary evidence that these New Academy innovations result in increased commitment to an array of values and activities most would consider important in a pluralist democracy: tolerance, commitment to equity, civic attentiveness and involvement.

But something is missing in all this as well. Or, to put it another way, something important to this entire discussion remains so tacit, so subtly implicit in even these positive movements toward an Engaged Academy that we are endanger of missing it altogether - and therefore, I sometimes fear, of losing it. That something, I suggest, is a direct and explicit engagement with the challenges, the responsibilities, the dangers and the internal contradictions of democratic principles and commitments in and of themselves.

Much of the educational work we have reviewed--the new scholarly fields and curricular structures, service learning and other activist pedagogies--is driven finally by a passion to make real and meaningful the aspirations to justice, equity, democratic involvement and accountability that are both explicit in our history and yet still imperfectly realized. But these aspirations are typically addressed in all these initiatives only by indirection, through attention to offenses against them rather than to the aspirations themselves. Thus, for example, many new general education courses deal explicitly with issues of bias and discrimination, while a growing number of general education requirements literally mandate attention to the connections between difference and inequality. But only a handful of programs organize themselves around the value of equality that is presumably at stake. Or, again, while a concern for social justice is often overtly expressed in new courses, programs and pedagogies, it is unusual to find general education courses and requirements that explicitly explore the complex ideas and practices that inform our own or other societies' conceptions of justice.

It has been instructive, during the period I was writing this paper, to see how little citizens know about the apparently routine workings of the "justice system" in the United States, including such practices as bringing witnesses before a grand jury or "squeezing" some to develop evidence on others--and how controversial some of these practices turn out to be once they become the subject of popular discussion. Where would the ordinary citizen have learned about any of this, outside the context of a national media frenzy?

If we shift our perspective to the global environment, surely the United States and other industrialized nations will be dealing for years to come with global quests for justice, economic as well as political. Who among us has been educated to address these issues knowledgeably?

If justice itself is more invoked than examined, democracy is simply conspicuous by its absence from most students' college-level learning. Service-learning programs, to choose one example, are often advocated as a way of strengthening civic involvement in our democracy. But they infrequently explore democratic ideas, complexities and alternative systems in and of themselves. The new scholarly fields explore their themes within the context of an invoked democratic system, but none of these fields make democracy itself their subject matter. We have, it seems, left democracy as a topic to specialists in political science and political philosophy. But it is not a theme that routinely appears in every student's general education.

The issues facing American democracy are enormously complex and increasingly timely. We are in the midst of a major demographic transformation that will make issues of "group representation" a contested issue, in congress and in courts, for decades to come. Who among us has been educated to deal with these issues? The United States has been rethinking the balance in its federal system for several years, with polls showing an increasing popular favor bestowed upon state governments at the expense of the national government? Who among us is studying the tradeoffs at stake? Popular discourse reveals a continuing tension between a privatized view of liberty and the expectation that citizens have responsibilities to and for one another. Where in the college curriculum are these issues explored? Technology is making the prospect of the instant

referendum increasingly realistic. Have we considered the implications of this for what is supposed to be a *deliberative* democracy?

If we put all this together, we see that the academy is increasingly investing itself in a new engagement with the important issues of our society, but not, in any purposeful or comprehensive way with the basic questions that inhere in democratic practices, values and aspirations in and of themselves.

I write this after spending five years directing a national initiative explicitly concerned with developing connections between diversity and democratic aspirations in the context of general education requirements and courses. Based on our studies of the new programs, and on five years' worth of active discussions on dozens of campuses as well, I am persuaded that there is not just a neglect but a resistance to college-level study of democratic principles, practices and contestations.

Some of this resistance is residue from the 1960s, when many of today's faculty members were rightly troubled by calls to judgment-free patriotism in the context of the Vietnam War. Some of it is the legacy of the academic revolution with its emphasis on the separation of scholarship from practice. Some of this comes from a principled conviction that democracy ought to be studied in the schools, which everyone attends, rather than in college, which is not a universal experience.

I believe that this is a view which the academy needs to rethink--collectively. With the great majority of recent high school graduates and ever larger numbers of adults now enrolling in postsecondary studies, Americans have an extraordinary opportunity--and I believe, a responsibility--to extend the transformative advantages of a liberal education to every student, especially those who initially view higher education as solely vocational. Equally important, we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to help all our students and the larger society discover meaningful connections between the knowledge, values and skills developed through liberal education and the democratic capacity, humanity and sustainability of our shared world.

We cannot meet this responsibility in our current state of muted attention to the connections between college learning and the vitality of the public sphere. Nor can we meet this responsibility by enlisting a small part of the academic choir to take on yet additional roles as good citizens.

What is needed, I believe, is a far-reaching conversation about education for citizenship as an actively owned commitment of the American academy. The Association of American Colleges and Universities has already made a set of recommendations about educating all students for their roles in a diverse democracy. These recommendations include: learning about one's own cultural inheritances and commitments, in their complexity; learning about other cultural traditions and communities; studying democratic principles and practices in American history as they have been variously experienced by and denied to different members of the community; direct experiences with the justice-seeking or opportunity-expanding efforts of particular communities; and attention to issues of diversity, equity and negotiating difference in one's own chosen field of study.³⁰

These AAC&U recommendations set a framework for what students need to learn to emerge both prepared and inspired to assume responsibility for the future of a diverse democracy. But these recommendations call for further attention to basic questions about the preparation of faculty members; about the organization of faculty time and effort; about the expansion of concepts of scholarship to include attention to civic questions; and about rewards for faculty and staff as they learn to effectively support students' engagement in crucial challenges confronting this society.

We stand, as we are daily reminded, on the threshold of a new millennium. How appropriate to for the academy to take on at last these fundamental questions about the future of our democracy. Beginning now.

Endnotes

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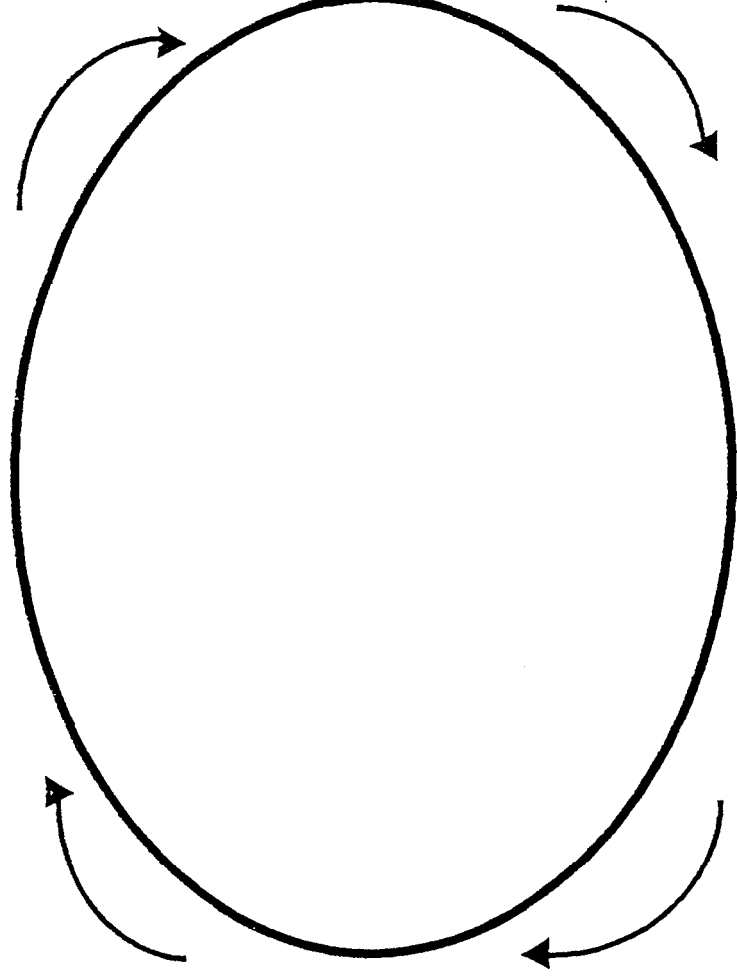
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(figure 1)

EDUCATIONAL MISSION I: INDIVIDUAL LEARNING

Personal
Experience



Active
Experimentation

Reflective
Observation

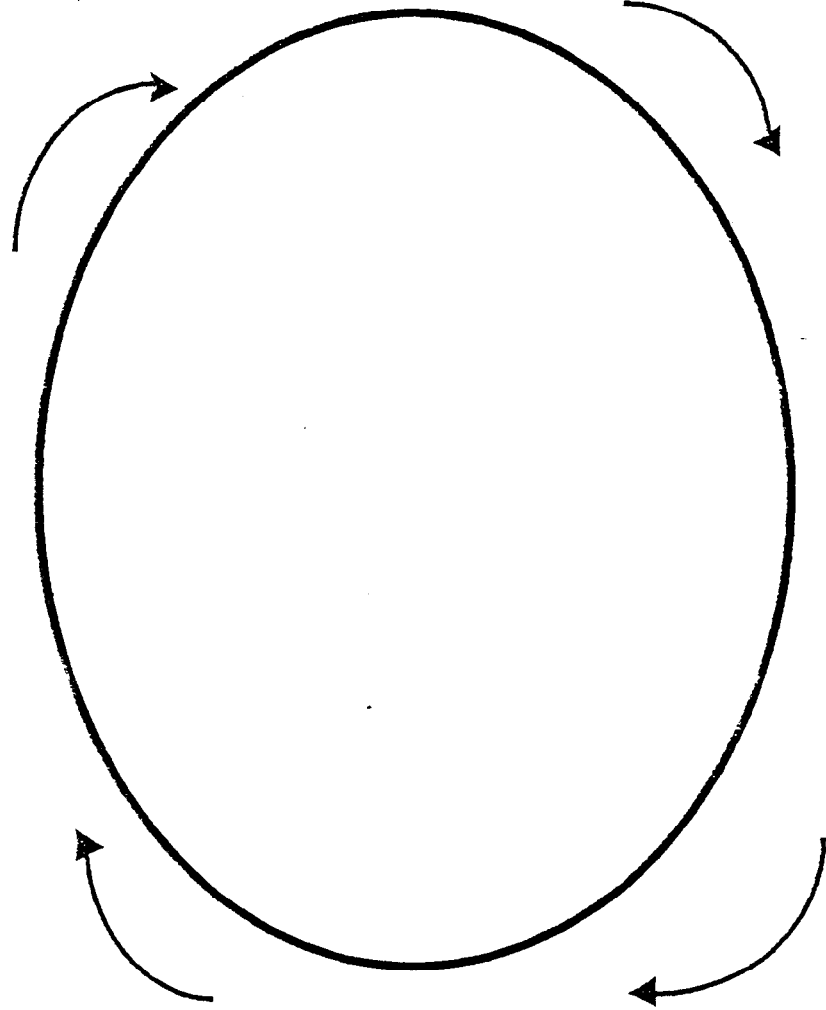
Abstract
Conceptualization

David Kolb
Experiential Learning

(figure 2)

EDUCATIONAL MISSION II: RELATIONAL LEARNING

Multiple Experiences
of Self and Others



Collaborative
Action/
Service Learning

Reflective
Dialogue for
Understanding

New Relational
Models/ Concepts

With thanks to David Kolb,
And Patricia Hill Collins
Black Feminist Thought