

***A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future***  
**How the National Report Has Spurred Action**  
**2012–2016**

“Not since Ernest Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered* has a national report received such buzz and had such impact.”

VP for Outreach, Auburn University

***The Creation of A Crucible Moment***

In response to widespread concern about the nation’s anemic civic health, the US Department of Education contracted with the Global Perspectives Institute, Inc. (GPI) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) to assess the status and vibrancy of civic learning in colleges and universities and to recommend how to animate education for democracy as a twenty-first-century outcome of college. From 2011 to 2012, GPI and AAC&U organized a series of five national roundtables at the US Department of Education for nearly 140 participants from a wide range of constituencies including among others: civic educators and scholars, college presidents, students, student affairs professionals, leaders of civic organizations, disciplinary associations, philanthropists, and federal government representatives. A National Task Force oversaw the project and draft versions of the evolving report were circulated for commentary through additional public forums.

On January 10, 2012, at a White House conference telecast nationally, the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) released *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future* which proffered A National Call to Action. In brief, *A Crucible Moment* calls on higher education to reclaim its civic mission and to make civic learning at the college level expected rather than optional. To increase knowledge about civic ethos, literacy, inquiry, and action, the report calls for such learning to be pervasive and occur over time throughout the college experience: in both general education and college majors, in student life, in campus/community partnerships, and as an understood area of investigation and scholarship for faculty members across all disciplines.

Thanks to a grant from Bringing Theory to Practice and its donors the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation and the S. Engelhard Center, AAC&U published and is continuing to disseminate *A Crucible Moment* widely. The report is also promoted as a PDF free on line through AAC&U, the US Department of Education, and a group of thirteen national organizations that are in a coalition (The Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Action Network, described below) to coordinate collective and individual strategic actions that advance civic learning and democratic engagement throughout higher education.

***A New Vision for Civic Learning in Higher Education***

An earlier definition of civic education stressed familiarity with the various branches of government and acquaintance with basic information about US history. This knowledge is still essential but is no longer nearly enough. Americans need to understand how their political system works and how to influence it. But they also need to understand the cultural and global contexts in which democracy is both deeply valued and deeply contested. Moreover, the competencies basic to democracy, especially to a diverse democracy like ours, cannot be learned only by studying books; democratic knowledge and capabilities are honed through hands-on, face-to-face, active engagement in the midst of differing perspectives about how to address common problems that affect the well-being of the nation and the world. Civic learning should prepare students **with knowledge and for action** in our communities and at their workplaces.

## Overview of Key Arenas of Action

### A. Snapshot of How Some Campuses Are Using *A Crucible Moment* to Advance Civic Commitments

**Wake Forest University** used *A Crucible Moment's* Civic Learning Matrix through a newly created university-wide task force to identify areas of institutional strength and weakness across civic ethos, literacy, inquiry, and action. One finding caused the institution to focus on developing more cocurricular opportunities to increase students' civic literacy, and on enhancing Wake Forest's Social Action Collaborative to increase students' sense of efficacy in solving shared problems.

**Oregon State University**, inspired by *A Crucible Moment's* challenge to make civic learning more pervasive across campus domains, began to re-map organizational boundaries between student and academic affairs by making non-classified staff newly defined as professional faculty with service on the faculty senate and its committees. The process has facilitated cross-campus collaboration and a sense of shared ownership of student learning goals overall and education for democracy in particular.

**Fort Hays State University** used *A Crucible Moment's* Civic Investment Plan in a new strategic plan and first gathered data as *ACM* recommended; those data were then used to inform a set of recommendations to improve existing activities, expand efforts to reach all students, and institutionalize civic work across the university. The university has adopted the educational framework for a civic-minded campus (ethos, literacy, inquiry, and action) and created eight recommendations that include among them the development of the "engaged scholar" with specific metrics, adopting an academic focus for civic learning across general education and the major, and promoting a campus structure and culture that models civic learning and engagement.

**Kingsborough Community College** used *A Crucible Moment's* call to provide every student with a civic learning opportunity as inspiration for instituting a two-part civic engagement requirement for every Kingsborough graduate. Both can be within a course, or one can be within a course and the other within student life. The institution has a host of civic engagement sections now certified in their curriculum and cocurriculum, with more on the way. Strong faculty and staff development opportunities occur throughout the institution.

**Elmhurst College**, inspired by the report, did an environmental audit of civic learning and democratic engagement on its campus and then used *A Crucible Moment's* chart, "A Framework for Twenty-First-Century Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement," as a standard to identify where student affairs in particular was addressing or omitting to address various dimensions of civic knowledge, skills, values, and action. The institution then created a Civic Action Plan for monitoring progress in closing the identified gaps and keeping up a rich array of opportunities for students' civic learning.

Other campuses have used *A Crucible Moment* for a faculty development summer institute (**University of Wisconsin**), used the report for a campus-wide discussion (**Keene State University**), used sections of *A Crucible Moment* to train student leaders and use their new knowledge in student clubs, assigned chapters from the PDF in courses (**University of Wisconsin**), and used sections of it with their community partners (**University of Pennsylvania**).

In addition to the groundbreaking initiatives that have been instituted on individual campuses, considerable change has occurred within and across state systems of higher education.

The **Massachusetts Board of Higher Education** has included "preparing citizens" among seven Key Outcomes for all graduates from the commonwealth's twenty-nine public campuses, becoming in 2012 the first state board to emphasize civic learning as an expected college learning outcome. As part of the commonwealth's Vision Project, the board created a policy for implementation in 2014; metrics for measurement are currently under development.

In connection with Massachusetts' Vision Project, the **State Higher Education Executive Officers Association**

and AAC&U have included civic learning among the list of student learning outcomes being assessed by the **Multi-State Collaborative (MSC) to Advance Learning Assessments**. Stakeholders from the twelve states participating in the project—Connecticut, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, and Utah—are using AAC&U’s Valid Assessment of Student Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics to assess authentic learning using students’ actual work.

### **B. Leadership Coalitions: AAC&U and the CLDE Network**

AAC&U has long emphasized the foundational ties between “liberal education” and education for informed, responsible democratic participation. In that spirit, we formed the CLDE Action Network, convened by Caryn McTighe Musil, which is committed to enhance coordinated strategies that advance *A Crucible Moment’s* goals. Each of the thirteen members is a national organization with extensive reach; each includes individuals who attended the CLDE National Roundtables; and each functions through its strong infrastructures as an important ongoing arena for sustained commitment to making civic learning expected rather than optional for college students. **Together, these organizations reach some 2,000 universities and colleges (both two-year and four-year) and include more than 8 million students.**

*The CLDE Action Network includes the following:* the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU); the Anchor Institutions Task Force; the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U); the Bonner Foundation; Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP); Campus Compact; The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE); The Democracy Commitment; Imagining America; the Interfaith Youth Core; the Kettering Foundation; NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education; and The New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE).

### **C. Selective Sponsored Project Initiatives by CLDE Action Network Members**

#### **Bridging Cultures to Form a Nation: Community, Difference, and Democratic Thinking (2012–15)**

The National Endowment for the Humanities awarded AAC&U and its partner, The Democracy Commitment, a three-year faculty and curriculum development grant for community colleges. The project seeks to integrate civic scholarship and pedagogies across high-enrollment transfer and degree-completion humanities courses to deepen democratic understanding and capacities.

#### **Citizenship Under Siege (2016–present)**

Building on the success of Bridging Cultures to Form a Nation, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded AAC&U and The Democracy Commitment a second three-year faculty and curriculum development grant to facilitate a tapestry of public dialogues exploring who counts as citizens and who has been accorded full rights to democracy’s promises. Seven community colleges will participate in this project, with dissemination of project findings and faculty development tools coordinated by the project’s national leadership.

#### **NASPA’s Lead Initiative on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012–present)**

Initiated in 2012, this ongoing project now involves 73 NASPA member colleges and universities committed to encouraging and highlighting the work of student affairs in making education for a diverse democracy part of every student’s college education. The schools are building CLDE activities into student affairs strategic goals and learning outcomes, collecting data on students’ civic learning, and collaborating with students on strategies that help solve community problems through collective action.

#### **Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Action Collaborative (Chicago and Philadelphia)**

The Robert M. McCormick Foundation awarded AAC&U a grant from 2012 to 2013 to create a two-part Chicago CLDE Action Collaborative to help twelve institutions create more civic-minded colleges and universities across domains and disciplines. AAC&U partnered with Illinois Campus Compact and Interfaith Youth Core for this project. In 2014, the McCormick Foundation funded a Chicago-based project to infuse

civic inquiry and action across disciplines, especially in upper division courses. In 2014 to 2015, AAC&U funded a similar Philadelphia CLDE Action Collaborative in partnership with Pennsylvania Campus Compact to work with twelve colleges and universities seeking to use *A Crucible Moment's* recommendations to help foster more civic-minded institutions.

#### **Bonner Foundation High-Impact Initiative: Integrating High -Impact Learning and Community Engagement**

AAC&U and NERCHE are partnering with the Bonner Foundation in its multi-year project that spans from 2012 to 2016 and is now composed of 23 colleges and universities. Caryn McTighe Musil of AAC&U and John Saltmarsh of NERCHE serve as ongoing consultants for the project that seeks to make civic learning more pervasive on campus and more beneficial to communities off campus.

#### **The Kettering Foundation**

The Kettering Foundation has initiated a series of partnerships with CLDE Action Network partners. AAC&U and Kettering are working on a project examining the relationship between educating for citizenship and educating for work. Kettering and The Democracy Commitment are examining how community colleges can offer leadership on education for democracy. Kettering is partnering with AASCU and its American Democracy Project to explore how to assess civic learning.

#### **BTtoP's Funding Call for Civic Proposals**

Bringing Theory to Practice has been an important partner in promoting information about *A Crucible Moment* in its newsletter and in its five-book monograph series on civic learning (*Civic Provocations; Civic Values, Civic Practices; Civic Studies; Civic Engagement, Civic Development and Higher Education; and Civic Learning and Teaching*). In 2012, BTtoP also issued a broad call for proposals intended to foster deeper understandings about the centrality of higher education's civic mission and received a landside of proposals. The call supported campus dialogues, research, publications, and curricular and campus-wide initiatives.

#### **Degree Qualifications Profile and Tuning**

Over 500 colleges, universities, and community colleges participated in a set of projects designed to beta test a proposed framework for twenty-first-century degrees that Lumina Foundation released in draft form in 2011 and in revised form in 2014. This Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) makes civic learning one of five expected component elements of undergraduate education. AAC&U and AASCU are both involved in DQP projects with state systems and partner campuses within those systems.

#### **Assessing Civic Learning**

AAC&U and AASCU's Civic Learning Assessment Task Force produced a publication that offered profiles of the purpose, cost, administration, and outcomes of the major existing civic learning assessment instruments and made it available free on their respective websites.

### **D. Publications**

#### **AAC&U's Quarterly Periodical *Diversity & Democracy: Civic Learning for Shared Futures***

A vehicle that has been capturing campus-based civic work since 1996 (originally under the title *Diversity Digest*), *Diversity & Democracy* continues to lift up topics that are essential to civic learning and democratic engagement. The Fall 2013 issue on **Higher Education for Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement** was informed deeply by the CLDE project. Since then, the publication has kept a steady focus on the recommendations flowing from *A Crucible Moment* and how campuses are putting them into practice. Other especially relevant thematic issues include: **Transformative Partnerships at Home and Abroad** (Winter 2013); **Assessing Students' Diversity, Global, and Civic Learning Gains** (Summer 2013); **Collaborating for Civic Learning: Student and Academic Affairs**, produced in partnership with NASPA (Fall 2013); **New Technologies: Implications for Higher Education's Democratic Mission** (Winter 2014); **General Education and Democratic Engagement** (Summer 2014); **Publicly Engaged Scholarship and Teaching**, produced in partnership with

Imagining America (Winter 2015); and **Student and Institutional Engagement in Political Life** (Fall 2015).

#### **Peer Review on Rethinking Preparation for Civic Work**

Another of AAC&U's quarterly publications focused in summer 2015 on the topic of Rethinking Preparation for Civic Work: A Civic-Enriched Liberal Education. In a world where college graduates spend the majority of their public lives engaged in work, this issue of *Peer Review*, sponsored by the Kettering Foundation, focused on how colleges might reconceive preparation for work in addition to preparation for citizenship.

#### **Civic Prompts: Making Civic Learning Routine across the Disciplines**

Published by AAC&U in 2015, *Civic Prompts* addresses the undergraduate major as the next frontier of civic learning. A practical tool for building faculty capacity to meaningfully embed civic learning in their courses and programs, *Civic Prompts* represents a first step in investigating a largely uncharted territory. The publication is available for free download at AAC&U's website.

#### **Imagining America Launches New Publication called *Public***

This new online peer-reviewed and multimedia journal features projects, pedagogies, resources, and ideas that demonstrate how to incorporate humanities, arts, and design in public life and as a means of constructing democratic societies and cultivating democratic culture. Its first publication appeared in 2014.

#### **Bringing Theory to Practice Civic Series**

This CLDE Action Network partner committed to producing a five-volume civic series that includes *Civic Provocations*; *Civic Values*, *Civic Practices*; *Civic Studies*; *Civic Engagement*, *Civic Development*, and *Higher Education*; and *Civic Learning and Teaching*. All publications are available in print and free PDF versions.

#### **Kettering Foundation Higher Education Exchange Journal**

This CLDE Action Network partner produces an annual publication intended to develop more democratic societies through the exchange of ideas between scholars and the larger public.

#### **Individual CLDE Action Network Publications**

Though there have been a host of these, two deserve special mention. The Bonner Foundation produced *Deepening Community Engagement in Higher Education: Forging New Pathways* (2013) and NERCHE director John Saltmarsh co-edited *To Serve a Larger Purpose: Engagement for Democracy and the Transformation of Higher Education* (2011).

#### **E. Distribution of A Crucible Moment**

As of January 2016, through AAC&U alone, **8,134 printed copies** of *Crucible* have been sold or distributed freely; **31,307 individual visitors have viewed the PDF** of *ACM* on the website, and another **8,277 copies of the PDF were downloaded**. Thus, **the *Crucible Moment* touch total is 47,718**. If combined with data from AAC&U's twelve other partner CLDE Action Network organizations and from visits and downloads on the Department of Education site, that number increase dramatically.

Many who receive copies of *A Crucible Moment* share it with others. Still more learn about *ACM*'s central ideas through the Campus Compact *Praxis Brief* written by several state compact leaders, while student affairs professionals learn about key concepts through the NASPA/Florida Campus Compact *Reading Guide*. Each of these is available for viewing, downloading, or purchasing from Campus Compact and NASPA respectively and on AAC&U's website. The Department of Education also produced its own publication, *Civic Learning and Engagement: A Road Map and a Call to Action*, responding to recommendations in *A Crucible Moment*.

*A Crucible Moment* has also been introduced to hundreds if not thousands of other people through conferences, webinars, audio conferences, and workshops. Campus Compact with its 35 state chapters has been especially aggressive in promoting *A Crucible Moment* through its state and regional meetings, and

Caryn McTighe Musil who authored the report on behalf of others, has spoken at conferences that represent 15 states.

*A Crucible Moment* has also gone global, primed through conferences and publications of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy that has been working for the past twelve years in partnership with The Council of Europe and through *A Crucible Moment* presentations in South Africa and Japan.