

*Bringing Theory to Practice Monographs*

**THE  
CIVIC  
SERIES**

# Civic Provocations

EDITOR: Donald W. Harward  
SERIES EDITOR: Barry Checkoway

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Edited by Donald W. Harward  
*Bringing Theory to Practice*  
Washington, DC



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# Civic Provocations

*Informal essays, provocations, that support and  
deepen inclusive and intentional campus-based  
consideration of an institution's own civic mission  
and the civic mission of higher education today*

EDITOR: Donald W. Harward

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Deserving of special thanks for the creation of the monograph and the model of civic seminars is the BTtoP core leadership: national evaluator Ashley Finley; demonstration site director and civic monograph series editor Barry Checkoway; BTtoP co-founder and supporter Sally Engelhard Pingree; project scholar Jill Reich; project manager Jennifer O'Brien; and project assistant Dylan Joyce. Each played a significant role in the civic project—and any successes of BTtoP are the results of their unflagging commitment.

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### ABOUT THE EDITOR

Donald W. Harward is president emeritus of Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. Since 2002, when he cofounded the Bringing Theory to Practice Project, he has been its director, working with more than two hundred colleges and universities that have been involved with or received grants from the Project. He is the editor of *Transforming Undergraduate Education: Theory that Compels and Practices that Succeed* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2012).

## INTRODUCTION AND USES OF THE PROVOCATIONS

Each of the “Civic Provocations” was initially presented at the Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) National Civic Seminar, November 2011, held at the Aspen Wye River Conference Center outside of Washington, DC. We are most grateful to the authors who adapted their remarks to create these brief written provocations. Each piece is accessible and provides a means of considering an important aspect or dimension of what “centering attention to the civic” at an institution, and in higher education in general, might mean and involve. These are not research papers. They remain informal and are intended to provoke conversations, making reference citations only where the authors and editor thought absolutely necessary.

The BTtoP Civic Provocation Project began with the planning of a series of scholarly seminars addressing the meanings of civic engagement, civic learning, and civic research. From those discussions emerged support for a model of inclusive (of students, faculty, administrators, and community members) campus-based “seminars.” (We called them “distributed civic seminars”—nineteen of them were

held in the spring of 2011 around the country and abroad.) From those campus-based seminars we gained significant insights regarding how a model could be used to support such experiences at a large number of colleges and universities so that, during the next two years, scores, if not hundreds, of higher education institutions of all types could examine the meaning and realization of a civic mission in their own context. Reports from the many participating campuses will be posted online, making real their involvement in a truly participatory dialogue—including the sharing of resultant action steps.

The *Civic Provocations* monograph is designed to be used as an aid to your own campus conversation—your own “civic seminar.” The implicit “provocation” is that your campus will design and offer a half-day, to one-day, focused seminar (or series of seminars) involving multiple and diverse constituents. The monograph features suggestions for how you could effectively do so, along with guiding questions that could assist those conversations in moving to a deeper level—and, most importantly, lead to institutional actions.

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## PERSPECTIVES FROM SELECTED CIVIC SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS

*Introducing the Civic Provocations monograph are brief perspectives from seven of the participants in the Bringing Theory to Practice National Civic Seminar. These perspectives, some autobiographical, suggest an inclusive tone of inquiry and a diversity of points of view. Before examining the provocations themselves, you will find the following brief accounts an engaging introduction.*

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### **The Links among Civic Engagement and Cultural Values**

*Shirley Mullen*

The link between civic responsibility and education has been taken for granted throughout much of history. Civic responsibility has been understood to be one of the appropriate ends of education, and education has been assumed to be necessary for civic responsibility to be well stewarded. One can illustrate this from the classical Confucian tradition of China, the classical tradition of ancient Greece, and the history of the instruction of Renaissance princes and early modern kings.

Two factors are worth noting about this pattern, as we move from history to current reality. First, through much of history, education for civic responsibility was intended for the elites of society—those few who were assumed to govern. Second, there was assumed to be a common framework of values that was both critical

for determining the particular goods or ends toward which society should be aiming, and necessary for the very existence of peaceful civil society.

This “traditional” model began to change with the advent of the French Revolution, when the first of the above assumptions changed. Wherever the message of the revolution went, so also went the need to prepare a responsible citizenry for self-governance. The tension between the liberal values (those linked to the empowerment and freedom of the individual) and the egalitarian values (those linked to the nature of the goods that should be available to all) of the French Revolution has played itself out in the various countries of the Western tradition and wherever in the world the West has taken its political values.

But up until the twentieth century, this tension was worked out in contexts where populations shared basic value assumptions—or at least thought they ought to share such common value assumptions. I would argue that much of the ethnic cleansing that has been so tragically present in the last two centuries is linked to the sense that civil society requires the sharing of a fairly common framework of values—whether those values come from tradition, religion, ethnicity, or ideology.

The challenge that faces us today is how to educate citizens for societies that need to be prepared for constant change

as well as for societies that are made up of citizens who have not only different ethical frameworks, but different meta-ethical and meta-political frameworks. It is one thing to bring together people of different cultures, all of whom believe that tolerance and pluralism are appropriate values for a civil society. It is quite another to bring together populations when some believe in their core being that tolerance and pluralism are inappropriate values for a peaceful and sustainable civic order.

Today we live in a world where, for a mix of historical, religious, and meta-ethical reasons, some people believe that civil societies of diversity, tolerance, and pluralism are essential, appropriate, and imaginable, while others believe that such societies are neither essential nor desirable—and certainly not imaginable.

Thus, as we talk about education for civic responsibility, it would seem that we must

- name the complexity of our current challenge more fully;
- acknowledge explicitly the importance of value frameworks in shaping political dialogue and citizens' mentalities—rather than assuming or skipping over this as we often tend to do;
- develop curricula that study examples where such conflicting value frameworks have hampered the formation and flourishing of civil society, and study the ways in which those societies have attempted to address this issue—ideally, such studies would be comparative, drawing on examples from around the world;
- draw on what we know about experiential and cohort learning—especially under situations of managed and limited stress—to create experimental situations where students are placed in living situations for a semester to think through and “live through” what might be possible—or what might be imagined as we seek to create flourishing and stable societies for the realities of the world of the twenty-first century and beyond.

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## On Civic Education: Make Sure We Link the Local with the International

*Ellen Hurwitz*

I recently completed leadership overseas in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, where I served as president of the American University of Central Asia (AUCA). This university is located across the street from the parliament building, which was the headquarters of an unprecedentedly democratic provisional government that oversaw the formation of a parliamentary democracy amidst longstanding ethnic and tribal tensions and nearly daily demonstrations. Students at this university, themselves from more than twenty different countries and still more nationalities, were exposed daily to the opportunities and pitfalls of the developing civic consciousness within and beyond AUCA's walls. Faculty were challenged to keep above the fray in their teaching and research, while they actively engaged in the development of the country's democratic institutions. Civic engagement is inevitable, but thoughtful and principled political engagement is harder to clarify. The university itself is manifestly nonpartisan, but has had to work with the powers that be, who are oftentimes perpetrators of corruption and close relatives of the power elite.

In this heady context of developing democracy, the AUCA student—who more often than not has entered the university with the expectation of exercising political and social leadership in a post-Soviet country—is eager to be well prepared for a lifetime of civic engagement. Over the past five years, the university has developed a purposeful curriculum that involves the study of classical and contemporary political philosophers—Western, Asian, Russian—and that leads to undergraduate research on topics such as the relationship between freedom and responsibility in the development of open societies. Interactive, interdisciplinary dialogues about the relationship of these studies to

social action have taken place constantly in spite of, or in some cases because of, flagrant manifestations of dictatorship and corruption just beyond the walls of the university. Alumni and faculty are involved in constitutional reform and service in governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and they bring back to the classroom and policy seminars a palpable sense of civic engagement. For most AUCA students and faculty, civic engagement is the name of the game.

My experience during these very turbulent times has deepened my thinking about the role of the civic in universities in the United States as well as in less developed countries, where civic engagement, whether corrupt or honest, is a given. In the United States, it seems to me after these years of service abroad, we have an increasing obligation to prepare our students for global citizenship. If our relatively young nation wants to continue to play a leading role on the world stage, it must prepare its citizenry for that role, not just in diplomacy schools but across all higher education. From my vantage point, if we do not help our students to see themselves as part of a global exchange and to act in a global context, the United States will continue to lose its geopolitical edge. If our students do not appreciate the implications of every individual and local act upon all of human society, then we will fail as a nation to be a model democracy.

Civic consciousness and engagement should be intentionally placed in a global as well as a local context; one without the other is insufficient for the century in which we live and plan. Students should plan ahead based on what they read. They should undertake global projects and/or contextualize their local projects globally. And they should develop personal and professional plans (portfolios) that include a globally civic dimension. Community-minded education should be about both “just around the corner” and “across the world.” The world has become our community. On the agenda for the nation’s liberal arts colleges should be an insistence

on a civic education that is steeped in thoughtful philosophical and historical readings from across the planet, and in social action that deepens cultural sensitivity and the capacity to generate constructive change.

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### **Targeting the Intersections of Diversity, Engagement, and Student Success**

*John Saltmarsh*

The need to connect diversity, community engagement, and student success has been simmering for some time now, and the dominant response has been what I would call “thin” approaches—typically, programs in which undergraduate students perform volunteerism aimed at preparing underserved high school students for access to higher education. While this is a useful activity and much needed, it only addresses access—not persistence or success in higher education—and it does not require that the institutions of higher education do anything differently in order to create environments where underserved students can thrive and succeed.

What I suggest, instead, is a “thick” approach aimed at breaking new ground by making connections between advances in active and collaborative teaching and learning, on the one hand, and collaborative knowledge generation and discovery, on the other—all with the goal of more effectively fulfilling the academic and civic missions of higher education. I suggest that we find systematic ways to connect student success with faculty diversity, faculty diversity with engaged scholarship, community engagement with inclusive pedagogical practices, and engaged scholarship with institutional rewards and changes in institutional culture. More specifically, a “thick” approach would make connections among the following “data points” in ways that explore their intersectionality:

- Student demographics have shifted: there is now greater diversity (ethnic, racial, and cultural), and increasing numbers of students from historically

underserved groups—e.g., first-generation students and students from low-income families.

- The academic success of students from historically underserved groups is enhanced by increased opportunities to identify with faculty and staff who represent ethnic, racial, gender, and cultural diversity.
- The academic success of students from historically underserved groups is enhanced by increased opportunities to participate in high-impact educational practices that foster greater engagement in learning.
- Although today's graduate students and early-career faculty are more diverse than ever before, there is a rotating door for careers in higher education: the academy is attracting more faculty from historically underrepresented groups, but these faculty are not staying in the academy.
- Research has shown that women faculty and faculty of color are more likely than their male and white counterparts to engage in both interdisciplinarity and community service—including community-engaged, inclusive pedagogical practices and research related to public problem solving in local communities; these faculty are also more likely to cite such experiences as critical to their sense of purpose in the academy.
- Faculty roles and rewards—and criteria for research/scholarship—either reward community engagement as service (counting it for little in promotion and tenure) or do not specifically reward community engagement in teaching, research, creative activity, or service. The norms of traditional scholarship privilege single-authored scholarship, credentialed and discipline-based peer review, and publication in academic (selective, top-tier, highly specialized) journals. By contrast, the norms of engaged scholarship value artifacts of public value, such as technical reports, curricula, research reports, and policy reports; evaluation by those in the community who are af-

ected by the research and can recognize the data and findings as their own, value them in their own terms, and use as they see fit; and collaborative knowledge generation.

Each of these “data points” calls for a change in the culture of higher education. Moreover, this line of inquiry suggests that if campuses are going to take student success seriously, if they are going to take diversity seriously, and if they are going to take new forms of knowledge generation seriously, then campuses need to take engagement seriously.

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### Civic Responsibility and Greater Diversity

*George Sanchez*

The major issue I am interested in regarding civic engagement revolves around the relationship between racial/ethnic and class diversity and civic engagement work, both on campus and in the communities we engage. I am concerned by what seems to be a declining commitment to diversity on university and college campuses (despite the celebratory rhetoric), particularly in faculty hiring and PhD programs, at a time when discussions of civic engagement seem to be more and more pronounced at a wide range of types of universities and colleges. While the racial/ethnic (though often *not* class) diversity of undergraduate students does seem to continue to grow, fewer of these students see themselves reflected in the faculty or those preparing to be faculty. Preliminary work conducted by *Imagining America*, a consortium of universities and organizations dedicated to advancing the public and civic purposes of humanities, arts, and design, has revealed that the “civic engagement faculty” is comprised overwhelmingly of white middle- and upper-class members whose parents went to college.

Contrast that with the growing diversity and poverty in the communities with which many of us are engaged. Thirty-five of the top fifty metropolitan areas of the

United States are currently majority-minority, often with black-Latino combinations. Moreover, disinvestment in urban and rural educational systems is often a key focus of civic engagement work, and many of our largest urban school systems do not graduate the majority of their high school students. Over the past thirty years, the majority of university and college financial aid has been spent not on those with financial need, but rather on students with high metrics that deem them “merit cases.” This makes it more and more difficult for students from modest backgrounds to fund their college education. How do we solve the dilemma of a civic engagement that is increasingly the “false charity” of a privileged white faculty and a privileged multicultural student body working with impoverished and highly racialized communities? Can we develop new models that promote a different form of civic engagement, one that takes on these issues directly and links issues of civic engagement and diversity? How does civic engagement work when it is done well by minority faculty and first-generation college students who are often connected with communities they themselves come from?

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### **Civic Seminar Thoughts and Recommendations**

*George Mehauffy*

First, focus and definition: I grow weary of seeing terms like “civic engagement,” “civic mission,” and the like all becoming vague because they try to do too much. For me, this work is not about the engagement of institutions with their communities, important as that is. It’s not about the scholarship of engagement, as important as that is. For almost ten years, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ American Democracy Project has worked to prepare undergraduates to be informed, engaged citizens for our democracy. For me, student learning is what this work needs to be about.

Second, this work is about institutional intentionality. We have reams of evidence of good, interesting, effective, creative (I could go on) civic programs for students at many different campuses. However, these programs are far too often islands of civic excellence in a sea of indifference and inattention. I’m not interested in what happens to a few students (well, I am, but that’s another discussion); I want to know what’s happening to *all* our students. Institutions have to be intentional in order to achieve truly important and significant civic outcomes.

To get campuses to focus—as institutions—on civic outcomes, we need to focus more on presidents and chancellors. What language can we give them so that they can use their bully pulpits to effect institutional change? Presidents are pulled in many different directions by many different agendas. Far too often, civic outcomes aren’t in the top tier of agenda items. I think we could change that with some powerful conceptions, great language, and striking examples. I see lots of engagement by provosts and some faculty, but presidents need to take a stronger leadership role, and, to help facilitate that, we need to provide some critical tools.

I’m particularly interested in signature pedagogies and signature practices that are effective in reaching large numbers of students and make a demonstrated difference in student civic learning outcomes. I’m starting to collect some of my favorites but, instead of cataloguing what sometimes are probably just cool and interesting approaches, I wish I had more data on effectiveness and outcomes. I’m particularly interested in civic skills and political efficacy, areas that sometimes don’t get the kind of attention I think they deserve.

We don’t have enough metrics for our work. With the new focus on student learning outcomes, I worry that we’ll measure what is easy to measure, not what is important to measure. We in the civic community need to develop some powerful tools to measure and assess civic outcomes, at both the course and program

levels. We have a few instruments, but nothing that begins to capture the information we need.

Finally, it worries me that, far too often, the civic education events in which I participate lack diversity. I know that communities of color have very rich histories of civic engagement, yet that would not be obvious if one attended some of the civic engagement meetings I go to. How can we reshape ourselves to be more inclusive? How can we be more welcoming? And how can we learn from communities of color that are deeply engaged in the work of our democracy?

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### Civic-Perspective Narrative

*Ashley Finley*

I was recently tasked with writing a comprehensive literature review on civic engagement as part of a larger agenda and policy setting effort for the US Department of Education, which was seeking to establish a framework for civic education at the postsecondary level. After doing this work, I now see that the broad challenge in the study of civic engagement, both within the literature and for future research, is one of internal validity. What exactly civic engagement is, how students should go about it, and what it should do for them after the fact—these issues lead to a philosophical debate and present an assessment challenge. Most of what we know about the empirical effects of civic engagement comes through the lens of service learning. This research has delivered a vast and convincing amount of evidence across a range of outcomes, including both gains in learning and aspects of personal and social development. But is this *really* civic engagement? Service-learning interventions have been critiqued for failing to engage students more intentionally in activities that specifically foster democratic skill building (i.e., deliberative dialogue, collaborative work, problem solving within diverse groups). Or more perversely, service-learning experiences are good for

helping students develop social capital, but they don't really help students become better citizens. That's the crux of the philosophical debate.

The translation of this debate into practice forms the challenge for assessment. Without a common understanding of what qualifies as civic engagement, we cannot expect that students are responding to the same set of conceptual ideas when taking a survey, writing a journal, or responding to an interview. How then do we more fully interrogate the programs and interventions aimed at connecting students' civic participation with the skills necessary for functioning in a democracy (e.g., decision making, leadership, teamwork, and problem solving)? I would argue that the answer lies more in finding a set of common practices than in finding a set of common outcomes. Thus, the assessment of civic engagement should begin with the assessment of the *processes* of the interventions, programs, and experiences themselves, rather than their summative effects on student outcomes.

Regardless of whether civic engagement is defined as service learning or as democratic skill building, there seems to be broad agreement on the foundations of best practice (i.e., reflection, high levels of interaction, duration and intensity of the experience, and opportunities for real-world application). How might the challenge to define civic engagement be altered if we were to focus on delineating the parameters of practice, rather than on the label itself?

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### More than an Add-On: Civic Action and Higher Education

*Elizabeth Minnich*

Much as women's studies, black and ethnic studies, peace studies, environmental studies, and other obviously crucial subjects were initially added on to otherwise barely changed higher education curricula, scholarship, and teaching (and needed to be added for related reasons, but that takes more analysis than I can do here),

we are now adding on concern for action, political and social responsibility, democracy in practice, and “engagement.” Special offices and officers, programs, projects, courses, and units of courses proliferate. This is well and good, except that add-ons remain marginal, vulnerable, and unrelated internally to the thinking, knowledge, and cultures that are at the defining center of higher education (at least as long as it has not entirely become job training, which is itself externally defined).

Adding on what was not just left out but excluded, with justifications—in this case, action, and, more specifically, democratic action—does not suffice. We need to keep questioning fields and methodologies for which action in whatever modes (from application to creation) remain problematic. It is quite possible, and illuminating, to locate where, why, and how action is understood as extraneous, even antithetical, to knowing, judgment, imagination, memory, and culture. It is crucial to ask why we need to add practice to theory, as if it were radically discontinuous.

Stepping back to consider higher education itself, we can ask whether there is a horizontal ideal of democracy that is not only compatible with but also enabling of the best in higher education—to undo the old notion that knowledge and culture are over here, politics is over there, and a moat should divide them. We can ask whether equality, justice, comprehensive community, and free public life might actually be conditions for the possibility of understanding, judgment, sound inquiry, impartial knowledge, and transformative teaching and learning. Having been engaged in such work for many years now, I submit that justice and equality are pre-conditions for sound scholarship, effective institutions, teaching that is always also learning—in short, for higher education worthy of the name.

Through our action add-ons, we are learning how to think as actors, act as thinkers, and in so doing practice judgment and keep testing knowledge. Theory, then, for example, can be rethought

as no longer created in one realm and carried “out” to another to be unilaterally applied in the old superior/inferior, dominant/receptive anti-democratic mode. It is to be practiced, in differing settings that include differing conceptual languages, purposes, and logics; it is to be practiced democratically throughout.



PART 1

Provocations:  
The Nature and  
Current Relevance  
of Attending  
to the Civic



# Why Now? Because This Is a Copernican Moment

*David Scobey*

*If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?—RABBI HILLEL*

RABBI HILLEL'S FAMOUS PASSAGE, a touchstone of the Jewish ethical tradition, evokes the creative tension at the heart of undergraduate education. We become human, it implies, in the dialogue between self-care and responsibility to the larger world—or, to put it in the educational idiom of Bringing Theory to Practice, between the inner development and the civic development of the student. Yet that creative tension is not offered simply as an abstract model, an ideal type, a mission statement. As Hillel's final question underscores, it is urgently historical. It is a call for intervention in the present moment. It is upon us *now*.

It is that *now* that I want to write about. I am a historian by training, and I want to write about the historical moment within which the provocateurs in this volume—and many other colleagues—are pursuing our answers to Hillel's first two questions. We are part of a movement to connect academic work and public work, scholarship and citizenship, and the inner and civic development of students (and teachers). Over the past twenty years, that movement has seen robust success in the growth of practices and projects and in the proliferation of centers, faculty networks, and consortia like Bringing Theory to Practice. And over those same years, we have witnessed a growing crisis of civic culture in the United States—the thinning out, fragmenting, and privatizing of democratic public life.

Yet my concern here is not with the achievements of the academic engagement movement or the larger “civic recession” to which it has responded. Rather, I want to focus on a third aspect of our *now*: the current context in higher education within and against which we are working. If we compare the current situation to that of a quarter-century ago (when Campus Compact was launched) or a decade ago (when Bringing Theory to Practice began), it is clear that our efforts for change confront an academy in the throes of change, even revolution. Academic civic engagement emerged and flourished in response to change, and, in many ways, we have responded creatively to it. Yet I want to argue that the larger mix of crisis, change, and creative innovation that defines this *now* involves issues, challenges, and possibilities that our “civic turn” has not yet fully grappled with.

We all know or sense that the academy is in the throes of transformation. The knowledge, skills, and values in which students should be educated; the intellectual landscape of disciplines and degrees; the ways in which educational

institutions are organized; the funding of teaching, learning, and research—all this promises to be profoundly different in twenty years. The forces of change have resulted partly from our own inertia, partly from the consequences of our success, and partly from broad political, market, and technological developments not of our making. The question is not *whether* the academy will be changed, but *how*. Neither defending the status quo nor pursuing small-bore reforms is an option.

This is unnerving, even, or especially, for critics of the academic status quo. It has been tempting to assume the stability of an older, established paradigm against which, like a whetstone, our ideas for change have been honed: an undergraduate regime of full-time, postsecondary students and full-time, tenure-stream faculty; a four-year, two-stage course of study in which general education segues into advanced majors defined by disciplinary specializations; a curriculum segmented into fungible units of labor, effort, and time called “courses,” “credit hours,” and “semesters”; a campus world segregated into academics and extracurricular student life and hived off from the “real world.” This *was* the paradigmatic architecture of baccalaureate education in the United States. Even as we have struggled with its negative effects—student instrumentalism, faculty hyper-professionalism, institutional siloes, the disengagement of academics from public life—it made sense to critique higher education as *stuck*. Our goal was to act as an Archimedean lever, dislodging the academy from its satisfied, secure inertia.

Yet I want to argue that this is *not* the moment in which higher education finds itself. In almost every way, the taken-for-granted of the older paradigm do not hold. Only about one-third of undergraduates fit the profile of recent high school graduates attending a single four-year institution; twice as many faculty work on term contracts as in tenure-stream positions. Student debt has doubled in five years, and its growth is now a core, corrosive element of the business plan of higher education. We have become caught in a tuition-growth bubble that seems to me unsustainable. In part as a result, the for-profit sector is burgeoning, as is online learning across *all* sectors—to my mind, an even more consequential change. All this is taking place in the context of a fiscal crisis, the result of a perfect storm of stressors: an expanding educational mission, declining public support, growing costs in areas like health care, information technology, and facilities maintenance. And beneath the fiscal crisis lies a legitimization crisis that has eroded the social compact between the academy and the larger society. None of this was true, or so massively and visibly true, when I developed the Arts of Citizenship Program at the University of Michigan fifteen years ago.

At the same time, as Bringing Theory to Practice has underscored, the educational practices that seem to make the most difference to student engagement—so-called “high-impact practices” such as interdisciplinary learning communities, study abroad, capstone research, and community-based learning—are precisely those that tend to *disrupt* the established ecology of atomized courses, disciplinary courses of study, and the separation of curricular from cocurricular experiences. The problem is not, then, that the “official” paradigm of undergraduate education is constricting yet effective; it is that the paradigm is constricting and exhausted. A mix of crisis, change, and counter-normative creativity makes a new paradigm imminent, and yet also inchoate and up for grabs.

I have used the metaphor of a Copernican moment to describe this, because it seems to me much like the moment when the Polish astronomer distilled the heliocentric theory. Renaissance astronomers had long begun to catalogue the anomalies in the night sky; everyone could see the inadequacy of the old Ptolemaic system and was speculating about a new one, but they could not see it whole. It was in this moment—the exhaustion of the older system in the face of anomalous new phenomena, the intuition of a new system toward which the anomalies gestured—that Copernicus undertook his work. Similarly, in higher education, an older, “official” paradigm of undergraduate education has exhausted itself, just as an array of new educational practices has emerged—something like the anomalous points of light that the Renaissance astronomers observed in the night sky. These new practices illuminate the inadequacies of the older undergraduate system, and they point the way toward “a more reasonable arrangement of circles,” as Copernicus put it.

It is easy to locate in this metaphor the academic civic engagement movement. Our movement was, par excellence, a strategic and ethical response to the legitimation crisis: an effort to redraw the academic social compact by committing the work of teaching and learning to the enrichment of community and public life, and by trusting that such a commitment would, in turn, enrich teaching and learning and academic life. New experiments in publicly engaged teaching, learning, research, and cocurricular experience were among the brightest Copernican anomalies in the night sky.

And yet I want to question the *fullness* of our response to the educational crisis of the current moment. Even at its best, I would argue, the civic turn has tended to take as normative, or at least as unexamined, the assumptions of the traditional paradigm of undergraduate education: that our students are full-time and full of time, committed for a compact number of years to an educational experience in which they traverse the general education–major journey as a unified trajectory; that they have the time, space, and money for intensive, unpaid community-based learning; that they are taught largely by regular, full-time faculty who can undertake the hard work of community-based teaching, sometimes with the aid of paid civic-engagement staff; that the melding of public work and academic work is anchored in an “in-here” campus world that reaches out to partner with a locally bounded “out-there” community world.

And so I think we need to ask some new questions in this next chapter of our commitment to renewing the civic purposes of higher education. What does democratically engaged learning look like, and how can we foster it for an academy in which the majority of students will attend more than one institution, carry significant debt, and have the challenge of their employment paramount in their educational choices? What does public work look like for students who need constantly and strategically to blend family responsibilities, work pressures, and study in schedules with little time for large, chunky projects—students whose social geography conforms less and less to the in-here/out-there map of our partnership models? How do we support faculty in the intellectual and relationship-building work that underlies engaged education, even as the majority of them may be neither tenure-stream nor one-course adjuncts, but full-time contract employees? What does public engagement look like not simply at the scale of local, place-based communities, but at global and digital scales?

By way of prompting our collective thinking about these issues, let me end by suggesting preliminary answers. We need to update our assumptions about our students' lives. Unless we want engaged learning to be the preserve of students who are lucky to be full-payers, large financial-aid recipients, or attendees of selective institutions, we need to link it to student wage-earning and professional preparation. We need to integrate the pathways of career, liberal learning, and civic education—to see all of them as woven into a single, integral process of student development and self-authoring. Organizationally, we need to integrate career planning and mentoring with faculty-student engagement and community-based learning—and, at the same time, to educate students and external stakeholders *not* to cling to instrumental, linear paths between study, degree-holding, and jobs. We need to overcome any lingering allergy to engaging issues of the economic and professional benefits as threads in the braid of engaged and democratic education.

We need to develop educational practices and civic projects that engage not only local, but also trans-local, global, and digital scales of community—that is, all the scales of community that are now the ordinary lives of our students. This does not mean abandoning the practices and responsibilities of local community collaboration. Indeed—in the more expensive, unequal, socially fragmented institutional landscape that we face—working-class, first-generation, and nonwhite students are bound to be *more* localistic in their educational choices, even as they are parts of global networks and diasporas. But we need to develop educational practices that draw on their everyday weaving of geographically bounded, geographically networked, and online identities. Within a decade, the majority of academic credits in the United States are likely to be earned either wholly online or in hybrid “site/line” formats. Students who are already digital natives will learn to be online learners of one kind or another (whether instrumental or engaged learners remains to be seen) quite as naturally as they have had to learn fractions and essay writing today. We will want to teach them to be at once local, global, and digital learners and citizens—and this means learning it ourselves.

Finally, we will need more than ever to overcome the structural inequality and sectoral fragmentation that are among the most corrosive effects of the Copernican moment. In a world where the tuition bubble will have popped, we will need interinstitutional collaboration more than ever. In a world where most students are transfer students, we will need to make intersectoral collaboration, regional consortia, multi-institution pathways and partnerships (and therefore multiclass and multiracial student communities of practice) an *unexceptional* part of the landscape of engaged education. The stand-alone campus and the stand-alone service-learning experience—like the stand-alone personal computer—will be present in such a world. But like the personal computer, they will lose much of their value unless they become connected to larger networks of change.

One way or another, we are on the cusp of radical change. The Copernican moment may lead us down nightmarish pathways of instrumental education, in which off-the-shelf, modular degrees are purveyed to students in order to distribute them into some future, frozen, global division of labor. But the same forces of change open up other pathways that are difficult, bracing, and cool. Let us then carry into this future the values and creativity and democratic commitment that have marked the work of the academic civic engagement movement (and *Bringing Theory to Practice*). And if not now, when?

# To Democracy's Detriment: What Is the Current Evidence, and What if We Fail to Act Now?

*Carol Geary Schneider*

WHERE ARE WE NOW in fostering civic learning in college? What are the consequences if we fail to act boldly on what David Scobey described in the previous chapter as the “civic turn” in undergraduate liberal education?

This is a very good time to raise these questions. Several contributors to the Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) National Civic Seminar were also involved in framing *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*, the 2012 report of the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement.<sup>1</sup> This report was written in response to the Department of Education's request that higher education leaders assess the current landscape for civic learning in the college years and frame recommendations, both to the department and to the higher education community, about making civic learning a more pervasive and widely shared commitment. In preparing its report, the task force reviewed a rich array of recent evidence about where students are today in terms of their civic learning, and considered what the evidence suggests about where higher education needs to go next.

Four primary sources of evidence were used in framing *A Crucible Moment's* analysis of student progress in civic learning. First, Ashley Finley prepared a synthesis of the available research on civic learning in college as background for those involved in crafting the report.<sup>2</sup> Her background paper underscores the point that we have much more empirical evidence about student involvement in, and educational gains from, service learning than about other aspects of civic learning, such as intergroup dialogue and civic problem solving. Second, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) recently completed, with support from the Templeton Foundation, our own Core Commitments initiative on using evidence to foster student learning related to personal and social responsibility.<sup>3</sup> As part of that initiative, University of Michigan researchers surveyed some twenty-three thousand college students, evenly divided from first to final year, about the extent to which they themselves saw civic learning as a priority, and whether they thought they had gained significantly from college in civic learning, engagement, and commitment. One alarming finding from that research is that, as the students progressed from first to final year, their perception of the extent to which their campuses actually care about

their “contributing to the larger community” declined steadily: 45 percent of first-year students strongly agreed that their campus supported this, but only 38 percent of seniors held that same view.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, for all the emphasis higher education now places on “engaging diversity” as an educational value, only 52.6 percent of seniors in the same study strongly agreed that college had developed their capacities to learn from diverse perspectives. Engaging difference, especially difficult difference, is surely a civic requirement in a diverse democracy. But we have a long way to go in fostering this democratic capacity.<sup>5</sup>

The third source of evidence was *Making Progress?*, a new AAC&U report that focuses on multiple aims and outcomes of liberal education, and on what we know from national studies about student progress in achieving them.<sup>6</sup> This report, also prepared by Ashley Finley, includes a long section on students’ civic, intercultural, ethical, and global learning gains in college, drawing evidence from various research centers and studies. Alas, the quick answer to the title question is that, when we compare evidence from 2005 with results of more recent studies, we find that we are making very little overall progress in fostering civic learning and other closely related capacities.

Finally, the task force benefited from national assessments that show the K-12 “civic shortfall” in student learning about the values and workings of democratic society and constitutional government. To cite just a few particulars: only 24 percent of twelfth graders performed at or above the proficient level on the civic examination administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the nation’s “gold standard” for precollegiate learning assessment.<sup>7</sup> Only 12 percent of graduating high school seniors are proficient in history.<sup>8</sup> Yet students are rarely required to study history in college, and civic inquiry in any form is almost always optional. Many college students, it is clear, do not benefit from such “options”—to democracy’s detriment.

So, across various studies, what the current evidence shows is that, even though there certainly is a renewal of civic mission and engagement on campus, that renewal is still reaching only a portion of all college students. Far too many students arrive on campus lacking knowledge basic to democracy, and far too many graduate, a few years later, still underprepared for their responsibilities as citizens in our globally engaged and broadly influential democracy.

The evidence, in short, is troubling.

It has become a national goal to provide some form of postsecondary study to the majority of Americans. That means, at least in theory, that we are now poised to establish higher education as a primary site for developing the kinds of inquiry, learning, and community engagement that prepare Americans to tackle the really daunting challenges we already face on every possible front—challenges of equity, justice, sustainability, health, basic sustenance, and much more. But for a very large portion of college students, American higher education is not yet reaping the civic potential of this moment.

One might say that this landscape analysis shows us a civic learning movement in higher education now reaching the halfway mark and poised for future expansion. If this is how we read the evidence, then our challenge is to continue the work, expand our reach, and look forward to the day when the civic renewal effort is working at scale to prepare the great majority of college students

for knowledgeable and highly engaged citizenship. And indeed, the authors of *A Crucible Moment* took exactly that stance. Make civic learning pervasive rather than partial, the task force recommended. Move it from optional to expected. The report provides myriad examples of colleges, universities, and community colleges that already have taken this critical step. But this interpretation of the prospects for expanded civic learning may be overly optimistic.

From my vantage point at a national higher education organization, what I actually see on the academic horizon are two highly divergent conceptions of the future of higher education. The first conception—let’s call it Civic Mission Reclaimed (CMR)—embraces a liberating and public-spirited education for everyone. CMR takes seriously the core recommendations in *A Crucible Moment*, and deliberately maps civic inquiry and learning across the curriculum and the cocurriculum, with special attention to students’ majors—including career, technical, and preprofessional majors. This design for college learning lifts up questions about wise uses of knowledge and skill that are inherent in every field of learning, and it engages students with the inevitable contestations about how to deploy knowledge and skill in ways that serve the greater good. This approach probes, rather than simply assumes, differing conceptions of the “greater good” and evaluates the evidence for competing claims. In the CMR vision, the “big picture” investigations of the arts and sciences are necessary preparation for civic responsibility, because they illuminate both the contexts and the consequences of important choices we need to make for our future. (AAC&U and BTtoP, I should add, are strongly committed to CMR.)

The second vision, however, is anything but public spirited. Indeed, we might accurately call it Civic Mission Discarded (CMD). Soberingly, CMD promotes a far more technical and instrumental understanding of “learning,” and sees college as primarily a way of imparting only the knowledge and skill one needs to “perform” successfully in specified job roles. CMD is not especially interested in helping students probe either the larger world in which they live or consequential public choices important to our future. Its proponents are quite ready to do away altogether with any part of the curriculum that isn’t directly and instrumentally job-related.

Proponents of this CMD vision bring an econometric model to the table. How much does the education cost per unit? How much debt does the unit (sometimes known as a learner) actually incur in acquiring certifiable job-readiness? How much do the units actually earn once they are in the marketplace? This model assumes rather than explores the value of the “learning” acquired between entrance and exit. It further promotes forms of study that can be routinized and customized through the use of digital and distance technologies. Its ideal is the virtual marketplace of course products, which students can access any time, from any location. It heralds for-profit models where full-time faculty are few and tenure is, literally, nonexistent. Recently, enthusiasts have talked about providing “badges” to certify that learners have “qualified” through their completion of short programs tied to very specific knowledge and skills. Proponents believe that this kind of learning can be delivered much faster and much less expensively than the more nuanced, multidimensional, and community-based forms of learning that CMR is working to advance. CMD has a broad array of

policy and philanthropic exponents lined up in its favor. Many of these people, focused mainly on the affordability question, have put questions of quality on hold. Committed to higher education as a driver for the economy, they have fallen entirely silent on democracy.

Considering these two models in tandem helps me posit my own answers to the following questions: What happens if we fail to act now? What is lost if we fail to reap the full possibilities of civic reform efforts in higher education? What's at stake, I suspect, is the very future of place-based educational communities. CMR, fully elaborated, helps us reconceive the nature and role of inquiry communities. While still celebrating the importance of scholarly work, it operates in new ways to connect scholarly work with the needs and challenges of specific contexts and communities.

As *A Crucible Moment* makes plain, one of the most powerful concepts framed through the civic renewal effort is the concept of “stewardship of place,” or an ongoing partnership between higher education and local communities that is designed to tackle and ameliorate festering social problems and inequities. When these kinds of reciprocal, long-term, collaborative efforts are formed, they provide a very powerful locus for both faculty and student engagement in civic inquiry and problem solving. They provide extraordinary opportunities for the academic community to learn from the insights and judgments of civic communities, with their multiple sources of perspective, energy, skepticism, disagreement, wisdom, and grass-roots decision making. These collaborative civic problem-solving partnerships model democracy in action. But they also bring a new rigor about evidence to the work of civic inquiry, analysis, and decision making. And rigor about the evidence we use to make decisions is urgently needed.

When we think about civic inquiry and learning in these terms—scholars, students, and staff working with community partners, taking a long-term responsibility for the quality of our lives in community—then, in my view, we begin to see the outlines of a twenty-first-century argument for the future of our colleges, universities, and community colleges as dedicated inquiry communities that are anchored in specific geographical places and responsibilities. By doubling down on the work that campus and community can do together, we can replace the old notion of the Ivory Tower/Academy on the Hill with a new notion of Democracy's Civic Centers to which we bring different kinds of wisdom—centrally including scholarly wisdom—with the goal of advancing solutions for our future. The university changes, but changes for the better by renewing its sense of purpose as a public resource and a public trust. Reclaiming our civic mission, in other words, brings with it the closely related benefit of revitalizing and repositioning academic community. This enriched conception of educational community will be good for democracy, beyond doubt. But it will also breathe a renewed sense of purpose and centrality into the academy itself.

The CMD university, by contrast, makes no claim to be a resource for democracy. Indeed, it makes no claim to be a resource for scholarship. Its purposes are economic and instrumental, period. It may assume that better-educated people will be good citizens, but the virtual university is not being designed to help students engage—in situ—with actual community partners on important

community challenges. Indeed, the CMD university has no capacity at all to add to scholarship of any kind. In its online forms, the CMD university, implicitly, prefers scripts to “deliver” its learning products to distant learners. But actual communities of inquiry, explicitly, know that there are no scripts for the difficult problems we need to solve, both at home and abroad, in ways that win the consent of free people. We will solve big problems only by pooling shared intelligence and evidence, of many kinds, and by testing approaches against their results for practice. The CMR university recognizes democracy’s stake in helping everyone develop both the capacity and the commitment to work together for the greater good. The CMD university is dangerously oblivious to democracy’s real needs.

In sum, then, if we seize this “crucible moment” to reclaim and revitalize higher education’s civic mission, we may find that we have also “saved” the academy as well. The academy will look different than it used to, but that is, after all, the essence of its history: core purposes, pursued through a succession of different institutional strategies, each aligned productively with the needs of a changing world. Conversely, if we do not seize this moment, with all its democratic challenge and potential, we may find that we have also “lost” the essence of what makes the academy important: its dedication and commitment, through the work of scholars, to the world’s most important questions—contemporary questions, enduring questions. I believe the costs of failure would be very high indeed—both to democracy itself and to democracy’s historic association with a long-term investment in the powers of the human mind.

*Committed to higher education as a driver for the economy, they have fallen entirely silent on democracy*

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#### NOTES

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4. Dey and Associates, *Civic Responsibility*, 6.
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7. National Center for Education Statistics, *The Nation’s Report Card: Civics 2010* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2011), 2.
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# Why Now? The Civic as a Core Part of What Higher Learning Means

*Donald W. Harward*

REFLECTING ON HIS EXPERIENCES as an undergraduate at Bates College, Dr. Benjamin Mays, president of Morehouse College and mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., said that “Bates College (Class of 1920) did not ‘emancipate me’; it did the far greater service of making it possible for me to emancipate myself, to accept with dignity my own worth as a free man.”<sup>1</sup> Bates provided the context (the culture or ethos) that encouraged Mays to be free. We know that a deepened campus culture (including but well beyond place) is the crucial element in creating opportunities to learn, in encouraging learning, and thereby in enabling students to choose to liberate themselves. This essay is a provocation that calls for us to center the civic in our campus cultures. It is a provocation, not a fully developed argument. There are few empirical citations of evidence, and there remains much more to be said. But as a provocation, it may stimulate discussion and the thinking of others.

There is here the use of “civic” as a noun. This is not intended to be confusing or complex, but rather to suggest that there are multiple uses of “civic” as an adjective (e.g., “civic learning,” “civic development,” and “civic engagement”). While no essential thread of meaning runs through all those uses, most suggest or derive from the relation of individuals to a community, society, and civil affairs and practices that value and support the common good. Using “civic” as a noun picks up on that pattern of uses and resonates with its cognate, the Latin noun “civitas,” meaning a concept of citizenship, the importance of shared responsibility, and a common purpose and commitment to community beyond the self. To keep referring to “civitas,” however, is awkward; so here, stipulating the use of “civic” captures an important thread of use and conventional meaning of the word.

My intent is to use this provocation as an opportunity to provide an incentive for why, indeed, we should act now. The provocation is to encourage redirecting our attention, understanding, and commitment to the civic in its full meaning and implications. At our separate institutions and in higher education collectively, we can move that attention from the periphery to the core. The provocation is to encourage us to align our practices and policies, our structures and rewards, our pedagogies, priorities, and expectations with the objective of

realizing the civic mission of our institutions—a mission not only consistent with, but also inherently connected to, our purpose and mission of learning, discovery, and the development of the full potential of our students.

Such a provocation, if acted upon, could, at many institutions, require significant, perhaps transformative changes—but it would open new and imaginative discussions and collective steps of action, and expectations would be reconsidered. A deeper consideration of civic learning would translate into its examination in multiple disciplines and in interdisciplinary inquiry. We would review curricula, pedagogies, the nature of assignments, the venues for learning, and the inclusion of multiple senses of who teaches and who does civic-related research. We would consider whether there is a field of civic studies, and what might be the relation of the civic to civility and to meaningful work—including not only its economic, but also its humanistic dimensions. We would continue the enduring examination of the nature and extent of civic responsibility, civic learning, and civic action within an open, free, and democratic social and political structure—our own democracy—and beyond. We would recognize the importance of enabling a profound understanding of the civic in order to contextualize our asking and acting in response to such questions as, What does an international or global civic mean, and what will it require?

But what would induce or incentivize the changes such a provocation suggests? Why should, why would, we change? And why change now? Very briefly, I think there are at least two sufficient reasons. And I want to argue that there is also a necessary reason that has not been given enough attention.

The first sufficient reason is eloquently captured in David Scobey’s “Copernican” provocation, in Carol Geary Schneider’s provocation, and in the national report *A Crucible Moment*. There is a desperate need to change—and if we do not, a resultant denigration of the civic mission of higher education will occur with huge implications for our democracy. The second sufficient reason is that, as a result of bringing the civic mission to the center of our work, we will have a novel opportunity to address the chronic challenges that currently occupy all our attention in higher education and on our campuses. It would give us a fresh start at examining the systemic causes of those challenges. We could look at our costs and the distribution of expenses and revenues with fresh perspective; we could question access policies, prevailing structures, pedagogies, calendars, the venues where students learn, reward systems, effective uses of technology, criteria for institutional strengths (beyond conventional ranking data)—all with an eye to what a focus on our civic mission would entail. And we could rigorously assess what is achieved by connecting the civic to the other core purposes of higher education.

While these may be sufficient reasons, however, they are not necessary. The necessary reason that serves to support centering the civic into our work and expectations in higher education is that the civic (i.e., the basic meaning and ethical foundation of the civic as suggested by “civitas”) is part of the meaning of learning—part of knowing and realizing that we know when we are engaged in learning and are not simply conditioned, or rote, learners. Regardless of discipline or experience, at the basis of examination, an epistemological inquiry reveals, independent of our differences of emphasis or perspective, that we both

teach and learn with either an explicit or an implicit understanding of what knowing and learning mean. Examining that epistemological basis leads to understanding the inherent relation of higher learning to the civic—that part of what we mean by learning, by higher learning and knowing, involves a core dimension of the civic. This provocation is a call to all of us as knowers and learners. It is a provocation to attend to the civic, whether we are theorists or practitioners, within or without the academy—and whether we are motivated by the sufficient reasons or not.

Before outlining the argument for considering this epistemologically based reason for centering the civic, I'd like to begin with a conviction. It is the conviction that there are inextricable connections among a triad of purposes and objectives of higher education. While the framing language varies among us, there is general agreement with the characterization of that triad as follows: (1) higher learning—engaged learning that is inclusive of skill development and information acquisition (but is much more), learning that is essential to discovery and the making of meaning, learning that engages, confronts, and involves the learner; (2) the well-being, the psychosocial development of the whole person, involving greater self-identity, resilience, and the expression of individual flourishing; and (3) the civic—the complex of conditions and efforts that lead to civic actions, behaviors, and learning that characterize the civic development and free (both supportive and contrarian) engagement of the type of learner that is necessary if an open and democratic society is to be sustained.

The conviction implies that the central objectives of our institutions—the prevalent pedagogies, funding priorities, structures, and policies—are each aligned to maximize learning, including the well-being and civic development of our students. It implies that we place priority on those efforts and opportunities for which we have evidence that by maximizing we can truly deepen the campus culture for learning for all our students. But the conviction is realistic, implying that we do have good ideas and intentions, but we often pull back—often for reasons of lack of support, or funding, or collective will. We then take some comfort in citing changes that are occurring—but on the periphery, or as “add-ons.”

So this provocation is to propose that, in order to make the changes we know to be effective, we move our shared conviction to the very center of the enterprise, as an incentive for all of us. This conviction is rooted in a shared conceptual understanding of the meaning of higher learning and its basic connection to the meaning of the civic.

Giving attention to the civic mission of higher education and to civic learning would not, then, rest solely on the awareness of apparent declines in civic knowledge, civility, or civic participation and behaviors. Understanding the core dimensions of the civic as necessary components of the meaning of higher learning or knowing, we justify making clear the centrality of the civic—even though we recognize that much needs to be said and developed beyond this basic connection. The civic (what it has meant and implied across generations and cultures) is an inseparable aspect of the triad linking higher learning, the well-being of the learner, and the civic awareness and engagement of the learner. Higher learning does not occur or exist without those related components,

and it cannot be understood or promoted without attention to each and their relatedness. So attention to change and to the implications for the civic is the same discussion as the consideration of what it means to champion higher learning—specifically, liberal education. Championing the civic is championing the positioning of learning and liberal education at the center.

Briefly, the argument. We can think about learning, coming to know, or gaining knowledge as a learner standing in relationship to what is an object of knowledge. Engaged learning is not descriptive of some act occurring *within* the learner. It is a relational concept, not a descriptive one; it suggests a relation of agent to what's outside of the agent, between agent and what's beyond agent. Whether the learning is superficial or profound; whether it makes connections possible; whether it affects our behavior, our recall, our use in further inquiry, and so forth—all these distinctions are rooted in the conditions that support the agent in a context of learning. Consistent with developmental psychology, engaged learning is having the individual learner be in contexts where there are multiple opportunities for being profoundly and repeatedly in relationship to what is beyond him or her. This is what a deepened culture—the context—for learning provides.

As higher learners, we are relational agents. We're also meta-learners. That is, as engaged learners or knowers, we are aware of our learning. We're aware that we are standing in relationship to something outside of ourselves—some state of affairs, some other learner, some actions, some activity, something that is not our self. The notion of our recognizing that we are in relation to what is other, or what's outside of ourselves, is why it has been argued that there's an ethical dimension to knowing (and learning), a dimension that is at the core of any understanding of the civic. As higher learners, we recognize that we are standing in relationship to something outside of ourselves—to what we may call “the other,” or even “community.” This recognition is connected to our obligation to diversity, to civility, and to broad multicultural objectives. And in so recognizing, we understand the character of the responsibility we have to that which is outside of ourselves. We have a responsibility to understand its integrity, to respect it, and to act consistently with our values to sustain it independently of ourselves. To stand in relation to the other, and to be in relation to an “other” when we know and learn, is at the core of what is meant by “civic.”

To be an *engaged*, or *higher*, learner is to be in a relationship to an “other” and to respect its integrity—to know, judge, and act in a community. It is why Dewey and current neo-pragmatists argue that matters of learning and thinking are inseparable from a social ethic, from matters of social action where knowing and practice in the social context are inseparable. They are the very core of civic responsibility. The conceptual grounding, the very understanding of higher learning, involves understanding an inseparable connection among the forms of that higher learning, and the cultivation and deeper understanding of the meaning of “the civic”—the thread of use suggesting the importance of shared responsibility, a common purpose, and a commitment to community (to other) beyond the self.

Because the civic is part of the meaning of higher learning, we can determine whether specific pedagogies have more civic potential than others; whether a field of civic studies or a concentration of studies in the civic (a major or minor) is justifiable; how research programs or disciplinary inquiry have a civic dimension; whether there are approaches, assignments, curricular topics, or other aspects of our teaching any course that have more “civic potential.” Of course, service learning and community-based research are relevant, but they are only examples of what faculty could choose to consider, design, and use. Each of these discussions is an effective entree—a strategy—for putting at the center of our institutional attention the full meaning of higher learning.

To attend to a basic understanding of the centrality of the civic in our pedagogy, in our curricula, in our assignments, and in our expectations of the values of inquiry, research, and discovery is not to dilute or distract us from our primary opportunity or obligation to craft contexts—to deepen the culture—for higher learning. We do so because these are aspects of what learning means.

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NOTE

1. Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 60.



# The Eudeamonic and the Civic

Corey Keyes

I'D LIKE TO TRACE A CONNECTION between the broad interest in civic engagement and my own interest in positive mental health. The original emphasis of the Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) project was on promoting student well-being and addressing the problem of mental illness, because mental illness is a serious problem in all our societies. The World Health Organization projects that, by 2030, mental illness will be the leading burden on *all* societies on the planet, if we do not do something to stem the tide.<sup>1</sup> All the evidence suggests that we are not going to treat our way out of this problem. Adding more staff clinicians and counselors is not a solution; rather, it is a sign of the failure of our attempts to promote good mental health.

I see BTtoP and its promotion of civic engagement as critical to promoting flourishing in students. Evidence shows that by promoting flourishing in a population, we can prevent mental illness and reduce the risk of premature death at all ages for men and women. For this reason, governments are now taking positive mental health very seriously. In 2011, for example, the Canadian government announced that, when it comes to mental health at a population level, its public policy is devoted to one thing: promoting positive mental health.

In drawing a connection between positive mental health and civic engagement, I want to make the point that it's not just about fixing problems in our colleges and universities. It's also about helping our students develop a suite of skills that will allow each of them to pursue a better life. The United States remains an experiment in extending freedom and the individual right to pursue happiness. Jefferson said, "Happiness is the aim of life but virtue is the foundation of happiness."<sup>2</sup> What did he mean by that? He's restating Aristotle's notion of what happiness is. Aristotle believed that happiness is an activity. This notion of an active happiness is called *eudeamonia*. It has very little to do with pleasure. It puts *functioning well* first. "Happiness is an activity of the soul," Aristotle believed. And by soul he meant reason, our human capacity to act deliberately according to our own designs and plans. It's our job to do that in accordance with virtue.

What, then, is this virtue thing all about? It may sound a bit antiquated, but *virtue* is back. I was recently in South Africa, where people were asking,

“Why do we care about this virtue stuff?” And I said, “Well, tell me, is it enough that you’ve done nothing wrong? Is a good person someone who has done nothing wrong?” Some said, “Yeah.” I responded, “OK. Is it enough that you’ve broken no laws?” Those are the two orienting principles of modernity: consequentialism and deontological thinking. There are lots of individuals and corporations that break no laws and do no harm. But are they, therefore, good? In our heart of hearts, we know that that alone is not enough. We also need actively to construct a good life, one that has a positive impact on society and that promotes the well-being of others. In doing so, we also achieve a better life for ourselves.

We can—and do—pursue our own interests and pleasures automatically. The limbic system is “wired” to seek pleasure. And hedonic, or emotional, well-being is associated with a certain kind of happiness. Attempts to measure this in the United Kingdom and the United States have found that over 90 percent of citizens in both countries are either quite or very happy.<sup>3</sup> What’s wrong with that picture of today’s society? Nearly everyone feels good about a life in which, they will tell you in their next breath, they are not functioning well and the world is going to hell. Well, they’re not flourishing. They have found a way to satiate and adapt to some of life’s worst conditions. That’s a wonderful human capacity, but it’s not a sign of doing well.

The point is that we can seek pleasure in the midst of all kinds of circumstances. But, only through the restraint of reason can we flourish. We must use our rational capacity to constrain the pursuit of individual interests that are at the expense of public happiness. That’s what we do in truly “higher” education and in civic engagement work. Only through the restraint of reason and the exercise of virtue can we attain happiness in a way that reconciles and balances pleasure with functioning well in life. That’s what *eudemonia* is, and that’s the point of civic engagement.

So, there are two kinds of happiness. One is attained through the pursuit of individual interests and pleasure, the other through the pursuit of the greater good. While in our hearts we may prefer the latter, the elephant in our brain that is the limbic system pushes us toward short-term gratification and pleasure. We don’t privilege functioning well or feeling good. Aristotle said that although this can be taught theoretically, it must be practiced in order to cultivate the appetite for doing more of it.

My flourishing model actually measures both of kinds of happiness. To flourish, you have to feel good about a life in which you are also functioning well. Every study we’ve done has shown that those who flourish—whether they’re kids or adults, from South Africa or the Netherlands or the United States—have the lowest risk of mental illness, now and in the future. In a variety of ways, those who flourish do better than those who just “feel great”—not to mention those who languish, a state characterized as the absence of good, not the presence of bad (e.g., depression).

Just as there are two kinds of happiness, there are also two kinds of virtue. The first is intellectual or theoretical virtue—the “theory” in Bringing Theory to Practice. We could teach people all kinds of things about what is good, what it means to live a good life, and how to be a good person. That, however,

would not be enough. They would still need to attain the second kind of virtue, which is, in Aristotle's language, moral virtue. Moral virtue refers to *practical* wisdom—the “practice” in Bringing Theory to Practice. Knowing what is good is distinct from, though still related to, doing what is good. Ideally, we do good *because* we know it is good—as can happen when we participate in some form of civic engagement. We all know of many things we should do in order to promote our health. The disjuncture is in the practical, in the practice. And that's the problem with happiness today. It's why so few people are flourishing. Here's what Aristotle believed, and I think he was right, “You can teach theoretical wisdom but you cannot teach practical wisdom.”

So what can we do? We can learn to do good by doing good. That is, we need to develop habits. I was raised as a Catholic, and Catholics go to Mass and Sunday school to learn to be good. But that alone doesn't work. You've got to get outside the institution and *do* good works. As Tocqueville said, hearkening back to Aristotle, “By dint of working for the good of one's fellow citizens, the habit and the taste for serving them are *at length acquired*.”<sup>4</sup>

This is the connection between civic engagement and positive mental health. Civic engagement is an activity, first and foremost. It should be done in the spirit of joining and addressing an issue that is of concern not just to you, but to others, where the well-being or public happiness of others is at stake. Civic engagement is also an achievement—just like, as the philosopher Julia Annas argues, eudaemonically, that happiness is an achievement.<sup>5</sup> Nobody wants happiness just to be given to them. In a classroom experiment, Annas tells her students, “I will give you all of the things that will make you happy.” They respond, “No. Don't. We want to work for it.” This, then, is our paradox. We have students who want to work for it, want to earn it, want to achieve it; they don't want just pleasure. Yet, higher education doesn't help them cultivate the skills that are necessary to achieve a better and eudaemonic life. Doing that requires civic engagement.

*Civic engagement is an activity, first and foremost. It should be done in the spirit of joining and addressing an issue that is of concern not just to you, but to others, where the wellbeing or public happiness of others is at stake*

The purpose of civic engagement is not just to fix social problems. We're a nation that says you actually can be involved in helping engage the civic fabric of life, which awakens all sorts of good things in people: their sense of contribution, their acceptance of others, the belief that they can make sense of what's going on in the world around them. Engaging the civic fabric of life increases people's confidence to express their own ideas and opinions; it gives them a purpose in life. All these good things also happen to be the same things we look for to determine whether someone is functioning well and flourishing in life.

In 2010, the American Public Health Association published a special issue of the *American Journal of Public Health* that focused on the promotion and protection of mental health.<sup>6</sup> Key members of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention contributed articles and, thereby, endorsed the promotion of positive

mental health as a way of preventing mental illness. Yet although we've planted a flag for flourishing here in the United States, we're still behind Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, and other countries that are further along in promoting positive mental health for their citizens. We cannot treat our way out of the problem of mental illness. To promote flourishing, we need to help people do better than just pursuing individual interests and pleasure.

A 2005 study of the American population, which was conducted over the previous ten-year period, found that adults who had already been flourishing or who began to flourish were at the lowest risk of developing a mental illness.<sup>7</sup> Compared to those flourishing, the population studied who had only “moderate mental health” had a fourfold risk of mental illness. Compared to those flourishing, those who had a mental illness ten years earlier had a fivefold risk of having another in 2005. Think about that. A significant part of the study's participants had moderate mental health and were free of depression, anxiety, or panic disorder, but with the lack of flourishing their risk of developing a mental illness was almost as high as for those who started out with one! Moreover, for those in the study who were languishing (who were not experiencing anything good or bad, and were not functioning well), the risk of developing a mental illness was sevenfold.

Clearly, there is a viable alternative to the treatment-only approach to mental illness. By promoting flourishing, we can contribute greatly to the public good by preventing mental illness. By investing in more civic engagement, students can contribute to the greater good and increase their chances of flourishing. This is a beautiful win-win for self and society.

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#### NOTES

1. World Health Organization, *The Global Burden of Disease: 2004 Update* (Geneva: World Health Organization Press, 2008), 51.
2. Charles B. Sanford, *The Religious Life of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1984), 36.
3. Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 14.
4. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cwperthwaite, and Company, 1841), 112.
5. Julia Annas, “Happiness as Achievement,” *Daedalus* 133 (2004): 44–51.
6. “Mental Health Promotion and Protection,” special issue, *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. (2010).
7. Corey L. M. Keyes, Satvinder S. Dhingra, and Eduardo J. Simoes, “Change in Level of Positive Mental Health as a Predictor of Future Risk of Mental Illness,” *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. 12 (2010), 2366–71, Table 4.

PART 2

Provocations:  
Probing Dimensions  
of the Civic



# Civic Engagement, Civic Learning, and Higher Education

*Barry Checkoway*

“CIVIC ENGAGEMENT” IS WHEN PEOPLE JOIN TOGETHER to address issues of public concern. It can take many forms, such as when people organize action groups, plan local programs, or develop community-based services. They might vote in an election, contact a public official, or speak at a public hearing; they might organize an action group, mobilize around a neighborhood problem, or join a protest demonstration. There is no single form that characterizes all approaches to practice, but as long as people are joining together and addressing issues of public concern, it is civic engagement.

“Civic learning” is when people develop knowledge for a public purpose. The term can be paraphrased from the categories proposed by Ernest Boyer, who distinguished among the scholarships of “discovery” or research, “integration of knowledge” across disciplines and fields, “application of knowledge” to address societal issues, and “teaching” to facilitate learning about them. He later added the “scholarship of engagement” as a “means of connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems.”<sup>1</sup> All these categories can be used to conceptualize “civic learning” as an approach to knowledge development.

Democratic societies are always changing and, as they do so, their forms of civic engagement and civic learning should also change. We should expect to find different forms of practice in the different contexts of ancient Greece, colonial America, contemporary Eastern Europe, and the emergent Arab Spring. We should expect the forms of engagement and learning to be changing in societies that are experiencing significant shifts in their populations—such as shifts in population from the North and West to the South and East—and in the information technologies through which people communicate among themselves and across their differences—such as from face-to-face discussions to those that occur by cell phone or on the Internet. If forms of engagement and learning do not change along with changes in society, democracy will be limited.

Higher education is ideally positioned for both civic engagement and civic learning. Many colleges and universities were established with a civic mission, such as “education for democracy” or “knowledge for society.” Over time, these

institutions have taken up multiple purposes, but have not necessarily abandoned the civic purpose with which they were founded. For example, my own university has become a powerful research engine known for interdisciplinary initiatives involving faculty campuswide and, at the same time, there is an inscription on an older building that reads: “[This building is] the hearthstone of the campus, providing cultural, social, and recreational programs serving as a laboratory of citizenship, for training students in social responsibility and for leadership in our democracy.”

Colleges and universities have immense institutional resources for scholarship that relates to the pressing problems and issues of society. Campuses have programs, departments, and centers that strengthen scholarship in all academic disciplines and professional fields, and that relate these to problems in society. These programs operate in buildings, classrooms, conference facilities, libraries, and laboratories.

The potential for civic work is limitless. For example, faculty members, in their roles as “civic scholars,” can conduct research or teach courses that draw upon their disciplines or fields for the benefit of society. Students can learn about issues of public concern through courses that develop civic competencies, or through cocurricular activities that have a strong civic purpose. Opportunities for civic learning are everywhere on campus, if only members of the campus community would see it this way.

Colleges and universities are more than centers for scholarship; they are anchor institutions in society. They are major employers, producers, and consumers of services; they are powerful economic units whose decisions ramify from neighborhood to nation. Despite their civic potential, however, questions arise about their present performance. It is difficult to thrive as a civic institution when students perceive that the chief benefit of higher education is personal gain rather than the public good, or when they arrive with a low commitment to community participation or political leadership. Once on campus, students find few courses with “civic” in their titles, class discussions do not address public issues, and assignments do not challenge civic imaginations. There are institutions that promote civic engagement, but they are the exceptions.

Faculty members have potential, too, but most of them are not very civic-minded. Indeed, faculty are shaped by an academic culture that runs contrary to engagement. They are trained in graduate schools whose courses ignore civic content, and they enter careers whose gatekeepers dissuade them from public work. They are socialized into a world whose institutional structures shape their beliefs and cause behaviors that are consistent with their conditioning. They are led to believe that engaged scholarship is not central to their roles, that there are few rewards for this work, and that it might even jeopardize their careers in the university.

Even if higher education were to renew its original commitment to civic engagement, questions would remain about its appropriate roles. Psychologists argue that adolescence—as the stage in which young people are especially concerned about social justice and open to roles and role models of this type—is the most promising time for civic development. If so, then this would suggest that secondary schools, rather than colleges and universities, should place

special emphasis on this purpose, and that the role of higher education might best emphasize forms of research, learning, and teaching that build capacity for younger students.

Even if both secondary and higher education were able to collaborate for a common civic purpose, however, the fact would remain that school is only one among several institutions that affect civic development. And the others—such as the family, the media, and the market economy—might be more powerful influences than education, in the absence of strategy to the contrary.

Should colleges and universities have a strategy for renewing the civic mission, and, if so, what should it be? Strategy is a resource that describes what people want to accomplish over time. It expresses their values, shows what they care about, and provides direction for the actions they will take—not as a one-time event, but rather as an ongoing process. Any comprehensive strategy for civic renewal would include goals that are broad and encompassing, objectives that are specific and achievable, and activities that can be sequenced and scheduled on a timetable. These three elements—goals, objectives, and activities—would give shape to a renewal strategy.

A renewal strategy would include efforts to strengthen students' learning and contribute to their civic engagement, and it would involve faculty members in research and teaching that complement this purpose. It would include an infrastructure to sustain the work, and leadership at multiple levels, including the president, provost, vice presidents, deans, and department heads—in addition to students and faculty members. Institutions have strategies for many purposes, and they should have strategies for civic renewal too.

*There is nothing a priori to prevent each and every faculty member from thinking of his or her work in this way, and obstacles are a normal part of the change process*

How can colleges and universities strengthen student learning for civic engagement? The answer to this question includes finding ways to ensure that curricula, courses, and cocurricular activities have a civic purpose. Every single course—from anthropology to zoology—has potential for civic learning.

How can institutions engage faculty members in research and teaching that develop civic competencies? All faculty members have a role to play, from sociologists and political scientists to philosophers and physicists; the more seemingly remote the discipline, the more interesting the epistemological challenge. There is nothing a priori to prevent each and every faculty member from thinking of his or her work in this way, and obstacles are a normal part of the change process.

Which institutional structures can support the strategy? There are several options, such as centralization of civic purpose into an administrative structure at the presidential, vice presidential, or other institutional level; or decentralization of this function to all academic units across the institution; or incorporation into existing units that already show leadership or potential for leadership; or building upon existing structures without creating new bureaucratic units. No single structure fits all institutions; the key is to fit structure to situation.

In recent years, many colleges and universities have established new centers for civic action or civic learning, and these centers have increased in number to

a level at which it is now possible to speak of “engaged institutions” as a formal classification and of their creation as a “movement.” Their establishment is noteworthy, and, after their champions pass on and their enthusiasm wanes, history will remember them until the movement returns. Most of the centers focus on a particular program—such as service learning, community-based research, or campus-community collaboration—and some of them have grown to a level at which they combine several services. They can be found in all types of colleges and universities—small and large, public and private—as well as in other types of institutions.

My own view is that, for colleges and universities, the potential for civic renewal is in the entire institution, not in any single unit or particular program. The power of these institutions is in the totality of their resources (including all their faculty members). These institutions are ideally positioned for comprehensive renewal, but there is a need to infuse the civic into all curricular and cocurricular activities and into all disciplines and fields. If only a few of these institutions were to think of themselves in this way, the outcomes would be extraordinary.

If we wanted to establish a national strategy for civic renewal of higher education, what would it be? This question assumes that the nation is a unit of

practice for higher education, that there are champions to lead the effort, and that colleges and universities will benefit from and participate in the process. In almost any society, there are champions who take the nation as their cause and who want to organize all institutions under their banner, with or without the support of the institutions themselves. The present wave of civic renewal has this characteristic. Any national movement for civic renewal might or might not have benefits for colleges and universities. This depends on the characteristics of the institution, on the renewal process that is put in place, and on the ability of the champions—both national and institutional.

In the short run, social justice questions almost always arise at the national level, for some colleges and universities have substantial resources; others do not. In the present environment, however, few

institutions are willing and able to sustain a comprehensive campuswide strategy for civic renewal; there are exceptions, but they are truly exceptional. My own view is that any national effort should assume that a window of opportunity is open for civic renewal at the present time; that national momentum will wane when the window begins to close; that the contribution of national movements is in their institutional development; and that institutions should strengthen their capacity while there is national momentum, and before the window of opportunity closes. If national champions want to contribute to a movement for civic renewal, they should assume that the most important contributions will come from real outcomes at the institutional level, not from their own rhetorical pronouncements about institutions they purportedly represent.

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The measure of a national movement is not in the gatherings or speeches of national champions in the national capital, but rather in the changes that take place at the institutional level. This was the lesson of the wave of feminism that left behind women's educational institutions that have sustained themselves for more than a century. I see no evidence that today's national civic champions have this in mind.

My own belief is that any national movement should generate a series of facilitated conversations about the civic at the institutional level, that the measure of success should be in the level of sustainable institutional development, that institutional leadership is instrumental to institutional development, and that investment in institutional development should be the priority. Most colleges and universities with an interest in civic renewal have some measure of presidential or executive officer support, at least one champion or change agent who has commitment, a core group of people who are passionate, and at least a few faculty members who step forward. A "talented ten" is a minimal requisite for starters, before scaling upward. This is where the national investment should be. Movements like civic renewal are like the tide: they come in with the waves and a bang, then they recede. The question is, what do they leave behind?

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NOTE

1. Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).



# Civic Studies as an Academic Discipline

*Peter Levine*

THE LAST THING I READ before participating in the Bringing Theory to Practice National Civic Seminar was *The Engaged Campus: Majors, Minors and Certificates as the New Community Engagement*, a volume edited by Dan W. Butin and Scott Seider.<sup>1</sup> It's an excellent book. The chapters are very well written, for one thing; some of them are beautifully written. It is basically a set of case studies of college and university programs that support civic engagement, and so it is full of stories about faculty, students, and community partners taking on problems in communities around their institutions—from Providence, Rhode Island, to Santa Cruz, California.

It struck me that these small groups of committed, thoughtful students, faculty, and community partners face a monumental intellectual task. The question before them is, what must be done? To answer that, they must know what the conditions are in the world, what strategies might possibly work from their own vantage point—we're not talking about what the federal government should do, because small groups have no leverage over that—and they must decide whether what they might try to do in the world would be good. So they must decide three things together: facts, strategies, and values.

I noticed in reading the book two absences that exemplify the challenge before us. (This is not a criticism of the book, because I couldn't fill the absences either.) First, there is no mention of anyone from any of these groups joining an organized political movement of any size. And, second, there are few evocations of living political social theorists or public intellectuals.

I began to think about what would have happened if a book like this had been written—and maybe it was written, for all I know—exactly fifty years ago: in 1961, instead of 2011. I think at that point, if you read a book about student groups and faculty/student groups going out and doing something in the world, you would have found many of the groups aligned with a political movement. The movement would not just offer an ideology; it would provide values, principles, underlying moral commitments, diagnoses, prescriptions, strategies, networks, inspirational stories, living leaders, historical leaders, candidates and parties (even if they were minor candidates and parties), regular news reports in journals (not just academic journals, but *The Daily Worker* or

an equivalent), organizational supports, cultural expressions like particular songs or clothes, and potential career paths: a whole package.

Some of the student/faculty groups would have been aligned with various forms of Marxism, certainly diverse and sometimes literally opposed to one another. Today, Marxism is basically located on the syllabus; it is a reading assignment, not a movement. Other groups, probably the biggest set, would have aligned with the mid-twentieth-century liberalism of the New Deal, at that point called the New Frontier. Our research shows that the values of that period are actually more popular now than they were then, but I think liberalism is basically understood as protective or conservative of the institutions built in that period. Liberalism today has nothing like the momentum of the 1960s.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, a whole bunch of students would have joined the civil rights movement in 1961, then perhaps at its apogee. Today's activist students still align with some of its values, but they cannot join the civil rights movement itself. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was published in 1962. Carson didn't invent the environmental movement, but her book was a symptom of that movement's origins. So environmentalism would have been an option. Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, and like Carson, she did not invent a movement but contributed to its development. However, in 2008, just 14 percent of all Americans of all ages considered themselves feminists.<sup>3</sup> Finally, some students would have endorsed the libertarianism of Barry Goldwater as a politician and Milton Friedman as a thinker. I actually think that movement remains vital today; it deserves respectful attention. But even if you're respectful of it, you also have to acknowledge that it does not draw very many of our students; it draws a chunk of them, but not a very large one.

I think the authors represented in *The Engaged Campus* might regard the decline of these organized political movements and ideologies as a *good* thing. One of the authors, Talmage A. Stanley from Emory & Henry College, advocates "militant or radical particularity, knowing a place in its fullness, with its contradictions, its conflicts, its questions, what it means to be a citizen in that place."<sup>4</sup> That is an implicit critique of any ambitious, widely applicable theory. Keith Morton emphasizes that the curriculum at Providence College "introduces a relational and experiential complexity."<sup>5</sup> Community studies at the University of California–Santa Cruz has been criticized for its allegedly leftist orientation, but Mary Beth Pudup insists that the required "field study was not framed in terms of specific ideological commitments."<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, few theorists are cited. Noam Chomsky appears once, but I think it's kind of a throwaway. The authors who do appear are John Dewey (in three different chapters), Paolo Freire (four different chapters), Parker Palmer (twice), and C. Wright Mills (three times). These are diverse thinkers, but one interpretation is that they are not keen on proposing political theories or general ideologies; they are process oriented. They're more interested in inviting readers or participants to develop their own ideas in their own particular contexts, and that's why they are cited.

The one ideology that's discussed a lot is neoliberalism, which emerges as a sort of shadowy enemy without a clear definition, without a specific parallel on the left that people might join up with. Neoliberalism ends up being *everything*

academics don't like, including budget cuts and conservative cultural politics, which don't seem to me to be neoliberal at all. So it's a sort of vessel for everything that is a threat.

Stanley imagines the voice of communities around his institution, which is in Appalachia, saying, "We do not need your answers, we need citizens who can struggle with tough questions, we need citizens and partners with the capacities to put down roots, to understand, and take the long, long view. Do not send us answers, they say, send us people, young people, who have the capacity to hear our stories, endure the conflicts, keep silent when silence is called for, and understand the questions."<sup>7</sup> I resonate with this view. My own philosophical position is actually, for what it's worth, called "particularism"—I didn't invent it, but I've been developing it.<sup>8</sup> But think how hard it is. First of all, it's much easier to participate in politics and civil society if you can employ ideology's heuristic and if you can join a large movement that has already developed both theory and practice. Making a decision from scratch about each policy and each situation is hard for anyone, and hardest for the young and the marginalized. If the young don't already have a lot of education, experience, or leisure time, an ideology is a valuable shortcut. And we know from all kinds of research that people who have ideological commitments or party memberships and who otherwise belong to movements or organizations vote at higher rates. So ideology is a resource that can compensate for a lot of time and education. You can write the history of declining participation as a result of declining social movements.

So the authors of *The Engaged Campus*, like many of us, are radically ambitious. We are hoping to increase the scale and frequency and equity of civic engagement, while also deliberately eschewing ideologies that might help mobilize people, and while avoiding large political movements. Unfortunately the academic world that stands behind them and us is not well organized to help small groups of thoughtful and committed citizens make wise decisions, for a couple of reasons. First, social scientists tend to emphasize that small groups of people and citizens taking deliberative action—coming up with strategies and solving problems—aren't very important. Social scientists tell us that markets, technologies, institutional structures, and demographics drive change, so they're very often rather skeptical about the importance of studying the little nitty-gritty strategic decisions that a small group of committed citizens might make. And yet, if you are *in* a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens, you really do need research to help you figure out what might work.

Second, scholarship is not as helpful as it should be if we're deciding whether any given change would be beneficial. It is a very familiar point, but it's worth repeating: Social scientists are willing to study people's values, treating them as opinions to be investigated (or as biases of their own to be minimized and disclosed), but not as propositions that could be true—not as propositions that should be defended with arguments and critically assessed. Meanwhile, in philosophy, theology, political theory, and other parts of the humanities, values are openly debated, but scholars in those fields tend to be quite uninterested in strategy. I think of a philosopher colleague who recently made a forceful argument in favor of greater racial equality in education. When he "was asked

about political resistance to larger preferences for African-American students, his response [was] ‘I’ve given up on the public.’”<sup>9</sup> That’s an example of a sophisticated, probably valid moral theory that is attached to absolutely no political strategy. It’s completely inert.

It’s hard to name contemporary writers who combine empirical data with strategic acting and moral persuasiveness in work of broad relevance rather than tight particularity, which is why there are few living intellectuals in a volume of four hundred pages about civic work and communities. So, the challenge implicit throughout *The Engaged Campus* is huge. Decide how to improve the world when it is getting worse in so many ways, when there are no satisfactory big ideas and attendant political movements, and when academia is not oriented to inform and support civic work.

But, if you’ll excuse the cliché, a crisis is also an opportunity. If we lack compelling political and intellectual movements, and if our major institutions are performing very badly, then we’d better begin building examples of ethical and effective civic work at the grassroots level. If our intellectual life is fractured in ways that reduce its value for active citizens, then we’d better find settings that reintegrate scholarship and address serious problems. That’s what I think we’re trying to do, but my provocation is that the intellectual work involved in that is extraordinarily difficult.

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#### NOTES

1. Dan W. Butin and Scott Seider, eds, *The Engaged Campus: Certificates, Minors and Majors as the New Community Engagement* (New York: Palgrave, 2012).
2. Peter Levine, Constance Flanagan, and Les Gallay, *The Millennial Pendulum: A New Generation of Voters and the Prospects for a Political Realignment* (Washington, DC: New America Foundation, 2009).
3. “The Barrier That Didn’t Fall,” *Daily Beast*, November 18, 2008, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2008/11/18/the-barrier-that-didnt-quot-fall.html>.
4. Talmage A. Stanley, “Building in Place,” in *Engaged Campus: Certificates, Minors, and Majors as the New Community Engagement*, eds. Dan W. Butin and Scott Seider, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
5. Keith Morton, “Service Learning and Challenges of Interpretation,” in Butin and Seider, *Engaged Campus*.
6. Mary Beth Pudup, “We’re All Engaged Now: The Rise and (Possible) Demise of Community Studies” in Butin and Seider, *Engaged Campus*.
7. See note above 4.
8. Peter Levine, *Reforming the Humanities: Literature and Ethics from Dante through Modern Times* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
9. Richard Kahlenberg, “Calling Philosophers of Education,” Innovation (blog), *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 12, 2011, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/innovations/calling-philosophers-of-education/30542>.

# Critical Civic Research

*Michelle Fine*

THE SCIENCE WRITER JANINE BENYUS seeks the answers to social problems in nature. She's the kind of writer and scientist who looks at the aftermath of Katrina and asks which trees survived and why. She has studied the mighty oaks that stood strong even after the storm. Although they appear to be bold, autonomous, and free-standing, Benyus asks how is it that they survived after the tides. She discovered that even though they look strong and autonomous, underneath the ground there are deep entangled roots, snuggling up on each other, supporting each other.<sup>1</sup>

That's what I think of as civic fabric: the deep roots of the public good, the source of our collective ability to withstand trauma—economic, political, social, or personal. We may appear strong and autonomous, but that's because there's a deep network of roots that holds us together. I worry that we live in neoliberal times when the roots are being cut out from under us and that the most vulnerable are falling. Civic engagement is an opportunity to remind us of our desperate need for rich interdependence; to strip away the fantasy of autonomy; to reveal that if the most vulnerable fall, we are all threatened.

Higher education has an ironic relation to this set of ideas. On the one hand, university life is a space for teaching about interdependence and inequality gaps. At the same time, universities are spaces that cultivate a sense of autonomy, individualism, and freedom from biography. This delicate tension deserves serious consideration: the university is a place where we can educate youth toward the belief that they need nothing but self-motivation, or we can educate them about all the ways we need to hold each other up. Thus, my first provocation asks, how do we keep civic from becoming vanilla?

I believe we're at a moment of civic victory when the idea of civic engagement as foundational to higher education has prevailed, even grown trendy. Civic engagement could, however, become vanilla in a hot second. By that I mean to

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suggest, or worry, that civic engagement could become a massive volunteer effort to pick up the pieces of neoliberal society; it could become a strategy that accommodates, rather than contests, inequality gaps and social injustice. If we mean something deeper—if we mean a commitment, a value, an institutional shift in the membrane between the university and the community—what would that look like? To address this question of what bold civic engagement might look like, I want to discuss public science, or critical civic research—research that not only examines “what is,” but that also expands the landscape for “what could be” and engages audiences in widening the social imagination for “what must be.”

The Public Science Project at the City University of New York Graduate Center has been committed to designing research projects as pivots between the academy and social justice struggles, and to developing generations of students and activists who embody a commitment to critical civic scholarship. Every ideological force in the academy presses away from critical civic research and toward self-promotional, individualistic, traditional research—secure a large federal grant; publish as sole author; get tenure with many quick turn-around studies. What do you mean the community owns the data so you can’t publish another analysis? I fear we don’t have cultures in higher education that cultivate critical civic inquiry and commitment in our young scholars. Over the next decade, particularly in the midst of the Arab Spring and our current “revolting” times, it seems crucial to build such intellectual and political nests in and outside of the academy, cultivating and sustaining communities of critical researchers within and beyond the academy who engage a debt to/with communities for justice projects.

In this vein, during the summer of 2011, we at the Public Science Project held our first summer institute for researchers/activists working on critical participatory action research. Over the course of the week, participants and facilitators participated in scheduled workshops and then invented and eventually facilitated original workshops on critical statistics, participatory surveys, mapping, ethnography, archival analyses, and on how to conduct focus groups and use various “forgotten” critical methods. Deep and important tensions were lifted up about the contentious, compelling, and sometimes thrilling jagged edges between critical race theory; indigenous, postcolonial, and feminist theories; and queer and gender-based analyses. We discussed differences and overlaps between participatory action research and organizing; research based in place or *across* places; the sticky intersections of culture, class, sexuality, and gender; and the perverse relationship of state violence and intimate violence.

We debated the ethics and delicacies of policy research that is conducted *in collaboration with* the state, policy research that is conducted *in opposition to* the state, and projects that are designed *as if autonomous from* the state. We developed a braiding of the research practices of validity and engagement. We created a community of researchers engaged intimately with the thick complexity of what it means to “do” civic. We were able to identify and build connections across our many separate projects—at once rooted in place and circuited across place. We were able to explore history, structure, and struggle within and across sites by making visible the circuits of dispossession, resistance, validation as well as the circuits of possibility that link these sites.

We began to consider how universities can “be of use,” simultaneously supporting the integrity and autonomy of deep, radical, local work and charting/energizing what geographer Cindi Katz calls “counter-topographies”—the lines of latitude by which our lives, politics, and social movements connect across place and time.<sup>2</sup> The activists and researchers who participated in the summer institute wanted to learn how to do community research *in community*. For me, a light went off: quiet, down-low, community-based participatory action research needs to be designed in ways that lift up conversations that need to be had locally, intimately, and delicately, not broadcast for policy or systems change—at least not yet.

This is why the point Barry Checkoway makes is so important: “civic” means different things in and for different communities. There were white middle-class women at the institute who wanted to do this research and go to Albany, for sure—and I love that; that’s me, right? And there were other groups who were trying to figure out what “civic” means in their own communities. What does it mean in the Orthodox Jewish community, where you just want the men to begin to listen? What does it mean in the Caribbean or African community, where undocumented women can’t realistically call the police, for fear that their kids will get taken away? Feminist health activists in the Native American community carried into the institute generations of knowledge and mistrust of the US and Canadian governments’ desire to intervene to “protect” women. So, we’ve developed this multisite project in which teams are deeply engaged in research *in place*, and the Public Science Project helps circuit all this—the resources, the knowledge, the political support, the stories—toward policy and toward an archive of women’s lives across place, time, and space.

With this as context, I offer another provocation. If in these times of deep, grotesque, and cumulative inequality gaps we assume that Occupy Wall Street is the ultimate form of civic engagement, then what is the civic debt of the university? Those of us who are *off/for/in* public universities have one way to think about the public debt, but really all universities are in receipt of an enormous amount of public money. One has to think through the question, what is our debt? Are we the 99 percent? Are we the 1 percent, since our institutions don’t pay taxes? Or do we stand on the sidelines and watch? More specifically, how do we wrestle with higher education’s contradictory relationship to inequality gaps and structural interdependence?

I think it might be interesting to think through the landscape of civic research. What are the variable frames, and what are our non-negotiables? What’s sacred, what’s debatable, and what’s our bottom line? What variations within civic engagement are appealing, and what could constitute an unacceptable dilution of civic ethics and commitments? In what follows, I want to sketch a topology by describing four forms of civic research.

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First, there has been and should continue to be significant *research on civic engagement as practice*. This form of civic research assesses the impact civic engagement has on youth development, academic outcomes, political knowledge, critical consciousness, and the adults involved. It focuses on the effects of civic engagement on youth, communities, elders working with youth, policy, and collective health. Connie Flanagan, Rod Watts, Kavitha Mediratta, Seema Shah, Ben Kirshner, Matthew Countryman, and many others have done this work.

A second line of work involves *research as civic engagement*, which is more like the participatory action research that we've done at the Public Science Project. We recently completed Polling for Justice, a survey that asked 1,200 young people across New York City about their experiences of what we call circuits of dispossession in education, criminal justice, housing, and healthcare. Through the survey, we have documented unbelievably high rates of negative police interaction between kids of color and police. For the most part, the respondents love their schools, they love their teachers, they want to participate in civic life, and they believe in democracy. Yet 48.1 percent of them had had a negative interaction with a police officer in the previous six months.<sup>3</sup> These are white, black, Latino, and Asian kids.

We've been mapping these quantitative patterns of police interaction by gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and neighborhood. On Saturdays we hold sessions called "Stats for the People," during which we throw the data up on a screen. Young people, public health researchers, and lawyers come and help us analyze the data. Together, we identify geographic "hot spots" of police activity. And through a secondary analysis of the New York Police Department's own database, we've discovered that these "hot spots" mirror those identified by the police themselves.

We're now engaged in the Morris Justice Project (MJP). The MJP trains teams of young people, moms, grandmothers, and former corrections officers in the community to document not just troubling relations with police, but positive interactions as well. With a random sampling design and a full, vibrant neighborhood, the MJP will document the incidence and consequences of intensive racial profiling, over-policing, and stop-and-frisk. The MJP will also investigate questions for which we don't have answers: What might community safety look like in economically disinvested and overly criminalized neighborhoods? How can people feel safe and protected? Under what conditions can police cultivate a community sense of human security and not further the violence? The MJP is collaborating with the library and will present the data, hopefully at a local library or community performance center.

A third form of civic research involves *community projects designed to provoke civic inquiry, participation, and action*. In New York, political scientists, economists, and sociologists are working with community people on a participatory budgeting project. They're asking, how do you read your local budget? The more standard story is that the public is "invited" to budget briefings, the talk is way over everyone's heads, and people stop going either because they don't understand the process or because it seems fixed before the meeting. Then the story is that the people don't care or that they agree with the politicians.

I was recently reminded of an idea floated decades ago by the philosophers John Dewey and Maxine Greene. They contrasted *anesthetic* educational experiences, which put you to sleep, with *aesthetic* experiences, which provoke new ideas, relationships, and activities. Perhaps we should catalogue the conditions under which we can produce civic engagements that are aesthetic, provocative, enlivening—and not anesthetic. People familiar with W. E. B. DuBois know *Philadelphia Negro*, his writings on the talented tenth, and his work on *The Crisis* magazine. But what many do not know is that DuBois also produced a rich pageantry genre. “The Star of Ethiopia” was one of his performances of black history and sociology for the people. DuBois performed black history and sociology on the streets, because he was committed to giving away knowledge, redistributing and activating civic thought and criticism, and provoking a racial consciousness for justice.

Finally, as a fourth form of civic research, we might think about *civic research designed explicitly to document and contest the civic constraints placed on young people by neoliberal policies*. As youth in the United States and around the world live under what are now called conditions of “precarity”—they live in precarious times—can we document the constraints in order to dismantle them? This fourth category is in some ways the boldest, particularly when turned inward toward our universities. The civic and inequalities are not just “out there”; they are also “in here.” At present, higher education serves an important and dangerous function as the economic, educational, and civic gatekeeper determining, in part, who has access to lives of meaning, creativity, solidarity, and flexibility. To what extent are we willing to study the conditions of shrinking access and cumulative constraint with respect to who goes to college and who graduates? Would we launch research on student debt, credit card debt, or mortgages? Would we launch research on all the ways our institutions keep undocumented kids out, all the ways our institutions keep students with incarceration on their records out, all the ways our institutions rely upon test scores we know to be invalid?

All of this brings me to another provocation: What are the features of university life that either limit or could help us advance the civic agenda? Where are the radical possibilities within the academy? This is where David Scobey’s focus on the interior consciousness, soul, and infrastructure of academic institutions becomes so important. Within most universities today, civic work resides in centers and is enacted by nice people who work with schools, prisons, communities, gardens, or youth and who work on literacy or immigrant rights. In the academy, civic commitments are typically individualistic, often idiosyncratic, and generally fleeting. They are not structural, built into the institutional DNA, or sustained over time. What in our university supports this kind of work, and what are the forces that discourage such commitments? What if we reclaim the notion of “impact factor” as a metric to assess the extent to which our scholarship, teaching, mentoring, and work in communities advance social solidarities, reduce inequality gaps, and redistribute opportunities and possibilities?

My last question—my final provocation—poses a more direct confrontation with the often colonizing history of the academy and our local communities:

Other than economic seduction, dramatically unequal power relations, and because they often have little choice, why should communities collaborate with us? Or, what kinds of power negotiations need to be addressed before universities can enter into discussions of collaboration with communities? What's our legitimacy with respect to communities? Universities must initiate repair work, a kind of community-based restorative justice, given our often colonial relationship to local communities. Fair or not, for good historic reasons, real people in real communities, particularly communities of color, don't trust researchers and can't imagine researchers or universities working for or with them.

Critical civic research recognizes that universities and communities are profoundly interdependent and that we have a debt to cultivate and deepen mutual understanding. Critical civic research cannot be designed to reveal injustice and then induce sympathy; it must reveal how privilege and dispossession are circumscribed, how inequality gaps undermine us all, and how movements of solidarity can spark radical imagination and action for what could be. Our challenge is to ensure that civic engagement in higher education—as it enjoys cultural currency—doesn't melt into empathy but, instead, grows bold and outrageous as a critical element in struggles for social justice. We must ensure that civic engagement sustains the heart, passion, and moral responsibility of higher education in desperately unequal times.

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# Civility In and Out of the Academy

*Daniel M. Shea*

WHY WOULD A SCHOLAR whose work is focused on youth political engagement shift his attention to political discourse? Allow me to provide a little background.

The meager levels of youth political engagement at the end of the twentieth century were unsettling. Election turnout had dropped precipitously: In 1972, when eighteen-year-olds were first given the right to vote, 50 percent of those under the age of twenty-five went to the polls. By 1996, participation had dropped to just 33 percent.<sup>1</sup> As for midterm congressional elections, one in four in this age group was making it to the polls by the end of the century.<sup>2</sup> A 2002 study commissioned by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) found that only that only 60 percent of those in this same age group were even registered to vote.<sup>3</sup>

But the problem ran much deeper than nonvoting. According to the American National Election Study, the percentage of young citizens who are “very much interested in campaigns” stood at roughly 30 percent from the 1950s to the 1980s, but had declined to just 6 percent by the 2000 election.<sup>4</sup> The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California–Los Angeles conducts an annual survey of college freshmen. In 1966, HERI data showed that 57.8 percent agreed that “keeping up to date with political affairs” is very important. That figure had dropped to 25.9 percent by 1999. Only 14 percent of freshmen in 1999 said they frequently discussed politics, compared with the high of 29.9 percent in 1968.<sup>5</sup> What is more, several polls of young Americans in their late teens and early twenties found that less than 50 percent were thinking “a great deal about” elections in 2000. This result compares to roughly 67 percent in 1992.<sup>6</sup> The withdrawal of young citizens from politics appears to have been rapid, deep, and broad. Robert Putnam, in *Bowling Alone*, summed up the issue this way: “Very little of the net decline in voting is attributable to individual change, and virtually all of it is generational.”<sup>7</sup>

Then things changed. Those of us who have been working in this area breathed a sigh of relief after the 2008 election. Go to the CIRCLE website, and you will find evidence of a dramatic change between 2000 and 2008. It seemed that young people had rediscovered the potential of electoral politics. Indeed, given the role that young voters played in several of the early presidential nomination contests, it

seemed to make sense that *Time* magazine dubbed 2008 the “Year of the Youth Vote.”<sup>8</sup> To mix metaphors, we had turned the corner and were out of the woods.

Or were we? Youth turnout in the Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial elections was actually lower in 2009 than it was four years earlier.<sup>9</sup> And then there were a couple of special elections in 2010—one in upstate New York, and one in Massachusetts. In the latter, 57 percent of voters over the age of thirty turned out, but only 15 percent of voters under thirty went to the polls.<sup>10</sup> So much for that all-important sixtieth Senate seat!

What about the 2010 midterm elections? Given the rise in turnout in 2008, wouldn't we expect the next midterms also to produce an upward bump? Turnout for those under the age of thirty reached just 24 percent, a figure *lower* than in the previous midterm elections (2006).<sup>11</sup> That just one in four young Americans went to the polls in 2010 seems especially meager given the salience of many issues, particularly the economic crisis, health care reform, and the DREAM Act. I should also note that turnout for *all* voters actually rose in 2010, to 41 percent.<sup>12</sup> This implies that the gap between younger and older voters is actually growing. Moreover, coming off of the heels of the “Year of the Youth Vote,” the drop in voter turnout runs against a long line of scholarship suggesting that once a citizen votes, repeated acts are habitual.

So the problem of youth political disengagement has not gone away. But what would be driving young people away from the process this time? Might there be some new developments that are turning off young citizens?

At the same time as we're getting this information on shrinking youth engagement, we're also starting to see the rise of rude, nasty politics. Peggy Noonan, who writes for the *Wall Street Journal*, suggested in the spring of 2010 that “it's a mistake not to see something new, something raw and bitter and dangerous, in the particular moment we're in.”<sup>13</sup> Right about the same time, Tom Friedman of the *New York Times* opined on whether or not we could *do* politics in America any longer,<sup>14</sup> and Brookings scholar Darrell West argued we had reached an “arms race of incendiary rhetoric.”<sup>15</sup>

I began to wonder whether declining civility might be driving young people from the process. Writing a few years ago of the irony of deep youth commitment to community service but limited interest in politics, columnist and author Jane Eisner suggested as much: “The attraction of service for young people is undeniable, and growing. It is propelled by the characteristics of this generation—their tendency toward compassion and their nonjudgmental concern for others, and away from what they see as a political system driven by conflict and ego.”<sup>16</sup> So we rolled up our sleeves at the Center for Political Participation and commissioned a national survey on civility and compromise, the first of its kind.<sup>17</sup> How might mean-spiritedness be affecting levels of engagement? In the end, we did two other surveys—one in September of 2010, and another a few days after the midterm elections.<sup>18</sup>

This research proved to be helpful and informative. In particular, it was a pleasure to learn that 95 percent of Americans believe civility in politics is important for our democracy, and that 87 percent believe that it is possible to be respectful even when confronting difficult policy challenges. As for a causal link between the vitriol in politics and declining youth engagement, we found

compelling evidence to support that supposition.<sup>19</sup> Eisner was right: young folks are tuning out because they don't like what they are hearing.

The surveys were valuable because they provided novel data, and our college loved that these results became big news. Yet beyond the new survey data and the headlines, our efforts in the area of civility in politics pushed me and others at the Center for Political Participation to consider broader themes, such as the forces that might be driving the heated rhetoric in the first place. What might be the implications for the body politic? Are these forces merely societal trends, or might they show up in the classroom or on the college campus? How might scholars and college administrators respond to these broader trends? Is this an issue we should fret about? More important, is this an issue we should try to *do* something about?

I have come to the conclusion that while broad forces may be at work in creating an environment in which mean-spirited politics can thrive, these very same forces have the potential to change the way students learn. And as teachers and scholars, perhaps it is incumbent upon us to use this opportunity to do something about it.

Scholar Kent Weeks recently wrote an important book, *In Search of Civility: Confronting Incivility on the College Campus*. His perspective is rather stark: "Right now, there is a crisis of incivility on the American college campus. Notions of politeness, courtesy, and respect are increasingly yielding to a new wave of cultural influences that steer students out of the realm of genuine concern for others into a pattern of intense self-absorption that undermines any civil society."<sup>20</sup> While some might suggest Weeks overstates things a bit, let's examine the cultural forces that he refers to.

A number of works have suggested that Americans have moved toward ideologically homogenous cocoons: shelters of concordant information. A few years ago, in *What's the Matter with Kansas*, Tom Frank suggested there had been a concerted effort by conservatives to draw a distinction between "real Americans" (heartland Americans) and others.<sup>21</sup> In a powerful new book, *The Big Sort*, Bill Bishop argues that over the last three decades Americans have physically moved to communities with like-minded citizens.<sup>22</sup> Many others have further suggested the homogenization of information is intensified by the Internet. We seek out information that is consistent with our preexisting framework. Roger Cohen at the *New York Times* has written, "The Internet opens worlds and minds, but also offers opinions to reinforce every prejudice. You're never alone out there; some idiot will always back you."<sup>23</sup>

In short, political strategies, demographic trends, and new patterns of accessing information have narrowed our exposure to diverse ideas, and have triggered what I believe are our tribal instincts. We all know that tribalism is an old tune in politics. The call of "us vs. them" has been a handy strategic tool for operatives, and it is at the center of myriad bigoted policies and countless

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private prejudices. But tribal instincts are most acute when there are perceived disturbances—a jarring of the established order. This has certainly been the case in the past few years.

Okay, but so what? This might be an interesting phenomenon, particularly for political scholars and operatives, but how would this understanding impact the work of educators and the efforts of those who do civic engagement programming? Why would I be drawing attention to this issue?

One problem with self-absorption and deep tribal instinct is the persistence of factual errors. It is utterly dumbfounding that in August, 2010, nearly one in five Americans believed that Barack Obama was a Muslim.<sup>24</sup> When educators confront factual errors—errors that are used to reinforce tribal behavior—the clash can be dramatic. I’ve talked to many instructors of American government, and many are set back by the recalcitrance of students to move beyond factual errors. Of course Barack Obama’s policies cannot be legitimate: he is not a Christian, or he is not a real American. End of conversation.

Related, as intellectual disputes are merged with notions of values and rights, compromise becomes difficult and rhetoric becomes heated. Mary Ann Glendon charted the rise of “rights” politics in the 1970s—a tendency to frame nearly every social controversy in terms of a clash of rights (a woman’s right to her own body vs. a fetus’s right to life), which impedes compromise, mutual understanding, and the discovery of common ground.<sup>25</sup> There is no middle ground on issues of right, as anyone opposed to the rights you favor is an oppressor. In recent years, policy questions have been rejected simply by calling into question their constitutional validity. Health care reform, gun control, federal mandates to states, and even the entire Social Security system are simply deemed unconstitutional. Compromise has become unpatriotic. The other side’s position is not legitimate because it is not constitutional. Again, end of conversation.

More importantly, there is growing evidence that when like-minded individuals come together they promote extremism. Social psychologists call this “the risk-shift phenomenon.” There is no room for discussion, no need to be tolerant of other points of view, and fewer reasons to be polite.

Let’s move now to the brass tacks: What can educators do about this? Maybe we should start with what we should *not* do. Any move to reduce or eliminate general education courses would be adding fuel to the fire. We are all aware of a strongly pragmatic, even vocational, force in higher education, and of a growing number of institutions pitching the virtues of moving quickly—rapid steps to the ultimate goal of a “great job.” General education courses slow things down, but they also expand student experiences and broaden exposure to diverse ideas and perspectives. They give our youth a chance to practice disagreeing, and they give educators an opportunity to model and to teach youth how to deal with the opposition in a positive, sophisticated manner.

The proliferation of vocational and community college campuses, commuter campuses, for-profit colleges and universities, and distance-learning classes may have also transformed the nature of coursework, heightening the importance of a narrow type of study. Moving quickly through a broad range of topics becomes essential; confronting discordant material becomes a waste of time. At best, new ideas are encountered, but not engaged.

While less of a problem than in the past, unreflective service-learning courses and volunteering programs help students change their behavior (getting off campus and into the community, for example), but do little to broaden understandings of systemic forces or divergent perspectives. Similarly, themed houses and dorms offer interesting learning opportunities, but they can also fuse like-minded students. Are these groups (dare we say tribes?) willing to confront diverse perspectives? Are so-called “green houses,” for example, willing to consider pro-business perspectives? We might even reconsider the growing designation of particular courses as “civic” or “global.” These sorts of demarcations (often an asterisk in the course listing) help some students find similar offerings, but they might offer clues to other students that they should steer clear of “those” offerings.

At the heart of it all is our obligation to disrupt cognitive filters and to push students into uncomfortable territory. A colleague of mine at Allegheny College, Brian Harward, and I have recently published a piece on this very issue.<sup>26</sup> We suggest that education is about intellectual emancipation, and that colleges and universities must encourage students to extend themselves, to become self-reliant, and to take responsibility for knowing. Students and faculty must overcome a deep, understandable aversion to risk—to stepping beyond their tribal doctrine, if you will. Such a reconceptualization of the purpose of higher education demands more from both faculty and students than a model based on “information transfer.” It requires that students accept a level of risk that involves exposure to criticism and the questioning of fundamental assumptions.

I would suggest, then, that the over-heated rhetoric that seems so disturbing is a mere symptom of a broader malady. A growing number of Americans, indeed a growing number of our students *and* colleagues, have merged with their ideological tribesmen. Members of these groups read the same material, share the same ideas, and espouse the same solutions. They never challenge each other or confront opposing points of view. And when forced to do so, their counterpoints are rejected with language that makes the refutation sharp and unequivocal.

Colleges and universities are once again being called upon to deepen the meaning of democratic citizenship. Just as we have fretted about ethics, morality, critical thinking, and low levels of engagement, we should redouble our efforts at intellectual emancipation. By pushing our students, and indeed ourselves, to confront the “other” in respectful, meaningful ways, we bolster the core missions of our institutions and help our nation move forward to confront new challenges.

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# Diversity and Democratic Engagement: Civic Education and the Challenge of Inclusivity

*Matthew J. Countryman*

HOW SHOULD THE CIVIC EDUCATION MOVEMENT respond to the challenge of racial and class diversity in a time of significant demographic change in the nation, particularly among college-age populations? Should civic education concern itself with issues of racial and class inequality? Or does attention to the differences between us—ascriptive, cultural, economic—contradict civic education’s commitment to promoting the common good? On issues from affirmative action to the racialization of poverty, debates have raged over whether colorblindness or careful attention to racial conditions and outcomes is the best method for achieving racial justice. For some, the strength of the American civic tradition lies in its availability to all citizens, irrespective of race or ethnicity; those who emphasize racial and ethnic differences are seen as dividing the nation and thus weakening its commitment to the public good.<sup>1</sup> The point of this provocation is to argue that opposite point—that it is essential that the civic education movement helps students grapple with the lived experience of race and racial inequality in contemporary American society.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, W. E. B DuBois famously wrote that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.”<sup>2</sup> Paraphrasing DuBois nearly 110 years later, we might say that the paradox of the twenty-first century is that, despite the defeat of legalized segregation and the repudiation of ideologies of racial superiority, race remains a powerful organizing force within American life, structuring the life chances available to many Americans. For the civic education movement, the challenges posed by racial diversity can be encapsulated in two questions: How should the civic education movement respond to persistent evidence of racial inequality on campus and in the wider community? How should we respond to the changes in the racial make-up of college-aged young people?

The civic education movement operates in a higher education system that is at the frontlines of changes in American racial demography and yet remains stratified along lines of race and class. According to the 2010 census, non-Hispanic white Americans now make up less than two-thirds of the total US population. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Latino/a and Asian-American populations both grew by approximately 43 percent, to 16.3 and 4.8 percent of

the total population respectively.<sup>3</sup> The US Census Bureau currently projects that, sometime in the 2040s, the non-Hispanic white population will fall below 50 percent and the Latino/a population will surpass 30 percent.<sup>4</sup> These demographic changes are taking place at a time when young people of color are significantly underrepresented in institutions of higher education. For example, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) found that, in 2007, African-Americans and Latina/os comprised 32 percent of all young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine, but 43 percent of young people in that age group with no college experience and only 23 percent of those with some college experience.<sup>5</sup> A 2009 study from the National Center for Education Studies found that non-Hispanic whites constituted 68 percent of undergraduate students in four-year colleges and 61 percent of students in two-year colleges, and projected that, among all degree-granting institutions, the percentage of racial minorities will increase from 36 percent of undergraduates students in 2008 to 42 percent by 2018.<sup>6</sup>

These demographic changes provide two sets of challenges for the civic education movement. The first is rooted in the racial gap between college populations and the society as a whole. In 1968, the Kerner commission famously agonized that the United States was on the verge of becoming two societies: “one black, one white—separate and unequal.”<sup>7</sup> While there have been significant changes in the American racial terrain in the nearly fifty years since the Kerner report was released, the danger remains that the United States is breaking into two societies—one disproportionately white, with educational and economic opportunity largely determined by access to financial resources; the other disproportionately non-white and largely (though not completely) locked out of the educational and economic opportunities offered by higher education. Civic education has little meaning if it can’t help students make sense of, and develop strategies for addressing, the paradox of a colorblind society riven by racial and economic inequality.

At the same time, the civic education movement must be prepared to look inward, to ask how well the higher education sector is responding to the nation’s changing racial demographics. For more than forty years, affirmative action has been the prime means of diversifying selective colleges and universities, while underrepresented minority students have disproportionately attended less-selective institutions. Affirmative action may not survive its latest judicial review, given the conservative majority on the Supreme Court, but colleges and universities face an even broader challenge. The nation’s colleges and universities, particularly the most prestigious of them, will have to undergo much more fundamental changes—in terms of not just their admissions policies, but also their curricula and the make-up of their faculty and staff—if they are truly to reflect the majority-minority society that the United States will be by the middle of this century.

What role, then, should the civic education movement play in efforts to democratize higher education for a truly multiracial nation? What can we contribute to the undoing of the current racial stratification of higher education? In particular, how do we ensure that the professoriate of the future reflects the inevitable changes in student populations? The challenge, it seems to me, is to

approach the mandate of democratic engagement as a two-way street. As advocates of the engaged university, we must see our challenge as contributing not only to healthy communities and a democratic civic culture, but also to a democratic and inclusive university—one that is working to lessen racial and class stratification in the larger society, rather than serving as an instrument of that stratification.

Two papers, one very recent and the other a recent classic, suggest the ways that efforts to promote civic and community engagement can and should also contribute to the creation of diverse and inclusive college communities. In 2005, University of Southern California historian George Sanchez published *Crossing Figueroa: The Tangled Web of Diversity and Democracy*. This critique of the service-learning movement drew attention to the failure to make connections between efforts to encourage student involvement in poor communities, on the one hand, and challenges to affirmative action and other university initiatives to increase racial diversity among college students and faculty, on the other. Sanchez worries that “the widespread growth in service learning and community engagement at universities across the nation and the rapid decline in programs and commitments to make our own university communities more inclusive and diverse” are not coincidental.<sup>8</sup> Rather, he suggests, they may reflect an ethos according to which it is enough to provide assistance to individuals in need without also addressing the social and political causes of inequality and deprivation. It is not just community service, Sanchez concludes, that is remade when engagement efforts are linked with initiatives to increase racial diversity on campus. While the Supreme Court declared in *Grutter v. Bollinger* that racial diversity provides educational benefits to the entire student body, Sanchez’s formulation pushes us to see the inclusive and engaged campus as an essential component of efforts to achieve racial and social justice throughout society.

*It is not simply that engagement and diversity are parallel and compatible positives for the university; when linked, each becomes a mechanism for achieving the other*

A more recent paper titled *Full Participation: Building the Architecture for Diversity and Public Engagement in Higher Education*, coauthored by Susan Sturm, Timothy Eatman, John Saltmarsh, and Adam Bush, builds on Sanchez’s formulation as well as on efforts on campuses across the country to propose a model for the linkage of diversity and engagement. For the authors, the term “full participation” captures the ways that “the intersections of student and faculty diversity, community engagement, and academic success [can serve] as a nexus for the transformation of communities on and off campus.”<sup>9</sup> To put it another way, it is not simply that engagement and diversity are parallel and compatible positives for the university; when linked, each becomes a mechanism for achieving the other.

In a roundabout way, the counterpoint to Sturm et al. can be found in “Syracuse’s Slide: As Chancellor Focuses on the ‘Public Good,’ Syracuse’s Reputation Slides.” This article, published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, purports to be about the ways that Syracuse University Chancellor and President Nancy Cantor’s dual commitment to engage the university in efforts to

revitalize the local community and to increase racial and class diversity in the student body have weakened Syracuse's academic reputation. In and among the quotes from Syracuse professors who fear that Cantor's commitment to engagement and diversity will compromise the academic excellence of the institution, however, the article provides strong evidence that Cantor's policies have not only strengthened the city of Syracuse, but have also strengthened the university's student body by increasing its racial and class diversity. In the seven years that Cantor has been at Syracuse, the percentage of Syracuse students who receive Pell grants has grown from 20 to 28, and the percentage of minority students has grown from 18 to 32.<sup>10</sup>

As David Roediger and others have shown, racial and ethnic identities and categories are historically dynamic and invariably change over time and space.<sup>11</sup> No one can be sure what the relevant racial issues or categories will be ten, twenty-five, or fifty years from now. But one can be fairly sure that America's racial future will be very different from its racial past. This is the challenge that the civic education movement must confront directly.

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# An Engagement for Democracy

*Matthew Hartley*

WE'VE COME A LONG, LONG WAY. In 1985, Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States, wrote an influential book titled *Higher Education and the American Resurgence*. In it, he said that “if there is a crisis in education in the United States today, it is less that test scores have declined than it is that we have failed to provide the education for citizenship that is still the most significant responsibility of the nation’s schools and colleges.”<sup>1</sup> The book caught the attention of the presidents of Stanford, Georgetown, and Brown Universities, and they went on to form Campus Compact, an organization that has done a great deal to promote service learning and civic engagement. In response to a 1990 survey, which is among the oldest survey data we have from Campus Compact, member campuses reported that 16 percent of their students were involved in service (almost all of it volunteerism); only 15 percent of these institutions had offices to support this work; 59 percent of the presidents characterized the extent of their faculty’s involvement in this work as “little” or “not at all.”<sup>2</sup>

Now, fast-forward to today. The most recent Campus Compact survey available shows that one-third of all students participate in service and/or service-learning courses annually; 95 percent of the member institutions have an office or center coordinating service efforts; 64 percent of the institutions take involvement in activities like teaching service-learning courses and engaging in community-based research into account in promotion and tenure decisions; and 90 percent of the institutions’ strategic plans specifically mention instilling in students a sense of responsibility to their community as an important student outcome.<sup>3</sup>

That’s a striking shift. But, at the end of the day, has the civic engagement movement changed American higher education, or has higher education changed—tempered—the civic engagement movement? This was the question John Saltmarsh and I began mulling over about four years ago. With the help of Derek Barker at the Kettering Foundation, we expanded our conversation by bringing together a group of thirty people who had been involved in this work for some time. Afterward, a group of us developed papers building on ideas from those discussions, which were, in turn, brought together in the edited book *To Serve a Larger Purpose*.<sup>4</sup> A central idea that we play with in that book is

the notion of the democratically engaged university. What would the university look like if it were wholly committed to serving society and strengthening our democracy?

On many campuses, the predominant approach in conducting research—including community-based research—is exemplified by the phrase “we’re from the university, and we’re here to help.” The professor is the expert. That’s the norm on many campuses. By contrast, democratic engagement assumes that developing new knowledge requires tapping funds of knowledge both inside and outside the academy. So, rather than having experts come and solve problems (the technocratic approach), people from inside and outside the university work together to grapple with pressing problems, to create new understandings, and to do something about it. What we lay out in the book is a dichotomy between civic engagement, which as it’s expressed on many campuses tends to be technocratic in orientation, and democratic engagement, which requires a very different stance. Let me give two examples.

Here’s the first example. A faculty member in environmental science responds to concerns about lead poisoning among local children by having his students go into the community and systematically gather samples, analyze the data, and then present findings to community groups. That’s civic engagement. It’s good work; it’s important work; it is responsive to the needs of a community. This model produces information for the community and learning for the students; it represents teaching/learning/research *in* the community—that is, it’s engagement defined by activity and place.

Here’s a second example. Concerns in the community about lead poisoning lead neighborhood and school leaders to meet with faculty members from a nearby university (from environmental science, health sciences, and education). Together, they formulate a plan:

- Community leaders work with parents to encourage participation in a voluntary testing program for lead exposure.
- Faculty and students work with parents and older schoolchildren to learn where young children play.
- College students help high school students learn how to take lead samples in the community, and jointly analyze patterns in the data to map out the extent of the problem and to make sense of those findings.
- Students from nursing and education work with teachers and high school students to develop and implement educational programming for early elementary school students about lead safety.
- Project leaders from the university and the community present a report in a series of community forums.
- Community leaders use the data to pressure apartment owners to comply with local ordinances around lead abatement and to pressure municipal authorities to police apartments more closely.
- Partners publish findings on strategies for community-based health initiatives.

In this model, people from inside and outside the university work together to produce learning and new knowledge in order to challenge and change the status quo through democratic means—that is, it’s engagement defined by process and purpose. Pursuing this kind of engagement requires us to rethink our

fundamental practices—how we teach, whose expertise counts in the production of knowledge—and our ideas about what matters most—garnering grant dollars and peer-reviewed articles, or working for change. This sort of talk very quickly takes the academy out of its comfort zone. There is a deep reluctance at many institutions to do anything that appears remotely activist or “political.”

There is a lot of criticism of higher education today—some of it warranted, and some of it purposefully designed to shut us up. Here’s Ann Coulter’s advice to college students: “Your professors and instructors are, by and large, evil people whose main goal is to mislead you.”<sup>5</sup> It’s a little less funny when you’re a faculty member at an Ohio university and a state senator attempts to enact legislation limiting your speech because “many faculty undermine the values of their students because 80 percent or so of them . . . are Democrats, liberals or socialists or card-carrying Communists,” which is what happened several years ago.<sup>6</sup> I hope the tenor of the times is changing. But I also think that it is time for us to step up and begin to defend the historic democratic purposes of our colleges and universities.

Movements are not built with modest, safe plans. They require audacity. And rather than tinkering around the edges, we ought to start imagining something worth fighting for. And we ought to be willing to fight as if our democracy depended on it—because it does.

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PART 3

Provocations:  
Implications of  
Considering the  
Civic as a Core Aspect  
of the Mission of  
Higher Education



# Is the Civic a Culturally Dependent Concept? Are Democratic Practices?

*Richard Detweiler*

YOU ARE BEING PROVINCIAL IN YOUR THINKING about the concept of “civic” as an essential attribute of liberal arts education. I make that assertion because it seems that the basis of thinking about the civic dimension of education derives from the experience of people in one “province,” namely, the United States. That may not be unexpected; since most liberal arts institutions and educators are in the United States, the thinking very naturally focuses on programs that serve students in the United States.

The reason I’m choosing to be provocative along this line is twofold. First, given that preparation for this global era is a key part of the mission of every higher education institution, I believe that thinking about civic engagement should also reflect how this principle may be viewed in other parts of the world. Second, if you reflect a bit on that first idea, you discover some new or different insights that could inform and enrich the work you are doing in civic engagement here in the United States as well as outside the United States.

I come to this issue as a social psychologist—an intercultural psychologist—so I am not approaching the topic as a political scientist or a historian, though I will include some history and politics in my comments. My thinking has been shaped by an enlightening experience I had about a dozen years ago when, as a college president, I was invited to Egypt to talk about American higher education. I spoke at several events, and my remarks were greeted with despair by a number of people in attendance. I was able to talk about classes of twenty students. One responding Egyptian faculty member said, “I have 1,200 students in my class and no teaching assistants. Can you tell me how the ideas you’re talking about are transferrable to the context of my university?” I felt rather depressed. What business did I have advocating educational approaches and a philosophy that may only be possible at relatively wealthy institutions in a nation with a long tradition of civic involvement?

But on that trip I coincidentally had the opportunity to visit the American University in Cairo, and I “discovered” a liberal arts–oriented institution in Egypt. And while it is a comparatively rich institution, I learned that it is possible to bring fundamental liberal arts concepts to education in that very different cultural, social, and historical context. That experience led me on a quest to

learn how liberal arts education gets expressed in different settings, and I subsequently visited liberal arts institutions of many kinds in many places around the world.

I became fascinated by the fact that even in the face of increasing skepticism about the value of liberal education in the United States, there are higher education institutions in other parts of the world that affirm its value. In founding institutions of learning on the liberal arts model, people of very different cultures and backgrounds convey their belief that, in some important way, the success of the United States as a civil society relates to our tradition of education in the liberal arts—and that the fundamental nature of a liberal arts approach to education helps instill a deeper sense of the importance of serving the common good. That is, higher education is less about training a person for a particular kind of profession—a short-range goal in our rapidly changing world—and more about the longer-range goal of creating a viable and humane society.

While there is a shared sense of the underlying purpose of liberal education, the educational approaches that are taken vary around the world according to context. While liberal education is in some ways different, it is not being distorted or watered down by these contextual differences. I learned that by viewing the differences through a cultural lens, one gains new insight into what is truly essential about the practice of liberal education. Our thinking about the essence of liberal education in the United States may be limited in ways we don't realize—as much a reflection of our cultural assumptions as it is a reflection of true educational purpose.

Just as Tocqueville's "foreign" observations about American society gave Americans fresh insight about our society, these liberal arts colleges abroad provide us with valuable "foreign" insights into the essence of liberal education. I found that we have as much to learn from them as they may have to learn from us—that we are different but equal when it comes to sharing the future of the liberal arts. This insight led me to create an international partnership of liberal arts colleges—the Global Liberal Arts Alliance—that is dedicated to strengthening liberal education through action as a partnership of equals.

How would we think of the "civic" if we brought to bear the perspectives of liberal education as conceived in other cultural contexts? Since, within a single nation—the United States—the meaning of civic varies from community to community, from school to school, and from place to place, its meaning must also vary in a global context.

Are we provincial in our thinking about liberal education and the civic? Are we blinded by our own culture, society, and experience? Here is a quote from a commencement speaker: "If it were not for our education, the everyday person might be in charge—the ruling class would have been subjected to mechanics, cobblers, and tailors; the laws would not have been made by decree but [by] the plebiscites' appeals to base passions and revolutionary ramblings."<sup>1</sup> Is this the view of a proponent of the liberal arts? Actually, it is from a proponent of the liberal arts as practiced on this continent at Harvard University. That statement was made at Harvard in the 1670s, a time when the concept of the liberal arts was practiced in a way much purer—closer to the Greek ideal—than it is today. So at one time in American history it was seen as essential for liberal education

to serve the elite, not to serve democracy. Now, here is another quote about higher education in the United States:

Our republican form of government renders it highly important, that great numbers should enjoy the advantage of a thorough education. On the eastern continent, the *few* who are destined to particular departments in political life may be educated for the purpose; while the mass of the people are left in comparative ignorance. But in this country, where offices are accessible to all who are qualified for them, superior intellectual attainments ought not to be confined to any description of persons. *Merchants, manufacturers, and farmers*, as well as professional gentlemen, take their places in our public councils.<sup>2</sup>

That's also about the United States, but about 150 years later—from the Yale Report of 1828.

What happened between 1670 and 1828? The American Revolution occurred, and it caused a fundamental change not only in national governance but in education as well. While it would be *nice* if higher education caused that revolution, it seems instead that the democratic revolution changed higher education's view of its own purpose, from serving the elite to serving a broader and more inclusive share of the population—including the mechanic and the farmer and other humble people who would need to be prepared to contribute to their society. We are now living 180 years after the Yale Report was published, and we have a nation in which every person has the right to be involved in decisions about society. It is a right that is protected in law as well as in custom, albeit not perfectly. Every individual in this country has many thousands of opportunities for civic engagement and involvement—within their own organizations at the local, regional, state, and national levels.

Can we, or should we, be viewing the core of liberal education based on our unique history and our society's contemporary opportunities? Obviously my

*To ensure the continued relevance of the liberal arts in serving global needs, it is essential that we bring global perspectives to bear on our conceptions of liberal education and the role of the civic*

answer to you is that we have to be very careful, remembering that a long tradition of democracy is unique to North America and Western Europe; it is a kind of society that has not existed for an overwhelming majority of the world's nations or populations. To ensure the continued relevance of the liberal arts in serving global needs, it is essential that we bring global perspectives to bear on our conceptions of liberal education and the role of the civic.

About ten years ago, not too long after the Czech Republic and Slovakia separated, I was invited to Eastern Slovakia to talk to a group of Slovak academics who wanted to determine how they could work with their former colleagues in the Czech Republic. Because two separate countries had been established, all kinds of synergies and sharing that had existed before were now gone. With simultaneous translation into Slovak, I was able to give my entire talk without pause, and questions and comments were saved until the end. There were then some modest questions, but not much indication that people were particularly taken by my talk. After we concluded, a distinguished senior professor came up to

me and said, “You know, you made a very fundamental error in your talk.” I said, “Oh, what did I do? Did I mislead?” He replied “No, you talked repeatedly about collaboration.” And I said, “Oh, yes, that was the point of what I had to say—how to create effective collaboration.” He said, “In *this* culture, given *this* nation’s history, collaboration carries with it everything bad, everything wrong, with the relationship between the individual and the state, both during the Nazi era and the Communist era.”

It was not just the word I had used, but the implications of the word. That is, if one is going to work with others to cooperate—to “collaborate”—one has to be thinking critically about substantive issues that I had not, based on my experience, considered in any depth: With whom are you going to be working? For what purpose are you going to be working? What are the consequences of your work with that other individual? Civic responsibility should not cause one just to “sign on” with a person or an organization that seems good; it is *always* important to take the step of reflecting carefully on the nature and implications of one’s choice.

Let me give three examples of what it means to be civically engaged in other parts of the world. The first comes from Poland. I’m not an expert on that country; my knowledge is the result of what I have learned from a Polish classicist, Jerzy Axer. Don Harward introduced me to Jerzy through an email saying, “Would you collaborate on a chapter in a book on liberal education with Jerzy Axer from Poland? I think you’d do interesting work together.” In addition to a great deal of digital exchange, we had several days together in deep dialogue. I learned, roughly, that Poland is a nation with about twenty years of democratic self-governance—not two hundred years, but twenty years. Jerzy has a beautiful little liberal arts college within a university there; he spoke deeply about what it means to be liberally educated, and about how one becomes a responsible citizen within the context of a place that experienced hundreds of years of occupation by external invaders, including the Communist era.

What does Jerzy—now my good friend—say is the most critical underlying purpose of an education in the liberal arts, one that prepares people to be constructive contributors to their society? He says it is educating them to be *autonomous*. Poles have lived through many generations in which others were telling them what they had to do and what they had to believe—the state had clear expectations about what every citizen needed to believe and how to act. If you were a civically responsible person, you served at the direction of the party during the Communist era—or whoever the particular invader happened to be at a particular time. So he said that the most important thing to do is to educate people for autonomy, because from autonomy comes freedom, and until you have autonomous and free people you cannot have a civil society. Rather than thinking of “civic” as community-focused, in a Polish context the focus is very much on the individual. That is, the purpose of civic liberal education is not to encourage people to collective action, but to prepare the individual to make autonomous and free choices.

A second example comes from educators from Muslim-majority nations. I was involved three years ago in a meeting of sixteen academicians from Muslim-majority nations. I took the opportunity to engage the question, what

is the fundamental purpose of education? A number of these people were from nations with traditions of higher education that are far older than those of Europe and the United States; in Egypt, Morocco, and Turkey there are universities in operation today that go back 1,200 years. What has the goal of education been from these people's point of view? While I am generalizing across a number of people and perspectives, the shared focus was on the development of change agents. The notion of "change agent" was individually defined, not collectively defined. That is, they advocated educating young people so that they would learn to change traditional ways of thinking and doing in a constructive manner; over the long term, they believe, their societies could become better. In some cases these people might be called revolutionary, avant-garde, or something similar—but in all cases these were seen as individual roles. In putting these comments together, I was reflecting on that fact that the Arab Spring has been fascinating from an American perspective because of the apparent lack of leadership. Could this phenomenon be what this was all about—individuals who, in their society, are trying to figure out how to work as change agents without a collective leader?

A third example is from Saudi Arabia, a country that has certainly not been known as democratic, though it is stable. There is an institution in that country called Effat University. It is acting in the mode of the most remarkable change agent imaginable within a Saudi context: providing a higher education for women where it did not exist before. For example, women could not have internships in corporations because that was against traditional practice. The university persuaded the king to decree that that was no longer the law of the land so that these students had to be allowed internships. Women could not go to engineering school, so they created an engineering school, and their graduates are now highly sought after. Effat University is moving creatively and constructively to bring change to its society because it believes that change is essential. But the administrators, faculty, and students of Effat are never revolutionary, nor do they want to threaten their society's stability, for they know the result could be catastrophic. They adopt tactics that are aimed at—and that define the purpose of higher education as—*enlightenment*. They are trying to enlighten their students, helping them understand a broader world and competing perspectives so they will be in a position to help their society change constructively and productively.

One of the most interesting aspects of Effat University is its mission statement, which locates the whole purpose of the institution and its liberal education goals within Islam: "Effat University believes that the future of the nation lies in the divine act of reading as expressed in the Holy Quran." The verb "iqra," which I understand is the first word in the Quran, means "read," and reading long ago transformed this society, which had earlier favored the oral transmission of culture and the lyrical expression of ideas. Through the beliefs and values of Islam, the region produced breakthroughs in mathematics and astronomy (among other fields) and produced a formidable number of written manuscripts. Again to quote from the mission statement: "Effat University maintains that its future prospects reside in reviving this important part of the divine inspiration, reading, and in increasing comprehensive human knowledge in order to provide the nation with an infusion of new blood and guide it towards enlightenment."

There's a very heavy focus on long-term civic good and the betterment of humanity, but conceived very differently than is typical elsewhere.

The American view of civic engagement is absolutely entwined with our more than two hundred years of democratic governance, and the laws and customs that have supported it. With the exception of Western Europe, that context does not exist elsewhere in the world. If we are to prepare our students to be civically engaged global citizens as well as civically engaged local citizens, we need to understand that the strategies and mechanisms that thoughtful people adopt as being appropriate in other countries may well differ from the strategies Americans see as self-evident. If you reflect on ideas such as these, my hope is that it brings some fresh insights and perspectives to what you do on behalf of the goal of civic engagement. Is liberal education to focus on creating people who work for collective action, or people who are able to become independent of it? Are religious values central to the purpose of liberal education, or should we, as most US institutions do, steer clear? Should a liberally educated person seek to work within the system or to fundamentally change it? Indeed, should liberal education even seek to serve the civic at all?

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#### NOTES

1. Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 250.
2. *Committee of the Corporation and the Academical Faculty, Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College* (New Haven, CT: Hezekiah Howe, 1828), 29.

# What of the Civic Should Be Exported? What Should Be Imported?

*Samuel Abrahám*

WHEN WE DISCUSS IDEAS, and not just material goods, it is always a delicate matter to decide what should be *imported* to Europe, especially when it concerns concepts “made in USA.” Considering that US popular culture dominates the minds of our youth, many European educators and intellectuals perceive anything American as yet another colonial imposition. Liberal education is an excellent example—along with bachelor’s degrees—of something alien to our tradition. Hence, even those who wish to establish liberal education as the best model for our undergraduate education, even if admitting the US connection, stress its European pedigree.

Indeed, the liberal arts can be perceived as an extension of the old European concept of *Bildung*, which has been forgotten and ignored for almost two centuries. On the back cover of a booklet describing the school I direct, there is a definition of the liberal arts that was provided at my request by my colleague Hans Adriaansens from the Netherlands. Not surprisingly, the European connection is a key element in this quote used to legitimize the liberal arts in Europe: “The liberal arts and sciences model was exported from Europe to the United States a long time ago. All major US universities and colleges use this model for their undergraduate programs. It is interesting to see that, since the Bologna Agreement was signed by the ministers of education of the European countries, Europe is now ready to import what it once had exported.” We use this text both because it is true and because it is surprising to our students. Our US friends also like it because it makes European educators partners, rather than imitators of the American model. And this is the key point, because the decision to import an idea says as much about the idea itself as it is says about ourselves and our society. As the importation of the liberal arts model exemplifies, the implementation of even an excellent idea depends on the conditions and the willingness to accept it. Certainly, it would be best for European schools to embrace and implement the idea of the bachelor’s degree. Unfortunately—how shall I put it?—the relationship between the liberal arts and Europe has not been consummated—not yet, I wish to add.

One of the requirements of the Bologna Agreement, which was signed in 1998 and implemented by 2005, was the division of traditional five-year university

studies. However, even after this agreement, the division into separate bachelor's and master's degrees did not change the nature of studies, not even a little. Actually, up to today, a number of universities throughout Europe are antagonistic toward this division of their previously established five-year programs. This is because they perceive the bachelor's degree as an additional layer of already excessive bureaucratization caused by the imposition of the Bologna process by the European Union.

The response of the majority of universities in Europe was a mechanical division of the five-year degree, as required by the European Union. The only difference, in their view, has been that at the end of the third year, there is baccalaureate graduation—after which students are encouraged to continue at the same university. In fact, some of the universities in Central Europe have established prerequisites for their master of arts programs such that only their own baccalaureate students can apply and be accepted. Considering such a mechanical division of degrees, paradoxically, student protests are justified. Students see no reason for the bachelor's degree to exist when no employer considers it a terminal degree for the majority of careers. Indeed, for these graduates, employment in good jobs is minimal. The reason is that none of the countries in Europe take the bachelor's degree seriously. It is viewed as representing an unfinished university education.

Currently, there are about thirty institutions in Europe that offer a liberal arts education and are loosely associated within ECOLAS—European Colleges of Liberal Arts and Sciences. These are mostly university colleges, a model that seems the most suitable for the European setting. Independent, small, residential colleges, often in rural settings, will always be rare in Europe, due to the lack of a tradition of founding and supporting such institutions. A typical university college in Europe emerges within a large university, if there are one or two champions of the liberal arts who are willing to convince the administration that such a kernel of high-quality undergraduate education would be beneficial to the whole university. With all these colleges, there has been a close American connection and close contact. It is thus fortunate for us that the liberal arts have been preserved in the United States and, as Adriaansens put it nicely, it has now been imported back to Europe.

I stress this US connection so that you will realize the importance of both your work and your tradition for the future of quality education in the world. I stress this because I sense some gloom among US liberal arts institutions that are questioning their purpose and legitimacy in their own society. I follow closely the debate about the threat facing liberal arts education in the United States. This debate is very useful because it allows the defenders of liberal arts education to revisit its purpose and mission, and to reformulate its aims in society. The diversity and quality of those colleges with which I have come into contact are worth preserving, especially in this age of crisis and confusion as to where our countries are heading.

My observation, however, is that the attack against liberal arts education in the United States might originate in a sense of complacency and self-congratulation that is rooted in the past, when the means were in abundance and rates of student application were high. Could not the criticism stem from the fact that liberal

arts colleges overlooked the nature and extent of the changes and needs in your society? Evidently, the world of economics, politics, and values has altered, and society demands adjustment and help from institutions of higher learning.

Perhaps someone with a view from the outside can better appreciate what you have achieved in the United States and the way you carry on debate. I am impressed that even a discussion of your internal issues and troubles are always reflected upon from a viewpoint of the whole society. That is a rare occurrence elsewhere. I can hardly imagine having this kind of soul-searching debate in most of the workshops and conferences among the university administrators in Europe. There, administrators either engage in a high philosophical debate about the state of our societies and the world without reference to institutions of higher learning, or they listen to mundane complaints about hardships and the lack of money for universities. However, these discussions never take place in the same room. Let me elaborate on this point.

When Rick Detweiler mentioned in his provocation that “liberal arts” can mean autonomy, and then someone responded that actually critical thinking is more important, my reaction was that the two represent the same thing. There is no autonomy without the freedom to say and do—following logic and reason—what you believe is true and right. When you hear about someone being taken by the ideology of a regime, it means that the regime withheld the autonomy of that person by restricting his or her capacity for critical thinking. It is in the condition of the free

*It is in the condition of the free exchange, or even confrontation, of ideas that freedom has a meaning and justification. Ideologically regulated freedom is an oxymoron*

exchange, or even confrontation, of ideas that freedom has a meaning and justification. Ideologically regulated freedom is an oxymoron. Argumentation and the search for consensus are essential for true democracy. This kind of reflection among university administrators in Europe would be impossible; it would be considered a red herring in the “important” debate over money and resources.

What I have also learned is the importance of asking questions. For, in our age, the questions, not the answers, are most daring and in danger of being foreclosed by ideologues and fanatics. Answers vary, are subjective, are tainted by ideology, and are rightly considered matters of opinion; however, questions might go to the core of the matter. What I mean is what Michelle Fine posed in her comment: “What is the role of academia in our society?” Or what someone else asked: “How shall we define ourselves within a large society?” Or, “What is our debt to a society that is in crisis?”

When I go to meetings of the presidents of Slovak universities, it’s often a dreary experience. There is *never* a discussion about the quality of education. A few times I have asked, “Have you noticed that we haven’t mentioned the word ‘student’ in the four hours of our discussion?” And I get blank stares. If I were to ask, “What is the purpose of our universities in Slovakia?” they would regard me as an idiot who is wasting their valuable time. They complain, and they discuss money. How should they influence the minister? What should be our next demand?

Here is another reflection or provocation. To me, there are two Americas—one very shallow and prominent in the world, and one profound and much less known outside the country. To use a metaphor, the first is the America of Hollywood, Mickey Mouse, and McDonald's; the other is the America of the likes of Leonard Bernstein, Richard Rorty, and Toni Morrison. The latter is the America that reflects and acts upon the deepest concerns of humanity, that carries on the cultural heritage of the West and the rest of the world, and that represents the last defense line of the Enlightenment tradition. I might add that whether Barack Obama succeeds or not with his political goals, it is encouraging to know that he is part of the latter tradition.

It is unfortunate but natural that it is the America of mass culture and junk foods that broadcasts itself to the world and that has a rather bad image, despite the fact that millions outside the United States eat at McDonald's, grew up with Mickey Mouse, and love to hate Hollywood movies. The other America, on the other hand, is in a state of shock, is looking for a new direction. This is disconcerting, but not surprising. Civic engagement and civil behavior is a long-term, nonaggressive endeavor. It takes generations to build a value system and good education to fortify its structure. That structure is under threat everywhere, and it is being shaken by economic crises and by a wide variety of ideological and religious extremism.

When I went to Zucotti Park in New York City during the "Occupy Wall Street" protests, I enjoyed the atmosphere there. I had been afraid to encounter fanaticism, ideology (Left or Right), or energy that could get out of hand. I was glad I didn't see any of that. Instead, I saw people engaged, often passionately, in very interesting debates. I met libertarians and Wall Street types who, in a very civil way, discussed their ideas for hours and hours with the "occupiers." I found this to be very enriching and gratifying. On the other hand, it is also symptomatic that the movement has lost momentum without achieving its purpose. It seems that an enlightened civic revolt cannot achieve revolution—even a very civil one.

In conclusion, let me reflect on what I think should be the future of our endeavors here at this national civic seminar. What will be left from our discussion next Monday? What will we remember from this seminar? When you go to your campus, when you go to your office, what will still linger in your mind? Some conferences are great experiences, but there is no continuation in deeds or reflection. This goes back to Don Harward's remark that if there is no continuation, then, however good the discussion may be, it's a waste of time and energy. How then can we discuss things that can be done and that would be useful?

My experience is that one should always aim at small deeds—whether the result at the end might be great and important is not decisive. The first President of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, was the champion of small deeds (*drobná práce*), yet what he achieved was anything but small. He was of mixed Czech and Slovak origin, a philosophy professor and moderate politician in Prague during the Habsburg Monarchy (which he criticized but still supported). When World War I broke out, he decided that the monarchy was no longer tenable. Being over seventy years old, he went to France, England, and

the United States and was instrumental in the creation of Czechoslovakia and the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was a stupendous achievement, indeed. Yet, even as president of Czechoslovakia, he always stressed that it is the small deeds that are the most important and the most feasible.

To me, this is the key position and strategy for reflecting on education and its role. Even if they sometimes concur with our aims, politicians, the media, and business always see things and think in terms of large projects and

big changes. They have influence and impact, but at the same time they have their own vested interests and agendas. What enhances a gathering like this seminar is the sincerity of soul-searching and the dedication to institutions and their students. The scope of our goals must be concrete and purposely limited. The smaller the objective, the larger the impact it will have on our minds. And this is more than one can hope for, because setting an example—being an example—can

have transformative effects. Concrete positive action is something that those thinking in terms of large deeds simply cannot fathom.

There are things in education, in our civic engagement, that we simply cannot achieve and we should not even try. Changing the world is a good rhetorical exercise, but a bad planning strategy that will always be deemed to fail. Changing the world is something that either small children or big politicians have on their agendas. I think an intelligent person should strive only for small deeds that go no further than one can reach within his or her own horizon, figuratively speaking, that one can reach within his or her reach.

*Concrete positive action is something that those thinking in terms of large deeds simply cannot fathom*



# A “National Call to Action” from the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

*Caryn McTighe Musil*

I REMEMBER THE PATRIOTIC PRIDE I felt when, as a Girl Scout, I was chosen to carry the American flag at the front of my troop in my small town’s Memorial Day parade. My parents and sisters cheered when I marched by, badges sewn carefully onto my green sash. A white middle-class child complete with the requisite freckles, I was living in a Norman Rockwell world that I mistakenly thought was the national norm. With that ill-informed, naive kind of civic consciousness, I crossed through Duke University’s three-foot stone wall to begin my college education, leaving most of the world on the other side.

With its whites-only waiting room at the Greyhound bus station, its balcony seating for blacks in the movie theater, and its white-robed Ku Klux Klan members holding parades on Main Street, the world of Durham, North Carolina, in 1962 was foreign to my Yankee consciousness. That same whites-only sign was operational at Duke University itself, which was, like almost every other southern college at the time, a segregated institution. I don’t believe I ever understood that was the case when I applied, sight unseen, to Duke. I never asked.

The first black students were admitted to Duke in 1963, arriving without incident on campus a month after the March on Washington—all four of them. While the civil rights movement challenged the long-held practices that shut African Americans out of full access to democracy’s promise, and many whites fought violently to hold on to white supremacy as the norm, my classes at Duke never made the historic clash outside our stone walls part of our subject of study. “The first and most essential charge upon higher education,” proclaimed the Truman Commission in *Higher Education for American Democracy* in 1947, “is that at all levels and in all fields of specialization, [higher education] shall be the carrier of democratic values, ideals, and processes.”<sup>1</sup> Most colleges and universities ignored that charge, including those north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

What would it have meant to bring those questions, stark inequalities, violent clashes, and roiling debates into our classrooms, our syllabi, our assignments, and our campus life? How might we students have been asked to compare the then-current civil rights movement with other struggles for justice and full inclusion that had taken place at earlier points in our nation’s history or that were then taking place in other countries? How did white supremacy get reestablished

after the Civil War anyway? How have states' rights and federal rights played out over time, and with what consequences for whom? Why did the Ku Klux Klan resurface in the early part of the twentieth century—not in Mississippi, but in Indiana as part of a nativist response to waves of immigration? These critical questions about the meaning of our democracy, its aspirations and principles, were not the subject of everyday study on most college campuses. It was a lost opportunity. Many students opted to participate directly in shaping America's fate through the civil rights struggle, but they had to leave campus to do it.

The new national report *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* seeks to place the study, debate, and practice of democracy at the center of campus life and intellectual inquiry. Released at the White House in cooperation of the US Department of Education on January 10, 2012, *A Crucible Moment* issued a national call to embrace the legacy of the Truman Commission and reinvest in the fundamental civic and democratic mission of higher education. The report asserts that “[a] socially cohesive and economically vibrant US democracy and a viable, just global community require informed, engaged, open-minded, and socially responsible people committed to the common good and practiced in ‘doing’ democracy.”<sup>2</sup> It describes how colleges and universities have begun to reframe, restructure, and reimagine themselves in order to help prepare today's students to become stewards of a democracy desperately in need of courageous, thoughtful, informed, caring citizens.

The instigation and initial funding for the report came from Under Secretary of Education Martha Kanter, the former president of a community college and someone who is passionately committed to the civic dimensions of higher education's mission. In the lead-up to the release of *A Crucible Moment*, two entities—Global Perspectives Institute, under its president Larry A. Braskamp, and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), under me as its senior vice president—led the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Project for a year under the guidance of a national task force that met regularly. The charge was based on two key questions. First, what is the state of education for democracy on our campuses, and what do we know about the impact of these programs? Second, what do we need to do to make such learning a national priority? To answer those questions, we commissioned papers and organized a series of five national roundtables that brought together 134 civic leaders spanning various constituencies: civic organizations and directors of campus-based civic centers; presidents, faculty, researchers, students, and student affairs professionals; disciplinary societies, foundations, K-12 leaders, and government officials. *A Crucible Moment* is the people's report.

Five members of the national task force also participated in the 2011 Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) National Civic Seminar (Derek Barker, Richard Guarasci, Donald Harward, and David Scobey), which suggests that there has been a series of concentric conversations occurring simultaneously and having a mutual influence on one another as we each address the serious civic crisis before us. David Matthews, president of the Kettering Foundation, refers to this crisis as a movement toward a “citizenless democracy.”<sup>3</sup> Charles Quigley, executive director of the Center for Civic Engagement, talks of a “civic recession,”<sup>4</sup>

in response to the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress' civics test on which only 24 percent of twelfth graders scored at or above the proficient level—a figure that has declined since 2006.<sup>5</sup> The United States ranks 134 out of 172 democracies in the world in voter participation, and only a third of students strongly agree that while they were in college their civic skills, awareness, or commitments were enlarged.<sup>6</sup> These and other indicators of anemic civic health reveal a civic knowledge gap, a civic skills gap, and a civic practice gap of troubling proportions.

To reverse this downward spiral, *A Crucible Moment* calls for five essential actions that form an overarching set of aspirations informing the more specific recommendations made in the report:

1. *Reclaim and reinvest in the fundamental civic and democratic mission* of schools and of all sectors within higher education.
2. *Advance a contemporary, comprehensive framework for civic learning—embracing US and global interdependence*—that includes historic and modern understandings of democratic values, capacities to engage diverse perspectives and people, and commitment to collective civic problem solving.
3. *Enlarge the current national narrative that erases civic aims and civic literacy* as national priorities contributing to social, intellectual, and economic capital.
4. *Capitalize upon the interdependent responsibilities of K-12 and higher education* to foster progressively higher levels of civic knowledge, skills, examined values, and action as expectations for every student.
5. *Expand the number of robust, generative civic partnerships and alliances locally, nationally, and globally* to address common problems, empower people to act, strengthen communities and nations, and generate new frontiers of knowledge.

The report also calls for higher education to commit to creating civic-minded campuses. As the sidebar on page 72 explains in greater detail, the report identifies four ways to do that: creating a civic ethos governing campus life; making civic literacy a goal for every student; integrating civic inquiry into majors and general education; and encouraging civic action as a lifelong practice.

*These and other indicators of anemic civic health reveal a civic knowledge gap, a civic skills gap, and a civic practice gap of troubling proportions*

The good news is that, over the last several decades, a strong foundation for this work has already been laid. Civic reformers have invented and tested programs, practices, and pedagogies. There is some evidence—though we still need more—of the impact of the various interventions on student learning. In the course of creating this foundation, the edges where more advanced work can take place have also been delineated. The bad news is that in the rush of invention and creativity, the practices and programs are random rather than plotted, largely uncharted and lacking signage, without sufficient developmental pathways over time, and optional.

But some emerging designs of twenty-first-century civic learning are now visible. Some campuses have begun to create well-crafted curricular pathways. In some cases, for instance, civic literacy is a core expectation for all students in a gradual progression of two, three, and even four sets of required civic experiences in general education programs like those at Tulane University, Portland

## What Would a Civic-Minded Campus Look Like?

### *Civic ethos governing campus life*

The infusion of democratic values into the customs and habits of everyday practices, structures, and interactions; the defining character of the institution and those in it that emphasizes open-mindedness, civility, the worth of each person, ethical behaviors, and concern for the well-being of others; a spirit of public-mindedness that influences the goals of the institution and its engagement with local and global communities.

### *Civic literacy as a goal for every student*

The cultivation of foundational knowledge about fundamental principles and debates about democracy expressed over time, both within the United States and in other countries; familiarity with several key historical struggles, campaigns, and social movements undertaken to achieve the full promise of democracy; the ability to think critically about complex issues and to seek and evaluate information about issues that have public consequences.

### *Civic inquiry integrated within the majors and general education*

The practice of inquiring about the civic dimensions and public consequences of a subject of study; the exploration of the impact of choices on different constituencies and entities, including the planet; the deliberate consideration of differing points of views; the ability to describe and analyze civic intellectual debates within one's major or areas of study.

### *Civic action as lifelong practice*

The capacity and commitment both to participate constructively with diverse others and to work collectively to address common problems; the practice of working in a pluralistic society and world to improve the quality of people's lives and the sustainability of the planet; the ability to analyze systems in order to plan and engage in public action; the moral and political courage to take risks to achieve a greater public good.

SOURCE: National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2012), 15.

State University, and St. Edward's University. Some institutions—e.g., Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Wagner College, and the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee—have integrated civic inquiry into a central field of study where students are using the disciplinary lens of their majors to address real-world problems.

In addition, powerful civic pedagogies that deepen students' civic capacities across a spectrum of civic dimensions have been firmly established on many campuses. Credit-bearing intergroup dialogues designed to promote deep investigations into how to understand, talk, and work across differences have been seeded through programs like those at the University of Michigan and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Deliberative dialogue—both in and outside of the classroom—has been incorporated into a freshman program at California State University–Chico, while community dialogues are tapped at Gulf Coast Community College, where students lead sustained dialogues over a semester or more through weekly discussions of urgent issues.

Service learning is by far the most influential and far-reaching pedagogy to have taken root in academic credit-bearing courses. Driven by national organizations like Campus Compact and programs like the American Association of

State Colleges and Universities' American Democracy Project, service learning has penetrated many disciplines and continues to have the most profound impact on student learning among all high-impact educational practices.<sup>7</sup> Some institutions, like California State University–Monterey Bay, have built a two-tiered service learning experience into their general education programs, making it a requirement for all students. The first “tier” is an introduction to the practice of service learning, while the second “tier” is an advanced-level service-learning course that is linked to the major.<sup>8</sup>

Yet another civic pedagogy that is emerging as effective and more widely practiced is collective civic problem solving. Oriented not toward service but toward solutions, this pedagogy is action oriented, designed to empower people and alter society, and done in collaboration with others. Northern Arizona University's CRAFTS program, with its Action Research Teams linked to community-based projects, offers an excellent example of how this pedagogy can be embedded at introductory and advanced levels in a way that transforms students and the community members with whom they partner.<sup>9</sup>

A final innovation on the edges of the already-laid foundations for civic learning and democratic engagement is one that advances collaborative, generative civic partnerships and alliances that have moved from being relationships characterized by charity and reciprocity to being truly transformative relationships based on generativity. These new democratic spaces have been carved out most clearly by a group of institutions that call themselves “anchor institutions.” Typically urban, they partner with many other anchor entities to address large problems in the community. They represent a paradigm shift of enormous consequence. Instead of defining themselves as going out into the community, these institutions define themselves as part of the community. This kind of shift changes everything. It is likely to transform how research is done, where it's done, the length of time that it's done for, its purposes, and the way in which higher education redistributes its resources.

The agenda set forth in *A Crucible Moment* is huge, but so is the crisis to which it responds. To dig our way out will require everyone's involvement, imagination, and commitment. Bringing Theory to Practice obviously has already played a significant role, and is going to be one of the real levers for making meaningful progress in the coming decade. As John Dewey said, “Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.”<sup>10</sup> It is time for each of us to get the water in the kettles boiling, get our gloves on, and get our towels ready to usher in that new generation.

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#### NOTES

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3. Scott London, *Doing Democracy: How a Network of Grassroots Organizations Is Strengthening Community, Building Capacity, and Shaping a New Kind of Civic Education* (Washington, DC: Kettering Foundation, 2010), iv.

4. Charles N. Quigley, “Statement on the Nation’s Report Card: NAEP 2010 Civics,” National Assessment Governing Board, accessed March 21, 2012, <http://www.nagb.org/civics/statement-quigley.pdf>.
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PART 4

Campus  
Civic Seminars



# Campus Civic Seminars: A Basic Design and Guiding Questions

AS YOU CONSIDER holding a “civic seminar” at your institution, plan for at least a half-day (if not a full-day) gathering of a broadly representative group of faculty, staff, students, and community members—a total of approximately twenty to thirty is manageable, when a host and facilitator is available. The intent is to have a thorough and participatory conversation, one that leads to a set of possible next steps.

The most direct and effective design for a civic seminar is one that addresses three guiding questions regarding the exploration of your own institutional civic mission and what would lead to achieving it, as well as the generation of insights into what should be the civic mission of higher education today:

1. *Why?* Given prevailing and current evidence and discussions, why should we now be concerned about our institutional civic mission or that of higher education in general?
  2. *What?* What is our own institutional civic mission? What does it suggest about the features that should characterize the civic mission of higher education in general?
    - On what does our civic mission rest—on what social, cultural, ethical, educational, and democratic values?
    - What are the distinctive features of our civic mission?
    - Through what policies, practices, programs, opportunities, and actions do we realize that mission?
    - In what ways could we achieve more?
  3. *How?* How could specific steps make priorities of what would deepen the achievement of our civic mission? Can we determine who should be tasked and be responsible for leading those steps?
- Or, more succinctly: Why now? What should be addressed? How can it be achieved?

*Why now?* Why is now the right time for your institution to address the strengthening and centering of both its own civic mission and that of higher education in general? Why is now the time to intensify or strengthen the civic mission of higher education? Will doing so at this time make any difference—will it actually lead to changes that give new focus to efforts to realize a civic mission?

*What should be addressed?* Before discussing *what*, we recommend that you consider the following questions: Does my institution, and does higher education in general, have a special and unique responsibility to claim and realize a civic mission? Is ours, in this sense, a privileged position? As you consider these questions, you may want to ask whether “privileged” means “special” or even “core,” given that the civic is inherent in what higher learning means; or that the civic is inherent in the history and expectations of your institution and of many other institutions of higher education—in their establishment and in their cultural and social histories; or that no other social or cultural institution has or could have the same resources, opportunity, and credibility needed to claim and realize a civic mission. You may also want to consider whether “privileged” means that we in the academy have defined “civic” too narrowly and have determined who has access to its benefits. Perhaps the “civic mission of higher education” is a construct that would be better understood in partnership with a community or as an aspect of—as inherently linked to—an even broader civic mission.

The following are additional suggestions to help guide your discussion of the nature and extent of your institution’s civic mission:

- Explore the conceptual construction of the “civic mission.” What is meant? Who and what are included? What are civic behaviors, processes, rights, and duties?
- Consider what “civic learning” means. What are the pedagogies, curricula, practices, and venues?
- Consider the differing roles and structures needed to contribute to, or to realize, an institutional civic mission.
- Consider what it means to encourage civil discourse within and beyond the campus.
- Explore how diversity and cultural (international) perspectives are related to a democratic society and civic responsibility.
- Consider how your institution (and how colleges and universities in general) could deepen the examination of the conditions of liberty, choice, and individual responsibility that are necessary for civic development, and how those conditions could be reinforced in educational contexts.
- Ask how we (and how do colleges and universities) extend the examination of expressions of the “civic” to a variety of elements of the complex of civic action, dispositions, attitudes, and choices. (For example, how to move beyond volunteerism and service, in pedagogies and practices, in order to explore even more promising steps?)
- Ask how we can accept the importance of preparation for the future workforce in the context of a broadened understanding of the civic without limiting the full purposes and expectations of higher education and learning.

*How can it be achieved?* To structure the *how*, we recommend that you consider the core strategies and specific means that your institution individually, or that higher education collectively, could use to foster change and that could lead to the realization of a greater civic mission. We also recommend that

you consider who could lead the effort, and how you would measure achievement. For example, institutions that have offered civic seminars have

- started student-led, web-based journals to disseminate locally developed scholarship and sources for the development of significant steps in giving attention to aspects of civic engagement;
- built “civic learning” as an aspect of disciplinary and interdisciplinary inquiry, involving disciplinary models, infusion models, and stand-alone models;
- developed reward systems for faculty and staff that recognize the intensity needed to craft attention to the civic;
- scheduled faculty workshops or institutes that feature pedagogy, scholarship, and the development of “local civic learning” assessment tools;
- structured intensive educational experiences that involve non-faculty as teachers or that occur beyond the classroom, cultivating civic action (linking learning to the world) as a deeper meaning of civic engagement;
- developed practical structures for understanding the civic in a global context by rethinking where study-abroad programs are housed—structurally and strategically—within the institution, and how they could be used to focus on the civic mission.



# Organizing Your Civic Seminar

*WHILE THE SPECIFIC ORGANIZATION of your seminar should reflect your and your participants' primary interests and the needs of your institution, we propose you consider the process outlined below as a general guide to organizing your civic seminar.*

1. Invitations to participate should explain why the seminar will be held, the importance of the invitee's involvement, that a national effort supports your institution's involvement, and that the campus seminar will have an impact on the steps taken by your institution and perhaps by others using your insights.
2. The seminar should be planned as roughly a half-day event, and may include a break for refreshments or a "working meal."
3. Make a record of at least the substantive parts of the seminar.
4. The seminar should have a host who may or may not also serve as facilitator. The host or facilitator should briefly reiterate the background and how the campus civic seminar will help shape the agenda, the outcomes, and perhaps the actions the institution will take.
5. Participants should identify themselves and the perspective they bring to the seminar.
6. Open the seminar with guiding, open-ended questions (see the previous chapter for suggestions).
7. Once begun, the seminar should focus on the specific issue that you, and those you've consulted, agree is most promising.
8. The concluding part of the seminar should focus on how to move forward and on possible action steps:
  - What are just a few of the steps, the changes, and the emphases that need to be made—and by whom—if the civic mission of our institution (and generally higher education) is to be realized?
  - How will we know that our civic mission is being realized?
  - What special issue, perspective, or actions do we want to emphasize?

Many topics—and the framing questions that could be used to introduce them—cannot be adequately addressed in one or even several civic seminar sessions. What individual campuses or seminar organizers consider essential to a full and productive examination of civic issues and the role of higher education

in addressing those issues or questions will vary necessarily. We encourage raising the issues that best open the full discussion in your own institutional context. The themes you choose to emphasize will be considered for more thorough attention and analysis by other institutions and in the work of the Bringing Theory to Practice project, which will thereby be aided by your contributions and insights.

For example, consider the significant issue of transforming demographic changes on campuses and in society, and how valuing diversity is a central dimension underlying the civic in a democratic society and in higher education. On what does such valuing rest? In what ways is the valuing of diversity expressed and carried out—or not—in social and educational practices and policies?

Or, consider the challenges to understanding the impact of the “digital revolution” and social networking on what we have heretofore considered civic engagement. Are social networking and immediate communication incompatible with perspective taking, civility, and holding to the belief that one’s own views must bear the weight of challenge—as opposed to seeking immediate confirmation by the like-minded?

*Please note that these are simply suggestions. How the seminar discussion is framed will have much to do with the culture of the individual campus, your interests and those of the participants, and the perceived needs of your institution.*

# How Support Available from Bringing Theory to Practice Can Make a Campus Seminar Happen and Subsequent Campus Seminar Reporting

THE BRINGING THEORY TO PRACTICE (BTtoP) project's new round of funding for 2012–14 will be used to support institutions that take steps to do exactly what this monograph has encouraged: move greater attention to the civic (and, thereby, also to engaged learning and student well-being) to the center of the institution, and align practices and priorities to the objective of realizing that core mission.

For many institutions, the task will be simply to begin to have meaningful conversations—with constituencies within the campus and with those in the community—about what the civic mission of their own institution is, and what the civic mission of higher education in general now means and entails. Current emphases on the troubling condition of higher education's efforts to address a civic mission, as well as the recommendations contained in *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*, the 2012 report of the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, form the backdrop for the conversations (seminars) here encouraged.

The BTtoP project will support those conversations—and can also be supportive of institutional initiatives that focus on the action steps for change and the reordering of priorities that flow from those conversations.

Campuses considering how they can respond to the recommendations in *A Crucible Moment* may wish to use *Civic Provocations* as a discussion stimulant and companion piece—as well as seek our support to help enable campus conversations. It is particularly relevant that the *Civic Provocations* monograph and the BTtoP grant support both activate broad national, and perhaps international, campus-based dialogue and action steps. A full description of the application procedure for a seminar grant is provided in BTtoP's 2012–2014 RFP (see [www.aacu.org/bringing\\_theory/documents/BTtoP12to14RFP](http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/documents/BTtoP12to14RFP)). We expect that many colleges and universities will participate.

If your civic seminar is supported by funding from the Bringing Theory to Practice project, you will be asked to share a brief report afterward. As a shared contribution to institutional practices and a national learning community, reports will be publically available on the web. In this way, we will cultivate an extensive

community of institutions that are developing a deeper sense of their civic mission. Your brief report should include the following elements:

- *Basic information about the seminar.* Who was the host? Who facilitated? When did the seminar occur? Who attended? Rather than names of individuals, a rough demographic would be useful—perhaps by race, age, and gender; by area of campus responsibility (faculty, student, staff, etc.); and by responsibility beyond the campus (community leader, journalist, etc.).
- *A brief summary (1–2 paragraphs) of the discussion of the opening issues and the questions you decided to use.* Do be sure to include any perspectives that seemed important or new to the group.
- *A summary (several paragraphs) of the specific topic(s) chosen as a seminar emphasis and the insights that emerged.*
- *A listing of recommendations, specific action steps, and suggested “products”/“outcomes” of the seminar.*

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## APPENDIX: SPRING 2011 CAMPUS SEMINARS

The contents of this monograph were shaped by the many civic seminars held in 2011 at the institutions listed below. In each case, participants reported the importance of the conversation and the success of using the seminar to advance their own understanding and efforts to realize a deeper civic mission.

Allegheny College (Meadville, Pennsylvania)  
Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts (Bratislava, Slovakia)  
California State University–Chico (Chico, California)  
The College of Wooster (Wooster, Ohio)  
Colorado College (Colorado Springs, Colorado)  
City University of New York Graduate Center (New York, New York)  
Drew University (Madison, New Jersey)  
The Evergreen State College (Olympia, Washington)  
Houghton College (Houghton, New York)  
Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (Indianapolis, Indiana)  
The New England Resource Center for Higher Education at University of Massachusetts  
(Boston, Massachusetts)  
The American University of Central Asia (Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic)  
Towson University (Towson, Maryland)  
Tufts University (Medford, Massachusetts)  
University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, Michigan)  
University of Nebraska–Lincoln (Lincoln, Nebraska)  
University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)  
University of Southern California (Los Angeles, California)  
Wagner College (Staten Island, New York)

THE BRINGING THEORY TO PRACTICE  
MONOGRAPHS: THE CIVIC SERIES  
Barry Checkoway, General Series Editor

*Civic Provocations* is the first in a series of monographs that will raise questions and provide perspectives on fundamental issues about the civic mission of higher education.

Civic initiatives are—and should be—ongoing in democratic societies, but only some of them are accompanied by written papers in which their participants explain their positions and the thoughts on which they are based.

*The monographs in the series will provide opportunities for authors to share with readers their ideas about contemporary civic concerns in ways that will complement but not duplicate present initiatives and, in so doing, contribute to the quality of civic discussions and actions.*





The Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) Project encourages colleges and universities to reassert their core purposes as educational institutions, not only to advance learning and discovery, but to advance the potential and well-being of each student as a whole person, and to advance education as a public good that sustains a civic society.

The Project supports campus-based initiatives that demonstrate how uses of engaged forms of learning that actively involve students both within and beyond the classroom directly contribute to their cognitive, emotional, and civic development.

Bringing Theory to Practice is understood and appreciated as being a rare source of intellectual and practical assistance to all institutional constituencies willing to make, or strengthen, the changes needed to realize their own missions of learning and discovery, creating campus cultures for learning that recognize the necessary connections of higher learning to student well-being and to their civic engagement and development.

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