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The proposition that ‘Young People Don’t Vote’ has finally been proven wrong,” proclaimed Heather Smith, executive director of Rock the Vote, a nonprofit group that encourages young people to participate in the political process. This claim seems justified—the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) reports that more than 6.5 million young people under the age of thirty participated in the 2008 primaries and caucuses. According to CIRCLE, this marks a dramatic increase in youth voter turnout over the last comparable election cycle in 2000.

At this exciting time when our country’s leadership is on the threshold of change, this issue of Peer Review examines how the academy engages students in their learning today to help them grow as engaged citizens for tomorrow. And because it is a presidential election year, we decided to focus in on “political engagement,” as opposed to the broader goal of civic engagement with all that entails. For many years, AAC&U campuses have successfully involved students in service-learning and community-based research, and other forms of civically engaged learning. But campus leaders have bemoaned the fact that while college students are enthusiastic about these kinds of programs, they lack interest in electoral politics. Is 2008 a turning point?

As I read about the innovative programs that schools are putting in place to expand their efforts to encourage and engage students politically, I learned that many students are embracing their roles as agents of change in their communities and in local and national politics. Heartened by this knowledge, I decided to use my immersion journalism training to gather firsthand evidence of student political engagement. I was not disappointed.

First, I attended a conference sponsored by Demos, a nonpartisan public-policy research organization, called “A Better Deal: Reclaiming Economic Security for a New Generation.” There, I heard a diverse group of student activists address the growing economic plight of young voters. From those responding to the stirring opening session given by Andy Stern of the Service Employees International Union to the small-group discussions and the thought-provoking closing comments, every young adult with whom I spoke was actively engaged in the political process.

I also attended a group discussion on “The Current Political Scene, as Viewed from the Left and the Right,” sponsored by the Paul Peck Institute at Montgomery College. In this classroom setting, students of traditional and nontraditional ages, professors, an administrator, institute director Francine Jamin, and I had a lively discussion based on readings by Robert Reich, David Brooks, and Paul Gigot. From my time spent with this community-college-based group, I found that passionate political ideas and ideals span across generations and campus roles.

Finally, I attended the 2008 Campus Progress National Conference, which included sessions such as What’s Next?—Transforming youth voting into youth power and Rap Sessions—How the hip-hop generation is reshaping politics. I spent a few hours in the exhibit hall going from table to table talking with student interns from nonprofit organizations such as Young People For..., DC Vote, Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom, 1 Sky, and Green Corps. These young people, many of whom had arranged their own internships, spoke clearly and passionately about the goals of their organizations. It was clear to me that the active roles they had taken in determining this country’s future would continue long past November’s election.

AAC&U has joined with other higher education groups to launch “Your Voice, Your Vote,” a Web-based campaign that gives campus leaders tools for encouraging students to register, learn about the issues, and go to the polls on Election Day. Campuses are embracing the campaign’s message—this summer, my daughter, who attends Goucher College, received an e-mail communication from Sanford Ungar, her school’s president, urging students to register to vote in their home states. To underscore his message, Ungar wrote, “Voting is about more than the feuds and foibles of individual candidates. It’s about taking advantage of a right that many people in the world do not have. In former careers, I have worked in countries where people spent their lives fighting for the right to vote—and where many died pursuing the right to have their voices heard.”

This edition of Peer Review features a range of articles about student political engagement written by leaders of prominent groups who are experts on these issues and by faculty who teach, inspire, and lead. With this issue, we hope to give readers an understanding of this critical topic and supply them with tools to further engage and prepare students for their roles as leaders in a world of complex challenges and unlimited possibilities.

—SHELLEY JOHNSON CAREY
Although preparing young people for intelligent democratic participation is undeniably important for them and for the country, this goal is not addressed in a direct and systematic way in American higher education. To be sure, higher education does improve political understanding and engagement. Virtually every study of political knowledge, interest, and participation shows a positive relationship of these variables with educational attainment. But, despite this positive effect, many college graduates are not very politically knowledgeable, sophisticated, skilled, or engaged.

Even though the proportion of the U.S. population attending college has increased dramatically in the past fifty years, according to some indicators, political knowledge and engagement have actually decreased. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), for example, found that from the 1940s to the 1990s, overall levels of political knowledge did not go up, while the percentage of Americans attending college more than doubled. As they put it, “Today’s college graduates are roughly equivalent [in political knowledge] to the high school graduates of the 1940s.” Likewise, Bennett and Bennett (2003) report that the statistical strength of the relationship between higher education and political knowledge and participation has weakened in recent years. They found, for example, that exposure to higher education had a weaker differential effect on news consumption in 2000 than in 1972. Research my colleagues and I have conducted suggests that this trend could be reversed if higher education would address students’ political learning more directly.

**DEFINING POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT**

The relative lack of attention to college students’ political learning becomes apparent only if we distinguish between political and apolitical civic engagement. In the past couple of decades, both secondary and higher education have done a remarkable job of encouraging and supporting young people’s involvement with their communities through programs of extracurricular volunteer work and service learning, in which volunteer service activities are integrally connected with the substance of academic courses. This community service is often a valuable resource for nonprofit organizations, local communities, and the disadvantaged people these organizations serve. Volunteer experience helps establish a philanthropic mindset and habit in those who take part. Properly scaffolded, it can widen students’ circle of identification, helping them see the disadvantaged as less alien than they otherwise would, and inspiring a desire to contribute to purposes beyond the self. But this kind of voluntarism is inadequate preparation for democratic citizenship. For that, we need explicit attention to political learning.

What counts as “political” learning? In a study of programs that support students’ political development, my colleagues and I defined political engagement broadly enough to include the wide range of ways that people, especially young people, participate in American democracy, without making the definition so broad that it includes all of civic voluntarism. Political engagement, therefore, includes community and civic involvement that has a systemic dimension and various forms of engagement with public policy issues, as well as electoral politics at all levels. A key criterion is that political activities are driven by systemic-level goals, a desire to affect the shared values, practices, and policies that shape collective life.

But does this distinction between political and apolitical civic engagement make any real difference developmentally or educationally? Many educators assume that voluntarism of a nonpolitical kind will lead eventually to political engagement. In fact, civic participation can contribute to students’ political learning, but there is no guarantee that this will happen.

Civic engagement sometimes exposes participants to political knowledge or imposes political demands, thus drawing them into the political realm. For example, if students are stocking shelves in a food pantry when state funding for hunger programs is cut, volunteers may be drawn into efforts to raise public awareness of state budget issues and the community’s need for these services. But
this kind of thing does not often happen. In fact, there was a consensus among the undergraduates in our study that students are seldom helped to connect their volunteer work with systemic issues that relate to it and are unlikely to make those connections on their own.

Civic participation can also lead to the development of politically valuable skills—e.g., planning and running meetings, writing memos, various kinds of public persuasion, and many more. But not all settings or roles build these kinds of skills. That only happens if the role is one in which the person needs and therefore learns and practices those skills. In many kinds of civic engagement activities, like tutoring children or cleaning up a beach, students are not in roles where they learn these kinds of politically relevant skills.

We know that students are given many opportunities and incentives to do individual volunteer work. But they generally encounter very little encouragement to get involved in politics, even broadly defined. The result is that most students are unclear about how they might become politically engaged and what that would involve. For this generation of young people, politics is unfamiliar territory, whereas community service has become almost as familiar as going to school. As one student in our study put it, “There was always more pressure toward community service and more opportunities available. Our high schools promoted community service activities, but never, ever, promoted a political engagement activity. I don’t remember that happening even once. Community service is just so much more emphasized to our generation.”

**THE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT PROJECT**

A study of college-level moral and civic education that my colleagues and I did several years ago (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens 2003) confirmed this impression—that education for specifically political learning is not widespread on college campuses. Even so, we were able to find some promising courses and cocurricular programs that address this set of goals. We undertook a new study, the Political Engagement Project, in order to learn more about these efforts to support college students’ political learning. The project investigated the impact of a variety of efforts to educate for political learning, documenting the goals and teaching strategies of twenty-one courses and cocurricular programs located at a diverse array of institutions throughout the country. Our book, *Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Responsible Political Engagement* (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold 2007) presents the results of that investigation, along with an exploration of the goals of political teaching and learning and guidelines for how to use the central pedagogical strategies documented by the study.

The faculty who teach in these twenty-one courses and programs treat political learning as importantly multifaceted. For them, the quality of political engagement is at least as important as the frequency of engagement. High-quality participation reflects wise judgment grounded in political knowledge and understanding, familiarity with and competence in a wide array of political skills, and a strong strategic sense for when and how to deploy these skills, along with steadfast motivation, including the capacity to withstand setbacks and disappointments and a commitment to basic democratic principles such as equal opportunity and majority rule. It is also important to work toward a sense of political participation that is emotionally compelling, intellectually interesting, exciting, attractive, and personally consequential. An undergraduate education can make only a start toward these goals—none will be fully achieved. But a clear vision of the multidimensional nature of the goals will go a long way toward ensuring that the endeavor will at least be headed in the right direction.

Teaching for political understanding and engagement involves helping students find political issues they can be passionate about while also staying open to opposing views. It involves teaching students to be sensitive to others’ feelings about hot-button issues while also encouraging them to be tough and slow to take offense themselves. Students also need to develop a thoughtful, reasoned approach to politics without becoming immobilized by doubt. They need to take politics seriously but also see how it can be fun, at least some of the time.

Can this be done? The answer is yes, it can. This is not the place to give a detailed account of our research, but the bottom line is clear: Students show significant, usually substantial, increases along many dimensions of political understanding, skills, and motivation after participating in academic courses and cocurricular programs designed to foster that development. There are many different ways to accomplish these
outcomes. We studied a diverse array of courses and programs, with different structures, pedagogies, and content. They include summer institutes, a semester-in-Washington program, both summer and academic-year internships, academic courses in various departments, cocurricular programs, and multiyear living-learning programs. They all use active pedagogies, including invited speakers and mentors, deliberation about politics, internships and other placements, political action and research projects, and structured reflection on their political experiences.

These active pedagogies are especially well suited to accomplish deep and enduring learning, because they engage students simultaneously on several different levels: intellectually, emotionally, socially, and personally. In many of the courses, students take key ideas learned in an academic setting and apply them to the complex and uncertain realities of policy implementation or political action, with important reciprocal impact from the realm of action back to the intellectual domain, enriching their grasp of the intellectual subtleties of the classroom material. Most of these pedagogies offer ongoing assessment, coaching, and feedback, often self-consciously instilling in students the capacity for self-assessment and an active search for multiple sources of guidance.

Furthermore, the active pedagogies we studied connect students not only with ideas but also with people. Students interact with faculty, program staff, and peers, with mentors, speakers, and staff at placement sites, and with clients or constituents of placement organizations. These people are often inspiring—personalizing and dramatizing the issues, offering solidarity in a common quest, and leading students to new identifications that change their sense of who they are and who they want to be (Colby and Damon 1992; Youniss and Yates 1997).

Students chose to participate in these courses and programs for many different reasons. For some, the course just fit well into their schedules or fulfilled a requirement. Others were seeking out politically focused experiences. In our assessment of the programs' impact on students, we found, first, that those who came into the courses and programs already very interested in politics and those who came in with very little political interest and experience both showed significant gains on just about every dimension, with larger and more consistent gains in the group that started with little prior interest. Second, two items showed no change in either of these groups—political ideology and political party affiliation. These programs do work to strengthen students' political understanding, skills, and motivation and, equally important, they do so without pushing students toward one end of the political spectrum or the other.

THE IMPERATIVE OF OPEN INQUIRY
The finding of no systematic shift in ideology is notable because of the widespread fear that education for political learning is bound to be ideologically driven, imposing faculty biases on students. This could otherwise be a serious stumbling block, especially since conservative critics have been drawing public attention to the alleged liberal biases of higher education.

My colleagues and I share with the critics the conviction that education for political learning is legitimate only if it is implemented in ways that are compatible with the central values of academic life. What are these values? To reduce a very complicated set of issues to a simple list, scholarship and teaching in higher education need to be guided by intellectual integrity, mutual respect and tolerance, a willingness to listen to and take seriously the ideas of others, public consideration of contested issues, and a commitment to rational discourse and civility.

In practice, it is not easy to sort out exactly what it means to align efforts to support political development with these core academic values. It does not mean giving equal time to ideas that are without merit, for example. But it does require a real commitment to open-mindedness on the part of faculty and administrative leaders.

In the courses and programs in our study, we saw that it is possible to combine passionate concern and commitment with openness to views different from one's own. Many of the students reported that they gained a gut-level understanding that those with opposing views are real people, not demonic caricatures.
They learned how to find common ground with people whose interests are quite different from their own and saw that both can benefit when they cooperate around shared goals. We were continually impressed by the ways these courses and programs were able to work toward political clarity and conviction combined with human understanding, tolerance, open-mindedness, and a sense of community that transcends ideological difference.

At the level of the campus as a whole, we have seen faculty and administrative leaders who are quite deliberate in raising the issue of open inquiry, fostering conversation about what it is, why it is important, and what the principle of open inquiry means in practice. At the level of individual courses, faculty support open inquiry by working to ensure that students encounter in readings, invited speakers, and other experiences a wide array of perspectives on the policy and other political issues addressed by their courses. These faculty also pay attention to establishing a civil atmosphere in their courses, and report that creating a sense of community early in the course helps students engage diversity of opinion without personal animosity.

**COMPATIBILITY WITH COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Many educators acknowledge the importance of preparation for thoughtful, effective citizenship but don’t believe they can afford to make it a high priority, given the press of other goals. Fortunately, high-quality teaching for political understanding and engagement contributes to other aspects of academic learning in college, so these goals need not be traded off against each other. In a recent statement about pressing challenges for American higher education, five influential national education associations pointed to “some fundamental aspects of higher education” that “do not and should not change” 1: “The most basic goals of an undergraduate education remain the ability to think, write, and speak clearly; to reason critically; to solve problems; to work collaboratively; to acquire field-specific knowledge; and to acquire the judgment, analytic capacity, and independence of thought to support continued, self-driven, lifelong learning and engaged citizenship” (American Council on Education and others 2006). Education for political development can address directly every one of these outcomes.

A highly regarded instrument for assessing what students learn in college, the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), illustrates the intersection of political learning with the kind of general intellectual development that is the hallmark of successful collegiate learning (Klein and others 2005; Shavelson and Huang 2006). The CLA assesses students’ critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and writing abilities, using performance tasks of several kinds.

To measure problem solving, the CLA uses tasks in which students are given multiple sources of information about a problem and are asked to evaluate and analyze the information and use it to draw and defend conclusions about the problem at hand. These problems are often questions of public policy, and are very similar to questions addressed in the courses and programs we studied. For example, students must integrate information from newspaper articles, federal investigation reports, scientific studies, internal memos, and other documents to formulate a policy recommendation for an organization. The CLA analytic writing measures are similarly consistent with the kinds of skills students learn in the programs we studied.

**COMPATIBILITY WITH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Intellectual development is universally acknowledged as among the most important goals of higher education, but it is not the only goal. Preparation for a career is at least as salient in many students’ thinking about the purpose and value of a college education. The majority of respondents (73 percent of women and 65 percent of men) in the 2005 freshman survey conducted by UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute said that they are attending college in order to pursue training for a specific career. Seventy-two percent of both women and men said they had decided to attend college in order to get a better job (Pryor and others 2005).

In this area, as in the case of general intellectual development, it is clear that political learning makes an essential contribution. Every occupation affects and is affected by the public-policy contexts within which it is located. Issues of professional licensing and accreditation, the institutional settings of work and regulations that affect them, workforce and compensation issues, and the complex of forces that shape the clienteles or other publics the occupation serves are just a small sampling of topics within the political domain, broadly understood, that students preparing for a particular occupation can benefit from studying.

In addition, virtually every occupation has the potential to serve the public good. A major longitudinal study that followed students during and after college found that six years after college, graduates’ civic voluntarism that is unconnected with their work had fallen off significantly, but more than half (57.7 percent)
report participating in volunteer service opportunities through their employer. In addition, these alumni increasingly believe the work itself contributes to the greater good: “Two thirds (66.2 percent) of the study participants are satisfied or very satisfied with the opportunities to contribute to society through their job,” (Higher Education Research Institute 2006). A survey by Cone, Inc. also found that “young people are extending their social consciousness to the workplace. Of the 28 percent of young people (ages 13–25) who are employed full time, 79 percent said they want to work for a company that cares about how it affects or contributes to society” (Jayson 2006). A strong background in thinking about the public purposes of one’s chosen work and the broader issues connected with the social impact of a range of institutions and occupations can help ensure that this desire for social contribution is more than wishful thinking or rationalization.

A good liberal education should provide students with the intellectual capacity to make sense of their environment and to locate themselves within the complex influences of their time and place (Sullivan and Rosin 2008). Learning about political institutions, issues, contexts, and practices should be an integral part of that enterprise. College graduates cannot make sense of their environment and their place in it if they are politically ignorant, unskilled, and lacking in a sense of civic agency, the sense that they can work with others to solve problems that concern them — in their communities, workplaces, or elsewhere. In this sense, a basic understanding of the political and policy contexts in which people live and work is an essential dimension of liberal learning, and students are not well educated if they fail to develop that understanding.

REFERENCES

AAC&U MEETINGS
NETWORK MEETINGS
DIVERSITY, LEARNING, AND INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE: Accelerating and Assessing Progress
October 16-18, 2008
Long Beach, California

ENGAGING SCIENCE, ADVANCING LEARNING: General Education, Majors, and the New Global Century
November 6-8, 2008
Providence, Rhode Island

GENERAL EDUCATION, ASSESSMENT, AND THE LEARNING STUDENTS NEED
February 26-28, 2009
Baltimore, Maryland

SHAPING FACULTY ROLES IN A TIME OF CHANGE: Leadership for Student Learning
April 2-4, 2009
San Diego, California

ANNUAL MEETING
READY OR NOT: Global Challenges, College Learning, and America’s Promise
January 21-24, 2009
Seattle, Washington
At the end of May 2008, students, civic leaders, and faculty and staff in leadership studies and development from universities across the country came together for a national symposium on civic leadership education and democracy. These talented students were already passionate activists, organizers, and volunteers working to address a broad range of issues affecting their local communities. The group convened to discuss the scope and content of successful leadership education programs. While the group expressed some concern over “getting to scale” and involving more than “the usual suspects” on campuses, it was clear that many American colleges and universities have established some promising programs to educate the next generation of activists and organizers.

At the same time, there was little discussion about the normative values driving this work and a broader understanding of why students pursue education and experiences in civic leadership. Although the term democracy was in the title of the symposium, it was only toward the end of the two-day meeting that one student questioned the relevance of democracy to this work, and when she did, other students in the room nodded in agreement. One explained:

I am uncomfortable with the suggestion that we are doing this work to strengthen democracy. To me, democracy means partisanship, special interests, and corruption. I am not inspired to do this work as a way to advance democracy.

In some e-mail exchanges that followed, the students offered more explanation. Democracy is a theory and an idea that every person gets an equal and valued vote. In reality, elected officials are swayed by “money and large corporations” rather than citizen interests and needs. One said, “The term democracy makes me cringe.”

It may be troubling, but it should not be surprising, that students find democracy uninspiring if not ignoble. This generation has witnessed policymaking that is characterized by point-counterpoint exchanges among distant political elites. Matters of public interest are reduced by the media to incomplete or misleading information, often about the divisions between Americans based on political party, ideology, race, gender, class, geography, and religious beliefs, rather than about the issues’ merits.

The net result is a divided public. Despite unprecedented levels of engagement during this presidential primary season, researchers William Galston and Pietro Nivola reported in the New York Times (May 11, 2008) the results of a comprehensive study of the nation’s polarization. They concluded that not only are ideological differences between the political parties growing but they have become “embedded in American society.”

Nor is it clear that Americans are paying close attention. Fewer than half of the eligible voters actually vote. In response to a survey question, “Have you ever worked together informally with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community where you live?” only 20 percent of adults answered yes. In an annual survey that measures lifestyles, participants were asked whether they have worked on a community project in the preceding year. In 1975, 43 percent responded yes. In 2005, only 27 percent responded yes, and the responses in between show a steady decline. There are other surveys that measure civic involvement, and they demonstrate low levels in all indicators: membership in at least one group (around 25 percent); volunteerism (around 34 percent); protest (around 8 percent); contacting a newspaper (around 10 percent); donating to a political candidate (15 percent); raising money for a charity (27 percent) (Levine 2007, 58). In October 2007, the Civic Health Index, compiled by the National Conference on Citizenship, released its most recent findings. The Civic Health Index examines forty indicators of civic participation, such as voting, volunteering, membership in civic...
clubs and organizations, public giving, attending community meetings, and staying informed. The index showed that only about 15 percent of Americans take on significant civic responsibilities—the lowest number in a thirty-year decline (with a brief gain between September 11, 2001, and 2004).

When Americans do not pay attention, they risk supporting or challenging public policies based on false information. At the time of the 2004 election, a majority of Americans incorrectly believed that Saddam Hussein’s Iraq had supported al Qaeda (Levine, 54). In a 2006 poll, two-thirds of the respondents said that the American government spends more on foreign aid than on Social Security, when in fact Social Security costs at least twenty-five times more money than foreign aid (Levine, 54). Recent polls reveal that approximately 15 percent of Americans erroneously believe that presidential candidate Barack Obama is Muslim.

In the meantime, while politicians increasingly distance themselves from the public by creating smokescreens, ignoring constitutional ideals, and abandoning basic civility, the nation’s problems grow. Consider facts reported by the U.S. Census Bureau in October 2007: In 2006, nearly 10 percent of American families lived in poverty and 17.4 percent of all children under the age of eighteen lived in poverty. By race, these numbers change: Among Hispanic families, 20.6 percent live in poverty and among black families, 24.3 percent live in poverty. The number of people without health insurance coverage rose one half of a percentage point from 2005–6. The number of uninsured children increased from 8 million (10.9 percent) in 2005 to 8.7 million (11.7 percent) in 2006. These are issues that should concern all citizens, not just politicians on one side of an imagined ideological fence.

Yet despite ongoing challenges over how to achieve it, democracy is commonly viewed as an ideal. All societies have problems. It is best to have problems within a democratic society.

Each generation faces social, political, and economic challenges that provoke a reexamination of democracy—a reframing. This generation is facing that challenge now, and the task is all the more difficult,

**It is a charge to educate in ways that instill in students a renewed commitment to core democratic ideals, to inspire them to become actively involved, and to provide them with the skills that they will need for meaningful engagement in the democratic process**

five times more money than foreign aid (Levine, 54). Recent polls reveal that approximately 15 percent of Americans erroneously believe that presidential candidate Barack Obama is Muslim.

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**THE MOVEMENT TO ADVANCE A MORE DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY**

This generation is experiencing and learning that democracy does not function well when citizen participation is limited to voting, volunteerism, and personal sacrifices, particularly when the levels of those forms of participation are relatively low. What is called for is a new way of doing democracy, one in which citizens are actively engaged in public affairs in ways that are meaningful and that influence policy choices, one that some refer to as deliberative democracy.

A deliberative democracy exhibits certain characteristics, including an educated and informed citizenry, fair processes, and active participation by citizens in policymaking at the local, regional, and national levels. In this form of democracy, ordinary citizens are skilled in sophisticated methods of democratic dialogue, deliberation, and public reasoning. They recognize origins of conflict and polarization yet commit to keep working together to find common ground and reach more acceptable outcomes. They understand the notion of shared governance and of citizens working together and with policymakers to generate fair laws and to effectuate social change. They work toward a common vision for American society, on that promises justice, equity, and freedom. Policymakers accept the responsibility for being accountable to the public for their choices and actions.

In a deliberative democracy, the responsibility for social, political, and economic change is shared. This is different from a system in which officials consult citizens before making decisions for those citizens. Instead, problems are considered from multiple perspectives: what can our policymakers or the government to do address a problem? What can others do—others such as nonprofit organizations, citizen groups,
corporations, and faith communities?
And what can I do as an individual? What changes can I make in my own habits and behaviors? What is my responsibility to address these concerns, and how do I live up to that responsibility? Imagine a society where citizens do more than vote or express themselves by writing a letter, protesting, or making a comment at a public meeting. Those mostly one-way forms of communications are frustrating and inadequate for what is called for now: a sense of shared responsibility for improving society.

Does it work? In recent years, thousands of American communities have been experimenting with intergroup and sustained dialogue programs, study circles, issue forums, public conversations, deliberative polling, electronic democracy, citizen juries, and other forms of deliberative democracy (see Gastil and Levine 2007). These are carefully designed opportunities for people with different perspectives and ideas to come together, study and talk about public issues, work through conflicts, deliberate, and act individually and collaboratively, with each other and public officials; to effect change for the common good.

These are promising practices that are described on Everyday Democracy’s Web site (www.everyday-democracy.org/en/index.aspx) and in Matt Leighninger’s The Next Form of Democracy and David Schoem and Sylvia Hurtado’s Intergroup Dialogue. Oregon undertook an open and deliberative process to change its health care system (Gutmann and Thompson 2004, 17–20). In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, citizen study circles have become the foundation for democratic decision making and social change (see Portsmouth Listens, http://portsmouthlistens.org/). These plus thousands of other examples provide educators with a unique opportunity to teach not just from theory but from experience. People who engage in these processes post favorable testimonials on the Everyday Democracy Web site, which receives about 7,000 hits a month.

The evidence that it works is compelling, but it is also clear that deliberative democracy would be more effective if American citizens already possessed the skills they need to engage in this form of democratic process. Those skills are: democratic dialogue, public reasoning and deliberation, conflict management, and collaborative leadership. Colleges and universities can advance deliberative democracy by being intentional about teaching these skills.

Dialogue is an interpersonal relationship-building process that involves listening and talking and that has a purpose of gaining mutual understanding that then serves as the foundation for individual, social, and/or public policy change. Organizations and initiatives that seek to improve the way we do dialogue in American public life promote dialogue as a way to: (1) change individual behavior and attitudes, and particularly to increase intercultural understanding and tolerance; (2) confront and address historic and contemporary social and economic injustice; (3) increase civility and respect (addressing the claim that “our civil society is less than civil”); (4) build community and networks; (5) change institutions such as governments and workplaces; (6) manage and capitalize on the transformative nature of conflict; and (7) change the way laws and public policies are made (The Democracy Imperative FAQ).

Dialogue is not to be confused with everyday conversations and is more than “just talk,” which is why we usually characterize dialogue as “democratic.” Democratic dialogue adheres to certain principles. It is:

- inclusive, seeks broad participation and diverse perspectives
- facilitated, guided by a trained, neutral individual or two
- respectful and governed by ground rules, agreements people make about how they are going to work together
- guided by a discussion guide, framing paper, choices, and other approaches
- grounded in personal stake, stories, and perspectives
- part of a larger, communitywide initiative
- attentive to outcomes, process, and relationships: personal commitment and action, improved intergroup relations, stronger communities, reasoned and more sustainable public policy decisions, political and social efficacy, a healthier democracy (The Democracy Imperative FAQ)

The term deliberation often brings to mind the judicial process and the role of juries: a small group of men and women charged with the responsibility of listening to evidence, giving that evidence careful consideration, weighing choices, and making decisions, all in ways that are intentional and not hurried. In a public deliberation, people come together to study a community, social, or political issue, identify possible solutions (choices), consider the advantages, disadvantages, and trade-offs for each choice, and make decisions about how an issue should be addressed.

Some might argue that dialogue focuses on the dynamics of groups and interpersonal relationship-building and deliberation focuses on issues and decision making. Others suggest that, in a public setting, democratic dialogue is the foundation for quality deliberation and sustainable decisions. Either way, the two are symbiotic.

The quality of this form of engagement can be enhanced by attention from the academy. When people deliberate, they
engage in a process of collaborative consideration of (1) solid information, facts, and knowledge about the issue; (2) diverse viewpoints, including perspectives based on cultural identity, political ideology, beliefs, and opinions; and (3) multiple solutions, including individual and collective action. It is a process of public reasoning.

Consider for example how issues are currently framed for public discourse. The debate over whether it is legitimate to imprison someone indefinitely and without a judicial hearing—to deny them the right to *habeas corpus*—is framed by political leaders as “whether enemies of the United States deserve American justice.” Challenges to proposals to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge are framed as efforts “to drive gas prices to record levels.” Critics of the Iraq war are accused of being “people who don’t support our troops” or “soft on terrorists.” Legitimate concerns over the extent and appropriateness and extended exercise of executive privilege are characterized as efforts to compromise national security. These framings are misleading and they defy the facts. They also present students with ideal learning opportunities to study an issue, critique the commentators, and reframe an issue for more civil discourse.

Ensuring that public discourse is welcoming to people of all perspectives is both an organizing challenge and a potential challenge in managing conflict. Students can learn not just who has a stake in the outcome of an issue—who deserves a seat at the table—but also how to make intergroup dialogue positive and productive. Respect, active listening, understanding, identifying common ground, creating ground rules for civil discourse, diffusing tension without censoring viewpoints, being attentive not just to outcomes but to process and relationships, issue framing, critical analysis, problem solving—these are critical democratic citizenship and leadership skills that colleges and universities advance. College and university classrooms, residence halls, local communities, and campuswide programs are ideal venues for citizens to practice democracy.

**REFRAMING AND RECLAIMING DEMOCRACY**

Despite promising developments in deliberative democracy nationally, there remain valid questions about whether deliberative democracy is realistic or even desirable. The foundations for truly democratic dialogue—inclusiveness, open-mindedness, informed participation, reasonableness—seem unattainable or unenforceable. True inclusiveness requires that those with power set it aside. Is it realistic to expect that level of personal integrity? A deliberative process can be time-consuming and impractical. For some issues, our pluralistic society makes it nearly impossible to find common ground. Too many conflicts, particularly those stemming from moral beliefs, are irreconcilable. These legitimate concerns are not reason to abandon the challenge. They call for continued study, experimentation, and discussion (The Democracy Imperative FAQ).

Reclaiming democracy requires more than a theoretical reframing. It is a call for action linked to civic duty. It is a challenge to citizens to examine what works in American democracy and to experiment with and study alternative processes. It is a reminder to this generation of the core principles that guide this work: constitutionally grounded principles of freedom, justice, and equal opportunity.

The students at the leadership conference may be right about the state of American democracy. In his June 29, 2008, opinion piece, Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* wrote, “We are a country in debt and in decline—not terminal, not irreversible, but in decline. Our political system seems incapable of producing long-range answers to big problems or big opportunities. We are the ones in need of nation-building [at home.] It is our political system that is not working.”

Higher education can and should be a critical partner in Friedman’s “nation-building.” For the past ten or more years, colleges and universities have supported community-based student learning and engagement and have become more active partners in local community building. These efforts reflect a positive alliance of the university’s educational and civic missions. It is now time for higher education to focus directly on democracy both as a form of government and as a set of principles and practices that guide how people interact and work together every day to improve society. It’s time to help this generation reclaim democracy.

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Pursuing Franklin’s Democratic Vision for Higher Education

Benjamin Franklin, in founding the University of Pennsylvania (then the Academy of Philadelphia), conveyed an expansive and highly democratic educational vision. While many colonial colleges were established to prepare the scions of wealthy families, Franklin’s vision was far more egalitarian in nature (Brands 2000). He was also profoundly skeptical of classical education. As historian John Hardin Best explains,

Commenting in his usual pungent style, [Franklin] noted that Greek and Latin were the “quackery of literature.” Further, he wrote that they were the “chapeau bras” of learning, like the hat carried by an elegant European gentlemen [sic], a hat never put on the head for fear of disarranging the wig, but always carried quite uselessly under the arm (Best 1962).

What set Franklin’s notion of education apart was his insistence that a college draw students of ability from all social strata and actively and purposefully cultivate civic values in these students and provide them with the practical skills necessary to address the pressing problems of the day. In short, a central purpose of higher education was service to society and to the commonwealth.

Franklin’s blend of pragmatic civic idealism proved prescient. In the years immediately following the American Revolution, hundreds of colleges were founded with the express purpose of upholding the fledgling democracy (Rudolph 1962). In the nineteenth century, this sentiment found expression in the Morrill Act of 1862, which established land-grant colleges and universities. These institutions were intended not only to advance the mechanical and agricultural sciences but to expand access to higher education and to encourage active citizenship. For example, in 1873 the trustees of the Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Ohio State) said that they intended not just to educate students as “farmers or mechanics, but as men, fitted by education and attainments for the greater usefulness and higher duties of citizenship.” The Wisconsin Idea, which began in earnest in 1903, similarly underscored the ideal that universities can and should take an active role in spurring societal change. When Charles Van Hise became president of the University of Wisconsin, he and his former classmate Governor Robert La Follette resolved to make “the boundaries of the university...the boundaries of the state.”
When asked what spurred the progressive reforms that spread across the Midwest in the early twentieth century, Charles McCarthy, the first legislative librarian of the United States said “a combination of soil and seminar”—universities dedicated to solving pressing, practical problems and to fostering enlightened civic and political leadership.

REVIVING THE CIVIC IMPERATIVE
By the 1980s, however, this proclaimed commitment to civic engagement had grown increasingly hollow. In part this was because American higher education had dramatically changed. In the twentieth century, colleges and universities emerged as central societal institutions and were beset with many competing demands. In 1900, barely 4 percent of all high school graduates attended college. By 1970, that number had grown more than tenfold (45 percent). Fueled by grants from the federal government, universities expanded their research efforts and came to depend on these revenues for their financial stability. Undergraduate education took a back seat at many institutions. The reasons for attending college began to shift.

Economic purposes gained ascendancy. Data from an annual survey of more than 200,000 incoming freshmen by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA show that in 1969, 80 percent of incoming freshmen believed that developing a meaningful philosophy of life was a very important goal; by 1996, that percentage had diminished to 42 percent. In 1971, half of the students (49 percent) said they were attending college “to be able to make more money”; by 1991, that figure had climbed to three-quarters (74.7 percent). Increasingly, the public came to view a college education as a ticket to securing a good job—a private rather than a public good.

There was also a sense that our common life was being eroded, a state of affairs powerfully illustrated by political scientist Robert Putnam in the image of Americans “Bowling Alone” (Putnam 1995). Political engagement dramatically declined. Among college freshmen surveyed by HERI, the percentage who agreed that it is “important for me to keep up to date with political affairs” declined from 58 percent in 1966 to 26 percent in 1998. Electoral turnout among 18–24-year-olds declined from 42 percent in 1972 to 28 percent in 2000. In 1989, the American Political Science Association’s Task Force on Civic Education for the 21st Century concluded: “We take as axiomatic that current levels of political knowledge, political engagement, and political enthusiasm are so low as to threaten the vitality and stability of democratic politics in the United States.”

At many institutions any pretense at promoting political engagement or civic agency had receded into the background. As Frank Newman, then-president of the Education Commission of the States, tellingly argued in his seminal Carnegie report, Higher Education and the American Resurgence (Newman 1985), “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.” In a meeting with college and university presidents the following year, Newman observed that after having visited numerous campuses, he found faculty “remarkably resistant” to the idea that “they had a responsibility for more of their students’ education than simply the development of the students’ knowledge about their own discipline.”

This state of affairs—the changing nature of the academy, concerns over our fraying social capital, and anxiety over the future of our democracy—generated considerable dissonance within the academy. People began to act. First dozens then hundreds and finally tens of thousands of faculty members and administrators began actively pursuing the revitalization of the civic purposes of American higher education on their campuses and through a number of key associations (Hartley and Hollander 2005).

EMERGENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES
What emerged was a broad-based civic engagement movement. Civic engagement has proven to be something of an elastic term. For some it denotes any activity that involves groups or communities external to the academy. Others equate it with the cultivation of political knowledge or of political processes, and perhaps even a sense of political agency. Still others use the term to describe the development of democratic, creative, caring, committed citizens who actively contribute to creating a democratic, just society. The conception of civic engagement (and practices intended to promote it) has evolved considerably over the past two decades.

In the 1980s, civic engagement strategies focused squarely on volunteerism (often referred to as public service.) The
idea was that if we could get students into the community, they would develop a sense of social responsibility and thereby become better future citizens. The early 1990s saw a shift in strategy as individuals began advocating for the purposeful integration of community-based experiences and the curriculum (that is, service learning) (Kendall 1990). This approach proved immensely popular. The growth of Campus Compact, a national coalition of college and university presidents and a leading proponent of service-learning, underscores the degree to which this pedagogy gained currency. In 1985, Campus Compact was founded by three university presidents; today it has nearly 1,300 members, approximately a quarter of all colleges and universities in the United States.

Through the mid- and late 1990s a number of civic engagement efforts were undertaken. The American Association for Higher Education’s annual forum on faculty roles and rewards sought to promote a broader conception of scholarship, especially the scholarship of engagement—applying disciplinary expertise for the betterment of society (Boyer 1990, 1996). Another notable effort was the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ American Commitments project, which was launched in 1993 and over the next eight years worked with more than 160 institutions to grapple with the pressing challenges of preparing students to live in our diverse democracy. Many institutions of higher learning undertook significant curricular change efforts during the 1990s (as many as three-quarters by some estimates) and some of these sought to advance a wider public purpose (Hartley 2002). Some colleges and universities began experimenting with democratic deliberation—structuring dialogue and debate regarding local and national issues. That said, the predominant form of civic engagement on campuses was expressed programatically through volunteerism and service learning.

Service learning’s success can be explained in part because it proved to be a remarkably powerful pedagogy and a highly useful means of conveying disciplinary knowledge (Astin and Sax 1998; Eyler and Giles 1999; Stanton, Giles, and Cruz 1999). A student in an environmental science course not only reviews research describing the effects of industrialization, she helps measure them in her own city. A sociology student not only reads about homelessness, he helps design and conducts a census of the population and develops a richer understanding of who these individuals are. Data gathered from 22,363 students who participated in HERI’s freshman survey four years later show that participation in service learning influences participants’ choice of careers in service fields, increases awareness of community issues, imparts to students a sense of personal efficacy (“I can make a difference”), and fosters greater commitment to social activism (Astin and Sax 1998).

The transformational aims that drove the service-learning movement in its early years (Stanton et al. 1999), however, were increasingly tempered over time. For many service learning practitioners, acceptance by disciplines became an end, rather than a means to realize democratic educational and societal ends. Similarly, a narrow focus on student learning outcomes replaced the powerful animating goal that initially inspired the service learning movement; namely, to create a truly engaged academy dedicated to helping to create a more equitable and just society. The inclination to place the need for academic legitimacy as a primary goal of the service-learning movement was also reflected in debates regarding emergent institutional efforts around community and political engagement. While some individuals held that addressing pressing real-world problems and working in reciprocal and democratic partnerships with the local community ought to be the central work of the academy (Boyte and and Kari 2000; Harkavy 1996), others saw community impacts as a secondary and ultimately subsidiary consideration, a hoped-for byproduct.

By the late 1990s, the service learning movement had in a real sense lost its way—in practice at many institutions its purpose had become reduced to merely another pedagogical technique or method. The ideal of working to create a more-democratic society had become much less prominent (Harkavy and Benson 1998). Recognition of this state of affairs is reflected in the President’s Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, which grew out of a conference cosponsored by the American Council on Education and Campus Compact in 1999. (The document was ultimately signed by more than 500 college and university presidents.) It states:

We are encouraged that more and more students are volunteering and participating in public and community service, and we have all encouraged them to do so through curricular and co-curricular activity. However,
this service is not leading students to embrace the duties of active citizenship and civic participation. [...] We must teach the skills and values of democracy, creating innumerable opportunities for our students to practice and reap the results of the real, hard work of citizenship.

The implementation question is how specifically can a given institution (in our case a private research university) translate this broader and more-robust conception of democratic civic engagement into practice?

**RECOMMITTING TO FRANKLIN’S DEMOCRATIC VISION**

Penn’s experience in many respects reflects the evolution of the broader civic engagement movement. Over the past two decades many individuals—senior administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community partners—have collaborated in an effort to better fulfill Franklin’s far-reaching democratic vision, by developing democratic, mutually beneficial partnerships with communities and schools in the Philadelphia region, particularly in Penn’s local ecological community of West Philadelphia.

To offer one recent example of a region-wide effort, a few years ago Mary Summers, senior fellow at Penn’s Fox Leadership Program, developed a course with the assistance of the Netter Center for Community Partnerships. Professor Summers and her students began with a simple and powerful question: Why do only 60 percent of Philadelphia residents eligible for food stamps participate in the program? Partnering with the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger and the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND), a consortium of thirty-six colleges and universities in the greater Philadelphia area, Summers became principal investigator of a research project funded by the USDA that involved faculty and students from fourteen area colleges and universities (Porter, Summers, Toton, and Aisenstein 2008). Ultimately, the campaign screened 7,463 potential clients and enrolled 2,123 people. The research not only identified bureaucratic hurdles that prevented greater enrollment, but the data also were used to exert pressure to change policies in order to eliminate those barriers. (For example, County Assistance Offices expanded the use of phone interviews rather than requiring face-to-face interviews to become enrolled.) Helping someone eligible for food stamps enroll is a worthwhile service (and Summers and her collaborators certainly succeeded on that count), but collaborating with community members and local agencies across the Philadelphia region in conducting research and using the resulting new knowledge to challenge and change public policy is exemplary democratic civic engagement.

Increasing numbers of faculty and students have joined in these efforts. In 1991–2 three faculty members taught four academically based community service (ABCS) courses to approximately 100 students. In the 2007–8 academic year, fifty-nine ABCS courses were taught by forty-nine faculty from eight schools and twenty-one departments and involved more than 1,500 Penn undergraduate and graduate students.

Efforts are also now being made to assess the impact of such experiences on Penn students. In 2004, Penn political scientist Henry Teune began an experimental seminar on undergraduate democratic development and civic engagement. The course conceptualized and pretested items for a survey of Penn undergraduates. The survey has been employed five additional times and some other universities are now using the instrument to gather data. The survey, in the tradition of political socialization research, focuses on gathering data in several key areas: democratic values and dispositions, civic literacies and understandings, competencies and communication, and action and engagement. The data, though preliminary, are revealing and relevant to our discussion. First, democratic values are the most robust predictors of democratic engagement. Students who see the value in democratic decision making and have come to accept a measure of civic responsibility are far more likely to act on these convictions than those who have given scant thought to such issues.
CONCLUSION

Amy Gutmann, Penn’s current president, is a distinguished political philosopher whose scholarly work has explored the role universities play in advancing democracy and democratic societies. In her inaugural address on October 15, 2004, President Gutmann unveiled a comprehensive “Penn Compact” designed to advance the university “From Excellence to Eminence.” Although the compact’s first two principles—increased access to a Penn education and the integration of knowledge—have significant implications for our discussion, the third principle is particularly relevant:

The third principle of the Penn Compact is to engage locally and globally. No one mistakes Penn for an ivory tower. And no one ever will. Through our collaborative engagement with communities all over the world, Penn is poised to advance the central values of democracy: life, liberty, opportunity, and mutual respect. Effective engagement begins right here at home. We cherish our relationships with our neighbors, relationships that have strengthened Penn academically while increasing the vitality of West Philadelphia.

Penn as an institution is now strongly oriented to advancing democratic, civic work (Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett 2007). Needless to say, Franklin’s original vision of an institution dedicated to preparing a moral, engaged democratic citizenry cannot be fulfilled with a set of programs, no matter how extensive. It must become a central organizing principal of the institution, embedded in its DNA. And that is a primary goal of Gutmann’s Penn Compact.

To be true to this calling, Penn also needs to scrutinize the fruits of its labors: Can our graduates speak with a measure of authority on pressing policy issues, particularly those directly relevant to their majors? Are students equipped and encouraged to act on that knowledge through participatory problem solving learning? Penn, indeed each college and university, needs to examine how it goes about its everyday business. Mahatma Gandhi once famously observed that “The means are the ends in process.” We cannot foster democratic habits and dispositions among our students unless we model democratic behavior in our partnering with the community, in the workings of our deliberative bodies (the student government and the faculty senate), in the way we research, teach, and learn.

The bitter aftermath of Hurricane Katrina graphically revealed what Jonathan Kozol (2005) poignantly labeled “the shame of the nation”—the disasters of extreme poverty, persistent deprivation and pernicious racism that occur daily, and too often invisibly, across much of urban America. Tragically, many of these daily disasters occur right outside the ivy-trimmed walls of the nation’s foremost universities. Among the most significant and pressing challenges facing American higher education in the early decades of the twenty-first century is how can it powerfully and effectively contribute to radically reducing the pervasive, ongoing, seemingly intractable problems of our inner cities, as well as to radically reducing, in another poignant phrase from Kozol, America’s “savage inequalities.” Meeting that challenge would require a far more comprehensive and powerful form of civic engagement—one that is intent on changing higher education to help change society for the better. To borrow a phrase from the primary source of Franklin’s philosophy, Francis Bacon, the “rightly placed” goal, in our judgment, for American higher education is to help create a genuine participatory democracy so that America (finally) realizes the democratic promise of America for all Americans.

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strengthening the preparation of active citizens is important first and foremost because the future health of our democracy depends upon it. All too often we take for granted the continuation of America’s unique democratic system, and we do so at our peril. Colleges and universities have a large unmet responsibility in this regard. As Brian O’Connell has stated, “No leader or leadership institution—particularly no educator or educational institution—can presume that fostering active citizenship to prolong our democracy ... is someone else’s business.” (O’Connell 1994)

A less obvious reason to care about the civic engagement work of higher education is student demand. In increasing numbers, today’s undergraduates come to college expecting that community service and civic education be part of their undergraduate years (Kiesa et al. 2007). Twenty-seven percent of incoming undergraduates say there is a “very good chance” they will participate in community service—up from 17 percent in 1990 (Pryor et al. 2007).

We are in a period of escalating public criticism about the costs and productivity of higher education. Re-embracing the historic civic education role of higher education can play a part in addressing this challenge—by preparing future community leaders, undeniably an important public purpose and benefit.

There exists today increasing evidence that some forms of civic education also enhance students’ academic achievement in other subjects (Lee et al. 2000). Furthermore, improved civic education yields additional benefits to students’ personal and professional development. Political and civic engagement encourages ethical development and reflection. Engaged students are more likely to think about other people’s needs and interests, about the communities in which they are studying, about the purposes of their education, and about the obligations that come with their privileges. This is especially important now that success in college has such evident financial advantages, and there is such a strong ethos of careerism in higher education.

CAMPUS CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
A growing number of colleges and universities have developed impressive initiatives in civic and political participation (Brown and Witte 2008). These programs, many of them now reasonably mature and well-established, constitute a growing body of experience to learn from, models to adopt and adapt. Campus Compact, the nearly 1,300-member-strong national coalition of college and university presidents, makes readily available the civic engagement experience of its member institutions, which enroll six million students.

The civic engagement programs of colleges and universities represent a rich array of approaches: community service learning, selective leadership development groups, extracurricular activities, student voice in governance, internships and other external experiences, political research and action projects, bringing in role models, and political discourse events and processes (Colby et al. 2007). These diverse approaches show a broad range in orientation—from community service learning to education for political participation and civic agency. An increasing number of colleges and universities have taken significant steps to bridge the “service gap,” to encourage and guide student volunteers to take action on the root causes of the issues around which they are volunteers. At the same time, many ardent volunteers continue to eschew political participation, missing the opportunity to have a greater impact. This reality is a central challenge and opportunity.

Just within the last two years, institutions of higher education have moved into a new zone of financial and organizational commitment to their civic engagement work. Jonathan Tisch’s $40 million gift to name the Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University was followed quickly by the Lilly Endowment’s grant of...
movement—characterized by the factors noted above—provides a series of important opportunities to expand the scale of student participation and impact and to involve more students in political activism as well as volunteering. Political participation should include not only participatory acts (like voting) but coalition-building, analysis of complex situations, advocacy, communication, and organizing.

In this period of expanding opportunity, it is essential to be realistic and strategic about the persistent obstacles and challenges. These include the common bias in academia that public service programming is academically inferior, and concern that efforts to strengthen political participation tend to promote a liberal political agenda and to detract from other educational priorities.

Further, although some students seek opportunities for civic engagement and say that they want to become community leaders, “becoming well off financially” remains a far more common motivation for incoming students (Pryor et al. 2007). Many students have an interest in getting civically or politically involved, but worry about anything they perceive as distracting them from meeting academic or “purposeful” goals (Peter D. Hart Research Associates 2004).

Institutions that compete for undergraduates must emphasize economic benefits. Meanwhile, for many faculty, excelling within their own academic disciplines seems more important than labor-intensive local work with students and communities. Those who are motivated to be civically engaged scholars and teachers often face a lack of rewards and incentives (Gibson et al. 2006, Ellison and Eatman 2008).

STRATEGIES THAT HOLD PROMISE
The recent experience of colleges and universities that have the most robust and innovative civic engagement programs suggests a set of strategies that hold particular promise for advancing this work throughout higher education. We advocate the following fifteen-point approach:

1. Define political participation and civic agency broadly. This definition should include electoral politics and support the fundamental role of government, and also to support pathways to community change through nonprofit and private sector action (Colby et al. 2003; CIRCLE and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2006).

2. Integrate education for political participation across the curriculum. Involve all disciplines, not only the social sciences—in order to reach more students and also engage the insights and models of more fields of study. We need not only social science majors, but also future engineers, natural scientists, business people, doctors, journalists, and artists who are both competent in their professional roles and also are active, effective citizens.

3. Stop relegating civic engagement to the cocurriculum. Actualize the rich synergies between students’ curricular and extracurricular experiences.

4. More fully exploit the educational potential of cocurricular activities. Invest heavily in elevating what students learn by volunteering and through political activity.

5. Demonstrate that programming to elevate civic agency can lead to higher quality education. Political participation is important in and of itself, but proponents can garner additional support by demonstrating its broader educational benefits as well.

6. Involve all constituencies. Administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners all play substantial roles in the development of current effective models. Support collective leadership, and both top-down and bottom-up leadership. Some of the most powerful civic initiatives have been invented and organized by students. Community partners can be great coeducators.
7. Take advantage of student-produced news and information. This rapidly growing form of student democratic participation is one that will grow in its influence on students and on other constituencies as well.

8. Encourage students at different institutions to collaborate. Peer effects are powerful: by concentrating on young people who are civically engaged and academically successful on certain campuses, we strengthen their civic development (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). However, we also isolate them from much less engaged groups of students and young people, for whom peer effects may be negative. Deliberate efforts should be made to bring young people from different campuses together in civic projects.

9. Strengthen research about youth civic engagement. The further development of this area of research can support, guide and reinforce educational programming. This is a particularly important opportunity for research universities that, with a few notable exceptions, have been comparatively cautious in their civic engagement programming.

10. Attend to the international as well as the domestic context and dimensions of civic agency. Educate for global as well as local and national citizenship.

11. Work for real academic culture change, not just effective programs. Overall campus climate matters; it has a powerful effect on this dimension of student learning (Colby et al. 2007). The twenty-two authors of a consensus report on higher education and civic engagement in 2006 found that individual programs were common and effective, but “few colleges and universities today have thought through an overall framework for civic and political education that is comprehensive, coherent, conceptually clear, and developmentally appropriate” (CIRCLE and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2006).

12. Measure student learning outcomes. The civic engagement movement of higher education has been long on rhetoric, short on evidence. Treat the obvious methodological difficulties as an opportunity, not an excuse.

13. Take steps to elevate institutional citizenship, which can only reinforce educational programming. When institutional politics and practices are in tension with educational goals and values, students notice the contradiction and it undercuts their learning of civic values and skills.

14. Advocate for public policies that support this area of education, including financial aid tied to public service and increased funding for national service (highly effective federal initiatives that warrant greater investment include the Learn and Service Program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, and community placements in college work-study).

15. Pay more attention to what happens after students graduate. Take steps to reinforce their civic agency in the years after they receive their degrees.

**TUFTS’ APPROACH**

The development of the Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University illustrates the value of the strategies described above. The mission of the Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University, which illustrates the value of the strategies described above, is to educate students in all fields for lifetimes of active citizenship. The prospective result of this ambitious goal is a much greater scale of impact than if Tufts were to concentrate its civic engagement functions in a separate school or center. When the trustees voted in November 1999 to create what was originally called the University College of Citizenship and Public Service, they consciously rejected the “separate center” model and launched a university-wide virtual college. To deliver on this promise, Tisch College has employed an infusion strategy, working as a catalyst and a resource to integrate and elevate civic values and skills across the entire curriculum and across the whole university.

The development of Tisch College has been a process of collective invention by multiple groups—faculty, administrators, student, alumni and community partners. Our basic strategy has been to ensure that a decisive majority of students have multiple experiences—in courses, internships, and extracurricular activities—that cumulate and make active citizenship a significant part of their college or graduate school experience and that become a lifelong commitment. The combined effects of our multiple initiatives and interventions is making active citizenship a pervasive part of Tufts’ ethos, an essential part of our institutional DNA.

Tisch College supports faculty in all parts of the university to conceptualize active citizenship in terms that fit their disciplinary methods and traditions. We have had considerable success with a faculty fellows program—two-year, part-time appointments of faculty members from diverse fields, supported to lead curriculum development and engaged research in all schools of the university. The thirty-five faculty fellows program alumni have evolved into the adjunct faculty of Tisch College. Each term, more than one hundred undergraduate courses in arts and sciences and in engineering place significant emphasis on active citizenship values, skills, and knowledge. Graduate programs are implementing the same integrative strategy. A growing number of professors support this effort because they have personal experience that courses that incorporate active citizenship often enhance students’ learning of other material. Civil and environmental engineering professor
Chris Swan explains, "Students in my soil remediation class started learning the technical engineering content better after Tisch helped me to add a community service project to the class."

In addition, the provost and dean of the college are supporting the leadership of a network of a dozen endowed chairs that concentrate on public service. As we endeavor to inspire and guide the civic development of students, we have been impressed with the powerful impact of several courses that are taught by practitioners—distinguished public leaders who share their vision and experience, and whose role modeling reaches far beyond what even the most activist full-time faculty member can accomplish.

Our student programming features a flagship peer-leadership program for undergraduates called Citizenship and Public Service Scholars—eighty students from a broad spectrum of majors who receive civic leadership training and function as ambassadors and organizers to elevate the civic development of their fellow students. Like our sister institutions, Tufts is experiencing a much-increased student demand for paid public service and social change internships and summer projects. Through Tisch’s Active Citizenship Summers and other programs, Tufts supports more than one hundred students each summer to participate in internships and social change projects. Tisch College provides staff, organizational and financial assistance to several student partner organizations, including a one-thousand-student-strong undergraduate volunteer service society that is the largest extracurricular group on campus, to strengthen their capabilities and the civic learning of their members. The office of undergraduate admissions, which emphasizes active citizenship in its recruitment materials, reports that Tufts’ strong emphasis on this topic has attracted top students who otherwise would have chosen to attend other schools.

Students have initiated a pair of efforts that focus primarily on increasing political participation—a voter registration and education campaign called Tufts Votes! and the Institute for Political Citizenship, a program of policy internships in Massachusetts state government. We are documenting and analyzing the educational results of Tisch College programs through an elaborate longitudinal study that follows students into their initial years after graduating and through other surveys of a sample of sophomores and of all graduating seniors.

Tufts alumni have played a major role in building Tisch programs. They raise money to expand public service internships, mentor summer interns in five major cities, advise on program directions, guest lecture in classes, and provide public service career advice. Local alumni chapters around the world have developed strong service projects and the Office of Alumni Relations emphasizes active citizenship in its programming. Most recently, the university established a Loan Repayment Assistance Program to help graduates of all Tufts degree programs who work in comparatively low-paying nonprofit and public sector jobs to pay back their educational loans.

After initially concentrating entirely on educational initiatives, Tisch College has added civic engagement research to its mission, supporting scholarship about civic learning and citizen participation, and facilitating community-engaged research through the Tufts Community Research Center.

Dynamic presidential and provostial leadership has been a key part of the development of Tisch College. President Lawrence S. Bacow has made active citizenship one of three defining themes in the University’s strategic vision. Biannually, in his matriculation address the president gives entering students their first homework assignment: “Register and vote.” In order to magnify the college’s impacts, Provost Jamshed Bharucha elevated it to an organizational status equivalent to that of Tufts’ seven other schools. President Bacow convenes an Annual Presidential Symposium on Community Partnerships and each year presents Presidential Awards for Citizenship and Public to the dozen undergraduate and graduate students who have demonstrated the most outstanding civic leadership.

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How does a university prepare students to take active roles in democracy—roles beyond the ballot box—as engaged citizens who help frame both issues and solutions in communities, the nation, and the world? The question is an important one, especially given Robert Putnam’s thesis that Americans are no longer participating in the kind of vibrant civic life that is critical to the success of a democratic republic (2000). To counter the erosion of what Putnam calls “social capital,” universities have a responsibility to provide students with an education in active democratic citizenship. The University of South Dakota (USD) and its department of political science has worked to accomplish this through the creation of civic space outside of the classroom, the utilization of course learning objectives, and the promotion of a culture of civic engagement among faculty members in the department. Together, these efforts contribute to a more vibrant civic life among students, faculty, and members of the community at large.

**Creating Civic Space**

The concepts of civic space refers to places—social, physical, or even virtual—in which members of a community can come together and share in public. At USD, the creation of civic space is a key strategy in our efforts to provide students with an education in democratic citizenship and includes efforts to develop and support organizations, courses, processes, and a culture that contribute to the development of engaged citizens.

Several student organizations take responsibility for engaging students in ideas about democracy. One such example is the Political Science League (PSL), an engaged student organization that has hosted numerous public forums, and facilitates these discussions in a nonpartisan fashion. PSL forums typically receive strong attendance from USD students, faculty, and community members alike. Beyond these facilitated forums, PSL has a speaker series, a policy think tank, and actively participates in a broad set of campus functions developed by other organizations/institutions in the community. Its “Thursdays at Four” discussion group invites the campus community to informally discuss a difficult public issue with faculty and students for an hour, one afternoon a week.

PSL was started more than fifty years ago by W. O. (Doc) Farber, who strongly believed in developing “the background to know, the vision to see, the will to do.” Farber’s legacy in the department of political science and for PSL advances his belief that the keys to a happy and productive life are “participation, involvement and concern for others.” With this, the PSL’s goal is to present information to students and the community in a way that creates active discussion, and allows individual ideas and opinions to be formed and then questioned. The PSL does this through its many activities, all of which build a foundation for rational decisions of citizens and scholars alike.

Another key component of USD’s strategy for promoting civic engagement is the active support of two campus political party organizations, the College Democrats and College Republicans. For example, the College Democrats are encouraged by political science faculty mentors to maintain a close relationship with the county Democratic committee by providing needed labor for annual events and elections, as well as through facilitating the recruitment of students for campaigns by inviting candidates and leaders to campus. Students trade labor for free admission to state party events and created a statewide federation of College Democrats to coordinate statewide events. In nonelection years,
College Democrats take the initiative to educate the campus at large on a series of issues, including the American health care system and the Iraq War, by sponsoring related films, discussions, and events.

Similarly, the College Republicans at USD routinely engage in events and activities that have the effect of promoting political engagement among our students, such as the maintenance of a College Republican daily political blog. This online feature offers students political news and analysis that is generated by fellow students. It serves as a space in which our students can develop skills they carry with them after graduation to a life of active democratic citizenship. Additionally, over the past year, the College Republicans hosted the 2008 State College Republicans Convention on campus, which brought together Republican students, alumni, and leaders from across the state. This convention provided our students with the opportunity to network statewide with Republican leaders and fellow College Republicans. Finally, in addition to setting up voter registration drives, the College Republicans are substantively involved in local and national elections. This affords our students the chance to gain valuable experience with local, state, and national politics—often in paid positions or internships—and ultimately translates into meaningful postgraduation civic engagement.

Just as important as the individual activities of the College Republicans and Democrats are in the creation of civic space is the dialogue and cooperation that exists between the two organizations. An annual jointly sponsored policy debate, for example, provides civic space for students on either side of the political spectrum to engage in meaningful dialogue about the issues of the day. Likewise, the College Republicans and Democrats cooperate in sponsoring a “Last Chance All Night Voter Registration Drive,” which not only had the positive effect of increasing the number of registered voters, but also provided the opportunity for students to work actively together to promote civic engagement.

Of course, it takes more than the existence of organizations to create an activist student body. It has been critical for each organization to have a faculty mentor who meets with group leaders periodically to encourage them to think broadly about their role on campus and in the community. In addition, the department contributes the resources necessary to sustain such activities including speaker’s fees and the occasional pizza. Student groups often partner with departments and other organizations in order to obtain increased resources and a broader communication network to support events. These partnerships result in healthier turnout for civic and political events than would be possible with one sponsor. While more senior students can carry on the civic traditions, faculty input is necessary to maintain a strong, active civic culture.

Finally, the creation of civic spaces can be thought of literally, as well. What spaces on campus are congenial to the kinds of deliberative discussions that promote civic engagement? Is there a theater space that is flexible enough to accommodate both a film and the post-film discussion? Does the library’s interior space promote the formation of small group meetings? Is there conference space near faculty offices for small groups to meet with professors to organize and plan events?

The traditional university quadrangle is especially well designed to facilitate unplanned conversations among faculty and students from various departments and these are critical to communicating across departmental lines. Thus, facilities planning and architecture play an important role in structuring spaces where the university community can engage. Finally, if universities desire to engage the surrounding community, they must provide visitor parking. There are few greater discouragements to community participation than the inability to park.

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**UTILIZING COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

The political science department and the university also seek to make students more politically engaged through the utilization of political engagement course learning outcomes. The course Introduction to Research Methods, for example, incorporates an action research component. This emerging approach to teaching research methods recognizes that traditional pedagogical approaches are less effective than those in which students are active participants in the research process. Thus, students in this course take part in an ongoing exit poll that is delivered in the fall of even years (national and statewide election years), and analyzed and disseminated in following semesters. Students participate in developing
questions for the survey, delivering the in-person survey at several polling locations throughout the state, entering data from the surveys, analyzing the data and presenting findings to media and research audiences. This realtime and real-life experience in contemporary polling practices prepares students with a range of skills and values to carry forward in their life after the course. It is planned and executed as an experience in democratic citizenship from both philosophical and technical perspectives. One might easily call the class “Applied Democratic Theory,” rather than Introduction to Research Methods, as the lessons are more broadly conceived and presented as learning for democratic citizenship and engagement.

Another course example, Campaigns and Democracy, is designed to introduce students to practical politics and to reflect on the impact of campaigns on the quality of democracy. Candidates for political office and campaign representatives attend the first class of the semester in order to recruit students, who are then required to spend a minimum of eight hours a week working on a campaign until Election Day. During this period, the class focuses on practical campaign skills and utilizes a campaign manual as the course text. After Election Day, students focus on evaluating the extent to which the campaign system in which they have worked provides good governance and responsive democracy. Course alumni have successfully run for elected office and served as city council members and state legislators, and many have gone on to become political professionals working for candidates, political parties, and political consulting groups. The American Political Science Association has included the syllabus for Campaigns and Democracy in its model syllabus collection on political parties and elections.

In the university at large, the Interdisciplinary Education and Action (IdEA) Program requires that students take a six-credit course sequence that focuses on community, sustainability and justice issues, culminating in a community service project that applies course concepts to real life. The goal is to give students the experience of investigating important contemporary issues and devising a plan for responding proactively to an issue of interest. Thus, students take on local projects that take them beyond campus boundaries and experience the possibility of initiating action for the greater good under the guidance of a supportive faculty member. The IdEA Program is a graduation requirement and ensures that every graduate has had at least one opportunity to apply learning to public problems in a concrete way.

**PROMOTING A CULTURE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

In addition to creating civic space and incorporating learning objectives, a third strategy in preparing students for a life of active democratic citizenship is our conscious promotion of a culture of civic engagement. Of key importance here are efforts to identify faculty who are committed to, and have experience in, civic and political life; as well as creating structures that motivate and guide student involvement. Many universities have political organizations and clubs but do not enjoy quality, diversity, and attendance at civic and political events on campus nor student engagement off campus. We believe that it is USD’s culture of civic engagement that makes a critical difference in education for democratic citizenship.

One practical way in which the department of political science advances its desire for engaged faculty who value civic life is by making public service experience a desired qualification in all faculty position announcements. Additionally, the candidate screening process weights this kind of experience in evaluating candidate credentials. Thus, it is no accident that we have a faculty committed to civic and political engagement.

In turn, faculty involvement in civic activity provides a bridge from the campus to the community and civic spaces in which political engagement and awareness can be promoted among our students. For example, a faculty member who chaired the local historic preservation commission organized a class in which students learned to survey historic structures and research local history in preparation for a successful application to place the community’s downtown on the National Register of Historic Places. Another example includes a professor who taught a conflict-resolution class by working with students to create a volunteer mediation nonprofit. In each case, faculty members served as town–gown bridges linking the campus to the community, and created structures that motivated and guided student civic engagement.

**CONCLUSION**

Universities can create a rich civic culture that prepares students to contribute to community life in powerful ways by paying careful attention to the creation and use of civic space, the utilization of course learning objectives, and by promoting a culture of engagement. To that end, faculty mentoring of public-regarding organizations, courses that promote engagement with important public problems, the promotion of a civic culture on campus, and facilities that invite formal and informal interaction are key strategies in designing and implementing programs that prepare students for life in a democratic society.

**REFERENCE**

Prairie View A&M Students Walk the Walk of Political Engagement

Ronald D. Server, assistant professor, criminal justice program, Prairie View A&M University

It was a typical late winter day on the rolling hills of South Texas. But something was happening just over the horizon that was not business as usual. A group of students from Prairie View (PV) A&M University, a historically black college, were approaching the Waller County Courthouse, with banners and flags, chanting “No justice, no peace.” and “We shall overcome.” It was not a scene from the 1960s civil rights era, but one that took place in February 2008. More than one thousand PV students took to the streets to protest changes in early voting locations in the county, which they saw as a challenge to their right to participate in the Texas during primary elections this spring. This was not the first time that students from Prairie View have marched for their right to vote, and some in the community say it unfortunately may not be the last time.

Prairie View’s main campus is located forty-five miles northwest of Houston. Students at the university have been involved in a longtime dispute with local county officials that date back to the civil rights era. The current dispute centered on the Waller County’s plan to have only one early voting polling place, at the county courthouse, approximately seven miles from the campus, to accommodate all Waller County residents. Texas is one of a few states that have a designated period before the actual voting date to allow its citizens the opportunity to vote early and avoid the Election Day congestion. According to student leaders, this action would have created an undue burden on students’ ability to exercise their constitutional right to vote. Initially, county officials claimed that because of budgetary restraints, they could only afford to provide one location for all county residents—some twelve thousand citizens. Some residents would be forced to travel as far as thirty miles to cast their votes. Community activists, led by Judge DeWayne Charleston, a local justice of the peace, filed complaints with the Texas Attorney General’s Office and the U.S. Justice Department. But the wheels of justice grind slowly and as Election Day grew near, students decided to march to the courthouse on first day of early voting.

Community activists—like Judge Charleston, and other elected officials, including the mayor of the city of Prairie View, Frank Jackson, and student leaders, including student government association president Andre Evans—who were intimately involved in organizing the march. Coordination with local law enforcement agencies was paramount to ensure that the event would be peaceful and to limit as best as possible any disruption to the community. March organizers made arrangements with university officials to allow students to participate in the march without penalty on their academic work.

STUDENT VOTING RIGHTS IN WALLER COUNTY

How did the PV community get to this point? A brief review of the history involving student voting is necessary to understand the deep feelings on both sides of this issue. While attending Prairie View, the author was denied the opportunity to participate in the 1972 presidential elections, as was the entire student population during that time. Waller County was the last county in Texas to allow students to register and vote. Student voting rights were not obtained until after a long court battle over a number of years that eventually went to the U.S. Supreme Court for resolution. Ballas v. Symm, (351 F. Supp. 876) was filed in 1972, challenging, in the words of the writ, the Waller County tax assessor-collector’s “practice of requiring students who seek to register as voters in Waller County to complete what he denominates as a Questionnaire Pertaining to Residence, referred to herein as questionnaire.” The county claimed that the questionnaire was used as an aid in “determining whether an applicant is a bona fide resident”. Only students were required to complete this form.

The plaintiffs were successful, first in the District Court and the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals rulings that the county’s
actions were a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause and the Civil Rights Act of 1965. When the U.S. Supreme Court denied the county’s final appeal in 1979, students obtained the right to vote. Unfortunately, this decision by the court did not end the controversy.

In 1979, Waller County was the only county in Texas in which the majority of the county’s population consisted of African Americans even before counting students from the historically black university. At that time, some local residents expressed concern that the sheer number of minority voters might change the balance of political power in the area, particularly if the students were allowed to vote, resulting in a number of local offices being dominated by minorities and students. However, this fear was never realized in that after the initial euphoria of winning this long struggle, students became apathetic about voting. While there were some gains in minority officeholders—including the election of the first black county commissioner since Reconstruction and the appointment of a number of African Americans to municipal offices—we did not experience the dominance of student voting in local elections that was predicted.

Because of this unique history, any attempt by county officials to alter the delicate balance involving student voting was met with suspicion and concern about attempting to turn back the clock. This concern was evidenced in 1992 when then-District Attorney (DA) Buddy McCraig indicted nineteen Prairie View students for illegally participating in the 1991 general elections. According to the indictments, these students, who became known as the PV 19, voted twice — first in their hometowns and then in Waller County. Discrepancies in election records were the primary source of these indictments. Students and community activists viewed the DA’s action as an attempt toward voter intimidation. This litigation led Prairie View students to organize their first march, which became known as the PV 19 march, to demonstrate support for these students.

“The [2008] march was very similar to the PV 19 march in that the immediate objective was to get the students to vote,” Mayor Jackson recalls. “Once they (the students) came to realize that their votes mattered and that if they elected people that had their best interest in mind and would represent them, then they would better realize themselves as agents of positive change.”

The 1992 march was a peaceful demonstration without any incidents that featured both elected official and community activist speakers. The event brought needed public attention to the situation in Waller. As a direct result of the march, which increased the media’s and justice officials’ scrutiny of the students’ case, all nineteen indictments were eventually dismissed for lack of evidence. One case in particular turned out to be a father and son having the same name, voting in two different locations.

Twelve years later, in 2004, another Waller County district attorney, Oliver S. Kitzman, again challenged Prairie View students’ eligibility to register and vote, claiming again that they did not meet the residency requirements as defined in the election code of the state of Texas. According to District Attorney Kitzman, a number of complaints had been raised concerning voter fraud involving student voting, and he publicly questioned the legitimacy of residency of students. He challenged the interpretation of the Supreme Court decision granting residency rights to students in a letter to the editor of a local paper.

Despite contrary opinions by the Texas attorney general, the Texas secretary of state and the U.S. Justice Department, the district attorney’s opinion reignited the controversy that resulted in a second March on January 15, 2004, the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. Led again by Mayor Jackson and Judge Charleston, with other elected officials including State Representative Al Edwards and U.S. Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, two thousand students made the trek from campus to the courthouse. This controversy was eventually resolved with the resignation of the district attorney, but lingering suspicions remained.

The 2006 General Elections had its own controversies. More than 700 votes at the Prairie View Polling Station were challenged because they were cast without proper voter registration verification. The majority of these votes were cast by students who had registered thirty days prior to Election Day but had not received their voter registration cards. After the election, a number of unprocessed voter registration applications were uncovered in the Election Office. The county election officer was removed and an ongoing investigation was commenced by the Texas Attorney General and the Justice Department.

**THE 2008 MARCH**

The decision by the commissioner’s court to only provide one polling place for early voting in 2008 for twelve thousand...
residents of Waller County caused an immediate response from community activists in Prairie View. Formal complaints were filed with the Texas Secretary of State and the U.S. Justice Department, and activists decided to embark upon another march to draw public attention to this perceived attempt at voter suppression.

Working with student leaders and university officials, the 2008 march was scheduled to take place on February 19. Meanwhile, the commissioner’s court, in an emergency meeting the day before, agreed to open three additional early voting sites, including one at the Prairie View Community Center. Students had demanded a site on campus, but the community center was seen as a compromise in that it was a mile from the campus and within walking distance. Despite the court’s actions, organizers decided that the march would go forward.

More than one thousand students and supporters participated in the march that day without incident. Upon arrival at the courthouse, the marchers were greeted by other community leaders and supporters. A number of persons voted while others listened to political speeches extolling the virtues in exercising their constitutional rights. At the end of the day, more than five hundred students had voted, according to Judge Charleston, and “an additional one thousand students voted during the primary election.”

Because of this history, a legacy of political activism has been created at Prairie View. From their first day on campus until graduation, students are constantly reminded of the struggle for equal voting rights at Prairie View. Through their history and political science classes, they are exposed to the history of the civil rights era in this country, but also to the struggles that have taken place on our campus.

Criminal justice professor Edward Schauer, a two-time veteran of the marches, once said that our role as teachers is more than just ensuring that students have a basic knowledge of the subject matter. “We are in the business of creating ‘change agents’ whose task is to question and in some cases, challenge the status quo, when an injustice is perceived,” Schauer explains. Students take with them the experiences of marching for justice back to their hometowns and communities. Craig Watkins, the current Dallas County district attorney and a PV graduate and marcher, recently made national news when he opened the district attorney’s files to the Innocence Project, a national litigation and public policy organization dedicated to exonerating wrongfully convicted people. This examination of prior criminal convictions resulted in twelve men being released from prison after they had been wrongfully convicted. Watkins learned an important lesson in his tenure at Prairie View—that it is not always politically advantageous to challenge the status quo, but sometimes you have to “take it to the streets.”

Like Watkins, today’s Prairie View students have learned much about the value of political engagement through marching for their right to vote. After graduation, along with their degrees, those Prairie View students will take with them a sense of how their actions can make a difference as they remain ever vigilant in guarding their rights as citizens of this country.

**REFERENCES**


Democracy Matters at Colgate University

Joan D. Mandle, associate professor of sociology and anthropology Emerita, Colgate University; executive director, The Democracy Matters Institute

Colgate University students have been actively engaged in working to deepen democracy and promote civic engagement among their peers since 2000, when they formed a campus chapter of the nonpartisan national student organization, the Democracy Matters (DM) Institute. DM is a nonpartisan organization of students and professors working on seventy or more campuses across the country each year to educate people about the role of private money in politics, and its negative impact on democracy.

Colgate's Democracy Matters (DM) chapter holds weekly educational and planning meetings. This past year’s activity included a variety of outreach events both on campus and in the local community, including lectures, brown bag discussions, a pro-democracy concert, “DemROCKracy,” and a series of events during two “Fair Elections Weeks of Action”—one week in November and the other in April. DM members published op-eds and articles in the campus newspaper, held student empowerment training sessions, produced a video shown in the campus center, registered their peers to vote, invited local politicians to campus to discuss important issues, organized a “Speak Out” rally on the main quad, traveled to local high schools to teach American government classes about the role of money in politics, and went door-to-door in the local town of Hamilton talking to residents about why democracy matters.

During the year, Colgate DM activists met, exchanged ideas, and often collaborated with representatives of national nonstudent citizen organizations, such as Common Cause, as well as with other Democracy Matters chapters from across the country. With other DM students, they participated in the three-day 2007 Democracy Matters Summit, attended by over one hundred students. And this year’s graduating Colgate Democracy Matters intern, like many other DM alums over the years, has chosen a career path that continues her active involvement with political engagement. She is working as a health care reform organizer with a New York nonpartisan grassroots citizen’s organization.

THE FOUNDING OF DEMOCRACY MATTERS

The Democracy Matters Institute was founded by three Colgate University professors and one of their former students, Adonal Foyle. Foyle was drafted into the National Basketball Association (NBA) in 1997, and three years later he invited several faculty to help him start a national student organization that would give students a voice in the effort to change the way political campaigns are funded.

Foyle reasoned that the apathy and cynicism about politics he had experienced among his fellow Colgate students resulted from their belief (widely shared in the society) that big campaign donors largely control the political agenda and that as a result ordinary citizens’ voices—especially students—are ignored. Foyle believed he could spark enthusiasm for political and civic engagement by enlisting students to organize around the links between the need for campaign finance reform and issues like the environment, health care, rising college tuition and interest on student loans, foreign policy, and others. By establishing DM chapters on multiple college campuses that would educate others on the issue of money and politics and actively involve fellow students as advocates for deepening democracy, Foyle hoped to stimulate lifelong patterns of civic and political engagement among young people.

Democracy Matters was born out of these concerns. Since 2001, the organization has had active chapters on more than five hundred college campuses in twenty-six states. These have included small private liberal arts colleges such as Colgate and Scripps, large public universities like Ohio State and the campuses of the University of California, historically black colleges like Winston-Salem and Morehouse, women’s colleges such as Smith and Mount Holyoke, religiously affiliated campuses like Calvin College, community colleges like California’s De Anza and New York’s Ulster County, urban schools like the University of Denver, and rural campuses like St. Lawrence. Each spring, the Democracy Matters Institute receives applications from hundreds of undergraduates for one of its seventy DM paid Organizing
for Social Change internships, to be awarded for the following academic year. The DM Board of Directors reviews applications and selects seventy interns. Only one student from each campus may be selected. The colleges included in the program in any one year are those attended by selected interns. (Information on applying for a DM internship is available at www.democracymatters.org.)

DEVELOPING LIFELONG CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Colgate’s Democracy Matters activities are typical of the organizing work of other DM chapters. Over the years we have found that many factors influence the success of a chapter, its longevity, and its ability to engage students. One important determinant is that students are in charge of selecting their own mix of activities. Each intern, along with chapter members, takes responsibility for creating a strategic plan for the semester. The DM Web site (www.democracymatters.org) offers detailed descriptions by interns of activities carried out on their campuses, but each chapter is encouraged to come up with its own ideas. In order to support this process, each DM intern is assigned a member of the Democracy Matters Institute field staff—themselves young people who have experience in campus organizing—for brainstorming and for help in planning and implementing successful events. Interns have a weekly phone check-in with their staff “link,” and staff travel to campuses each semester as well. Staff are trained to be mentors—even “teachers.” Their goal is to build in students the skills and leadership ability necessary for developing lifelong civic engagement. In sum, while students are given responsibility for organizing on their own campus, they do so with continuous and individualized support and ongoing training.

Another important factor concerns the role of the university itself. Some colleges and universities encourage and indeed facilitate civic and political engagement among their students while others remain more neutral. However, at some schools with the administration to create a program that encouraged all first-year students to register to vote. Democracy Matters students were invited to return to campus before the regular academic year began in order to participate in First-Year Orientation and implement their program. In addition, as part of the university’s ongoing support for student organizations, the Colgate DM chapter, like other clubs, is able to request a budget to support its activities, use campus facilities for meetings and events, and utilize the expertise and help of Colgate’s activities staff in both planning and implementation. Also important has been the involvement of Colgate faculty, who are often willing to participate in Democracy Matters-sponsored events. Examples include a recent successful teach-in where each of five faculty briefly described an important issue facing society (global warming, food contamination, the war in Iraq, educational policy, and increasing poverty), and a member of the Democracy Matters Institute speaker’s bureau then discussed how each of these issues was related to the role of private contributions to political campaigns and what students could do to support change.

OTHER LESSONS LEARNED

We have learned many other lessons in our eight years of campus organizing, but three in particular stand out. The first is recognizing the importance of campus coalitions. Democracy Matters chapters have grown and been effective because they reach out not only to individuals on campus but to groups as well—regardless of their political affiliation. Because DM’s mission is nonpartisan, chapters
can appeal to and attract students with diverse interests and concerns. Last year at Colgate, for example, Democracy Matters students arranged to present ideas to a variety of student groups about how they might work together. They built relationships not only with explicitly “political” groups, but also with those concerned with specific issues and also with groups involved in volunteer service activities. DM members spoke at a meeting of a campus environmental group, explaining how working together for campaign finance reform would impact U.S. environmental policy, and they also attended a meeting of The Brothers, an African-American student organization, to discuss public financing as a remedy for the frequently underfinanced political campaigns of low-income candidates. This outreach has often led to groups participating in each others’ events and continuing to collaborate. Given the balkanization of most campuses into different groups and causes, bringing students together to talk and act politically is of great importance.

Another lesson has been the importance of a positive message. Faculty and students at institutions like Colgate excel in developing critical thinking, and this is of course important. But being only critical tends to depress rather than encourage student activism and involvement. Democracy Matters at Colgate has been successful because students have not only offered a critique of large private political contributions as a danger to our democracy, but also explained how students can make a concrete, practical difference by helping to create a fairer system of campaign funding. Democracy Matters students at Colgate create events to educate others about the public financing of election campaigns as a positive solution to the problem of special-interest money in politics. For example, they ran a weeklong educational poster campaign that illustrated the way public financing creates a level playing field among candidates and allows people who are not wealthy—including students—to run for office.

One important aspect of the DM message is that students can make a difference politically. By pointing to the fact that full public financing has been implemented in seven states and two cities in the United States, where ordinary people have effectively changed the campaign funding system and enabled citizens from all walks of life to run for office, students can see the tangible results of active political engagement. Colgate DM members share the message that the political process in a democracy can work for students rather than exclude them. They emphasize examples of how others, like themselves, have succeeded in creating successful political reform. Many students tell us that they had given up on politics before learning about public financing of campaigns. This positive content—offering hope for real and workable solutions to a political problem—is critical for sustaining student involvement.

A final lesson is the importance of encouraging students to think long-term and beyond their own campuses. For many undergraduates, their campus and their friends are their whole world, and they are reluctant to venture afar or to think too much about their lives after graduation (except perhaps with anxiety). By encouraging students to create links between their campus activities and ongoing groups and issues in the wider community and world, a different kind of learning takes place. Specifically in this coming academic year—an election year—the Democracy Matters Institute will emphasize the importance of knowing about and participating in the 2008 election. Colgate students as well as other DM chapters are already planning to work with other campus groups to disseminate information on candidates’ views (including their positions on campaign finance reform), and to help to register students and then bring them to the polls on Election Day. But equally important for DM will be an effort to encourage students to think about what will happen—and what role they can play—after election day. Democracy Matters students will be creating events to explore the broader and deeper issues that this election is raising—problems that will continue well beyond November. They will encourage their peers to remain involved in influencing important ongoing policy discussions, in communicating with their representatives, and in being proactive on the issues they care about beyond Election Day and indeed beyond graduation. Undergraduate activism in Democracy Matters provides a model for, as well as information about, involvement with national civic and political organizations. This experience can facilitate students’ post-college transition to becoming lifelong politically engaged citizens.

Democracy Matters’ focus on democratizing the political process by implementing public financing of campaigns has captured not only the enthusiasm but also the concern for the future that characterizes many college students. Students often don’t know how to express that concern, and today’s political system can seem alienating, confusing, and difficult to influence. By training, supporting, and involving them in working on a concrete and pragmatic political change that affects many issues they care about, Democracy Matters’ program helps students understand not only how active citizens can succeed in creating a more responsive political system but also how they personally can play an important role in that process.
American government is the only course that all students are required to take while earning their degrees at Michigan's Oakland Community College (OCC). This unique status brings with it scrutiny from a number of groups: students from every academic and technical field, many of whom approach the course with less-than-fond memories of the American government class required for a high school diploma; collegewide review committees, who periodically wonder if the stand-alone status of this course is still justified after more than forty years; and local business and government leaders who seek employees and citizens who will participate in the political process with high interest and acumen.

As is the case with most classes, students will get more out of studying American government if they understand its importance and practicality in their everyday lives. Similarly, faculty outside the political science discipline and the larger community will develop an appreciation and enthusiasm for the work accomplished in the class if they have an opportunity to understand and witness the benefits the course brings to the college and to society as a whole. By developing a curriculum that is rich with both principles and application, American government teachers can overcome the initial cynicism that surrounds the course and provide students with the knowledge and experience needed to counter the cynicism that often permeates public attitudes toward government and the political process.

**Finding Relevance in Everyday Political Experiences**
The first step in developing relevance is to make sure students fully understand the depth of their daily political experiences. At OCC’s Auburn Hills campus, all class sessions include time to discuss current political events, and give students opportunities to sharpen their critical thinking and communication skills. This proves to be important, since many students use news sources that offer a surface view of current events, and observe political discussions that involve more chair throwing than respectful listening. The recent Democratic primary elections, in which the Democratic National Committee ruled that Michigan’s pledged delegates and superdelegates would not count in the nominating contest after Michigan moved its primary to January, served as a perfect opportunity to relate the fundamentals of political parties to today’s world. It also created an opportunity to discuss the relationship between political parties, the Constitution, and the attitudes of the Founding Fathers toward parties. By including these discussions, and assigning students the task of finding recent newspaper articles focused on government fundamentals, teachers give students the chance to reflect and respond to a variety of political issues, and to those holding differing viewpoints on those issues.

Once these individual skills are sharpened, there are many ways the classroom can be utilized to politically engage students, beyond the traditional lecture technique. Based on an experiential pedagogical approach, one set of exercises asks students to identify concerns that are relevant to them and act on those concerns, first at an individual level, and then to higher levels of collective engagement such as student issues conventions. One very successful *individual-level* technique has been an exercise that challenges a student to identify an issue that concerns him or her, and to “take action” on the issue in the political community. The scope of that political community is linked to the specific concern of the student. For example, political communities can be conceptualized at the local level when students choose an issue like getting a stop sign on a street corner, which requires communication with local government officials. The political community moves to a different level when students select broader concerns such as environmental issues,
which often requires contact with state, national, and global-level administrators and institutions.

While frequently students express frustration with the “exercise,” they nonetheless discover what to do if they have a problem, and how levels of government can function to assist and sometimes thwart addressing whatever set of concerns the student identifies. Students are required to write a short reflective assessment of the exercise, which allows them to reflect on their individual efforts, and enables at least a crude measurement at the instructional level regarding the usefulness of the exercise. This exercise can take on life-changing proportions for some students; as a direct consequence of completing this project, some OCC students had the opportunity to work on national presidential campaigns, and a few went on to run for their own political office. One student was also offered employment as a congressional aide.

In addition to this exercise, students engage in voter registration and education at a variety of levels. In addition to registering themselves, students in some classes are required to assist an eligible voter to become a register voter. While some students are initially overwhelmed by this assignment, they soon become surprised to find a wide array of friends, families, and new neighbors who are often motivated to register only because the students invited them.

During an electoral cycle, students staff voter registration and information tables. The tables include voter registration forms and either the option to fill out the form (students deliver completed forms to the county clerk before the deadline) or to take the form with them. Students also distribute voter guides published by the League of Women Voters. During the 2006 electoral cycle, almost one thousand guides were distributed and hundreds of voters were newly registered as the result of the tables staffed by students.

For the 2008 electoral cycle another major effort is scheduled at OCC. Students note how fulfilling it can be to staff the tables, register voters, and discuss issues during an actual election season. The only challenge is to organize the effort quickly, as Michigan voters must be registered within a month before the election.

**TRANSCENDING CLASSROOM WORK THROUGH VOTER EDUCATION ACTIVITIES**

Another voter education activity that has been used is Political Awareness Day. Students go into the community and find a candidate, interest group, or political party willing to come to OCC to participate in a political “fair.” Each participant is given a table to display his or her message to students in the OCC student center. Lasting for a full morning, Political Awareness Day gives local political entities exposure to thousands of students as they traverse the campus. Participants may share their political views, seek volunteers for membership or other activities, and raise public awareness of their existence. Political Awareness Day is promoted in the local newspapers and is open to the public as well.

Students also have the opportunity to work in groups that transcend classrooms and even colleges to advance their political concerns to elected officials, especially during elections. One successful technique used here at OCC has been organizing a campus student political issues convention, based on the model posited by Feinstein (1997). The project begins when students in each political science class develop a list of concerns or issues they would like to see addressed by government officials, or issues neglected by government (or even issues the government should NOT be involved in). The process of developing a class agenda takes approximately thirty minutes, depending on how involved the students get in terms of debate on relevant issues and how they reach a consensus on the actual class agenda (typically, a process of majoritarianism is agreed to by the class as the way to reach consensus).

Once the class has reached a decision on its agenda, it can be used as a basis to extend discussion on particular issues and form research groups that focus on one particular topic, and later, as an introduction to the eventual student issues convention. At the campus convention, participating instructors, classes, and institutions come together to reach consensus and share their research. Once a set of rules have been agreed upon and after all issues have been presented, participants meet in caucuses to select the topics of greatest interest and significance. The whole group then votes on the issues brought forth from the caucuses,

[Students] soon become surprised to find a wide array of friends, families, and new neighbors who are often motivated to register only because the students invited them.
the emphasis on interaction; rather than a simple recitation of what the students have discovered, the goal of the presentation is to create audience interest in the topic, much like a legislator attempts to create consensus with colleagues in the real world. In emphasizing the goal of group interaction, the presentations and the caucus sessions are designed to generate discussion, requiring facilitators and audience members alike to fine-tune their skills of critical thinking and interpersonal communication. The agenda-setting exercises and the research projects begun in the classroom create an expectation for a higher level of discourse, one a student may have never been exposed to in his or her adult life. The presentations and caucus sessions also create an opportunity for students to sharpen the most essential tools of democracy—listening, finding common ground, and agreeing to disagree civilly. If the exercise is used in class, the agenda developed earlier in the semester can be revisited and explored after in class presentations. If the effort is linked to the larger collective convention exercise, students get to experience delivering their presentations to communities beyond the classroom and interact in caucus sessions comprised of participating classes, instructors, and institutions that cross regional boundaries.

INTERCOLLEGIATE POLITICAL ISSUES CONVENTIONS

Taking the student political issues convention to an intercollegiate level has been a challenging and beneficial experience at OCC. In cooperation with their peers at Henry Ford Community College and other local colleges, universities, and high schools, OCC students have participated in a number of conventions. In 2006, OCC students presented workshops at a convention at HFCC and were able to interact with other participating students from across Oakland and Wayne counties. Through discussions between instructors across institutions before the semester began and integration of the convention into the class syllabus, the basic challenge is to bring participants into the project and ensure that students show up on the day of the convention. In one class, the convention date was approximately at the same time as the class meeting, so the event was essentially a “field trip” for that scheduled class meeting. For other classes, it becomes a bit more challenging. Sometimes incentives can be created by offering extra credit, or the class can collectively agree at the start of the semester to participate in the convention. In either scenario, a bit of preparation is involved, framed by two key variables: integrating the exercise itself into the class syllabus and working with other educators well before the semester begins. Preparations for a national Student Political Issues convention in October 2008 are already underway between OCC and HFCC, along with an expanded effort to bring in more participants from across the United States after all participating institutions have held their regional conventions. Using synchronous and asynchronous venues, OCC and HFCC hope to bring students’ concerns—both regionally here in southeast Michigan and nationally—to political actors via presentation of the national and regional agendas to those running for office at conventions and through other forums, like student-organized candidate interviews and Web-based forums such as Facebook, Yahoo groups, and other Internet forums.

Student evaluations of American government classes often cite the real-world activities as a course highlight; faculty colleagues bring their classes to Political Awareness Day and support students in their individual projects; college administrators and civic leaders welcome the ties these activities reinforce between the college and the larger community. By keeping an eye on the end goal of greater civic engagement and civic literacy, American government instructors at OCC’s Auburn Hills campus have discovered the best means is the end, and that practice moves everyone—students, faculty, college, and community—to a greater appreciation of empowerment and opportunity.

REFERENCE

Value-Added Learning

- Yvette Alex-Assensoh, associate professor of political science, Indiana University-Bloomington; and a member of the Indiana State Bar Association.
- Mary Ryan, president, the Washington Internship Institute

For a growing number of American college and university students, the fundamental aspects of higher education are not enough. Frequently, students desire some advanced learning that takes them beyond the boundaries of pristine college campuses to the high-stakes environment of the nation’s capital, where political and ethical conflicts of monumental proportions are waged daily. (What happens in Washington usually does not stay in Washington.) In this essay, we explain the ways in which well-structured internship programs can be the bridges that equip students with the skills necessary to move beyond the campus based delivery to a different stratosphere of more complex and applied learning. In such programs, students learn to compete effectively in today’s marketplace and responsibly engage in our multiracial American democracy.

**FACILITATING EXTRAORDINARY LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

Most students coming to Washington, DC, will have an extraordinary experience in a variety of areas. It is not unusual to overhear visiting student comments such as: “I saw one of my senators!” or “I didn’t expect so many homeless people in our nation’s capital.” But an extraordinary experience is not necessarily a learning experience. In well-structured DC-based academic internship programs, students not only have unusual experiences, but experiences that lead to applied learning. Well-structured programs include seasoned faculty who understand theories of student development and learning. Such programs will be complemented by the best practices of teaching and learning: critical reading, analytical thinking, engaged classroom experience, reflection, self direction, and analytical writing. These students will not only ask questions like, “Why is there human trafficking?” but they will be challenged to explore the problems associated with such practices and work in organizations that address the issue. As a result of this type of applied learning, the issue of human trafficking becomes real and the student works in a policy organization to alleviate the problem.

**CULTIVATING KNOWLEDGE IN THE WORLD AROUND THEM**

One of the fascinating things about well-structured internship programs is that they inspire student interest in the larger world. Students frequently report that they have never read a daily newspaper before coming to Washington. In participating in the internship program, however, students realize that there is a cost to ignorance—discussions in Washington almost always lead back to politics. Students quickly realize the value of being informed, and this lesson stays with them long after they finish their internships. In this sense, the learning that occurs in well-structured internship programs generates increased engagement among students, which is an important resource for social capital and American democracy.

In fact, after realizing their own need for involvement, students generally report one of two different points of view about their Washington internship experience. Either they expect and are motivated by political discussions, or they are surprised at how many people have political opinions, which makes them feel left out. Most of these students realize the need to know more and to learn about the pressing domestic and international issues as quickly as they possibly can. They also realize that they cannot
escape political discussions. In order to be truly engaged, they have to express opinions; think about what people are saying, writing, and doing; and analyze the issues. They quickly realize that they cannot simply rely on their parents’ political views, and that they are increasingly motivated to inquire about the “big questions” that were irrelevant to them in the safe environment of their college campuses: “Why do we have a trade deficit, and is that okay?” or, “How can I find out what the budget is for international development?” One student asked: “What government agency is responsible for human rights?” It is in this sense that the learning inspired by well-structured Washington internship programs is like a gift that keeps on giving, because it changes students in ways that have the potential to change others around them as well.

AN ENDLESS ARRAY OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
Completing an internship experience as part of their undergraduate education, or right after graduation, gives students motivation, skills, and knowledge they can carry to the professional world. DC internships provide students with examples of what they do not know. And in almost every case, the intern is motivated to find out more about the problems or issues, and how to develop the skills in order to get the job done. In one example, an intern spent almost a week doing research on women judges around the world. At the end of the week she came upon a Web site as well as an organization that represents women judges. With this discovery, the intern became frustrated that she had spent so much time finding out from various sources what the one source could have provided. In class, when asked about the experience and what she had learned, the student replied, “Work smarter, not harder.”

Professional writing is often a challenge for students in internship programs. When asked to do a summary of a long report, the supervisor often wants the summary to be one page or two pages at the most. Most students struggle with how to concisely convey the material and not miss major points. Students asked to draft speeches or talking points have rarely had such an assignment for their courses; they must learn the finer points either by researching, reading, or talking with staff members who have completed such assignments.

The specialized knowledge that students gain during their internships is progressive, experience-based, and far deeper than they realize. Upon arriving in Washington, they probably will know very little about the actual content and mission of an organization. Frequently by the end of the semester, students gain significant, almost expert, knowledge and considerable understanding of an issue through their work and research in well-structured internship programs.

INCUBATORS OF CREATIVE POLICY AND RESEARCH INSIGHTS
For students interested in policy, it is a truly eye-opening experience that through their DC internships, they may influence policymaking decisions. With researched and careful internship placements, students can immediately be involved in policy-making. Recently, a student from South Dakota was placed with the United Nations Association of the capital area. One of his assignments was to set up a Hill briefing day. His job was to make appointments with congressional representatives and “tell the UN story.” The student returned to South Dakota with every intention of chartering a UN chapter in his home state.

In well-structured internship programs, students are able to translate their Washington immersion learning—their internships—into strategies for their own communities or states. Their internships in Washington might end, but their involvement with larger issues and the big questions will continue. Once in the professional world, former interns have run for local office, become staff members at the local Red Cross, worked on education policy, or have been impelled to learn more by going on to graduate studies or law school.

YOUTH ARE OUR FUTURE
But there is another aspect to Washington that is very exhilarating to students. Washington is a youthful city. Many young people who work in the nation’s capital have very responsible positions. On Capitol Hill, this is particularly true—Hill staffers are powerful individuals who research and write policy. Staff members often serve as gatekeepers to elected officials. The opportunity for students to make their mark on the Hill is evident, since most junior staffers are hired right out of college and staff turnover is constant. Senior staffers are often in their late twenties or maybe in their early thirties. There are very few staffers who have touches of gray hair.

Whether the internship is in government or other organizations, the influence of youthful exuberance and optimism is strongly felt. The research assistants, the deputy directors, the coordinators or directors of various departments are all in their twenties or early thirties. These young people do policy research on issues, and they influence decisions.

The assumption that interns don’t do “real work” is just wrong. The influence interns have as part of the workforce in the nation’s capital and in a range of occupations in government, associations, and other organizations is remarkable. Interns have done medical research, assisted the president’s chief of staff, organized events, raised significant
funds, and passionately worked for policy issues such as global warming, oil drilling in Alaska, (or not drilling in Alaska), and endless other examples. One of the students at WII served as the acting desk officer for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs at the State Department. These are examples of unparalleled experiences taking students into areas where the college curriculum could not take them.

**SOCIETAL BENEFITS**
Students who have completed internships in DC increase their knowledge of how our government works and how the United States influences global relations and economies. It is the kind of learning that broadens their perspective on life and their place in society. The former interns are more likely to engage in civic activities and to care about the quality of life in their communities. They are more likely to vote, to do volunteer work or community service.

More than half of the intern alumni report that they are optimistic about the future. Over half report that they believe they can change the world, whether on a macro level of large scale change or on the micro level of incremental change. It is inspiring to know that these young professionals believe passionately in a bright future for themselves and our society. In this sense, the learning that is facilitated by well-structured internship programs is a gift that keeps on giving in the form of long-lasting societal benefits that continually renew and inspire democratic activity and engagement among our citizens.

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**Washington Internship Institute: An Example of Complex and Applied Learning**

The Washington Internship Institute (WII) structures the student’s course of studies in such a way that experience informs knowledge, and that knowledge contributes to experience. Internships provide specialized experiential learning, and the Institute’s seminar guides the student in combining the reflectiveness and insight of classroom sessions with the vicarious learning through hearing other students’ experiences. Students who attend WII are generally high-achieving risk takers who want to increase their knowledge and skill development. They want to know what they can do with their education. WII is the bridge between on-campus learning and growing into their professional lives. For information see: www.ielnet.org.

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**Internship Opportunities**

For students who want to get involved and gain real-world experience, internship opportunities related to political engagement are available at a host of organizations. Listed below is just a small sample of internships available for college students of all levels.

**1Sky**
1Sky’s mission is to communicate a positive vision and advocate a clear, simple set of goals and policy initiatives necessary to stabilize the endangered climate. This group’s offices are located in the metropolitan Washington, DC area in Takoma Park, MD.
www.1sky.org/files/1sky_internship.pdf

**Americans for Informed Democracy**
Americans for Informed Democracy interns work in the fields of global education, global development, global health, environmental sustainability, peace and security, nonprofit management and arts and activism. This group’s offices are located in Baltimore, MD.
www.aidemocracy.org/internships.php

**Campus Progress**
Campus Progress works to help young people—advocates, activists, journalists, artists, and others—to make their voices heard on issues that matter. Campus Progress is based in Washington, DC.
Campusprogress.org/about/1849/internship-program

**The Cato Institute**
Interns with the Cato Institute, a public policy research organization, work on a range of issues that relate to market-liberal solutions for the full range of policy issues. Offices are located in Washington, DC.
www.cato.org/jobs/intern/index.html

**Green Corps**
Founded by U.S. PIRGs in 1992, Green Corps is a graduate school for environmental organizers. The one-year Green Corps program intersperses intensive classroom instruction with multiple campaign efforts. The program is based in Boston, MA.
www.greencorps.org

**The Heritage Foundation**
The Heritage Foundation introduces student interns to the policymaking process and encourages them to become active and effective participants in public affairs. Offices are located in Washington, DC.
www.heritage.org/About/Internships/
Political Engagement in the Age of Facebook: Student Voices

AARTI SHETH, junior
State University of New York-Stony Brook
Political science major

What factors influence you to get involved, do more research on an issue, or take action?
It depends a lot on whether I have strong beliefs on an issue. To take action, you have to have passion. Recently, I worked on my campus with NYPIRG (New York Public Interest Research Group) to do a textbook pricing survey, to find out what students were paying for their textbooks. We put together a report for the New York state legislature and possibly to go to Congress. The goal is to see new legislation to help students better afford their textbooks.

Are students of your generation more or less politically engaged than those on campuses in the past?
I think there was a general shift from indifference to engagement this primary season. There are a lot more organizations now that are geared toward youth and getting students involved, so there are a lot more opportunities.

How do you learn about politics?
Mostly, I learn through the broadcast news and the Internet, from reading online. I learn from my professors a lot, too—I definitely think my education is connected to my political engagement. One of my professors used to be in politics and told me a lot about her work, and I was very inspired by her.

Are social networking Web sites like Facebook and MySpace useful for encouraging student political engagement?
I think Facebook and similar sites are great tools. You can find out who is interested in the same things as you are, and what political organizations they’re involved with that you might also want to be a part of. And YouTube is great for catching up on whatever you miss with candidates and debates.

Are you hopeful your political participation will affect change?
I think students are just starting to realize we have the ability to make change. Having Barack Obama as [the democratic presidential] nominee is change in itself—just seeing that gets a lot of students excited.

GABE BAROUH, sophomore
Montgomery College
Sociology major

How do you learn about politics?
I’d definitely say my father is a big influence. But so are friends, family, and friends’ parents, just having everyday conversations. When I hear a name or idea, I look it up, usually on Wikipedia, even though that’s probably bad. Lately, it’s been a lot of me asking my friends’ parents, “What is your opinion on X?” because they know so much about things, and I think we should take advantage of it.

Are social networking Web sites like Facebook and MySpace useful for encouraging student political engagement?
Sometimes it can be useful, I guess, but I don’t take it seriously enough. If someone sends me a Facebook invite to a political event I might not go, but if someone invites me directly, I’m much more likely to go. Social networking sites do help everyone get on the same level, but I don’t think people use [these sites] for a political purpose that much.

In addition to our contributors’ research and analysis about student political engagement, Peer Review sought out opinions directly from the source: current college students and recent graduates. Associate editor Laura Donnelly-Smith spoke to students from across the political spectrum about political engagement and their generation’s attitudes toward politically active citizenship.
Are you hopeful your participation in politics can bring about change?
I’m not really into Democrat/Republican. I’m interested more in options, what’s available outside them. I think being stagnant is bad, and letting other people run things. I think maybe the problem with America is that people allow others to run things and don’t get involved enough on their own.

Are students of your generation more or less politically engaged than those on campuses in the past?
Compared to during my parents’ youth, young people today are definitely not engaged. In the 1960s, politics was all around, and there were people who wanted to change the system. Our parents did pass the gene on to us, though, and now it’s getting bigger again—being open-minded and questioning the government. Are we as involved, action-wise? I doubt it. But a lot of kids are smart and are reading up on things now.

CHRISTINE ANGSTMAN, May 2008 graduate University of Utah, Business administration major with international business emphasis

Did you have a defining moment that inspired you to become politically engaged?
In college, I was really involved in a sorority as the philanthropy chair, and that got me out in the community, organizing events and projects. You really learn firsthand how issues matter to people when you’re connecting with them at the community level. That’s definitely what’s motivated me to want to stay involved after college.

Are social networking Web sites like Facebook and MySpace useful for encouraging student political engagement?
I’ve never been a member of any social networking Web site. I’ve never done it because it’s a very impersonal way to network and communicate with others. I think if you use it the right way, it can be useful for networking, but some of the stuff that ends up on those sites doesn’t accurately portray people as they are.

Are you hopeful your participation in politics can bring about change?
As pessimistic as it may sound, I do think politics settles into “business as usual.” It’s from lack of involvement and apathy from large numbers of people. The most effective role I can take is to be involved myself, and try to get others involved. That’s how change happens.

How do you learn about politics?
I learn about politics first through my family—dinner-table debates are not rare. I read the newspaper, and just being in Washington, DC for my internship has opened up a lot of doors for me, for learning new sources of information. I’m seeing how people are passionate, and how they do research and learn about issues.

NATALIE BROWN, first-year American University International relations major

How do you learn about politics?
When I was in high school, I had a teacher who suggested I try speech and debate. Participating in that really got me interested in current affairs, and I also did mock trial and student government. I’m always online, reading MSNBC every day and reading the newspaper.

Are social networking Web sites like Facebook and MySpace useful for encouraging student political engagement?
We already spend so much time on the phone, texting, and on things like Facebook, and now they are becoming more “mainstream”—the New York Times is on MySpace now. It’s much easier to learn about politics through sites we’re already using. People who wouldn’t normally educate themselves during an election year now do—it’s easier, and more available in formats we are used to.

What factors influence your decisions to get involved, do more research on an issue, or take action?
Just hearing people voice their concerns is the biggest factor. I was an intern at my senator’s state office and answered the phones. When people call and say that they are really concerned they’re going to freeze this winter in Maine if [heating oil] prices don’t go down, that makes me interested in the issue. I want to go online to find out what’s happening, both on the Senate floor and at the global level.

Do you think your civic involvement is connected to your education?
I think my college education is going to
help me link everything together, all my interests in politics, international issues, speech, and debate. I think college will also be a good push for me to accomplish more in other subjects that aren’t my main interests, so I can see all the connections.

KELSON MOSIER, Senior
Brigham Young University,
Geography major with geospatial intelligence and Farsi emphasis

How do you learn about politics?
I would say through my parents and grandparents, who are really politically active. I think a lot of people my age are less involved than our parents’ generation was. I’ve learned a lot in the classroom, too.

What factors influence your decisions to get involved, do more research on an issue, or take action?
The most important factors are my background and my personal interests. I served in the ROTC and Air Force Reserves for a year and a half, so the Iraq War and veterans’ issues are really important to me. I know firsthand why it’s important and why we need to take care of these issues. The other thing is that I feel I’m really personally moderate, and I look around and see only one or two extremes. I feel an inevitable need to participate, and if I see something that isn’t right, I have a moral responsibility to do something about it.

Did you have a defining moment that inspired you to become politically engaged?
I did a [church] mission in Brazil for two years. It really broadened my horizon about how people outside the United States perceive what we’re doing. It opened my eyes that we really need to take into consideration of other’s perspectives—it makes us be more open and a little more tolerant.

Are you hopeful your participation in politics can bring about change?
I think we should bring about change in politics, and can do that by learning from people who came before our generation. We have a dilution of what people a few generations ago got in terms of civic, social, and political stances on things. We’re so far off the foundation that we’re forgetting why we do stuff—we just go through the motions. I think it’s our responsibility to learn more.

Are social networking Web sites like Facebook and MySpace useful for encouraging student political engagement?
I think Facebook and things like it are vital—not only because it’s made a difference in campaigning, but because we’ve got groups all over the Internet that people join because it’s an amazing forum for political opinion that couldn’t exist elsewhere—it’s a fourth dimension. You have your television media, newspapers, your interpersonal communications, and then you have the Internet. I think it might even eclipse all the others as an outlet of political opinion.

Invite your students to contribute their thoughts about political engagement to our online forum. Visit www.aacu.org/peerreview/online_forum/forum.cfm.
Highlights of AAC&U’s Work on Civic and Political Engagement

THE CENTER FOR LIBERAL EDUCATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Founded in 2003, the Center for Liberal Education and Civic Engagement seeks to deepen understandings of the relation of liberal education and civic engagement to the heart of a student’s academic learning. It aims to do this through partnerships and projects such as the Council of Europe, Film Your Issue, and the Democracy Imperative. (For information about the Democracy Imperative, see director Nancy L. Thomas’s article on page 9.)

The center is the result of a partnership between AAC&U, the nation’s leading advocate and voice for liberal education, and Campus Compact, the nationally known organization promoting service learning. See www.aacu.org/civic_engagement.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AT THE CENTER

Informed by the work of the Bonner Foundation, Civic Engagement at the Center: Building Democracy through Integrated Cocurricular and Curricular Experiences highlights developmental models for students’ civic learning and socially responsible leadership implemented at seventy-seven campuses. The monograph describes key elements of the cocurricular model, research on its impact on students, and emerging civic engagement minors created to complement decades of work in student affairs. To order, go to www.aacu.org, e-mail pub_desk@aacu.org, or call 800.297.3775.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE PROJECT ON DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

AAC&U partners with the Council of Europe to define ways colleges and universities can more effectively foster student learning about democratic cultures and human rights, while also enhancing students’ capacities and commitments to be civically engaged in multicultural and divided societies.

Now in its eighth year, this transatlantic partnership cooperates through joint research projects, symposia, publications, and activities to promote the critical role of higher education in educating for democracy, social responsibility, and human rights. A major international forum in Strasbourg sponsored by the council resulted in a declaration of commitment by all those present, a shared international Web site, and an annual spring symposium. A fall 2008 symposium is planned at which Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University and member of the National Leadership Council of AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative, will speak. For more information, see www.aacu.org/civic_engagement/councilofeurope.

Visit the Council of Europe Web site (www.coe.int).

FILM YOUR ISSUE

Film Your Issue (FYI) is an opportunity for young people to make films documenting the social and political issues most important to them, locally or nationally. Now in its fourth year, the contest is cosponsored by AAC&U and other organizations, including the United Nations, The Associated Press, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, MTV and the NAACP. To watch winning films and to learn more about the program, visit the FYI Web site at www.filmyourissue.com/index.shtml.

Network for Academic Renewal Conference

Diversity, Learning, and Inclusive Excellence: Accelerating and Assessing Progress, October 16-18, 2008, Long Beach, California

This meeting will highlight curricular, cocurricular, and institutional models that enable higher education leaders to develop, implement, assess, and continually learn from the experience of fostering diverse learning environments—environments in which all students develop, in increasingly sophisticated ways, critical knowledge, skills, and capacities for work and citizenship.

Featured speakers will include Jamie P. Merisotis, president and chief executive officer, Lumina Foundation for Education; Mildred García, president, California State University-Dominguez Hills; and Daryl G. Smith, professor of education—Claremont Graduate University.
CORE COMMITMENTS: Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility

AAC&U’s signature initiative, Core Commitments: Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility, aims to reclaim and revitalize the academy’s role in fostering students’ development of personal and social responsibility. It is designed to help campuses create learning environments in which all students

1. strive for excellence;
2. cultivate personal and academic integrity;
3. contribute to a larger community;
4. take seriously the perspectives of others; and
5. develop competence in ethical and moral reasoning.

Part of the philosophy guiding Core Commitments is the belief that education for personal and social responsibility, to be intentionally fostered in all students, should pervade institutional cultures. To this end, AAC&U staff are working with twenty-three institutions competitively selected on the basis of exemplary programs already in place and a commitment to expand, deepen, and assess their work.

One of the activities this Leadership Consortium has undertaken in the past year is the use of a new campus climate assessment tool, the Personal and Social Responsibility Institutional Inventory (PSRII). Developed by a team of experts for AAC&U, the PSRII surveys four constituent groups on campus—students, faculty, student affairs, and academic administrators—to gauge people’s perceptions about opportunities for personal and social responsibility across the institution.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM CORE COMMITMENTS SURVEYS

Last fall, nearly 23,000 undergraduate students and 9,000 faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs staff from across the twenty-three institutions completed the PSRII. Data from that administration are currently being analyzed in depth, but preliminary findings indicate that:

- Across all the groups surveyed, a majority believe that personal and social responsibility should be a major focus of attention at their own college or university. Support for this view increases to more than 90 percent when those who “strongly agree” and those who “agree somewhat” are combined.

- Many of those surveyed, however, do not believe that these issue are, in fact currently a major focus on their campuses. Within “striving for excellence,” for example, 4 out of 10 students and 3 out of 10 campus professionals “strongly agree” that helping students develop a strong work ethic is a major focus of their campus.

- Students and campus professionals do believe that students make progress on these issues while in college. For example, more than half of students surveyed report that students leave college having developed their “capacity to learn from diverse perspectives” and their “understanding of personal integrity.” Fewer campus professionals (about 40 percent), however, “strongly agree” that students make progress in these areas.

- Only 33.6 percent of students and 42.7 percent of professionals “strongly agreed” that students leave college having increased their “awareness of the importance of contributing to the greater good.”

For summary of the preliminary findings, see www.aacu.org/core_commitments/assessment.cfm

WHAT’S NEXT

Following additional refinements, AAC&U will make the PSRII available to the higher education community, along with promising practices developed by the Leadership Consortium. The Consortium institutions are currently using their own findings to inform dialogues across constituent groups and to focus and refine the projects they proposed when selected for participation. These projects include: identifying key points in the curriculum and co-curriculum to embed issues of personal and social responsibility; developing new methods to assess student learning in these areas; offering focused faculty and staff development workshops; and creating new partnerships among faculty, student affairs staff, students, alumni, and community organization leaders in order to enhance related programs and services. For more information about Core Commitments on the Web, including a growing resources section, see www.aacu.org/core_commitments.
New Research on College Students’ Political Views

In the charged political climate surrounding the upcoming presidential election, where do college students fit in? According to new research conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Leon and Sylvia Panetta Institute for Public Policy, American college students are politically engaged and have strong opinions about candidates and election issues, but are pessimistic, overall, about the state of the nation. These results come from the Panetta Institute’s April report, “2008 Survey of America’s College Students,” which includes data drawn from more than 1,000 telephone and online interviews with a nationally representative sample of four-year college students.

FINDINGS

The State of the Nation

- Nearly half of all college students—47 percent—believe the country is headed in the wrong direction. Only 32 percent of students think the country is on the right track.
- Student opinion about the state of the nation becomes significantly darker with each class year—43 percent of freshmen think the country is headed in the right direction, while only 32 percent, 31 percent, and 26 percent of sophomores, juniors, and seniors agree.
- Almost two out of three (64 percent) of college students are “uncertain and concerned” about the future of the country, while 26 percent are more confident.
- “Improving the health care system” is college students’ most pressing political concern, cited by 38 percent. “Dealing with the situation in Iraq” follows at 34 percent.

The Political Landscape

- A full 82 percent of college students indicate that they are paying “a lot or some attention” to the 2008 presidential campaign and 29 percent are paying “a lot of attention.” In April 2004, 22 percent of college students said they were paying a lot of attention to that year’s campaign.
- Sixteen percent of college students indicate that they are active in a political campaign, and 20 percent have plans to become active.
- African American college students are the most likely to already be involved in a campaign (25 percent)

Primary and General Election Participation

- About one-third (33 percent) of college students reported that they voted or plan to vote in a Democratic primary, and 13 percent voted or planned to vote in a Republican primary
- Seventy-nine percent of college students report that they are registered to vote. Among registered students, 81 percent report that they will definitely vote (up from 73 percent in April 2004).
- College students who indicated they are paying “a lot of attention” to the race are more likely to say they will definitely vote (88 percent) than students who are paying “some attention” (70 percent) and “not much or no attention” (39 percent)

The entire report may be downloaded in PDF format from the Panetta Institute Web site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Interest in Various Careers</th>
<th>% Very/Fairly Interested</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All College Students</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for socially responsible organization</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for a not-for-profit community organization or foundation</td>
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<td>Working for government</td>
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Source: 2008 Survey of America’s College Student, Panetta Institute for Public Policy.
Cast Off Cynicism and Cast Your Vote

Beth Martin Birky, professor of English, Goshen College

I remember my first voting booth: a cardboard refrigerator box in the hallway of Oak Street Elementary school. In the 1972 election between Richard Nixon (R) and George McGovern (D), my sixth-grade class studied the electoral process, ran campaigns for the candidates, and cast our votes in our handmade polling station. At home, my dad (a staunch Republican) and sixteen-year-old brother (a vociferous McGovern supporter) dominated dinner conversation with heated political debate. At age eleven, I didn’t have the rhetorical skills to join the conversation, but I knew that on Election Day, I could cast my own vote. That was my first step into the U.S. political process, and, since graduating from college, I’ve voted regularly, even when the outcome did not yield victory for my chosen candidate. I believe I have a responsibility to participate in the process, to record my vote—even when the political landscape reflects few of my personal values.

As a college professor, I hope students recognize the responsibility and the opportunity a presidential election offers. Campaigning is about articulating and promoting social values and not just about backing the winning candidate. People are important, but issues like education, health care, housing, the environment and military, etc., surpass individual campaign platforms. Although we may feel powerless when the dominant political views do not agree with our own, we all have a stake in these issues on a national and local level. This past spring, traditional-age college students (18–23) staked their claim in the political process by participating in the presidential primaries at record levels. Even my small liberal arts college campus was politically engaged on a new level. CNN anchor Rick Sanchez asked to interview seven Goshen College students for the “League of First Time Voters” series.

Like many university and college campuses, Goshen College benefited from the close Democratic presidential primary race. As the nation focused on Indiana, one of several states that gained importance as the primary competition continued into May, Democratic canvassing resulted in voter registration on campus, a campaign office downtown, glossy flyers in the mail, and repeated candidate visits to northern Indiana. All of these activities facilitated vigorous engagement in the political process, as well as passionate commitment to individual candidates. As the primary race continued, though, I heard some complain that the extended Democratic primary race would have negative consequences in November. I disagree. Expanding political debate and including more people in the process can only have positive results for our democracy as a whole and our communities in particular. People should value public conversation as much as their chosen candidate.

Every vote offers a political perspective that will be acknowledged, even if it does not directly determine who takes office in 2009. Just in the past year alone, Clinton and her supporters have had a significant impact on our country’s perception of women and political power; Obama and his supporters have altered assumptions about race and political power. These reflect important social changes created by individual as well as communal action.

Primary elections are only one step in a long political process, something a seasoned politician like Hillary Clinton knows very well. When I visited Clinton’s Web site on June 9, 2008, two days after she suspended her campaign, I found her encouraging supporters to back Barack Obama. “Together,” she says, “we can write the next chapter in America’s story.” Together and can are important words. We need to value our communities as much as our individual beliefs. We also need to believe that our participation matters.

Indiana is a state that has only voted blue (Democratic) in four presidential elections since 1900. Some might argue that casting my Democratic ballot here has no more impact than voting in a refrigerator box. But a democracy guarantees participation, not consensus. If I could send an e-mail blast to all of this nation’s college students, I’d tell them this: if the 2008 state primary was your first step into the U.S. political process, please don’t let that be your last. It’s your right and your responsibility to cast your vote on November 4, 2008, no matter which candidate you support, and on every Election Day in the future.
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AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,150 accredited public and private colleges and universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education at both the national and local levels and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at www.aacu.org.

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