Rethinking Preparation for Work
A Civic-Enriched Liberal Education
CONTENTS

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SUMMER 2015

From the Editor ......................................................... 3

ANALYSIS

Civic-Rich Preparation for Work
Caryn McTighe Musil, AAC&U ........................................ 4

For a Good Life: Integrating Liberal and Civic Arts Education with Work
Elizabeth Minnich, AAC&U ........................................... 6

Civic Virtues for Work and Action
Bernie Ronan, Maricopa Community Colleges; and Derek W. M. Barker,
Kettering Foundation ................................................. 8

PRACTICE

Be the Change: Academics as Civic Professionals
Amy Koritz, Drew University; and Paul Schadewald, Macalester College .......... 12

Weaving Together Career and Civic Commitments for Social Change
José Zapata Calderón, Pitzer College; and Seth S. Pollack, California State University–Monterey Bay .............................. 16

Developing Lifelong Civic Habits at Widener University
James Harris, the University of San Diego and Widener University .................. 20

Science, Curriculum, and Public Controversies
Kyle Powys Whyte, Michigan State University; Byron P. White, Cleveland State University; and Darlyne Menser, Carolinas Health Care System ......................... 23

Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries with Civic Literacy
Mary Gowan, James Madison University; and Margaret Salazar-Porzio,
Smithsonian Institution .............................................. 27

RESEARCH

What Does It Mean to Be an Educated Person Today?
Jean Johnson, National Issues Forums Institute ................................ 30

Highlights from AAC&U Work on Civic Learning ........................... 33

REALITY CHECK

Reconstituting Civic Engagement for Tomorrow’s Students
David J. Maurrasse, Marga Incorporated and Columbia University ............... 35

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peerReview (ISSN-1541-1389) is published quarterly by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1818 R Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009-1604. Annual rates are $35 for individual subscriber and $45 for libraries. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 2015. All rights reserved. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Peer Review, 1818 R Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009-1604.
“Democracy must be reborn in each generation and education is its midwife.”

—John Dewey

Summer 2015 was the season when candidates of all stripes began vying for attention as they made their cases to become the next president of the United States. As I watched news clips of politicians working the Iowa State Fair crowds, I wished that those contenders would put down their fried Snickers, funnel cakes, and corndogs and pick up a copy of A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future. As those candidates refine their higher education platforms, they’d do well to heed the words of the report’s authors, the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, who caution, “Public leaders who believe that the ‘economic agenda’ of higher education is reducible to workforce training also fail to understand that there is a civic dimension to every field of study, including career and technical fields, as well as to every workplace. Industries and services have ethical and social responsibilities of their own, and, in a democracy, citizens and community partners routinely weigh in on such questions. Workers at all levels need to anticipate the civic implications of their choices and actions.”

The recent Hart Research Associates report Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success, conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, underscores the need for workers with civic awareness. In the report’s findings, which summarize responses from a national survey of employers, one sees that there is broad agreement among employers that students, regardless of their chosen field of study, should gain civic and democratic capacities in college. In fact, 87 percent of the employers agreed that all students should gain an understanding of democratic institutions and values, and 86 percent agreed that students should take courses that build the civic knowledge, skills, and judgment essential for contributing to a democratic society.

In a world where college graduates spend the majority of their public lives engaged in work, this issue of Peer Review, which was produced in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation, focuses on how colleges might reconceive preparation for work in addition to preparation for citizenship. Instead of making the case for civic learning only by noting that civic education skills also are useful in getting a job, this issue explores whether there is a more expansive and civic notion of work to which higher education might contribute. Are there civic skills and attributes that students need to be successful workers? If so, what are they? Does this enriched concept of work have resonance with employers, and does it challenge prevailing notions of work? How have colleges and universities incorporated civic concepts of work across their curricula? In this issue you will find a series of articles that serve to challenge and provoke those committed to a fundamentally civic understanding of liberal education.

While election season is often a time of contention and difficult discussions, it can also inspire us to become hopeful about the future. This sense of optimism about America’s liberally educated students as tomorrow’s workers and decision makers is clear in Martha Kanter and Carol Geary Schneider’s 2013 Change article, in which they note: “If we succeed, as we must, our students will have the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need to meet tomorrow’s challenges. They’ll be America’s future public servants, problem solvers, entrepreneurs, inventors, and leaders. They’ll be the heartbeat of our common culture, the stewards of our shared civic life, and the trustees of our values. They’ll “do” democracy in a way that provides hope and inspiration for the world.”

—SHELLEY JOHNSON CAREY

Kettering Foundation, established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, is a nonprofit operating foundation that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. Kettering’s primary research question is, what does it take to make democracy work as it should? Kettering’s research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through interrelated program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The interpretations and conclusions contained in this volume represent the views of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, its directors or its officers.
Civic-Rich Preparation for Work

- Caryn McTighe Musil, senior scholar and director, Civic Learning and Democracy Initiatives, AAC&U

Recent headlines indicate that many hybrid and electric car owners are trading their automobiles in for sports utility vehicles now that gas prices have dropped significantly. Such is the consequence of using primarily an economic rather than a public interest rationale to justify purchasing hybrid cars in the first place. Are we making the same mistake in our defense of liberal education? We assure students and their parents that liberal education produces a perfect match for capabilities that employers seek. Liberal education thus becomes a means to a greater end: economic security. In so doing, are we selling students short and undermining deeper values and dispositions critical for the workplace, the world, and the vibrancy of our democracy?

Propelled by our collective work on A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future, Derek Barker from the Kettering Foundation approached the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) about creating a joint civic project. Elizabeth Minnich and I took the lead for AAC&U. We decided to explore the intersection of civic engagement, liberal education, and work. Now in our third year, we have narrowed the focus to a simple question. What if we rethought what higher education counts—and students understand—as preparation for work and made civic learning a centerpiece? How might that alter both liberal education itself and students’ commitment to sustaining the public good? How might a deliberately civic-enriched liberal education prepare students for good jobs and for exercising civic muscles and democratic values while doing their work?

WHAT KIND OF WORKERS DOES THE WORLD NEED?
With college access now widely available to formerly excluded people across class, race, and income, we should embrace the fact that college leads to greater economic and social mobility. Such trends strengthen our democracy, economy, and social cohesion. Obtaining a college education is a smart employment strategy. In Working in the 21st Century, the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, reports that “college graduates age twenty-five and over earn nearly twice as much as workers who stopped with a high school diploma.” We are not therefore backing away from how important college is in securing decent jobs. Instead we are taking that end very seriously by asking: What kind of workers does the world need higher education to develop, given the fact that its academic and public missions are intertwined?

At the moment, we are settling for too little. According to a series of important AAC&U research surveys of employers over the past five years, five capabilities rose to the top in almost every survey: (1) critical thinking, (2) written and oral communication, (3) teamwork skills, (4) ethical decision making, and (5) the ability to apply knowledge in real-world settings (Hart Research Associates 2010, 2013, 2015).

Of these, only the fourth one is uniquely important to a democratic society. Except for ethical decision making, the other four outcomes were part of what made financial lending in the subprime mortgage scheme so wildly profitable. The one troubling drawback—not to the lender, but to others—was that what earned some financial workers dazzling private incomes sent the rest of the world into financial chaos on a scale not seen since the Great Depression.

The five liberal education skills above therefore leave unanswered to what ends these capabilities will be put. Applying knowledge to real-world settings in order to do what, exactly? This is where AAC&U’s third pillar in the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes—personal and social responsibility—is key. With it in place, a much stronger case can be made for liberal education’s intellectual, democratic, and economic value. But too few in academia make social responsibility a priority. Too often it is optional—or assigned to student affairs alone. Yet it is the outcome that couples liberal education inextricably with public
ends. When attentive to social responsibility, students gain necessary context to evaluate what their ends might be, who is served or left out, and how to work with others to invent, create, imagine, and construct the public ends that serve democracy’s purposes most effectively and justly.

Instead of the usual assumption that citizenship is only practiced outside of work, we posit it as integral to preparation for work. These democratic questions include, among other things, how the workplace is organized, who has a say in how things are run, how wages and perks are dispersed, how ethical practices are encouraged or stifled, the social purpose of what is produced, who has access to purchasing it, what the affects are on the people and the planet producing it, who benefits from it, and whether there is exploitation.

EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
What we are suggesting, then, is to turn the tables a bit. We propose that colleges make education for social responsibility a non-negotiable, sought-after outcome for every student, whatever the specialty. Such a stance would require that we specify the public democratic dispositions that we can incorporate in courses, campus life, pedagogies, and institutional policies. It might then prompt students to turn to questions about the public’s welfare as a civic compass when they are at work. All employers might not seek this, but higher education can—and should.

What a civic-rich liberal education looks like in practice is visible on many campuses. It is not yet routine, however, for all students across their college years and across all majors, despite compelling evidence about how to foster it. In “Advancing and Assessing Civic Learning,” Sylvia Hurtado, Adriana Ruize, and Hannah Whang offer evidence of the power of service learning as a predictor of five civic outcomes: critical consciousness and action; social agency; integration of learning; civic engagement; and political engagement. But in Hart’s 2015 survey, only 23 percent of students had done service learning in two-year schools, 41 percent in four-year publics, and 56 percent in four-year privates (16).

Similarly, Hurtado et al. report that the more students engaged with others of different racial/ethnic groups whether in or out of class, “the higher their scores or change on all six civic outcomes” (12). That same article also showed that an inclusive curriculum is associated with contributing to a pluralist orientation so important to a diverse democracy like ours.

Other high-impact pedagogies can improve student learning, provide useful work skills, and develop civic capacities. These include action projects in which students work in diverse groups to tackle messy public problems; participatory research assignments; civic-rich, problem-centered internships; or sustained community-based partnerships, whether in the United States or beyond its borders. AAC&U’s next generation of work in LEAP iteration calls for every student to do a Signature Work Project that occurs over a semester. If such a culminating project embeds civic questions within it, liberal education will be cultivating not just good learners but good citizens, in and outside of the workplace. Finally, A Crucible Moment also recommends that all departments, not just some, define with and for their students “the public purposes of their respective fields, the civic inquiries most urgent to explore, and the best way to infuse civic learning outcomes progressively across the major” (32). Were this routine across all disciplines, as AAC&U’s new publication Civic Prompts suggests is possible, higher education would indeed be transformed into an intellectual civic commons (Musil 2015).

With such a civic-rich liberal education, students could achieve private goods without abandoning public ones. Rethinking preparation for work as deliberately incorporating a civic lens in students’ studies could be the single most valuable college outcome for the workplace and the world. This is a degree that no owner will want to trade in.

REFERENCES
For a Good Life: Integrating Liberal and Civic Arts Education with Work

Elizabeth Minnich, senior scholar, AAC&U

“The task of democracy is forever the creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute.”
—Thomas Dewey

“The return from your work must be the satisfaction which that work brings you and the world’s need of that work. With this, life is heaven, or as near as you can get. Without this—with work which you despise, which bores you and which the world does not need—this life is hell.”
—W. E. B. DuBois

During our work on AAC&U’s Civic Learning at the Intersections: Liberal Arts as Civic Arts project, we heard from a fine, varied group of people—academics with experience in engaged civic education; professionals from fields including medicine, business, government, and journalism; research universities and community colleges; philanthropies; and people of differing backgrounds, ages, and communities.

As we assessed where we are in redesigning and reclaiming a form of liberal education that centers on civic arts of responsible public action—now intersecting with work—we heard two differing kinds of stories. The first confirms the belief that civic and liberal arts are mutually enhancing and, together, prepare students to find, or make, good work for themselves and for others. Three examples:

“My family worked in the fields and in our community. I didn’t know I was learning civic arts, but in college, where they talked about it, I found I had. I was able to become part of this community too, and on the way I fell in love with art. Put it all together, and now I work for a museum that is reaching out to communities beyond its historic audience.”

“I’ve been in touch with students who have graduated. They’ve taken what they learned in the social sciences and the work we did with social justice efforts into great careers—holding elected public office; working in unions; creating businesses to provide jobs for their communities. There’s no question about it. Learning social responsibility gave them a sense of their own worth and abilities, a far wider sense of life’s possibilities, and the skills and knowledge to support their choices.”

“A business paying attention to nothing except the bottom line risks failure. Employers and employees need to understand the world they live and work in, or they will make mistakes. Companies led by people who don’t care about civic life and the public sector are forgetting that you can’t do business without stable government, good education, functional infrastructure. Business has a huge stake in happy employees and a strong civic life.”

We also heard contrasting observations that educating for work “in the real world” does—or some say ought to—mean training for jobs, shorn of the ‘frills’ of civic or liberal arts:

“There is increasing need to educate for specific jobs. Public funds are limited; fields that do not lead directly to jobs are luxuries.”

“To be accountable, schools are being publicly evaluated on the basis of the starting salaries of their graduates.”

“There are well-educated CEOs who say they want employees with the abilities developed by the liberal arts, especially critical thinking. But human resources offices look for skill sets, not history majors or philosophers.”
Clearly there is tension between these two viewpoints. While we can still make the familiar case for liberal education for social responsibility, self-discovery, the joy of learning, and the capacity to keep learning—education for a richly varied personal, social, and cultural life—it is made today in a world in which the message that a college education is only a means to a well-paying first job has a lot of air play and comes from public figures, including governors, as well as prospective students and parents. Meanwhile, billionaire drop-outs are among the cultural heroes of this age.

Liberal arts education, civic education, education for work: the case for each of these has its proponents, and they rarely speak quite the same language. That is not just a matter of rhetoric. A hierarchical history has informed our present situation, along with differing philosophies of life, and, as always, real conflicts of interest. How can we rise above taking sides and choose instead the ongoing experiment that is also our history—the one that asks us to keep learning how to educate well and truly in a country aspiring to democracy?

It is relatively easy just to leave things as they are while adding a few new provisions and requirements. We have long done just that. The philosophy professor teaches her field; the social work professor teaches his; required service learning is arranged through that office, and it is left to students to integrate their learning. The service learning office, the center for engagement, civic institutes, interdisciplinary programs, and centers for democratic studies are among provisions that have been added.

NOT JUST ADDITIVE CHANGES

All this can indeed be useful, but the changes we are exploring ask more of us. For instance, not only do all fields raise ethical issues—they all have histories, socio-political contexts, psychological effects, linguistic dimensions. No job, no profession, no discipline exists in a silo. We are falsifying what we teach when we define a subject too narrowly. We are even undercutting the possibility of ethics that can guide choices in our multi-dimensional world.

Furthermore, the additive approach costs money in budget-cutting times, and anything not integrated with a defined core is vulnerable to being cut. The additive approach, which seems easy because it rocks few boats, can be both unsound and not strategic. To move beyond it, then, we explored an alternative—thinking from and beyond the intersections. Some gleanings:

- Students ought to have as many chances as possible to learn who they are, what they can and love to do in the fullness of their own special being, what there is to do in this life, and that they have choices and responsibilities. An integrated civic, liberal, and work education can serve those ends.
- People need to know, as they do not now, that higher education is responsive to their work concerns. We shouldn’t misparse our values as if jobs and “economic competitiveness” are all we care about, but the alternative is not to repeat the usual case for liberal education. That case needs to be made now in demonstrable relation to all subjects, for all students, in all kinds of schools. Otherwise, it remains a set of abstractions that are easily heard as no more than “Trust me, this will be useful.”
- Higher education has been divided—usually hierarchically—between theory and practice, pure and applied research, education and training, the privileged and the rest. Breaching hierarchy can seem to challenge quality. Can we consider now how practical and theoretical education keep each other honest, and each in its way excellent?
- Faculty need to be central to efforts to move from additive, to intersectional, to integrative civic, liberal, and work studies because scholarship and expertise provide the content and judgment of quality needed for sound academic programs.
- Higher education cannot quickly or directly change worlds of work or political realities. It can, however, fulfill its own civic roles in appropriate ways (including supporting critics and contrarians, analysts and artists, and other free thinkers).

Finally, another caveat: “integrating” does not mean ignoring significant differences.

Action, as public life; work, as economic life; and education, as conservation and renewal of knowledge, arts, and cultures, entail each other, but are also markedly distinct. We enact freedom and authority differently, and evaluate by differing standards when we are working, studying, teaching, acting. For instance, we do not test truth by negotiation. Martin Luther King Jr. inspired people; he could neither order them to march to Selma nor fail or fire them if they chose not to. There are overlaps, complementarities, contradictions, confusions when we are dealing with human lives, not logical abstractions. We want neither the old divisions, nor a collapse into sameness: an integrated civic, liberal, and work education should retain significant distinctiveness as appropriate.

Through this work we are experimenting, inviting creativity where hierarchies and silos blocked it, bringing theory and practice into mutually challenging dialogue, and seeing how scholars, activists, artists, workers, communities, professions, and employers can inform and improve each other—not to make them alike, and not all the time, but seriously and often enough to keep the windows open, and the doors.*
Civic Virtues for Work and Action

- Bernie Ronan, director, Division of Public Affairs, Maricopa Community Colleges
- Derek W. M. Barker, program officer, Kettering Foundation

“Citizenship is the struggle, carried out through conversation, to achieve accounts of the world that accord with norms of friendship and provide grounds for action.”

—Danielle Allen

College students in America are experiencing what might be called a widespread “depoliticization” of our society. With high debt loads and an uncertain economy, students are increasingly pressured to see their education in terms of its benefits to their working lives rather than their public lives. Moreover, every day, they see polarized news media, policy-making institutions in gridlock, elections hijacked by special interests, and negative advertising. Lacking anything comparable to the student movement of the 1960s, they are understandably frustrated and alienated from what is called “politics” (Kiesa et al. 2008) and receive little guidance from colleges on how to connect politics to their working lives.

Students seek to make a difference and better the world around them, but they see politics as an ineffective way of doing so. If higher education is to produce an active and engaged citizenry, it must expose students to a different kind of politics—one that allows them to experience conflict, power, and collective action, but without reproducing the dysfunctions of our broken system. For a way to reconcile political engagement and preparation for work as part of a college experience with a genuinely political vision of higher education and its civic mission, we turn to Hannah Arendt, a preeminent 1950s political theorist. Drawing on Arendt’s framework, we argue that meaningful work is what links individuals to the world of politics, and should be the central aim of liberal education.

LABOR, WORK, AND ACTION: ARENDT’S LEGACY

Arendt was a German émigré who saw a similar depoliticization as the precursor of twentieth-century totalitarian movements. She feared that the industrial societies of the time—whether the free market systems of the West or the planned economies of the Soviet bloc—encouraged citizens to focus on economic activity rather than public life. Inspired by the Greek polis, Arendt sought to preserve the political world that humans shape, their “web of relationships,” the space in which they organize themselves and appear to each other and act in pursuit of their common lives (Arendt 2000, 179). It was the polis that Arendt cared about and sought to love. The polis is neither the government nor elections, though these have come to seem coterminous with the word “political.” There are myriad other settings—town meetings, union halls, clubs, even religious associations—in which the work of democracy is pursued today. Dubbed the “political wetlands” by David Matthews (2014), these informal spaces are where the modern polis can be found. Recreating more of these spaces is the task of politics today.

Arendt saw the polis as threatened by the “social,” or economic, sphere of modern life—we have become a consumer society. To make sense of these trends, she developed classic distinctions among three forms of human activity: labor, work, and action.

**Labor** assures not only individual survival, but the life of the species. **Work** and its product, the human artifact, bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time. **Action**, in so far as it engages in founding and preserving political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history.... Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought (Arendt 1958, 8–9, emphasis added).

Arendt sought to recover an ethos of action in a world in which work—and worse, labor—claim ever-greater importance in our lives, replacing politics as the sphere that gives meaning and dignity to our lives.
According to Arendt, “labor” serves no purposes other than biological necessity and survival. It is purely economic and often characterized by drudgery. “Jobs” can now be seen as the current analog of her term “labor.” To the extent that they lack a sense of meaning or purpose, even Information Age jobs and skilled public sector jobs have this quality.

In contrast to labor, Arendt characterized “work” by the creation of artifacts, objects whose permanence impacts both the physical and political worlds (e.g., in the creation of works of art). For Arendt, work, while not fully political, at least reflects a sense of purpose and meaning that is lacking in labor. Similarly, in this sense, as one community college faculty member often tells her students, “My job is not my work” (L. Jones, pers. comm.). While one has a job to “make a living,” work is tied to the notion of a vocation, a calling to make a contribution to our shared world and enhance it. Kayla Mueller, the “humanitarian worker” killed by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, moved from job to job, but what was constant was her “work”—her advocacy and her action. If meaningful work is sustained over a lifetime, it can become one’s “body of work,” a lasting legacy of good done for the world. Since its purpose is the care the worker feels for the world, and the need one feels to show that care, this kind of activity instantiates what Arendt called amor mundi (love of the world).

Arendt understood work as “pre-political,” since it does not necessarily impact action in the polis. However, work draws the individual into the world. The meaningfulness of work cannot be experienced in isolation. For example, Kayla Mueller’s humanitarian services affect our lives together in the material and digital worlds. Such work can be seen as connected to and impacting the polis, the web of relationships in which we live. Work is the link, so to speak, between the individual and the public.

While having a job that impacts the world is noble and worthwhile, action is the preeminent political activity. Action alters this web of relationships and literally changes the world. To an extent that is not true in jobs or work, action is inevitably tied up with speech; the two are usually found together. Speech can be a form of action, and we reveal ourselves as agents in a unique fashion when we act, and make a difference in the world, first through deeds and then through words (Arendt 1958, 178–80). Through speech we explain our actions, and actions often validate the integrity of what someone is saying. Plurality defines action. When we act, we act into a world with others whether we act individually or together, whether the action occurs in a fourth grade classroom where college students mentor children in action projects to improve their school, or in Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring. To restore politics, our goal must entail fostering more opportunities for civic action.

Action also has the unique ability to reveal who we are, as agents, rather than what we are, as persons. Since action implies a world of others and relies on the individual initiative of the actor or the unpredictable initiative of a group working in concert, both of which are infinitely complex and impossible to forecast, action has a unique revelatory quality, especially when accompanied by speech, an ability to show us to the world for who we uniquely are. Doing a job each day does somehow define us, as in the frequent conversation starter: “What do you do?” Still, a job does not reveal us in the unique way that action does. This is why Arendt cites natality—the utterly distinctive ability to do the new—as a major characteristic of action.

**WORK, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND THE DECLINE OF POLITICS**

Much of the pressures diminishing the place of politics—and consequently changing higher education—has to do with how modern concepts and practices of work have changed. In the classical world that influenced Arendt, education and citizenship were naturally connected.

While one has a job to “make a living,” work is tied to the notion of a vocation, a calling to make a contribution to our shared world and enhance it.

As an elite activity, education was for people who were expected to play a leading role in public life. The liberal arts were truly civic arts centered on the education of the next generation of public leaders. The classical view of citizenship was very robust, but reserved to a narrow elite.

Now, from a democratic perspective, we have a fundamental irony: as citizenship has been democratized, it has been diminished. We have now come to believe that regardless of race, gender, or occupation, all citizens are entitled to equal democratic citizenship. However, the majority of modern citizens do not have a significant amount of leisure time to engage in politics and philosophy. They primarily work for a living. Civic activities are done in spare time, after work and family obligations have been satisfied. Work is more inclusive and pluralistic than ever before, but action and citizenship have reduced their claims over our lives.

In this context, higher education in the twenty-first century is more inclusive than
ever before, notably due to the increased access provided by the community college system and public four-year colleges. And yet this same irony holds. Community colleges have explicit workforce development missions, while private colleges and universities are increasingly preprofessional in their orientation. Despite their differences, higher education institutions are now widely viewed in terms of their career benefits to their graduates. Indeed, it would be irresponsible to the students if higher education did not prepare them for employment in the modern economy, and it would be self-defeating to the institutions to ignore these realities. However, the consequence of these pressures is that liberal education is no longer viewed as a civic enterprise. To the extent that higher education focuses narrowly on jobs, it educates students for what Arendt calls labor. It fails to prepare students for meaningful work, let alone active democratic citizenship.

While the “civic mission” of higher education has received renewed interest in recent years, colleges and universities have in some ways reinforced the decline of politics. Responding to increased pressures in an uncertain economy, institutions encourage students to see their education in terms of career and professional development. Even when pushing back against this narrowing of mission, colleges and universities have trumpeted the “soft skills” known to find resonance with employers, such as critical thinking and working in teams. Nevertheless, students can be critical and still be completely alienated from politics. They can work in small groups on agreed-upon tasks without learning how to come together politically on the tough issues that divide our society. Such “skills talk” falls critically short of what our young people really need to rekindle their passion for politics.

Similarly, many college campuses do offer opportunities for civic experiences to be interwoven into the curriculum and tied to serious academic outcomes. In practice, however, civic engagement has primarily meant volunteer activities disconnected from conflict and power. Such civic experiences can be tremendously rewarding and educational, and yet they subtly reinforce the message that there are better ways than politics to change the world.

FROM SOFT SKILLS TO CIVIC VIRTUES

At one point, Hannah Arendt considered using Amor Mundi as the title for her masterwork on human activity, but decided instead to name it The Human Condition (Young-Bruehl 1982). That alternate title usefully offers a different perspective on the human activity she analyzed in her book, suggesting the role of the heart as a political force at the core of democratic citizenship. For students to engage in action as envisioned by Arendt, they need much more than technical skills or even soft skills. Rather, they need a complex blend of skills, habits, and attachments. The ancient language of virtue or excellence better captures the habits of an educated democratic citizenry. Elinor Ostrom, who won the Nobel Prize for economics, saw civic culture as the key to collective action:

When de Tocqueville discussed the “art and science of association,” he was referring to the crafts learned by those who had solved ways of engaging in collective action to achieve a joint benefit. Some aspects of the science of association are both counterintuitive and counterintentional, and thus must be taught to each generation as part of the culture of a democratic citizenry (Ostrom 1998).

A civic culture implies much more than academic knowledge, technical skill, or job training. It suggests a “civic spectrum” of at least three dimensions of civic virtue: emotional, intellectual, and political—the heart, the head, and the hands (Ronan 2011).

The affective or emotional virtue is civic friendship. This civic friendship, according to Aristotle (1925), is what holds cities together across their many differences. This special relationship among citizens acting in concert is a public thing, unlike personal friendships or tribal bonds. For students to engage in action together, they must first see themselves as part of a community. A civic identity provides the motivation to engage in deliberation and action. Arguably, the notion that civic education entails matters of the heart seems foreign to us, yet any substantive reflection on our own experience of civic action, or that of others, will quickly reveal that the heart is involved and that civic relationships do matter greatly for the ultimate success of any public work or action.

The cognitive or intellectual virtue is judgment (phronesis in Greek, which also translates as prudence). One might have the motivation to participate in a community without having the actual cognitive ability to do so, instead falling back on partisan beliefs and ideology. Habits of judgment fill this gap. Aristotle wrote that phronesis is not theoretical knowledge; it is focused on action, on getting something done in the world (1925). This savvy is acquired principally through deliberation, which revolves around how to take the practical steps in order to function as a polis. People learn from the experience of interacting with each other, particularly when they together confront ethically complex and politically divisive issues. They learn the art and practice of dialogue: the process of reaching practical, actionable conclusions and defining and talking about their problems in order to act together.

Finally, the political virtue requisite for rejuvenating a love of the world in our common life is empowered agency. Agency
is what enables citizens to act on the basis of their judgments and realize their civic identities. This civic power is self-reinforcing as long as the citizens continue to deliberate, giving them a sense of efficacy. Citizens in these civic experiences come to have a sense that their words and deeds matter, that what they are doing has significance. To develop and sustain their agency, students must be given regular opportunities, in school and in their communities, to engage in collective action and learn from the results. Without such habitual participation in politics, Arendt feared that the civic capacities of modern citizens would be truncated, and they would lose the taste for public affairs.

The epigram to this piece, from a talk Danielle Allen (2001) gave to graduates about the struggles and conflicts of citizenship in the shadow of 9/11 can shed light on the virtues these citizens need. Through deliberative conversation, they “achieve accounts of the world,” a public knowledge of what they need to do (head). This savvy must be commensurate with the bonds, or “norms of friendship” among the citizens (heart), and “provide grounds” for civic action (hands).

Fostering the growth of jobs that have a sense of purpose is important, as is recalibrating existing jobs so they have a more purposeful direction to impacting the world. One could begin with the millions of public sector jobs in this country. While such public sector jobs are arguably civic in legislative intent, they are nonetheless often typified for the laborer by mindless drudgery rather than engagement with citizens, thus the term “bureaucratic.” Still, it’s encouraging that the private sector and the nonprofit sector are growing jobs that have an avowed civic intent. Higher education can do its part to teach students to better recognize the larger social and political context of their future careers and better enable them to find meaning and purpose.

Of greater import for the sake of our political life is the encouragement of students to confront the polis, with all of its issues and challenges, and answer the call to civic work, which will enable each student to flourish. This kind of civic work can be pursued outside the confines of one’s job and can be undertaken through volunteer activities with others. Finally, students must be encouraged to undertake collective action, to enter the fray of a polis that matters to them and engages their interest, to deliberate with their fellows about whatever cause or interest has brought that “space of appearance” into being in the first place, to discover in their interlocutors new civic friends who share their common interests and support their work, and to roll up their sleeves and act in the world—the purpose for which they were born into the polis, which was there before they came and will last beyond their leaving.*

REFERENCES
Be the Change:
Academics as Civic Professionals

Amy Koritz, director, Center for Civic Engagement, and professor of English, Drew University
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Given the pressure higher education faces to provide graduates with clear pathways to careers, those of us working in the liberal arts need better strategies for affirming and furthering civically and community-engaged learning in undergraduate liberal arts education. We argue that developing and embracing a professional identity among faculty that includes the civic—what we are calling “civic professionalism”—should be one such strategy. We came to this conclusion through our work with the Engaged Undergraduate Education Research Group of Imagining America, a consortium committed to public scholarship in the arts, humanities, and design disciplines. This research group, with support from the Teagle Foundation’s Faculty Work and Student Learning in the 21st Century initiative, consists of faculty and administrators from six institutions, ranging from small liberal arts colleges to large public and private research universities. Together we established a collaborative learning community to guide our inquiry into the conceptual and practical usefulness of civic professionalism as an approach to undergraduate education in the liberal arts.

CIVIC PROFESSIONALISM

Particularly resonant to us was William M. Sullivan’s conception of civic professionalism, which he grounds in a commitment to a work–life governed by knowledge, practice, and a sense of responsibility to the good of society, not just the individual. In his analysis of the optimal forms of professional education, Sullivan gives renewed attention to an education that utilizes classroom learning, mentoring by practitioners, and ethical reflection to provide students with the academic knowledge, practical skills, and “educated conscience” that for him forms the basis of an identity as a “civic professional” (Sullivan 2005).

While Sullivan initially focused on graduate professional education, his framework also applies to undergraduate liberal arts education. Sullivan developed this application in a critique of contemporary trends in undergraduate education that stresses either an instrumentalist orientation that only values vocational outcomes and practical skills or one that focuses on “critical thinking,” defined as the discipline-specific “distanced intellectual stance” that divorces knowledge from real-world contexts. He proposes instead reclaiming earlier goals of a liberal arts education that prioritize helping students “make sense of the world and discern their place within it” by cultivating wise judgment alongside academic knowledge (Sullivan 2012, 141). Wise judgment and practical wisdom form the heart of Sullivan’s reimagining of the purposes of the liberal arts for undergraduates. Practical wisdom entails more than having sufficient content knowledge. It requires the ability to bring appropriate knowledge to bear on specific circumstances, making it relevant to people affected by those circumstances, and understanding why this particular knowledge serves this circumstance best. Thus, the pursuit of practical wisdom requires not only academic content knowledge but also practical experience in the uses of that knowledge and a grasp of relevant questions of social and ethical purpose and meaning (Sullivan 2012, 153–155). Civic professionalism as a goal of undergraduate liberal arts education embraces the goal of practical wisdom as a fundamental purpose.

Like Sullivan, we employ the term “civic professionalism” to mark the intersection of formal knowledge, practical skills development, and a commitment to the common good. In this model, knowledge, practice, and the common good co-define and cross-fertilize each other. Knowledge becomes a necessarily integrative pursuit, work becomes a path toward individual and communal flourishing, and civic responsibility becomes a continual aim. As a
bridge between intellectual and practical learning, and between individual vocational goals and benefit to our shared communities, civic professionalism offers not only a new language for thinking about the content, methods, and aims of a liberal arts education, but also a toolbox of practices for changing what faculty do as teachers and scholars.

**DEVELOPING A RUBRIC**

To populate this toolbox, the research group developed a Civic Professionalism Rubric, loosely modeled on the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U) VALUE rubrics, which focuses on dimensions of civic professionalism. We collected feedback on this rubric from campus project directors and faculty and staff colleagues from the six participating institutions and from Imagining America national conference attendees. Also responding to the rubric were members of the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Action Network, a group coordinated by Caryn Musil of AAC&U. This rubric attempted to lay out the dimensions of knowledge, purpose, and practice integral to effective civic professionalism as understood through Sullivan’s conceptual framework. These dimensions consisted of civic knowledge, intercultural collaboration, civic advocacy, civic practice, and civic attitudes and values. The capstone (most advanced) level of each dimension focused on students’ ability to understand, articulate, advocate, and practice in ways that aligned academic knowledge and practical skills with a commitment to social and personal responsibility in real-world, complex settings.

Respondents found the rubric useful in its articulation of the place of civic life in a liberal arts education. For some, this rubric tapped a need to conceptualize a civicly engaged undergraduate education that avoided falling into either an instrumental focus on vocational preparation or the increasingly dilute category of “experiential learning.” Instead, the rubric helped integrate both domains under the overarching need to educate civicly engaged citizens who are also empathetic, effective workers in all parts of society. Some thought the use of the term “professional” to be overly narrow, suggesting that a broader term, such as “civic work,” might be more appropriate. In adopting the language of professionalism, however, the hope was to articulate an approach to the civic in the liberal arts that linked the importance of preparation for performance in the world indicative of college-level standards of knowledge and practice with a commitment to the common good. Informing this approach was our collective understanding of “professionalism” as a set of behaviors that might inform work in many contexts—including volunteer work, school-related work, and hourly wage work, as well as professional employment. That is, we assumed the category of “professionalism” encompassed much more than “the professions” narrowly defined.

This assumption was not always evident to others. Many respondents also requested clarification regarding the relationship between “civic engagement” and “civic professionalism.” There were also useful comments highlighting the importance of civic agency—as distinct from advocacy—and the importance of collaboration as a component of civic practice. By far most intriguing, though, was the frequency with which respondents either asked whether the rubric was intended for faculty members or for students. So, on the one hand this feedback made it clear that we still had work to do to create a genuinely useful tool for assessing the progress of students; on the other, it clarified for us an aspect of the problem we were trying to address that had not before crystallized. In preparing our liberal arts undergraduates to be civicly responsible employees and members of communities, faculty members clearly play special roles. The research group came to wonder whether or not it was the case that faculty members who themselves did not identify with the role of a civic professional could effectively educate students who would embrace such an identity.

Researchers writing on faculty roles in higher education frequently comment on the individualistic nature of the training, work-life, and expectations surrounding faculty careers and definitions of success (Rice, Saltmarsh, and Plater 2014). An
individualistic, entrepreneurial model of professional academic life, however, is reinforced by the increasing number of contingent and non-tenure-track faculty in the academic workforce who must respond to market conditions that may not value civic engagement. Further, calls to such faculty to demonstrate a greater sense of duty to their institutions (as opposed to only their disciplines) require a reciprocating commitment on the part of those institutions.

**ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES**

Nevertheless, as KerryAnn O’Meara has shown in her work, even in this challenging environment many faculty members embrace the civic purposes of higher education and seek to cultivate a sense of civic identity among students (O’Meara 2011). In O’Meara’s analysis, faculty members have two major orientations towards their professional identities: the “Post WWII Academic Professional” and the “Engaged American Scholar.” The latter category constitutes the academic professional as a civic professional, while the former is primarily concerned with discipline-defined norms and measures of success. This professional identity is wrapped up in the possession of highly specialized expertise and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (O’Meara 2011, 192–93). In contrast, the faculty members she labels as Engaged American Scholars, those we call civic professionals, define their most important contributions to society in terms of the partnerships they form with students, community members, and others in order to bring their knowledge and expertise to the table in the service of shared problem-solving. Put differently, whereas the academic professional most values research in pursuit of truth, the engaged scholar most values knowledge pursued to improve the world.

The structure and demands of faculty work, embedded as it is in the complex institutional context of contemporary higher education, can create enormous pressures against commitments to civic purposes. Despite such pressures, there are, and have been for a long time, faculty members, academic staff, and other university employees who take seriously social impact as a measure of professional efficacy and as an integral part of their professional identities. Many of our colleagues, for example, model civic professionalism by integrating community-based learning and participatory research into their courses despite the additional work this commonly requires.

**Whereas the academic professional most values research in pursuit of truth, the engaged scholar most values knowledge pursued to improve the world.**

It is important to acknowledge as well the wide variety of forms that a commitment to the civic dimensions of an academic professional identity might take. It may be expressed as a duty to engage with students outside of the classroom as a mentor or student club advisor. It may take the form of a commitment to participate actively in shared governance and the defense of academic freedom within the university. Particularly valuable to the goal of educating the next generation of civic professionals are those faculty members who embrace John Dewey’s idea that the expert is beholden first of all to the interests of the community, shaping a research and teaching agenda that seeks to be responsive to such interests. In all these ways, those of us involved in Imagining America’s Engaged Undergraduate Education Research Group sought to articulate a collective sense of ourselves as civic professionals. Fundamentally, however, we pursued a full integration of civic purpose into the liberal arts rather than accepting compartmentalization in our professional identities. Ultimately, we concluded that by embracing an identity as a civic professional, we could overcome the disjunctions between the liberal arts, the practical arts, and the civic arts.

Over the past three years, the research group, which included representatives from six collaborating institutions along with a research associate from Imagining America, worked together with the larger purpose of bridging these three dimensions. Campus representatives facilitated small-scale projects on their campuses that reflected a range of strategies to facilitate the development of civic professional identities and practices among faculty, staff, and students. These local projects provided insight into a variety of change strategies, ranging from structural changes to departmental majors to capacity building seminars and curricular grants for faculty to help them imagine new approaches to their work. We committed to monthly phone calls to discuss relevant research and share advice in planning these projects. The support, community, and shared commitment to the public purposes of the liberal arts we found in the research group modeled and reflected the broader civic identities we hoped to foster among others.

We submit that the concept of civic professionalism can address the challenges and opportunities of redefining the goals of liberal arts undergraduate education by integrating the pursuit of knowledge with practical skills and civic purposes. Perhaps more important, however, is the potential of civic professionalism to redefine the work of academic professionals. Although
there is extensive support for the public purposes of higher education, including educating students to be responsible citizens, many in academia do not make these goals a priority in their work lives. This is perhaps because such goals are not explicitly incorporated in their own, their discipline’s, or their institution’s definition of their purpose. Civic professionalism redefines professionalism to make the civic purposes of a professional identity clear, thus helping us reimagine what it means to be an academic professional. In redefining our identities as professionals we likewise redefine our relationships—to students, to communities, and to the purposes of education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We want to recognize the contributions of the faculty and staff members of the Engaged Undergraduate Education Research Group from the six participating institutions: Brigitta Brunner and Giovanna Summerfield (Auburn University), Robin Bachin and Hadassah St. Hubert (University of Miami), Catherine Gerard (Syracuse University), Amy Koritz (Drew University), Paul Schadewald (Macalester College), and Kenneth Townsend and Andrew Thaw (Millsaps College).

The project received funding and support from Syracuse University and from the “Faculty Work and Student Learning in the 21st Century” initiative of the Teagle Foundation. The project received guidance from Ashley Finley, Caryn Musil, KerryAnn O’Meara, Julie Hatcher, Kristin Norris, Molly Sutphen, William M. Sullivan, the Kettering Foundation, Imagining America research associate Amanda Niskode-Dossett, former Imagining America director Jan Cohen Cruz, and Imagining America Faculty co-director Timothy K. Eatman, who serves as the principal investigator of the Teagle Foundation grant for Syracuse University.

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Weaving Together Career and Civic Commitments for Social Change

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“Recognizing that affordability is as much about quality outcomes as costly input, we will provide the next decade’s students with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in satisfying and remunerative careers that will justify the expense of undergraduate and graduate education.”
—Rochester Institute of Technology 2014 (emphasis added).

The above quote from the Rochester Institute of Technology’s 2015–2025 strategic plan is one example of how an institution has embraced the public’s focus on return on investment (ROI). They are not alone. Clearly, those in higher education have heard the message and are striving to prove that graduates will be workforce ready and that the return (salary upon graduation) is worthy of the student’s (or parents’) investment.

EDUCATING STUDENTS FOR PUBLIC LIFE AND PRIVATE GAIN

But what does this emphasis on workforce preparation, and the narrow focus on remuneration, mean for the civic mission of higher education? What does it mean for higher education’s role in educating students for public life as well as private gain? Historically, American higher education has sought to balance career and workforce preparation with an emphasis on the development of students’ civic commitments and their capacity as citizens and builders of the commons. However, with this new focus on the individual student’s earning potential and narrowly defined preparation for work, higher education is ignoring the significant social and economic realities that threaten our nation’s social cohesiveness, economic competitiveness, and even the viability of our democracy.

As reported in A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy’s Future, our college graduates are having to enter a world defined by “intensified global competition,” increasing “demographic diversity,” and “dangerous economic inequalities” (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement 2012, 20). The structural nature of our society’s racism, classism, sexism, hetero-sexism, and able-ism, among other forms of oppression, continues to alienate and systematically marginalize significant segments of our population. Nationwide, our demographics have shifted, as we approach 2044 when it is estimated that the United States will be a “majority minority nation” (Frey 2014). The majority populations of the largest twenty cities are now non-white. And while enrollment of students of color in higher education has increased dramatically over the past two decades, the “achievement gap” remains. Low-income minority students graduate at much lower rates than their middle- and upper-class white counterparts (Campaign for College Opportunity 2013); in fact, only one in ten low-income students will complete a college degree (Achievement First 2014). Furthermore, as we have seen all too frequently in the past year, fifty years after the passage of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, we are still struggling to learn that “Black and Brown Lives Matter.”

Unfortunately, the narrow focus on workforce preparation and an individual student’s ROI ignores the deep-seated societal divisions and inequities that continue to undermine our cohesiveness, threaten our productivity, and imperil the fabric of our democracy. As the report by the National Task Force eloquently states:

A socially cohesive and economically vibrant US democracy
and a viable, just global community require informed, engaged, open-minded, and socially responsible people committed to the common good and practiced in ‘doing democracy’ (13).

This requires that we move beyond a narrow focus on economic capital (the individual student’s ROI) to a framework that recognizes the importance of social, cultural, civic, and political capital as well. Our students, as future professionals and engaged community members, need to leave college with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to build a new, more inclusive, and more equitable multicultural commons. And most importantly, we need to see this broader skillset as essential preparation for both work and civic life.

What kinds of questions about social justice, inequality, and democracy need to be inserted as a vibrant part of all students’ education? And how do the intentional structures for raising those questions influence disciplinary preparation for professional practice? Below we present examples from our work as faculty members at institutions that have made explicit and systematic commitments to a more holistic approach to the preparation for work and civic life that is grounded in social justice concerns. Though California State University–Monterey Bay (CSUMB) and Pitzer College are quite different institutions, they are united in their commitment to engaged learning that addresses social inequities, and to building long-term partnerships with underserved and marginalized communities as a core component of our academic programs.

CSUMB: INTEGRATING SOCIAL JUSTICE, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, AND CAREER PREPARATION

California State University–Monterey Bay is recognized as a national leader in service learning and civic engagement. It is one of only a handful of public universities that has made service learning a graduation requirement. In addition, CSUMB’s service-learning program is grounded in social justice, an approach which it calls “critical civic literacy” (Pollack 2015). Distinct from a traditional civics approach, critical civic literacy emphasizes the role of power in facilitating or inhibiting meaningful participation in decision making and civic life. As all departments at CSUMB have to develop service-learning courses, critical civic literacy is integrated into the core knowledge base of each of the degree programs. The departments themselves have had to wrestle with issues of diversity and social justice in new ways as they have developed their service-learning courses. As a result, the core curriculum has been transformed, and new questions and concerns about social justice, equity, and social responsibility are being asked as part of the evolving cannon in the academic programs.

For example, computer science students are not just engaging with the latest technology in the community. They are asking fundamental questions about the digital divide: how can technology serve to reduce systemic inequities and social divisions? In business, students are doing more than just focusing on profit maximization and entrepreneurship. They are exploring questions related to the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit: how can businesses be more sustainable, people friendly, and beholden to a wider set of community stakeholders, and not just stockholders? And in math, students are asking questions about who does and doesn’t get through algebra, the gateway course to higher education, and why.

At CSUMB, we say that our goal is not just to produce workforce-ready professionals, but rather, to produce socially responsible and social justice-oriented professionals. We describe this goal as creating “multicultural community builders: students who have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to work effectively in a diverse society to create more just and equitable workplaces, communities, and social institutions” (CSUMB).

This goal guides curriculum and academic program development campus-wide, and its impact can be seen in a number of ways. First, it can be seen in the faculty that are being hired in tenure-track positions. As the core curriculum addresses issues of social justice, it is important that there are faculty with the expertise to deliver that aspect of the curriculum. As a result, the makeup of our departments is changing. Secondly, the impact can be seen in the partnerships that the academic programs build with organizations (businesses, nonprofits, governmental agencies, unions, etc.) that work with the marginalized communities in our region. CSUMB’s academic programs are not just developing partnerships for traditional internships, they are also developing relationships that provide their students with meaningful opportunities to experience and address the deep-seated systemic inequities that exist in the region. For example, hospitality students in the College of Business can become interns with the elite hotels and golf courses on the Monterey Peninsula. But, the same students are also building relationships with the families of the workers at those hotels as they volunteer with tax preparation clinics being offered by the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program. This year, VITA secured more than $2,719,000 to 1,975 low-income families in our community through tax refunds, or an average of $1,675 per family. Kinesiology students are finding internships with high-end physical therapy and athletic training offices throughout the region, but they are also working with programs that address diabetes and childhood obesity and with organizations that provide recreation outlets to severely disabled youth and elders. Because the curriculum focuses on issues of social justice, the faculty and the academic departments themselves are investing in long-term relationships with
diverse community actors. And it is the students who are reaping the rewards of these investments in social capital, as newly formed connections are being built across long-standing societal divisions.

A third way that the impact can be seen is in the career choices and civic commitments of CSUMB graduates. The deep divides and social inequities that exist in our society act to limit the kinds of careers that students can imagine themselves as having and the kinds of communities in which students can imagine themselves living. Left unchallenged, these deep-seated biases and prejudices serve as an internal red lining process, demarcating entire careers and communities as unworthy—no viable future to be found. However, as students confront these biases in class and then build new meaningful relationships in the community, their career and community boundaries expand. Communities previously seen either as “places to get out of” or “places to avoid” are now seen as possible new homes that are worthy of the investment of one’s time and energy. Students also begin to experience greater social and cultural capital ROI and discover new ways to integrate their profession and social justice commitments. Here are a few quotes from recent computer science students that show this influence:

- “My work at the service-learning site has changed the path I want to take with my professional career. At first I wanted to create my own start-up so that my financial income would increase. What I want to do now is become a professor and speaker so I can encourage children to become software engineers.”

- “One of the impacts that this site has had on my professional career is the drive to want to get younger kids interested in computer science … to help reach out to younger girls and let them know that computer science is a possibility for them. The lack of women in gaming and computer science is saddening, so we are trying to make a difference.”

- “I had never considered becoming an instructor for an educational institution, but the work done at this service-learning site has definitely given me experience toward this field. Even if I don’t choose to become an instructor, the skills acquired are helpful in many aspects.”

By designing a curriculum that treats issues of social justice and inequality as core content in their majors, CSUMB gives students an opportunity to develop their social purpose as they also develop their career trajectory. The two are complementary, as students reap the rich rewards of their (and the university’s) investment in economic, social, cultural, and civic capital.

**Pitzer College: Social Justice through Political Engagement**

At Pitzer College, the focus has been on using community-based engagement and research to create outcomes that result in social change. Most distinctively, we are focused both on the impact of our partnerships in the community and on the lives and career opportunities of our students. In all of our efforts, the focus is on building more just and equitable communities and enriching our democracy. One example was the successful organizing effort in 2012 by Pitzer students, faculty, and community members to defeat Measure T, a bill to undermine representative democracy in the community. The bill sought to replace the system of specific council districts, created to ensure representation of Pomona’s disenfranchised communities, with an at-large election system. It was the research of Pitzer students and community members that ultimately was able to create a multi-racial coalition and actively work to defeat the measure.

This example is not an isolated example but reflects an ethos of community engagement that has emerged as a common practice through Pitzer College’s Center for Community Engagement and affiliated classes. This ethos is entrenched in the advancement of intercultural and interdisciplinary understanding as well as in the ideal of democracy translated as social responsibility. Through campus–community partnering, our students and faculty engage in acts of collaboration that go beyond the charity or project paradigms to a model of social change that builds partnerships of equality between all the participants, that gets at the root causes of problems, and that focuses directly or indirectly on political empowerment (Morton 1995).

As these long-term partnerships are developed, students and faculty can become civically engaged forces in their communities. Once engaged they come to see themselves as participants with a stake in the decisions being made and are challenged to find common grounds of collaboration with community institutions, unions, organizations, and neighborhood leaders to invoke social consciousness and long-term structural change.

This type of community engagement uses history, research, teaching, and learning to bring about fundamental social change. It leads us in the direction of creating new ways of carrying out democratic forms of learning and curriculum building in our classrooms; and to new models of building partnership in our communities that are about the creation of a more democratic, equitable, and socially just culture in our society. Because of our long-term commitment to specific sites and specific community collaborations, this type of community engagement allows the collaboration to build trust and to be able to get at the root causes of problems.

One of the main results of this practice has been the many students who have been
affected long term to continue the study and work that influenced and involved them. To name a few, for example, Suzanne Foster, who interned with the Pomona Day Labor Center during her four years at Pitzer, went on to obtain a master’s degree in urban planning at UCLA, became the director of the day labor center in 2007, and copublished an article on the center, “Organizing Immigrant Workers: Action Research and Strategies in the Pomona Day Labor Center” in *Latino Los Angeles*. Jessica Arciniega, who worked with the United Farm Workers Union after graduation, obtained her law degree through an apprenticeship program and is now the assistant general counsel of the California Agricultural Relations Board. Michele Siquieros, a daughter of immigrant parents from Mexico, who helped to develop the first class that took Pitzer students to live and work with farm workers in the San Joaquin Valley, is now the director of a statewide program, The Campaign for College Opportunity, which is expanding access and success in college for California students.

Another student who was a leader in both the day laborer and farm worker partnerships, Brianne Davila, is now an assistant professor in sociology at California State Polytechnic University–Pomona. Juan de Lara, Pitzer’s first Rhodes scholar, is now an expert on inequality and the warehouse economy as a professor of American studies and ethnicity at the University of Southern California. Kevin de Leon, who, when he was a student at Pitzer, helped lead a demonstration that drew 100,000 in East Los Angeles against Proposition 187, is now the Senate Pro Tempore, one of the most powerful positions in the state. Fabian Nunez, who graduated from Pitzer and was the first board chair of the Pomona Day Labor Center, came to hold the position of California state assembly speaker. Joaquin Calderon is a program officer with First 5 LA, an organization that partners with parents, community members, elected officials, county agencies, and service providers to ensure that all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and in life. The list includes Sekou Andrews, a national award-winning spoken word poet. Dozens of other students, such as David Pihl, Sergio Donis, Alex Espinoza, and Filiberto Nolasco Gomez, are in positions as researchers, organizers, and directors in national and international unions.

These are careers that on one level are about sustaining the individual and on another are about continuing to develop creative forms of positioning and organizing to create democratic spaces of forward-looking social change. All these students, as examples, continued to advance a practice that they had been part of in their undergraduate years, when they experienced the classroom as part of the civic realm and engaged with their communities to find solutions to economic, political, and social community problems. It shows the return that is possible on one’s investment in terms of economic, civic, and, perhaps most importantly, political capital.

**RECOGNIZING THE VALUE OF SOCIAL, CULTURAL, CIVIC, AND POLITICAL CAPITAL**

Rather than seeking to focus narrowly on the individual student’s economic ROI in college, both CSUMB and Pitzer have developed a more complex understanding of ROI. This more holistic perspective is grounded not only in economic return (i.e., salary), but in recognizing the value of social, cultural, civic, and political capital. It in no way limits one’s expectations on the ROI of a college degree. Rather, it creates a more holistic and integrated vision for the college graduate, representative of both the workforce development priorities and higher education’s civic mission.

If the institution’s stated goal is the narrow focus on economic ROI, then we develop our academic programs and community partnerships with that goal in mind. However, if we look to help students build the social, cultural, civic, and political capital that they truly need to navigate our increasingly complex and divided world, then our academic programs must develop a different curriculum, and our institutions must build relationships with a much more diverse set of institutions that are engaged in struggles for equity and justice. In that way, our students will be able to develop both remunerative and meaningful careers and social justice commitments, and they will provide new innovative solutions to our society’s deep-seated, systemic problems.

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The desire to develop rich, reciprocal, generative partnerships that simultaneously transformed the lives of students and the communities they served was not a central goal of Widener University in 2002. Likewise, no one had connected the students' community-based engagement with their preparation for work. However, over the next decade Widener embraced its role as an engaged university in one of the nation’s most distressed cities, Chester, Pennsylvania, and discovered that by doing so it was providing students with a rich learning environment to develop not only lifelong civic habits but also valuable skills for their work life after college.

Prior to 2002, the university sought to distance itself from the environment surrounding the campus. The negative reputation of Chester was one of Widener’s greatest obstacles to attracting students, and a series of unfortunate incidents involving students and local citizens led to the university’s decision to barricade itself off from Chester by enclosing the campus and forcing entry through a set of gates, which denied local citizens access to the school. The reality at the time was that Chester—with high crime rates, failing schools, and an increasingly difficult political environment—made it tough for Widener to intervene in a meaningful way. However, as difficult as it might have been to engage the community, there was no systematic mechanism or desire by the university to form truly democratic partnerships to address societal issues through engagement. There also were few community leaders who viewed Widener as a potential partner or as a catalyst to reconstruct a meaningful democratic polity in Chester.

Internally, shared governance was fractured from years of a hierarchical university leadership approach, as well as from two contentious promotion and tenure cases that led to a lawsuit filed against the university by faculty members. In other words, in 2002 when I arrived at Widener, the university had a far from ideal environment internally in which to engage in generative, interdisciplinary partnerships, and neither faculty nor students felt empowered to create democratic partnerships with local citizens to address the serious issues facing Chester.

**TOP-DOWN MANAGEMENT VERSUS DEMOCRATIC PARTNERSHIPS**

For a large portion of its history, Widener University was a military college, but in 1972 it became a civilian university. Still, over the next three decades, the administration adopted the tone set by their military predecessors—a top-down management style that was not democratic in practice. As the university grew, a shared governance model emerged that allowed for more faculty voice in decision making; however, the power remained concentrated in the hands of very few people. In 2003, a survey of faculty members revealed that few felt they had any voice in institutional decision making.

As the new president, I thought it was important to engage a broader range of constituents in decision making to chart our future. We started with the creation of a strategic planning committee made up primarily of faculty members who sought input from key stakeholders inside and outside of the university. Next, we created a new mission and vision for Widener that would focus on the role of an urban university in addressing societal issues through civic engagement and the formation of democratic partnerships. To help achieve that mission, the university developed an office of community engagement and hired an experienced person with a background in community development to build connections with Chester.
The type of organizational transformation we collectively achieved at Widener over the next decade is a case study of democracy, in all its messiness, at work. Campus constituents involved in that change, including students who became part of that process, learned how to listen to others, design more inclusive democratic processes, stay engaged when things got tough, and come up with innovative solutions to difficult problems.

**WORKING INTERNALLY TO DEVELOP CAPACITY EXTERNALLY**

In the fall 2003, after months of listening sessions and meetings with hundreds of constituents, Widener hosted a visioning conference with myriad stakeholders, including Chester community members. More than 100 people participated in the daylong workshop that produced a set of shared values that were later included in the school’s new mission and vision statements. To encourage broader participation, both statements were shared publicly for further feedback before being adopted by the board. The result was a new direction for the university that had civic engagement with the local community at its core. While the vision conference produced the desired result, perhaps the more important outcome was the tone that had been set—one that recognized that all voices needed to be heard for Widener to achieve its potential.

The new mission, which stated that the university would “connect the curricula to societal issues through civic engagement” and “contribute to the vitality and well-being of the communities we serve,” moved Widener into a leadership role in the national dialogue on civic and community engagement. Over the next decade, by maintaining the discipline to implement its new mission and vision, Widener gained a national reputation for its work in Chester. For example, the planning process itself resulted in a pilot project for the Middle States Commission, leading to a revision of its options for institutional reaccreditation.

The change in academic focus for Widener was more than a laudable step toward clearer academic goals and civic sensibilities—it was also a way to help students develop the kind of capabilities major employers were looking for in our graduates. For example, the 2015 Hart Research Report, prepared for AAC&U, demonstrated that 96 percent of employers surveyed “thought that students should have experiences that teach them how to solve problems with people whose views are different from their own.” It turns out that our new focus not only helps build stronger communities but also provides our students with essential skills for the twenty-first-century workplace.

An example of an academic initiative developed by the university to promote the new mission was the creation of the Academic Service-Learning Faculty Development Program, which provides faculty with resources, release time, and a monthly opportunity to work with other faculty from across disciplines to develop community-based learning courses. During the first ten years of this program, more than seventy-five courses were developed. However, as the program gained momentum, faculty and students found it difficult to develop meaningful community-based learning because of the lack of sustainable community partnerships with organizations that shared similar goals and had capacity for collaboration.

As faculty worked across disciplines, they often found greater synergies with colleagues from other schools than in their own departments. This led to two new initiatives. The first was the development of an advanced faculty workshop to enable engaged faculty to continue to collaborate. To address the issue of sustainable community partners, the university redoubled its commitment to community development through the creation of an office of civic engagement and of civic scholarships for students assigned to nonprofits to build capacity in Chester. Monthly meetings between community members and university officials were also established. With more engagement in Chester and the development of greater capacity among community organizations, the university was better able to identify sustainable, democratic partnerships, and students developed valuable skills that helped them to bring about change and build alliances.

**The type of organizational transformation we collectively achieved at Widener over the next decade is a case study of democracy, in all its messiness, at work.**

**COMMITTING TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND DEMOCRATIC PARTNERSHIPS**

When the university launched its largest campaign in history, civic engagement was a central theme. One new endowment fund, geared toward helping faculty see themselves as civic educators and students as engaged citizens, is a great example of how philanthropy helped advance this work. The Borislow Community-Engaged Faculty Research Fellowship is awarded...
annually to faculty who link scholarship
to Chester-based engagement through
democratic partnerships. This award
enables faculty recipients to pursue a
collaboratively designed research project
with a Chester community partner that
involves our students in community-based
research. Last year, the fellowship sup-
ported the work of faculty and students in
the evaluation of a local afterschool and
summer camp program and a community
assessment of a local neighborhood. The
data for both research projects will be used
for program development and planning
grants by local community organizations to
build capacity. This type of experience for
our students is invaluable because they are
engaging in precisely the type of activities
that employers say is important for the
workplace. In essence, they are creating
portfolios for employers that demonstrate
how they defined a problem, researched it,
and took action to address it.

The board also revamped its approach
to governance by adding a student and
introducing more opportunities for board
members to engage with faculty and
students on a regular basis. Town hall
meetings are now held twice a semester to
keep people informed, and also we host
quarterly coffee hours to bring the campus
and local community together, and faculty
from across disciplines are invited to meet
with the president and provost in small
interdisciplinary groups. As trust between
different internal constituents started to
grow, we discovered new ways to work
in a more democratic fashion, including
more meetings between faculty and admin-
istration to set financial and academic
priorities.

By 2010, the Association of Governing
Boards recognized the transparent nature
of the governance structure at Widener by
including the university in its publication
Leading Change: How Boards and Presidents
Build Exceptional Institutions. In the book,
fifteen colleges and universities were iden-
tified as exemplars of university board best
practices, and Widener was specifically rec-
ognized for how a president and the board
can collaborate through shared governance
with faculty to bring about significant
institutional change.

As trust and belief in the university’s
mission grew, faculty and staff were more
open to developing closer ties to the local
community. Early in my tenure, I had
developed a local community advisory
board made up of local community leaders
who shared their concerns and provided
advice on how Widener could be more
engaged. Over the years, the focus of the
group evolved from an advisory group to
an action committee and helped move
Widener from a service model to deeper
democratic engagements.

The movement to deeper democratic
engagement evolved as the university
developed more trust with community
partners, who then addressed significant
issues together in a more democratic
fashion. For years, Widener’s approach to
issues was reactive and self-serving, only
intervening in the community when there
was a direct impact on the university. Over
time that attitude changed, and several
sustainable partnerships sponsored by
Widener and select community partners
have emerged. Examples include the
Widener Partnership Charter School, the
Widener Small Business Development
Center, the Chester Community Physical
Therapy Clinic, the Widener Community
Nursing Clinic, and the Widener Center
for Violence Prevention. These com-
community initiatives were started when a
cross-disciplinary team of Widener faculty
and students engaged in dialogue about
their work in the community, which led
to discussions with local partners with
similar interests. For example, the Widener
Partnership Charter School, which today
serves more than 450 low-income children
in Chester, was created through a multidis-
ciplinary team of faculty who worked with
local activists to develop a new holistic
approach to elementary education. Being
witness to and a participant in the imple-
mentation of the work of these coalitions
also helped our students learn lessons in
how to innovate and think outside the box,
which was one of the highest priorities
named as key to workplace success by 95
percent of the employers in the 2015 Hart
Research survey.

As our desire to create democratic
partnerships grew, we also collaborated
with other colleges and universities. The
Delaware County College Access Center,
which annually serves more than 1,000
local high school students, is a joint part-
cnership with Cheyney University, Delaware
County Community College, Neumann
University, Penn State Brandywine,
Swarthmore College, Widener, and other
local partners. This initiative, along with a
nonprofit organization called the Chester
Higher Education Council, started when I
asked five other college presidents to create
a partnership to pool our resources to
address the educational needs of Chester
residents.

CONCLUSION
Widener’s journey over the past decade
to create deeper and more democratic
partnerships within Chester provided our
students with the best possible learning
environments, encouraged our faculty
to see themselves as civic educators, and
empowered the community with a voice
to find real solutions to pressing societal
issues. Developing these reciprocal, gener-
aive partnerships also turned out to be
one of the most effective ways to prepare
our students for today’s competitive job
markets.

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Scientists, medical practitioners, and other “specialists” certainly must be prepared to cope with public controversies related to their work: from scientists who serve on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to medical researchers and health professionals who explain the dangers of opting out of required vaccinations for personal, not medical, reasons. In many cases, scientists and medical practitioners play an active role in public deliberation on crucial issues. Yet to what degree does higher education in science, medicine, and other technical areas prepare students for these challenges as well as foster deeper knowledge and respect for the communities affected? We write this essay to suggest ideas based on our combined experiences about how the curriculum provides this preparation.

TRIBAL INTERNSHIPS AT THE INTERSECTION OF SCIENCE AND DELIBERATION

Since the US Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act of 1975, the 566 federally recognized tribes have put in place their own educational, health, environmental, and other governmental agencies and departments that rely on scientists to perform research and regulatory functions that support tribal self-determination and cooperation with state, federal, nonprofit organizations, and private entities. For tribes, this ideally involves hiring scientists who are themselves tribal members or members of other tribes, or scientists of other heritages who have the cultural and social competency to work in tribal contexts. One of the authors (Whyte) has worked on connecting tribes to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics tools, especially those of climate science, for tribal planning purposes.

A number of case studies point out that scientists in tribes are often responsible for convening public deliberation and dialogue about controversial issues. In the changing world in which we live, this involves issues of what species should be restored with limited funds or whether jobs should be traded off for environmental quality. For example, in the Little Band of Ottawa Indians, who live in what is now known to most as the Manistee, Michigan, area, tribal biologists helped to organize a cultural context group made up of a range of tribal members, from staff to elders to ordinary tribal citizens. This group holds cross-cutting deliberations about how to build programs that engage with non-tribal members on key issues affecting the environment. These deliberative efforts have led to the creation of a unique restoration program—the Lake Sturgeon Stewardship program—which has brought together tribal members and others around a vision of taking responsibility for the environmental quality of the watershed (Holtgren 2013).

Many people working in Indian country today understand the importance of tribal scientists convening deliberative processes and the mentoring of future tribal scientists. Tribal colleges and universities are taking the lead in educating students to take on these roles in addition to their “lab” scientific training. The Sustainable Development Institute at College of Menominee Nation (CMN) has an active internship program that is highly integrated within research, education, and outreach projects and can include sometimes up to fifteen college students enrolled in different disciplines at CMN and other institutions of higher education.

In the internship program, the students not only learn about sustainability science, how to do research, and how to carry themselves professionally—they are also expected to take part in and organize the deliberative events organized by the institute. In one case in 2014, the interns supported the organization of a 150-attendee deliberative summit connecting tribal scien-
tists with federal climate scientists. In another case in 2015, the Sustainable Development Institute organized an Indigenous Planning Summer Institute, which was geared toward providing interns with lessons and materials on how to engage in the deliberations needed for tribal planning.

At Haskell Indian Nations University, students enrolled in the environmental science program and the Indigenous and American Indian studies program founded the Indigenous Peoples Climate Change Working Group. The working group, now in its tenth year, meets twice a year, usually at a tribal college, to utilize aspects of physical and social sciences to contemplate climate change and variability holistically. In these meetings, the working group has engaged tribes and native and non-native scientists in a dialogue about the significance of climate change and how to determine policies that are beneficial to various tribes, given differences in location, values, worldviews, economic status, and other concerns. One Haskell graduate, Paulette Blanchard (Absentee Shawnee), used the skill sets she developed as a working group member to organize the largest intertribal deliberative gatherings of both native and non-native scientists and leaders on climate change issues affecting Oklahoma tribes (Riley et al. 2012).

For both Menominee and Haskell, a significant component of this work has been helping students see the possibility of returning to their own tribal nations to work and establish meaningful careers. The programs set up enduring peer and mentorship relationships that students can rely on in years to come as they engage in career planning. This suggests that college preparation for work not only involves learning skills that one now needs to practice as an effective environmental scientist but also imagining where that practice can occur.

**PHYSICIAN HEAL THYSELF: THE COMMUNITY AS MEDICAL TRAINER**

For decades, the United States has struggled to overcome dramatic health disparities between black and white citizens, and today whites still have a longer healthy life expectancy than blacks. For instance, according to *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, non-Hispanic black adults are at least 50 percent more likely to die of heart disease or stroke prematurely (before age 75) than their non-Hispanic white counterparts (Frieden 2013).

There has long been a belief in medical education circles that one way to address these disparities is to train physicians who are more culturally competent at working with residents in the urban core of cities, where African American populations tend to be concentrated. One strategy calls for dramatically increasing the number of African American practicing physicians, with the expectation that they will be more competent and more willing to practice in urban areas.

However, very little progress has been made toward this goal. Marc Nivet, chief diversity officer of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), made headlines in many medical publications in 2013 when he noted that there were 100 fewer black males enrolled in medical school that year than there were in 1984. Data obtained from the AAMC website shows that there was a modest gain of 3 percent in the number of male African American medical school graduates from 2002 to 2011, but the proportion of new doctors who were black men remained about the same: 2.6 percent in 2002 and 2.4 percent in 2011. Overall, African Americans account for 13 percent of the US population, but only 6 percent of 2011 matriculants into medical school were black, as are just 4 percent of practicing doctors.

Cleveland State University (CSU) has confronted this challenge head on with its Urban Primary Care Initiative. In this program, the Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED) and CSU work together to identify and train health care professionals to meet the challenges of creating a more diverse health care workforce that cares for medically underserved populations. Each year up to thirty-five CSU students enter the joint program. CSU students in the program can be promoted to a guaranteed seat at NEOMED in two years if they successfully meet the grade point average (GPA) and Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) requirements. Both universities aggressively pursue scholarships for students while they are at CSU and NEOMED, some in exchange for their promise to work in underserved Cleveland neighborhoods after receiving their medical degrees.

The Urban Primary Care Initiative has three ambitious goals. The first is to train medical professionals who are distinctively qualified to practice in urban communities—specifically, in the city of Cleveland. This is accomplished through a community-based curriculum developed by CSU and NEOMED known as the Cleveland Neighborhood Model in which students become immersed in one of eight targeted Cleveland neighborhoods, all of which exhibit low health indicators. During their two years at CSU, students spend considerable time learning about all the neighborhoods before focusing on one of them to fully engage with that community’s family and health care networks. This engagement includes shadowing health care professionals and working with community partners to address the social determinants of health in the neighborhood. One component of the Cleveland Neighborhood Model sends interdisciplinary teams of health professions students to local communities to promote the health of small groups of residents and their families. When the urban primary care students matriculate to NEOMED, they maintain their focus and relationships in those neighborhoods.
The second goal is to recruit a critical mass of students from the very neighborhoods where the curriculum is implemented. This addresses the need for diversity in the medical profession, since most of the target neighborhoods are predominantly African American and Latino. However, it is also the case that these students are prime candidates for the program because they enter with valuable insights into the culture and practices within an urban community.

The third goal is to deploy these students back to the target neighborhoods as primary care physicians—pediatricians, family doctors, gynecologists, and internists—after they complete their medical education and residencies. While there are ongoing efforts to provide student scholarships that require this professional commitment, it is understood that the most compelling reason for students to practice in these neighborhoods will be a sense of obligation that is driven by some allegiance to their communities and their residents.

The primary strategy for achieving these goals is to give local residents significant influence in the program’s design and execution, particularly as it engages its students. This deep level of participation is pursued in multiple ways.

A fifteen-member Community Advisory Board is involved in every aspect of the program, from curriculum development to creation of retention strategies. The board’s diverse membership includes not only representatives from the major health systems in the region but also ministers and community activists. Its prominence is bolstered by two revered local leaders who co-chair the board: former Congressman Louis Stokes and retired physician and health care advocate Edgar Jackson.

In addition, a lead organization from each of the eight targeted neighborhoods plays an active role designing the community experiences for students and helping them to navigate the neighborhoods. The lead organizations vary greatly, from community development corporations to settlement houses. All, however, were selected because they are highly respected in their communities and operate under a model of inclusive participation by community residents.

Finally, a corps of Community Champions has been recruited from those neighborhoods and assigned to each student in the program. The Champions—from retirees to leaders of grassroots organization to a firefighter—not only provide emotional support to students but also involve the students in community activities that expose them to the practices of neighborhood leadership.

The expectation is that by embracing the community in such fundamental ways and giving it authority, community stakeholders will play an active role recruiting their best and brightest for the program, encouraging them to persist through completion and, ultimately, to return to the urban communities where they learned to practice as professionals. Centering knowledge of a community and one’s professional responsibility to its people as part of curricular preparation for a medical career is a radical notion—and one that promises to reduce disturbing racial health disparities.

UNDERGRADUATE PREPARATION FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL—SCIENCE IS ONLY PART OF THE STORY

Almost 50,000 undergraduate students applied for 20,300 places in allopathic medical schools in the United States last year, and another 18,000 applied for the approximately 6,700 places in osteopathic medical schools (Beck 2015). How should these students have been advised in college to prepare to be accepted to a medical school and then to be a physician?

AAMC developed the MCAT, which most schools use, along with students’ GPAs, to screen applicants to consider for interviews. Admission to medical school is attained by only about one in four applicants who are interviewed. The MCAT has undergone a major change this year. What was previously a four-hour test with three sections, mostly related to science knowledge and critical thinking, is now a seven-hour test with four sections. The new section covers psychology, sociology, and the biological foundations of behavior. MCAT questions are designed to test not just what the student knows but how well the student can apply what she or he knows to new problems. Although these changes to the MCAT were announced three years ago, those who took the test in April 2015 were the first cohort to experi-
ence the new format. For more information about the new MCAT, see the fall 2012 issue of Peer Review, www.aacu.org/peerreview/2012/fall.

The standards for subject prerequisites for medical school admission were established by the Council on Medical Education of the American Medical Association (AMA) in 1904. In 1910, Abraham Flexner, an educational reformist and author of Medical Education in the United States and Canada, revised these requirements somewhat but only included math and science subjects. By 1929, some schools and students were already publicly suggesting other opinions regarding appropriate preparation for medical school.

For Flexner, who exposed the poor state of academic rigor present in the medical schools in the United States in 1910, an emphasis on preparation in the sciences for those entering medical school was understandable. He and the leaders of the best medical schools at the time sought to enroll students who were prepared to advance the knowledge of the scientific causes of diseases so that better diagnostic tests and treatments could be found for acute and chronic diseases.

There is still a need for scientific discovery in medicine today. However, many patients need physicians who are prepared to form therapeutic alliances with them to treat chronic illness such as obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure with lifestyle modifications such as diet and exercise, which are equally, if not more, effective in managing these conditions as prescribing medications.

Some medical schools believe their mission is to prepare elite research physicians for careers in an academic setting, while other medical schools are more interested in preparing students for the practice of medicine. One of the schools that embraces the latter mission has been using a different strategy for choosing some of its students for quite a while.

Mt. Sinai’s Icahn School of Medicine began its “early assurance” program in 1987. This program, originally known as the Humanities and Medical Program, is now called the FlexMed program in honor of Abraham Flexner. Students apply to FlexMed during their sophomore year of college. Applicants must have completed either one year of chemistry, biology, or physics. Once accepted, students are free to pursue any areas of undergraduate study, without having to meet traditional science requirements or taking the MCAT. However, FlexMed students are required to take some undergraduate science and math courses—maintain to make at least a B in each one and to maintain an overall GPA of 3.5. They may major in whatever interests them but students admitted to the program are required to take courses on statistics, ethics, and, public or global health or health policy. FlexMed students who do not have a sufficient background in clinically relevant sciences are asked to participate in a six-week course before matriculation to medical school that emphasizes basic concepts in biochemistry, molecular biology, and anatomy.

About five years ago, the Boston University School of Medicine began reviewing all of the applications they received to evaluate for information on life experiences, socioeconomic status, and cultural and ethnic background. The students selected to be interviewed when these criteria were included had college grades and MCAT scores equal to those chosen for interview by traditional screening methods, but they produced a class that was more collegial, supportive of one another, and open to new ideas.

These examples reinforce the notion behind the changes made to the MCAT, which suggests that choosing students with a broader educational background does not harm the performance of medical students and may provide advantages that may enhance the physician workforce of the future. These shifts suggest a growing acknowledgment that successful physicians need to know about more than diseases and diagnoses; they need to know their patients too. By gaining more comprehensive knowledge of the patients—their contexts, communities, and behaviors—physicians can more effectively practice their job of healing.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As the examples in this article show, the way colleges prepare students for careers in scientific fields, such as medicine and environmental management, has begun to change. These changes have been driven largely by what many health care practitioners and environmental scientists have discovered is actually part of their jobs. Both deeper knowledge of specific communities and an ability to publicly engage and share power with those communities are now understood by some as indispensable components of practicing these professions effectively. This has profound implications for what preparation for work might actually mean in colleges. Thinking about one’s public responsibility—and to whom—as part of preparation for work is no longer just a personal preference, but is coming to be a workplace necessity.

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Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries with Civic Literacy

Mary Gowan, dean and Kenneth R. Bartee Endowed Professor for the College of Business, James Madison University
Margaret Salazar-Porzio, curator, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

Most universities require students to complete a core undergraduate curriculum that emphasizes a balance among the sciences, humanities, and the arts. This curriculum is designed to challenge the intellect and encourage a lifelong curiosity and hunger for further learning. Upon graduation, a liberally educated person is able to explore disciplines outside his or her own specialty with the expectation of at least grasping what professionals in other fields are discussing.

A liberal education also ensures that students graduate with civic literacy. Civic literacy provides students with three capacities: critical thinking, proficiency in bridging and understanding different cultures, and the ability to imagine and sympathize with the situation of others (Nussbaum 1997). Each capacity prepares students to go forth and be enlightened citizens. Graduates with a liberal education should understand that, whatever their chosen profession, they are part of a larger society in which the choices they make affect not only themselves but those around them as well. Civic literacy cuts across all disciplines and benefits all sectors of society and work. Furthermore, it provides a grounding for students in moral and ethical reasoning and enables graduates to use their critical thinking skills to add value in their chosen professions and in their communities.

A Hart Research Associates 2013 survey of 318 employers, conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, affirmed the need for such attributes. The survey identified the most important characteristics for graduates entering the workplace. These included the ability to think critically and rationally and the ability to uphold high ethical and moral standards. Ultimately, graduates must be able to offer employers more than the knowledge of their majors, be that finance, art history, or any of the other narrow disciplines taught in the academy.

We use two case studies to demonstrate the importance of a liberal education, with an emphasis on civic literacy. On first glance, these case studies appear to be at opposite ends of the spectrum. One perspective is from business education, a world frequently and repeatedly challenged as being myopic and at odds with liberal education. The other perspective is from museum curation, a world seen as intimately related to a liberal education, yet also a world that relies increasingly on entrepreneurial initiative for sustainability. What these two case studies demonstrate is the shared importance of critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and a broad world view—civic literacy.

Of equal importance, these case studies highlight why it is important for faculty who teach liberal arts courses to embrace the role they play in preparing students for future career success, whatever the chosen profession. When academics and professionals begin to embrace their connectedness rather than call out their differences, the long, ongoing debate about the relevance of a liberal education will no longer be necessary.

CASE STUDY 1: A VIEW FROM THE BUSINESS SCHOOL

James Madison University (JMU) has recently embarked on two university-wide initiatives in which the College of Business stands to benefit and to play a leading role. The first initiative is the Madison Collaborative, Ethical Reasoning in Action. Developed as the Quality Enhancement Program to meet reaccreditation requirements for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the Madison Collaborative is a university-wide program designed to teach an ethical reasoning framework to all JMU students. The goal is to provide students with a decision-making framework that they learn and apply throughout their university education and beyond. Designed around eight key knowledge...
questions, known as the 8KQs, drawn from the ethical reasoning tradition, the Madison Collaborative teaches students a set of prompts to use in making decisions. These 8KQs apply across cultures and provide students with a set of lenses that prepares them to embrace the tough choices they will inevitably face. The 8KQs focus on fairness, outcomes, responsibilities, character, liberty, empathy, authority, and rights. Applying these 8KQs requires critical thinking, proficiency in bridging and understanding different cultures, and the ability to imagine and sympathize with the situation of others. In other words, civic literacy.

The second initiative is still under development and focuses on providing all JMU students the opportunity to develop an entrepreneurial mindset through exposure to concepts in classes or through participation in extra- and/or cocurricular activities. This effort is being led collectively by all of the academic deans on campus. The Center for Entrepreneurship, housed in the College of Business, serves as a hub and a catalyst for much of the activity, which includes a focus on innovation, creativity, and collaboration.

Entrepreneurial thinking involves looking beyond what is to what can be, an ability and willingness to identify and exploit opportunities. On the surface, such a way of thinking may be perceived in a negative light. Taken within the context of a strong grounding in civic literacy, however, that view changes. Consider the student who learns to look beyond the current health initiatives in a community to define and exploit opportunities to make health care more readily available. Or the musician who will need to take ownership of his or her own career to be successful (or even to just have a paycheck).

As the deans worked collectively to define and foster this entrepreneurial thinking initiative, we realized the importance of folding the Madison Collaborative, Ethical Reasoning in Action framework into how we talk about and teach entrepreneurial thinking. For those of us in the College of Business, it is through these two different lenses—ethical reasoning and an entrepreneurial mindset—that we live out our mission to prepare students to be engaged, principled business professionals and leaders. Through these lenses, topics such as social entrepreneurship and conscious capitalism move from the realm of theoretical constructs to actionable ways of managing organizations. Ultimately, the business landscape is transformed by ensuring that profit maximization is not the only goal, or even the primary goal.

The collective of the strong focus on civic literacy as part of the rich JMU liberal education heritage, the Madison Collaborative, and entrepreneurial thinking ensures our business students are receiving a grounded, unique, and solid business education that prepares them to excel as principled business professionals and leaders who are enlightened citizens. They leave JMU prepared to be collaborative business partners, engaged with ideas and the world.

**CASE STUDY 2: A VIEW FROM THE MUSEUM**

The link between business and museums is evident in the kinds of people museums hire. Museums generally look for people with expertise and interest in collecting, preserving, and interpreting material culture, but in recent years, the buzzword “entrepreneurial” has infiltrated a wide variety of job profiles and calls across the field. As a preference for hiring committees, “entrepreneurial” has become a code word for candidates with business savvy, money-raising connections, and marketing capacity. There is recognition that having a mind toward profits is not necessarily a bad thing and can lead to sustainable futures for museums. This inclination, however, can present conflicts of interest, especially if it influences the contents of collections, exhibitions, and the presentation of public history.

Museum advocates may lament this trend toward museum corporatization, but there seems to be no going back. In this profit-driven environment, how do we make sure that museum management remains ethical and focused on its real task—providing an important resource for continuing to tell the story of time and history? Museums in this environment need people who are knowledgeable about the subject matter (arts, humanities, science and technology, history, etc.), entrepreneurial, and ethical. In other words, museums need individuals with a high level of civic literacy complemented by business acumen.

The Smithsonian National Museum of American History (NMAH) recently
has begun a new hiring initiative to replace retiring staff and rejuvenate the museum’s curatorial force. This initiative follows the development of the NMAH’s 2013 strategic vision and set of core values that seek to operationalize civic literacy in our work at the museum. The values focus on stewardship, critical thinking, inclusion, curiosity, collaboration, risk taking, and ethics. We are looking for people who practice a kind of social entrepreneurship that comes from training in ethical reasoning provided by a liberal education like the one found at JMU. As JMU and other higher education institutions have shown, this can be cultivated by a liberal education that has at its core strong traditions in the arts and humanities and includes a focus on civic literacy.

Civic literacy allows students to develop broad intellectual and cultural understanding; it nurtures creativity and deepens participation in public discourse and modern democracy. Society flourishes with citizens whose understanding of the world is broad and analytical, and that is true of museum management as well.

In the best cases, arts and humanities in higher education encourage what philosopher Martha Nussbaum has called a “narrative imagination”—the capacity to enter into worldviews and experiences different from one’s own (2010). According to Nussbaum, this kind of learning can foster real democratic practice and lead to shared values of respect for freedom and human dignity; empathy, open mindedness, and imagination; a desire for tolerance, justice, and equality; and responsibility to a larger good, all of which are characteristics of the ethical citizen. Humanities fields teach this kind of understanding through literature, arts, language, history, and other fields that encourage people to imagine themselves in the situation of others; diverse stories transport audiences to other moments in time, make foreignness familiar, and allow a person to get lost in the beauty of objects and images. This kind of imaginative work is at the very foundation of museums.

Museums like the NMAH provide a space in which the evidence of our material past and present (collections) can be used to tell such stories, to remind us of what has happened on Earth and beyond, and to shape a more humane future. Cultural artifacts remind us of our interconnectedness; the way we live our lives is not so different from the manner in which others—past and present—existed in this world. More than ever, we need people who know how to tell stories about how we exist in complex intersection.

Graduates with civic literacy acquired as part of a strong liberal education foundation and coupled with an ethical approach to life and work can use the knowledge gleaned from our material culture to inform and nourish our sense of connection to each other and the world. This is a significant responsibility given the corporatization of cultural institutions, and it will be taken up by the next generation of ethical and entrepreneurial leaders at the NMAH and beyond.

Funding for museums will ebb and flow, as ever, but we see that across the board—from business to medicine to cultural institutions—a commitment to ethics and entrepreneurial thinking will always be needed. As funding cuts continue to be felt in the museum sector, organizations will adapt, and they will need to search for people with entrepreneurial minds and broad expertise who can resist being swayed by funders’ objectives. A liberal education based on tenets like those exhibited by JMU’s Ethical Reasoning in Action initiative can cultivate the museum professional who also practices ethical entrepreneurship.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the day, what we need is a fundamental rethinking of how we position the value and role of a liberal education. Clearly, a liberal education should provide the civic literacy that crosses disciplinary boundaries and is necessary in all sectors of society—for business students and for students who will lead museums. In the university setting, we need to be more purposeful in guiding students’ selection of courses and showing them that, for instance, having an interest in science is not mutually exclusive with having an interest in working on Wall Street or curating a museum exhibit, but rather can be complementary.

Having an interest in art does not preclude one from becoming an entrepreneur but rather can lead one to be a successful entrepreneur by studying both art and entrepreneurship and enabling a museum to be more successful in finding resources to continue and grow its work. As the academy deepens its efforts to enable students to perceive the necessity of all learning being deeply grounded in civic literacy and an ethical framework, we begin to equip our students to succeed both professionally and personally in ways we can only begin to imagine.*

REFERENCES


What Does It Mean to Be an Educated Person Today?

Jean Johnson, vice president for moderator development and communications, National Issues Forums Institute

A quick glance at the polls seems to suggest exactly what the public wants from higher education—get graduates ready for jobs. According to a 2014 Gallup survey, nearly seven in ten Americans say that “the percentage of graduates who are able to get a good job” is one of their top criteria for judging the quality of a college or university.

But what, precisely, are people calling for when they voice sentiments like these? Do they want colleges and universities to reshape their programs to match the job market? Do they see any value to study and learning that doesn’t have a clear-cut connection to the student’s future line of employment?

To shed light on these questions, three nonpartisan organizations—the National Issues Forums Institute, American Commonwealth Partnership, and The Democracy Commitment—joined forces in 2012 to organize more than 125 public forums in twenty-two states. The topic was the future of higher education, and between 2012 and 2014, students, parents, professors, employers, and others gathered in libraries, schools, clubs, and on campuses to look at competing missions for the nation’s colleges and universities and to think about the benefits and trade-offs of each.

A MORE NUANCED PUBLIC VIEW

Overall, the forums suggest that public thinking about higher education is considerably more aspirational and nuanced than polls sometimes suggest. Moreover, as documented in a Kettering Foundation report, Divided We Fail: Why It’s Time for a Broader, More Inclusive Conversation on the Future of Higher Education, the forums show convincingly that a broad swath of Americans continues to hold “a rich, expansive, vivid—perhaps even idealistic—view of what higher education should be.”

At the same time, the forums reveal a potentially troublesome gap between the way policy makers and more typical Americans think and talk about higher education. Based on the forums, people outside leadership circles appear only barely aware of the historic changes occurring in higher education today. Few seem to be closely following front-burner debates over issues like outcomes-based funding and competency-based education. Many are just starting to think through what values and priorities in higher education are most important to them.

Overall, the forums suggest that public thinking about higher education is considerably more aspirational and nuanced than polls sometimes suggest.

SO WHO CAME TO THE FORUMS?

It is essential to acknowledge at the outset that the people who attended the forums in 2012–2014 were not a representative sample of the American public. They were a diverse group of individuals with enough interest in higher education to come to a meeting to talk about it. Moreover, by attending the forums, these people did something that is quite unusual— they invested some ninety minutes or more weighing different ideas about higher education’s role and exchanging views on the subject.

Most of the participants were college graduates, and more than four in ten were students. Many began their deliberations by...
referring to higher education’s impact on their own lives. Older participants often explained how their college experiences had changed their perspective on the world, even though they had completed their studies decades earlier.

To capture the gist of the discussions, representatives of the National Issues Forums Institute and the Kettering Foundation observed a number of forums and reviewed transcripts and moderator reports. They also examined more than 1,200 questionnaires returned by participants after the forum discussions. A detailed summary of what took place in the forums, Divided We Fail is available free of charge at https://www.kettering.org/wp-content/uploads/PA-KF-Divided-We-Fail-Final.pdf. Below are some of the major themes emerging from the forums.

THE VALUE OF CHALLENGING, WIDE-RANGING STUDY
As a starting point for the discussion, forum materials offered three broad goals for higher education’s future: (1) emphasizing science and technology to help the economy; (2) offering students a rich, broad education accentuating values such as responsibility, integrity, and cooperation; and (3) expanding opportunity by helping more students attend college and graduate. Most participants saw important benefits in all three, and much of the discussion centered on whether higher education could do justice to all of them and what kinds of trade-offs were acceptable if it could not.

As they wrestled with these dilemmas, the participants often returned to one central question: What does it mean to be “an educated person” today? And in forums across the country—on campuses and off—participants repeatedly stressed their conviction that a well-educated individual is someone who has studied broadly and been exposed to a wide range of ideas and viewpoints.

At Kansas State University, one woman put it this way: “Granted, I’m biased towards the liberal arts, but if you have a higher education background, period, you’ve had opportunity to be exposed to different cultures, different lifestyles, different religions, different belief systems, and you have a heart. . . . and a mind that are both opened. . . . I think that’s what education does for you.”

A senior citizen attending a book club forum in Maryland talked about the importance of a broad and varied education in preparing the nation’s leaders: “[It] used to be the kind of thing that created our thinkers and our leaders and our managers, because they would have that broad array of courses and ideas and cultures . . . . The thinkers are the people [who] are going to do the kinds of things that build communities and make our lives [better]. . . .”

Hardly anyone in the forums discounted higher education’s role in preparing students for work after college, and students (and parents) often talked about the tensions in their own minds between the value and attraction of broader study versus the need to compete for jobs in a tough, exacting economy. Even so, many participants seemed to sense that something valuable was being lost with the increasing focus on jobs. “Thinking about college solely [as career preparation],” a New Mexico woman said, “just makes you a resource to be optimized by society, rather than to be a real person and a free thinker.”

Among those who returned post-forum questionnaires, the overwhelming majority agreed that college should be “where students learn to develop the ability to think critically by studying a rich curriculum that includes history, art and literature, government, economics, and philosophy.” In fact, more than half indicated that they “strongly” agreed with this idea.

Moreover, most people in the forums seemed to value both a rich course of classroom study and a diversity of learning experiences. Among those returning questionnaires, solid majorities said “internships, community service, and campus projects that teach problem-solving skills” were also worthwhile parts of the college experience.

A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT TAKE ON STEM
In recent years, a number of studies and reports have underscored the country’s need for more college graduates with degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields. Most forum participants seemed well aware of this advice, and in the follow-up questionn-
naires, strong majorities agreed that "our country's long-term prosperity heavily depends on educating more students" in STEM.

But the discussions on STEM also contained a caveat. Participants frequently warned of the dangers in STEM education that is too narrow. Many worried that graduating legions of students whose college work consisted exclusively of engineering, math, or science courses would undercut American competitiveness—not enhance it. Many reiterated their belief that invention and creativity emerge when people have a wide-ranging education, not when students devote themselves single-mindedly to a specific field.

"Innovation is the strength of the United States in science and technology," one woman explained. "That means a broadly educated and experienced person… They need to be very good at their technology or science, but [they need more than that], or we're going to be another China. They're very good at technology. They're not very good at innovation. That's why they send their students here."

A Kansas professor made a similar point: "I think it's great to encourage mathematical and science education—and I think we need more of it, and if there's stuff we can do, I'm all for it. [But I have] always thought [that] higher education—whether you majored in chemistry or art history or business or whatever—it taught you how to learn, and so if there were shifts in the economy, you learned how to learn the new thing… .Science [and] math [are] super important. We should encourage more of it, not less of it. … People in the arts should learn how to do calculus… . But if higher education becomes job training, we're all in trouble."

In Tennessee, a local employer made a similar point. Her company, she explained, was on the hunt for employees with work skills in technology and engineering, but with broader and deeper capacities as well: "We're really looking for people in the shop who are well trained and can think logically."

A MEANDERING DISCUSSION OF COSTS
With costs in the headlines—and with about four in ten forum participants currently in college—it's hardly surprising that worries about tuition and student debt would surface. Many participants told stories about their own or someone else's financial struggles—anecdotes that were specific and heartfelt. Yet, few seemed to have thought much about why costs might be rising, and even fewer seemed on top of the contentious policy debates over how to control them.

From time to time, a participant would question whether the country and its taxpayers place enough "value" on higher education. Others zeroed in on solving individual problems such as how and where students could find scholarships. But when the conversation turned to more systemic questions, the deliberations often faltered and became unfocused.

AN OUTMODED DEFINITION OF "COLLEGE"
For most participants, the word "college" meant a traditional four-year residential program catering primarily to eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds. Few mentioned community colleges initially, even though discussion materials specifically referred to them. Only a handful brought up older or nontraditional students. Nearly all seemed to understand that the US higher education system is diverse, containing many different types of institutions. Still, most of the discussion revolved around four-year college programs, with some participants pointing out that high school graduates who are not academically prepared for college or oriented toward traditional college coursework could benefit from a more diverse set of options.

It was evident that many people in the forums had thought extensively about how going to college (or not being able to go to college) affects individuals—themselves, people they knew, people they taught, people they hired, people they worked with. It was also evident, as some people freely admitted, that thinking seriously about the role and direction of the higher education system as a whole was new territory for them.

Overall, the forums showed that even well-educated, motivated, and interested Americans have much to learn about and think about when considering higher education's future. But the forums also showed that many members of the public have ideals, concerns, and convictions about higher education that should be weighed as part of national and state policy making.

TOP-DOWN CHANGE OR A BROADER DISCUSSION?
The question the country faces now is whether higher education will be reshaped from the top down—with elected officials and higher education leaders and experts advancing changes and adopting solutions based on their own visions, values, and assumptions—or whether they expand their deliberations and give Americans outside their circles a meaningful chance to think seriously about what the United States needs and expects from higher education.*

REFERENCES

The Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Action Network

As part of its commitment to preparing all students for civic, ethical, and social responsibility in the United States and global contexts, and determined to use A Crucible Moment as a clarion call to action, AAC&U formed the CLDE Action Network, a coalition of thirteen civic focused national organizations. Determined to make civic inquiry and engagement expected rather than elective for all college students, the CLDE Action Network coordinates strategies, publicize each other’s publications, projects, and conferences, and identifies initiatives that can be done jointly. Together they reach some 2,000 universities and colleges (both two-year and four-year) and include more than 8 million students.

Partner organizations include: the American Association of State Colleges andUniverses, Anchor Institutions Task Force, Association of American Colleges and Universities, The Bonner Foundation, Bringing Theory to Practice, Campus Compact, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, the Democracy Commitment, Imagining America, the Interfaith Youth Core, Kettering Foundation, NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and New England Resource Center for Higher Education.

Bridging Cultures to Form a Nation: Community, Difference, and Democratic Thinking

Co-directed by AAC&U and The Democracy Commitment (TDC), Bridging Cultures to Form a Nation supports a community college network focused on civic learning and democratic capacity building through the humanities. The grant supports a three-year curriculum and faculty development project for humanities faculty in ten community colleges committed to infusing questions about difference, community, and democratic thinking into high-enrollment transfer courses in the humanities; promoting greater adoption of high-impact practices that advance civic learning; creating a series of humanities-enriched professional development opportunities for community college faculty; and expanding the project’s impact through collaboration with additional community colleges and partnerships with state humanities councils.

The Kettering Foundation/AAC&U Joint Project on Civic Arts and Preparation for Work

AAC&U and Kettering have been working on a joint project over the past three years to examine the relationship of liberal education, civic learning, and work. This special themed issue of Peer Review, Rethinking Preparation for Work, is one visible product of that exploration.

Bringing Theory to Practice

In partnership with AAC&U, the Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) project supports and encourages colleges and universities to link the learning, well-being, and civic development of students. It now assists those institutions in planning and actually taking steps of transformative change in pedagogy, structure, funding, and reward systems in order to further their commitment to an even stronger campus culture for learning and the fullness of student achievement. Having gained foundation and individual support of more than $9.3 million from the project’s inception, BTtoP has awarded more than 460 grants to colleges and universities throughout the country.

The Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy in Partnership with The Council of Europe

A founding Steering Committee member of this Consortium more than a decade ago, AAC&U works with other higher education associations in the United States, Europe, and Australia along with our key partner, The Council of Europe, to promote education for democracy in a divided but interdependent world. The Consortium sponsors conferences, produces publications, and initiates periodic joint projects.

AAC&U’s Quarterly Journal Diversity & Democracy: Civic Learning for Shared Futures

Diversity & Democracy supports higher education faculty and leaders as they design and implement programs that advance civic learning and democratic engagement, global learning, and engagement with diversity to prepare students for socially responsible action in today’s interdependent but unequal world. Recent issues have included Publicly Engaged Scholarship and Teaching (Winter 2015); General Education and Democratic Engagement (Summer 2014); New Technologies: Implications for Higher Education’s Democratic Mission (Winter 2014); Collaborating for Civic Learning: Student and Academic Affairs (Fall 2013); Assessing Students’ Diversity, Global, and Civic Learning Gains (Summer 2013); and Transformative Partnerships at Home and Abroad (Winter 2013).
AAC&U Publications on Civic Learning

A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy’s Future

This report from the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement calls on the nation to reclaim higher education’s civic mission. Commissioned by the Department of Education and released at a White House convening in January 2012, the report calls for a twenty-first-century vision of college learning for all students—a vision with civic learning and democratic engagement an expected part of every student’s college education. The report documents the nation’s anemic civic health and includes recommendations for action that address campus culture, general education, and civic inquiry as part of major and career fields as well as hands-on civic problem solving across differences.

A Crucible Moment was prepared at the invitation of the US Department of Education under the leadership of the Global Perspective Institute, Inc. (GPI) and AAC&U. The publication was developed with input from a series of national roundtables involving leaders from all parts of the higher education and civic renewal communities.

Civic Responsibility: What Is the Campus Climate for Learning?

How well is the academy meeting its civic purpose today? Our nation’s shared future depends on an educated and engaged citizenry, and civic engagement should be a learning goal for all college students. Civic Responsibility: What Is the Campus Climate for Learning? is the first of three reports from AAC&U’s Core Commitments initiative that provides insights about the civic commitments and practices of today’s colleges and universities. It presents findings from a unique campus climate assessment tool—administered in 2007 to 24,000 students and 9,000 academic administrators, faculty, and student affairs professionals at twenty-three colleges and universities—and assesses the perceptions of these four constituent groups regarding campus opportunities for contributing to a larger community. The survey includes questions about the importance of campus learning, the degree to which students are encouraged to develop civic awareness and skills, and practices that advance students’ civic commitments. Civic Responsibility is ideal for on-campus and campus-community discussions about the aims of education and civic engagement.

Developing a Moral Compass: What Is the Campus Climate for Ethics and Academic Integrity?

The second Core Commitments initiative report, Developing a Moral Compass, focuses on whether—and how well—educational environments foster academic integrity and promote ethical responsibilities to self and others. Issues addressed in the publication include sources of support for students to discuss their moral and ethical challenges and the impact of academic honor codes.

Engaging Diverse Viewpoints: What Is the Campus Climate for Perspective-Taking?

The final Core Commitments initiative report, Engaging Diverse Viewpoints, focuses on whether—and which—environments promote students’ abilities to understand and be informed by perspectives that differ from their own. This publication also addresses what aspects of the college experience promote engaging difference and appreciation for multiple perspectives.

Civic Prompts: Making Civic Learning Routine across the Disciplines

By Caryn McTighe Musil

Published as part of AAC&U’s ongoing work on “Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement,” Civic Prompts addresses the undergraduate major as the next frontier of civic learning. A practical tool for building faculty capacity meaningfully to embed civic learning in their courses and programs, Civic Prompts represents a first step in investigating a largely unchartered territory. It offers a process, or set of prompts, through which faculty can begin to increase student learning by defining discipline-specific civic lenses that explore the public purposes, civic inquiries, and actions embedded in their fields. Ideal for faculty development initiatives, teaching and learning centers, and anyone interested in providing faculty the tools to embrace and implement effective civic learning.

The LEAP Challenge: Education for a World of Unscripted Problems

Published as part of AAC&U’s ongoing work on “Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement,” Civic Prompts addresses the undergraduate major as the next frontier of civic learning. A practical tool for building faculty capacity meaningfully to embed civic learning in their courses and programs, Civic Prompts represents a first step in investigating a largely unchartered territory. It offers a process, or set of prompts, through which faculty can begin to increase student learning by defining discipline-specific civic lenses that explore the public purposes, civic inquiries, and actions embedded in their fields. Ideal for faculty development initiatives, teaching and learning centers, and anyone interested in providing faculty the tools to embrace and implement effective civic learning.
A well-rounded liberal arts education ideally prepares students to function at many levels in a democratic society. This emphasis on shaping students holistically can help them refine a range of marketable skills that transcend singular jobs or professions. But despite the merits of the liberal arts in general, efforts to justify their value are continually dismissed under blistering critiques.

With the declining economic realities facing the last couple of generations of young people, insecurities are defining choices about and perspectives on higher education. In the face of diminishing economic security among a larger percentage of the US population, the liberal arts are increasingly being deemed as irrelevant and incapable of providing the necessary training for highly paid jobs.

With higher education’s increasing price tag, parents, students, and others simply must question the degree to which an undergraduate education is a sound financial investment. Those of us who continue to champion the liberal arts know that a liberal arts education can nurture a wide range of useful skills for careers and life. We know that higher education is not only about preparing for financial success. However, we must recognize and understand the sharpening viewpoints driven by economic uncertainties from households to schools all the way to the president of the United States.

An even smaller subset of those of us who champion the liberal arts see promise in experiential learning. We believe students’ civic engagement through service learning and community partnerships can complement a liberal arts curriculum, infusing it with real-world practicality and a sense of purpose or justice.

Students involved in community partnerships can apply their learning in any discipline in the process of solving problems faced by local communities or those in various parts of the country or world. The field of civic engagement in higher education has expanded over recent decades, as many educators have come to realize that applied learning is more interesting to students and prepares them on many levels. Engaged learning deepens students’ understanding within a given subject matter, and the problem-solving activities in which students are engaged in communities are closer to the practical skills required in the workforce.

However, while projects designed to examine concerns in critical matters such as education and health may benefit the students they engage, they cannot come close to moving the needle on any of the major social indicators confronting vulnerable populations. And, as demographics shift, the student body of the future will be even less financially stable and more diverse. Certainly civic engagement experiences could benefit the preparation of these less traditional college students, but their priorities are far different. Lower-income students, coming from under-resourced primary and secondary schools, not only have to catch up academically but also have to generate income for survival while in school.

The next generation of college students will also include many older students either returning to the classroom or continuing to progress through a much longer trajectory toward a degree. We can already see this complex dynamic playing out for today’s lower-income students, who are more likely to enroll in community colleges. Many of the elite colleges with substantial civic engagement activities are largely inaccessible to these students.

Certainly a liberal arts education infused with experiential civic engagement activities can be beneficial to students from all walks of life. However, this brand of a college experience must be reconstituted in order to be more relevant to lower-income students and have a greater impact in the communities where civic engagement activities are taking place.*
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 1,300 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges, community colleges, research universities, and comprehensive 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 and inclusive excellence 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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