“A socially cohesive and economically vibrant US democracy… require[s] informed, engaged, open-minded, and socially responsible people committed to the common good and practiced in ‘doing’ democracy…. Civic learning needs to be an integral component of every level of education, from grade school through graduate school, across all fields of study.”

Excerpt from A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future

The overarching education goal for the Obama administration is to once again lead the world in the proportion of college graduates by 2020. In this context, we hope this report sparks a national conversation and call to action about how institutions of higher learning can embrace and act on their long-standing mission to educate students for informed, engaged citizenship—a quality for all graduates. The completion of postsecondary education and the acquisition of twenty-first-century critical thinking skills in the liberal arts and sciences are an economic necessity as well as a social imperative. To fulfill America’s promise in our global society, our education system at all levels, from early learning through higher education, must serve our nation both as its economic engine and its wellspring for democracy.

This report from the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement finds that civic learning and learning in traditional academic disciplines are complementary, rather than competitive. The report points to research findings that suggest that students who participate in civic learning opportunities are more likely to

• persist in college and complete their degrees;
• obtain skills prized by employers; and
• develop habits of social responsibility and civic participation.

We would like to see further research explore these connections.

In the months ahead, the US Department of Education will analyze the recommendations advanced in A Crucible Moment and identify actions we can take. For now, we want to express our gratitude to the National Task Force, and the many individuals and organizations who contributed to this ambitious project, for their work and their commitment to educating students as citizens for the twenty-first century. Together we must advance a civic learning and democratic engagement agenda worthy of our great nation.

Sincerely,

Martha Kanter
Under Secretary
US Department of Education

Eduardo Ochoa
Assistant Secretary for
Postsecondary Education
US Department of Education
For Democracy’s Future: Five Essential Actions
From The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

1. Reclaim and reinvest in the fundamental civic and democratic mission of schools and of all sectors within higher education.

2. Enlarge the current national narrative that erases civic aims and civic literacy as educational priorities contributing to social, intellectual, and economic capital.

3. Advance a contemporary, comprehensive framework for civic learning—embracing US and global interdependence—that includes historic and modern understandings of democratic values, capacities to engage diverse perspectives and people, and commitment to collective civic problem solving.

4. Capitalize upon the interdependent responsibilities of K–12 and higher education to foster progressively higher levels of civic knowledge, skills, examined values, and action as expectations for every student.

5. Expand the number of robust, generative civic partnerships and alliances, locally, nationally, and globally to address common problems, empower people to act, strengthen communities and nations, and generate new frontiers of knowledge.

See Chapter III for the entire set of recommendations in the National Call to Action.