

CONNECTIONS

VOLUME XV

ISSUE 1

August 2004

- Exploring the Public-Academy Relationshippage 2
- The Civic Mission of Higher Educationpage 7
- Revitalizing the University of Minnesota's Civic Missionpage 8
- The Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Building Civic Responsibilitypage 11
- The New Engagement: From Community Relations to Community Partnershipspage 13
- The Public Practice of Scholarship and the Production of Knowledgepage 17
- Apple IPM in Massachusetts: Public Scholarship in Actionpage 18
- College Students as Citizenspage 22
- Fraternal Futures: Empowering Students to Shape the Future of Greek Organizations.page 23
- Increasing Student Civic Engagement through Balanced Democratic Dialogue.page 25
- June Board Summarypage 28
- An Update on Public Journalismpage 29
- The Footbridge Forumpage 31
- New Stories for Television: Promoting Public Judgment in Colombia.page 32
- Books Worth Readingpage 34



Exploring the Public-Academy Relationship

By David Mathews

Kettering research is rooted in three perennial issues of democracy: one is the responsibilities of citizens and their capacity for self-government; another is the functioning of communities, which have been the bedrock of American democracy; and a third is the legitimacy of governments and other authoritative institutions, such as schools, institutions of higher education, and the press. Studying democracy without encountering these three issues would be impossible. They provide a framework for Kettering's efforts but do not inhibit the foundation's work. The framework is sustained by a rich literature on citizenship, communities, and institutions, which stretches from contemporary sources back to antiquity. This literature not only provides the grounding required for good research, but also allows — actually compels — the foundation to enter into a dialogue with other research organizations and scholars who are also grappling with the challenges of self-rule.

Good research has to have a focus, or an integrity, which in Kettering's case keeps the foundation from bouncing all over the broad landscape of democracy. Kettering's focus is, and has been for some time, on the public — the citizenry as a whole, the sovereign in our political system. “We, the People” are the most obscure, ambiguous, hotly debated element of a democracy, and “We” have been since Plato voiced doubts about humans' capacity for virtuous self-rule. This central focus as well as the obvious interrelationship of citizens, communities, and institutions enables each research project both to draw from and contribute to every other project.

Having a consistent focus doesn't mean that Kettering research is static

any more than research at the National Institutes of Health is static because it has always centered on making people healthy. “Making democracy work” is an ever-changing challenge because of ever-changing circumstances. Each year, Kettering's strategic plan for research describes what the foundation has learned from the previous 12 months of research and the new questions that have to be addressed.

The foundation's strengths are in what it has learned about citizens, communities, and governing institutions. We have spent decades delving deeper and deeper into how a democratic public comes to exist and how a citizenry decides and acts wisely and justly. We have explored what the public sector in a community must do, as well as the democratic practices that put the public into the public's business. And for 15 years, we have been tracking the way “The People” establish productive relationships with the institutions they created to serve them in the maintenance of a democratic society.

One generation of research builds on another, and Kettering owes a great debt to staff, associates, and trustees who developed our institutional capacities. For example, George Gallup, who served on our board from 1964 to 1973, encouraged what is now an extensive repository of studies on public attitudes. Later, Daniel Yankelovich helped refine this research when he introduced concepts such as “public judgment.” Kettering now has 20 years of records on how the citizenry moves from first opinions to more shared and reflective judgments. We are just beginning to do studies using these unique archives.

The focus in this issue of *Connections* is on the foundation's research into the relationship between the public and America's colleges and universities. Our studies

Colleges and universities ... are caught in a grinding tension. On the one hand, they are expected to be efficiently managed businesses and, on the other, they are to serve the civic purposes that they were chartered to serve.

of higher education have relied on what we are learning about citizens and collective decision making, what we have found out about the role of the public in addressing community problems, and what we are discovering about the tensions between the public and the major institutions of the country. Kettering's findings on the relationship between the public and the academy have been reported in studies such as *College Students Talk Politics*, which was done by the Harwood Group, and in all ten issues of the *Higher Education Exchange*.

Because the foundation always starts its research with "the public and its problems," studies of the public-academy relationship are done from a public perspective. Frankly, we are not experts on American higher education any more than we can claim to be knowledgeable about what goes on inside public schools, governments, the media, or any of the institutions that have obligations to democracy. Hundreds of research centers and think tanks are better prepared to study these institutions.

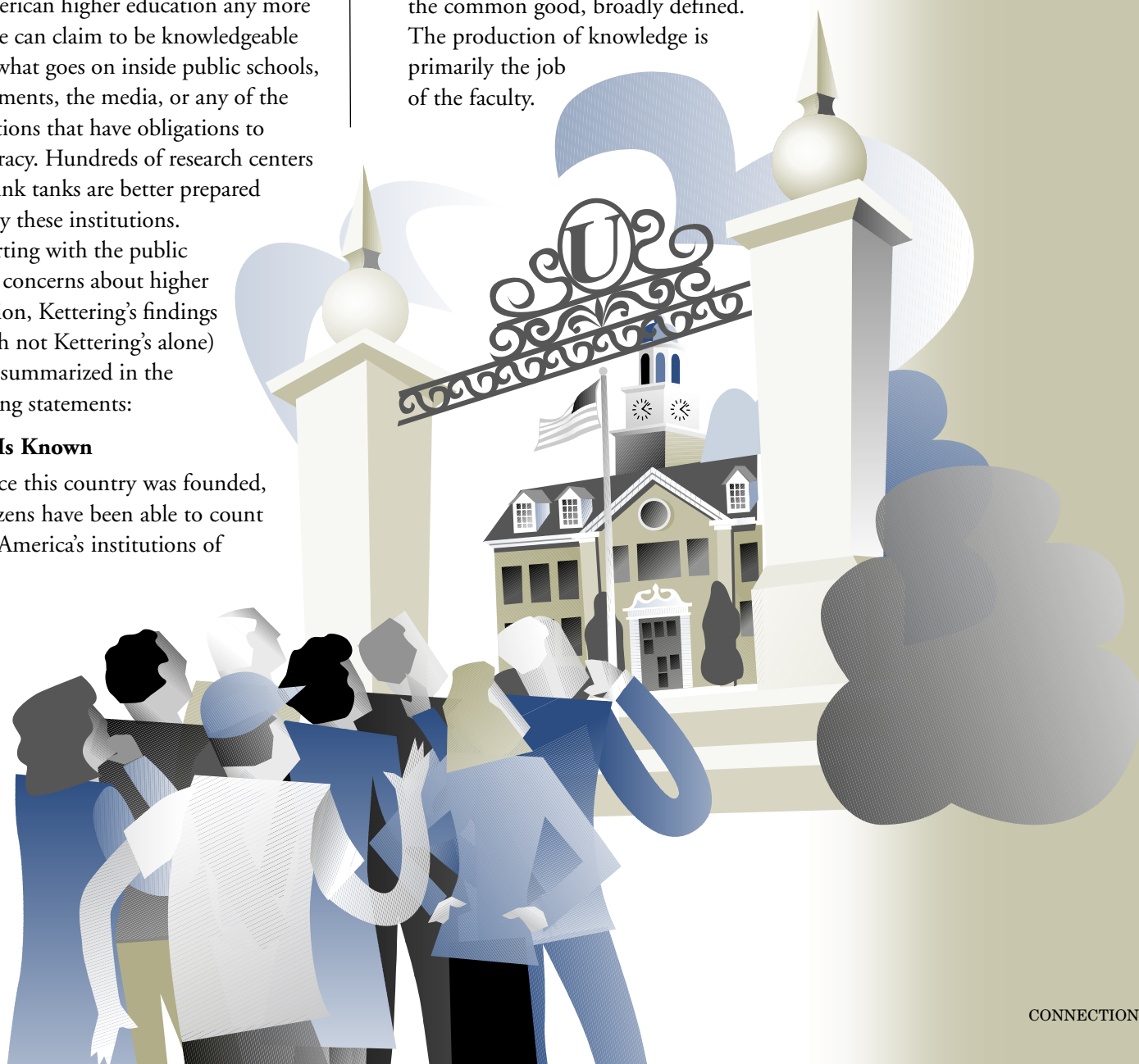
Starting with the public and its concerns about higher education, Kettering's findings (though not Kettering's alone) can be summarized in the following statements:

What Is Known

1. Since this country was founded, citizens have been able to count on America's institutions of

higher learning to play a crucial role in making self-rule possible. Now, however, academic institutions have other priorities, especially since universities have become major sources of research for the federal government and large corporations. In addition, colleges and universities are undergoing financial pressure as costs rise. Consequently, institutions are caught in a grinding tension. On the one hand, they are expected to be efficiently managed businesses and, on the other, they are to serve the civic purposes that they were chartered to serve.

2. The academy also has been responsible for the production of socially relevant knowledge, which has served the common good, broadly defined. The production of knowledge is primarily the job of the faculty.



In a democracy there are no experts for questions of what should be done. Citizens have to make those decisions.

3. One of the most important roles of colleges and universities in the service of democracy has been to prepare young people to be good citizens, a role that is still acknowledged in most charters and mission statements.

What Isn't Known

1. How important are the historical mandates to serve the larger public good when institutions of higher education today are faced with pressures from individual consumers — parents and students — who see the institutions as the gateway to personal success, both economically and professionally? Some analyses (Brint/Levy, Wolfe, Jencks/Riesman) suggest that the civic mission of colleges and universities has fallen far down on the list of priorities. The engaged university movement indicates otherwise, yet it isn't certain that this movement has any relationship to the public's concerns about democracy. Will trustees and other key institutional actors make public engagement more than a new public relations gambit?
2. Most everyone has benefited in some way from the expert knowledge that comes from faculty scholarship: medical breakthroughs, new computer technologies, better designs for highways and buildings. Yet when it comes to the knowledge people need to solve the problems that plague their communities or the wisdom required to make sound decisions on hotly debated moral issues (questions that can have more than one answer), the role of experts isn't as obvious. In fact, in a democracy there are no experts for questions of what *should* be done. Citizens have to make those decisions. What kind of knowledge must citizens have in order to govern themselves wisely and justly? Can academe provide that knowledge?
3. These days, many students volunteer to serve others, yet they are averse to participating in the political system.

They don't believe the system can solve the problems they care about. That attitude may be changing, but the evidence isn't conclusive. Other data suggest students still believe there is little place for them in the partisan political system, an attitude reflected in low participation in elections. What would show students how they can make a difference in politics?

Why the Issues Are Important

Students: College students mirror the cynicism other Americans feel about the political system. Americans are particularly concerned when college campuses appear to be modeling the worst kind of citizenship. People are taken aback by reports showing that at least 1,400 students die every year because of binge drinking or by stories of racial conflicts erupting on campuses.

Scholars: Some faculty are unhappy with the narrow, highly technical, elite character of academic research. Numerous attempts are being made to introduce a more public form of scholarship, but this is an embryonic effort facing considerable opposition because of fears that academic excellence will suffer. Public scholarship will not win many federal grants nor, in most cases, count toward tenure. Unless this type of scholarship finds support in other quarters (perhaps from trustees), its potential may never be realized.

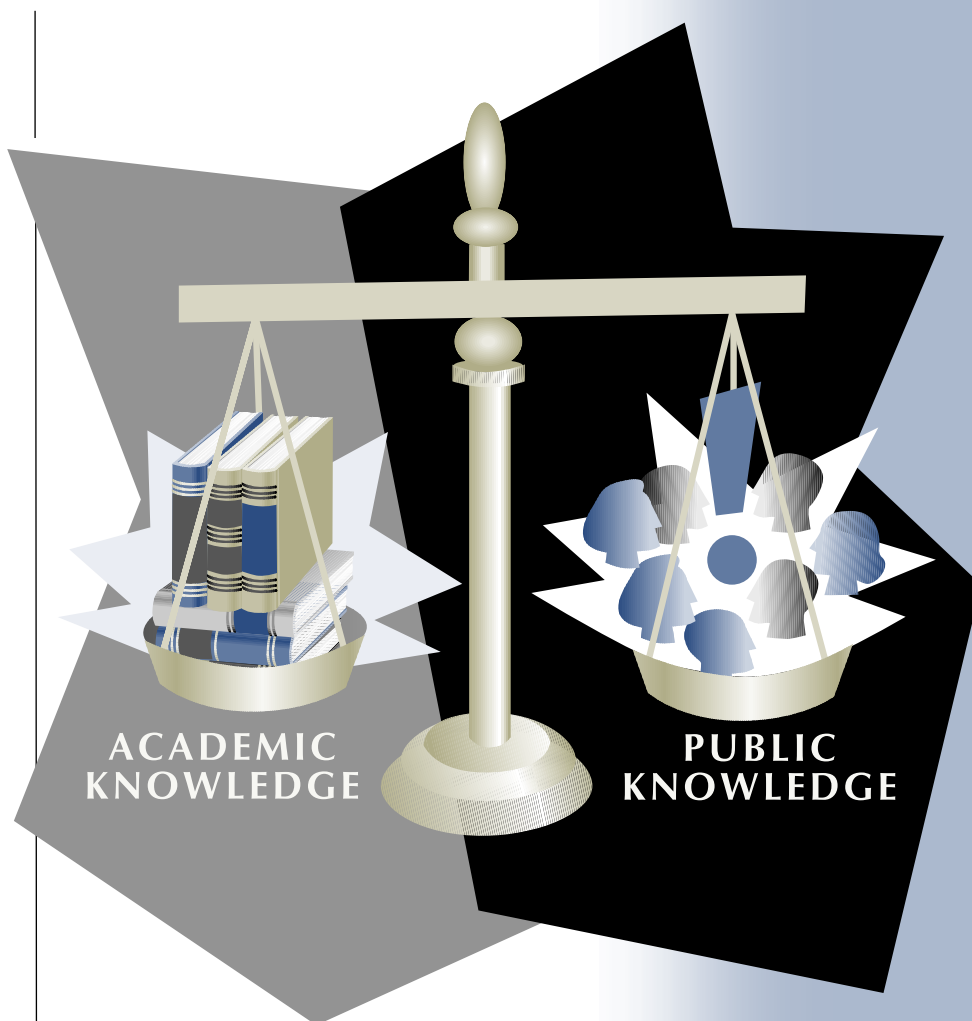
Institutions: At various times in its history, the academy has encountered an aroused polity — a citizenry determined to rule itself. These encounters have led to higher education's public mandates. Such an exchange took place around the time of the American Revolution, and it changed both the focuses and the curriculums of colleges (see L.L. Tucker's *Connecticut's Seminary of Sedition: Yale College*). Another encounter occurred in the early years of the republic when state legislatures chartered colleges to prepare leaders for the new nation. Still another took place in the nineteenth century and resulted in the founding of land-grant institutions intended to serve America's

working citizens — its farmers and mechanics. The mandates of historically black institutions and community colleges have emerged from similar encounters. Is something like this happening today? Does it need to?

Conversations among people in higher education are filled with talk of “the engaged university.” Yet in their study “Professions and Civic Engagement,” Steven Brint and Charles Levy found that “references to broad socio-cultural purposes” in both professional associations and higher education had “declined over time” in the rhetoric of institutional leaders. They were “replaced by discussions of internal affairs and to a lesser extent by discussions of the instrumental and technical achievements of members.” While there have been notable exceptions, this trend suggests that academe may have lost touch with the historical forces that have been its principal source of legitimacy. Unfortunately, boards of trustees, which are in the most logical position to connect the academy and the public, don’t appear to have that task high on their agendas. Some books (e.g., Jacques Barzun’s *The American University*) portray board members as engrossed in internal matters, such as financial accountability. Only a few trustees, such as William Hubbard, former chair of the University of South Carolina’s board, have talked about civic accountability.

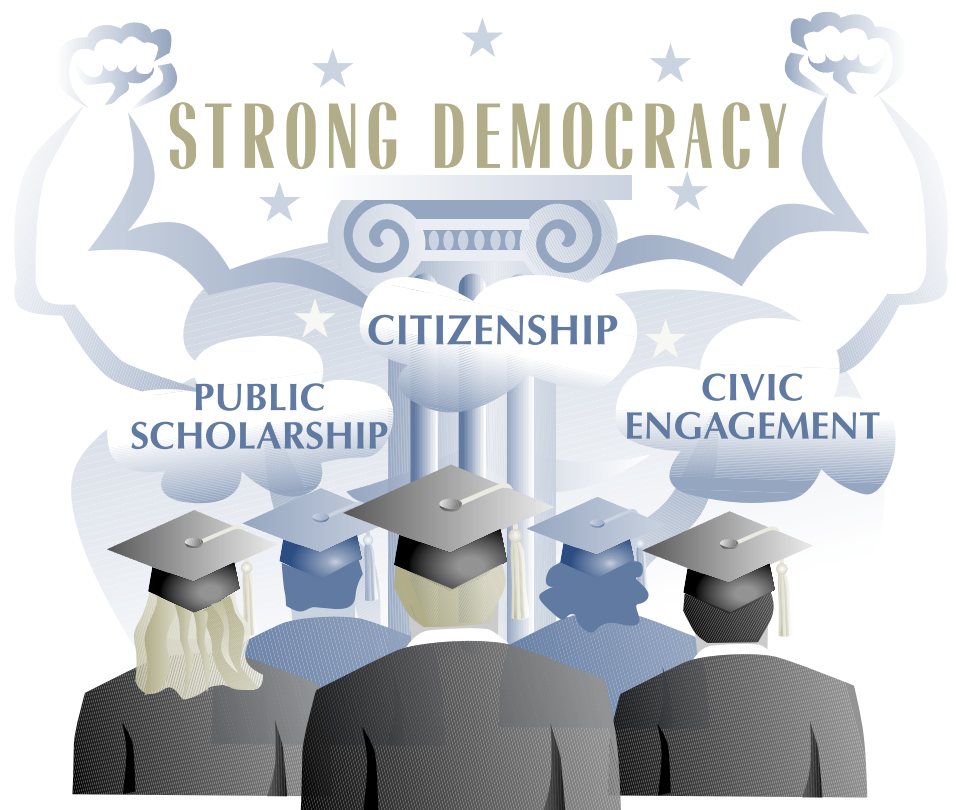
What Kind of New Research Would Be Useful?

1. One option would be to pursue the question of how institutions understand their obligations to democracy today and, more importantly, how they understand what it takes for self-government to be effective. On the surface, it would seem that these obligations are a priority. Mission statements, for example, suggest that the academy is well aware of its responsibilities to serve the public good. What isn’t so clear is how the institutions see “the public” and what



they think of as the “public good.” Some academic leaders have taken the position that their institutions are themselves a public good; their very existence meets any obligations to democracy. Benefits from teaching, research, and service are cited in support of this claim. Academe won’t get beyond such self-referential justification until more attention is given to the nature of the work a sovereign public must do and what institutions of higher education can do to assist in that work. “What public?” and “What good?” may be the real issues in the relationship, and they may be the best subjects for future research.

2. A second option for research would be to look more closely at public scholarship. Is it possible to recognize the difference between academic knowledge and public knowledge and find a way to relate the two?



Something is happening in higher education that has to do with democracy, and we need to understand what it is.

Or might it be more productive to follow up on cases where faculties have been less concerned about providing knowledge and more concerned about creating opportunities for a democratic public to take shape? Consider the example set by The Ohio State University, among other institutions. In 2002, the university's Civic Life Institute was called to Cincinnati to help in dealing with racially charged issues. The institute did not offer professional or expert knowledge; instead, it helped frame the issue of race relations so that it would be easier for citizens to weigh options for actions that might reduce conflict and restore justice. Cincinnati's citizens have had more than 150 deliberative forums involving nearly 2,000 people. Some folks just talked; others began to act. Have all racial problems been overcome? No. Yet, according to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, the community has developed a stronger sense of its civic capacity to deal with its problems, which is reflected in the slogan "Cincinnati Can." In addition, a new grassroots movement called *Neighbor to Neighbor* has emerged to follow up on the forums.

3. A third option would be to delve more deeply into the question of the civic education of students. Indications that institutions are getting at the problem behind the problem would be evidence that students see ways, other than just voting, to be effective political actors. The research would have to test whether or not students develop an appreciation for what scholars call "strong democracy," where citizens are engaged with other citizens in the kind of public work that can affect the issues young people care about.



The attention now being given to "civic engagement," "public scholarship," "public work," and similar concepts is, according to a recent study by Susan Ostrander, "unprecedented." Or, as David Brown, coeditor of Kettering's *Higher Education Exchange*, suggests, something is happening in higher education that has to do with democracy, and we need to understand what it is. The role colleges and universities play — or don't play — is crucial to whether or not democracy works as it should.

David Mathews is president and CEO of the Kettering Foundation. He can be reached by E-mail at dmathews@kettering.org.

The Kettering Foundation, chartered in 1927, is an operating foundation — not a grant-giving foundation — rooted in the American tradition of inventive research. Its founder, Charles F. Kettering, holder of more than 200 patents, is best known for his invention of the automobile self-starter. He was interested, above all, in seeking practical answers to “the problems behind the problems.” The foundation today continues in that tradition. The objective of the research now — the study of what helps democracy work as it should. Six major Kettering programs are designed to shed light on what is required for strengthening public life. Kettering is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) research corporation supported by a \$250 million endowment.

How to Order Kettering Foundation Publications

To request a *KF Publications Catalog*, call 1-800-600-4060, send a FAX to 1-937-435-7367, or write:

Kettering Foundation
 Order Department
 P. O. Box 41626
 Dayton, OH 45441

Name _____

Title _____

Organization _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____

Phone (_____) _____

For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation’s Web site at www.kettering.org.

Connections is published by the Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799.

Unless expressly stated to the contrary, the articles in Connections reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its trustees, or officers.

Those who contributed to producing this issue include:

Editor...

Ilse Tebbetts

Program staff...

Maxine Thomas

John Dedrick

Deborah Witte

Graphic Design

& Desktop Publishing...

Long’s Graphic Design, Inc.

Copy Editor...

Betty Frecker

Assistant to the Publisher...

Valerie Breidenbach

Publisher...

Kenneth A. Brown

LGD-0881-KF-15500-MP-07-04

*Kettering
 Foundation*

© Copyright 2004 by the Kettering Foundation

200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799 (937) 434-7300

444 North Capitol Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001 (202) 393-4478

6 East 39th Street, New York, New York 10016 (212) 686-7016

Kettering Foundation
 200 Commons Road
 Dayton, OH 45459-2799

Nonprofit
 Organization
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 Dayton, OH
 Permit No. 638