HIGHER

EDUCATION

EXCHANGE

2012
The Higher Education Exchange is founded on a thought articulated by Thomas Jefferson in 1820: I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.

In the tradition of Jefferson, the Higher Education Exchange agrees that a central goal of higher education is to help make democracy possible by preparing citizens for public life. The Higher Education Exchange is part of a movement to strengthen higher education’s democratic mission and foster a more democratic culture throughout American society. Working in this tradition, the Higher Education Exchange publishes case studies, analyses, news, and ideas about efforts within higher education to develop more democratic societies.
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FOREWORD
By Deborah Witte

This year’s issue of the Higher Education Exchange continues in the recent vein of highlighting and showcasing innovations and new thinking in higher education. Readers of this journal know that the Kettering Foundation’s interest in this area of study is not really higher education. Kettering’s interest is in putting the public at the center of the higher education-public relationship and getting at the problems behind the problems in the relationship.

In our work—in this area and others—we talk about the problems of democracy and problems in democracy. Higher education is good at addressing the problems in democracy. Innumerable college and university centers and institutes hold colloquia and conferences each year addressing such problems as poverty, health care, civil rights and others. Many universities consider this part of the service or outreach that connects them to the communities they border.

But it’s the problems of democracy that most concern my colleagues and me at the foundation. These are problems like citizens sitting on the sidelines of the political system, with no way of entering the process except through voting. The problems of citizen agency and action are two other problems of democracy. Too many citizens don’t believe they have any part to play in democracy, and citizen action is all too often limited to attending hearings and old-fashioned protesting. A more robust role for citizens is missing.

The articles in this volume respond to both the problems of democracy and the problems in democracy. They run the gamut from narratives on what should be done to bring citizens to the center of democracy, to interviews with leading higher education scholars and practitioners that outline the continuing challenges to this work, to stories of successes, both celebrated and cautiously hopeful, as well as a courageous story of a former faculty member who has found new purpose outside the academy.

We begin this issue with David Brown’s interview with a well-known and respected scholar/practitioner. Harry Boyte’s passion is civic agency, and this passion comes across strongly in his interview. He identifies an immense hunger for public experiences on the part
of the public. He acknowledges that many faculty norms of detachment are part of the professionalism of the academy. He suggests that the development of a new paradigm for civic engagement—called the “civic studies”—may, by integrating strands of work from a number of fields, help to push civic engagement front and center on campuses. Read this interview to see how Boyte describes this new initiative.

The story of a tenured professor who has left the academy follows. Seeking a better quality of life than the role of an academic could afford her, Claire Snyder-Hall decided, after spending more than twenty years as a faculty member, that “enough was enough.” Rather than continuing to live a life with one foot in the community and one foot in the academy, she embraced her community-based work and now devotes her time to doing what she really values.

Following Claire’s article is an interview with a leading scholar and philosopher, Elizabeth Minnich, who outlines the conceptual changes needed for educating democratically. She calls for the academy to recognize that traditional research standards can be applied to other, equally valid, research methods, such as action research that is undertaken with a community. She would like to see education embrace the idea of helping people become better at thinking creatively and responsibly—in other words, engaging with the world and people around them. Education, she asserts, should practice, inform, and renew.

Three stories from faculty follow. They illustrate different approaches to addressing the problem of the civic engagement of young people. Living Democracy, an example of a growing group of faculty who are using the community as a classroom, seeks to give students a more dynamic learning environment. This pioneering approach to civic engagement—and its effects on students—is described by its codirectors, Mark Wilson and Nan Fairley, with excerpts about some of the students in the program.

Introducing a civic engagement component of graduate education is tackled in the article by Ellen Knutson and Dan Lewis of Northwestern University. Their curricular program, carried out by the Center for Civic Engagement, provides practicums for doctoral students while supporting a scholarship of engagement and developing new career opportunities for students. Another noteworthy
outcome is the strengthening of ties between Northwestern and local community organizations. Don’t miss the companion article by student Robin Hoecker. From a perspective not often heard in this conversation, she skillfully articulates the contributions to scholarship that her participation in the program has enabled.

Wynne Wright, a faculty member at Michigan State University—long a frontrunner in civic engagement among land grant universities—shares the struggles she and her colleagues face, namely the complexity of agrifood and natural resource problems. She characterizes these as “wicked” problems and shares three cases that describe new ways to approach solutions to these kinds of problems—all of which wrestle with questions of epistemology and local knowledge. Her recommendations may surprise you.

Elizabeth Hudson provides a review of *What Is College For? The Public Purpose of Higher Education*. This edited volume is another in a long list of books over the last ten years calling for answers to the crisis of the lost mission of higher education. Hudson identifies the problem as one of audience rather than message. While the sense of crisis is coming in loud and clear she argues, it isn’t being directed at the people who can best hear it—the public.

David Mathews rounds out the issue by positing that a battle of sorts is being waged between factions within higher education. While the challenges of higher education are many, Mathews explains that the foundation is watching the promising experiments both on and off campuses. He suggests that a solid connection between the strong democracy movement off campus must meet the civic engagement movement on campus.
CONTRIBUTORS

Harry Boyte is the director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, now at Augsburg College, which develops theory and practice of civic agency and public work, and a senior fellow at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. He serves as national coordinator of the American Commonwealth Partnerships.

David W. Brown is coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange and coedited two recent Kettering publications, Agent of Democracy and A Different Kind of Politics. He taught at Yale's School of Management and New School's Milano Graduate School. He is the author of When Strangers Cooperate, Organization Smarts, and The Real Change-Makers: Why Government Is Not the Problem or the Solution.

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Elizabeth Hudson is a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of Michigan and a Kettering predoctoral research fellow. She is currently writing her dissertation about the politics and process of an urban coalition to improve higher education access. Her research explores the challenges and opportunities of upholding higher education's historically civic mission in an increasingly diverse democracy.

Ellen M. Knutson is the program director for Graduate Engagement Opportunities at the Center for Civic Engagement at Northwestern University. Ellen is also a research associate at the Kettering Foundation, where she works with college and university faculty members who want to include elements of civic engagement in their teaching and research. Ellen received her PhD in library and information science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Dan A. Lewis is the director of the Center for Civic Engagement, a professor of Human Development and Social Policy, as well as a faculty fellow in the Institute for Policy Research (IPR) at Northwestern University. Recently, he conducted evaluations of the homelessness problem in the Chicago suburbs and headed a consortium to study welfare reform efforts in Illinois for the state legislature and interested citizens.

David Mathews, president of the Kettering Foundation, was secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in the Ford administration and, before that, president of the University of Alabama. Mathews has written extensively on Southern history, public policy, education, and international problem solving. His books include Politics for People: Finding a Responsible Public Voice and Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy.
Elizabeth Minnich is a senior scholar with the Association of American Colleges & Universities, and professor of philosophy at Queens University. She has worked as an administrator, faculty member, consultant, speaker, author, board and national panel member focusing on the mutual relations of education and democratic ideals, equity, and excellence. Most recently, she collaborated with AAC&U and the Democracy Commitment on a summer institute funded by NEH’s “Bridging Cultures to Form a Nation” grants.

Claire Snyder-Hall writes popular and scholarly texts on issues related to democratic theory and practice. She holds a PhD in political theory from Rutgers University and a BA cum laude from Smith College.

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Deborah Witte is a program officer for the Kettering Foundation and coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange.

Wynne Wright is associate professor of Community, Food, and Agriculture at Michigan State University. Her research explores the contested terrain of food, agriculture, and rural culture. Much of this work is devoted to democratizing the agrifood system as a key element of sustainability.
Democratizing Deliberation

A Political Theory Anthology

Edited by Derek W. M. Barker, Noëlle McAfee, and David W. McIvor

Democratizing Deliberation brings together recent and cutting-edge political theory scholarship on deliberative democracy. The collection reframes deliberative democracy to be sensitive to the deep conflicts, multiple forms of communication, and aspirations for civic agency that characterize real public deliberation. In so doing, the book addresses many of the most common challenges to the theory and practice of deliberative democracy.

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Are you concerned about the rising cost of higher education? Are the nation’s colleges and universities doing a good job preparing students for the future? How does higher education benefit society as a whole?

The diverse system of US higher education—including public and private universities, smaller four-year independent colleges, two-year community colleges, for-profit schools, and others—already serves a number of important social purposes. But this guide focuses on the future. It takes up this fundamental question:

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