CONNECTIONS
THE KETTERING FOUNDATION’S ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

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EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

Stories of INNOVATION in HIGHER EDUCATION
The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering’s primary research question is, what makes 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 foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation’s website at www.kettering.org.

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NEW from Kettering Foundation Press

**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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To read excerpts and purchase this book, visit www.kettering.org.
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In a strong democracy, higher education serves a civic mission, not only preparing students for public deliberation and active participation, but also partnering with communities to do public work. If higher education is to achieve this mission, the faculty, who do the core work of teaching and scholarship, may be the most critical sector. Indeed, throughout Kettering’s research on higher education, many of the most powerful stories have come from faculty members who are trying to strengthen the connection between higher education and democracy and to reacquaint colleges and universities with their historical civic mission. I am currently part of a group that has been meeting at the foundation to study these efforts. As our inquiry has developed, we are finding a common theme: an aspiration to bring together the professional lives of faculty with the underlying civic aspirations that drew many of them to higher education in the first place.

Faculty members engaged in public work are going against the grain of the current norms of acadeeme. Faculty today are experiencing numerous pressures to prioritize their professional lives over their civic aspirations. Administrators at
colleges and universities increasingly view higher education as a business and as an individual rather than a public good. They seek to raise institutional status by requiring faculty to prioritize publishing over teaching and service. At the same time, the disciplines have continued to embrace models of expert knowledge that encourage detachment from public life in favor of research on narrow questions with measurable results, published in journals with audiences limited to a few peers. Consequently, faculty efforts to explicitly prepare students for citizenship, to engage in public scholarship, or to partner with communities to solve shared problems are seen as marginal, if not antithetical to, the way colleges and universities understand their mission.

What motivates faculty to engage in public work, despite institutional incentive structures and academic cultural norms that undermine their efforts? Some seem to be motivated, at least in part, by a sense of unhappiness with current norms. As Harry Boyte discovered in Going Public, his Kettering Foundation study of academia and public life, many faculty members are unhappy with “the erosion of the spirit of community, connection, and public culture in their departments and in the university as a whole” that has occurred over the last few decades. Second, as KerryAnn O’Meara discovered in her Kettering Foundation working paper “Because I Can,” a study of faculty and their “civic agency,” many faculty members turn to public work as an antidote to the sense of isolation they often feel at universities, where each faculty member works individually on his or her own scholarship, which often has little connection to important public problems. According to Ellen Schrecker in The Lost Soul of Higher Education, this sense of isolation is particularly acute for contingent, non-tenure-line faculty, who now comprise 70 percent of the professoriate. Finally, some faculty members probably share Peggy Shaffer’s sense, revealed in the 2008 issue of the Higher Education Exchange, that higher education is not doing enough to help create the kind of world they want their children to inherit. As she puts it:

I have joked with colleagues that I am in the midst of an academic midlife crisis—questioning every aspect of life in academia. In thinking about my future in the university, I have wondered whether my time will be well spent researching and writing a scholarly monograph that might well get me promoted, but that will be read by only a handful of like-minded scholars with similar intellectual interests. I have questioned the time I devote to teaching critical thinking skills to students who are socialized, both inside and outside the university, to care more about their final grades and potential career options than the knowledge they can share and the collective future they will create. As a parent of two young children, I look out to the world and worry about what their futures will be. . . . I wonder if my work in the academy is paving the way for a culture I want my children to inherit. On very bad days, I think not.

For Shaffer, this angst spurred her to make greater efforts to connect her professional and public lives.

An ongoing series of research conversations at the Kettering Foundation is asking whether focusing on the concepts of public happiness and civic agency might help us understand how higher education might be moved toward a stronger understanding of its democratic mission. Helping others, and being active in community, charitable, and political activities.” Thus, a major implication of the happiness studies research is that it provides empirical evidence for Arendt’s discussion of public happiness—a concept based on Aristotle’s ancient claim that human beings are “political animals,” meaning that the most fulfilling human activities are done in common with others. And it is precisely Aristotle’s claim that seems to be at the root of the most powerful examples of civic engagement work in higher education.

If human beings really do find fulfillment through common work, then it makes sense that faculty members operating within an academic culture that isolates them in the ivory tower of autono-
mous expertise might be rendered unhappy by a lack of connection. Indeed, when interviewing faculty members, O’Meara found those who are civic minded reach out to the larger community for that reason. Interestingly, however, some of the professors she interviewed say they do not tend to work with other faculty members on their campuses—at least not tenure-line faculty. That is to say, while they did mention that they get valuable support and advice from directors of centers or service-learning programs on their campuses, when they comment on their lack of connection with other faculty on campus, they imply that they do not consider these directors their peers. This perspective makes sense, given the strong sense of hierarchy endemic to academic culture.

Kettering’s research on public happiness seeks to better diagnose the problems faced by faculty who are struggling to do public work and aims to learn from experimental efforts by faculty to address those problems. The research has two prongs, academic culture and the business model, both of which present barriers to public work. On the one hand, many elements of academic culture undermine academia’s public relevance—things like the hierarchical structure of campus life, the prevalence of individual status-seeking, the valorization of peer-reviewed articles over all other work, the ideal of the autonomous scholar, and the denigration of public work as unscholarly. The growing movement toward utilizing a business model within higher education also challenges public values, even as it undermines many of the traditional norms of academia that prioritize education over more material goals. This business model aims at bringing in money, primarily through institutional status-seeking. Administrators and a few celebrity scholars enjoy huge salary increases at the same time that most faculty have increasing workloads and decreasing quality of professional life. Together, these sometimes antagonistic trends complicate the possibility of strengthening higher education’s civic mission. In Squeeze Play, a 2010 Public Agenda study, citizens identified both trends as problematic.

While it is hard for individuals to change ingrained cultures and institutions, faculty have been able to push back against anti-civic trends through deliberate collective action. As Derek Barker has noted, for example, the O’Meara study has documented that “engaged faculty overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles and persevered in meaningful public work. While O’Meara takes these obstacles seriously, her work provides a rebuttal to the view that faculty are powerless to change institutional systems.”

Indeed, perhaps the most important goal of our research on public happiness is to document examples of constructive change taking place in spite of the current climate. At a recent workshop, we invited teams of faculty who are doing collaborative work at several universities to share their work with the foundation. These teams hope to change campus practices and move their institutions in a more democratic direction, which might be the beginning of a new phase of faculty public work. We do not yet know much about situations where faculty members collaborate with each other on public work, nor have we fully explored faculty efforts aimed specifically at changing campus cultures. The public happiness research seeks to learn more about this interesting development.

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Citizens, Deliberation, and the Practice of Democracy: A Triptych from the Kettering Review

Citizens, Deliberation, and the Practice of Democracy brings together writing by 19 leading thinkers on the contemporary challenges of democracy. These provocative essays, first published in three issues of the Kettering Review to celebrate 25 years of the National Issues Forums, challenge readers to rethink conventional notions of democracy, public deliberation, and citizenship.

To read excerpts and learn more about these books and other publications, visit www.kettering.org.
**Voice and Judgment: The Practice of Public Politics**

By Robert J. Kingston

“We are victims of argument and instruments, from time to time, of circumstance or the influence of others’ whims. Our civic movement, however, is from a state of anxiety, puzzlement, blame, defensiveness, or anger, toward the place where contraries meet, where unavoidable tensions remind us that no life is lived without risk . . . or collaboration. A deliberative public begins with opinions but shares experiences; it recognizes shared concerns or ‘values’ in unexpected, sometimes unfamiliar circumstances; it responds to the divisive with restraint . . . Public deliberation reveals not a verdict but the making of a ‘public,’ the formulation of a public will that can be described and put to use.”

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**Community Educators: A Resource For Educating and Developing Our Youth**

By Patricia Moore Harbour

Community Educators asserts that the relationship between education, community, and democracy are inseparable and illustrates that education is broader than just schooling. Current thinking about education is challenged and reveals how the public participates in the education and development of youth. This book is a call for action and responsibility—both individual and collective—to transform education beyond simply reforming schools.