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munity partners. One research outcome from a number of the centers has been a series of papers on “deliberative pedagogy.” This research, to be published by an academic press, has advanced Kettering’s understanding of civic education in the academy and will build new scholarship for the work.

While the shift has had these upsides, there are also some downsides. The commitment to NIF has diminished. Centers value NIF as a starting point, but they tend to focus much more on locally framed issues. However, these new centers may impact NIF in important ways, encouraging locally adaptable issue guides, experimenting with formats and design, committing to online forums, and focusing on policy briefings with selective legislators rather than large, public events that report on NIF.

The current approach with centers for public life appears to have jump-started the depth and speed of development among new organizations in the NIF network. While it may have taken early PPIs 10 years to grapple with issues of community impact and change that began with the forum, the current centers begin with the politics. Working to affect the politics might result in a forum that encourages citizens to recognize the things they hold valuable, their resources, and how they might organize to create changes they care about.

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At Franklin Pierce, Learning to Make a Difference

Joni Doherty

The New England Center for Civic Life at Franklin Pierce University is dedicated to the teaching, practice, and study of deliberative democracy. As director of the center, I helped align the center’s mission with that of the university. The center was founded in 1998 on the premise that engaged and deliberative communities are vital for a healthy democracy and for individuals to realize their goal of experiencing rich and fulfilling lives. Through initiatives that use deliberative democratic practices, the center creates opportunities for people to become active producers of knowledge and engaged community members. At first, our efforts were divided between community-based and campus-based work; today, about three-quarters of the center’s activities are on campus. We learned that the best way to realize the center’s mission was to meet people where they are, and where we are too—on a rural, small, liberal arts college campus.

One challenge we faced was connecting the self-interested, personal goals of undergraduates, who understandably are preoccupied with doing well academically and preparing for their future professions, with the larger public good. We also faced the challenge of the workload of faculty, who teach four courses each semester. There is often little time for civic, cocurricular, or extracurricular activities.

We learned that if we were to engage these groups, we needed to become involved in their primary areas of concern. With that in mind, we began the work of integrating deliberative practices (includ-
ing identifying issues on one’s own terms, and on what is held valuable; considering possible actions; and making sound judgments through weighing benefits against trade-offs) into courses and the curriculum, not as “extras” or “supplements,” but rather as activities essential for teaching and learning in a democratic society. These practices foster critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and good communication skills and are done within an environment that encourages collective learning.

**Engagement through Community**

These practices can foster deeper engagement through connecting course content with community life. Examples include having students participate in a deliberative forum on a community problem that is relevant to course content; creating an issue guide with various options for addressing a problem; ensuring diverse perspectives are represented in course assignments (readings, films, and so on); and presenting ethical dilemmas in ways that invite the consideration of multiple options. Because deliberative pedagogy recognizes the impact of self-interest on engagement, affirms the value of personal experiences, and takes up “real-life” problems, it integrates formal education with the “subject matter of life-experience,” which John Dewey has identified as an essential part of learning.

Our first major initiative was the Diversity and Community Project, which began in 1998. Faculty and students created guides on issues related to gender, sexual orientation, and race. We also used the National Issues Forums racial and ethnic tensions guide to situate our campus issue within a broader national context. We held annual moderator and issue-framing workshops, led class-based and campuswide forums, and began a Civic Scholars program. The project was integrated into the first-year seminar. A grant allowed us to share what we had learned with other colleges in northern New England. Over time, these activities became integral to all of the center’s programming.

Another example of curricular integration, and one that connects courses across the disciplines, is the Art and Dialogue Project, which focused on a different issue for each of its five years. Our first project, in 2010, explored a water-related environmental issue. In following years, we took on other challenges, including respect (or lack thereof) in public life. This project includes creating a public participatory art installation, which, along with concern-collecting sessions, is part of how we name and frame the issue, and convening forums. It culminates in a multimedia celebration that has included video, music, light and sound installations, and storytelling. This is not a programmatic sequence of individual performances, but one in which the public (in this case, students) are co-creators of a deliberative public exchange. It is a way for students to transform the everyday routines of college life into one in which they are the primary actors and agents for change.

As one of the university’s primary community liaisons, the center also partners with towns and local residents on projects. Because they do not follow academic schedules, faculty and student involvement tends to be episodic, and having a full-time, year-round director ensures the necessary continuity. In “Rindge 2020: Mapping Our Future,” town officials from Rindge, university faculty, and local residents framed the issue, wrote a guide, held forums, and implemented several actions. Another example, “Citizens Seeking Common Ground,” involved residents in a school district that spanned two towns. The group held a series of dialogues to work out a way of addressing a six-year impasse on the need for new or improved school facilities.

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