The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit operating foundation, chartered in 1927, that does not make grants but welcomes partnerships with other institutions (or groups of institutions) and individuals who are actively working on problems of communities, governing, politics, and education. The interpretations and conclusions contained in the Higher Education Exchange, unless expressly stated to the contrary, represent the views of the author or authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its trustees, or officers.

Copyright © 2014 by the Kettering Foundation

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.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deborah Witte</td>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire Snyder-Hall</td>
<td>Faculty Happiness and Civic Agency</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David W. Brown</td>
<td>Blind Spots in Academe</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodore R. Alter</td>
<td>Faculty, Citizens, and Expertise in Democracy</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffrey C. Bridger, Paloma Z. Frumento</td>
<td>A Vision for the Liberal Arts: An Interview with Adam Weinberg</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorlene Hoyt</td>
<td>University Civic Engagement: A Global Perspective</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard M. Battistoni</td>
<td>Beyond Service and Service Learning: Educating for Democracy in College</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romand Coles and Blase Scarnati</td>
<td>Beyond Enclosure: Pedagogy for a Democratic Commonwealth</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marietjie Oelofsen</td>
<td>We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: The Promise Of Civic Renewal In America</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Mathews</td>
<td>Who Are the Citizens We Serve? A View from the Wetlands of Democracy</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FACULTY HAPPINESS
AND CIVIC AGENCY
By Claire Snyder-Hall

What motivates faculty to do civic engagement work, given that most institutions of higher education do not reward, and sometimes even penalize, such work? And does the work give faculty “public happiness”—the sense of flourishing that comes from engaging with others in work that has public relevance? To explore these questions, I interviewed a diverse group of 39 faculty members, asking them how they got involved in civic engagement work, what motivates them, how their institutions have responded, how the work has affected their lives, and whether they are “happy.” (In the interviews, I use the term “civic engagement work” because it seemed to be a term that is both broad and broadly recognized. In this paper, I use it interchangeably with “public work.”) While the sample size is small, these interviews provide a collection of stories that give rise to a number of common themes.

Faculty who do civic engagement work generally encounter a number of challenges. The publication treadmill, the rise of status-seeking behavior within academic culture, the introduction of private business management practices within higher education, and the loss of public purposes are a few trends that undercut public work. I was particularly interested in what motivates civic faculty, since I struggled for years to balance academic and public work, and ultimately ended up leaving academia after 20 years—a story I tell in the 2012 issue of this journal under the title “Tales from Anti-Civic U.”

Faculty malaise is not unusual. Indeed, The Chronicle of Higher Education discusses that topic in “Why Are Associate Professors So Unhappy?” (Wilson 2012). The article reports that:

New national data show that associate professors are some of the unhappiest people in academe. They are significantly less satisfied with their work than either assistant or full professors, according to the data, which were collected this year . . . by the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education [COACHE], at Harvard University. Adjunct professors have also made their unhappiness with their work conditions well
known, but the Harvard survey focused on faculty members within the tenured and tenure-track ranks.

The *Chronicle* article made the case that associate professors are unhappy because they feel overwhelmed by their extremely heavy workloads, in particular the onerous amounts of committee work required after tenure that keeps them away from what they need to do to get promoted, which is publish.

If you look more closely at what those interviewed actually said, however, it becomes clear that it is not just frustration with too much committee work that bothers associate professors. To the contrary, many are disappointed that their work lacks public meaning and their campuses lack community. In short, they desire public happiness, which theorists from Aristotle to Thomas Jefferson to Hannah Arendt have argued arises from working with others on projects that have public relevance, such as participation in the practices of self-government.

**O’Meara’s Study of Faculty Civic Agency**

My study builds on a study by Kerry Ann O’Meara, in which she interviewed 25 tenure-line faculty who do civic engagement work (O’Meara 2010). O’Meara discovered that all of her subjects “had early family, religious, community, and professional experiences before entering academia that they attributed to their current work” (O’Meara 2010, 6). Motivating factors mentioned include “family legacy;” religious beliefs; love of a particular community; gender, racial, and/or working class identities; and membership in Generation X or Y (O’Meara 2010, 9). In addition, “all the women in the study who were parents talked quite a bit about the world their children would inherit and mentioned that part of their identity as a central explanation for their sense of civic agency” (O’Meara 2010, 9).

O’Meara’s interviews document that civic faculty often do public work to counteract the sense of isolation that can develop at universities, where each faculty member is an expert in a particular area and rarely has departmental colleagues in the same narrow field, and where they are not linked by a shared focus on public life. Many said they fulfill their need for connection with community work.
Interviews with Faculty Who Are Doing Civic Engagement Work

For my study, I interviewed 39 faculty who do civic engagement work of various kinds, including deliberative pedagogy, service learning, public scholarship, and community engagement. I recruited interviewees largely from the Kettering Foundation network, including 26 from foundation meetings on higher education, four from the Public Philosophy Network (PPN) conference in 2013, and eight from the American Democracy Project (ADP) annual meeting in 2013, plus one who was referred to me by a friend. I chose people who seemed to have an intriguing story or who were recommended to me.

The interviewees include a diverse group of academics who work at various types of institutions, come from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, and are at different points in their careers. They include faculty at 18 research universities, 10 comprehensive or regional universities, 10 liberal arts colleges, and three community colleges. (The total comes to more than 39 because two adjunct professors taught at more than one type of institution.) They hail from the Northeast, the South, the Midwest, the Mountain West, and the West Coast. (The “Mountain West” does not include Texas (South) or California (West Coast), and the Northeast includes the Mid-Atlantic Region.) And their backgrounds include the social sciences, the humanities, the arts, education, and the sciences. (Of the 20 social scientists, nine are in political science. Of the humanities professors, seven are in philosophy. For the purposes of this study, nursing and math were included as part of the sciences.) The group is comprised of full professors; associate professors; assistant professors; adjunct professors; instructors or lecturers; a visiting assistant professor; and a center director who also teaches.

In contrast to O’Meara’s findings, in my study almost half of those interviewed came to civic engagement work on the job, rather than as an outgrowth of core values or the product of pre-professional
experiences or identities. More specifically, while 13 of my interviewees got involved in civic engagement because they saw it as connected to their long-standing commitments to “social justice,” 18 faculty members—almost half—came to the work on the job. Three came to it through a need in their teaching, and five came to civic engagement after connecting with people affiliated with the Kettering Foundation. All the ADP faculty were recruited on the job, except for two, and two of them cited meeting Tom Ehrlich as a catalyst. Two were very active in electoral politics before discovering ADP.

A third group within my sample constitutes a hybrid; they came to civic engagement work not because of values instilled in childhood or opportunities presented on the job, but through experiences they had during their own educational process. Three people discovered civic engagement during high school, two in college, and four in graduate school. Three were hooked by volunteering, while others were taken by intellectual ideas introduced in the classroom or through reading.

“I’m Tired but I’m Happy”: Faculty Workloads

The author of the Chronicle article depicts heavy workloads as the main cause of faculty unhappiness, so it is puzzling that civic professors voluntarily take on huge amounts of extra work that most likely falls under the category of “service,” which generally does not count for much. I will never forget a conversation I had with a friend who teaches at a regional state university. I told her I was conducting a study of why faculty do civic engagement work. She replied, “I’ll tell you why they do it: because some dean tells them they have to, and they are stuck with it.” Her jaw dropped when I told her that faculty actually take the work on voluntarily.

My study found that both workloads and levels of happiness were extremely high across the board. Almost all those interviewed say they work almost all the time, and that remains true across rank. What is remarkable, however, is that despite their heavy workloads, all those interviewed reported being happy in the public sense, and, remarkably, none of the eight associate professors interviewed said they were unhappy in either sense, a marked contrast from those in the Chronicle article.
My study did not find lower levels of happiness among female faculty who are married and have school-aged children in the house, which other studies have found. Cathy Ann Trower has found that “59 percent of married women with children were considering leaving academia” (Trower 2012, 63). The majority of the people I interviewed were women, and a little over a third were married (or the equivalent) with school-aged children at home. Three were tenure-line faculty at research universities, three were tenure-line faculty at regional universities, two were non-tenure-line faculty at research universities, and one was a tenure-line faculty member at a community college. All were happy in the public sense, and interestingly, concerns about their children’s future were barely mentioned. While the small sample size precludes generalization, the finding suggests that civic engagement work might help make female faculty happier as well.

**Benefits for Student Learning**

Many common themes emerged from the interviews. First, faculty believe that civic engagement work provides huge benefits for students, so being civically engaged helps them do their jobs better. One man explains how experiential learning improved the quality of his teaching:

This notion of public happiness [for me relates to my experience] that in the classroom, there’s a fair amount of fear, a fear of being exposed as someone who doesn’t know everything, who isn’t perfectly wise and all knowing . . . [who by not having all the answers] was made to look the fool. . . . And I can remember experiencing that very early on in my life in classrooms, a sort of feeling, like, if you didn’t know the answer, it was really bad. So you wanted to really avoid that. . . . I think on a subconscious level and through just the way our educational system is set up, there is that level or at least some level of fear in that space.

I’m pretty good at having a good discussion, and it wasn’t like I was some dictator, but on the edge of kind of trying to manage things to avoid some of that vulnerability. And I found sometime ago . . . I realized that that way of handling things in the classroom was not working for anyone. There was very little
space for the students to be directly involved. And it took a huge amount of effort and energy on my part to kind of manage that.

So I realized that on some level what I needed to do was just let go, kind of not try and manage the classroom as carefully as I had before. And to me, I relate that to a notion of developing a more public space, a freer space in the classroom for genuine discussion and deliberation and dialogue that is riskier, right, in order to know where that’s going to end up.

Many faculty members emphasize how much satisfaction they get from the positive impact civic engagement work has on student learning. This man is especially worth quoting:

I was often frustrated in my discipline teaching because I wasn’t reaching my students. As a PhD from a major research university in [the sciences]—how much opportunity do I have in a [typical] undergraduate classroom to make a difference? But when I started having those students do community-based projects, seeing the difference that can make, I just thought that my teaching became alive again with purpose. So, I’m more fulfilled that way.

It was very clear that civic engagement work allows faculty to establish a sense of connection with students that exceeds anything that can be measured by student learning outcomes.

“I Do Believe that Human Beings Are Social Creatures”: Connecting with Others

As if in direct response to the Chronicle article, the faculty I interviewed recount that their work provides them with strong connections with students, other faculty, and/or the larger community. Some emphasize the value of seeing students blossom:

How satisfying could it be, though, to launch a student out into the world who you just know is going to make a difference? And she was really—you know, I just remember her as this very quiet, shy college freshman, and then by her senior year, she’s this incredibly competent and capable 21-year-old, who is feeding people in Africa and gathering together people to talk about a very divisive [state] farm bill and hosting a series of conversations on everything on the history of farming in [our] County . . . how exciting to watch her now. So I think for me, I live very vicariously.
through my students, and so I don’t know how you could be more deeply satisfied than to watch that sort of thing... How could you not be satisfied, right? I just get chills thinking about it.

Other faculty agree that engaging together in civic work allows faculty to connect with students more deeply than they can in a traditional classroom setting: “That ability to get to know students so personally—and to me, civic engagement work allows me to do that. I mean every single one of these 30 kids that I just had in this class this semester—it was just amazing. It was just amazing.”

In addition, civic engagement work in particular allows faculty to connect with others in a deeper way:

Well... I feel that a large part of the [deliberative] process, and one reason I like it so much, is because it engages people, not just intellects, but full people with lives and values and relationships. And I do believe that human beings are social creatures, and we are happiest when we are fully engaged on all of those levels.

Civic engagement adds something valuable to faculty work: I’m thrilled to be doing this kind of work. And I—it would be depressing for me to go back to just teaching philosophy. I’m thrilled with this. This is like, what I want to do. This is my life—I can have these public conversations with people in [local towns] and live here and do this work. I’m just like, “What else?” I’m totally happy... I’m doing what I really love, and I think it’s needed, and people appreciate it. So, I mean, it’s really great. [While] I think I am dispositionally happy... I’ve had jobs that made me miserable. I’ve done things that I didn’t love, but I love doing this. I mean, I think it’s just a great opportunity, and I’ve been lucky that they’ve let me do it, because there’s not really a model for it. I just started doing it, and it was supported.

Civic engagement work also makes faculty feel more connected to the local community, which could play an important role in faculty retention. That is to say, a lot of faculty yearn for community (Trower 2010), but the structure of the academic job market makes that prospect difficult. Applicants must move wherever the jobs are. If you want a tenure-line position, you generally cannot choose where you live. Civic engagement work could ameliorate the downside of that reality by providing a sense of rootedness in the local community.
Work that is Meaningful

In addition to achieving a stronger sense of community, civically engaged faculty find their work to be very meaningful, and that makes the increased workload worthwhile. “It’s a lot of meetings. It’s a lot of extra writing. But to me, it certainly has been satisfying. I would say it has increased the meaningfulness of the work I do, I think because I see it as having direct relevance . . . to our community and to the wider world.”

Another woman stresses that faculty should organize their careers in accordance with core values:

I think in general, faculty have to find the agency in themselves, that they can ask, “What are my core values here?” And what is the reason why I have this job and use that as a constant rubric for evaluating what committee assignments you’re taking on, what classes you’re starting to teach . . . And finding that alignment also just helps with the work-life balance.

So I’ve been trying to be more smart about that, I’m really committed ethically to being a scholar that continues to be productive, as I move to full professor . . . but that work has to have a meaning to me in terms of being related to values and goals that I have for myself and for my students and things that I want them to understand in classes, and to teach in communities, where I feel like they’re aligned with something of value. So it doesn’t always work out that way, but it should most of the time, or else the whole happiness thing’s not going to happen.

“It’s What Feeds My Soul”: Spiritual Dimensions of Civic Engagement Work

One of the most surprising things that came up during interviews is how many faculty use spiritual or quasi-religious terms to describe their work. For example:

So, my motivation, I guess, originally came from the sort of feeling of—I won’t try to get too touchy-feely with this, but there’s sort of a spiritual dimension about that process of making and creating things with people and communities, and in a sense, performing by developing events and projects. So, that’s how I originally came into it.
Another uses the quasi-religious language of being part of something larger than herself:

But there’s also this collegial element of being involved with something that is for the public good or feeling part of the public good . . . There’s something about that, that feeling that you’re part of something that’s larger than you could possibly be. And I do think that that’s the key to happiness.

**Synthesis and Synergy**

Faculty clearly enjoy their civic engagement work and report that, despite heavy workloads, the work energizes them. “It’s just very rewarding and satisfying in many ways, which makes up for a lot of the extra work that it takes to do this stuff,” says one professor. “It makes me feel tremendously happy. It almost makes me feel alive. It’s so invigorating,” says another.

In addition, civic engagement work helps faculty members synthesize the disparate parts of their jobs, which increases productivity. One person commented that because of the work, “I actually feel surprisingly allowed to be fully who I am here. And we just had a meeting with a bunch of our community partners last week. Yeah. I felt like I wasn’t actually having to kind of soft-pedal who I am.”

**“I Just Love It!”**

In addition to all these specific benefits, faculty members told me again and again that they just love doing civic engagement work. Consider this account:

[I feel] jazzed up [doing civic engagement work]. I mean, I just—you know, really I just get the goose bumps—you know, the chills—from head to toe, just thinking about how important it is. And not to say that from a place of ego—like “I am doing something so important”—but from a place of just caring so deeply about wanting to see community members empowered and, kind of, supported. Supported in a way to have the skills to be able to feel like, “Okay, we can deal with this. We can do this.”

In light of all we know about the dysfunctions of academia, I find the energy, enthusiasm, and happiness reported by the faculty I interviewed extraordinary. Clearly, when professors undertake
civic engagement work, they may be busy and overworked, but they are effective with students and research; more connected to students, colleagues, and communities; and they feel energized and very, very happy.

REFERENCES


CONTRIBUTORS

Theodore R. Alter is professor of Agricultural, Environmental, and Regional Economics and codirector of the Center for Economic and Community Development in Penn State’s Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education. He is program head for Penn State’s Intercollege Minor in Civic and Community Engagement and Scholar-in-Residence with the Penn State Sustainability Institute. He also serves as Adjunct Research Fellow in the School of Law at the University of New England in Australia. Alter’s research and teaching focus on community and rural development, institutional and behavioral economics, and public scholarship and civic engagement in higher education.

Richard M. Battistoni is a professor of political science and public and community service studies at Providence College, where he also serves as the director of the Feinstein Institute for Public Service. An accomplished practitioner and scholar of the role of education in a democratic society, Battistoni researches service learning, citizenship education, community organizing, and democratic theory and practice.

Jeffrey C. Bridger is a senior scientist with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education in Penn State’s College of Agricultural Sciences. He frequently teaches undergraduate courses in community, environment, development, and rural sociology. Bridger’s work focuses broadly on community interaction, sustainability, and barriers to community agency, and has contributed to the methodological use of narratives as an explanatory tool for gaining a deep understanding of communities.


Romand Coles is the Frances B. McAllister Chair and director of the Program for Community, Culture, and Environment at Northern Arizona University, where he is a leader in the democratic education initiative discussed in his essay in this volume. He has collaborated with the Kettering Foundation, the American Commonwealth Partnership, and the American Democracy Project. Coles is the author of several books, including Beyond Gated Politics: Reflections for the Possibility of Democracy (University of Minnesota Press 2005); Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian (with Stanley Hauerwas, Wipf and Stock 2008); and Visionary Pragmatism: Toward Radical and Ecological Democracy (forthcoming from Duke University Press).

Paloma Z. Frumento is a research associate with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education in Penn State’s College of Agricultural Sciences. Her research interests include democracy and collective action, community arts and education, paradigms of development, empowerment theory, and emerging technologies and public policy.

Lorlene Hoyt is the director of Programs and Research for the Talloires Network, a global coalition of engaged universities. She is also an associate research professor in the Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts University and a visiting scholar at
the University of Massachusetts, Boston’s New England Resource Center for Higher Education. From 2002-2011, Hoyt was an assistant, then associate, professor of Urban Studies and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she founded MIT@Lawrence, an award-winning city-campus partnership with the city of Lawrence, Massachusetts.

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 (University of Illinois Press 1999), Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy (Kettering Foundation Press 2006), and The Ecology of Democracy: Finding Ways to Have a Stronger Hand in Shaping Our Future (Kettering Foundation Press 2014).

Marietjie Oelofsen is a Kettering Foundation resident researcher from South Africa. Her research focuses on talking and listening as devices for political communication and political participation. She will submit her PhD dissertation in media studies this fall at Rhodes University in South Africa. Oelofsen has published papers in the Global Media Journal-African Edition and in Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research.

Blase Scarnati is the director of First and Second Year Learning at Northern Arizona University, which includes the First Year Seminar-Action Research Teams Program. He is also a codirector of the First Year Learning Initiative and associate professor of musicology in the School of Music at NAU. Scarnati has collaborated with the Kettering Foundation, the American Commonwealth Partnership, the American Democracy Project, The New York Times Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

Claire Snyder-Hall writes popular and scholarly texts on issues of concern to democrats and others. She served as research deputy for the Kettering Foundation on the faculty happiness and civic agency project. A former associate professor of political theory, Snyder-Hall holds a PhD from Rutgers University and a BA cum laude from Smith College. She resides in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.

Adam Weinberg is the president of Denison University. He began his career at Colgate University, where he also served as dean of the College. Most recently, Weinberg served as president of World Learning, a global organization that runs international education, exchange, and development programs in more than 70 countries. Weinberg is a sociologist by training and has published extensively on civic engagement and higher education.

Deborah Witte, a program officer with the Kettering Foundation, is coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange. She also directs the foundation’s collaborative research with Russian nongovernmental organizations. Witte serves on the executive committee, as well as the board, of the Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education (SOCHE) and the Ohio Humanities Council. She received her PhD in Leadership and Change from Antioch University.
The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit operating foundation, chartered in 1927, that does not make grants but welcomes partnerships with other institutions (or groups of institutions) and individuals who are actively working on problems of communities, governing, politics, and education.

The interpretations and conclusions contained in the Higher Education Exchange, unless expressly stated to the contrary, represent the views of the author or authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its trustees, or officers.

Copyright © 2014 by the Kettering Foundation