

HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



2017

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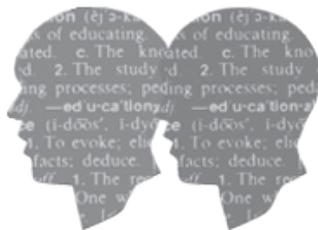
The *Higher Education Exchange* is founded on a thought articulated by Thomas Jefferson in 1820:

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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ISSN 2469-6293 (print)
ISSN 2471-2280 (online)



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We dedicate this issue of the *Higher Education Exchange* to Dan Yankelovich, who just passed away. His writing about public judgment has been critical to Kettering's understanding of deliberation. His seminal book *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World* is required reading for thoughtful scholars of democracy.

He was not only an emeritus board member of the Kettering Foundation; he was also a great friend. We will all miss him.

David Mathews

CONTENTS

Derek W. M. Barker	Deliberation as Public Judgment: Recovering the Political Roots of a Democratic Practice (Foreword)	1
Jane Mansbridge	Beyond Adversary Democracy	6
Ronald Beiner	What Is Political Judgment?	13
Daniel Yankelovich	The Bumpy Road from Mass Opinion to Public Judgment	21
Noëlle McAfee & David McIvor with Derek W. M. Barker	Beyond the “Informed” Citizenry: The Role of Public Judgment in a Deliberative Democracy (An Interview)	29
Lori L. Britt	National Issues Forum Guides: Eliciting and Habituating Public Judgment	39
Maura Casey	How Civic Engagement Spread Across Six College Campuses	49
Harry C. Boyte	Shaping Our Future: The Public Purpose of Higher Education	53
David Mathews	Democracy Is in Trouble, Higher Education Is in Trouble (Afterword)	61
	Contributors	72

NATIONAL ISSUES FORUM GUIDES

Eliciting and Habituating Public Judgment

Lori L. Britt

This essay reflects on the concept of judgment underlying the National Issues Forums approach to deliberation. In so doing, Britt argues that judgment, so understood, is central to the civic purposes of higher education.

As a communication scholar, I am immersed in the study and practice of communities engaging in addressing issues that they face, in determining what type of community they want to be, and in developing the communicative spaces that allow this civic work to happen in productive, collaborative ways. As an educator, I am concerned with how we show students what engaged citizenship looks like and offer them an opportunity to gain and practice the habits of engaged citizenship, many of which are communicative habits. Important to both of these pursuits is a keen interest in the language we use when we try to name, understand, and consider ways to address public issues—the language that we use to shape public judgment.

It was out of this interest that I became fascinated with looking at the guides produced for the National Issues Forums (NIF), curious as to what lessons I might learn in looking at the history of the guides and what insights I might gain that would support my role as a practitioner and educator of dialogue and deliberation. For over 35 years, NIF guides have helped shaped conversations about some of our country's most complex public issues. From education to immigration, health care to jobs, drugs to democracy itself, the guides created to stimulate and support forums where citizens together consider these public issues have served to engage citizens in the work of doing democracy.

What is the work of doing democracy? As the essays in this volume note, much of the work of participatory democracy is about coming to public judgment. How do the NIF guides support this work of public judgment, and what can we learn about our shifting conceptualizations of this term in looking at the language and structure of the NIF guides over the course of their history?

Those questions were at the heart of research I undertook in partnership with the Kettering Foundation. My exploration focused on a set of 33 guides,

featuring one from each year from 1982 to 2015 (with the exception of 2004, when no guides were published). The topics of the guides analyzed represented a broad range of public issues but included several issues that were framed in multiple years, such as health care, education, and crime. My focus on the structure and language used in the guides offered a look at how they serve as tools to shape deliberative engagement. I wondered how language use elicited specific work of citizens and how that work was supported in the way the guides were presented.

This approach to my research was pragmatic, seeking to explore how the guides enable or constrain the kind of deliberative work intended. The focus was on how the guides shape possibilities for public talk about the issues in particular ways, influenced by the language choices used in framing. Emerging from the specifics of word usage, verb forms, structural details of the guides, and charting of changes to the guides over the years was a view of how the guides specifically help shape the work of coming to public judgment.

Creating a Space Between Adversary and Unitary Democracy

Jane Mansbridge's seminal distinction between adversary and unitary democracy are foundational for participatory democracy. Mansbridge defines unitary democracy as a form of democracy where people who disagree reason together until they find the best answer to a public issue, rather than resorting, when our interests conflict, to a vote where the majority rules.

As Mansbridge notes, the effort to maintain unitary elements in the nation, in turn, depends on widespread rejection both of the cynical doctrine that interests always conflict and of the credulous assumption that they can always

Differences must not prevent us from addressing critical issues.

be harmonious. The structure of the NIF guides over their history highlights a focus on addressing problems in way that offers a bridge between unitary and adversarial democracy, making constructive discourse possible without any

expectation of agreement. The structure of considering at least three options or approaches to addressing a public problem helps avoid binary thinking of win-lose and forces participants to more deeply reflect on how what they value might be protected or attained through various courses of action.

We always have both common and conflicting interests, according to Mansbridge, and the structure of the NIF guides reflects that reality but also emphasizes that differences must not prevent us from addressing critical issues.

With their structure of naming a domain and a central question as the title of the guide, which emerged as the predominant format by 1991 (for example, *Youth and Violence: Reducing the Threat* and *Economic Security: Taking Charge of Our Future*), NIF focused energy toward problem solving. The language of the guides helped direct participants to concentrate on best ways to address the issue to gain collective benefits. In his introductory letter to the 1983 guide, Keith Melville, then editor-in-chief of the National Issues Forums (now the National Issues Forums Institute), said participants were expected “to air their differences and to begin to identify their common ground,” to come to public judgment.

The guides evolved over time to foreground not more information, but more talk of things held valuable.

NIF Guides Support “Working Through”

Dan Yankelovich offers an important distinction between two perspectives on what denotes quality in public opinion: “quality-as-well-informed” and “quality-as-public judgment.” In the former, which he says is the dominant model, quality is measured by the public having all the facts. The remedy is to provide more information. The earliest NIF guides may have been partially operating under this definition of quality public opinion. They were presented as issue primers, and ranged from 24 to 45 pages between 1982 and 2009. They were later gleaned down to a trim 12 to 13 pages. The earliest guides also featured structural elements, such as glossaries, issue summaries, chapters that elaborated different facets of the issue, and suggested further reading lists, that further implied that one of their functions was to better inform the public.

The shortening of the guides addressed pragmatic considerations of cost and intended use, but also corresponded to increasing access to the Internet and easy availability of information and perspectives about national issues. The guides evolved over time to foreground not more information, but more talk of things held valuable and the inherent tensions between options, trade-offs, and consequences that participants must consider in order to work through the choices facing citizens and the nation.

Yankelovich’s three stages that result in public judgment—consciousness raising, working through, and resolution—are reflected and supported by the structure and language of the NIF guides. That fact that certain issues are framed each year by NIF supports that these are issues that require attention and action. The NIF guides help support this readiness for action by using direct language

of assertions (for example, “prepare students to be successful in the workplace,” “treat substance abuse as an illness,” “provide health care coverage as a right”) when discussing the options or approaches to be deliberated. Stating these options as actions in definitive terms immediately primes deliberation, as it does not require additional explanatory text to help participants begin to envision the types of actions that would support a particular approach or the types of consequences that might arise from particular actions. Using assertions to state the options has been the most frequent linguistic construct since 1982, and has been used almost exclusively since 2007.

Yankelovich’s second stage of working through is really what the NIF guides are designed to support: to help participants work through and recognize competing tensions against a backdrop that recognizes a need for change. Yankelovich posits that this stage is largely an internal process, “that individuals have to work at and ultimately achieve for themselves.” However, the NIF model promotes this working through as a collaborative process. Engagement with others—and hearing how the issue directly affects others in our community—helps participants see that the ways we address issues have unintended consequences.

Finally, Yankelovich offers that stage three, resolution, is multifaceted. Cognitive resolution helps participants enlarge their thinking about an issue by taking new realities into account—realities shared by other participants in the deliberation. Emotional resolution is often assumed of NIF participants, because choosing to come and deliberate about an issue presumes they are no longer content with *avoiding* the issue. And finally, moral resolution requires people to balance their personal needs and desires with the needs of others to find an ethical way to address the issue, to address how we should proceed and act. Of the verbs most commonly used to frame the central question of the NIF guides, the most common is SHOULD, which indicates duty, propriety, and a moral consideration. With this construct, the NIF guides highlight that certain issues are not best addressed using only facts or technical solutions because those issues are value-based problems. They require people to consider together the values that are in tension in any possible path forward.

The Context in which Political Judgment Can Occur

Ronald Beiner offers insight that judgment is a general attitude shared by all citizens, and the exercise of judgment itself qualifies entry into participation in political life. Political judgments, he adds, are judgments about the form of

collective life that it is desirable to pursue *within a context of possibilities*. It is this context that NIF guides offer citizens, a context that changes and requires new questions to be deliberated when the context and its possibilities shift. For instance, in looking at the five guides that have framed the issue of health care between 1981 and 2015, it becomes evident that the context was different for each of these deliberations by the combination of the way the question is asked, the options being proposed, and the description of the problem. The way the issue is framed against this contextual backdrop implies particular work to be done by deliberators. The exploration of the guides showed that six types of work were implied for participants. Depending on the context at the time each guide was released, participants were asked to respond to the public issue in a particular way:

ADAPT: Alerts participants to the fact that something has changed, which requires rethinking the approach to the issue and compels shifting priorities and courses of action;

ADDRESS: Asks participants to decide on actions that need to be taken to deal with a growing problem or hot-button issue, even if they might not currently feel the direct impacts of these issues;

CLARIFY: Requires work to clarify the nature of an issue, the purpose or intent of a program or policy, the vision for the country, or who should make decisions about the purpose, intent, or vision;

DECIDE: Encourages keeping long-term effects in mind and being more future-oriented than present-oriented;

PIVOT: Requires consideration of a large shift in the direction or type of solutions being proposed to address a long-term issue. This framing implies that in addressing an issue, citizens need to decide which way to pivot or how to take a new approach that departs from current practice or thinking;

PREVENT: Similar to the DECIDE framing, the preventative framing requires participants to act wisely now to decide on actions that avoid or minimize future problems, such as passing a crushing national debt on to future generations (2011) and considering what should go on the Internet (2013).

The Issue of Healthcare: Framing the Issue Against Different Contextual Backdrops

Year	Title and Choices/ Approaches	Problem and Contextual Backdrop	Typology Category/ Specific Work to Be Done	Citizen Agency
1984	<p><i>The Soaring Cost of Health Care</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RX for high medical bills: more competition • The government's role: redefining benefits, regulating prices • The high cost of heroic measures 	<p>"The problem is money." Examines high costs of extending care to such a large portion of the population.</p> <p>"This nation has put a priority on health care, and as a result, this has been America's leading growth industry." The question is, how to curb its appetite for additional resources.</p>	<p>ADDRESS</p> <p>Purpose is not to examine all of the factors that contribute to health-care costs or to assemble a list of "villains" on whom the problem can be blamed, but to examine some of the proposed solutions to soaring costs and to "provoke debate" about them.</p>	<p>Make choices to impact reduction in costs of health care at individual and societal levels.</p>
1993	<p><i>The Health-Care Cost Explosion: Why It's So Serious, What Should Be Done</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plugging the Leaks: Waste, Fraud, and Excessive Profits • Medical marketplace incentives to economize • Drawing the line on medical miracles that we cannot afford 	<p>Most Americans think the health-care system needs to be fundamentally reformed. But there is no agreement about how to proceed. How far do we need to go to contain costs? Which direction is the best direction?</p> <p>Then-president Clinton emphasized the effects of hemorrhaging health-care costs that were increasing faster than any other federal budget item and, if unaddressed, would "bankrupt the country."</p>	<p>CLARIFY</p> <p>Understanding the complexity of rising costs, "which is no easy matter."</p> <p>Examine the source of the problem. Why have health-care costs risen more rapidly than all of the other goods and services we consume?</p>	<p>Learn about a complex and technical issue and infuse the technical knowledge with social values.</p>

Year	Title and Choices/ Approaches	Problem and Contextual Backdrop	Typology Category/ Specific Work to Be Done	Citizen Agency
2003	<p><i>Examining Health Care: What's the Public's Prescription?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connected parts, not fragmented pieces • Partners, not just patients • Care for all, not just for some 	<p>The US spends more than any other country in the world on health, yet serious problems with access, cost, and quality persist, depriving many people of the care they need and jeopardizing the health of our nation.</p> <p>More than 41 million Americans are without health insurance, are using ERs, getting inconsistent care, and postponing care until problems are difficult to treat.</p>	<p>PIVOT Careful thought and deliberation are needed to understand the nature of the problems in health care, its impact on people's health, and possible courses of action. These approaches are based on the broad and deep concerns expressed by Americans.</p>	<p>Consider a new approach to taking on an issue that is continuing to have negative consequences for individuals and the nation.</p>
2008	<p><i>Coping with the Cost of Health Care: How Do We Pay for What We Want?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the threat of financial ruin • Restrain out-of-control costs • Provide coverage as a right 	<p>People say they are worried that they will be wiped out financially by medical expenses; that they feel taken advantage of by out-of-control prices for health care; and, that it's wrong for some to get good care while others don't because they can't afford it. Worries about being able to handle health-care costs outstrip anxieties about losing a job, terrorist attacks, crime, and losing savings in the stock market.</p>	<p>ADAPT Decide what choices we can live with as individuals and a nation in trying to pay for what we need. Should we tinker with the system we have, or try something new?</p>	<p>Make necessary but difficult choices about what to give up.</p>

Year	Title and Choices/ Approaches	Problem and Contextual Backdrop	Typology Category/ Specific Work to Be Done	Citizen Agency
2015	<p><i>Health Care: How Can We Reduce Costs and Still Get the Care We Need?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a nation and as individuals, we need to live within our means • Make health care more transparent, accountable, and efficient • Take responsibility for lowering health-care costs by focusing on wellness 	<p>Americans worry about their ability to pay for health care and the US spends 22 percent of our national budget on health care, but it is not buying us better health. The US ranks last among 16 other high-income democracies in infant mortality and life expectancy, with higher rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, chronic lung disease, and general disability. Need to understand what is driving the increasing costs.</p>	<p>PIVOT</p> <p>Broaden our understanding of what factors and behaviors contribute to these high costs.</p>	<p>Recognize the system is not working and consider actions beyond paying more as an individual or nation.</p>

Learning From the History of NIF: Developing a Capacity for Public Judgment in Higher Education

My research into how National Issues Forums guides have been framed over the past 35 years, and my participation in framing and facilitating National Issues Forums has reinforced the value I see of helping students see themselves as civic actors who play a crucial role in shaping public judgment. There is no doubt that higher education advances discovery, helping to find answers to questions about our world and generating more questions. However, higher education should embrace as fully a commitment to consideration of how to use the knowledge generated to address complex public issues—*wicked* problems for which a single perfect solution does not exist. It is against this backdrop of complexity that institutions of higher education can help to shape the kinds of thinkers that can embrace the challenges that face our world, challenges that have the potential to further polarize people instead of harnessing energy toward reasoned and thoughtful deliberation. Some universities and colleges are embracing this facet of their mission, and I am proud to work at a university that recognizes and takes seriously this responsibility.

At James Madison University, our efforts are influenced by our name. We owe a great deal to James Madison, not only as our University's namesake, but also as a public leader and father of the Constitution. Shaping and leading our nation required him to grapple with very complex issues both publicly and privately. We draw on Madison himself to offer students an understanding of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions one needs to cultivate and use to play a vital role in shaping our communities and our nation by addressing public problems. In presenting him as a civic role model, we recognize that he exhibited many traits desperately needed today. At the same time, we refuse to idealize him; he had numerous flaws and foibles, and his legacy, like our nation's, is mixed.

James Madison University seeks to provide opportunities for students and faculty, as well as our campus and broader communities, to deeply explore public problems, explore how these problems are experienced, and begin to consider how complex issues can best be addressed in ways that bring our public values into discursive consciousness.

These opportunities are woven into curricular and co-curricular experiences across campus and throughout a student's course of study. Many involve engagement with broader communities, and focus on using deliberation as a pedagogical tool as well as an instrument of democracy. Through our Institute for Constructive Advocacy and

Dialogue, designated as a Kettering Center for Public Life, we engage students in designing and facilitating difficult conversations about complex public issues on campus and in the community. Students have helped shaped conversations about mental health, services and support for refugees and immigrants, comprehensive city planning, police and race relations, community gardens, and

more. Students learn how to model and support these civic habits that can encourage thoughtful, just deliberation that shapes public judgment. As facilitators, students recognize that keeping people focused on the work of making choices and considering trade-offs and consequences can help to ingrain a sensibility for considering options richly and fully before abandoning an idea or perspective. This opportunity has primarily tapped communication

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and public-policy majors, but we recognized a desire to reach students in every discipline.

Framing issues to enable public judgment is one of the best academic endeavors we can offer our students. Engaging in this process of exploring an issue thoroughly and understanding multiple concerns and values that are in tension allows students to see that addressing public issues is not simple, and that this is not just the work of elected officials. It requires students to practice almost every civic habit and disposition as they delve deeply into contemporary and localized public issues.

We have recently developed a new curricular approach that revolves around framing public issues for a required general education communication course. As a starting point, we are offering this course to all 200 of our incoming honors students, who represent every discipline and program on our campus. They will work throughout the term on not just researching a public issue and developing presentations *about* the issue (which is a hallmark of introductory communication courses), but also on designing conversations to *engage with* others to address the issue. In essence, student teams are collaborating to explore and frame a conversation and produce an NIF-style guide. This is more than an activity or project; the approach is committed to helping students shape a deliberative mindset and show the value of participatory approaches to addressing public issues.

Our efforts at James Madison seek to continue the work the National Issues Forums have been supporting for decades, helping citizens experience the work of coming to public judgment. As a public university, we strive to educate citizens equipped with the ability to consider what we *should* do about the complex challenges that are an inevitable part of the public landscape. We look forward to learning from and with other institutions of higher education that are heeding this call to influence public judgment by creating generations of graduates who have the habits and skills to engage productively to find the best ways to address public problems.



CONTRIBUTORS

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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. Brown is the author of *Organization Smarts* (Amacom 2002), *The Real Change-Makers: Why Government is Not the Problem or the Solution* (Praeger 2011), and *America's Culture of Professionalism: Past, Present, and Prospects* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014). Brown's recent book, *Assumptions of the Tea Party Movement: A World of Their Own*, was published in 2016 (Palgrave Macmillan).

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