

HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



2022

Anti-Elitism and the Civic Purposes of Higher Education

Articles

Maria Farland

Scott Peters

Katy J. Harriger and Jill J. McMillan

Derek W. M. Barker

David W. Brown

Kara Lindaman, B. Da'Vida Plummer,
and Joseph Scanlon

Afterword

David Mathews

Additional Reflections

Harry C. Boyte, Joni Doherty, Sara A. Mehlretter Drury,
Mathew Johnson, and Timothy J. Shaffer

Editors: Derek W. M. Barker and Alex Lovit
Managing Editor: Renee Ergazos
Formatting: Long's Graphic Design, Inc.
Copy Editor: E. Ray Walker

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.

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 © 2022 by the Kettering Foundation

ISSN 2469-6293 (print)

ISSN 2471-2280 (online)

HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



CONTENTS

Derek W. M. Barker and Alex Lovit	Anti-Elitism and the Civic Purposes of Higher Education (Foreword)	1
Maria Farland	Academic Professionalism and the New Public-Mindedness (with an introduction by Joni Doherty)	6
Scott Peters	The Civic Mission Question in Land-Grant Education (with an introduction by Timothy J. Shaffer)	15
Katy J. Harriger and Jill J. McMillan	Public Scholarship and Faculty Role Conflict (with an introduction by Sara A. Mehlretter Drury)	29
Derek W. M. Barker	Five Emerging Practices in the Scholarship of Engagement (with an introduction by Mathew Johnson)	37
David W. Brown	The Public/Academic Disconnect (with an introduction by Harry C. Boyte)	48
Kara Lindaman, B. Da'Vida Plummer, and Joseph Scanlon	Ivory Tower or Town Square? Anti-Elitism and the Civic Purposes of Higher Education (an Interview)	54
David Mathews	More than Academics Talking to Academics about Academe (Afterword)	64
	Contributors	67

THE PUBLIC/ACADEMIC DISCONNECT

David W. Brown

In 1995, David W. Brown argued that higher education had become detached from democratic culture. He observed detachment shifting faculty identities and described how academics felt pressured to seek approval of their peers rather than pursue public value. Their concepts of what counted as knowledge had changed. He foresaw looming problems that resonated with our experience at the University of Minnesota. When our Center for Democracy and Citizenship interviewed faculty members in 1997, most described a loss of public purpose in research, an erosion of teaching, and demoralization.

Higher education is an upstream institution that prepares future professionals, educators, and curricular frameworks. Thus, detachment also reshaped K-12 schools, which became increasingly governed in top-down, bureaucratic ways. Parents, who once played significant roles in schools, felt pushed aside, and PTA membership plummeted. The idea of “common schools,” both in K-12 and higher education, largely disappeared.

Long-simmering anger in local communities has exploded at schools and school boards across the country. Today’s fights over K-12 schools and higher education reflect not only curriculum and ideology but also an undercurrent of anger at the loss of popular ownership and agency in education at every level. Brown anticipated much of this. He proposed “civic training centers” to educate future professionals and to reeducate faculty in “arts of collaboration.” He presaged today’s movement of citizen professionals who work “*with* citizens, not *for* them.” Beyond the market view of education as consumer choice and the state-centered view of education as expert delivery, we need a movement, again, for schools and colleges to be the new commons in which whole communities have a role to play and a stake in their future.

— Harry C. Boyte

The much talked about crisis in higher education is, superficially, one of dollars—more competition for research funds, downsizing of both academic and staff functions, trying to cope with the financial aid needs of students, and the deferred maintenance costs of the physical plant—in a political climate that offers no prospect of a bailout with larger public subsidies or dramatic tuition increases.

No doubt the crisis is financial, but it arises, in substantial part, from legislators and taxpayers having second thoughts about the kind of returns they are getting on their investment. Many institutions of higher learning are being forced to reexamine their relations to a public that can no longer be counted on to support them as they have in the past.

For most Americans, higher education has always been a very pragmatic investment—used both for personal advancement and for civic purposes too.

Personal advancement still rides high in the saddle. Short of rhetorical flourish, serious civic purpose has not been seen for some time. Each of our more than 3,000 colleges and universities is left to articulate and pursue

Many institutions of higher learning are being forced to reexamine their relations to a public that can no longer be counted on to support them as they have in the past.

whatever mission fits its circumstance, and what they do now is serve as necessary vehicles for faculty and student ambitions. Most colleges and universities, however, have no coherent agenda of their own that serves larger public interests. Ernest Boyer, executive director of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, says, “Increasingly, the campus is seen as a place where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the nation’s most pressing civic, social, economic, and moral problems.”¹

Where once we educated a small class of relatively privileged young men to serve and govern their communities, now we educate a much larger and heterogeneous cohort with hardly a thought given to their preparation for such civic work. Civic purpose is, at best, a university’s mission to educate for professional employment by which its graduates distinguish and distance themselves from a lay public and then serve that public according to certified knowledge, skills, and self-regulated codes of ethics.

The chasm is especially wide between academics and citizens—too wide for anyone to leap without risking serious injury. Perhaps no other professional world is more removed now from democratic culture than the hierarchies within and among academic departments, in which opinion, anyone’s, is valued only to the extent that it has first been certified by an elaborate credentialing process. If citizens are heard, they certainly are not listened to. Thomas Bender

concludes that “academic truth” and “political knowledge” are now worlds apart and make it difficult for “academic intellect” to be involved in “democratic culture.”²

Even those professors who see “politics” and “power” in every text and institution nonetheless pursue their critiques in very orthodox academic fashion. They deconstruct, but they do not communicate with the larger public. They labor for the approval of their peers but not for the sake of that public. There are clearly rewards for their academic performance but very little of it benefits the real-world constituencies that inspire their scholarship.

The marginality that Boyer speaks of, and the chasm described by Bender, underlies the supposed crisis that presidents, deans, department chairs, and faculty now must deal with, whether they acknowledge it or not. It is not just their budgets that are precarious but also their public standing.

On the assumption that a good teacher uses any problem that arises in the classroom as an opportunity to learn, perhaps the crisis in higher education is an opportunity for universities to learn how they can better serve those who have become hostile or indifferent to their interests, or become more relevant to the nation’s challenges, as Boyer suggested. Conceivably, the pressures on many universities may result in some attention being paid to strategies that reconnect them to the broader jurisdictions in which they are located or that underwrite a large portion of their costs. For Thomas Bender, “The agenda for the next decade . . . ought to be the opening up of the disciplines, the ventilating of professional communities . . . that have become too self-referential.”³

A good way to begin is by encouraging academics to do work that has

The chasm is especially wide between academics and citizens—too wide for anyone to leap without risking serious injury.

practical consequence for public problem-solving and to do such work *with* citizens, not *for* them. Universities alone or in a regional consortium might establish “civic training centers” to educate graduate students and

to reeducate faculty members as to the arts of collaboration with the numerous publics whose participation is essential if pressing social problems are to be solved.

Most problem-solving in most organizations and communities is a shared enterprise that some people think of as “politics.” If I found myself

alone on a desert island, there would be no politics. To be political is to be engaged in a process of analysis and interaction with other people. Independent grounds for judgment surely exist, such as the norms of a methodology or an ideology, but there is rarely any feasible way to enforce them in the political life of organizations and communities. In such venues, academics, and those who study with them, are called upon to help make decisions rather than discover answers. Whatever their technical skills or ideology, they must be prepared to adjust to public circumstances over which they have little or no control.

Perhaps the crisis in higher education is an opportunity for universities to learn how they can better serve those who have become hostile or indifferent to their interests.

A civic training center would be the place to develop “interrogating practices” that help citizens break down and break through the proprietary languages of academics so that their specialized vocabularies can be made intelligible, be reflected on, and used without license by nonspecialists. A civic training center would also be the place to promote the equally important practice, so often neglected by academics, of learning to ask, “What is it that members of the public know that I need to know if I am to be of any help?”

Two existing university centers are working examples of how new civic training centers might be organized. The Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota, and more particularly its Project Public Life, develops and teaches ways “to reengage citizens in the public world.” The project’s work includes action research, teaching methods, organizing, and outreach, which combine theory, language, and skills that help citizens be participants in the everyday politics of problem-solving. One significant initiative under way is the project’s recent work with service, health, and professional organizations and their staff development programs. Harry C. Boyte, a codirector of the project, believes that “professional identities,” without reform and civic enrichment, are not only unequal to public problems but also present serious obstacles to their resolution.

The Center for Community Partnership at the University of Pennsylvania is an important partner working with the West Philadelphia Improvement Corp., a decade’s effort to create and sustain comprehensive community schools. The university does not contribute financial support but instead, through the

center, offers the talent of its students and faculty members to work with children, parents, and others in West Philadelphia. The goal is to create viable “community schools,” as social hubs for the entire community. Since those at Penn do not assume that they know how to do that for the residents of West Philadelphia, their center pursues a “Deweyan” strategy that emphasizes “a mutually beneficial, democratic relationship between academics and nonacademics.” The center is as much learning oriented as it is service oriented. Participation is not one-way, but two-way partnerships of faculty members, students, staff, and alumni, with residents—all learning from one another as they share problems and produce better outcomes than would otherwise happen if any one of them tried to do it alone.

Professional reputation is, and will remain, the reference point for those in the academy. That is why they must find a professional reason for being more attentive to civic culture. There is nothing like the experience of academics in real-world problem-solving to remind them that they still have much to learn or learn anew. It is possible that civic training centers would help to facilitate such learning and, thereby, influence the nature of reforms in graduate education and the research agenda of young scholars.

Whatever civic training centers might do to reconnect faculties and graduate students to the larger public world and its problems, the learning that took place could also be plowed back into teaching and problem-solving on campus.

Not only do many academic professionals refuse or fail to connect with real-world constituencies, they also set a terrible example in their academic

A good way to begin is by encouraging academics to do work that has practical consequence for public problem-solving and to do such work with citizens, not for them.

hierarchies on campus and the expert-novice distance maintained in lecture halls and classrooms. That is not how people come together in the real world to solve problems. Although “civic education” is not acknowledged on most campuses, it is, nonetheless, implicit in campus rituals and routines

that are conspicuously undemocratic. To experience public life and the politics that govern its outcomes means learning to reject the notion that the answers are “out there” in the custody of professionals. Neither are the answers “in here”—the radical subjectivity promoted by well-meaning teachers and facilitators.

Civic training centers might help teaching faculty to offer students learning structures in the classroom that resemble the complex organizations and diverse communities that await them. Treating students as consumers of higher education makes each of them feel important but also makes them ill equipped for influencing events or solving collective problems.

In normal times, the problems of a campus are usually addressed from the top down. Students are transient, some faculty find it hard to collaborate with others as equals, and professional staff is expected to administer the place for those who think that they have better things to do. But one might imagine another approach where the campus works to piece together whatever civic culture exists at any university going through the difficult transition of downsizing or experiencing other problems that disturb and divide the various constituencies. Such constituencies now find it hard to talk about their differences constructively, finding some group, other than their own, to blame. A civic training center might explore ways in which students, administrators, and faculty members can initiate and sustain a way of talking about the public life and problems that they share. Finding and practicing a democratic language—neither professionalized nor shrill—might help them get on with problem-solving together.

Moreover, a public needs problems to work on, not just to talk about. Diversity on any campus enlarges the circle, but each member of the circle needs a public role rather than merely having his or her “identity” acknowledged. If those in a circle are really to learn how to live with their differences, they need something to do together. Perhaps civic training centers could be places that help campuses move from the rhetoric of multiculturalism to real civic work.



NOTES

- ¹ Ernest Boyer, “The Scholarship of Engagement,” *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 1, no. 1 (1996): 19.
- ² Thomas Bender, *Intellect and Public Life: Essays on the Social History of Academic Intellectuals in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
- ³ Bender, *Intellect and Public Life*, 143.

Reprinted from David W. Brown, “The Public/Academic Disconnect,” Higher Education Exchange 1995, 38-42. This text has been lightly edited to conform with current Kettering Foundation style and citation guidelines.

CONTRIBUTORS

DEREK W. M. BARKER is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation and coeditor (with Alex Lovit) of the *Higher Education Exchange*. With a background in political theory, his research focuses on the democratic role of higher education institutions, philanthropy and nonprofit organizations, journalism, and the professions. Barker is the author of *Tragedy and Citizenship: Conflict, Reconciliation, and Democracy from Haemon to Hegel* and articles appearing in the academic journals *Political Theory*, *New Political Science*, *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, and *The Good Society*.

HARRY C. BOYTE is a public intellectual and organizer. He founded Public Achievement and, with Trygve Throntveit and Marie Ström, the Institute for Public Life and Work. He holds the title of Senior Scholar in Public Work Philosophy at Augsburg University. Boyte is the author of 11 books, including *Awakening Democracy through Public Work*. His articles have appeared in more than 150 publications, including the *New York Times*, *Political Theory*, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. In the 1960s, Boyte was a field secretary for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s organization, and subsequently did community organizing among low-income White residents in Durham, North Carolina.

DAVID W. BROWN (1937-2020) was coeditor of the *Higher Education Exchange* from 1994 through 2017 and coedited two recent Kettering publications: *Agent of Democracy* and *A Different Kind of Politics*. He taught at Yale's School of Management and the New School's Milano Graduate School. Brown is the author of *Organization Smarts*; *The Real Change-Makers: Why Government Is Not the Problem or the Solution*; *America's Culture of Professionalism: Past, Present, and Prospects*; and *Assumptions of the Tea Party Movement: A World of Their Own*.

JONI DOHERTY is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation. She conducts collaborative research with professionals working in cultural and educational institutions. These initiatives explore how to foster the disposition and skills needed for making decisions about public problems, both contemporary and historical, using deliberation. Doherty's essays have been published in *Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement*; *Deliberation and the Work of Higher Education: Innovations for the Classroom, the Campus and the Community*; and the *Higher Education Exchange*. Before coming to Kettering, she taught in the American Studies program at Franklin Pierce University and directed the New England Center for Civic Life. She holds a PhD in philosophy from the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts.

SARA A. MEHLTRETTER DRURY is associate professor and chair of rhetoric at Wabash College and serves as the director of Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse. Drury's research and practice focus on the intersection of rhetoric and deliberative democracy, with attention to deliberative pedagogy, argumentation, and political communication. She has received grants from Indiana Humanities and the National Science Foundation and has been a visiting research fellow at the University of Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and an Indiana Humanities Action fellow. Drury received her BA *summa cum laude* from Boston College and her MA and PhD from Pennsylvania State University.

MARIA FARLAND has taught at Johns Hopkins, Wesleyan, and Columbia universities and is currently an associate professor at Fordham University. She has published numerous scholarly essays on links between institutions of higher education and disciplinary expertise in relationship to literary writers such as Gertrude Stein, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Robert Frost. She is currently finishing a monograph on images of rural backwardness in US literature and culture and is coeditor of *Studies in American Fiction* (JHUP/ProjectMuse).

KATY J. HARRIGER is a professor in the Department of Politics and International Affairs at Wake Forest University, where she holds the F. Michael Crowley Distinguished Faculty Fellowship and is faculty director of the Wake Washington program in DC. She teaches courses on American politics, law, and courts. In addition to her research on deliberation and the civic engagement of young people, she publishes generally in the area of American constitutional law. At Wake Forest she has been the recipient of the Reid Doyle Prize for Excellence in Teaching, the John Reinhart Award for Distinguished Teaching, and the College Board of Visitors Faculty Leadership Award.

MATHEW JOHNSON directs the Commission on Public Purpose in Higher Education. He cofounded and codirects the National Assessment of Service and Community Engagement. He also sits on the editorial board of *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* and has been recognized as an Ashoka Change Leader by the Ashoka Foundation. Johnson formerly served as president of Albion College, as a Carnegie visiting fellow at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and as a fellow at the Doerr Institute for New Leaders at Rice University. Prior to his tenure at Albion College, Johnson served as associate dean of the College for Engaged Scholarship, as well as senior fellow and executive director of the Howard R. Swearer Center for Public Service at Brown University. Johnson led the development of a transformational strategic plan and oversaw the growth and development of curricular and cocurricular programs, including Brown in Washington, the Engaged Scholars Program, the Bonner Community Fellowship, the Brown University AmeriCorps VISTA Fellowship, Community Corps, and the Royce Fellowship.

KARA LINDAMAN is a professor of political science and public administration at Winona State University. Having earned her PhD from the University of Kansas, she studies the policy process and citizen engagement in wicked problems and primarily teaches courses in public administration. She is fortunate to have advised many student-citizens in public service. Since 2009, she has been the campus coordinator of the Association of American State Colleges and Universities American Democracy Project, where she is a civic fellow and has embraced numerous opportunities to work with colleagues and students as moderators and in democratic deliberation.

ALEX LOVIT is a program officer with the Kettering Foundation. He holds a PhD in history from the University of Michigan, where he studied 19th-century political history. He helps manage the foundation's research into democratic education both in K-12 schools and in higher education, coordinates research into democratic innovation in the judicial system, and is the coeditor (with Derek W. M. Barker) of the *Higher Education Exchange*.

DAVID MATHEWS served as president of the Kettering Foundation from 1981 to 2022. He is now president emeritus. He 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; Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy; The Ecology of Democracy: Finding Ways to Have a Stronger Hand in Shaping Our Future; With the People: An Introduction to an Idea; Together: Building Better, Stronger Communities; and With: A Strategy for Renewing Our Democracy*.

JILL J. MCMILLAN is professor emerita and research professor at Wake Forest University. Her early work centered on organizational and institutional rhetoric and communication. Since 2000, she has been involved with a team of Wake Forest colleagues who study deliberative democracy in higher education and have published their work in *Speaking of Politics* and *The Long-Term Impact of Learning to Deliberate*. Articles connected to this work have appeared

in *Communication Education, Diversity and Democracy, Beyond Politics as Usual: Paths for Engaging College Students in Politics*, and the *Higher Education Exchange*. The team is currently assessing the degree to which deliberative democracy principles may have diffused into their institution over the past two decades.

SCOTT PETERS is a professor in the Department of Global Development at Cornell University. From 2012 to 2017, he served as faculty codirector of a national consortium, *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*, which is devoted to supporting engaged learning and research in the arts, humanities, and design fields. He currently serves as coeditor of a new Cornell University Press book series, *Publicly Engaged Scholars: Identities, Purposes, and Practices*. As a historical sociologist positioned in the newly emerging field of civic studies, Peters uses narrative inquiry and analysis tools to study the public purposes and work of academic professionals and institutions. His latest book, coauthored with Daniel J. O’Connell, is *In the Struggle: Scholars and the Fight Against Industrial Agribusiness in California*. Peters received a BS from the University of Illinois and an MA and PhD from the University of Minnesota.

B. DA’VIDA PLUMMER is a six-time Emmy award-winning news industry executive who joined Fellowships at Auschwitz for the Study of Professional Ethics as coexecutive director focusing on advancement and operations. She previously served in the dual capacity of assistant vice president for marketing/media and dean of the Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communication at Hampton University. During her nine-year tenure with the prestigious HBCU, she served as an associate professor of broadcast journalism and the director of the William R. Harvey Leadership Institute while providing marketing leadership for the Hampton University Proton Therapy Institute. Plummer is a native of Nansemond County, Virginia, where she was introduced to the importance of community service through a global faith-based organization led by generations of her paternal lineage. She received her BS in journalism and MA in communications from Ohio University.

JOSEPH SCANLON is assistant professor of political science at Monroe Community College (MCC) in Rochester, New York. Dr. Scanlon’s teaching and research interests include American government, comparative politics, and international relations, with a specialized research interest in the global politics of sport. He is the coordinator of the Democracy Commitment at MCC, a campus initiative that promotes civic engagement and participation in civic education.

TIMOTHY J. SHAFFER is the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Chair of Civil Discourse and associate professor in the Joseph R. Biden, Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware. He is also director of civic engagement and deliberative democracy with the National Institute for Civil Discourse at the University of Arizona. Shaffer is author or coeditor of six books including *Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement*, *Creating Space for Democracy: A Primer on Dialogue and Deliberation in Higher Education*, and the latest book, *Grassroots Engagement and Social Justice through Cooperative Extension*. He earned his PhD from Cornell University.

Kettering Foundation

200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459 (937) 434-7300; (800) 221-3657
444 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 434, Washington, DC 20001 (202) 393-4478
www.kettering.org
