

HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



2018

Editors: Derek Barker and Alex Lovit
Copy Editor: Joey Easton
Formatting: Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

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 © 2018 by the Kettering Foundation

ISSN 2469-6293 (print)

ISSN 2471-2280 (online)

HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



2018

A Note of Appreciation

David Brown has not just been an editor of *HEX* since 1994. He is also its cocreator, together with former Kettering Foundation program officer Deborah Witte. The *Higher Education Exchange*, as readers will know, is a publication whose purpose is to facilitate a conversation in higher education about the role of academe in democracy, particularly the role of students as actors and producers.

David was ideal as an editor of the journal because he brought to the work an astonishing breadth of experience, both inside and outside the academy: from serving as deputy mayor of New York City under Mayor Ed Koch to teaching at Yale's School of Management and New School's Milano Graduate School, and serving as president of Blackburn College. His perceptive insights were evident in the interviews he conducted, which were regularly published in *HEX*. And he undoubtedly drew on what he learned from the *Exchange* in his own books, including *The Real Change-Makers: Why Government is Not the Problem or the Solution* and *America's Culture of Professionalism: Past, Present, and Prospects*.

His most recent contribution to Kettering's work has been to help launch a new initiative in higher education to cultivate a greater civic and democratic understanding of professionalism. We are deeply appreciative of David's many contributions to this journal and to Kettering's research. We are pleased to have Derek Barker, who is leading Kettering's studies of democracy and higher education, continue on as coeditor of the journal. And we welcome Alex Lovit as coeditor; he is leading Kettering's research on teaching deliberative democracy through historic decisions.

David Mathews

CONTENTS

Derek W. M. Barker	Learning to Strengthen Democracy, Democratically (Foreword)	1
Harry C. Boyte	Public Achievement: The Work of Building Democratic Culture	5
Joni Doherty & Alice Diebel, with Joseph Hoereth, David Hoffman, Marla Kanengieter-Wildeson, Windy Lawrence, David E. Procter, Norma Ramos, & Lisa Strahley	Centers for Democratic Public Life: Learning as a Deliberative Democratic Practice	17
Lorlene Hoyt	Reflections on Advancing University Civic Engagement Internationally	29
John J. Theis, Carrie B. Kisker, & Alberto Olivas	Deepening Deliberation in Community Colleges: Reflections on Our Research	39
Nicholas Longo & Marshalita Sims Peterson, with Derek W. M. Barker	Learning to Teach Democracy (An Interview)	51
Alex Lovit	A Loss of Public Purpose: How Will Higher Education Respond?	61
David Mathews	A Question of Culture	68
	Contributors	76

A LOSS OF PUBLIC PURPOSE

How Will Higher Education Respond?

Alex Lovit

In this essay, HEX coeditor Alex Lovit reviews For the Common Good: A New History of Higher Education in America by Charles Dorn (Cornell University Press, 2017), A Perfect Mess: The Unlikely Ascendency of American Higher Education by David F. Labaree (University of Chicago Press, 2017), and What Do You Think, Mr. Ramirez?: The American Revolution in Education by Geoffrey Galt Harpham (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

American colleges and universities are facing a crisis of public confidence. Citizens express dissatisfaction with the rising cost of tuition and distrust in the current leadership and structure of higher education institutions. For years, the Kettering Foundation has tracked this trend, noting that Americans increasingly see colleges as promoting the private interests of their graduates, rather than as providing public benefits for society as a whole.

Recently, higher education institutions themselves are coming to see declining public support as an existential threat, and scholars have sought to recapture and reinvigorate higher education's sense of public purpose. Recent historical accounts of American colleges and universities by Charles Dorn, David Labaree, and Geoffrey Galt Harpham all focus on how these institutions balance claims to provide private benefits to their graduates (such as technical skills and improved job prospects) and public benefits to American society and democracy (such as contributions to public knowledge and better informed voters).

The scholarship reviewed here chronicles American higher education's long history of promoting both the private (primarily financial) interests of students and the public (economic, social, and political) interests of the nation as a whole. It is encouraging to see prominent scholars of higher education embracing and articulating their institutions' role in promoting the public good. These authors' diagnosis of the challenges facing higher education is fundamentally similar to Kettering's. Collectively, these books are sincere, scholarly, and smart attempts to reckon with the legacies of American higher education and to articulate colleges' and universities' past and ongoing contributions to the public good of the nation.

However, it is hard to see how books like these—written by academics for an academic audience—can influence higher education's fading legitimacy

in the eyes of the public. Nor do they provide much of a road map for the future; as paeans to how higher education's history of serving the public good, these texts are fundamentally conservative. They are backward-looking, not forward-looking, arguments that academia is already serving the public, rather than calls for reform. This critique is not to question the accuracy of these accounts, nor to impugn the motives of faculty and administrators, but simply to point out, as Kettering Foundation president David Mathews has written, "Only the public can confer a public mission in a democracy."¹

Nevertheless, there are elements of this literature that might interest readers of *Higher Education Exchange*. These accounts help to provide context

"Only the public can confer a public mission in a democracy."

and historical legitimacy to colleges' and universities' claims of promoting both private and public goods. This literature also helps to define a conver-

sation to which the Kettering Foundation as an organization, *Higher Education Exchange* as a periodical, and deliberative democracy as a concept, might usefully contribute. As higher education confronts its legacy and the current predicament of waning public support, these authors are imagining how to recapture colleges' and universities' public mission. Again, David Mathews has something to say about this: "The response from academe has to be more radical in the sense of getting at the roots of the problem. And the roots . . . have to do with how academe understands the role of citizens."² To rebuild public trust, higher education must be outward-facing, not inward-looking. And colleges and universities must invite input and participation from the public, in capacities beyond the usual list of student, alumnus, research subject, and so forth.

For the Common Good by Bowdoin education professor Charles Dorn, the most substantial and scholarly of these three texts, provides a comprehensive account of American higher education from the foundation of the republic to the 21st century. In 10 chapters, describing 11 institutions representative of trends and types of colleges over the course of American history, Dorn describes the evolution of higher education.

As the title of his book suggests, Dorn emphasizes the long-standing tradition of American colleges and universities promoting the general benefit of local communities and of American democracy. By dint of archival scholarship, Dorn demonstrates higher education institutions' sustained commitment

to public benefit, covering the major trends and types of institutions that define the history of American higher education. Early national colleges primarily sought to train public servants in genteel professions—most prominently ministry, law, and politics. In the late 19th century, agricultural and “normal” (teacher-training) public colleges and entrepreneurial private universities promised to lift students to success in applied fields. During the same period, new institutions were founded to educate women and minorities. After World War II, urban universities and community colleges rapidly expanded to serve burgeoning demand for post-secondary degrees.

Dorn provides convincing evidence that college faculty and administrators have perennially seen their work in terms of public benefit, but his emphasis on continuity of purpose and his focus on institutional origin stories somewhat obscures the shifting meaning of “common good” over time—from training civic leaders to producing research for public benefit to helping communities retain middle-class jobs. As his account grows closer to the present moment, Dorn notes a shift in “higher education’s central purpose toward providing a credential that helped men and women procure the wealth necessary to fully partake in the nation’s consumer culture,”³ and that an “emphasis on educating for citizenship by prioritizing teaching gave way to the entrepreneurial priorities of generating wealth and increasing institutional prestige.”⁴ But in this text, these remain tensions that distract from higher education’s guiding purpose of promoting the common good. The impressive breadth of Dorn’s historical research belies the simplicity of his argument.

David Labaree, professor of education at Stanford University, offers a more skeptical account of this history in *A Perfect Mess*. Where Dorn argues that American higher education has always been focused on the public good, Labaree takes a contrary position. “Over the long haul, Americans have understood higher education as a distinctly private good.”⁵ In this view, most citizens see colleges’ primary purpose as advancing or cementing students’ socioeconomic position. Labaree sees the Cold War as an exception to this pattern, when the federal government invested heavily in higher education to reintegrate World War II veterans into the economy and to provide scientific research. Declines in state funding for public universities in recent decades, therefore, should be seen more as a reversion to the mean than as a betrayal of principles. Meanwhile, for most students, higher education remains the sole path to climbing the socioeconomic ladder or preserving positions of privilege, with the hierarchy of prestige among institutions allowing for both advancement and perpetuation. “The system lets us have things both ways: access and advantage,

opportunity and privilege, mobility and stasis.”⁶ But in Labaree’s view, students of every description primarily see higher education as promoting their own private benefit.

This might seem a cynical take on higher education, but Labaree closes his book with a surprising paean to the “perfect mess” of the American system. Paradoxically, he argues, American higher education “continues to serve the public good—promoting economic growth, national power, cultural richness—

“Universities are much less useful to society if they restrict themselves to the training of individuals for particular present-day jobs or to the production of research to solve current problems.”

but only as a side effect of its core dynamic, which is driven by private actors pursuing personal benefit.”⁷

Labaree is suspicious of efforts to reform higher education by introducing greater transparency or focusing strictly on job preparation. “Universities are much less useful to society if they restrict themselves to the training of individuals for particular

present-day jobs or to the production of research to solve current problems.”⁸

In the end, although Dorn and Labaree’s arguments appear diametrically opposed, neither author would deny that American higher education produces both private and public benefits. The debate between them is more about emphasis than about substance.

Geoffrey Galt Harpham, a fellow at Duke University and former director of the National Humanities Center, offers a historically and philosophically narrower argument for higher education’s contributions to enhancing civic skills. Harpham’s title, *What Do You Think, Mr. Ramirez?*, is based on the story of a Cuban refugee who enrolled in a community college, where a professor challenged him to analyze a Shakespeare sonnet with the titular question. For Ramirez, “It was the first time anybody had asked me that question,” and it ultimately helped to propel him to a career as a professor of comparative literature. Harpham argues that this question—prompting students in every type of college to develop their own analysis of difficult literary texts—is emblematic of American higher education’s contributions to democracy.

Harpham develops this argument in three historical narratives. The first (chronologically, though not in the organization of the book) is a story of the United States’ origins as a society of Protestants dedicated to biblical literacy

and as a nation whose principles were enshrined in written documents. The origins of American democracy were based in “a citizen’s right that is so deep-laid in the American self-understanding that contradiction of it is almost unimaginable: the right to read and interpret foundational texts such as the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence . . . and . . . to argue for one’s interpretations in court and in public.”¹⁰

Harpham’s other two narratives both describe trends in American universities following World War II: the rise of general education requirements as the core of college curriculum and the growing dominance of the New Criticism movement in English departments. The ideal of general education, as outlined in 1945 by a committee of Harvard professors in the book *General Education in a Free Society*, required all college students to study the humanities, and through them liberal values, including civic capacity, self-realization, and grounding in common cultural heritage. Meanwhile, within newly empowered English departments, close textural interpretation was becoming the dominant method of literary analysis. In the view of New Critics, “The future of democracy and all its individual citizens . . . depended . . . on the cultivation of the cognitively and politically crucial skills involved in the interpretation of poetry.”¹¹

The confluence of these historical trends, Harpham argues, created the world in which college students were challenged to generate their own readings of complex texts. Requiring students to construe literature, in this argument, is training for civic skills of public interpretation and deliberation:

The interpretable text, which is at once open and accessible to the public . . . gives us an immediate and intimately familiar model for a concept that should be precious, the rights-bearing individual living in a lawful civil society, the kind of society . . . in which citizens in a democracy should expect to live.¹²

Harpham’s reasoning is convincing, and his daring yet fluid writing is testimony in itself for the study of the humanities. His analysis of the New Criticism and general education demonstrates that seemingly esoteric disciplinary and administrative discussions within higher education can be relevant to broader questions of these institutions’ role in society. Yet Harpham’s argument, like any that focuses solely on colleges’ educational mission, cannot fully account for higher education’s benefits to the public. After all, a college education has never been a prerequisite to the privileges of citizenship.

What is lacking from these accounts—and from academia, generally—is a concept of how higher education institutions might relate to citizens who aren’t students (or alumni or donors and the like). As long as the relationship

between student and institution remains central for how citizens and colleges understand each other, the private benefits that higher education supplies for graduates will be more obvious to all parties than any public benefits to the broader society or nation. The history of American colleges and universities,

Colleges and universities, which are suffering from a lack of public trust, might gain from identifying the communities they serve and encouraging public deliberation about what citizens expect and desire from higher education.

as reviewed in these books, also demonstrates that institutions have enjoyed the greatest public support when they served particular constituencies (such as local communities, demographic groups, and economic classes), rather than when they pursued a single model of scholarly prestige. Higher education cannot generate

a public purpose without the public. Colleges and universities, which are suffering from a lack of public trust, might gain from identifying the communities they serve and encouraging public deliberation about what citizens expect and desire from higher education.



NOTES

- ¹ David Mathews, “Democracy’s Challenge for Academe: From Public Good to Consumer Good and Back?” in *Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education*, William V. Flores and Katrina S. Rogers, eds. (New York: Lexington Books, forthcoming).
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Charles Dorn, *For the Common Good: A New History of Higher Education in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), 172.
- ⁴ Ibid., 198.
- ⁵ David F. Labaree, *A Perfect Mess: The Unlikely Ascendancy of American Higher Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 142.
- ⁶ Ibid., 177.
- ⁷ Ibid., 195.
- ⁸ Ibid., 189.
- ⁹ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *What Do You Think, Mr. Ramirez?: The American Revolution in Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 3.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 96.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 132.
- ¹² Ibid., 174.

REFERENCES

- Dorn, Charles. *For the Common Good: A New History of Higher Education in America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017.
- Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *What Do You Think, Mr. Ramirez?: The American Revolution in Education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- The Harvard Committee. *General Education in a Free Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945.
- Labaree, David F. *A Perfect Mess: The Unlikely Ascendency of American Higher Education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Mathews, David. "Democracy's Challenge for Academe: From Public Good to Consumer Good and Back?" In *Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education*, edited by William V. Flores and Katrina Rogers. New York: Lexington Books, forthcoming.

CONTRIBUTORS

DEREK W. M. BARKER is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation. With a background in political theory, he works primarily on research concerning the democratic role of higher education institutions, philanthropy and nonprofit organizations, journalism, and the professions. Barker is the coeditor (with Alex Lovit) of Kettering's *Higher Education Exchange* and has contributed to other Kettering publications, including the *Kettering Review* and *Connections*. He is the author of *Tragedy and Citizenship: Conflict, Reconciliation, and Democracy from Haemon to Hegel* (SUNY Press, 2009) and articles appearing in the academic journals *Political Theory*, *New Political Science*, and *The Good Society*.

HARRY C. BOYTE is a public intellectual and organizer. He founded Public Achievement and cofounded with Marie Ström the Public Work Academy. 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* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2018). 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 SCLC, organized by Martin Luther King Jr., and subsequently did community organizing among low-income white residents in Durham, North Carolina.

ALICE DIEBEL is a senior associate with the Kettering Foundation. As a previous program officer with the foundation, Diebel helped initiate its centers for democratic public life research in 2011.

JONI DOHERTY, a program officer at the Kettering Foundation, has a long-standing interest in discourse ethics and how the arts and humanities can inform deliberative democratic practices. She directs research on the centers for democratic public life and is involved with learning exchanges with higher education institutions, humanities councils, libraries, and museums. Doherty was previously the director of the New England Center for Civic Life at Franklin Pierce University and taught in the American studies program. Doherty earned a BFA in painting at the University of New Hampshire, an MA in cultural studies at Simmons College, and a PhD in philosophy and art theory from the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts.

LORLENE HOYT is the executive director of the Talloires Network, an international association of 385 engaged universities in 77 countries. Previously, as associate professor of urban planning at MIT, she founded MIT@Lawrence, an award-winning city-campus partnership. Her book *Regional Perspectives on Learning-by-Doing: Stories from Engaged Universities Around the World* (Michigan State University Press, 2017) demonstrates how universities can effectively mobilize their resources to create more equitable and prosperous communities while also educating civic leaders. Hoyt is a research professor in the Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning, faculty member of the Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University, and a visiting scholar at Brown University. She holds a PhD in city and regional planning from the University of Pennsylvania.

CARRIE B. KISKER is an education research and policy consultant in Los Angeles and a director of the Center for the Study of Community Colleges. She engages in research pertaining to community college policy and practice, and regularly consults with college leaders on issues related to civic learning and democratic engagement. Kisker holds a BA from Dartmouth College and an MA and PhD from UCLA. She has coauthored two books, including *The American Community College* (Jossey-Bass, 2013) and *The Shaping of American Higher Education: Emergence and Growth of the Contemporary System* (Jossey-Bass, 2009). In 2016, Kisker, along

with Bernie Ronan, edited a *New Directions for Community Colleges* sourcebook on civic learning and democratic engagement.

NICHOLAS V. LONGO is a professor in the departments of Public and Community Service Studies and Global Studies and a Faculty Fellow for Engaged Scholarship with the Center for Teaching Excellence at Providence College. Longo is the author of a number of books, articles, and reports on youth civic education, engaged scholarship, and deliberative pedagogy. His publications include *Why Community Matters: Connecting Education with Civic Life* (SUNY Press, 2007) and several coedited volumes, including *Publicly Engaged Scholars: Next Generation Engagement and the Future of Higher Education* (Stylus Publishing, 2016), and *Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement* (Michigan State University Press, 2017).

ALEX LOVIT is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation. With an academic background in the study of history, he assists with Kettering's experiments in deliberating about historical issues through Historic Decisions issue guides. He also works for Kettering's K-12 and higher education research and provides historical research for the foundation. Lovit is the coeditor (with Derek W. M. Barker) of Kettering's *Higher Education Exchange*.

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, Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy*, and *The Ecology of Democracy: Finding Ways to Have a Stronger Hand in Shaping Our Future*.

ALBERTO OLIVAS is executive director of the Congressman Ed Pastor Center for Politics and Public Service at Arizona State University, as well as a trainer and consultant on issues related to public participation and civic engagement in higher education. Previously, Olivas served as director of the Center for Civic Participation for the Maricopa Community College District. He served in appointed leadership positions for Arizona governor Jane Dee Hull and Arizona secretary of state Betsey Bayless, and on the Arizona Commission of Indian Affairs. Olivas is currently board secretary for the National Civic League, vice chair of the Arizona Town Hall board of directors, and serves on the board of Democracy Works, a national civic technology nonprofit.

MARSHALITA SIMS PETERSON is a consultant and researcher committed to public scholarship, deliberative pedagogy/dialogue, facilitation of National Issues Forums, and transformative action within the work of democratic practice. As founder of M.S. Peterson Consulting and Research, LLC, she is also dedicated to processes involving strategic planning, communication constructs, effective leadership, team building, and innovative processes of engagement to enhance organizational productivity. Peterson's research and work in the field of teacher education spans 38 years. She is former chair and associate professor of teacher education at Spelman College in Atlanta. Peterson has also served as a Whisenton Public Scholar and Whisenton Scholar-in-Residence at the Kettering Foundation.

JOHN J. THEIS is the director of the Center for Civic Engagement for Lone Star College-Kingwood, where he is also a professor of political science. He earned his PhD in political science from the University of Arizona. Theis serves as chair of the steering committee for The Democracy Commitment and on the board of directors of the National Issues Forums Institute. He has been involved in civic engagement work for over 20 years, founding both the LSC-Kingwood Public Achievement program and the Kingwood College Center for Civic Engagement.

Kettering Foundation

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