EDUCATING FOR
DEMOCRACY

Stories of
INNOVATION
in
HIGHER
EDUCATION
The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering’s primary research question is, what makes democracy work as it should? Kettering’s research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through interrelated program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation’s website at www.kettering.org.

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**Editors**
Derek W. M. Barker  
Melinda Gilmore

**Copy Editor**
Lisa Boone-Berry

**Design and Production**
Long’s Graphic Design, Inc.

**Illustrations**
Long’s Graphic Design, Inc.
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If we step back and look at the big picture of democracy today, that picture is particularly troubling. Americans are worried about where the country is heading; the economy tops the list of their concerns. Many have lost whatever confidence they had in the ability of government to solve our problems. Representative government, they feel, no longer represents them. People are also critical of most other major institutions, including those in education and government.

As you probably know, Kettering studies what it takes to make democracy work as it should. Some of that research is focused on institutions of higher education, specifically on their relationship with the citizenry. Historically, the country has relied on colleges and universities to keep our democracy strong. Most of these institutions still insist that they serve democracy, yet what they mean by democracy isn’t always clear, especially when it comes to the role of citizens. Citizens may be seen as playing a limited and relatively passive
role, albeit as informed voters rather than as active public agents who work with other citizens to solve common problems and make things that serve the well-being of all. Certainly colleges and universities understand citizens want an education they can afford. But, while understandable, the implication is that citizens are individual customers or consumers.

The Curriculum

Kettering has been studying the impact that institutions of higher education are having on the problems of democracy for some time. We began our research by looking at the curriculum. Many subjects, specifically the liberal arts or humanities, were to prepare young people for their role in democracy. We worked with faculty members who were trying to return the liberal arts to their historical mission as civic arts. Some feared that mission is being obscured or lost.

We found allies who shared our concerns in the Association of American Colleges and Universities and its company of scholars who produced the landmark report A Crucible Moment, as well as in crusading faculty members who have a passion for bringing civic engagement into liberal arts education. We are returning to this arena to see what has happened since we did the initial studies. We are also looking at all disciplines and professional studies to see what they imply about democratic citizenship.

Students and Other Young People

Focusing on the curriculum naturally took us to what else is being done to prepare young people to be citizens. Students have their own frustrations with politics. College Students Talk Politics, a study Kettering did with the Harwood Group in 1993, found high levels of cynicism about the political system and uncertainty about students’ ability to make a difference in it. A follow-up study, published in 2007 (before the Obama campaign) by CIRCLE, was more encouraging yet still reported students have some apprehension about the political system: “Students perceive politics, as it currently exists, as a polarized debate with no options for compromise or nuance.” More recent studies are even more discouraging.

Service and service learning have been popular and undoubtedly beneficial. Yet these programs don’t necessarily prepare students for the work of solving problems with other citizens, including those who aren’t like or don’t agree with them. In addition, we began to look at the political socialization of young Americans who do not go to college and may have attitudes about politics that are quite different from those who graduate from our colleges and universities.

As is the practice at Kettering, diagnostic research is followed by research on experiments to solve the problems that have been identified. The first of these studies was done with the National Collegiate Honors Council. In 1996 and 1997, students in honors programs across the country organized a series of public deliberations on the future of higher education. Later, beginning in 2001, Katy Harriger and Jill McMillan, two faculty members at Wake Forest University, started a four-year study of the effects of introducing undergraduates to deliberative decision making and problem solving. This study—described in the Kettering Foundation Press book, Speaking of Politics—found that deliberative experiences give students an understanding of citizenship that is far more robust and practical than that of other undergraduates.

Faculty

We have found allies for our research in concerned faculty like Peggy Shaffer at Miami University. In the 2008 issue of the Higher Education Exchange, she spoke about her need to integrate her public concerns into her academic career. Of course, faculty members can join the

Historically, the country has relied on colleges and universities to keep our democracy strong. Most of these institutions still insist that they serve democracy, yet what they mean by democracy isn’t always clear, especially when it comes to the role of citizens.

Reviewing Kettering Foundation Studies

Rotary Club and take active roles in partisan politics. But they want more.

Scholars like Shaffer are on every campus and in a variety of disciplines, yet they don’t always know one another. If they were able to work together across institutional and disciplinary lines, they might be a transformative force in academe that could help revitalize the democratic mission of their institutions. We are now doing more research with faculty members who are experimenting with what they call “deliberative pedagogy.”

In the course of this research, we got to know another remarkable group of faculty members who are challenging the dominant concepts of knowledge as they attempt to create a more democratically relevant research, which they call “public scholarship.” These faculty members range from those in philosophy and speech communication to those in professional fields like health care, cooperative extension, and architecture. The foundation has published a few articles showing that there are, indeed, valid ways of knowing that are distinct from conventional scientific methods. In addition to rational faculties, human beings have a capacity for moral reasoning, judgment, and practical wisdom, which are essential in politics.

Centers for Public Life

The foundation’s most extensive research on experiments to reposition higher education in democracy has been
with community colleges and universities that have created more than 50 centers for public, or civic, life. Not all of these centers are on campuses, but nearly all take their understanding of active citizenship a heavy emphasis on rural community life and community building. Continued pressures on dwindling rural communities today are making cooperative extension departments reexamine their missions. For example, expanding their focus to community development has relevance to both rural and urban places. Publications, such as Wynne Wright’s recent article in the Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement and Scott Peters’ book Changing the Story about Higher Education’s Public Purposes and Work, are moving the conversation beyond the scholars who have met at Kettering. Most recently, this group of faculty and staff, which now includes scholars in community and economic development, is looking at the role democratic values have (or don’t have) in development.

**Ships Passing in the Night?**

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the centers and public scholars, and despite institutional campaigns for increasing public engagement, the relationship between higher education and the public has grown problematic. As citizens have become clearer about what they need and want from higher education, academe’s traditional response about providing knowledge and service has become less persuasive. The most basic question a democratic citizenry asks is, how can we come together as a community to solve the problems of our community? Even though higher education has a great deal of useful knowledge and expertise to share, institutions have difficulty speaking to that question because technical assistance and service are about things that can be done to and for communities, but what people want to talk about is what they can do. I reported on this dilemma in the essay “Ships Passing in the Night?,”

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into their communities on close-to-home issues, such as closing local grocery stores in rural communities, curbing childhood obesity, regulating smoking, providing adequate resources for aging populations, and ensuring enough water for future needs. Kettering has found a number of opportunities for joint research with these centers and reported on them in Doing Democracy, authored by Scott London.

Several of the centers are interested in showing elected officials, both local and national, the importance of National Issues Forums deliberations in creating a more civil and reflective discussion of highly controversial issues, such as the sacrifices that will have to be made to get the federal debt under control. These centers are an essential part of Kettering’s A Public Voice programs in Washington, which show officeholders how citizens weigh options and deal with trade-offs.

I should clarify: the centers we have collaborated with in research aren’t all called “centers.” Some are in outreach programs and cooperative extension divisions. For example, over the past three years, a group of faculty and staff have been looking at the relevance of the original mission of extension, which included...

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**PROFESSIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY**

Professionals in many fields share the concerns that public scholars at the centers have about their relationship with the public. The role of professionals in a democracy, as Woodrow Wilson noted, is inherently problematic. Professionals are experts who presumably know best, and we all value the expertise of professionals when we are ill or in legal trouble. However, a democracy assumes that “we, the people” should decide what is best for us.

In today’s political climate, people are distrustful of professional expertise. And professionals often have a jaundiced view of citizens. The distrust is mutual. Efforts to improve this relationship using accountability measures haven’t been effective. Still, the mutual distrust is corrosive and needs to be addressed. The foundation has noted that colleges and universities educate most professionals. What better place to explore this problem?
which has been published in several places, including the foundation’s book *A Different Kind of Politics.*

Citizens who are asking how, despite their differences, they can come together to do something about their common problems see themselves as agents, workers, and producers, which is more than just their role as voters and taxpayers. Worried yet determined, this citizenry wants a stronger hand in shaping their future, and their instincts tell them that in order to do that, they have to do more work together.

Relating to these citizens requires colleges and universities to change roles from being “the sage on the stage” to being “the guide on the side.” It also requires a review of just exactly what kind of democracy academic institutions want to promote and what role they believe citizens should play. Relating to citizens who want to rule themselves requires focusing not just on the difficult problems *within* a democratic country (poverty, for example) but the systemic problems *of* democracy itself, the problems that keep democracy from working as it should (the sidelining of citizens, for example).

Beginning serious conversations about such challenges is proving difficult, however. Ironically, the barrier is not resistance to discussion of democracy but rather the assumption that the question has already been adequately addressed. As one university president said curtly, “My institution serves democracy just by being.” To be sure, what the academy is already doing serves democracy in a general sense; that is, research and service obviously benefit the country, which is a democracy. Nonetheless, there remains the nagging question posed by people who want to talk about how they can come together and not just about what can be done for them.

What can be done about this impasse? Obviously, institutions have to pay atten-

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*David Mathews is the president of the Kettering Foundation. He can be reached at dmathews@kettering.org.*
In the history of higher education in America, every major transformation has occurred in the context of larger social transformations. Early colleges in the founding era, the development of the land-grant system, and the expansion of higher education under the GI Bill—each reflected citizens’ changing views about the purposes and possibilities of higher education. For higher education to reclaim its civic identity today, it is crucial to understand more about how citizens think about its mission. Do they see the university as a civic institution? And if they do, what aspects of that mission do they value most?

To explore whether civic engagement in higher education resonates with widely shared public values, the Kettering Foundation is currently seeking to encourage and share in a national dialogue on higher education and the future of our nation, along with key higher education partners and the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI), a nonpartisan, nationwide network of locally sponsored, deliberative public forums. Our hope is that a new issue guide, *Shaping Our Future: How Should Higher Education Help Us Create the Society We Want?*, will advance deliberation and dialogue on higher education’s civic mission.

Where is the Dialogue on Higher Education’s Civic Mission?

It is no secret that most Americans see higher education as an important institution in American society. Majorities see a college degree as a virtual prerequisite for getting a good job. Surveys show most parents want their children to go to college, and most high school students say that is their goal. This is a major shift. According to a recent Gallup/Phi Delta Kappan poll, in 1978, just 38 percent of Americans considered college “very important,” compared to 75 percent today.

However, in such surveys, citizens are rarely asked to focus on the role colleges and universities play in our democracy or society overall. The natural tendency is for people to respond in terms of their immediate individual concerns. Not surprisingly, many are worried about college costs and student debt—and for good reason. These are issues that hit people close
to home. But most Americans have not spent much time thinking about whether colleges and universities can and should do more to strengthen our civic culture and help communities and the nation achieve long-term social, economic, and political goals.

If citizens had the chance to think more about the role of higher education in our collective future, what would they say? Right now, we do not know, but it is possible that people would respond differently if questions were posed to them plainly and directly in terms of major challenges facing the country—and if they had clear choices and explicit trade-offs to consider.

Launching a National Conversation: Shaping Our Future

In the coming year, citizens across the country will have that opportunity by means of a joint effort of NIFI and a new higher education organization, the American Commonwealth Partnership (ACP), a coalition, including the American Democracy Project of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities; The Democracy Commitment (TDC), a network of community colleges; Imagining America; a consortium of colleges and universities encouraging “scholars and artists in public life”; and Campus Compact.

Through this initiative, students, faculty, administrators, employers, and members of the general public will have the chance to reflect on how colleges and universities might help the country tackle some of its most vexing problems. Our hope is that, through this partnership, higher education will be a central topic in deliberative forums in the NIFI network and on college campuses around the country.

The American Commonwealth Partnership was launched in January 2012 at the “For Democracy’s Future” conference at the White House. The event called for a national conversation on civic learning and the role of higher education and featured, among others, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Senior Advisor to the President Valerie Jarrett, director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg College and National Coordinator of the American Commonwealth

| Higher Education and Our Collective Future

Partnership Harry Boyte, and Kettering Foundation president David Mathews.

In spring 2012, NIFI and ACP joined forces to prepare, publish, and distribute the new citizen issue guide, Shaping Our Future: How Should Higher Education Help Us Create the Society We Want? It is available for use on campuses and in communities across the country as part of a yearlong national conversation project.

NEW ISSUE GUIDE FROM NIF AND ACP

Shaping Our Future

How Should Higher Education Help Us Create the Society We Want?

The diverse system of US higher education—including public and private universities, smaller four-year independent colleges, two-year community colleges, for-profit schools, and others—already serves a number of important social purposes. But this guide focuses on the future. It takes up this fundamental question: How should higher education help us create the society we want?

To learn more about this issue guide, visit www.nifi.org.
Global Competitiveness, Values, and Fairness: Three Critical Problems in Our Society

This new issue guide asks citizens to reflect on what colleges, universities, community colleges, trade and vocational schools, and other such institutions could do to help us create the society we want. It explores three major challenges to our collective well-being: 1) helping the economy stay internationally competitive; 2) strengthening shared values like responsibility, integrity, and respecting and listening to one another; and 3) doing much more to ensure that our society is fair. The guide then presents citizens with corresponding ways of thinking about higher education’s role in confronting these challenges. Like other NIF guides, without privileging any of the options, Shaping Our Future finally asks people to consider the tensions and trade-offs involved in pursuing each of these approaches.

First, the book proposes that colleges and universities—including community colleges—could bolster US global economic competitiveness by helping us recapture our leadership in science and technology. Countries like China and India are transforming their higher education systems to educate more young people with high-tech skills in science and engineering. Supporters of this approach believe it is one of the best routes we could take to keep our economy growing. But there are risks and trade-offs. If we encourage more students to study math, the sciences, business, and foreign languages, making these subjects part of a core curriculum, students whose interests and talents lie elsewhere might become discouraged and drop out. If we reallocate funds to support superior science and engineering faculty and facilities, there would be less support for the arts and humanities—and less choice for students. Moreover, increasing our expertise in science and technology by itself may fail to address, and could even exacerbate, the social problems of a competitive economy, including the loss of good jobs here in the United States and a growing gap between rich and poor.

The second option asks colleges and universities to do more to strengthen core principles like responsibility and integrity and respect for others in order to help create a culture shift from “me” to “we.” It responds to what many Americans see as an epidemic of declining values: division, mistrust, and the inability to come together as a society and get things done. Because higher education is where many young adults develop their sense of what’s expected of them in the broader society, this option calls for colleges and universities to teach and reinforce high standards of honesty, integrity, and behavior. It also proposes that students study a broad range of subjects including history, science, literature, government, economics, philosophy, and the arts to help develop a better understanding of how different people think and how our society works. Finally, according to this option, every student should have some practical experience in community and collaborative problem solving. One key trade-off to this approach is that it gives colleges and universities a greater voice in defining what constitutes moral, ethical, and civil behavior. Many say this is a role for families, communities, and religious organizations and that higher education should steer clear of politics, morality, and religion. Many also worry that it will result in less emphasis on teaching the high-tech skills needed in the US economy.

Because graduating from college opens the door to advancement and economic security in our society, the third option speaks to growing concerns about fairness. In the wake of the financial crisis and rising perceptions of economic inequality and policies that favor the wealthy, more questions are being raised about whether American society is really as fair as we like to think it is. This choice argues that higher education, along with government and taxpayers, can and should do more to ensure that all Americans have a genuine chance to attend and graduate from college—and without accumulating huge debt. According to this option, financial aid should go first and foremost to lower- and middle-income students, and colleges should provide more mentoring and more effective remedial courses for students who struggle. Plus, colleges and universities need to control costs by offering more courses online and closing duplicative programs and departments. But again there are trade-offs. This approach requires taxpayers and higher education institutions to devote more money to grants and scholarships, and while colleges and universities may be able to do more to control costs, public higher education has already been hit with big budget cuts. The danger, of course, is that a substantial commitment to increase access and keep tuition costs low would inevitably result in compromises in quality, such as larger class sizes, online instruction, and fewer support services for students.

The Conversation Begins

To develop and test the choices and trade-offs in the new issue guide, the NIFI team reviewed public-opinion research on higher education, along with reports on the perspectives of key stakeholder groups, such as college presidents, faculty, trustees, and employers. The team also conducted exploratory focus groups with typical citizens and with college students, faculty, and administrators. The focus groups in particular suggested that, when people are given the chance to consider
and weigh competing ideas about higher education’s priorities, many see multiple benefits for the broader society. Nearly all of the respondents in the focus groups, for example, agreed that strengthening our ability to work together to solve problems is an urgent need, although most did not immediately see what role higher education could play in this area, and many saw strengthening the economy as even more important. At the same time, many were drawn to some of the specifics, especially the idea of students having a well-rounded and broad education, along with offering more courses and fieldwork that emphasize problem solving and the ability to work with people with differing backgrounds and opinions.

After developing the options and the trade-offs, we tested how people respond to them in real-life conversation in typical forum settings. This spring, a special Civic Summit was brought together to honor the long career of retiring president Judith Ramaley and to pilot test an early draft of the issue framing at Winona State College in Minnesota. At Georgia College, a public liberal arts university about two hours south of Atlanta, faculty, students, and other participants deliberated on these issues as part of a field test conducted while the guide was under development.

Gregg Kauffman of the Government and Sociology Department and Jan Clark of English and Rhetoric organized and comoderated the session. Students and professors exchanged views on what kinds of courses should be part of the core curriculum and what might happen if more science and math were required. Some students talked enthusiastically about community projects they participated in that helped them develop skills in collaborative problem solving, but most participants believed that they could do more to ensure that these projects truly involve community members. There was also frank discussion about the degree to which faculty can help struggling students if they are not putting in their best effort. The discussion showed just how much there is to talk about.

In his remarks at the White House event in January, Secretary Duncan said, “Our young people have an appetite, they’re committed, they want to be engaged. . . . But somehow we’ve walked away from providing those opportunities.”

The first step in giving young Americans that opportunity is starting a serious conversation about higher education’s role beyond what it offers to individual students in their careers and personal lives. It is time for citizens to reframe how we think about higher education’s role in strengthening our civic culture and helping us work together to create the society we want.

Jean Johnson is a member of the board of the National Issues Forums Institute and a senior fellow at Public Agenda. She can be reached at jjohnson@publicagenda.org.
College Students and Politics: Fed Up or Fired Up?

Jack Becker, Danielle Desjardins, Dwitiya Jawher Neethi, and Alice Diebel

A key underlying assumption of efforts to renew the civic mission of higher education is that young people want to play a more active role in politics. Do efforts to engage students in working with communities and expose them to dialogue and deliberation resonate with their concerns? Or are students more concerned with preparing for careers and participating in social activities? The Kettering Foundation is addressing these questions through a series of collaborative studies and research exchanges. Most recently, Kettering program officer Alice Diebel convened 15 college students from a variety of academic institutions in the College Students and the Future of Democracy research exchange at Kettering’s 2011 Deliberative Democracy Exchange. These students were all involved in programs, centers, or institutes in the academy that focus on civic engagement, including deliberation on national public policy issues, as part of their education and practice. These students have a strong sense of the value of civic engagement, which stands in contrast to the prevailing view of students as apathetic toward politics.

The students’ research exchange draws upon two previous studies on the political attitudes of college students that were done in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation. A 1993 Harwood Group study, College Students Talk Politics, found that students were extremely pessimistic about politics and their own political education. However, the study concluded that they were not apathetic so much as frustrated: “When the discussion about the practice of politics is changed slightly, the students we interviewed talk about a different kind of politics—one based on people coming together to find ways to talk and act on problems.” Updating this research in 2008, Millennials Talk Politics, a study by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Education (CIRCLE), found a similar phenomenon. The Millennials study revealed that students born after 1985 seem to be involved in direct service
but are ambivalent about formal politics. They dislike polarized debates and seek public dialogue about issues, but they do not see many opportunities for authentic civic learning. They are also suspicious of information supplied by the news media and rely on friends and family as filters. Despite their ambivalence toward politics-as-usual, the CIRCLE study found that Millennials are more engaged than previous generations and are eager to discuss public issues. The Harwood and CIRCLE focus-group research suggests that challenging and innovative civic experiences might make a difference in the agency of these young people.

The group of students who gathered for the Kettering research exchange shares their generation’s suspicions of politics-as-usual, but they have developed the civic muscle to tackle difficult conversations and political concerns. While the students in the exchange may not be typical, their exposure to civic education suggests that students with practical experience in deliberative democracy are more open to political engagement. Their experiences also suggest that the academy is an important place for preparing citizens who feel responsible for the work of democracy. Here are the perspectives of some of the participants.

The Problems Students Are Concerned About

Although many students and college campuses remain isolated from the community, most students who met at the Kettering research exchange sense that an important shift is taking place. Students discussed the processes they use to engage their communities through ethically and productively building partnerships and relationships, moving away from a focus on volunteerism towards dialogue and more personal engagement.

This shift is important because it creates a space for students to discuss common issues and concerns with other citizens. Students are interested in talking in forums with others about the problems they face in life like unemployment, housing, education, and their futures. It’s not clear that all students call these forums “deliberative” but they are getting involved in service or problem solving to improve their communities in a way that is often not connected to classes. However, much of the time service learning seems to be “on the side” for faculty and university programs, and problem solving is considered something that is done on your own time as a voluntary service for others. Within service-learning programs, it seems that faculty do not share much about their relationships with the community or about their stake in problems. Students are encouraged to either serve or solve problems for the community but are not given capacity-building skills that are imperative for citizen-student dialogue and engagement. Students in this research exchange, however, said that the problems facing their communities need to be addressed not as a service to others, but in service with the communities they belong to.

The students at the research exchange also indicated a growing concern with more polarizing issues that are rarely talked about constructively: abortion, immigration, race, gender, sexuality. These issues are nuanced and require much deliberation to better understand one’s own views as well as the views of others. Campus communities are often diverse and can become rich opportunities for dialogue across differences. Dialogue and deliberation, if introduced in colleges, will help students talk about these issues and develop the practical learning and capacity to address them together.
Connecting Students and Politics

In their own words:

PRACTICING POLITICS ON CAMPUS

Dwitiya Jawher Neethi

Coming from an ethnic minority background in Bangladesh, I started asking questions at a very early age. I attended an elite private school in Bangladesh where most students came from a similar background. Asking questions outside the curriculum was not encouraged. When I came to Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, the scenario was completely different. There was deliberation everywhere—in classrooms, dining halls, and common rooms. I had the opportunity to have my questions answered and to ask many more. The process made me a much more intellectual and critical thinker. Campus environments can be transforming. We have the enthusiasm and opportunity to learn and engage. Dialogue and deliberation help us express ourselves and understand an issue better. Students recognize the college campus is their community, and we see that the tensions around human rights are evident on campus. We are learning how to develop thought-provoking conversations about such issues on campus and after we leave.

Jack Becker

I started college with a sense of all service without discussion; the most talk I had with my community was when we took a break from raking leaves and the homeowners brought us lemonade. Politics was previously all about elections or public hearings; I wanted nothing to do with it. And service was all about volunteer work; I was told it would look good on my résumé. I now have deeper understandings of both; I ask more questions; I am less entrenched in partisan ideas; I see where the two fit together. I'm more open-minded about such problems. Half of me is a political junkie, but I’ve been disappointed by that. I'm looking for my way in. Lots of people are looking for a way in. The Center for Public Deliberation program at Colorado State University gave people a name for something they were looking for. And it hasn’t disappointed me once.

From my experience, addressing polarizing and systemic problems eventually becomes political; that may be why many students shy away from working on them with others. But they know that their education and life experiences provide a certain entry point into the conversation and that they have a stake in their community and the problems affecting their lives. I’ve seen deliberative spaces draw students into deep engagements with others: we are the better for it.

Danielle Desjardins

Before coming to college, I became interested in international diplomacy and the idea that by creating a social place where citizens from diverse countries could interact and bond, international relationships could be improved. In fact, that is why I chose to attend Mount Holyoke College, a school known for international diversity and connections. Here, dialogue and deliberation techniques were offered as theory in the classroom, which has taught me to appreciate the opportunities to discuss issues so they can evolve rather than be debated. As my focus moved toward domestic politics, I began to feel that much of “politics” in America today has the reputation of partisanship, which is one-upmanship rather than an attempt at improving society. Indeed, even within the college environment where students are given the opportunity to learn about taboo issues and discuss them, students are talking to faculty and other students and not in the community outside the academy.

We need to learn how to deal with local communities ethically and productively. Community constellations are complex, made up of formal and informal organizations, nonprofit organizations, schools, and the university. Yet the university is often isolated from the community. How do we engage in the community correctly? We cannot ride in on a white horse and think we will fix everything. And so, spaces for building deliberative techniques are imperative so that students can begin to appreciate how to communicate with and act as citizens.

Programs Students Are Seeking

Learning in an environment that promotes dialogue and deliberation about public problems provides 21st-century skills for students: research, networking, relationship building, working with diverse populations, and critical thinking. These skills are important to active, democratically minded citizens.

During the research exchange, students mentioned that one of the difficulties in implementing this work is that it is new and uncomfortable for them. Students are often working outside the safety of campus and interacting with people with whom they often disagree. In other cases, they are being exposed to classroom discussions designed to examine controversial issues. Open classroom discussions and the opportunity to pose critical questions encourages a deliberative environment; one marked by communicating at a high level, considering other people’s perspectives, discussing values, and working through inherent trade-offs involved in making decisions in a diverse world. Students who participated in the research exchange pointed out that the role of campus faculty is vital here—to facilitate inclusiveness, help create a safe environment to discuss even the most controversial issues, and take a difficult step into the community with students. Students also said there should be groups and organizations in colleges and universities where student leaders create a platform for deliberation. These leaders must try to include as many students as possible.

Examples of programs that might address the concerns voiced during the research exchange include the National Issues Forums, a program of public deliberation on significant policy issues; the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network; or The Undiscussed, programs that tackle difficult discussion about race, religion, or other divisions. Many campuses are experimenting with programs such as “living and learning communities,” in which students take a series of courses together as a cohort, live together in dormitories, and interact in neighboring communities. Much has been done in
During the research exchange in Dayton, the students each wrote a definition of civic engagement. Here are their words:

**Civic engagement is . . .**

- questioning, openness, action, actively getting others involved.
- genuinely working every day to engage yourself and those around you in what is going on locally and globally.
- acting on opportunities where your actions will improve your own life and the life of your community.
- strong participation in all institutions in which one identifies.
- participating in the public arena about political issues that one is passionate about or thinks is important.
- collective action inspired by a sense of compassionate obligation to one’s community, nation, and the world.
- the process with people coming together and, through dialogue, deliberating to address and reach resolution about community, local, statewide, or national issues.
- becoming involved meaningfully in what you are passionate about in order to advocate change and move a specific community toward greatness.
- getting a diversity of opinions to make a decision for the greater good.
- not only caring about the world we live in but also engaging in an activity to make a difference.
- when a group of people gets together to discuss, in a relatively informed fashion, issues in the community.
- more than two people talking about what is important to their self-habitat.
- people being involved with their community.
- a group of people coming together with like values.
- the starting point by which we begin to effect change in our world.

**In their own words:**

**THREE CLOSING THOUGHTS**

**Jack Becker: An Invitation**

Students are putting their good talents to work; we just hope more of them will do so by engaging in discussion of political issues. But most people don’t want to be political, so perhaps we need a better phrase to capture interest. Perhaps we need to mention that you needn’t be a liberal arts student or political junkie to fit in here. Some of the most gifted people I interacted with in this work studied disciplines that don’t intuitively connect to political discussion and deliberative work: horticulture, business, natural resources, urban planning, biology, English, and the list goes on. Working with these people, I’ve learned that we all have the talent to do community work. We need students to invite others into the community; a personal invitation is a powerful gift of courage to stimulate others to join us in this work: this is yours!

**Dwitiya Jawher Neethi: A Caution**

Deliberation should be encouraged, but it must be remembered that the point of the deliberation is not to convince the other party about your belief. The goal is not to solve or correct—it is to discuss and listen intently. A key time to start such engagement is in college, and colleges have a responsibility to create such an environment.

**Danielle Desjardins: A Question**

It is important for students to learn skills and practice and gain the confidence to establish a dialogue with other citizens outside of the academic environment. But then, learning how to communicate across age, education, and other perceived markers of difference is equally crucial to successful community problem solving. Students are actively seeking, and universities have the resources to offer, skills, and tools that allow them to ask not only ‘How can I contribute?’ but also ‘How can we work together to solve this problem?’
For just more than half of the young adult population, institutions of higher education guide and nurture their civic and social development and help them learn and practice the skills needed in a democracy. But who prepares the other half for their role as citizens? In particular, who prepares the youth who not only have few opportunities to pursue higher education but also often come from single-parent families, experience severe poverty, and live in disconnected neighborhoods? Where are they likely to acquire and practice the civic skills they will need in order to be the kind of citizens a democracy requires—engaged, confident, and deliberative? And how can higher education talk about its democratic mission when its programs fail to reach the most disadvantaged groups of young people? I have been working with the Kettering Foundation to ask these questions in a recent series of workshops, including a meeting this spring that brought
together youth-development practitioners from a variety of institutional sectors. The purpose of the two-day research exchange was to understand how the most disadvantaged populations might transition into full and active citizenship so they can make decisions, solve problems collectively, and participate in public life. Specifically, in this ongoing research, our hope is to move beyond a deficit model to understand what opportunities and assets all youth have to develop the civic skills that are needed to sustain a vibrant democracy.

Whether as a causal factor or an indicator of other variables, attending college appears to be closely related to how young people develop as citizens. We began our research by focusing on non-college-bound youth (NCBY), defined in the academic literature as a diverse group of young adults who are: (1) high school graduates with no college experience, (2) out-of-school youth who may be enrolled in GED preparation programs, and (3) institutionalized and socially disconnected youth. This third group generally includes the most vulnerable of this population: foster-care youth, youth involved in the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems, undocumented immigrant youth, runaway and homeless youth, former special education youth, youth in the mental health system, and youth with physical disabilities. According to the practitioners in our exchanges, the civic, educational, and economic gaps among youth continue to grow, and going to college—or not—appears to be at the center of these disparities. Getting through the transition period (when young adults complete their education, get a job, start a family, and purchase a home) is increasingly difficult for all young adults and is nearly impossible for the most vulnerable.

NCBY begin to experience the disparities starting as early as childhood, where the environments they grow up in are markedly different from their college-bound cohort. Youth who go on to college are more likely to come from affluent neighborhoods, be raised in higher income homes, have parents that are more civically engaged, attend schools with more resources where there are greater opportunities for them to participate in extracurricular activities, and have a wide range of civic activities that they can engage in at school and in college. Conversely, NCBY reside in communities that have fewer ties to public officials, have less political clout, and have fewer vibrant civic associations where public actions can be organized. Rarely do NCBY have opportunities to assume leadership roles in their schools and communities or to participate in civic activities. Consequently, they are less likely to learn how to be productive citizens. They are less likely to vote, volunteer, exchange favors with their neighbors, work with neighbors to fix community problems, and participate in one or more civic or social groups where leadership and social skills can be learned and practiced. These gaps continue through adulthood, especially when it comes to civic participation. In fact, the more educated one is, the higher the civic participation rate among all civic activities, as measured by the National Civic Health Index. An example of the disparity in civic participation occurred during the 2008 election, when 74 percent of young adults with at least a bachelor’s degree or higher voted, 68 percent of those with some college or an associate’s degree voted, 53 percent of high school graduates with no college voted, and only 31 percent of high school dropouts voted. While society invests billions of dollars in higher education and provides college students with extensive support, more often than not, NCBYs fade into the background after high school and in many instances become invisible members of their community.

However, in the course of our workshop conversations, a puzzle emerged: despite their circumstances and desperate situations, even the most vulnerable among this population are hopeful. Although marginalized by society, they do not see themselves as problematic or deficient. However, many of the labels we have for these young people, including NCBY, stigmatize them and define them in terms of what can be seen as deficiencies. Rather, participants in our research want us to reimagine the way we see and talk about this population. This is where we need practitioners’ and young adults’ help. We need to use a descriptive term that better captures young adults’ democratic aspirations.

Youth-development practitioners are starting to see their work in civic terms and are experimenting with ways for young people to experience agency in their communities, even under the most extreme circumstances.

Building on this more aspirational view, youth-development practitioners are starting to see their work in civic terms and are experimenting with ways for young people to experience agency in their communities, even under the most extreme circumstances. Participants in our recent workshop consisted of higher education representatives, a former youth-development researcher, faith leaders, retired school administrators, community-based and nonprofit leaders, and independent consultants, all with a shared interest in the civic life of NCBY. They shared the raw emotions, rich discourses, and experiences of this group of young adults in their communities. While it would be impossible to capture all of their stories in this article, three examples highlight some of their experiences:

- Peggy Flanagan, director of the Native American Leadership Program of Wellstone Action, is concerned about the “electoral strip mining” that occurs with-
Reimagining the Civic Life of Non-College-Bound Youth

in the Native communities; politicians show up during election season but do not return until another election. Yet, she seeks to provide capacity-building opportunities for people in her community through a leadership program that helps participants learn and practice the skills needed in a democracy. This program, through leadership and civic-engagement skills training, helps young adults develop the capacity to be effective citizens and citizen leaders by addressing the problems and issues that affect them and their communities, including lack of jobs and opportunities, lack of political representation, inadequate access to education and health care, environmental challenges, and high rates of domestic and sexual assault. Participants learn how to build relationships based on common ground, share information to intentionally build the power of others, give others responsibilities matched with their skills, make themselves accessible, and communicate authentically. She is most proud of the many successes of her work, especially when marginalized citizens see their “civic esteem” rise and they self-actualize to become city council people and community leaders—making decisions for themselves and others and collectively setting policies that affect the entire community.

- Marilyn Culliver Armistead directs West Mid Alabama Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit organization that represents a rural, isolated, and desperate three-county area. She struggles to provide education, training, space, and justification for why the population of formerly incarcerated young adults she works with needs to be served and supported (she also works with youth with special needs and youth who have not been involved in the courts). Working with these re-entry youth, the organization struggles daily to make the lives and the circumstances of this population visible to decision makers and to the broader communities. The circumstances they encounter seem sometimes overwhelming, but, because the participants and the program administrators see themselves as a family and as a last-chance opportunity, they persevere and support and depend on each other. Participants experience agency when they see that they have acquired new skills that allow them to give back and help others in need. They renovated a local public housing community that had not been upgraded in the facility’s nearly 40-year existence. They were also able to help families affected by tornadoes that swept through the community in April 2011. Participants’ educational hopes and dreams are realized when they complete the program successfully, having acquired a GED and a set of skills that will help sustain them throughout adulthood. More important, they realize that they do have assets and can be valuable members of the community from which they were once ostracized.

- Ann Higdon, an award-winning educational and social entrepreneur, shares her experiences of founding a program with only a vision and a sizable personal loan. In 2011, her organization, Improved Solutions for Urban Systems, was recognized as one of the nation’s “Top 25 Innovations in American Government” by Harvard University’s Kennedy School. The education and training program, located in Dayton, Ohio, takes unskilled, high school dropouts from the direst circumstances—poverty, drugs, teen pregnancy, and homelessness—and makes them high school graduates. Successful graduates become industry-certified to build homes; repair manufacturing equipment; and install, do preventive maintenance on, and network, secure, and troubleshoot computer technology. Some are also credentialed in the health-care industry as phlebotomy technicians, EKG technicians, and patient-care technicians. As an illustration of the prevailing attitude toward these youth, Higdon told us that a local reporter referred to these youth as “the over-age, underachieving, non-attending, court-involved, disciplinary problem, court-involved, drop-out youths.” Program leaders, however, see them become “transcenders” who are succeeding against all odds and moving beyond their present circumstances to become productive citizens in their communities, in their state, and in the nation. The participants see themselves emerging from youths considered both
troubled and troubling to independent adults, able to take care of themselves and their families and giving back to the community through hands-on community-service work.

A common thread runs through the lives of NCBY. Although they do not always succeed, they are resilient; they believe in themselves and in their future; they trust each other; and they trust the leaders who take time to nurture their social, civic, and educational development and show that they care deeply about what happens to them. Citizenship for this group of transitioning youth is about trust, community, respect, and aspiration. Yes, some of them are disconnected, and some of them are homeless and vulnerable. Many others are struggling to make ends meet, living with families longer, working multiple jobs, postponing getting married and having their own children, and hoping to one day be able to afford their own home. But this diverse and multifaceted population is more than those negative adjectives used to describe them. They are “aspirants” and “transcenders” who are hopeful about their lives and their futures. They are optimistic that their past and their present circumstances will not hold them back and will not keep them from achieving their American Dream. They ask for more institutions in their communities that they and their fellow travelers can turn to for support, encouragement, and educational, civic, and workforce development opportunities. In the meantime, we hope to learn more about what happens when youth-development practitioners take a civic approach to their work and provide experiences in civic agency that meet the aspirations of young citizens.

Wanda Madison Minor has led deliberative forums and been engaged with the National Issues Forums for more than 30 years. Currently, she is principal of Madison Minor Group, LLC and serves on the board of directors of the National Issues Forums Institute and the advisory council of the Alliance for Positive Youth Development. She is a former adjunct professor at Monmouth University in West Long Branch, New Jersey. She can be reached at madison.minor@gmail.com.

To read this report and watch the companion documentary, No Textbook Answer: Communities Confront the Achievement Gap, visit www.kettering.org.
I don’t like the pat-you-on-the-back kind of community service,” asserts Auburn University student Marian Royston. “I want to learn how to work with others to create change we can all live with.” Royston has participated in a recent series of research exchanges at the Kettering Foundation that is exploring how to affect college students’ sense of civic agency through experiences in community. Students like Royston want to do more than good deeds; they want to make a difference in the very fabric of communities. But, what differentiates community experiences that affect students’ sense of civic agency from the traditional community-service experience Royston describes? Kettering’s research exchanges in higher education are bringing together faculty, practitioners, and students from various colleges and universities who share an interest in moving institutions of higher education beyond service and service learning.

Service learning, which arose in part as a response to criticism that community service lacks academic rigor, is broadly understood as a combination of community service and active learning. In the last decade, practitioners have made great strides in incorporating deep reflection and serious academic content into service experiences, and the academic literature is starting to show positive student outcomes connected to service learning.

However, if one of the goals of higher education in a democratic political system is to help students realize their roles as active citizens, service learning may not go far enough. Historically, community service has not been thought of as political. Indeed, federal agencies that fund service learning explicitly discourage recipients from engaging students in politics. Although service learning engages students in a community, this engagement may not be structured to build the knowledge or skills associated with democratic participation or citizenship. Perhaps most worrisome, students sometimes see service as an alternative to politics—a way of performing good works without the hard work of negotiating across differences or bureaucratic institutions, which suggests that service experience could actually undermine students’ sense of civic agency.
In response to these challenges, students like Marian Royston are starting to demand richer experiences. She is part of a growing movement of students, faculty, and administrators who want to move higher education’s community-outreach strategy beyond the conventional community-service approach. This shift is evident in the number of colleges and universities that have renamed their service-learning offices and programming as “civic engagement.” Indeed, even proponents of service learning are anxious to show that it goes beyond the soup kitchen stereotype and makes lasting social change in communities. In recent years, there has been an explosion in the number of organizations and associations dedicated to promoting civic engagement in higher education. While the terminology is clearly starting to shift, a critical question Kettering’s research is asking is whether civic engagement is simply a new label for traditional community service or whether it is leading to substantive changes in students’ experiences of civic life.
A group from Auburn University, including Marian Royston, is participating in the Kettering research exchange; they are implementing an experiment designed to move beyond service learning by immersing students in the life of rural Alabama communities. The project, aptly named Living Democracy, is the creation of Mark Wilson, Director of Civic Learning Initiatives in the College of Arts and Sciences; Nan Fairley, a journalism professor; and Ralph Foster, director of the Office of Public Service. Following two semesters of preparatory coursework in civics and community journalism, undergraduate students live in participating communities around the state of Alabama for a summer semester. While living in the community, each student works with community partners to develop and execute a collaboratively designed project. The Auburn University team sees its work as distinct from service learning, writing in a project memorandum:

While [service learning] opportunities are important and useful for students and communities . . . they do not provide students and communities the opportunity to work toward and reflect on the larger purposes of higher education as it relates to democracy: the building of civic capacities and will to solve issues of concern.

This raises an important question: what is the relationship between service learning and political forms of engagement? Can they be complementary, or are they in tension? In a study for the Kettering Foundation titled *The Civic Spectrum*, Bernie Ronan suggests that service is part of a continuum leading naturally into politics. In his article “The Necessity of Politics,” Harry Boyte goes further arguing that the framework of service itself undermines agency and fundamentally opposes democratic politics. He points out that service often denotes altruism and selflessness, which effectively masks the self-interest of the service provider and at the same time obscures the capacities and contributions of those being served. The result of this apolitical stance, Boyte contends, "is moral passion, but little political savvy." In essence, if service learning helps students to understand the what and why of change, it is missing the how of change.

Whatever the relationship between service learning and political forms of engagement, most agree there is indeed a distinction. Wilson suggests that the two can be distinguished in the following ways. First, service learning is typically organized for students in predetermined projects, while democratic politics calls for organizing; that is, democratic politics involves students as active participants in a process that they help to create. Second, service learning requires students to give time (usually a specific number of hours for which they receive credit), while democratic politics requires an ongoing commitment, an ethical attitude in which students have responsibility for their actions. Third, service learning is designed to meet a need, which posts the recipients as passive consumers of services, while democratic politics engages people as active creators of stories. Fourth, service is typically an activity designed to make the service provider feel good, while democratic politics can make students feel dizzy, or disoriented, from having to work across challenging differences and navigate entrenched institutions. Finally, service learning is followed by an exclamation point, the sense of accomplishment from the completion of a discrete project, while democratic politics is followed by a question mark because it is an ongoing and open-ended process.

As Mark Wilson has observed, politics is about engaging people as active creators of stories. What happens next is open-ended, a point in the journey to discover, as Marian Royston put it, “how to work with others to create change we can all live with.”
Another group participating in Kettering research—this time at the University of Dayton in Ohio—illuminates some of these distinctions as they play out in the attempt to move beyond service. The Dayton Civic Scholars commit to a three-year program of ongoing community engagement. During this time, this select group spend a minimum of 360 hours working with community partners, take 12 credits of related coursework, and complete a semester-long internship. In their final year, the scholars must work as a group to implement a capstone project in the city of Dayton. The ultimate goal is simple: to help students learn how to work with others in community. The students are given a few guidelines and a small budget; it is up to them to choose, organize, and implement their own project. Far from being organized for them, it requires student organizing.

In the fall semester of 2011, the senior cohort of Dayton Civic Scholars began planning their capstone project. The scholars initially thought about starting an after-school mentoring or tutoring program with a local high school struggling with low academic standards, high dropout rates, and a host of other challenges that often accompany urban poverty. This kind of needs-oriented thinking is often ingrained in the minds of students steeped in the traditions of service and service-learning work. After we reflected on this issue, the scholars realized the direction of their project should be negotiated with the high school students themselves. That insight led the scholars to design a forum that would enable the high school students to help shape the focus of the scholars’ project. Through a forum, dubbed “Your Community, Your Future,” the scholars found that the high school students wanted to learn more about post-secondary opportunities, specifically how to prepare for and apply to college. With only two months left in the fall semester to plan and prepare, the scholars organized a resource fair geared toward first-generation college students. As a part of the resource fair, a panel of first-generation college students from the University of Dayton, Wright State University, Sinclair Community College, and Central State University engaged the high school students in a frank discussion about pursuing higher education.

Working collaboratively with people in a community, rather than traditional service, demands a great deal of flexibility. The experience can be frustrating for both students and community partners, who are more accustomed to the predictability of traditional community service. The scholars’ project illustrates a larger challenge facing higher education as it attempts to move beyond service learning and into the messier realm of civic engagement. But for the Dayton Civic Scholars, managing the uncertainties of civic engagement was well worth the effort. When the scholars reflected back on their initial plan to implement a short-term tutoring program, they recognized that they could not have imagined such a panel without engaging with the larger community.

As Mark Wilson has observed, politics is about engaging people as active creators of stories. What happens next is open-ended, a point in the journey to discover, as Marian Royston put it, “how to work with others to create change we can all live with.”

Alexandra Robinson is a former Kettering Foundation research associate and is currently a graduate assistant and graduate student at the University of Dayton. She coordinates the Dayton Civic Scholars, a program designed to prepare undergraduate students to be civic professionals and citizen leaders through sustained interdisciplinary civic engagement and scholarship. She can be reached at robinsona6@udayton.edu.
Deliberative Pedagogy: An Education that Matters

Joni Doherty

Many problems in the public sphere can’t be resolved through debate, compromise, or even simply “stating the facts.” Issues like climate change and abortion embody the tensions that arise when differing beliefs, values, and priorities come into sharp conflict. Finding answers to “What should we do?” dilemmas, which are so common in diverse and democratic societies, present daunting challenges to everyone personally affected by the issue and undermine confidence in our institutions, both public and private.

Deliberation is a set of practices that foster the conditions needed to understand and address these kinds of dilemmas. Participants in deliberative forums are encouraged to consider not only statistics and expert analysis, but also the experiential and value-laden aspects. Everyone affected by the issue needs to feel both welcome and encouraged to participate in defining and addressing the problem. Public deliberation requires each person to think critically and creatively, listen attentively, examine assumptions, value differences, engage in respectful and honest dialogue, and reach well-reasoned judgments.

Deliberating together is about deepening understanding of the problem in order to craft solutions, not about winning a debate or standing your ground. Deliberation can be understood as the cultivation of a set of capacities that can lead to a new construction of knowledge, one that comes out of the public’s work together.

Higher education has long embraced the expert construction of knowledge. Although this is changing, traditionally colleges and universities have conducted research and educated students on principles guided by this assumption. For example, many instructors focus on “covering” the course material through methods that ensure the efficient “delivery” of discipline-specific knowledge. This model, in which each side has clearly designated positions, may have secured the desired outcomes in a political, social, and economic environment where roles and responsibilities were categorically and hierarchically structured and in situations where everyone shared a common set of values and experiences. However, in rapidly changing and diverse societies, things are far messier.
Today, because of the overlap of private, professional, and public realms, knowledge is pluralistic and situated. Situated knowledge is context specific. “What is known to be true” depends on its relationship to other conditions present in any particular situation. Multiple understandings might exist around one event or a common understanding may emerge over time. This isn’t relativism but instead requires that we take into account the dynamic interplay of shifting contexts, diverse perspectives, and competing demands.

Deliberative pedagogies call for a rethinking and restructuring of the activities of teaching and learning. Through calling on each person to engage with others in democratic, inclusive, and respectfully discursive practices, deliberative pedagogies help students better understand differing perspectives and the complexity of persistent problems that spring from ethical dilemmas. Deliberative democracy minimizes or avoids the traditional leader/follower or expert/novice structure and foregrounds teamwork, intercultural knowledge, ethical reasoning, and action. For instructors who chose to fully employ deliberative democratic pedagogies, the shifts in teaching and learning would be far-reaching. Some of these would include a restructuring of traditional hierarchies and an interrogation of the very nature of what we understand to be knowledge and truth.

Teaching and learning based on the principles of deliberative democracy are valuable in all fields, not just those related to communication, public policy, or politics. The need to make complex decisions about matters of common concern extends across every discipline. Deliberative pedagogies provide the interdisciplinary perspective and social and communicative skills necessary for successfully navigating and engaging in a post-industrial and increasingly diverse society. Connecting discipline-specific knowledge to concrete problems that transcend disciplinary boundaries opens pathways for students to become engaged with public and professional issues both inside and outside the classroom. The primary goal isn’t civic education per se, but for students to develop the commitment, knowledge, and skills necessary for creating and maintaining equitable, diverse, and democratic spaces, whether it be in the local community, the workplace, the nation, or the world.

Instructors using deliberative pedagogies commit to cultivating strong listening, oral, and written communication skills, as well as critical-thinking skills, in their students. Both instructor and students share the responsibility of creating a learning environment where everyone feels welcome to share ideas and ask questions. Deliberative approaches to teaching and learning can be as straightforward as including multiple (but not simply opposing) perspectives in course readings, lectures, and discussions or by a fuller immersion into deliberative pedagogies, such as integrating issue framing and deliberative forums into coursework and affirming that the outcome of these efforts is valid. There is no “right” answer.

Connecting discipline-specific knowledge to concrete problems that transcend disciplinary boundaries opens pathways for students to become engaged with public and professional issues both inside and outside the classroom.

Experiential and community-based learning can be an important part of a course. In 1998, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) called on higher education to rethink its mission for the 21st century. Instead of focusing on nonvocational intellectual and personal development, the AAC&U’s board believes a liberal education • fosters a well-grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward lifelong learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions; and • requires that we understand the foundations of knowledge and inquiry about nature, culture, and society; that we master core skills of perception, analysis, and expression; that we cultivate a respect for truth; that we recognize the importance of historical and cultural context; and that we explore connections among formal learning, citizenship, and service to our communities.

In this vision of higher education, deliberative pedagogies don’t represent...
Deliberative Pedagogy

Deliberation is “political” in the broad sense of addressing controversial public issues. However, while enhancing students’ sense of personal and social responsibility, engaging with public issues in the classroom does not have to mean advocating for a particular political or social cause. Nor is it the same as community service or service learning, although it may overlap. Deliberative pedagogical approaches are similar to more traditional civic-engagement initiatives in that they foster civic knowledge and engagement. However, they differ in that—at the minimum—they invite students to enter a discursive public realm with the aim of being cocreators with the public of some new insight or knowledge. Students are not doing for or learning about, but rather are engaged in relationships marked by reciprocity.

I have employed the deliberative approaches described above and have also made use of deliberative forums. At the most basic level, students have participated in a forum in class. In some courses, I have taught students how to moderate deliberative forums and then had them lead a forum on a topic selected by other community members or groups. This is essentially a community-service or service-learning project. To move this learning experience to the level of reciprocal engagement, students would need to team up with community members to identify an issue, create an issue brief, convene and moderate one or more forums, and then work together to implement the outcomes. Everyone who participates in the project, students and community members alike, possess some kind of skill or insight essential for the project’s success. As student participation increases, I have definitely played more the role of a guide than a traditional instructor, assisting with keeping things on track but no longer the primary source of information and power.

The New England Center for Civic Life is part of a network of organizations—many of which are located at colleges and universities around the country—that partner with the National Issues Forums (NIF). NIF is a nonpartisan network of organizations committed to fostering the practice of public deliberation and is a resource for faculty and students as well as communities who wish to engage with the theory and practices of deliberative democracy. Members of the NIF network convene public forums on issues of local and national concern; prepare guides for deliberation; teach educators, students, and community members how to develop issue guides; and moderate deliberative forums. Members of the network may work together on a regional or national issue and then present the outcomes of these public deliberations to elected officials and policymakers.

While some of these organizations are primarily focused on student life, others, like the New England Center for Civic Life, work to more fully integrate deliberative theory and practices into the curriculum. The center is dedicated to the teaching, practice, and study of deliberative democracy. We generate activities that bring together community members and faculty and students from across the disciplines, either as creators or participants in various academic programs and university and community projects. For us, democracy is not simply a form of government nor a group of people, but a continual flow of interactions and initiatives based on principles of equality, inclusivity, empathy, and the idea that legitimate decisions depend upon well-reasoned discourse informed by a goodwill effort to understand the perspectives, values, and experiences of others.

The New England Center for Civic Life is located within the Academic Affairs Division at Franklin Pierce University. As
director of the center, I report to the provost; the university provides an annual operating budget that is supplemented with grants and research contracts. An advisory council consisting of university faculty, staff, a graduate student, and community members meets regularly. In addition, teams comprised of council members, other faculty, and community members work on specific projects. While some make a long-term commitment to the center’s mission, others are drawn in through their interest in a particular project. Our work doesn’t rely on the efforts of one or two committed individuals, nor is it entirely dependent on external funding, although both were crucial in the early years. Our current administrative and fiscal structure provides both stability and flexibility. The center’s activities fall into three areas. We design and implement curricular and cocurricular initiatives on campus; serve as a resource for using deliberative democratic practices for engaging the local, regional, and university communities; and are active regionally and nationally, often collaborating with other centers in the NIF network.

Some community members are surprised that a small private university supports a center whose mission is so civically minded. “What’s in it for Franklin Pierce?” they ask. For the past 12 years, we have been one way for the university to fulfill its mission to be a civically engaged institution and a good neighbor. Franklin Pierce’s new mission statement, adopted in 2011, is inspired by the AAC&U’s vision of liberal education in the 21st century. For the university, “an education that matters” is one in which students achieve “academic success through the integration of liberal arts and professional programs.” This will ensure that its graduates are “prepared for the professional, personal, and social demands of the 21st century” and “ethical leaders and catalysts for positive change within and beyond their communities.” Deliberative democracy is an increasingly important educational philosophy and set of pedagogical practices for integrating theoretical and applied knowledge in liberal education today.

Joni Doherty is the director of the New England Center for Civic Life and teaches in the American Studies program at Franklin Pierce University. She can be reached at DohertyJ@franklinpierce.edu.

**ADDITIONAL READING FROM KETTERING FOUNDATION PRESS**

**Deliberation and the Work of Higher Education: Innovations for the Classroom, the Campus, and the Community**

Edited by John R. Dedrick, Laura Grattan, and Harris Dienstfrey

This collection of essays demonstrates how deliberation can help higher education renew its mission of preparing citizens to sustain democracy and stimulate civic involvement on college campuses around the country. It also describes how deliberative dialogue can promote learning and problem solving amidst a culture of argument, debate, and polarization that is prevalent on campus and in society.

Agent of Democracy: Higher Education and the HEX Journey

From the editors of the Higher Education Exchange, David W. Brown and Deborah Witte

Ten thoughtful theorists and practitioners address how higher education prepares citizens for public life, how (and why) universities engage in the larger community, and how we can rediscover the civic roots of higher education. This book of essays is a contribution to a resurgent movement bent on strengthening higher education’s democratic mission and fostering a more democratic culture throughout American society.

**Speaking of Politics: Preparing College Students for Democratic Citizenship through Deliberative Dialogue**

By Katy J. Harriger and Jill J. McMillan

The authors in this study follow a group of 30 college students during their 4 years at Wake Forest University to discover whether their experiences in learning and practicing deliberation might counteract the alienation from public life that has overtaken so many young Americans today. Their research design included classroom learning and practical experiences in organizing and conducting deliberative forums both on campus and in the larger community.

To read excerpts and purchase these books, visit www.kettering.org.
Keith Melville, Kettering associate and founding executive editor of the National Issues Forums, talked to Murchland recently about what is happening on college campuses today and what needs to be done to take the civic arts seriously.

To pose a question you must often be asked, what do you mean by “civic arts”?

Murchland: The key word here is arts. The Greek root of the word is arête, which often gets translated as “virtue,” as in “civic virtue.” Partly because of its religious connotations, virtue is a weak word in English. A more direct translation is “skill or craft,” the right way to do something. When Socrates talked about arête, he often drew analogies with cobbler’s, athletes, shipbuilders, or flute players as models of excellence (which is another translation of arête). Civic arts, then, is the right way of acting in the polis as a citizen. That language found a home in the republican tradition, where it focused on certain key “virtues” a citizen ought to have. Liberal arts education was originally understood as education in these civic arts, with the purpose of preparing students for their responsibilities as citizens.

You have long had an interest in the connection between civic education and the liberal arts. The Civic Arts Review has frequently explored the ways the liberal arts tradition has been influenced by the classical curriculum, including the trivium of dialectic, rhetoric, and grammar. What’s the relevance of the trivium to what today’s college students should be able to do when they graduate? What kind of people should we expect universities to help shape?

Murchland: It goes without saying that we have to be educated in citizenship. The classical curriculum of the seven liberal arts is a kind of shorthand for that
kind of education. Bear in mind that the number seven is somewhat fungible, but nonetheless basic and indispensable. Consider how they were formulated in Roman times: the trivium consisting of dialectic, rhetoric, and grammar and the quadrivium consisting of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy (basically the sciences), and music (which we now include among the arts).

It can scarcely be denied that a basic scientific education is a sine qua non today. But the trivium is even more important—especially if we understand the trivium broadly, not as three discrete arts, but as arts that are most fully developed in active citizenship. For example, dialectic is a specific logical method, but it was also understood to aim at what we might call deliberation and judgment today. Rhetoric often refers to specific forms of argument, but a broader understanding is speech, good talk, and creative listening. (A medieval educator praised rhetoric in these words: “Reason would remain utterly barren if the faculty of speech did not bring to light and communicate its feeble per-

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Murchland: It is true that educators have added practical ethics courses and global issues and the like, and there is a lot happening in extracurricular areas...
like community service and volunteering. There is good talk—and some good initiatives—relating to civic engagement and partnering with communities. But these tend to be add-ons. With regard to the core curriculum, it’s pretty much the same old thing.

**If you were to choose one or two liberal arts programs or activities that are essential to your sense of the civic arts, properly understood, what are they?**

**Murchland:** Good question. A full answer would involve the restructuring of the curriculum. Within the present curriculum, our vocabularies, and many of our most pressing societal problems are political in nature, incapable of resolution by any objective truth. No serious philosophy of education from Plato onward has ever subscribed to so narrow a view of education.

**Why do many academics today take such a narrow view of their intellectual task?**

**Murchland:** In a paper I am currently writing, I go into this problem by examining the civic arts, tracing the idea from its foundations in Greek and Roman republicanism to the civic humanism of the Renaissance, which had a huge influence in America. Then I examine its connection to the liberal arts, and in doing so, I try to account for the disconnect between the civic arts and liberal arts that we experience today. The American Revolution has been called the last chapter in the history of civic humanism. This is where our history gets interesting.

Two serious challenges to the republican tradition arose in the Enlightenment period. The first was the battle between commerce and virtue, which was won by the commercial party, a battle well described by Eric MacGillvary in his recent *The Invention of Market Freedom*. The debate took place at a time of radical changes in our perception of human nature, society, and politics. In the republican view, society is considered a natural condition into which we are born and find our fulfillment through participation in it. In the political philosophy known as liberalism, the individual has priority over society. Government is no longer seen to nurture the moral growth of citizens but rather as an agency intended to protect previously existing (natural) rights. Political rhetoric shifted from an emphasis on community to the individual, from virtue to self-interest, from an organic to a contractual view of society.

The second challenge was the rise of science to a position of eminence in the academic world. Science came with two trademarks: value neutrality and specialization, both of which remove science from the realm of moral discourse. They eventually degenerated into “scientism,” the belief that science alone has a claim to be regarded as genuine knowledge. This was a serious blow to the liberal arts and accounts for the highly specialized nature of the curriculum and the fear many academics have about dirtying their hands in the mucky work of morality and politics. The humanities, while they did not go overtly to the side of science, retreated into what George Santayana called “the genteel tradition,” or the ivory tower.

**At a time when American public life seems notably downbeat, what makes you optimistic that civic arts will be taken seriously again in American higher education and that it will help to produce a generation of adults who are prepared to carry on the democracy project?**

**Murchland:** As the Russian general said in *War and Peace* when Napoleon’s armies were approaching Moscow: “Patience.” He knew that the Russian winter would stop the French. Crisis is the motor force of morality and politics. Believing that makes me what Jacques Barzun called a “cheerful pessimist.” When the crisis becomes bad enough, change will take place. In an interview I once conducted with Dan Yankelovich, he said that virtually every important domestic change in America has been bottom up. It has come from the public, not from leadership.

English departments would have to do more with regard to basic literacy (like reading and writing, as well as talking without using the phrase you know) and a cultural memory. A basic course in political philosophy (including its history) would be on my list, and finally, a rigorous, interdisciplinary course in science and technology.

**Literary theorist and New York Times columnist Stanley Fish has said the university should not be in the business of the civic arts; he says, “Save the world on your own time.” Why isn’t it enough, in Fish’s words, for liberal arts teachers to be passionately devoted to “the intellectual value of pursuing truth”?**

**Murchland:** What Fish says is seriously mistaken. We are not primarily intellectual beings. “Pure reason” is a recent fiction in the academic world. Science came with two trademarks: value neutrality and specialization, both of which remove science from the realm of moral discourse. They eventually degenerated into “scientism,” the belief that science alone has a claim to be regarded as genuine knowledge. This was a serious blow to the liberal arts. The humanities, while they did not go overtly to the side of science, retreated into what George Santayana called “the genteel tradition,” or the ivory tower.

**For readers interested in the Civic Arts Review, see the journal’s website: http://car.owu.edu.**
Community Colleges and the Work of Democracy

Bernie Ronan

A Time of Crisis: This phrase served as the title of a crucial section in the historic 1947 Truman Commission Report, *Higher Education for Democracy*, which framed how higher education should respond to the education crisis facing post-World War II America. The most lasting contribution of the Truman Report is that it argued for the creation of a national system of community colleges.

In a similar spirit, *A Crucible Moment* is the title of a 2012 report by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, which describes a crisis of democracy still facing our country. This sense of ongoing urgency over citizens’ confidence in the political system reflects the perennial, if not permanent, nature of this issue. Moreover, the crisis of democracy, or the problem of how to make democracy work as it should, is a constant challenge facing our nation’s colleges and universities. In the fall of 2011, a group of community colleges came together to form The Democracy Commitment, a new initiative committed to reclaiming their colleges’ democratic mission and responding to this time of crisis. Along with Brian Murphy of DeAnza College, I have been privileged to assist in the launch of this initiative, and part of this commitment includes a research partnership with the Kettering Foundation to advance experiments in civic learning and democratic engagement that can be used as exemplars for the nation’s community colleges.

“Democracy’s colleges” is the moniker applied to the nation’s land-grant colleges, which were created in the 19th century to democratize higher education. More recently, the same label has been adopted by the nation’s community colleges. Community colleges started using this term to describe themselves when they embarked on a national “call to action”—to redouble their efforts in assisting students to complete their degrees, echoing the country’s critical need for a well-trained 21st-century workforce. This is one dimension of the challenge facing community colleges—how to provide citizens with equal access to higher education and to the opportunities that completing a college education creates. This was a guiding premise when the land-grant system was established in the mid 19th century, as well as when a national network of community colleges was created in the mid 20th century.

However, as Scott Peters points out in the *Cornell Chronicle Online*, there is a second, and equally compelling, meaning implied by the term democracy’s colleges, what he refers to as “public work . . . work that taps and engages and develops the civic agency, talents and capacities of everyone . . . where ‘the world’s problems’ play out in ways that women and men can do something about.” This is the work of democracy.

This same duality in the challenges of American colleges—equalizing opportunity and doing the work of democracy—was also embraced in the Truman Commission Report in 1947: “The social role of education in a democratic society is at once to insure equal liberty and equal opportunity to differing individuals and groups, and to enable the citizens
to understand, appraise, and redirect forces, men, and events as these tend to strengthen or to weaken their liberties.” Today, community colleges are once more confronting this dual challenge. In their inaugural declaration, the founders of The Democracy Commitment state:

American higher education has a long history of service to democracy. Our nation’s colleges and universities have always had a mission to make education available to the many and not only the few, to insure that the benefits and obligations of education were a democratic opportunity. This is a proud history, but it is not enough. Beyond access to education itself, colleges and universities have an obligation to educate about democracy, to engage students in both an understanding of civic institutions and the practical experience of acting in the public arena. The American community colleges share this mission of educating about democracy, not least because we are the gateway to higher education for millions who might not otherwise get a post-secondary education. More critically, we are rooted deeply in local communities who badly need the civic leadership and practical democratic capacity of our students for their own political and social health.

Our organization is a national initiative providing a platform for the development and expansion of community college programs, projects, and curricula that aim to engage students in civic learning and democratic practice across the country. The goal is that every graduate of an American community college will have had an education in democracy. This includes all students, whether they intend to transfer to a four-year university, earn an associate degree, or obtain a certificate.

In collaboration with the Kettering Foundation, we are exploring this second dimension of the historic duality facing higher education and democracy: how these colleges understand their civic mission and their civic relationship to...
their communities. We are also investigating to what extent these colleges view themselves as civic agents in their communities, actively collaborating with their communities in addressing the challenges and issues the communities face. Further, we are asking, to what extent are they dedicated to instilling this sense of civic agency in their students, in inculcating in students the skills and capacities to be active and engaged citizens in their communities? How are community colleges developing and implementing programs to foster civic learning and democratic engagement? How does this appear in curricula? In extracurricular programs? In student life? In clubs and associations on campus, including student government?

Kettering research has focused primarily on problems of democracy, rather than problems that occur in democracy; that is, with how democracy works rather than with the specific policy issues that our democracy grapples with. The Democracy Commitment embraces both aspects of the democratic challenge by starting with specific issues that our communities face and asking how they are implicated in larger problems of democracy. How are community colleges engaging their students in the work of democracy—by focusing on the issues in democracy? After all, these are community colleges, institutions in, of, and for their communities, enriched and challenged by all of the issues their communities are addressing every day.

The problems our communities face—homelessness and poverty, race and class, public health and neighborhood development—are grist for the democratic mill. Civic learning and democratic engagement in community colleges have as both their rationale and their focus the problems these communities face. Our students come into our classrooms with these problems and deal with them every day outside of class. Community college students are more ethnically diverse, more economically distressed, more part-time and full-time employed, and more challenged in terms of transportation, housing, and language than any other population in American higher education. In this, they reflect their own communities. As The Democracy Commitment declaration states: “Community college students come from all walks of life and all social stations; they represent all ethnicities and religious communities; they are all ages. Their ability to exercise their democratic rights and work together in public life, to be generous and tolerant and yet able to advocate for themselves, will help determine the future of these communities.”

The research partners in this work are the community colleges that are participating in The Democracy Commitment. As I explain in the 2011 issue of the Higher Education Exchange, these colleges are now engaged in a rich variety of civic practices, including student-led dialogue at Skyline in California and Cuyahoga in Ohio, public achievement in Lonestar-Kingwood in Texas, community organizing at Minneapolis Community & Technical in Minnesota, student organizing at DeAnza in California, deliberative forums at Maricopa in Arizona, and developing civic-learning modules at Miami Dade in Florida. Representatives from these and other institutions are coming together in a series of workshops at the Kettering Foundation to reflect critically on a broad array of civic practices and to capture the rich narrative of students democratically engaged in the problems of democracy they actually embody.

In the first year of their work as a national consortium, colleges joining The Democracy Commitment will conduct a “civic inventory” to describe what is happening on their campuses and in their communities with regard to civic learning and democratic engagement. They will come together at an annual meeting to share best practices and learn from colleagues, joining together with a companion initiative composed of state colleges—the American Democracy Project of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

The ultimate goal of the initiative is for community colleges to fulfill their dual destiny as democracy’s colleges: to develop civic skills and a sense of civic agency in their students, through engaging in the challenging, pervasive problems arising every day in their own communities. Bringing together community colleges’ experiences in working with people in their neighborhoods with the Kettering Foundation’s research on deepening and advancing civic innovation, we hope that this partnership will catalyze more robust civic agency in America’s community colleges and in the communities they serve.

Bernie Ronan is cofounder of The Democracy Commitment and directs the Maricopa Community Colleges’ Division of Public Affairs, which includes the Center for Civic Participation, part of a national network that collaborates with the Kettering Foundation on experiments in the work of democracy. He can be reached at bernie.ronan@domail.maricopa.edu.

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In a strong democracy, higher education serves a civic mission, not only preparing students for public deliberation and active participation, but also partnering with communities to do public work. If higher education is to achieve this mission, the faculty, who do the core work of teaching and scholarship, may be the most critical sector. Indeed, throughout Kettering’s research on higher education, many of the most powerful stories have come from faculty members who are trying to strengthen the connection between higher education and democracy and to reacquaint colleges and universities with their historical civic mission. I am currently part of a group that has been meeting at the foundation to study these efforts. As our inquiry has developed, we are finding a common theme: an aspiration to bring together the professional lives of faculty with the underlying civic aspirations that drew many of them to higher education in the first place.

Faculty members engaged in public work are going against the grain of the current norms of academe. Faculty today are experiencing numerous pressures to prioritize their professional lives over their civic aspirations. Administrators at
colleges and universities increasingly view higher education as a business and as an individual rather than a public good. They seek to raise institutional status by requiring faculty to prioritize publishing over teaching and service. At the same time, the disciplines have continued to embrace models of expert knowledge that encourage detachment from public life in favor of research on narrow questions with measurable results, published in journals with audiences limited to a few peers. Consequently, faculty efforts to explicitly prepare students for citizenship, to engage in public scholarship, or to partner with communities to solve shared problems are seen as marginal, if not antithetical to, the way colleges and universities understand their mission.

What motivates faculty to engage in public work, despite institutional incentive structures and academic cultural norms that undermine their efforts? Some seem to be motivated, at least in part, by a sense of unhappiness with current norms. As Harry Boyte discovered in *Going Public*, his Kettering Foundation study of academia and public life, many faculty members are unhappy with “the erosion of the spirit of community, connection, and public culture in their departments and in the university as a whole” that has occurred over the last few decades. Second, as KerryAnn O’Meara discovered in her Kettering Foundation working paper “Because I Can,” a study of faculty and their “civic agency,” many faculty members turn to public work as an antidote to the sense of isolation they often feel at universities, where each faculty member works individually on his or her own scholarship, which often has little connection to important public problems. According to Ellen Schrecker in *The Lost Soul of Higher Education*, this sense of isolation is particularly acute for contingent, non-tenure-line faculty, who now comprise 70 percent of the professoriate. Finally, some faculty members probably share Peggy Shaffer’s sense, revealed in the 2008 issue of the *Higher Education Exchange*, that higher education is not doing enough to help create the kind of world they want their children to inherit. As she puts it, I have joked with colleagues that I am in the midst of an academic midlife crisis—questioning every aspect of life in academe. In thinking about my future in the university, I have wondered whether my time will be well spent researching and writing a scholarly monograph that might well get me promoted, but that will be read by only a handful of like-minded scholars with similar intellectual interests. I have questioned the time I devote to teaching critical thinking skills to students who are socialized, both inside and outside the university, to care more about their final grades and potential career options than the knowledge they can share and the collective future they will create. As a parent of two young children, I look out to the world and worry about what their futures will be. … I wonder if my work in the academy is paying the way for a culture I want my children to inherit. On very bad days, I think not.

For Shaffer, this angst spurred her to make greater efforts to connect her professional and public lives.

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### Beyond the Ivory Tower

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helping others, and being active in community, charitable, and political activities.” Thus, a major implication of the happiness studies research is that it provides empirical evidence for Arendt’s discussion of public happiness—a concept based on Aristotle’s ancient claim that human beings are “political animals,” meaning that the most fulfilling human activities are done in common with others. And it is precisely Aristotle’s claim that seems to be at the root of the most powerful examples of civic engagement work in higher education.

If human beings really do find fulfillment through common work, then it makes sense that faculty members operating within an academic culture that isolates them in the ivory tower of autono-
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. This annual periodical serves as a forum for new ideas and dialogue between scholars and the larger public.

To read the latest and past issues of the Higher Education Exchange, visit www.kettering.org.
Turning the Tide on POVERTY:
Shifting the University-Community Relationship through Cooperative Extension

Alice Diebel

Within higher education, many institutions have an explicit civic mission; however, the dominant expressions of this mission may be to disseminate technical knowledge to a passive public. A key question for Kettering’s research is whether a more democratic understanding of this public mission might be possible and what it looks like when it is expressed differently. One of Kettering’s key research initiatives focuses on the land-grant university system, specifically cooperative extension programs. Cooperative extension is particularly well situated to study and affect the university-community relationship because nearly every county in the country has an extension office that “extends” the university to the community. Extension is intended to focus on the serious issues that affect people’s daily lives and often operates important programs such as 4-H; however, these programs may not address a community’s serious issues. Perhaps more important, an historic mission of the land-grant system is that it would be a “people’s university” focused on building strong communities and providing education that people can use to that end. That is, these universities were created to help citizens learn to work together for the public good and take hold of their collective futures.

The Kettering Foundation has studied the relationship between land-grant universities and their communities in a shared research exchange with the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC). The SRDC is a regional collaboration of 29 land-grant universities in 13 states. In 2007, it conducted a survey of constituents; one of the top needs people expressed was fostering civic-minded communities. The SRDC website describes people’s concerns with civic life and how the SRDC works to address these problems:

Many Southerners rarely feel a sense of ownership for what takes place in their communities. Family and work demands, community problems with no easy solutions, uncertainty on how to get their voices heard, citizen apathy or alienation, entrenched leaders that oppose change—all are factors that tear away at the civic health of a community. Reviving and expanding the civic activeness of local people, institutions and organizations is a critical prerequisite for gaining traction and support for the tough choices that rural communities must make today. What the people of the rural South want are innovative ways to get involved, to share their insights and to make a difference.

The SRDC works with land-grant faculty and key partners to launch efforts that strengthen and facilitate people’s engagement in the lives of their communities. An important companion piece is research that uncovers key factors contributing to, or inhibiting, the emergence of civically active communities.

SRDC’s approach to community development through civic engagement suggests a different relationship between citizens and the land-grant university. In a series of workshops and research reports, we have asked SRDC to reflect on its work. Some of the research questions we are considering include: How does cooperative extension understand the role of citizens and politics in local communities? What assumptions does extension make about the role of citizens and communities? How are decisions made? What are the implications of that understanding on the approach extension uses to engage the community?

A research report by SRDC reveals how a network of universities can collaborate in a way that meets both the needs of communities for self-rule and the needs of the university to develop research-based programs. The stories of civic work included in the report offer a rich view of the challenges and successes
deliberative exchanges have made in these rural communities, all of which have a poverty rate above 20 percent. The SRDC used deliberative politics to build the capacity of citizens in rural communities to tackle pervasive problems. Building on ideas from the Kettering network of dialogue and deliberation practitioners like National Issues Forums and Everyday Democracy, the SRDC created study circles of community members who deliberated on approaches to addressing poverty: a program called Turning the Tide on Poverty. Extension agents with an interest in this work approached community members from a variety of backgrounds for six weeks of deliberation and choice work. These meetings helped the participants identify the serious issues that they wanted to address and develop action plans that might begin to improve the lives of people in the community.

One of the main results of this research is that citizens in these communities discovered their capacity and commitment to take action, particularly on the problem of poverty. For some people, this was the first time they had taken any community action. Others gained the confidence to address community needs in the future. They also became more aware of their community’s strengths, resources, and needs; understood each other better; and felt personally committed to doing more in their communities. Public deliberation plays an important role by helping citizens begin to understand issues more fully and also begin to see each other differently—and for the better. Citizens recognize they are not so different in what they care about, and they begin to recognize that they might be able to work together. These are clear indicators of building democratic capacity.

Participating in the Tide program helped citizens recognize that they can act on problems in their communities; in this case, poverty. Participating in the Tide program helped citizens recognize that they can act on problems in their communities; in this case, poverty. According to the SRDC report, people in these communities had become accustomed to outside organizations coming in to provide programs and services to assist local residents. In fact, this history became a significant barrier in launching Tide in some communities as many residents found it difficult to grasp that this project was the sole responsibility of local residents, not the work of an outside entity. As such, it is possible that some community members were cognizant of the history of dependence on the outside world for success, but were willing to join hands locally to help bring about important changes.

Communities that have citizens who realize they could address their problems—even under very difficult circumstances—have been the most successful. For example, as a result of citizen engagement in Clearview, Oklahoma, people have worked together to bring in broadband access, provide smoke detectors for citizens, develop a community garden for hunger relief, and identify local resources for public use. Citizens in Neshoba County, Mississippi, have developed a public clothing closet, a food pantry, and a volunteer corps to link citizens with resources. These initiatives are more than just volunteerism. In all areas of their communities, citizens are beginning to focus on the same, overarching problem, involving people with different talents and interests to come together in new ways. Such efforts can shift the relationships and networks in the community.

Less-than-ideal relationships between the participants in the Tide program and traditional community leaders were a motivating factor for citizens. Some people had very negative views of the leaders, describing them as “corrupt,” “self-serving,” or even “tyrannical.” According to the study, in some communities, there was an inverse relationship between the long-term sustainability of the effort and the perception of the leadership.

People found that by coming together with other people they could tackle difficult challenges with or without these leaders. In an ideal world, traditional leaders would be supportive of and reciprocate civic initiatives, but while mistrust of government might paralyze some people and prevent action, these citizens stepped up to make sound choices and take action. Further, the capacity of the extension agents has changed. They see this sort of engagement work as distinct from their more traditional, research-based, extension program activities. They recognize their roles as facilitators of public relationships in big issues over longer periods of time and as community developers in terms of civic life, not just economics. They have also begun to see themselves not as...
educators for one-off events but instead as colearners, collaborators, and facilitators in the community. The role of facilitator is distinct from the role of guiding programs. A facilitator helps the community decide what problems it wants to tackle and discovers resources to tackle them. A prepared program already contains what will be shared and learned, and the fit may or may not address citizens’ concerns.

Finally, the perception of cooperative extension is worth noting. After the first year of this initiative, the researchers interviewed extension administrators to see if they thought differently about their role as experts. The researchers asked, “When the university works with the community without answers to the problems that have not yet been clearly identified, then what is the role of the university?” They found that the expert model became more complicated. One administrator reported, “The agents do not have to be experts in everything related to subject matter because someone else in the community may have it.” The Tide program reveals the value of public knowledge to address community concerns, with the university as an agent to help public knowledge become shared, coherent, and effective. Focus groups held before the initiative got started revealed that the administrators were nearly unanimous in their view that the role of the agent was to educate citizens using unbiased university research. After the initiative, the understanding clearly changed; the administrators report that the agents enter communities as facilitators to help the community find its own answers.

However, some administrators struggle to balance such open-ended and uncertain initiatives in a research institution. Some administrators were afraid of the spread of misinformation in communities because the work was not drawing on hard science. They were also concerned about how the impacts of the agents’ work would be measured by their bosses and the communities that support them. Agents felt support from their leaders, but the response was mixed. Some administrators are convinced of the value of this work, while others do not see it as appropriate for the university to deal with political issues or with programs that have uncertain outcomes. The majority of agents recognize the value of civic engagement for issues beyond poverty; for example, one community is now tackling violence. As one extension agent explained, “My extension administrator has said this work once scared him but he’s learned that it has potential.”

Perhaps the fundamental challenge to all universities doing work that focuses on community change is that the endeavor is explicitly political, but most universities profess to be apolitical. Civic engagement introduces a different way of addressing community problems, disrupting the established relationships and typical ways things get done. Extension agents saw this work differently from their usual activities. One agent reported, “Most groups we work with are homogenous. These aren’t. They are diverse in race, income, all that.” And another said, “[Tide] takes us outside of the groups we usually work with. That’s a good thing. We have groups we like to work with and call on, our volunteers. This process causes us to connect to others.”

In the Kettering Foundation Press book A Different Kind of Politics, David Mathews writes about the divide between higher education and the community in his essay, “Ships Passing in the Night?” Mathews points out the very different understandings of what it means for a university to be “civically engaged.” The university often sees its role as providing technical assistance or professional advice described in apolitical terms, but the university cannot solve many of these public problems without civic engagement. What citizens seem to want is for the public university than to extend its resources to the community and build the capacity of people to work together? After all, civic engagement is all about knowledge and learning, which are key roles for the university to play.

Alice Diebel is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation. She can be reached at diebel@kettering.org.

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A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future

A report from the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement
Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2012

In January 2012, higher education leaders from around the country were invited to the White House for a conference to launch a national conversation on the importance of civic learning. A key item on the agenda was the release of the report, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future,* a national call to action for post-secondary institutions of education with regards to their civic-engagement programs and curricula. The report, prepared by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, reflects a series of discussions between 134 leaders and practitioners of civic learning, many of whom are part of Kettering’s network of collaborative researchers. Civic engagement has recently achieved an increased prominence within conversations about higher education, and the report is a genuine landmark. As highlighted by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s closing remarks, the event and report reflect not only a new level of national visibility and legitimacy for civic-engagement initiatives but also a sense of urgency for higher education to play a part in addressing the widespread loss of confidence in our political system.

The rhetoric of civic engagement has been steadily expanding in higher education over the past several decades. As the task force report acknowledges, however, the question at this “crucible” moment is whether this rhetoric can be matched with practical experiments on the ground that seek to improve democratic capacity for students, campus communities, and the broader communities in which institutions of higher education are situated. The question for Kettering is not whether institutions of higher education are finding ways to be successful according to their own missions, but instead whether they are playing a role in making democracy work as it should. And from this perspective, there is much to admire within the task force’s report.

For instance, the report argues that higher education will only fulfill its democratic mission if civic engagement shifts from being a marginal concern to an “ethos” that pervades all aspects of the institution. Higher education’s longstanding commitment to civic education and community service must be combined with an emphasis on programs and curricula that can improve democratic capacity through public work and collective action. Throughout the report the oftentimes-anodyne emphasis on “civics” is supplemented by the rhetoric of democracy. For instance, the report acknowledges that basic civic literacy is important, but that 21st-century democratic engagement requires the integration of civic knowledge, skills, and values to inform concerted public actions with others. In other words, public problem solving within and beyond campus communities is seen as an absolutely essential component of civic learning. This marks a significant shift from the earlier emphasis on occasion-
A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future

The report argues that higher education will only fulfill its democratic mission if civic engagement shifts from being a marginal concern to an “ethos” that pervades all aspects of the institution.

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Journalism as a Democratic Art: Selected Essays
by Cole C. Campbell
Edited by Tony Wharton

Journalism as a Democratic Art expresses at its heart Cole Campbell’s belief that “people expect the press to help their communities solve problems.” As one-time editor of the Virginian-Pilot in Norfolk, Virginia, and then the Post-Dispatch in St. Louis, Missouri, Campbell worked to align his profession with that belief, often facing considerable resistance from other journalists.

Campbell’s essays address a variety of subjects, including a partly finished dictionary for journalists; timely essays written in the months after Hurricane Katrina and 9/11; and an interview by Jay Rosen, longtime professor of journalism at New York University.

Citizens, Deliberation, and the Practice of Democracy: A Triptych from the Kettering Review

Citizens, Deliberation, and the Practice of Democracy brings together writing by 19 leading thinkers on the contemporary challenges of democracy. These provocative essays, first published in three issues of the Kettering Review to celebrate 25 years of the National Issues Forums, challenge readers to rethink conventional notions of democracy, public deliberation, and citizenship.

To read excerpts and learn more about these books and other publications, visit www.kettering.org.
Voice and Judgment: The Practice of Public Politics
By Robert J. Kingston

“We are victims of argument and instruments, from time to time, of circumstance or the influence of others’ whims. Our civic movement, however, is from a state of anxiety, puzzlement, blame, defensiveness, or anger, toward the place where contraries meet, where unavoidable tensions remind us that no life is lived without risk . . . or collaboration. A deliberative public begins with opinions but shares experiences; it recognizes shared concerns or ‘values’ in unexpected, sometimes unfamiliar circumstances; it responds to the divisive with restraint . . . Public deliberation reveals not a verdict but the making of a ‘public,’ the formulation of a public will that can be described and put to use.”

Community Educators: A Resource For Educating and Developing Our Youth
By Patricia Moore Harbour

Community Educators asserts that the relationship between education, community, and democracy are inseparable and illustrates that education is broader than just schooling. Current thinking about education is challenged and reveals how the public participates in the education and development of youth. This book is a call for action and responsibility—both individual and collective—to transform education beyond simply reforming schools.