

# DELIBERATION

& the Work of Higher Education



## Innovations for the Classroom, the Campus, and the Community

**Cristina Alfaro**  
**David D. Cooper**  
**Allison N. Crawford**  
**Michael D'Innocenzo**  
**Joni Doherty**  
**Larkin S. Dudley and Ricardo S. Morse**  
**Maria Farland**  
**Katy J. Harriger and Jill J. McMillan**  
**Lee Ingham**  
**Dennis C. Roberts and Matthew R. Johnson**  
**Douglas J. Walters**

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

# Deliberation & the Work of Higher Education

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**Innovations for the  
Classroom, the Campus,  
and the Community**

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## Afterword

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### Who Else Cares?

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David Mathews

*Deliberation and the Work of Higher Education* is part of a growing body of work showing that some faculty members, administrators, and students are thinking about the role that higher education should play in our democracy. I am pleased to see this interest, but it raises some challenging questions. In a nutshell, the central question is, other than the authors and their immediate audience, who else cares? Does this torrent of books and reports mean that a great many people in colleges and universities have come alive with concern about the role of citizens in a democracy and their responsibilities to this citizenry? And if that is so, what is motivating them? Are academic institutions today in touch with the citizens who are angry about being shut out of the political system? Is there any connection between the quest for a more “engaged” university and the efforts at public engagement going on in government agencies, schools, and civic organizations?

Just look at the books that have been published by Kettering Foundation Press in the last few years. Two faculty members at Wake Forest University, Katy Harriger and Jill McMillan, who have a chapter in this volume, also have authored a book describing a four-year experiment in which a group of students was exposed to deliberation-based democracy in the classroom and through direct experience. This experiment had a profound effect on the undergraduates involved; it also altered the way the faculty members see their own work. Harry Boyte, who has written about faculty members who want a deeper engagement with the public, would probably say that Harriger and McMillan found a measure of the “public happiness” that many scholars feel is missing in their careers. Boyte’s colleagues, Nan Skelton and Nan Kari, predated the Wake Forest book with a volume on what happened when they took their students into a nearby immigrant community and together founded the Jane Addams School for Democracy—where everyone could learn the meaning of democracy through collective

or public work. And Scott Peters and his colleagues in extension have written about turning their scholarly research into a public craft that builds community.<sup>1</sup>

The titles within this body of work tell a story of *Academics and Public Life* and of attempts at *Engaging Campus and Community*. The most provocative of the titles is the one for a collection of essays by contributors to Kettering's *Higher Education Exchange*. They chose *Agent of Democracy!*<sup>2</sup>

The authors in *Deliberation and the Work of Higher Education* care about the role of citizens in a democracy and what people can do to make democracy work as they think it should. Americans want to be able to make a difference in the electoral system, but they are discouraged when districts are gerrymandered to invalidate their votes or when moneyed interests have an undue influence. They want to be able to shape their future, beginning in their communities, but they are frustrated by a conventional politics that doesn't have a meaningful role for them to play. People sense they are being pushed out of the political system and, even though prone to throw up their hands with frustration, they care enough to be angry.

These authors believe democracy depends on citizens, and their distinctive take on democracy is reflected in their references to public deliberation and public work. Public deliberation isn't a technique for group dynamics. It helps put the public back in the public's business by giving people a concept of democracy they

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<sup>1</sup> Katy J. Harriger and Jill J. McMillan, *Speaking of Politics: Preparing College Students for Democratic Citizenship through Deliberative Dialogue* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2007); Nan Kari and Nan Skelton, eds., *Voices of Hope: The Story of the Jane Addams School for Democracy* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2007); and Scott J. Peters et al., eds., *Engaging Campus and Community: The Practice of Public Scholarship in the State and Land-Grant University System* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Harry C. Boyte, *Going Public: Academics and Public Life* (Dayton, OH: An Occasional Paper of the Kettering Foundation, 2004) and David W. Brown and Deborah Witte, eds., *Agent of Democracy: Higher Education and the HEX Journey* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2008).

can experience. Making decisions to shape our collective future brings us face-to-face with differences about what that future should be like. And these differences are moral. That is, they are more than differences in interests that might be compromised, bargained away, or resolved through rational arguments. Putting the public back into the public's business requires living with these differences without letting them spark the violence often associated with moral disputes. Deliberation involves recognizing different moral concerns and treating them all fairly. And it turns moral absolutes into practical political options by asking, if this concerns you, what do you think we should do? Deliberation doesn't treat moral concerns as *relative*, but rather *in relation* to the other things people hold valuable by asking them to weigh the consequences of various options for action. Deliberating makes people aware that differences over what is truly most important are often as much within them as individuals as between them as a citizenry.

The experience of deliberation also shows the connection between collective decision making and collective action (or public work) and the norms that are associated with democracy—freedom, equality, respect for others, and justice. The experience enables people to see that these norms are not simply abstractions. Citizens can't work together effectively without them.

Kettering's publications aren't alone in exploring the claims that various concepts of democracy have on higher education. A 2004 report by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, *New Directions in Civic Engagement*, argues for "why higher education must take a more active, engaged role in local communities." And the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) released a report in 2007 on college students' attitudes toward politics; these students seem interested in being involved and engaged in their communities. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) has an impressive American Democracy Project whose goals include increasing the number of graduates who are engaged as citizens. And Public Agenda's 2007 study of public attitudes toward colleges and universities is part of this body of work because it uncovers a wide range of public



concerns, some of which bear indirectly on democracy, such as the importance of preparing students to live and work with other citizens.<sup>3</sup>

Other related publications include those in various disciplines that suggest democracy has implications that reach into the academic core of higher education.<sup>4</sup> Consider *Democracy and Disagreement* by Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, whose discussion of deliberative democracy has had a significant impact on political theory. They argue democracy depends on open deliberations about issues with moral implications, which means democracy is inimical to predetermined conclusions—however compelling the moral imperatives may be. Their book also implicitly raises questions about the role of political science in democracy and resonates with an article Claire Snyder wrote for the *Higher Education Exchange* in which she recounts the democratic impulses that led to the founding of the American Social Science Association.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Abby Kiesa et al., *Millennials Talk Politics: A Study of College Student Political Engagement* (College Park, MD: Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation, 2007); Pew Partnership for Civic Change, *New Directions in Civic Engagement: University Avenue Meets Main Street* (Charlottesville, VA: Pew Partnership for Civic Change, 2004); “About ADP,” American Association of State Colleges and Universities, <http://www.aascu.org/programs/adp/about/default.htm> (accessed November 2, 2007); John Immerwahr and Jean Johnson, with Paul Gasbarra, Amber Ott, and Jonathan Rochkind, *Squeeze Play: How Parents and the Public Look at Higher Education Today* (San Jose, CA: Public Agenda for the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> I have written about these publications in David Mathews, “Listening to the Public: A New Agenda for Higher Education?” in *Higher Education for the Public Good: Emerging Voices from a National Movement*, ed. Adrianna J. Kezar, Tony C. Chambers, and John C. Burkhardt (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 71-86.

<sup>5</sup> Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996) and R. Claire Snyder, “The Civic Roots of Academic Social Science Scholarship in America,” *Higher Education Exchange* (2000): 5-16.

Despite such democratic impulses in academic disciplines, there are inevitable tensions in a society that depends heavily on expert knowledge, yet makes citizens, who aren't necessarily experts, the sovereign political power. No one has done more to identify the tensions between professional routines and democratic practices than William Sullivan in his work at The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

The most explicit study I have seen linking democracy and higher education comes from Russia. It was conducted by the Foundation for Development of Civic Culture in collaboration with the Department of Political Science and Sociology at Moscow State Pedagogical University. Although the study reports that the Russian public expects more education for democracy from its universities, it also reports promising developments. The most important may be a “de-ideologized” curriculum. In various other ways, the university system is said to promote democratic values, such as freedom of speech. It seems that there may be some interest within the Russian academy for creating a more democratically relevant system of higher education.<sup>6</sup>

### **Who Is Paying Attention—and to What?**

To see how widespread this interest is on U.S. campuses, researchers at the Kettering Foundation, Matt Johnson and Halima Sow, did a quick review of what outside observers and people inside the institutions are saying about higher education.

#### *Financial Pressures and Accountability*

One of the dominant concerns reflected in the literature is consistent with the findings in the Public Agenda study: more

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<sup>6</sup> Foundation for Development of Civic Culture, with Department of Political Science and Sociology of the Moscow State Pedagogical University, *University Students and Deliberation: Higher Education and Democratic Challenges in Russia, Report on Stage 1. The Status Quo: Where We Are with Higher Education's Civic Mission* (Moscow: Russian Federation, 2007).

than half of those surveyed now see colleges and universities as businesses that care mainly about the bottom line. People aren't convinced, however, that these institutions are doing enough to keep costs down. Rising costs limit access, another public concern, so institutions are pressed to be better managers of the resources they have.<sup>7</sup>

Given the cost pressures, much of the literature has to do with finance. Some examples: *Cost Containment in Higher Education*, *Analyzing Costs in Higher Education*, and *Economic Challenges in Higher Education*. This emphasis is so dominant it has prompted a critical response. In his book *Universities in the Marketplace*, Derek Bok warns explicitly against *The Commercialization of Higher Education*. Nonetheless, rising costs and consumer pressures have resulted in greater emphasis on "accountability," defined largely in managerial and financial terms. For instance, the federal government, a major source of revenue, is one of those pressing for more performance data to ensure this accountability.<sup>8</sup>

The accountability trend's hold on higher education is well entrenched. It reminds me of a meeting I attended in 1976 with a group of prominent intellectuals, including Margaret Mead, Charles Frankel, and E. O. Wilson, and leaders in higher education, including Pat Graham, Sam Proctor, Roger Heyns, and Frank Newan. The objective was to take stock of what was on the agenda of colleges and universities. We found that the "new egalitarianism" of the 1960s was being challenged by a coming "managerial revolution."

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<sup>7</sup> Immerwahr and Johnson, *Squeeze Play*, 3-5.

<sup>8</sup> Walter A. Brown and Cayo Gamber, *Cost Containment in Higher Education: Issues and Recommendations*, ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, vol. 28, no. 5 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002); Michael F. Middaugh, ed., *Analyzing Costs in Higher Education: What Institutional Researchers Need to Know*, New Directions for Institutional Research, no. 106 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000); Charles T. Clotfelter et al., *Economic Challenges in Higher Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Derek Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

In a 1973 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Harold Enarson, president of The Ohio State University, made an observation that rang true at the meeting:

There is a tempting heresy loose in the land. Very simply, it is the dangerous notion that state universities are simply another agency of state government, a unit to be policed, regulated, and whipped into a bureaucratic mold. In this view, the university is simply a production unit in the knowledge industry, a kind of specialized factory processing human beings for strictly utilitarian ends.... Make no mistake about it. In state after state, a managerial revolution is steadily under way.... The new articles of faith are control, coordination, efficiency, and something called "accountability."<sup>9</sup>

Today, these articles are no longer new, and they have far more champions than the federal government.

Concerns about what the new values would do to higher education's traditional role were palpable by the mid-1970s. The warning went out: colleges and universities were in danger of forgetting that they were once part of powerful democratic movements and that their values were shaped by those movements.

Today, many continue to be concerned. Boards of trustees, as representatives of the citizenry, might be expected to share these concerns about the mission of their institutions. Yet, if the literature is any indication, trustees pay more attention to what happens within their institutions than to the institutions' role in society.

### ***Social Justice and Diversity***

While much of the literature on higher education has focused on fiscal issues, a good deal of attention has also been paid to aberrant student behavior on campus (racial conflict, drug and alcohol abuse, and student violence). Perhaps out of concern for this behavior and the widespread public perception that the country has lost its

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<sup>9</sup> David Mathews et al., *The Changing Agenda for American Higher Education* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977), 71.

moral certitude, colleges and universities are emphasizing moral education and building good character.<sup>10</sup>

The premise in much of the literature that the Kettering researchers examined seems to be that democracy requires individuals with a strong sense of moral responsibility. So there is a tendency to equate democracy with moral precepts. Service learning is very popular, and proponents believe it promotes greater acceptance of differences in race, gender, and sexual orientation. The importance given to creating such diversity on campuses is reflected in statements that rank it as a “key component to educational excellence in the 21st century.”<sup>11</sup> On many campuses, moral education translates into advocacy for social justice. At some institutions, moral education has a decidedly religious grounding, although there are highly contested interpretations of what is “moral.”

It’s not surprising that these different views on morality have fueled ideological conflicts. Some critics have speculated that the ideological battles on campus may be contributing to hyperpolarization in the country’s political system, raising the question of whether higher education really promotes intellectual diversity. A number of efforts have been launched to combat what some see as faculty indoctrination and others see as academic freedom.

## What Kind of Democracy Does Higher Education Serve?

Now back to the questions I began with, questions about who else cares. Our researchers’ cursory survey of issues on campuses doesn’t show a complete neglect of concerns about democracy.

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<sup>10</sup> Although the dominant themes in the literature have to do with business issues or issues of social justice and diversity, it would be a mistake to conclude that either is the main concern of typical faculty members or students. Faculty, for instance, are more likely to be concerned with how prepared incoming students are. And the typical student is more likely to be concerned with schoolwork or finding a job.

<sup>11</sup> Debra Humphreys, “The Value of Campus Diversity: The Emerging Research Picture,” *Diversity Digest* 4, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2000): 1.

But it doesn't suggest a strong connection between the concerns of citizens and the issues that command the greatest attention at colleges and universities either.

If academic leaders were asked whether they care about the role their institutions play in our democracy, I am sure they would say that the very existence of their institutions is a service to democracy, although they wouldn't all define democracy in the same way. Champions of social justice and diversity would most certainly say that their efforts were at the heart of democracy because democracy can't function without justice and respect for differences. Fair enough.

It would be unrealistic to expect every institution to think of democracy as a citizen-centered system of self-government that relies on deliberative decision making to inform the collective actions citizens need to take to shape their future. But it isn't unrealistic to expect colleges and universities to pay more attention to the public's problems, such as people's frustrations in trying to make a difference in the political system and their often unrealized ambitions to build more livable communities. These concerns of citizens, however, don't appear to register with the academy as they have in other moments in history—when the American Revolution turned campuses into “seminaries of sedition,” when agrarian and labor distress revitalized the land-grant movement, and when the civil rights movement stimulated more than a decade of student activism and campus reform.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, this sensitivity to the plight of citizens and their role in democracy hasn't completely disappeared from campuses. And where it has lodged is interesting. For instance, who would have predicted that faculty members, pressured to publish in the conventional confines of their disciplines, would be leading the charge for a more publicly relevant form of scholarship? I have enjoyed meeting with faculty groups at the University of Minnesota, Pennsylvania

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<sup>12</sup> Louis Leonard Tucker's book on Yale is titled *Connecticut's Seminary of Sedition: Yale College* (Chester, CT: Pequot Press, 1974).

State University, and Kansas State University, among others, and I have found many professors are as determined as Scott Peters and his fellow extension educators to return to the democratic roots of their disciplines. I have been encouraged that students like those at Wake Forest, Central State University, Hofstra University, Franklin Pierce University, and Fordham University respond with characteristic idealism when given the opportunity to experience democracy in its most basic and direct form. And I suspect there is potential support for a college curriculum reuniting the liberal arts with the civic arts—the arts of citizenship—even though we are supposed to be living in a consumer-oriented, job-driven environment. In fact, this book includes accounts of connections already being made between the humanities, classical rhetoric, teacher education, and the civic practice of public deliberation.

There was a time when academics saw the need for connecting the work of citizens and the work of their institutions. They had to document what they were doing to make this connection and demonstrate the impact of their efforts. As this and other books illustrate, that is being done. I hope that this outpouring of books and reports will encourage other faculty members who share the concerns of these public scholars; other students who are looking for experiences with a democracy they can practice now; and other citizens who want more from higher education than career training.

Still, there is an additional challenge. Demonstrating impact is one thing; engaging others in a broader consideration of the full implications of democracy for higher education is something else. And if these efforts in higher education don't engage a wider audience, defensive tendencies (already evident in academe) will grow. To prevent this from happening, a connection has to be made with the self-interests of those whose attention is now more narrowly focused or is directed elsewhere.

I don't believe there is any group of citizens that is deaf to the concerns of their fellow citizens. Yet I don't think they can be reached by preaching to or arguing with them. They have to be engaged in terms of their own self-interests. The critical issue is

how to get those concerned with accountability, for instance, to broaden their notion of accountability and consider what research has documented in detail—the sidelining of citizens and the general weakening of civic life. This problem is profound:

American democracy is at risk. The risk comes not from some external threat but from disturbing internal trends: an erosion of the activities and capacities of citizenship.... Although some aspects of civic life remain robust and some citizens still participate frequently, Americans should be concerned about the current state of affairs. The risk is not to our national survival but to the health and legitimacy of our shared political order.<sup>13</sup>

Frankly, I don't know how to do what I am proposing. I suspect that the problem described in this analysis won't get much attention until there are more opportunities to discuss the true self-interests of higher education—discussions that include citizens both inside and outside academe. Meeting financial pressures is not negotiable; neither is meeting the expectations of individual students who know full well that their careers depend on getting a sound college education. At the same time, according to the Public Agenda study *Squeeze Play*, leaders of our major civic, governmental, and economic institutions want colleges and universities to benefit society as a whole, not just individuals. Maybe that is an opening for a broader conversation about self-interests. And maybe there is a way to expand on the current interest in social justice, diversity, and service learning. Most students want a meaningful life as citizens. When they experience the full meaning of citizenship, as they did at the campuses cited in this book, that experience resonates with an instinct deep within them. The positive effects are obvious in the way students interact with other people, beginning on campus. That is surely an opening for a broader conversation.

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen Macedo et al., *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation and What We Can Do About It* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 1.



As readers reflect on the reports in this volume, I hope they will consider the question of who else cares. If colleges and universities were to become merely cogs in the machinery of a knowledge industry, it would be an incredible loss. The forces that have prevented this from happening in the past have come largely from outside institutional walls. They have come from external imperatives that have inspired academic responses. That is why the question of who else cares is so important.

*David Mathews is president of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. He served as Secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in the administration of President Gerald Ford. Between 1969 and 1980, he was president of The University of Alabama. He has written extensively on education, political theory, southern history, public policy, and international problem solving. His newest book focuses on the relationship between the public and public education: Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy (Kettering Foundation Press, 2006). He serves on the board of a variety of organizations, including the Gerald R. Ford Foundation, National Issues Forums Institute, and Public Agenda.*