



# HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



2005

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

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.

In the tradition of Jefferson, the *Higher Education Exchange* agrees that a central goal of higher education is to help make democracy possible by preparing citizens for public life. The *Higher Education Exchange* is part of a movement to strengthen higher education's democratic mission and foster a more democratic culture throughout American society. Working in this tradition, the *Higher Education Exchange* publishes case studies, analyses, news, and ideas about efforts within higher education to develop more democratic societies.

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# FOREWORD

By Deborah Witte

One of the best things about being coeditor of this journal is the opportunity to work with the authors of the pieces that appear here. Every year, as *HEE* coeditor David Brown and I begin to brainstorm about what will appear in the next issue, who we might ask to write a piece, or who might make a good interview, I wonder again why people write for this journal.

We find the authors in many places. Sometimes we get a lead on a potential author by reading an already published essay by him or her. Or we might run into someone at a conference where they're presenting thoughtful insights about higher education or public scholarship. Sometimes they send us unsolicited, unpublished essays. Oftentimes, we encounter them in meetings, usually here at the Kettering Foundation.

I'm never sure if these potential contributors will have the time, or more importantly, the inclination to write for a journal that isn't peer-reviewed or indexed in the leading social science data bases and thus doesn't "count" if they hope to add it to their vita.

But the truth is, we've never been turned down. Sometimes the writer will need more lead time than the journal's deadlines can allow, and then their piece will appear in the next year's issue. Sometimes, they've overextended and have promised articles or chapters to too many other colleagues. That's when David Brown might interview them, a process the interviewee usually finds satisfying, delightful, and manageable.

I think part of the answer to the question of why scholars write for us is contained in the essays in this volume. Every one of the scholars in this issue has an evident pride of profession and a sense of responsible citizenship. They share many of the same dilemmas and pitfalls that are part of engaging in the work of public scholarship. Many wrestle with the same tensions inherent in the conflictual roles of scholar and citizen. Most have found a way to serve the public good, while still serving their responsibility to

the profession. Most are looking for a way to share and learn with other scholars.

I am continually amazed by their honesty about the dilemmas they face and the rewards they receive. Doing public scholarship is usually misunderstood, if not boldly denigrated, by the university. Working with community groups can be as frustrating as it can be uplifting. None of these contributors has shrunk from the hard work of attempting public scholarship or shirked the responsibility of reporting the outcomes, good and bad. They inspire me and they make this work meaningful.

Here's what's in store for you in this issue.

Jeremy Cohen, at Penn State, has been the driving force behind that school's commitment to public scholarship. Under his leadership, Penn State has recently approved a new Civic and Community Engagement (CIVCOM) minor. The story of how that innovation came about makes for a fascinating interview with David Brown. Jeremy shares the administrative details of getting a new minor approved as well as the insights into the intellectual journey that he and his colleagues embarked on as they created the minor. It remains a work in progress.

Katy Harriger and Jill McMillan write a strikingly honest account of the tensions inherent in their roles as researchers, teachers, and citizens of Wake Forest University. Like most faculty, they had learned to keep these roles and identities separate. Yet, in the course of their Democracy Fellows experiment, they found the lines blurring — not a comfortable position for two tenured professors with more than 50 years of teaching and research experience between them. Their essay explores how they are able to resolve this familiar, but vexing, challenge.

Bernie Murchland has long played a part in the evolution of Kettering's thinking about public scholarship. When Bernie first began his work with us this field was known as liberal arts/civic arts. So it's no wonder he now edits his own journal aptly titled, *Civic Arts*. Bernie is a philosopher and, in this interview, he shares his thoughts about the demise of the liberal arts as a leading hand in the academy. As we know, scholars have written extensively on this theme. But Bernie, with David Brown's prompting, pushes farther than the usual laments, explaining how we can steer our way back from an emphasis on training and schooling to a renewed emphasis on education.

Christa Slaton, a professor at Auburn University, shares a very

personal story of her work with the citizens of Uniontown, Alabama. She writes with clarity and frankness about the failures and rewards of community work. Rather than portray the scenario in such a way as to please her colleagues and her funders, she instead exposes the missteps and the misunderstandings in truly collaborative work. The final outcome is nevertheless promising, made all the more so because of her acknowledgment of the hard, sometimes hurtful, process of community-building.

Don Rothman's story, as it emerges in this interview with David Brown, speaks to every teacher who strives to make the connection apparent between democracy and the classroom to their students. Like Murchland, Rothman has decades of experience in the classroom. Most of his students are the first in their families to attend college and like most students, are disconnected from traditional political life. Yet Don tries, through his writing class, "to awaken their imaginations about who they are." And the students respond by producing "remarkably interesting writing." Rothman's students learn to appreciate "how much we need each other in order to think."

In this issue, Claire Snyder writes a follow-up to her 2000 article on the civic origins and purposes of the American Social Science Association. She focuses on the ways in which higher education has hindered or helped women scholars do their public work in social science outside the academy. Snyder outlines the three approaches taken by most women in the early twentieth century and concludes by placing herself within this tradition and reflecting on progress made and progress deferred.

Law student Matt Fery contributes a review of Harry Boyte's latest book, *Everyday Politics*. Boyte revisits his idea of public work and suggests that it is professionals who need to empower other citizens to engage in politics and government. Boyte specifically focuses on higher education and references his experience at the University of Minnesota. Fery suggests that Boyte's text "serves as a helpful resources for leaders in higher education looking to create, retool, or examine their civic engagement curriculum."

David Mathews has, in his usual "Afterthoughts" piece, drawn a comparison between the essays in this volume and the essays to appear in a forthcoming issue of another Kettering publication, *The Kettering Review*. He identifies a common theme of professionalism and invites the reader to indulge in reading both publications. Please be in touch if you don't already receive the

*Review*, I'd be happy to send it along as soon as it's available.

And, as always, be in touch with comments you'd like to share about any of the articles in this issue. Let me know if the scholars who share their stories have inspired you as they have me. I hope so.

# PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP AT PENN STATE

## An interview with Jeremy Cohen

*David Brown, coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange, talked with Jeremy Cohen, Associate Vice Provost Undergraduate Education and Professor of Communications at Penn State University. Brown was interested in learning more about Cohen's work on "public scholarship" with his colleagues at the university.*

**Brown:** A colleague at Penn State described you as a "leader in the movement" to develop a cohort of faculty and students who want to integrate their teaching, research and service, get the university to help ameliorate community problems, and provide a model for other institutions.

**Cohen:** My colleague is generous. So first, let's be clear that we are talking about *public scholarship*, which is a practice of academic professionalism or professional obligation. I don't view public scholarship as a movement. Caesar Chavez, Gandhi, Mandela, the American abolitionists, they each ignited and fueled true movements. They caught a peoples' imagination, enabled them to march to different drummers, to recognize social climates, and to find new hope and direction. Describing me as leading a movement is a bit dramatic.

It's more accurate to describe public scholarship as derivative. The public scholarship we participate in at Penn State emanates from generations of communities with origins in the Enlightenment belief in the ability to know, in the eighteenth-century *philosophes'* contribution to the ideal of democratic government and individual liberty, in the nineteenth-century establishment of land grant colleges, and in the twentieth-century voice of the teaching/research/service tricolor that underlies most current concepts of the twenty-first-century academic role. I'm not sure that it counts as a movement if we're simply trying to live up to a set of professional ideals anymore than judges lead movements because they encourage rule by law, or rabbis lead movements because they invite communities to engage in the 3,000 year-old Passover Seder. I invite people to engage in teaching and research that is rooted in notions of public scholarship.

**Brown:** It was good news to learn about the success in getting approval at Penn State for a Civic and Community Engagement (CIVCOM) minor and a new gateway course to go along with it. You described it as “grassroots effort to gain support among the faculty.” Can our readers learn something for their institutions from your experience of how that came about?

**Cohen:** The first annual Service Learning Research Conference was in Berkeley, California in 2001 and provided a carnival of visions for educational mission and approach. Panels and sidebars highlighted differences among participants. Some were calling for empirical studies to demonstrate service outcomes, some were focused on qualitative research as the *only* rational means of assessing community involvement. Many talked about wanting to bring service learning best practices back to their campuses. And there seemed to be widespread agreement about the positive efficacy of service learning. There was a colorful mix of service ideas, but not much talk about discipline-based research and little to justify the claim of an association between service learning and democratic engagement.

A handful of faculty accompanying me from my campus settled into a different discussion, much of it conducted outside the hotel on benches along the marina. There were a few very useful research presentations, but for the most part, our faculty were feeling anything but a sense of scholarly community.

**Brown:** Then what happened?

**Cohen:** Carol Colbeck, director of Penn State’s Center for the Study of Higher Education, psychologist Jeff Parker and I began to talk and an alternative approach began to emerge. What if the research question was not about service learning, *per se*, but about how students learn about relationships among their disciplines, the liberal arts goals commonly expressed as General Education, and democracy; and about why it’s so difficult to bring research faculty into the conversation? Dr. Colbeck’s research focuses on higher education organization. Mine is First Amendment-based and my assignment as an associate vice provost is focused on curriculum.

Working through the office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, I identified four or five colleagues and named them Public Scholarship Associates. We were trying consciously to create an identity around which a community could form. We wanted to create academic legitimacy for colleagues giving

serious thought to the professional obligations generated by the relations among education and democracy.

Colbeck, Parker, and I explored the notion of a public scholarship minor. Given Colbeck's emphasis on organizational theory, Parker's commitment to the value of offering disciplinary expertise, and mine on democratic learning and curriculum, it was a natural — and there perhaps is the first lesson for others.

Approaches don't just happen. We viewed the environment through our academic lenses. We concluded that the absence of a curricular and scholarly grounding was having a negative impact. We saw little likelihood of strong faculty involvement until the emphasis changed from service as a stand-alone, to scholarship and curriculum as a foundation for democratic practice.

Because we already had an interdisciplinary faculty base — the public scholarship associates — I could put the development of the minor on the table as a community project. Colleagues from a dozen Penn State Colleges took part in drafting the curriculum and in consultation with colleagues in their departments and in the faculty senate. Jeff Parker, from psychology, and Connie Flanagan, from Agriculture and Extension Education, accepted leadership roles and would eventually cochair the Interdisciplinary Minor in Civic and Community Engagement, which as an intercollege program has its administrative home in the Office of Undergraduate Education. The second lesson is obvious. Broad faculty involvement focused on the tenets of the faculty's work — scholarship — is vital, both organizationally and professionally.

**Brown:** Were there any other lessons you learned?

**Cohen:** A third lesson was less apparent until later on.

Learning and practicing democracy are not well suited to ownership by a single college or department. The complexity inherent in the idea that knowledge is not an end in itself — no more so than is service — but rather that knowledge is a means through which individuals and educational institutions can engage in enlightened democracy, has to be taken seriously. Programs are housed in esoteric colleges for political and pragmatic, as well as for epistemological reasons. Working together from a variety of colleges, our faculty concluded that viewing scholarship as public work also meant viewing it not as the work of Engineering, Liberal Arts, Education, Communication, or Agriculture, but as the unifying work of the university. That's an enlightened approach that has to

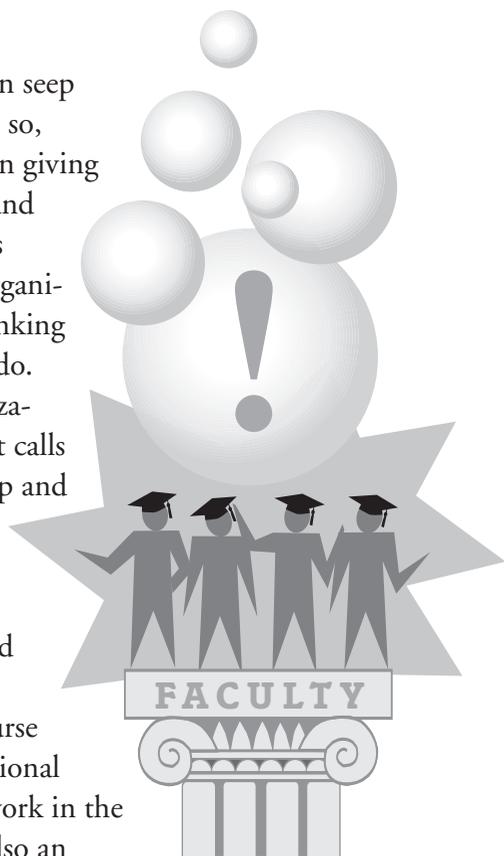
*Learning and practicing democracy are not well suited to ownership by a single college or department.*

bubble up from the faculty, rather than seep down from the executive offices. Even so, administration has a role just as vital in giving public permission, resource support, and intellectual depth to initiatives such as public scholarship that require new organizational alliances and new ways of thinking about the nature of the work that we do.

Now we're rethinking the organizational structure. The current blueprint calls for a Laboratory for Public Scholarship and Democracy. We're still in the conceptualization stage. This construction could house the Public Scholarship Associates, the new minor in Civic and Community Engagement, encourage research-based discovery as well as course development, and provide the institutional resources necessary to sustain useful work in the community. In one drawing there is also an Advanced Public Scholarship Institute to bring together academic, government, and community leaders interested in advancing public scholarship through mutual partnerships. The key will be to highlight the scholarly nature of the work and the view that democracy is a theory that is neither stagnant nor sustainable without enlightened public involvement that nurtures legitimacy and that is fueled by education and discovery.

**Brown:** I noticed that the number of Public Scholarship Associates went from 5 to 40 since 1999. How did it happen?

**Cohen:** Once a month, I provide a light lunch and a place to meet with colleagues. I learned long ago from my grandmother, Sadie Cohen, never to underestimate the attraction of deli. More recently, I've come to understand that the real key is the powerful attraction of membership in a community of peers — our Public Scholarship Associates take each other seriously. They share their work, critique each other's efforts, offer solace when a powerful pedagogy turns out to be one more failed experiment, and offer the excitement of interdisciplinary perspective. Most have joined us through word of mouth. Some are veterans of the 1960s; some are young faculty attracted by the desire to do meaningful work. Between the corned beef and the commitment to public scholar-



ship, the lunches are uplifting, and for many of us, just as rewarding intellectually and socially as publishing and teaching.

**Brown:** What in your personal and professional life accounts for your role in all this?

**Cohen:** My adult involvement in public service dates back at least to the Vietnam era. I received “Greetings” from President Nixon in 1970 while still an undergraduate at San Francisco State. Draft letters requiring induction into the service always began with salutations from the Commander-in-Chief. I was, and remain, a pacifist and conscientious objector, which enabled me to perform two years of alternative service with the YMCA in San Francisco’s Tenderloin District. Along the way I attended the Y’s outreach institute in Chicago, which focused on nonpartisan, nonjudgmental, nonviolent community organizing and service. Several dozen of us from the Chicago institute worked the streets every night during the 1972 Democratic and Republican Conventions in Miami trying to ensure that any citizen who wanted one would have a public voice, and there would be no repeat of the chaos and aggression that marred Mayor Daley’s 1968 abandonment of First Amendment principles when the Democratic Convention was in Chicago. We were not wholly successful. A lot of people were hurt and the democracy took a beating from the Committee to Re-Elect’s notorious “plumbers.”

So, my original notions of service were a mix of several compounds. Social service in the poverty of the Tenderloin, and national service as an alternative to organized warfare, laid the groundwork. I saw service then as a purposeful choice to contribute to building, rather than to tearing down. It wasn’t much more complicated than that for me in the beginning, although I was fond of justifying things with quotes from the likes of Martin Buber and James Joyce, neither of whom I yet understood.

**Brown:** How has your academic life contributed?

**Cohen:** Direction has also come from paths I have followed in my teaching and program of research. My work as a First Amendment scholar led me to believe that helping students to learn thoroughly their role in a democracy was just as important as preparing them for work or for graduate school. That was philosopher Alexander Meiklejohn’s notion long before it was mine. Service to a democracy is bigger than the individual and as my work progressed I came to believe that our Constitution requires democratic engagement from *WE, the People*. In this

*Helping students to learn thoroughly their role in a democracy was just as important as preparing them for work or for graduate school.*

framework, public education, and perhaps private education, too, has its own obligation to perform national service — not a service of volunteerism, but of educating students to engage in the democracy.

I had the opportunity to put some of these ideas to work during the ten years I taught at Stanford University. Many of my communication undergraduates, my professional master's students, and my doctoral students were involved in service-learning projects that originated in the Mass Communication and Society course I taught and in Process and Practice of Community Service, which I taught with Tim Stanton for American Studies and Urban Studies. I also initiated something called the Public Service Scholars Program before leaving Stanford for Penn State, and launched the first public service theme residence where my family and I lived with the students for two years. The honors program was a way to have Stanford undergraduates tie their honors theses into public service and this provided a real opportunity to connect research and democratic learning.

**Brown:** You have referred at times to “the *public's* scholarship” instead of “public scholarship.” Is it a distinction without a difference or something more?

**Cohen:** As individual students and faculty, you and I may choose to practice public scholarship, or ignore the obligation to focus and apply our work, at least some of the time, on public issues and problems. The public scholarship approach also involves teaching about the relationships among education, knowledge, and democracy.

Closely related to this, and part of the rationale for viewing public scholarship as a professional academic obligation, is the land grant tradition that is also visible in the establishment of public schools, public libraries, public museums, public parks, public colleges and universities, public auditoriums, and public arts programs as public trusts or commons, and as public incubators of public knowledge. Public education inherently belongs to the public. It's more than a tautology. It's a democratic principle. Public educators then ... I'm less certain about private educators ... have an obligation to serve as custodians of the public's scholarship. The public pays for their scholarship through taxes and through the nonprofit entitlements and tax breaks Congress and other public legislative bodies award to the schools. I've argued elsewhere that there is also an instrumental First Amendment

compact that emanates from the constitutional architecture the Framers designed — that is, a system of citizen-centered governance — that leads me to identify at least some of what we do as the public’s work.

**Brown:** The concept of public scholarship often does not include students. Why do you?

**Cohen:** A colleague on a faculty committee once looked at me, eye to eye, and said, “But of course you must agree that the students really get in the way of our real business.” To this day, I don’t want to know what he thought his real business was.

*Students are members of our academic communities — or at least, they should be.*

Students are members of our academic communities — or at least, they should be. Exclude them and they will experience a consumer-based campus culture of fraternity parties, alcohol, occasional philanthropic service, political antipathy, and intellectual boredom as they develop through their adolescent years into adulthood. Is that really what we want? Without the mitigating influence of guided learning from the faculty and without exposure to the links between classroom and community, few students will encounter the kinds of educational experiences we say we want them to have. Frankly, exclusion is an expensive waste of people and ignores just how badly we need to integrate citizens into some of the less selfish aspects of the democratic community.

And, of course, it is reciprocal. As human beings, many of us enjoy the professionally rewarding contact of give and take with others.

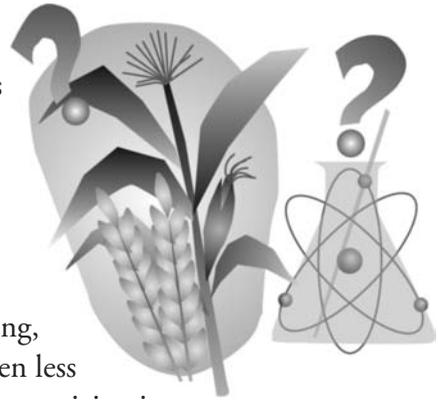
**Brown:** In a piece, however, that you wrote called, “Shouting Fire in a Crowded Classroom: From Holmes to Homeroom,” you are skeptical about classroom learning taking the place of “long-held notions of the world” that students bring to the classroom.

**Cohen:** My skepticism is hardly new and should never be considered discouraging. Sir Francis Bacon hypothesized about roles of experience and formal learning 300 years before Dewey captured the pedagogical imagination of a generation of teachers. Walter Lippmann, in a 1922 book called *Public Opinion*, talked about the differences between “the world outside and the pictures in our heads.” Today the cognitive psychologists have a good deal to say about how we learn.

My point is fairly simple: Some learning is best accomplished in a classroom, around a seminar table, in a lab or a practice room or studio. Other learning requires a different approach. *I would no more want* a student to spend all of her time studying political

organizing by working in the California farm fields than I would want a physicist to spend years studying nuclear energy in the lab without coming to understand, too, the consequences of reliance on that particular energy source.

What's required is balance and the use of appropriate methods to teach particular lessons. Right now, the balance is pretty uneven. We talk about leadership. We teach a lot of domain-based knowledge. We do little that helps people understand the consequences of using, or ignoring, that knowledge and even less time on learning to engage in public participation in the democracy in a manner that utilizes that knowledge.



**Brown:** You argued at a Kettering Foundation workshop that “taking part in ... democracy doesn't seem to be a natural and inherent skill. It is a learned set of skills. Participation is a learned set of skills.” How are such skills learned?

**Cohen:** There is nothing simple about effective democratic participation. We can learn a lot from babies. They are born uncivilized. They have to learn that throwing food, biting other toddlers, and shouting during kindergarten naptime are uncivil behaviors. Now multiply the relatively simple practices of civil behavior in a classroom by the overwhelming complexity of productive engagement in civil society that asks its members to be the government — to take responsibility for everything, from what we expect kindergarteners to learn. Engagement with questions such as whether we will take the lives of people convicted of crimes; how much of our treasure will go to highways; how many radio and television stations and newspapers a single company may own; and under what conditions we will unleash the whole killing force of our military in a pre-emptive war halfway around the globe. No one is born with an inherent, natural understanding of how to make it all work.

These are judgment calls. And people don't learn to make honorable or wise judgments in a void. The Enlightenment doesn't mean that we are inherently fit to govern. It means that we can learn to govern wisely. Making democratic judgments takes practice, information, mentoring, and feedback, as well as an understanding of the system of democratic governance itself.

Reading Tocqueville isn't sufficient to grasp the relationships among oil, poverty, religion, a consumer penchant for SUVs, and dreadfully inadequate schooling and medical care for millions of American children or for plotting out a means to take responsibility for the consequences of our democracy's public policies.

My point isn't liberal or conservative, Democratic or Republican. But it is political. Democracy thrives within a political landscape for which citizens need roadmaps. Meanwhile, the roadmaps are constructed by FOX News and its audience-envy competitors at the cost of subtlety, shading, context, and community. The greatest threat to our liberties and to our national security may not be from any number of foreign individuals or isms who select terror and violence as their mode of conquest. Our own failure to adequately educate young people in the public duty of participation in the public affairs of the nation may be sufficient to render the Founders great experiment senile.

**Brown:** Turning from students to faculty, you have observed that "we need help giving permission to faculty" who want to pursue public scholarship. What obstacles are you encountering that make it hard to confer, as you put it, "permission and legitimacy"?

**Cohen:** Scholarship is the university coin of the realm and, most of the time, scholarship carries a narrow definition constructed within a research paradigm. That's not surprising. Faculty with Ph.Ds took their training and credentials at research universities where their mentors succeeded in large part because of their own research track records. Freshly minted Ph.Ds going on to research-university careers are vetted by hiring committees, and later tenure committees, rooted deeply in traditional research environments. Meanwhile, university rankings and research dollars help to maintain the status quo. The professor who views undergraduate teaching, outreach, service, and participation in the community through her academic work as valuable elements of scholarship will not be preaching to the choir during job interviews or when it comes to tenure and promotion.

Research at UCLA a couple of years ago documented some of this. Faculty involved in service learning tended to be those without tenure and women, minorities, and others outside of the central academic power structure. And there are some other structural problems.

**Brown:** What are they?

**Cohen:** First, look at what's commonly referred to as General

Education in which a menu of courses, typically drawn from the social sciences, the humanities, the arts, and the sciences, are expected to provide students with an intellectual foundation that includes respect for a variety of ways of knowing, a grounding in the arts of liberty, and a familiarity with culture, diversity, and a mysterious concept, lifelong learning.

The problem is there are rarely active communities of General Education faculty. Successful academics generally work within disciplinary communities where they receive peer review, find accessible bodies of related work, and develop shared standards or protocols that help them to move their work forward. Disciplinary communities also create political strength within university organizations and provide access to funding and to the development of respected professional reputations.

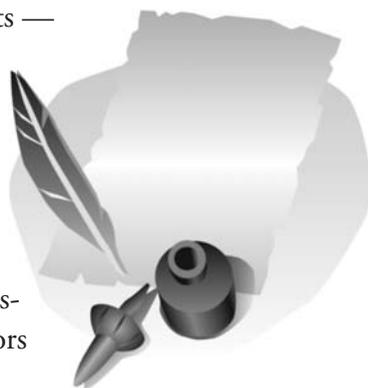
Each General Education course seems to stand on its own. Faculty rarely have regular opportunities to work as an interdisciplinary, General Education body in which their work is shared, available to others, peer reviewed, and crafted to contribute to a meaningful whole. No wonder students usually view General Education courses as hoops to jump through. No wonder there seems to be so little transference of knowledge by students among and between knowledge domains. There is no gen ed community. Only a gen ed requirement. Without that professional community, faculty have little opportunity to benefit from the elements of professionalism and scholarship available to them in their disciplines and little incentive to view themselves as General Education professionals. Doing so would be academically foolhardy for most. The reward system in research universities favors disciplinary research.

Furthermore, in service learning and related approaches, the illegitimacy problem is compounded. Scholars who want to focus their professional lives on the elements of public scholarship — teaching students to understand and to engage in the democracy, seeking to make the university's knowledge truly public knowledge utilized in public ways — face two additional powerful roadblocks. There is almost no professional academic community in service learning — and therefore, no way to take advantage of the pragmatic elements that have made traditional disciplinary communities and knowledge domains so useful. While student affairs personnel and faculty may have some things in common, their cultures, their standards, and their reward structures are not

*There is almost no professional academic community in service learning ...*

the same. In service learning, despite calls for academic standards, the emphasis on extracurricular service and the lack of academic leadership has meant that faculty participation means participating outside of the professional academic cohort.

Perhaps worse, faculty like these are likely to be thought of as political, rather than academic. There is real irony in this. Professional politicians and lobbyists have spent so much time accusing each other of doing things for political gain or political motivation that the word political has become synonymous with disreputable behavior. How did this happen? The American Constitution stood out — and continues to stand out when it isn't being co-opted by antidemocratic interests — precisely because it created a government of the people in which there is an expectation of political participation. WE, the People take part in the political discourse of our nation — act politically — precisely because WE are the state. Where do legislators or university administrators get off insisting on neutral behaviors that won't be seen as political?



More than a right, it is an obligation to be political. To take part.

**Brown:** Finally, from your vantage point, how would you assess the progress being made in the emerging practice of public scholarship?

**Cohen:** I invited several colleagues recently to join me in “A National Public Scholarship Conversation.” Thirty of us from thirteen research universities, PBS, and several foundations, educational think tanks, and governmental agencies gathered at Penn State November 12-13, 2004. There has been a clear transition, at least on some campuses, from volunteerism and public service to something with greater academic depth. Public scholarship, public work, curriculum-based service learning, and other monikers were being used. There appeared to be strong agreement that we have an obligation to help students to better understand the relation of democracy and higher education and to ground universities further in Land Grant and Enlightenment traditions that value knowledge and view discovery as a public resource.

There were few explicit examples of how this should best be accomplished. Democracy continues to be something we wish for and talk about. There are faculty communities developing at

Minnesota, Penn State, Michigan, and Ohio State, to name a few, in which faculty are actively engaged. But there is still a dearth of programs designed explicitly to teach students about democracy, help them to become engaged as scholar citizens, and create scholarly faculty communities in which public scholarship is valued, peer reviewed, shared, and held to standards that would apply to other disciplinary work. There are still open disagreements between those who value scholarly expertise and those focused on indigenous knowledge that springs from communities beyond the university. I'm not clear that these are useful dichotomies. Good scholarship, public scholarship, does not limit the conduct of discovery to the lab or library, or ignore the protocols of observation, application, and evaluation that have enabled real advances in health, science, justice, and the social or political contract.

Let's return to your first question. A National Public Scholarship Conversation did not bring me to believe that public scholarship is a movement. It did provide reason to believe that there is a national cohort of educators and others who believe that universities have: a role in helping students and communities to develop a sense of agency and voice; an obligation to model and transmit democratic values to the next generation; valuable bodies of knowledge and expertise, and useful protocols of discovery and application — some of which can be better shaped to benefit the public beyond the academy; a constituency of students whose developmental stage may make the university's democratic pursuits especially important; and a very real, and perhaps justified fear that engagement in public scholarship and the political work of democracy is so poorly understood by universities and politicians that faculty engagement carries risks as well as rewards.

Not long ago, most of our conversations were elementary. We don't have a movement yet, but perhaps even better, we do have the makings of a sustainable scholarly community interested in what it means to prepare students and communities for enlightened democracy. That's not bad at the end of a long academic day and it's lot better than the cynicism of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* in which Jake's response to Lady Brett's portrait of the what could be is, "Isn't it pretty to think so."

**Brown:** Thank you, Jeremy.

# PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP AND FACULTY ROLE CONFLICT

By Katy J. Harriger and Jill J. McMillan

For the last five years, we have been engaged in a public scholarship project that examines the experiences of college students with deliberation. While we have each been mindful in the past of the public relevance of our research agendas, we have found in this project new challenges to the comfortable accommodation we had made between our “traditional” research personas and our concern for public life. In the past, that accommodation involved separating what we did as “objective” social science researchers in Political Science and Communication, and what we did in the classroom or in our engagement with the larger community. This research project challenges the boundaries we had erected between the roles of teacher, researcher, and citizen of campus, community, and nation. In this essay, we consider the “role tensions” that we have encountered in public scholarship and we discuss the challenges of reconciling them.

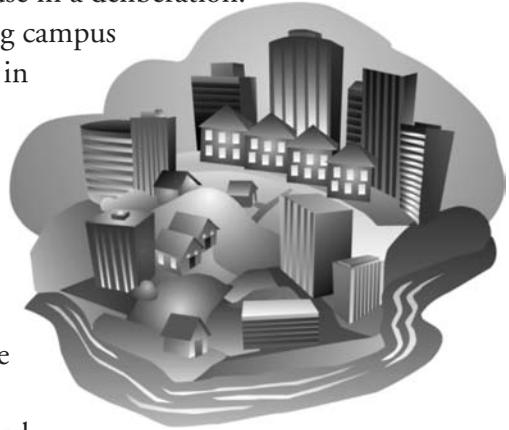
## The Project

In the fall of 2001, we launched the Democracy Fellows project at Wake Forest University. The project was designed to teach college students about the theory and practice of deliberation and to conduct a longitudinal study of their experiences during their four years of college in order to assess the effect of sustained exposure to deliberative experiences. From the entering class, we recruited 30 students and they were enrolled in 2 sections of a first-year seminar entitled Deliberative Democracy. In the seminar the students were exposed to debate in democratic theory, particularly the literature on deliberative democracy, and to Communication literature about democratic talk and effective group process. Then the students learned to deliberate through three National Issues Forums (NIF). After each deliberation we “debriefed,” analyzing what had gone well, what had not worked, and why. Finally, students studied the campus to discover major issues facing the campus community and, through a deliberative

process, chose one issue — building campus community — on which to focus.

In the spring of their first year, the Democracy Fellows conducted further research on the issue, conducted a framing exercise, and wrote an issue book for use in a deliberation.

The book focused on building campus community through changes in social life, academic culture, and service to the wider community. In the fall of their sophomore year, the Democracy Fellows were trained in moderation skills and planned and executed the campus deliberation. In the spring of that year, they studied



the Winston-Salem community, identified key issues facing the city, and chose the issue of urban sprawl for a community deliberation. They then researched the issue and adapted a National Issues Forums/Public Agenda book on the issue to the Winston-Salem setting. During the fall of their junior year, the students planned and conducted the community deliberation at a local science museum.

During this teaching and advising process, we were also engaged in conducting research on the impact of the three “deliberative interventions” outlined above. In the first semester, we conducted individual entry interviews with the Democracy Fellows and focus groups with an equal number of freshmen randomly selected from the class. In the sophomore year we conducted focus groups with the Democracy Fellows, a sophomore class cohort, and a group of students from across classes who had participated in the campus deliberation. Following the community deliberation in their junior year, we conducted focus groups with the Democracy Fellows and a group of their junior class cohorts. Finally, in this, the spring of their fourth year, we will conduct exit interviews with each of the Democracy Fellows and focus groups with a senior cohort.

In addition to the qualitative interview data, we gathered some quantitative data by including questions about civic engagement in the freshman survey given to the entire entering class in 2001, and in the senior survey given to a sample of the graduating

class of 2005. We also asked all of the students interviewed each year to fill out a participation survey that recorded their activities (both on campus and off) that year and asked them a few questions about their political activism and their involvement on campus.

## The Challenges

We were actively engaged with our Democracy Fellow students in the learning enterprise and two community engagement efforts during this time. But in addition, we were researchers gathering data, getting permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct “human subject” research and, attempting, as social scientists to analyze objectively data and draw conclusions that might be of value to higher education. We discovered, much to our surprise, the comfort level we had developed over our combined 50 years of teaching and researching, was constantly challenged. We learned that “public” or “engaged” scholarship of this type was enormously more challenging than we had grown accustomed to because it put into tension the faculty roles of teacher, researcher, and citizen that we had learned to keep separate.

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*Teacher v. Moderator* One of the first challenges we encountered as we conducted forums in the classroom was the uncomfortable difference between moderating a forum and our traditional role of leading a discussion about readings and ideas introduced in class. While we have both striven over the years to create free space for students to think and develop their own opinions, we have also seen our role as teachers as requiring a certain, and sometimes substantial, amount of guidance in steering students to wrestle with hard questions in our disciplines. Given that we had more substantive knowledge of the subject area, we felt free as these discussions unfolded to provide additional information, steer them away from overgeneralizing from their own experiences, and steer them toward larger abstract conclusions about the subject matter. In fact, we prided ourselves in our reputations as professors who encouraged and effectively guided discussions in the classroom. While we always tried and usually succeeded in keeping our personal views about issues out of the mix, we believed and acted on the belief that discussions would lead to particular conclusions corresponding to the theories of the disciplines we studied.

After we were trained in moderating deliberations and began moderating the classroom NIF deliberations, we found ourselves chafing under the requirements for effective moderation, particularly the neutrality requirement and the need to fade into the background. Good moderators disappear, we learned. And yet we also felt that we knew from years of classroom teaching that the teacher matters to the quality of the discussion. The push and pull between the roles of teacher and moderator proved especially difficult as our students floundered in the complex and challenging issues of racial and ethnic tensions. We felt as though we were abandoning our teaching personas and responsibilities for this strange new role as “neutral” moderator. There was no substantive outcome toward which to guide them, just a process to manage while they provided the substance. How very strange it felt.

*Teacher v. Researcher* We encountered even greater conflicts between our roles as teachers and researchers. The notion that these roles are in tension is certainly not a new one in academia; some schools call themselves “teaching colleges” and others “research universities,” and there is much discussion among junior faculty in particular about how one knows whether they are doing “too much” of one or the other given the culture of their institution. We have always seen this as a false dichotomy; being researchers enhances our teaching by keeping us engaged and up-to-date with the scholarship of our fields while teaching in an interactive way generates new questions for research.



The tension we encountered between these roles in “engaged” scholarship was a different one. Our students were also our “subjects.” At the same time that we were teaching and mentoring them about how to deliberate, how to moderate, and how to organize a deliberation, we were also studying them. We were both engaging and observing and the role conflict was very real. The “human subjects” model of traditional social science research has addressed the ethical dilemmas posed in studying human beings by creating an elaborate protocol involving informed consent.

*But as citizens of the community, we felt an ethical obligation not to treat our neighbors as “subjects” to be experimented with for our pedagogical and research purposes.*

Getting signatures on a form buys researchers the distance they need from their subjects in order to conduct objective social science research. But in the kind of engaged research we were involved in, this makes no sense. In fact, it raises a whole new set of ethical challenges. Teachers do not, or at least should not, treat their students as “subjects” with whom they are experimenting. Advisors who have brought together a group of students to organize a campus and community deliberation strive to mentor and help them develop the skills they need to succeed, not stand apart at a distance and watch them fail. But as traditionally trained social science researchers, we felt constantly challenged with these tensions, worrying that if we kept our distance, we were not fulfilling our understanding of the teacher/mentor roles, but that if we intervened actively, we could violate our understanding of what it means to objectively gather as opposed to create data.

*Faculty v. Citizen* Our comfortable faculty identities as teachers and researchers was challenged on campus in our teaching and our work with the campus deliberation. But the greatest challenge came for us and our students, as we moved into the larger community of Winston-Salem. Here the role tensions were even greater as our teacher/researcher roles bumped up against our roles as citizens of this community. In our traditional faculty roles we felt the obligation to make certain that our students came away from the experience having learned more about deliberation and about how it might work in a large, diverse, political community. Consequently, we felt it was important for them to be responsible for organizing the event, recruiting the participants, and preparing the materials to be used.

Our role tension came into sharp relief when we watched the students underestimate the timing and complexity of advertising and recruiting for this event. If they did not do an effective job in these tasks, our teaching and research interests told us that it was best to let them “fail,” given our belief that most learning comes from trial and error, and often, failure. But as citizens of the community, we felt an ethical obligation not to treat our neighbors as “subjects” to be experimented with for our pedagogical and research purposes. We also believed it was important for the students to see that this “detachment” was inappropriate. It would be wrong to invite community members into a public dialogue about making Winston-Salem a better place to live

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without doing our best to make sure that the experience was a positive one, at least in its execution, if not in its outcomes. When the community becomes part of the learning environment, responsible citizenship requires us to value and respect the new members of our learning community. This dilemma had multiple implications for future efforts at community engagement and connection between the university and the city and for the long-standing tensions between town and gown that exist in so many communities with institutions of higher education.

### **Reconciling the Conflicts**

The multiple role conflicts we encountered in this work have the potential to be paralyzing. At least at first glance, they felt nearly irreconcilable. But we have learned as we have worked together through these challenges that the conflicts, rather than being problems to solve, provide a creative tension for our work that strikes us as the fundamental value of public scholarship for the higher education enterprise. Our experience forced us to examine our comfortable patterns of behavior as academics and ask ourselves what it means for the democratic enterprise that so many of us negotiate the world of higher education by separating our various roles and keeping them distinct from each other. The detachment characteristic of the research enterprise seems a dangerous and undesirable practice in the classroom and on our campus and in the wider community. But so, too, does it seem at least undesirable, and at worst dangerous, to throw ourselves deeply into engagement with students and community members without being reflective — and yes, to some extent, detached enough to be reflective — about what we are doing, why we are doing it, and whether it is making any difference.

The ultimate goal of public scholarship is to contribute in some positive way to the health of the democratic community. The stakes are large, not small. In seeking to make a difference at this level, it seems inevitable that we will be forced to reconsider what it is that we do within the institutions we inhabit. For us, it has meant embracing the creative role tension and learning to live and work in that space rather than resisting or ignoring it. But it also means looking for and finding what it is of value that academics bring to public work. In doing public work, we are forced to ask what the meaning and value to democracy is of our work. As

trained social scientists we are encouraged to have a healthy skepticism about models, to distance ourselves enough to ask whether we are simply finding what we want to find because we want democratic practices to work, or whether something positive is actually happening. To see that something does not work is not to conclude that democracy cannot work, only that it is hard, continuous, trial-and-error work, imbued with all the complexities of human behavior.

In the end, we see that public scholarship is about bridging the gap between the reflection that occurs in the “ivory tower” and the engagement that occurs in the democratic classroom and community. Reflection without engagement has a sterility to it that presents little of value to the democratic enterprise. But engagement without reflection seems equally problematic, and bound, ultimately, to accomplish little.

# WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE LIBERAL ARTS?

## An interview with Bernard Murchland

*David Brown, coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange, spoke with Bernard Murchland who teaches in the philosophy department at Ohio Wesleyan University and is editor of the Civic Arts Review. Professor Murchland has written extensively on the link between the liberal arts and “civic competence” and their decline.*

**Brown:** How would you like to begin this discussion?

**Murchland:** Let’s start with some distinctions made by my late friend Manfred Stanley. He distinguishes education from socialization, training, indoctrination, and schooling. Socialization refers to the ways the young are inducted as members of society. Training aims to transmit specific skills and is based on expertise. Indoctrination seeks to inculcate students with an existing set of beliefs. Schooling is an activity whose end is the transmission of knowledge in the form of thought modules called curricula. All of these have the purpose of reproduction. Stanley wants to say, as I do, that education understood liberally transcends these reproductive functions. It means intervening critically in how we have been produced. I like the way Sartre puts it: making something more of ourselves than has been made of us.

**Brown:** Is education mostly reproduction now?

**Murchland:** Oh yes. I would say exclusively.

**Brown:** You mentioned “schooling.” David Mathews of the Kettering Foundation has noted that students question the value of a liberal arts curriculum as it relates to politics because they don’t think political education comes primarily from “knowledge about things.” Isn’t this a serious misunderstanding of what liberal education is?

**Murchland:** Students are taught to defer to academic expertise. They carry this passivity into the political realm, which is to say they are primarily spectators rather than participants. Faculty don’t think their job is political education or education for citizenship or anything like that. Their priority is to retail the hardware of their disciplines and feather the nests of professional advancement. Stanley Fish, who has turned himself into a kind of guru,

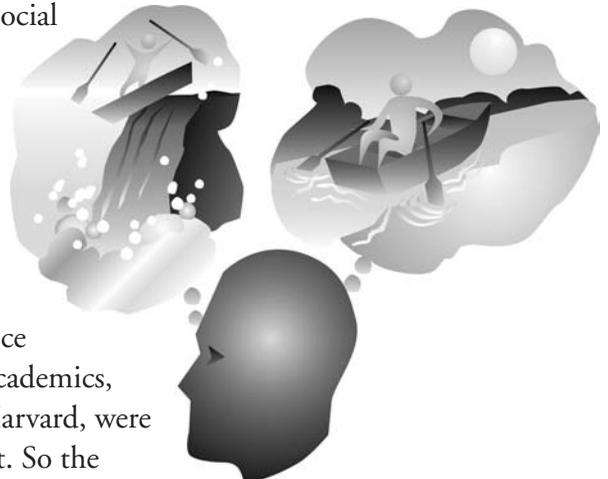
speaks for the great majority of academics when he says, “It is decidedly not my job to produce citizens for a pluralistic society or for any other. Citizen building is a legitimate democratic activity, but it is not an academic activity.” So speaks the big Fish!

**Brown:** How did we get this way?

**Murchland:** There are many reasons, but two developments in particular have created the dilemma we face. At some point, say since Bacon, science redefined itself in operational terms and formed a powerful alliance with technology and market forces. About market forces, Robert Zemsky, chairman of the Learning Alliance has said: “When market forces totally dominate colleges and universities, their role as public agencies significantly diminishes.” The working philosophy of this new outlook became research, specialization, and value neutrality. In due course the social sciences followed suit. Science and the social sciences came to dominate graduate schools and then the curriculum of the colleges. The colleges became, in effect, boot camps of the graduate schools thus losing a defining purpose and an appropriate pedagogy. But graduate schools are a very bad model for liberal education. The second thing that happened is that the humanities defaulted. Where they did not go outright over to the side of science they retreated into a genteel tradition. Lately, they got caught up in the vagaries of postmodernism, which didn’t do them much good. Taken together, these developments ripped the heart out of the liberal arts.

**Brown:** Say a little more about the genteel tradition.

**Murchland:** George Santayana coined the term in a lecture at the University of California in 1911. He said the American mind was split. On the one hand there was its practical activities — invention, industry, and social organization — creative and dynamic like the Niagara Rapids. On the other hand, there was the intellectual half becalmed in the backwater. Scholars and writers were abstract and bookish, not able to embrace experience wholly. Santayana thought academics, including his colleagues at Harvard, were ineffectual and self-indulgent. So the



genteel tradition was a kind of other-worldly escapism.

**Brown:** Do you think he was right about that?

**Murchland:** Not altogether, but it goes some way toward explaining why the humanities lost the wars with science.

**Brown:** Richard Rorty has argued that the Left in academic life gives “cultural politics preference over real politics.... It leads them to prefer knowledge to hope.” Is Rorty, someone in your field of philosophy, getting at what is keeping academia on the sidelines?

**Murchland:** He is. Sometimes. It behooves us to pay attention to him. Rorty lets a lot of hot air out of a lot of academic balloons. He is particularly good at puncturing science’s claims to a privileged access to truth. And he has great fun putting down certain kinds of philosophers. The above quote reflects Santayana on the genteel tradition. I would say Rorty is important to this conversation in two ways. We are long overdue for what he calls a redescription of education. The purpose of redescription is to develop a more powerful language for dealing with our problems, a language for example that would bring about more solidarity, less cruelty, better dialogue, more effective means of coping. Rorty also makes an important point about history when he says that: “The only way we can criticize current social issues is by reference to utopian notions, which proceed by taking elements in the tradition and showing how unfulfilled they are.” Precisely.

**Brown:** Gerald Graff has written, “a really clear vision would see that when what educated persons should know is deeply disputed, the dispute itself becomes part of what educated persons should know.” Do you think that Graff’s teaching of conflicts offers one way to puncture what you have called the myth of value neutrality?

**Murchland:** I think teaching the conflicts is all very well. But it is not clear how that would get to the root of the conflicts themselves. Here is another quote from Graff that I like better. He says:

Today reason appears commonly as a cause of alienation rather than a potential cure, a value free, depersonalized, finally aimless and irrational mode of calculation which subserves the goals of arbitrary power. The human agencies of emotion, value judgment and creativity are necessarily defined as antithetical to reason and objectivity. With the proliferation of technological knowledge and the spread of the behavioral sciences, modern man comes

to have a sense of being oppressed rather than enlightened by “rational” explanations.

Now that’s hitting the nail on the head. Graff is talking about what I have called the pedagogy of alienation. I wrote about that in my 1976 *Change* article entitled “The Eclipse of the Liberal Arts.”

**Brown:** To reconnect democracy and liberal education you have speculated that what is needed is a “moral Sputnik.” You thought Vietnam or Watergate could have been but were not. Has 9/11 come and gone as well? Where do you think a shock to the status quo will come from?

**Murchland:** Vietnam did produce a moral moment. It generated a lot of genuine intellectual activity on campuses and influenced the last generation of students who actually had any ideas. As for 9/11, it has not gone. September 11 was the tip of the iceberg of a new age. Terrorism is now globalization’s most conspicuous product and it is not going away. Within a generation, most nations will have access to nuclear weapons and then we will have to seriously engage in a reevaluation of all values, as Nietzsche foresaw. We humans will have to decide whether we want to continue to be the warring tribes of the planet we have historically been. Or whether we can invent the means of living together peacefully. The first principle of morality is that people don’t change their behavior unless some crisis forces them to it. Perhaps that crisis is at hand. I hold out hope that a concern for peace and world order will inspire a new public purpose for higher education.

**Brown:** How can we get back on track?

**Murchland:** Now we get to the nitty-gritty. Let’s face the fact that we don’t have a language to address the kind of problem we face, which is basically the lack of coherence in the curriculum. What we have to do is go back in history to frame the problem. Let me note some historical *points de repere* that I have found helpful.

I begin with Aristotle who distinguished three kinds of knowledge: theoretical, practical and productive — depending on whether knowledge is pursued for its own sake (e.g., philosophy and science as he understood it), or as a means to conducting ethics and politics, or as a means to making something useful and beautiful. Liberal education must integrate all three — what I have called in a modern idiom culture formation, value formation,

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and skills formation. That sense of unity was wonderfully sustained throughout the Middle Ages, as in the Benedictine Rule (which divided the day into three equal parts devoted to physical labor, intellectual pursuits, and spiritual exercises) and the School of Chartres. It had a rebirth in Renaissance civic humanism. The idea here was to bring intellectual interests to bear on the practical affairs of society, to educate professionals, government officials, and merchants toward the end of forming an active citizenry. The core value of civic humanism rested on the conviction that informed civic life is a necessary condition of self-development. That ideal informed the thinking of the American framers as is particularly evident in the writings of Jefferson.

I like to call attention to one of my favorite documents from the Founding called the *Rockfish Gap Report*. Rockfish Gap was where Jefferson and the state commissioners met to draw up plans for the University of Virginia. Like the civic humanists, and echoing Aristotle, Jefferson and his cohorts set forth the goals of education as follow: “to enlighten students with mathematical and physical sciences (theoretical); to form statesmen, legislators and judges and expound the principles of government; to cultivate morals and instill in students the principles of virtue and order (practical); and to promote the interests of agriculture, industry, and the arts (productive).”

**Brown:** Does that ideal have any contemporary resonance?

**Murchland:** Here and there. One hears it in Dewey for example. It still lingers in college catalogues. My favorite contemporary example is Whitehead’s fine book, *The Aims of Education*.

**Brown:** You argue the importance of history. But how do we apply the lessons of history to the contemporary scene?

**Murchland:** My point is not that history is everything. Only that history matters. It is the *sine qua non* of recouping an integrated view of education.

**Brown:** In discussing the linkage between education and the art of democratic politics, you have referred to Socrates’ emphasis “on dialogue rather than logical demonstration.” In what ways do you think higher education can prepare students for such dialogue?

**Murchland:** I came to this insight when I took an upper-level seminar on the Platonic dialogues in college. I was impressed by the fact that the dialogic method emerged at a time when the Greeks were experiencing the first flush of their democracy. The conjunction between the two is not accidental but necessary.

The dialogic method is the democratic way of arriving at truth. Dialogue we may say, in all of its forums of debate and deliberation, of controversy and choice, is the premier civic virtue of a democratic society. And the connection between democracy and education is also a close one. Socrates said at his defense that his dialogic method was for the purpose of educating the youth of Athens to be good citizens. And he claimed, no greater good has ever befallen the state than his service. Part of what we have to recoup is the art of dialogue. There is no doubt some irony in expecting universities, the most feudal of our institutions, to educate for democracy. But there is one important way in which they can and that is to sustain the Socratic tradition. That is why I argue that dialogue, not teaching the conflicts, between the disciplines or some such ought to be our first priority. What is at stake here is the critical intelligence of citizens. This addresses the political and the education problem in our society and is the common denominator between them.

**Brown:** Nonetheless, if the professoriate has not been liberally educated and their work is rooted in particular disciplines unlike the liberal arts, there are obvious deficits to overcome. At various times, you have suggested that academics could pursue interdisciplinary work, sabbaticals, and taking courses from colleagues to restore coherence to the curriculum. Do these measures still make sense to you?

**Murchland:** Interdisciplinary work does. I think it is the most dynamic aspect of higher education today. We see marvelous examples of it in feminist studies, various ethics courses like environmental ethics (in my mind, interdisciplinarity at its very best) and bioethics that are reaching out to bridge the disciplines, cultural studies, and so forth. I read in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently a report on how the classics are bringing together traditional linguistic and historical areas such as epigraphy and papyrology with new techniques of 3-D digital imaging and visualization. That hoary old discipline has joined hands with geographers, archeologists, political sciences, as well as modern technology to revivify the discipline. This is exciting. Various ethics courses are especially effective in bringing traditional thinking to bear on contemporary challenges. But interdisciplinary work by itself won't do the job. What is needed is radical surgery. We have to dismantle the whole disciplinary model that under the influence of the graduate schools determines the curriculum of the

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colleges. I was on the campus of a liberal arts college recently and noticed in the catalogue that more than 50 courses were offered in psychology. That's crazy. Psychology is very good stuff but 50 courses! The disciplines are like chastity belts with the twofold function of protecting academic turf and at the same preventing anything too exciting from happening. They are also responsible for the alienated and abstract language that pervades the curriculum.

**Brown:** What would you replace the disciplines with?

**Murchland:** Don't misunderstand me. I don't want so much to replace the disciplines as reconfigure them toward more liberal ends.

**Brown:** How would you do that?

**Murchland:** I would begin with something like Matthew Arnold's notion of liberal education as a broad understanding of the broadest ideas in the broadest sense of the word. Arnold thought of education as the formation of sensibility rather than merely training the intellect. Building on Arnold and simplifying for our purposes here, I would propose we educate for three sensibilities: a cultural sensibility (a knowledge of the best that has been thought and said), a techno-scientific sensibility (including a large dose of ecology), and a civic sensibility. Another way to put it is to say students are liberally educated when they can give cogent answers to three questions: the who question, the how question, and the what question. Who are we? How can we live together? And what kind of world do we live in? These questions point in a general way to the threefold disciplinary structure now in place but in a more integrated way — the humanities dealing with the who question, the sciences with the what question, the social sciences with the how question. These three questions should be put to entering freshmen and in their senior year they would draw on their college education to answer them in a qualifying examination for the baccalaureate. Something like this would be a way to preserve the disciplines but recluster them around basic issues. What I am talking about is a core curriculum of a distinct kind. I have never believed that hopping around the curricular cafeteria sampling snippets from the various disciplines is a very good model of education.

**Brown:** How have you applied your philosophy of education to your own teaching?

**Murchland:** I have been very lucky to work in a college that

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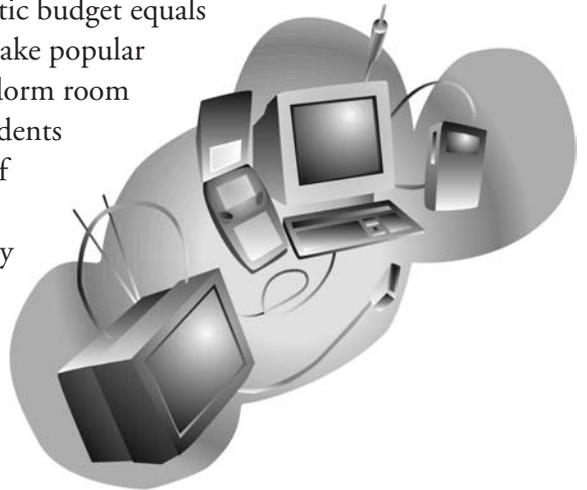
gives faculty extraordinary freedom to teach what they want, how they want, and when they want. This has enabled me to do a great deal of experimenting — in innovating new courses, in experiential education, in interdisciplinary work. I don't lecture any longer. That's like dropping buckets into empty wells and drawing nothing up. Seminars of an interdisciplinary nature suit me best. For one thing, they are an ideal venue for teaching the Socratic method. For another, they enable great interaction between students and faculty and between students themselves. Above all, it enables me to teach my intellectual heroes in some depth: Marcus Aurelius, Sartre, Camus, Thoreau, Dewey, James. Such thinkers were liberally educated and at the same time fully engaged in their times — public intellectuals in the best sense.

**Brown:** Could you expand on an earlier observation that the curriculum is a “shorthand for what we take to be the range and depth of political choices open to us as individuals and as a society”?

**Murchland:** Sure. It isn't as profound as it sounds. What I meant is that the curriculum mirrors the larger society rather than provides a critical edge. Take sports. Higher education is inconceivable without sports. It never seems to occur to anybody that sports have nothing to do with education. Even in a Division III college like my own the athletic budget equals academic programming. Or take popular culture. The average college dorm room looks like a Radio Shack. Students are hard wired to the world of “technopia,” electronic nomads wandering confusedly through the virtual world. This induces a kind of amnesia that little disposes them to see beyond the social horizon of their world or, as we put it earlier, to intervene critically in how they have been produced.

**Brown:** Some might think this a cynical view.

**Murchland:** Surely not. I would hope a realistic view. Public schools are a mess. Colleges are becoming body dumps and our universities are increasingly compromised by a commitment to technological imperatives that are leading we know not where.



My point is that we are educating a successor generation to a very self-indulgent and shallow lifestyle and we are going to have to pay a price for that.

**Brown:** In a 1979 piece, Robert McClintock argued “for the Greeks, the purpose of education was to suit free men, not to make them free.” But he notes that in our current civic environment —

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There is no purpose for liberal education worthy of free persons, for the simple reason that there is no place for free persons... An abstract division of activity [in schools, universities, philanthropies, civic organizations, farms, factories, unions, corporate offices, advertising agencies, public bureaucracies, publishing houses, law offices, churches, courts and clubs] has been successfully imposed upon public life.

How would you respond to McClintock’s rather depressing conclusion?

**Murchland:** That’s a very tough question, because it raises the deep philosophical question of freedom. And freedom is always at risk. There is a rhetoric of freedom that prevails in our political discourse and people tend to think they are free. But even in the best of times there is not very much of it around. In a recent *Civic Arts Review* we published an article on “The Persistence of Slavery.” The author argued, like McClintock, that one of the great paradoxes of contemporary democracy is that although we moderns imagine ourselves socially, morally, and politically freer than ever, we blithely converse with the universe in wholly deterministic terms that almost without exception make us victims of forces beyond our control. Compared to the horrors of our time, ancient slavery was a relatively benign institution. When I get seniors in my existentialism seminar, which is all about freedom, they express surprise. “I’ve never heard anything about that in my four years here,” is not an uncommon reaction. I have the sense that students don’t think they are very free. Most of the academic disciplines are resolutely deterministic conveying the idea that we humans are just like the rest of creation in that we are subject to the laws of chemistry and physics. The most strenuous work I do as a teacher is trying to convince them that they are free. I have to rely on the big guns to make the case — Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Thoreau especially.

I think it is probably true that for the Greeks, liberal education was for free men and not to make them free. But that is because they thought of freedom as opposed to slavery. Today, we are inclined to think that freedom, insofar as we have it, is an achievement and think of liberal arts as the freeing arts in the sense of helping us become free. That, at any rate, is how I think. The existential thinkers have made the strongest case for freedom. But even they don't claim too much. They could agree with the descriptive part of what McClintock says without buying his conclusion. Freedom for them is not a sun that illumines our universe but rather a small pinpoint of light that has to be protected against a surrounding sea of darkness. That struggle is what makes us authentically human.

**Brown:** Have you enjoyed your career in academia?

**Murchland:** I liked teaching. Actually, I think of myself more as an intellectual than an academic. The difference is that intellectuals are interested in ideas and academics don't tend to be. They are interested in the ideas of their discipline but that is a different matter. That is why I have always kept one foot outside of academia. I have done a lot of journalism; I have been an environmental activist; for years I worked for Habitat for Humanity; and, of course, I have had a long association with the Kettering Foundation, which was like getting a second Ph.D. By such strategies I have escaped at least some of the encephalic pitfalls of academia.

**Brown:** Do you have any final thoughts to close our interview?

**Murchland:** It occurs to me in conversations of this sort that we expect terms like democracy, liberal education, freedom, and the like to do a lot of heavy lifting. But in reality they are quite low-yield ideas. The best we can expect is incremental gains. That is certainly true of any curriculum reform we envisage. There are no wholesale solutions to any of our big problems. William James spoke of meliorism to make the point that the world can be improved but we can't improve it very much at any given time. Still we have a moral mission to make the effort. The melioristic approach it seems to me is best and most likely to ward off the temptation to cynicism and negativism. Discussions of this sort can easily lead to.

**Brown:** Thank you, Bernie.

# THE UNIVERSITY ROLE IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: SERVING AS A SPARK TO COMMUNITY-BUILDING

By Christa Daryl Slaton

Throughout my academic life, both as a student and a professor, I have never lost sight of where I began my academic pursuits and how my personal journey in education has been influenced and facilitated by those whom I sought to emulate. As an insecure student from a working-class background, I often felt inadequate and ill prepared for the challenges of higher education. Yet, I found within the academy several professors who recognized my thirst for knowledge and saw my potential for accomplishing goals that I believed were beyond my reach. They did more than teach; they listened. They cared about more than demonstrating their expertise — they also empowered me by imparting knowledge that would increase my sense of efficacy and that would diminish my dependence on them for answers to questions.

As I experienced the transformational process of moving from feelings of isolation and inadequacy in graduate school at the University of Hawaii to the exhilarating effects of assisting political science professors on research projects designed to engage citizens in representative government, I realized my professional path would be guided by the question: How could I use my expertise to help others realize and fulfill their potential to become effective democratic citizens? In the course of my research in deliberative public opinion polling and alternative dispute resolution, I came to realize that citizens have far greater capacity for decision making, deliberating, collaborating, and striving for the common good than is often presumed or expressed in academic literature. As my professors had seen in me, I saw citizens' competence to deal with complex issues and I recognized their untapped potential to work together to address public policy issues. This perspective guided

my research approach as I, a University of Auburn professor, entered an impoverished, polarized rural community in Alabama.

As a land grant university, the university's mission is to improve the lives of Alabamians and to strengthen the communities in which they live. For the last five years, the university has focused many of its efforts in the Black Belt region, which is named for a deposit of dark, fertile soil extending from Mississippi's border through the heart of Alabama. This region was once the backbone of the state's agricultural economy. Today, the region is besieged by pervasive poverty and economic stagnation — the worst in the nation by most standards. My research was concentrated in Uniontown, one of the poorest communities in the region — a community where hopelessness, frustration, and distrust were prevalent among the residents.

The year prior to my research in Uniontown, a coalition of seven universities in the state created a partnership with state and federal agencies to guide the city in developing a strategic plan. Although their intent was to engage a broad group of citizens in the planning process, the university outreach personnel worked through the mayor, who personally selected the citizens to be involved in the process.

While there was enthusiastic involvement from members outside of Uniontown, the participation of local citizens was limited. The kick-off rally for the strategic-planning process included more outsiders than citizens. Only one white resident in the predominately African American community participated. Young people were conspicuously absent. Nevertheless, university outreach faculty proceeded with the biweekly meetings with the small group of residents and produced a draft of the "Uniontown 2020" strategic plan. At this point, I was invited into the project to expand citizen input as the draft was disseminated for discussion and revision.

As a newcomer to the planning process and an outsider who lived more than a hundred miles from the town, I spent most of my time in the initial meetings as an observer, listening to the participants and taking extensive notes. My early assessment during this phase was that the plan was not community-generated. It was a professionally prepared document that relied largely on outside expertise and one that presented a grand image for a revitalized community. The draft did not establish priorities or detail how the community would proceed to accomplish its lofty goals.

My first year in the project was immensely educational and frustrating. It was the first time I had engaged in a community project that was organized so hierarchically and was so dominated by outside experts. I have long adhered to Carl Friedrich's view of public policy-making — experts should be on tap, not on top. Contrary to that view, each meeting was dominated by white professionals who lived outside the community. The local residents, most of whom were professional, middle-aged African Americans, attended sporadically and sat passively throughout most of the planning sessions.

Although my university colleagues recognized the imbalance in the participation, they drew different conclusions than I. The passivity of the local residents led them to conclude that the residents lacked “leadership capacity” and this presented further evidence that the outside experts needed to lead them through the planning process. I, on the other hand, concluded that the “experts” needed to be more circumspect. The Uniontown participants included a doctor, a former school principal, a city council member, and a minister. How, I wondered, could these accomplished individuals lack “leadership capacity”? Why were they so uninvolved in the process? To my colleagues, the completion of the strategic plan was a *sine qua non* for success. While I concurred that this was a worthy goal and an important element in improving the governance in the town, I also believed that the plan would be insufficient and potentially harmful if it did not engage diverse citizens in the process.

My prior research led me to question our top-down approach to the community. My observations led me to hypothesize that the assembled citizens did not believe their voices were heard or valued. Even though all the local participants had been hand-picked by the mayor, he was a leader with his own vision and goals and appeared to value loyal disciples. He was respected by the members of the group because he genuinely cared about the greater good and he worked tirelessly to improve the community. Yet his tenacious commitment to *his* vision left many who had different concepts of how to reinvigorate the economic and civic life feeling shut out.



It was my view that the close relationship between the university outreach workers and the mayor fostered the disengagement of the citizens.

As my colleagues and I discussed how citizen participation could be broadened in the next phase of the strategic-planning process, which would establish priorities and develop implementation strategies, I proposed a less traditional approach to attracting citizens. It is a common phenomenon in strategic planning to utilize the “blue-ribbon commission” model of citizen input, which taps elites in the community. A more egalitarian and widely used model is the open public hearing that invites all citizens to attend. This model, however, tends to attract those citizens who are already actively engaged in the community and it can often attract polarizing, vested interests that seek a particular agenda that favors one segment of the population.

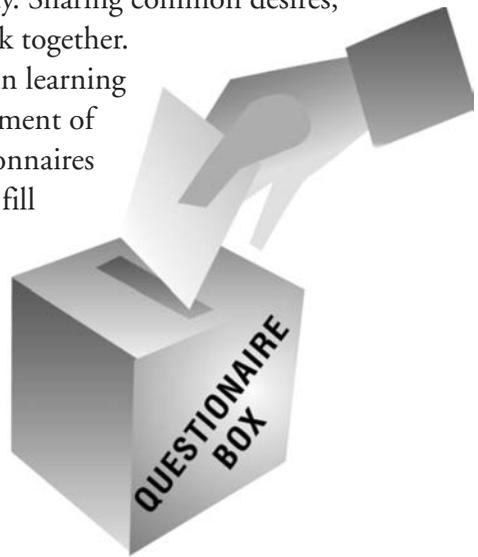
My dissertation research in deliberative public opinion polling, which included 400 to 1,200 randomly selected participants in 12 projects, taught me that there is an enormous latent democratic capacity in American public life. These findings are consistent with Ned Crosby’s work on *citizen juries* or *policy juries*, James Fishkin’s Deliberative Poll, and Alan Kay’s consensus-building polling process. Many more citizens are informed or aspire to be better informed than one might assume. Yet, citizens often lack the belief that those in power care what they think. I, therefore, chose to use a more grassroots or democratic approach to broadening citizen participation while my colleagues continued to work exclusively through the mayor to identify additional citizens to be involved in the process.

With the assistance of a graduate student and a staff member in the university’s outreach office, I began to conduct interviews throughout the town. The university hired a local resident to provide administrative assistance and to serve as a liaison between the university, the mayor, and the local residents. The four of us represented age, race, and gender diversity. We also had different personalities and political perspectives. This diversity helped us create a synergistic research team that could reach into many different facets of the community. We gathered varied perspectives on the history of the town and the problems and promises residents saw in efforts to invigorate the economic and civic life in the community. In discussions with educators, business owners, and public housing staff, we detected a combination

*In discussions with educators, business owners, and public housing staff, we detected a combination of hope and despair.*

of hope and despair. Most remembered the prosperity of the community when the region was the backbone of the state's agricultural economy and was the site of several factories. They all wanted to recapture the past glory because they were emotionally rooted to the place of their birth, their family connections, and their land. The departure of industry and the decrease in farming only magnified the polarization among the 3,500 residents. Each person placed blame for the decline on different segments of the community. Yet, each person interviewed expressed a love of small-town life, a pride in the history of the town, and a desire to aid in rejuvenating the community. Sharing common desires, they lacked a sense of how to work together.

To immerse ourselves more in learning from a larger and more varied segment of the community, we placed questionnaires all over town that residents could fill out and place in boxes located in shopping areas, government buildings, and recreational sites. We asked two questions: (1) What do you like about your town? and (2) What would you change about your town? When there was minimal response to this open inquiry that



allowed anonymity of the respondents, we took to the streets of Uniontown. After driving three hours from the university to the town, we would spend the rest of the day visiting government offices and businesses and walking the streets meeting and conversing with residents. We would introduce ourselves and briefly explain that we were in the community to assist them in planning for the future. We spent most of our time getting to know them, learning about their interests and activities, and discovering how they were rooted in the community. We also asked each person to fill out the brief survey. Not only did most residents complete the questionnaires, but they expanded on their comments to us personally. We shared many lively exchanges with residents who ranged in age from high school students to senior citizens.

As we spent more time in Uniontown, we found ourselves welcomed by those we had never met. Citizens would go out of their way to come shake our hands, thank us for being in town,

and offer to help us any way they could. All of this goodwill came about purely on the basis of our asking questions, listening, and demonstrating a genuine desire to help them work together to achieve their goals. It was an extraordinarily different dynamic between the community residents and the university “experts” than I had witnessed in my early involvement in the Uniontown meetings.

A surprising finding of our surveying the town was the commonality in the responses. Regardless of age, race, or occupation, the residents largely identified the same things they liked about the town and what they wanted to change. There was much less racial polarization on issues than the outsiders and many local leaders had presumed. We saw this as an extremely important finding that we could utilize to bring residents together in collaborative, deliberative discussion to give authenticity, life, and energy to the strategic-planning process.

Our next step was to hold public meetings to create the public space for the citizen dialogue. My previous research indicated that if we wanted to attract citizens from varied walks of life, we needed to *actively* recruit participation. Demographic data revealed that more than 90 percent of the Uniontown residents belonged to 1 of the 20 churches in town. These churches were as varied as the stately Episcopal Church attended only by whites and the historic, grand Baptist church founded by former slaves; churches in the most prosperous areas and those in the poorest. We believed that if each church sent at least one member to the public meetings, we could have racial and economic diversity in the meetings. We sent letters to each church explaining the purpose of the meetings and stressing the importance of encouraging all concerned citizens to attend. To help assure a mix in ages and gender, we developed a random scheme and requested that churches send at least one of their members who represented a specific gender and particular age range.

This plan was largely a failure since few attendees at the initial meeting came as a result of letters sent to the churches. Nevertheless, we attracted some participants through this method — a minister and his schoolteacher wife and a school janitor and his wife and teenage daughter. Others were recruited through our interviews and chance encounters. We extended personal invitations to each person we met, including a longtime resident we approached just hours before the meeting. He expressed the view

*In a few weeks,  
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and whites  
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dramatically.*

that no one cared what he thought and he believed these types of activities were a waste of time. We assured each person we invited that *we* really valued their input and that their contributions would help make the event successful. It is important to note that the gentleman who thought no one cared about his views became one of the most influential members of the group and served as a marvelous resource for historical background, explanation of the political processes in town, and identification of persons to involve in our activities.

Several months after adopting a more democratic model for broadening citizen involvement in the planning process, the mayor, with whom my colleagues had partnered, was soundly defeated in his re-election bid. The new mayor, a strong critic of the autocratic style of the outgoing mayor, distrusted everyone from Auburn University. He believed the strategic-planning process had intentionally excluded many in the community — which, in fact, it had since the mayor selected only his political supporters. The strategic plan was tossed aside. This actually became a blessing in disguise. Now we were able to facilitate the process by which local citizens articulated *their* visions and determined how *they* would go about achieving them.

Over the next two years, we met biweekly with an energized group of citizens who labeled themselves “Uniontown Cares.” They selected a logo designed by a high school student that expressed their purpose “to promote courage, wisdom, and power.” Over time, the group grew in size from approximately a dozen African American citizens, who expressed disenchantment with government officials and frustration over their inability to effect positive change, to a group of more than three dozen, which included whites, elected officials, and high school students. From the outset, they wanted to be more than a talking group — they wanted action. Their activities have included several fundraisers to address community needs, clean-up and beautification projects, and celebratory activities, such as parades and banquets.

This collaboration did not emerge instantaneously. Initially, the racial polarization in the group was obvious in their seating patterns and exchanges at meetings. As we experimented with different seating arrangements (rows of chairs, circle of chairs, long tables, small tables), we found a way to alter segregated seating. By actively soliciting input from the less talkative participants, we were able to initiate a dialogue between blacks and whites. In a

few weeks, the interaction between blacks and whites changed dramatically. They began sitting side-by-side, patting each other on the back, shaking hands, complimenting one another, and chatting informally before and after meetings.

My mediation background offered some insights about how to conduct the public meetings. In the first place, the university personnel did not control or dominate the meetings. I saw our role as mediators — neutral third parties who facilitated communication and did very little talking in the sessions. We discovered we could most serve the community by active listening and using communication skills to help them talk to one another to facilitate the process of deliberation among them. Consistent with most public meetings, an agenda was developed for each meeting and was widely disseminated. Yet, we did not adhere rigidly to the agenda and were not guided by *Robert's Rules of Order*. In fact, some of our most fruitful discussions were those that deviated from the formal agenda and led participants to reminisce, to engage in witty exchanges, and to brainstorm about new ideas and approaches.

The relationship between “Uniontown Cares” and the elected leaders was strained in the early months. A heated exchange between local officials and residents during the first month led a university outreach faculty member, who was observing the meeting, to publicly chide residents about their inappropriate behavior and unproductive hostility. He had come to Uniontown to teach leadership skills and used the meeting to assert his expertise in that area. Feeling scolded and dismissed, the residents promptly told him he was out of order. They told him he was an outsider who knew nothing about their problems and they did not appreciate his telling them how to express themselves.

Some of my colleagues saw this exchange as an indication that the group was plagued by angry anarchists and needed to be reigned in by professionals who knew how to control emotional outbursts. I held a different view. One of the components of successful conflict resolution is allowing the parties to vent. These residents had not used profane language and had not attacked anyone's character, but they did express in very candid terms their dissatisfaction with elected officials and their frustration at not being heard.

It took awhile before elected officials returned to the “Uniontown Cares” meetings. In the meantime, we worked with

*It took less than a year for the divide between government and citizens to close.*

residents to identify their goals, to tackle projects to improve the community, and to provide research and resources that were useful to their activities. We also encouraged them to express their appreciation every time they received assistance from government officials, to attend city council meetings, and to invite collaboration from government when it would benefit the community. It took less than a year for the divide between government and citizens to close. The new mayor learned that by supporting the initiatives of citizens, he would get more accomplished. The residents learned that their working together and approaching elected officials with concrete plans and implementation strategies was a far more productive technique than playing more passive roles that entailed reacting to action or inaction by the government.

In the last year “Uniontown Cares” has turned itself into a legally recognized, nonprofit group designed to serve the community. Its elected officers represent the gender, racial, occupational, and age mix of the town. The mayor’s mother, the current president of the group, embraced me after one of our meetings and commented on her assessment of Auburn University’s role in the community. She cheerfully stated, “You’re the spark that brought this town to life.” It is gratifying to see the enthusiasm exhibited by residents who are united in their love of their town and see them recognize their own abilities to make a difference by working together to address social, economic, and political problems.

What was the university’s role? We listened. We got to know the citizens. We saw their talents, their commitment, and their energy. We primarily served as mediators, who aided them in listening to one another, in recognizing their common vision, and in moving beyond feelings of frustration and isolation to a sense of shared possibilities. For me personally, I saw the extension of my professors’ influence on my life. In helping me recognize my potential, they opened my eyes to the potential in others. Through their encouragement, they got me to see past my limitations and to see the wonderful possibilities before me. And through my activities in Uniontown, I have come to learn how rewarding it is to encourage and see others emerge more confident and competent in their endeavors.

# THE WRITING CLASSROOM AS A LABORATORY FOR DEMOCRACY

## An interview with Don Rothman

*David Brown, coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange, sought out Don Rothman at the University of California Santa Cruz, who for more than 30 years has taught writing as Rothman puts it, “as if the world depended on it.” Brown was interested in exploring Rothman’s passion for linking his work with undergraduates to community engagement.*

**Brown:** You have characterized much of your work, Don, as “aspiring to realize the promise of literacy to enhance democracy.” What kind of “democracy” do you have in mind, and how does the teaching of writing help teachers and students “to participate more fully in civic life?”

**Rothman:** I have a particular interest in those aspects of democracy that require us to be aware of and conscientious about the nature of persuasion. To the extent that democracy expresses our aspirations to sustain public discourse for the purpose of enhancing the public good, its health depends on nurturing certain habits of mind and skills. Over three decades of teaching writing, I have come to see quite vividly literacy’s potential to enhance democracy, especially around the intellectual and social practices that make nonviolent persuasion possible. Literacy, of course, doesn’t guarantee freedom of expression, but writing, in particular, offers opportunities for people to counter alienation, isolation, and selfishness that undermine democracy. Too bad it isn’t usually taught with this in mind.

My students, for the most part, think of persuasion as coercion and, therefore, are reluctant to embrace the challenge to write persuasively. Like the rest of us, they have been bombarded by advertising and many do not want to intrude on others’ spaces in an effort to change their minds or urge them to act in certain ways. It’s as though persuasion is an ugly word that reveals a desire to abuse others rather than an act of social responsibility that can be performed with respect, even love. I try to direct students’ attention to the humane aspects of persuasion.

**Brown:** Could you say more about the role of persuasion in your teaching?

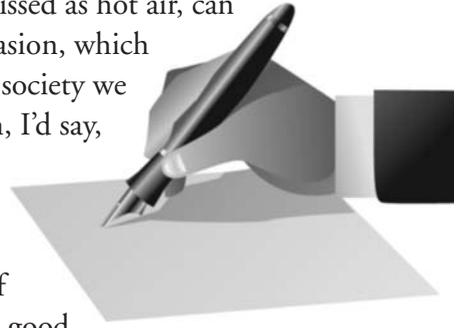
**Rothman:** I've been trying to understand teaching as an effort in noncoercive persuasion. As I now see it, I want to persuade students, mostly by example, to embrace the value of generative questions and not insist only on definitive answers. I want them to think about how a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing, and it often feels as though their willingness to explore this possibility depends on something like persuasion, which I keep trying to shape in the form of invitation. I want to persuade them to notice the pleasure in moving between the poles of personal experience and public discourse; the pleasure that comes from thinking with other people whose ideas fill your brain like dreams. I've come to assume that my students need new ways of thinking about themselves as learners in order to become more fully, thoughtful makers of the world. It's their resistance to this, I suppose, that makes persuasion a recurring aspect of my teaching.

One widespread belief regarding persuasion is that one should never weaken one's position by devoting much space to the other side. I can't tell you how often my students register surprise when I suggest that compelling essays mostly focus on issues about which thoughtful people disagree, and that the substance of that disagreement should be evident in their essays. During class conversations, we often notice how our political leaders rarely express respect for others' views that have shaped their own, and they avoid like the plague describing how they have been persuaded to change their minds by others' arguments. To be strong, it seems, is to be constantly resolute. (Othello's disastrous version of this: "To be once in doubt is to be resolved.") We have almost no public models revealing how persuasion based on logic and reason can be integral to elevating our collective intelligence about crucial issues. It's no wonder that persuasion is seen by so many as bad manners. It seems to me that democracy requires a kind of patience to listen to what others have to say and to work toward policies that are informed by diverse thinking. That means learning how to sustain other people's thinking and not just one's own. Writing can be really good for that.

To teach writing to enhance students' participation in civic life is to create a space in which we reclaim the role of persuasion in our public discourse. This involves motivating students to take certain kinds of risks and making sure that they understand how

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much is actually at stake in their learning to sustain conversation on issues about which we disagree. It involves a self-consciousness about how we inadvertently silence other people when we really need their insights. It also involves helping university students to reflect on how rhetoric, so often dismissed as hot air, can also be understood as the art of persuasion, which has a great deal to do with the sort of society we want to live in. The writing classroom, I'd say, is a fine laboratory for certain aspects of democracy, especially those that require us to honor individual intelligence and preference in the context of determining and protecting the larger good.



**Brown:** I have been interested in your own writing as well. You have said that “writing offers us a nonviolent way to negotiate difference, to sustain dialogue, and to honor our capacity to persuade without coercion,” and that writing gives people an opportunity “to explore what they weren’t altogether ready to say.” Does that mean that democratic deliberation centered on dialogue, not writing, is inadequate?

**Rothman:** Dialogue is always at the center of writing, so far as I am concerned. Whether we are writing to ourselves and imagining a self that urges us on, or to others, whom we also have to imagine as we compose, we write within relationships. What I have learned is that writing can be the result of generative dialogue and it can lead us back to dialogue. So many of my students are not practiced at talking in class, but they are, obviously, talking on cell phones and to friends all day. The classroom (like other public forums) has not always been a safe place to talk, and it certainly has not been a safe place to write. Many of them find that writing, especially their notes in response to readings, their in-class responses to each other’s ideas written during a five-minute pause in the conversation, and their more formal essays prepare them to more effectively enter classroom conversation. If a class works, students leave motivated to continue the dialogue both in conversation and in writing. I have to make sure to stay out of the way when they return to class expecting to share what they’ve done with these ideas since we last met. Through my open letters to the class, I make sure that my musings about our recent conversations are also available to them.

**Brown:** Open letters? How do they work?

*Writing slows things down and by doing so enables students to gather their thoughts, select appropriate words, and assess what is at stake in expressing their views.*

**Rothman:** For many years I have written three or four letters to my class per term, usually responding to unfinished discussions or representing my own after-class meanderings that I want to share. I make copies of these letters and encourage students to write back. When they do, especially if they read their responses aloud or distribute copies of their letters, we often expand our sense of community, however temporary it is. Moreover, we get to talk about how reading and hearing letters addressed to the class enable us to listen to one another differently and to notice how we tune into each other's writing voices. Reading aloud enables one to try on different voices and to hear oneself in the context of a group. It's a little like catching a glimpse of yourself reflected unfamiliarly in the window of a parked car as you walk by. "That's also me." Students often observe that hearing someone read her prose aloud deepens their appreciation for that person and creates a bit of solidarity around how hard it can be to write what you mean. Most important, what we write shapes what we talk about, and we recognize that the texts we're reading emerge from someone's impulse to communicate, something I cannot assume that students have already discovered.



**Brown:** Please go on...

**Rothman:** Disagreement is always on my mind as a teacher of writing because so many of my students, for cultural, class, personal, and gender-related reasons, are afraid to disagree, especially with authorities. This means that they have to learn to resist a text, to challenge teachers, and to reject ideas that emerge during class discussions. Unpracticed at disagreeing in the classroom (surely not in their lives elsewhere!) they have to learn the codes for disagreement in the university and decide which of them they will try out. As newcomers to university culture, the task is daunting, since fluency, vocabulary, cadence, all seem to have exaggerated importance to beginners. Writing slows things down and by doing so enables students to gather their thoughts, select appropriate words, and assess what is at stake in expressing their views. Spontaneous conversation is important, but it's clear to me that writing in the midst of a heated conversation allows many more voices to be heard in the long run.

I think of my classes as places where students can learn, with the help of writing, supportive disagreement (that sustains the conversation) and critical agreement (that links agreement to further analysis rather than simply head nodding). I have a story that illustrates one dimension of this. A deaf student in my class let me know by TTY, a machine that allows a deaf person to type a message that can be responded to in real time, that her interpreter was ill and wouldn't be in class. What to do? We wrote back and forth until we came up with a solution. We asked class members to take turns writing on the chalkboard tracing the trajectory of the conversation. Of course, this slowed the conversation down, since we respected our scribe's struggles to keep up. It did something else, as well. Students who had barely spoken entered the conversation. When I asked them about it they told us that they usually felt as though they were a few moments behind everyone else, and while they had plenty to say, their timing was off. On this day, the pacing and rhythm made room for their voices. Writing slowed us all down, and we benefited by having access to everyone's intelligence. By attending to the needs of someone who is deaf, we also, quite wonderfully, helped others.

One more thing about writing and nonviolent persuasion. Most of my students remember being told that the opening line of an essay should "hook" the reader. But they never recall being taught anything about how to sustain a reader's interest, how to invite a reader to think together with you, and how to acknowledge that something important is at stake in a piece of writing. As we explore the many possible relationships one can try to create with one's reader, we discover how much we actually know about persuasion. As children, we are experts at using what we know about our parents' relationship with each other to get what we want. As writers, trying to persuade readers to take their ideas seriously, students need to consult what they know about their readers, often but not always their professors. They realize that while raising their voices may persuade a younger brother to take out the garbage, or the threat of violence may work in some other context, persuasion often requires us to exercise our capacity to walk in another's shoes.

**Brown:** That's important ...  
learning to walk in another's shoes.



**Rothman:** It means being able to describe quite accurately what you disagree with, presenting respectfully the logic of a misguided argument. This is news to my students, and it transforms their understanding of citation conventions, which they come to appreciate as evidence of how ideas build on other ideas, and how nurturing our capacity to sustain inquiry sometimes requires attention to how and what other people think.

These are intellectual strategies that are alternatives to screaming, bombing, threatening, and humiliating. This is what I mean when I say that writing can enhance the effectiveness of negotiations among warring nations and hostile diplomats. When I consulted for the Kellogg Foundation and led writing workshops for Kellogg Fellows, we had a chance to explore the role of writing in community organizing, health policy management, and medical practice. Unfortunately, writing is rarely taught in schools as a tool for nonviolent persuasion or as a multifaceted activity whose effectiveness often requires us to enhance our empathy. It is rarely taught as a tool for exploring ways to live together.

In the institutes that I have led for teachers, we test writing's capacity to help us pay attention to each other. By reading aloud unpolished and polished writing, we often learn something about how being useful to each other as individuals empowers us as professionals to make our ideas more public and to explore leadership possibilities in our communities. Teachers who write with each other during a four-week summer institute often try to re-create this space with colleagues during faculty meetings. When they can count on principals to support them, teacher-writers have led writing workshops for parents of their students and, of course, the children benefit from membership in a community that has writing on its mind.

**Brown:** Is it writing itself or what happens in certain writing classes that can enhance people's involvement in democratic process?

**Rothman:** If I think of my beginning students at the university, I notice that they think of writing as a test. It is designed by teachers to assess their learning. *(In graduate school, I dreamed that John Milton and my father were, alternately, sitting on a throne. As I approached him/them to talk, Milton handed me a list of words and said I'd be punished if I used any words that weren't on that list. I grew very agitated and screamed out that if language were this kind of prison I'd go crazy. When I awoke, I realized that for my middle*

*class students at UC Berkeley and for my working-class community college night students, many Vietnam vets, writing was using someone else's words and fearing that one would be punished for getting it wrong.)* These students come to see that while writing will probably continue to be a test in some contexts, it is also a way to think, to discover new ideas, to explore feelings and, importantly, to enter a public space, the marketplace of ideas.

*The momentum of writing for oneself carries us out into the world.*

If one thinks of writing both as a way of accessing one's inner life and of entering public life, then it can enhance our engagement with democracy. This is complicated, and I can't claim to understand it clearly enough, but sometimes we write to explore an idea or an experience that is bothering us, that requires sorting out. In the process, we discover that we need to know what others think or we are compelled to let them know what we have discovered. Mostly, we talk to friends, colleagues, and family in such cases. But at times we write our way from the personal to the public, and we produce a letter to the editor, an op-ed piece, an article for a newsletter or journal. The momentum of writing for oneself carries us out into the world. Regrettably, many teachers are, like my students, reluctant to do this sort of writing, so they are eerily silent in our public discussion about educational reform.

I want my students and the teachers with whom I work to experience that momentum from the inner to the outer. I design my classes and institutes to encourage precisely this trajectory.

**Brown:** What else do you want them to experience?

**Rothman:** I also want them to experience the momentum of going from the public to the private, to ask themselves not only, "What am I inspired to write today?" but also, "What does the world/my community need me to write today?" This, I think, is very important and very neglected in the teaching of writing, which has (understandably) focused a great deal of attention on encouraging students to narrate what is most immediately important in their personal lives. It makes sense to start with the familiar. It may also make sense to start with the narrative. But if motivation is the issue, then we shouldn't neglect being useful in our efforts to teach writing, for being useful to others is surely motivating.

If I'm right that most students think of writing as a form of testing, then we can understand why so many high school and college graduates hate to write, and why connecting writing to democracy might seem off the wall.

**Brown:** I like very much something you wrote about your “authority” as a teacher:

To help them become stronger writers, indeed, involved citizens, I want them to become authorities as well. Whether I like it or even notice it, however, students have permission on their minds. Like other teachers, I want to use my authority to help them claim theirs.

How do you do that in the classroom?

**Rothman:** Many of my students are the first in their families to attend college. While they may be underprepared when they arrive, they work hard and often see themselves as scouts for younger brothers, sisters, and cousins, and as redemption for moms and dads in their quest to succeed. Many have chosen to major in science because they are under the misapprehension that they will not have to write in Biology or Chemistry. They know racism and poverty, but they assume that what they know will not be appreciated at the university. They assume that the areas in which they can claim some authority by virtue of 18 years of survival will be of little value in higher education.

My effort to help them become stronger writers engages a host of contradictions. I want them to use what they know about the world to illuminate our class inquiry, and I want them to become passionate researchers of others’ scholarly work at the same time. I want them to claim a level of authority as writers, and I want them to step out of the way to engage others’ work. This is a difficult dance.

**Brown:** Difficult dance ... well put.

**Rothman:** Consider the student in my class on censorship who announced on the first day that she had to write something about her parents kicking her out of the house because she refused to attend church with them. She asked if she could make that her first paper instead of doing whatever I had assigned. Not wanting to get in her way, I agreed, and she submitted a long, thoughtful narrative of her rocky senior year in high school. Proudly handing it to me she said, “Now I’m ready to start your class!”

The next class meeting I returned her paper with the proposal that she delve into the scholarly work that might help her place her story against academic theory, in this case child development and religion. By accepting my challenge, she discovered, as so many university students do, that what she first thought of as only her story also belongs to a larger world, one that scholars

study and write about. When she presented her findings to the class, she also discovered peers whose experience resembled hers and who were grateful to know about the research.

I remember a young man in another class who was dumbfounded when he heard someone use the expression “blaming the victim” after we’d read *Death of a Salesman*. When he finally was able to speak, he explained that for most of his childhood he’d blamed his mother for allowing his father to beat her. “I never knew that others experienced that ... that it even had a name,” he said. His paper on the role of tragedy in the education of a doctor reminds me that being able to see one’s experience as part of historical, economic, and social realities is a major step in taking responsibility for shaping those realities. It is also a way to claim some authority as an author without succumbing to solipsism.

In my classes, students are invited to contribute to our collective intelligence about crucial issues. They give copies of their essays to others in class; they present their research findings on subjects that have emerged from our discussions; and they struggle to retain their personal integrity as academic and scholarly conventions tug at them. We have a lot of fun asking, “Why would anyone invent a semicolon?” and “How often in the next week can you find a passive construction behind which someone is trying to hide?” But we also ask, “How can these essays that I am writing be useful to someone other than me?”

**Brown:** What evidence do you have that it carries over to their public lives outside the classroom?

**Rothman:** I don’t want this to sound quite so easy. Sure, some of my first-year students sign up to do community service and a few are active in student government. A few read daily newspapers and make sure that classmates know about rallies and teach-ins on campus. But, for the most part, when I meet these frosh, they are quite limited in their awareness of public life beyond the importance of voting. I see them as beginners, not only as writers certainly, but as citizens. I would like the ten weeks that they spend with me in a writing class to awaken their imaginations about who they are in the context of exploring who we are and can be collectively. When I ask, “How would our society be different if everyone could write with some degree of pleasure and satisfaction?” I am hoping to bridge the huge gap separating the personal from the public. When I ask students to speculate about how the essays they are writing constitute not only chapters of

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their autobiographies but also chapters of our collective history, I am doing the same. It is in this spirit that I also ask why a country that prides itself on freedom of the press and freedom of speech educates so many people to be allergic to writing.

It's difficult, of course, for me to know the real impact of my classes, but students credit their change of major to these discussions and come back years later to say how the writing class changed them.

**Brown:** You have expressed surprise by what you learn "working in the margins of young people's prose...." Could you share a few examples of what you have learned?

**Rothman:** I have resided in the margins of students' writing for 35 years. From this narrow perch I have learned a great deal about how powerfully marginalia can prompt students to grow and take risks and how easy it is to inadvertently discourage them. When I resort primarily to correcting errors, some of my students will thank me for paying attention to what they think is their major weakness. When I respond to the substance of their ideas, however, mostly asking questions, suggesting other ways to think and to organize their discussion, urging them to share what they've written in class, something much more important happens. If I write, "Our class really needs to hear this provocative idea," or "This really helps me understand what Baldwin is getting at, and I'm grateful to you for explaining it so clearly," something happens that often emboldens students to speak in class for the first time or ask to meet with me to continue what feels to them like a conversation.

The margins of student papers become a site for teaching. Committed to respecting how difficult it is for beginners to enter scholarly conversations, I have to confront my impatience as I scribble responses. In the margins and at the end of their essays, I try to sustain a relationship that will keep them writing and encourage them to put their ideas out in the world beyond me.

In the margins of student writing I have the chance to engage in something more than editing, something more like midwifery or coaching. From the margins I constantly confront my impulse to take over a student's work, to shape it in the image of my interests. It's the most humbling aspect of my job because it reveals where I am not yet adept at enacting what I aspire to as a teacher. I tell students, "You must help me to respond usefully to your writing by directing my responses, for if this isn't a partnership I may unknowingly get in your way."

I am also intrigued by the element of persuasion that is embedded in my teaching, as I said earlier. Committed to honoring students' intellectual growth, which requires them to take risks, I also try to persuade them to enter spaces in which premature certainty is dangerous and expertise difficult or impossible to come by. My marginalia are most useful, I'd say, when they pose authentic questions, answers to which I can't wait to hear.

**Brown:** You have asked your students over the years whether "beauty and justice should be in the same conversation" and speculated that "the desire to share beauty awakens an appetite to create justice." Could you say more about this connection and how it might help students to participate more fully in civic life?

**Rothman:** Encouraged by Elaine Scarry's provocative little book, *On Beauty and Being Just*, and by my presence on one of the most beautiful campuses in the world, I've been asking my students to consider whether beauty and justice belong in the same conversation.

My campus is full of deer. As I walk through the redwood forest I often come upon does and fawns. I usually stop to admire them, whispering, "How beautiful" to myself. A stranger comes up the path, slows as she sees why I have stopped. She walks closer to me, both of us transfixed by the presence of these lovely, delicate, agile creatures. Smiling and making eye contact, one of us says to the other, "They're beautiful, aren't they?"

Or, I am standing watching the sun set. The sky is brushed with familiar yet breathtaking, impossible reds, yellows, and blues. I whisper to myself. A stranger comes close. One of us speaks.

I recount these stories to my students. I ask them if they would feel intruded on by the stranger entering this sacred space. No, they say. It's even better to share it. I agree.

Scarry tells us that in the presence of beauty we are de-centered. We abandon the illusion that we are the center of the universe, and we seek to protect the objects or people in whose presence we experience generosity. In the act of sharing what is beautiful, it may occur to me that everyone has an equal claim



to this experience. Like Scarry, my students and I wonder if built into the smallest experiences of beauty is an impulse to notice the absence of symmetry in its availability. I ask: Can poverty or environmental degradation be distributed democratically? Some students choose to pursue projects that emerge from a question like this, including research on how decisions are made regarding public art like murals; the role of music in the Civil Rights movement; the influence of sexist advertising on women. We keep asking each other, “What are you learning about whether beauty and justice belong in the same conversation?”

This sort of inquiry doesn't lead to proofs. Rather, it honors speculation about the meaning of our encounters with deer and sunsets in the presence of strangers. If we agree that our impulse to share beauty with strangers is worth mulling over, then perhaps asking if justice can enter the conversation makes sense. Surely, this isn't the sort of inquiry that will attract everyone. But I've taught this class for three years now, reading Scarry, Robert Adams on photography and the revelation of form, Maxine Greene on educating the imagination for democracy, Jane Kramer on contested public art, Plato, Santayana, Freud, and Nancy Etcoff. Students have produced remarkably interesting writing and nurtured a classroom space that honors the possibility that what moves us most as individuals can also shape our engagement with societal issues, including justice. Students continue to connect the beauty found in nature and in works of art and the impulse to pay attention to economic and social imbalances.

My writing class on beauty and justice is largely an invitation to sustain inquiry around the possibility that our experience of beauty can lead us to recognize and perhaps struggle against injustice. Writing becomes a way to keep thinking, and as papers circulate among class members we come to appreciate how much we need each other in order to think. In fact, after we listen to each other read our writing aloud, we look at each other differently, and I continue to see that curiosity and, often, generosity as stepping stones on the path to a more engaged public life.

**Brown:** We've talked a lot about your work with students, but before we close, how does your biography and personal journey help to explain your work?

**Rothman:** I grew up in Brooklyn, New York, in the 1950s and early 1960s, on the cusp of profound social and political change. Many of my teachers had been activists whose lives were

transformed by the McCarthy era. They encouraged us cautiously to get involved in the civil rights and antinuclear weapons movements; they made sure that we knew about the power of writing to transform the world. Some of them taught as if the health of our society depended on our knowing this. My father raged against diverse forms of injustice and insisted on the power of books to improve the world.

As a child, I wrote to accompany myself, to make palpable the hauntings of my imagination. The adults in my life, my father especially, encouraged me to imagine a world that didn't exist. I learned the power of asking "What if...?" and "What if not...?" and in college I was drawn to literature and philosophy in order to find others with the same passion. I was thrilled by James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, mostly because he, like Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, and Danilo Dolci, with whom I conversed years later, didn't allow uncertainty and risk to obstruct his commitment to expose injustice. I was fortunate to have teachers who didn't hide their passion for discovery and who expected students to be creators of meaning.

In graduate school in the 1960s I studied renaissance prerevolutionary revenge tragedies, plays in which those responsible for maintaining justice were committing atrocious crimes, and I wondered if the antiwar protests and the organizing of the Black Panthers on the campuses where I studied and first taught were harbingers of revolution. I taught writing and post office test-preparation classes in churches and community centers, and many of my first students were black Vietnam vets who hoped that writing could help them put their lives back together. Much of my teaching has evolved from where I started. Since 1973, I have had the privilege of collaborating to build Oakes College at UC Santa Cruz and, until last year, to direct the Central California Writing Project. I am grateful to my UCSC Writing Program colleagues who are committed to helping students make writing the world as important as writing the word.

**Brown:** Thank you, Don.

# WOMEN, SOCIAL SCIENCE, AND PUBLIC WORK DURING THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

By R. Claire Snyder

Five years ago, I wrote an essay for the *Higher Education Exchange (HEE)* that asked how a group of academic research-scholars would go about reconstructing their own history in light of its civic purposes. My essay provided one approach to answering that question by tracing the original civic purposes of the American Social Science Association (ASSA). I found that when that organization disintegrated, there emerged two distinct groups of researchers: *academic social science scholars* who pursued their work within the newly created modern research universities, such as Johns Hopkins, Columbia, and the University of Chicago, and *nonacademic social science scholars* who continued to vigorously advocate social reform and address public problems directly through their work with settlement houses, such as Hull House. This latter group included almost all of the female members of the ASSA, most of whom did not have a realistic opportunity to pursue academic careers in the new universities.

My original article concentrated on the male social scientists and only mentioned the women in passing. This article focuses on the women and surveys the ways in which higher education hindered or helped them do their public work. It asks not how a group of academic research-scholars would go about reconstructing their own history in light of its civic purposes, but rather whether examples from women's history might provide any insights or inspiration for those of us in academia who want to do public work.

## Women's Public Work

During the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, a wide range of women across the entire country — southern as well as northern, western as well as eastern, black as well as white, less

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privileged as well as affluent — entered civil society to do public work, engaging via benevolence associations, temperance unions, women’s clubs, and settlement houses, and in the abolitionist, labor, antilynching, and women’s suffrage movements. Their traditional responsibility to care for human needs in the family combined with a strong sense of public-spiritedness and a socially engaged interpretation of Christianity spurred women to leave the private realm of the family and take public action with others to address public problems. In the absence of government regulation of industry, protections for working people and children, and social programs for the needy, many women formed social movements to address the problems produced by the burgeoning market economy, and over time their work helped establish a more active and progressive government.

The nineteenth century was a time in which women were increasingly able to access higher education, and many women’s colleges were founded. When the social sciences developed mid-century, some women wanted to use that approach to further their public work. Many of these women joined or affiliated themselves with the ASSA, founded in 1865 by a group of citizens who wanted to use social science methods to help solve public problems, many of them by-products of the industrialization process. The organization’s mission was “to collect all facts, diffuse all knowledge, and stimulate all inquiry, which have a bearing on social welfare.” The first generation of social scientists — none of whom held doctorates, which were not offered in the U.S. at the time — saw no contradiction between espousing scientific objectivity and advocating social reform. To the contrary, they firmly believed that a scientific analysis of public problems would reveal solutions that would lead directly to positive social change.

Several factors contributed to the disintegration of this original effort, but one of the factors was the increasing demand for objectivity by the newly created modern research universities. As social science fragmented into the disciplines of anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology, a split developed between men, who pursued social science in universities and newly constructed government bureaus, and women, who pursued nonacademic social science research in settlement houses. Settlement houses functioned as centers of social research, where researchers lived and worked side by side with the people affected by the public problems they studied. Between 1886 and 1914,

women comprised 60 percent of settlement residents, and most of them were unmarried college graduates who had virtually no other career options at the time. They spent an average of ten years working in settlement houses before moving on. Often, these women published books and articles based on their research and experience. These mostly female *nonacademic social science scholars* used the same research methods as their academic peers, but they continued to seek knowledge for purposes of addressing public problems, while men in universities and government bureaus increasingly divorced their studies from any normative aims in the name of “objectivity.”

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the alternative way of doing social science that women developed gave rise to the emergence of social work as a profession, while the “male” approach to social science within the new modern state led to the development of public administration. These two new fields epitomize the advocacy/objectivity split. Eventually, however, many of the women who actively advocated social justice did end up finding a place in the federal government, as the United States went through the state-building process.

### **Combining Academic Scholarship with Public Work**

Nineteenth-century women strongly resisted the pull toward objectivity. While most women did not have a realistic chance of pursuing academic careers, that was not the case across the board. For example, Sophonisba Breckinridge earned a Ph.D. in political science and economics (both considered “male” disciplines) at the University of Chicago, as well as a law degree, and taught there from 1904 to 1942. Her students Edith and Grace Abbott both earned graduate degrees as well. Edith earned a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Chicago in 1905, and her sister Grace received a Master of Philosophy in political science two years later. Both sisters taught, conducted research, did social work, and organized for social reform in a variety of combinations. Edith held teaching and/or research positions at a number of institutions, including the Carnegie Institution, the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, the School of Sociology and Social Economics in England (which subsequently merged with the London School of Economics), Wellesley College, and the School of Social Service Administration at the University of

Chicago. Grace Abbot served as a public welfare professor at the University of Chicago, after years of public work and a career in the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, where she spearheaded the effort to pass the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act of 1921, the first federally funded social welfare measure in the United States.

Edith Abbott wanted to do public work in addition to her academic career and was able to do both by working with settlement houses, which provided a venue for combining theory with practice. She, her sister, and Breckinridge conducted research there that maintained an emphasis on the fact-finding approach of social science, but used that methodology for the purpose of better understanding conditions they wanted to change. The sisters made a good team. Grace's academic approach — her ability to think clearly from a detached perspective — combined well with Edith's more engaged use of social science methods. Together they acted as a moderating force vis-à-vis some of the more passionate residents of the settlement house. The Abbotts and Breckinridge published a number of books and articles based on their research.

## **Leaving the Academy to Do Public Work**

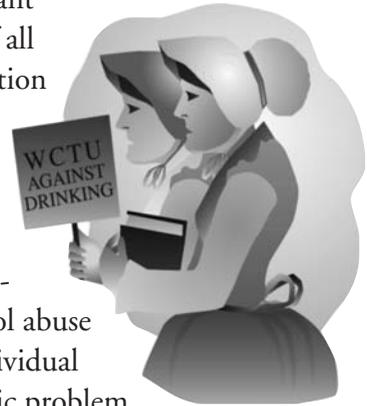
Frances Willard took a different path than Breckenridge and the Abbotts. Willard, an affiliate of the ASSA, ended up leaving an academic career in order to pursue public work more effectively. The nineteenth century was a period of increasing education for women, and Willard came from a family that highly valued education. Her mother had studied at Oberlin College — the first coeducational college — at a time when few women received higher education. The family recognized Frances' innate intellectual talents and gave her the best education that a young woman could receive at that time.

Willard was one of the few women who found a place in academe. In 1871 she founded the Evanston College for Ladies, introducing an innovative approach to women's education. Students had the choice of studying exclusively at the Ladies College or taking classes at its affiliated Northwestern University, if they wanted to pursue studies in traditionally male fields. Although they remained under the authority of the Ladies College, female students were allowed to earn a degree from Northwestern University. Willard pioneered this model to provide a supportive

environment for college women who otherwise would have to fend for themselves in male-dominated institutions. Willard's model of women's education was ultimately taken up by Radcliffe and Barnard (affiliates of Harvard and Columbia respectively).

Despite the huge success of her institutional approach and its extraordinary popularity among young women, Willard's work within academia was stymied when Charles Fowler took over as president of Northwestern and claimed authority over the women who studied at the university, thus torpedoing Willard's accomplishment. Northwestern University absorbed Evanston College (at which point Willard became its first dean of women). With her work undermined and facing increasing harassment by male students, Willard left academia and returned to her previous benevolence work, focusing her efforts on the temperance movement.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) exemplifies a women's association that links religious beliefs with social action that has a civic impact. That is to say, the WCTU was not simply a moral reform group, although it was that; it was also a civic organization that addressed the increasingly widespread public problem of what we today call alcoholism, but was then called the "sin of intemperance." Taverns and saloons had long functioned as important gathering places where male citizens of all social classes met together for conversation and ritualized drinking. However, this tradition also encouraged alcohol abuse that often led to financial hardship, psychological abandonment, and even physical abuse of women and children. Thus, the consequences of alcohol abuse devastated communities, as well as individual families, and so constituted a real public problem.



Under Willard's leadership, the WCTU transitioned from being a Protestant benevolent association to a major social reform organization with many foci. Understanding the desire of female citizens for civic engagement, Willard pioneered a "Do-Everything Policy" to address a wide array of public problems, including not only alcoholism, but also international drug trafficking, the sexual exploitation of women and children, poverty, prison reform, protections for working people, and

*The temperance movement taught women how to organize, fund raise, lobby, demonstrate, petition, and speak out about public problems.*

women's rights. In fact, Willard's study of public problems led her to conclude, by the end of her life, that poverty rather than alcohol abuse was the root cause of many public problems.

Participation in temperance organizations helped educate female citizens, teaching them important civic skills. That is, just like the abolitionist movement during the early part of the nineteenth century, the temperance movement taught women how to organize, fund raise, lobby, demonstrate, petition, and speak out about public problems. In fact, the temperance movement drew in a huge number of new female activists and played a key role in helping women gain a public voice on a variety of issues, including not only alcoholism, but also education, property and voting rights for women, labor organizing, prison reform, prostitution, pornography, and even birth control. Women learned leadership skills within the WCTU and then moved on to found other reform organizations that were even less moralistic and even more explicitly political.

### **The Impact of Higher Education and Social Science on Female Citizens**

Throughout her tenure as the president of the WCTU, Willard advocated for women's education. Higher education made a huge impact on the ability of female citizens to accomplish their public agenda. At the same time, the public work of Willard and others helped galvanize women across the country to do similar work in a variety of venues by providing a federated national organization through which women could take action. Thus women working both within and outside of the academy had a positive role in mobilizing new groups of women to work for social justice.

Female citizens were able to use the new social science methods to better pursue their public agenda and enhance their position in society. For example, women in Progressive-era Texas, like women elsewhere, developed new "scientific" approaches to homemaking and childrearing, a trend that both bolstered women's authority within the domestic realm and authorized their public roles as "municipal housekeepers." Armed with data, female citizens became champions of public health — clean drinking water, proper ventilation, municipal sanitation — and advocates of food safety and proper nutrition — causes about which male politicians were strangely unconcerned. The women hoped that

laborsaving devices in the home would allow time for them to assume a larger public role without neglecting their families. In addition, they focused a lot of energy on education, establishing kindergartens, improving public education, and extending higher education to women. They created both the “Girls’ Industrial School” and a home economics department at Texas A&M.

As in other parts of the country, Texas women mobilized to demand that the government pass laws to protect people from the ravages of the free market. Through their public work, female Texans learned from experience that many problems simply could not be adequately addressed by civic organizations acting alone, but rather required the cooperation of democratic government. Social reform required women to get involved in explicitly political work, like getting legislative sponsors for their bills and lobbying politicians for support. For example, women recognized that solving the problem of child labor would require state regulation. Through the force of their social movement, Texas women successfully demanded the enactment of laws restricting child labor, as well as reforming the juvenile justice system and establishing mandatory education. In addition, they got laws passed to: protect the food supply, institute minimum wage and maximum hour legislation for working women, found settlement houses, and abolish red-light districts.

Ironically, women’s exclusion from electoral politics helped transform them into active citizens. Their exclusion led to three interesting phenomena. First, because they could not vote, women had to mobilize in order to effect change. Consequently, they ended up having to engage in a more participatory form of democracy than men. Second, since they had to rely on networking and persuasion to accomplish their goals, women developed less-antagonistic relationships with governmental officials than did their male counterparts. Finally, however, the frustration engendered by the resistance of male politicians to women’s reform agenda motivated many previously conservative women to become suffragists, which benefited that movement greatly.

While many men also engaged in progressive reform efforts, women’s sustained work on social welfare issues led them to develop a progressive vision of government. For example, in Texas women’s emphasis on labor laws to protect children and female workers and on securing publicly funded education directly countered the southern tradition of limited government,

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low taxes, and local control — the idea that the smallest state best preserves human liberty. In the end, female Texans developed a much more active view of government than did their male counterparts, who (rightly) feared that social reforms would cost money, empower the national state, and hinder the ability of business and industry to exploit workers. Indeed, the experience of working for social reform within civil society made even conservative women more open to the idea of progressive government.

Thus, over time, nineteenth-century women came to see democratic government as an important partner with communities in public work. “Women expected state authority to enhance rather than inhibit their own power in community work.... [A] proactive state would require new positions, such as factory inspectors, pure food inspectors, and truant officers that women themselves might fill” (McArthur, 1998). Eventually, women’s public work formed the foundation for the construction of America’s minimalist social welfare state during the first part of the twentieth century (Muncy, 1991; Evans, 1997). Indeed Sara Evans has argued that “the entire concept of Social Security, government-sponsored insurance for the unemployed, the elderly, and fatherless children, as well as expanded public health programs, could be traced not only to innovations in western Europe but also to the earlier activities of female-led private charities, settlement houses, and the provisions of the Sheppard-Towner Act in the 1920s” (Evans, 1997). In other words, the American social welfare state developed, at least in part, in response to demands leveled by citizens acting within civil society.

Women, who were excluded from formal citizenship, formed voluntary organizations in the realm of civil society to take care of social welfare needs in the decades before America had a modern state. Thus, when the Great Depression hit, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt called for a New Deal, there were already women ready and waiting to staff the new agencies: “For more than a hundred years, women had painstakingly built a reform tradition on the politicization of domestic concerns and goals.... Female reformers had already laid the groundwork for a new concept of social responsibility for the poor and the unemployed.” With the advent of the New Deal, “a small but critical network of professionals and activists was in a position to bring their ideas to bear on the emerging shape of the welfare state” (Evans, 1997).

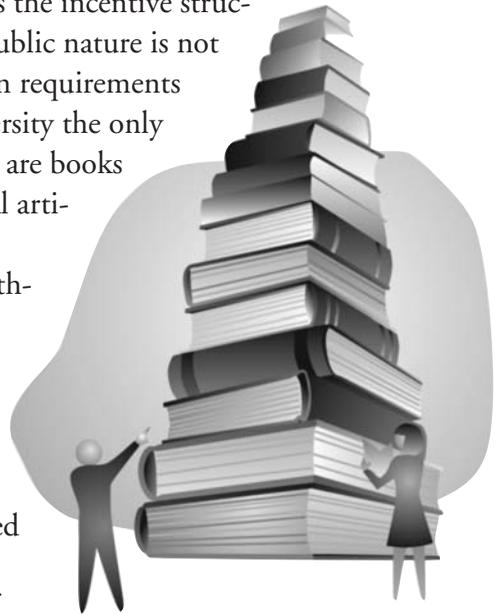
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## Personal Reflections

For the past few years, the Kettering Foundation has discussed ways to reconnect academic research scholars with the public or interest them in doing public scholarship or supporting public work. In many ways, the options available to today's academics are not much different than those available to women in the nineteenth century. First, you can do your academic work and hope that the citizens you educate will effectively pursue their own public agendas, like the Texas women did. Second, you can attempt to include public work in your research agenda and hope that you can still meet the requirements for tenure, taking the path of Breckinridge and the Abbotts. Finally, you can leave academia to focus your full energies on what you really care about, like Frances Willard.

In my own experience, I have found it quite challenging to think about doing public work on a tenure-track line at a research university. The main problem is the incentive structure. In general, research of a public nature is not rewarded. Of course publication requirements vary by school, but at my university the only publications that really “count” are books and blind-peer-reviewed journal articles. More pointedly, essays in journals like *HEE* count for nothing, despite its large readership and regardless of how scholarly the essay might be or how well received it is by university professors. In addition, the quantity of publications required is so high that it does not leave much time to do other types of research or writing.

My own work is fundamentally normative; it focuses on how to strengthen American democracy and engage citizens in public work. Academia, in general, still expects scholars in the social sciences to maintain a position of objectivity. As a political theorist, however, I have a little more room to maneuver because “normative political theory” is a recognized research area.



Nevertheless, I have encountered quite a bit of criticism for doing democratic work. For example, when I applied for my first tenure-track job and submitted my Kettering Foundation Occasional Paper *Shutting the Public Out of Politics* as a writing sample, I was told by a search committee member that one professor considered me “a narrow-minded ideologue” because of that publication. (I did not get the job. I was also unclear what ideology I was supposedly pushing.) Additionally, more than once, peer-reviewers have criticized my work for reading “like the op/ed page of the *New York Times*” because I have a political perspective.

When I came up for tenure, I provided an overview of my research agenda that discussed the connection between my academic work and the problems of American democracy. I was told to make my research agenda sound “less relevant.” While I balked at the suggestion, my advisor was right. I was more likely to get through the university promotion and tenure process if my work sounded theoretical and detached from real-world problems. Fortunately, I successfully navigated the tenure process and am now in a position to focus my research agenda fully on what I care about most, but it’s a sad commentary that academia has moved so far away from its civic roots.

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# EVERYDAY POLITICS

By Harry Boyte

Matthew Fery, Reviewer

There is a disease that runs rampant in the American political system. Its symptoms include apathy, disengagement, and a real lack of interest in politics and government. This disease plagues many communities and affects leaders at all levels of government. While the disease has no formal name, perhaps “the grand disconnect” is an appropriate description. Especially to younger generations, government is increasingly perceived as a field properly occupied by adult professionals only. The situation is troubling because leadership is developed through experience, not anointed by age or education. Leaders and thinkers are developed through many years of practice and experience. American democracy will weaken over time if the norm of disengagement among certain voting-age constituents becomes the rule, not the exception.

In *Everyday Politics*, Harry Boyte identifies several reasons why certain groups within American society are disengaged from participatory politics. First, the American political establishment acts increasingly as an elitist professional class that is out of touch with the average citizen. Second, ordinary citizens are intimidated by politics because of a prevailing political culture that rewards quantitative knowledge over basic intuition. Finally, in the wake of globalization’s seismic affect on the American labor market, citizens have a growing sense of powerlessness that discourages them from participating in politics.

Boyte contends that these problems have developed through the years alongside the growing ideological struggle between progressive and conservative populists. Progressive populists are essentially liberal Democrats who actively challenge corporate power over society. Conservative populists are conservative Republicans skeptical about the influence of liberal professionals over culture and politics. The theoretical frameworks of the dueling populisms are inherently adversarial and competitive. They serve as models of civic engagement that reflect a political movement. The combative nature of the dueling populisms

creates ample room for lively discourse among the political establishment. However, ordinary citizens may be alienated from politics due to the populist conflicts because their own values do not fit neatly within either ideological framework. In fact, the models for both populisms may be too absolute and narrow for the moderate view of many



Americans. Thus, while both populist ideas are meant to bring power to the people — both falter in practice.

Prevailing models of citizenship can be grouped around two theories: political participation and civil society. Political participation is the concept that citizens have the right and duty to participate in democracy, primarily through exercising the right to vote. The civil society theory, which is the common subject of modern academic discourse over citizenship, is defined by the concepts of deliberation and voluntarism. In order to reengage the public in politics, Boyte proposes that citizenship should be measured with a different type of calculus. While the prevailing models certainly have strength, Boyte argues they are flawed. First, most people agree that voting, while granted as a constitutional right to citizens, is not enough to maintain a healthy democracy. Second, the civil society approach is flawed because it “depoliticizes citizenship while it professionalizes politics.” (The subject of *Everyday Politics* is a discussion of Boyte’s theory of citizenship, essentially a third way of looking at how citizens could be engaged in democratic processes.

Boyte argues that citizenship should be measured through public work. Public work as a concept applied to civic engagement proposes that professionals, those who have been empowered to help society through a skill or practice, should essentially empower other citizens to engage in their communities, politics, and government as well. Professionals carry the torch of knowledge as power, and through the concept of public work, there is an obligation for professionals to perpetuate a healthy democracy by encouraging others to become engaged in democratic institutions. The fundamental premise behind this concept of public work

is that political participation in a healthy democracy does not require any specialized knowledge or degree — all that is necessary is a basic intuition of how government should be along with an idea of how the goal can be achieved.

Citizenship as public work takes place in “free spaces.” Boyte defines free spaces as “places where people learn political and civic skills ... culture-creating spaces where people generate new ways of looking at the world.” Simply, free spaces operate as a generator of political synthesis and realizations — a place where citizens can look outside the box and ultimately improve the world in which they live. Free spaces extend well beyond the traditional public forums protected by the First Amendment, as they include many professional employment settings. Health professionals, educators, therapists, government workers, and attorneys all operate within professional spheres where free space can exist. While the opportunity for synthesis and civic engagement may be different within each sphere, the possibility of empowerment is existent throughout.

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Boyte specifically focuses on higher education as a professional sphere where citizenship as public work can be applied. Colleges and universities act as incubators for leaders of future generations. Educational leaders at these institutions have an obligation to ensure that student populations enthusiastically and adequately understand the importance of civic engagement to the development and sustenance of an American democracy. While this mission seems entirely logical, practical, and appropriate, Boyte notes that many colleges and universities are not organized to embrace and develop the idea of professor as a conduit for public work. The principal harbinger to the concept of public work is the university bureaucracy and decision-making process. In order to implement any pedagogical change in how professors teach and a university operates, Boyte argues that all relevant participants must be on board with the program and should agree with what the program promotes. However, it is sometimes difficult to develop such a consensus in academia, and that can impede the effectiveness of promoting citizenship as public work to students.

Using his own experience as a reference, Boyte discusses the University of Minnesota’s attempt to institute citizenship as public work within the curriculum. Boyte asserts that the successful implementation of such a strategy comes in three steps. First, “to build support for civic engagement requires ‘thinking politically,’ that is, creating a broad alliance, engaging diverse interests, within

*The professionalization of modern society leads to the disengagement of ordinary citizens.*

the university and in the external environment.” Second, “the politics of civic engagement . . . involves complex, boundary-crossing institutional politics.” Third, “thinking politically in higher education means accenting the broad dimensions of politics to draw attention to the culture-shaping power of large, diverse institutions where many different interests, cultures, and ways of knowing can interact.” Boyte’s recommendations implicitly acknowledge that institutional inertia can have a detrimental effect on efforts to instill the ideas of civic engagement and participatory democracy on students. If administrative and/or academic leaders at an institution do not support a university policy promoting civic engagement, the legitimacy of the program in the eyes of students will be put into question as well.

Boyte’s theory of making institutions of higher education an example of a “free space” is highly attractive, but does pose several challenges. One such challenge is uniformity — some academic disciplines may find it easier to implement a civic engagement program than others. Civic-engagement programs are most logically tooled for liberal arts programs — where the fields of study naturally prepare students to act in their communities and engage in free spaces. Where the implementation of civic engagement programs becomes more difficult, perhaps, is in more technical fields like engineering, applied sciences, business, and mathematics. Those fields are highly linear and operate on promoting methods and processes. Normally, innovation in these fields arrives only after understanding of the processes is mastered. The logical challenge of integrating a civic engagement directive within these highly technical programs is also the reason why such a program is so necessary. As Boyte suggests, the professionalization of modern society leads to the disengagement of ordinary citizens. In order to put all citizens on an equal playing field, all professionals, even those with degrees that take them away from direct involvement with the public, require understanding civic engagement and the civic responsibility that accompanies a professional degree.

The need for the implementation of civic engagement programs within institutions of higher education is urgent. Boyte notes that undergraduate students have increasingly lost interest in politics and government. Higher education leaders have an obligation to reverse this trend — not only to develop an active and spirited student body, but for the sustenance of American democracy. If the professional classes, those who achieve advanced

degrees, do not understand the importance of civic engagement within a democracy, then democracy will falter. Therefore, it is imperative that higher education leaders evaluate their curriculum's effectiveness toward civic engagement among students.

Boyte uses the example of the Jane Addams School for Democracy (JAS) to illustrate how institutions of higher education can implement citizenship as public-work programs into their curriculum. JAS is a collaboration between several community groups and universities within the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Area. At JAS, members of the community, a good number who are new immigrants, interact and learn with university faculty and students. A motto of the school is that "everyone is a teacher, everyone is a learner." The school serves as a forum to discuss cultural change, political change and general welfare; discussion often focuses on the question of "What is citizenship? JAS rests on "the view of America as a commonwealth that is a work in progress, enriched by diverse traditions and immigrant cultures."

The JAS format reflects an innovative learning model, one that should be attractive to leaders in higher education. Programs like JAS not only provide a unique learning environment, it also forces several normally insular groups to interact and learn from each other. At JAS, the insular groups are immigrant enclaves and university students. By essentially creating a free space, these groups are encouraged to study all aspects of an issue and learn from the perspectives of others. The school is essentially an incubator of democratic discourse for people who traditionally do not have a coherent voice within the American political system.

Importantly, programs like JAS inform young professionals that the nonprofessional world is quite engaged in civil society discussion, when empowered to do so. As Boyte states, a problem that brought him to write this book was the professionalization of politics and the disengagement of certain groups within society. While college students are disengaged from politics during college, as professionals they will undoubtedly becoming highly involved in the political process out of self-interest. If professional training included the concept that an advanced degree provides



for personal empowerment opportunities and empowerment opportunities for the greater community, then society would benefit from a more engaged and innovative professional class. Society would be strengthened if professionals truly understood the concept that a professional degree does not necessarily make one more qualified to exercise power over others within a democratic society. Since political participation in a democracy does not require a formal degree, one person's professional degree is as valuable to decision making as another person's intuition gained from life experience.

Overall, Boyte's text serves as a helpful resource for leaders in higher education looking to create, retool, or examine their civic engagement curriculum. Through the examples he cites, Boyte undoubtedly encourages innovative and creative programs that push students to think "outside the box" in an environment that is physically outside the university grounds. The logical inference is that by promoting civic engagement to college students, they will promote citizenship as public work when they are professionals — thus creating communities that solve problems and include as many constituencies as possible. This goal is certainly worthy, highly relevant, and one to which all leaders in higher education should pay attention.

# AFTERWORD

by David Mathews































# CONTRIBUTORS

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