

# HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



Leadership and Democracy

## **Articles**

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Michaela Grenier

Matthew R. Johnson

William V. Muse and Carol Farquhar Nugent

Mark Wilson

## **Interviews**

Dennis Donovan and Harry C. Boyte

Katrina S. Rogers and Keith Melville

## **Afterword**

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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*

# LEADERSHIP EDUCATION AND THE PUBLIC MISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Derek W. M. Barker and Alex Lovit

This year, Kettering’s publications are focusing on the relationship between the public and the government, a fundamental component of any healthy democracy. Ideally, the public and the government would work *with* one another, each performing the tasks for which it is best suited. However, in a climate of intense partisanship and polarization, citizens distrust experts and elected officials alike. Public confidence in government appears to be suffering a long-term decline, coinciding with increased polarization in our public discourse and gridlock in Washington. Public distrust is not a phenomenon limited to government; public confidence has declined across a range of business, media, and professional institutions.

If higher education is to have a democratic mission, it must somehow address this crisis of institutional legitimacy—for government, professions, and for itself. Colleges and universities have long positioned themselves as incubators for future leaders. If higher education is to somehow serve democracy beyond the production of academic knowledge, the education of the next generation of civic leaders likely holds the key. As the well-known manager Peter Drucker has argued, we live in a “knowledge society” in which specialized skills are increasingly in demand across the public and private sectors.<sup>1</sup> Higher education plays an important role in determining how a variety of institutions and professions understand the roles, responsibilities, and practices of effective leadership. This leadership education function could be the key to colleges and universities reclaiming their identities as institutions with public purposes.

Moreover, this leadership education role is one of the few remaining public functions of higher education. Higher education seems to be experiencing a declining sense of its public purposes, due largely to pressures to emphasize career preparation and economic benefits but also in part to the political climate of heightened disagreement and polarization. Lacking agreement on the common good in general, it is no surprise that the public appears unable to agree on the public purposes of higher education. This phenomenon of declining

public confidence in institutions is a crisis for colleges and universities. Higher education institutions, like the professional institutions that tend to hire their graduates, are increasingly seen in cynical terms as self-interested and lacking in public purpose. However, no one can deny that higher education plays a critical role in shaping (or *not* shaping) the civic skills and habits of the next generation of professionals. If higher education could somehow, in a visible way, demonstrate that these future professionals understand themselves as *public* leaders, perhaps it could enhance its own standing while simultaneously serving our democracy.

Fortunately, higher education institutions often speak of leadership as a core goal of higher education, and many even have specific leadership schools and programs. How it understands leadership, however, is less clear. Does leadership in higher education mean the education of a narrow elite, the so-called best and the brightest? Or might it mean a distributed model of “leaderfulness,” the capacities of numerous citizens to inspire one another?<sup>2</sup> Does higher education affirm common conceptions of mobilization politics, organizing like-minded groups to action against their enemies? Or might it mean motivating disparate groups to work together, despite and across their differences? Different understandings of leadership could produce different, even contradictory, outcomes.

Influenced in part by the service-learning movement, many approaches to leadership are premised on the usual notion of impartial experts who serve the common good. However, in a climate of division in which experts are distrusted and the common good is in question, such approaches could simply reproduce the current dynamic. What kind of leaders are needed to not only serve the common good but help bridge divides and recreate a sense of citizens’ common interests? This issue of *HEX* brings together research on different approaches to leadership education that go beyond the conventional service-learning model. What other democratic skills and capacities are being taught? What are their implications for the future of our democracy?

Ralph Nader is, of course, famous for his political organizing and consumer protection advocacy, but his work on college campuses has been among his most lasting impacts. Recognizing the importance of educating young people as civic leaders, Nader founded the Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) national network to organize students for effective political advocacy. Drawing on an in-depth interview, Maura Casey tells the story of the PIRG network, highlighting Nader’s convictions that young citizens are capable of becoming active civic leaders and educational institutions should seek to connect the skills they teach to issues of public concern.

As mentioned above, if young people are critical to the future of our democracy, then so, too, is how higher education institutions define and teach leadership. This task has historically been of central concern to Student Affairs, with its role of educating the “whole person,” beyond just academics. However, as Matthew Johnson argues, contemporary efforts have produced mixed results, first, by neglecting group and societal leadership skills at the expense of individual actions, and second, by neglecting to engage students in conversations about and across differences.

Higher education is beginning to take steps to address those neglected areas. Leadership for collective action is at the heart of Public Achievement, a youth civic engagement initiative in which groups of K-12 students, coached by college students, engage in public work projects they have chosen. Cofounder Dennis Donovan describes Public Achievement as a form of leadership education in an interview with fellow cofounder Harry Boyte.

Similarly, Mark Wilson reflects on Auburn University’s Living Democracy experiment in which students simultaneously reside in communities and participate in their civic lives. Wilson’s article includes reflections of recent graduates of the Living Democracy program on the leadership education they received, along with an excerpt from a previous study focusing on their interactions with local government.

Public deliberation teaches the skills of understanding public issues, listening to diverse perspectives, and expressing one’s own views—crucial leadership competencies in a time of heightened divisions. William Muse and Carol Farquhar Nugent discuss their recent efforts to offer courses in public deliberation to a nontraditional college audience: retirement-aged students. Public deliberation represents not only an alternative to adversarial politics but also an opportunity for these citizens to renew their roles as community civic leaders.

Dialogue offers complementary experiences for emerging civic leaders, especially in circumstances of cultural conflict and misunderstanding. Michaela Grenier describes the use of a process called Sustained Dialogue in leadership education. Based upon a model originally intended for relationship building in international conflicts, these ideas were subsequently adapted for use in campus conflicts, with strong results reported in helping students in negotiating public concerns with other citizens.

In an interview with Keith Melville, Katrina Rogers discusses a recently published book inspired by exchanges held by the Kettering Foundation. Rogers emphasizes the important role that American colleges and universities play in supporting democracy and in educating students for citizenship. Most of the

contributors to that volume are, like Rogers, college presidents or in some other position of leadership in higher education and seek to use their influence to promote the next generation of civic leaders.

Finally, the Afterword by David Mathews asks whether teaching the leadership skills discussed in this volume of *HEX* might contribute to a stronger democracy in which government works *with* an active citizenry, as opposed to educating students as voters or consumers of services provided by institutions. Such a democracy runs counter to familiar models of politics, underscoring the importance of approaches to leadership education that are as nuanced as they are transformative. Higher education could play a valuable role in our democracy with innovation in this area, and, in so doing, make the best case for themselves as institutions with a public mission.



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Peter F. Drucker, “The Age of Social Transformation,” *Atlantic Monthly* 274, no. 5 (November 1994): 53-80.
- <sup>2</sup> David Mathews, *Leaders or Leaderfulness? Lessons from High-Achieving Communities* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2016).

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- Mathews, David. *Leaders or Leaderfulness? Lessons from High-Achieving Communities*. Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2016.



# RALPH NADER'S CALL TO CITIZENSHIP

Maura Casey

*American colleges and universities have never been fully insulated from the political culture of the larger country, yet they struggle to prepare students to become civic leaders. During the 1970s, intense political debates over Vietnam, civil rights, feminism, and other topics played out on college campuses. It was in this context that Ralph Nader, who had already gained national prominence as a consumer-protection advocate, recognized the potential importance of higher education in teaching young people the skills of politics. Nader created an innovation in higher education's approach to preparing students for civic leadership: Public Interest Research Groups, which became a national network with a distinctive approach to civic leadership education. We asked Nader to tell his story to Maura Casey, a former editorial writer for the New York Times and a senior associate of the Kettering Foundation.*

The small city of Winsted, Connecticut, is known for the Mad and Still Rivers that lap its boundaries; the looming mills lining Main Street that once produced textiles and clocks; and the Nader family, including its most famous son, Ralph: lawyer, consumer advocate, sometime presidential candidate, and above all, citizen.

Nader gained a worldwide reputation for his challenges to corporate power. Yet his impact on the civic activism of students, while lesser known, cannot be underestimated. It began nearly 50 years ago when Nader first established Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) on college campuses as a training ground for students to organize, research, petition, and lobby around a wide variety of causes. Over the years, the issues have changed, but the passion of students in PIRGs—still going strong in more than 20 states—has not diminished.

Walking the streets of Winsted helps one understand the origins of Nader's thinking and activism that has, in turn, influenced so many students. You can see the impact of the family everywhere in this leafy corner of Connecticut, close to the Massachusetts border. There is the American Museum of Tort Law, which Nader opened in 2015, housed within the neoclassical stone structure of a former savings bank. The museum tells the story of the evolution of torts, which provide legal recourse for wrongful injury to persons and damage to property. In a building on Main Street that once housed the Highland Arms restaurant owned by Nader's parents is a community book store established by Ralph Nader. It is fitting that the building is still in use by the family long after the restaurant closed for good. The eatery took the pulse of the town every day for nearly 50 years, and it was one of the businesses that Ralph's father,

Nathra Nader, an immigrant from Lebanon, established soon after he moved to the area in the 1920s.

## **A Dollar's Worth of Conversation**

The restaurant was where the four Nader children first learned civic lessons. When Nathra died in 1991 at the age of 98, his obituary in the *Hartford Courant* quoted a shoe store owner saying, "Go into Nader's restaurant for a 10-cent cup of coffee, and you'll get a dollar's worth of conversation."

***Nader learned about citizen power from the town-meeting tradition of New England and from his parents' restaurant and their encouragement to get involved and to make the community better.***

"These were the days with no fast food chains," Nader said. "People weren't sitting in the restaurant looking at their phones or listening to things in their ear, they spoke to one another." The conversations involved expansive topics like international

affairs but included small talk, too: "There was a lot of self-government," said Nader. "They would talk about parking problems, whether we had enough police or too many police, and argue about everything, including the Yankees and Red Sox."

The restaurant was located across the street from the factories. Workers would swarm in after their shifts; traveling salesmen would arrive on one of the seven trains that ran daily to and from New York City, a little over 100 miles away; politicians running for office would introduce themselves to people at the long counter, and, of course, Nathra, who would meet them at the coffee urn, shake their hands, and not let go until he knew what they were thinking. Nader remembered:

You could walk the whole town in 25 minutes. The schools, the stores, the library, the dentist and doctor's office, everything was here. We could see the horizon; we could see the sun go down and come up. We would walk about a mile to the high school. It was all reduced to human scale. At that time, we took it all for granted, and now when you look back, it has an idyllic aspect to it.

Nader learned about citizen power from the town-meeting tradition of New England and from his parents' restaurant and their encouragement to

get involved and to make the community better. “Learn to listen,” Nader’s mother, Rose, frequently advised her children. Hands-on lessons—talking to people, attending meetings, both listening and speaking out—later influenced his approach.

It is no surprise, then, that Nader believes too many school experiences are a waste of time and our democracy is the poorer for it. “Students could learn more if they got out of the classroom once in a while and connected the classroom with the community and actually studied things,” he said. “They could ask questions, such as ‘What’s going on in town hall? Where’s the drinking water coming from?’”

In Nader’s view, schools and the resources within them are underutilized. He believes civic lessons and questions should be folded into every curriculum:

Too often, K through 12 is a huge waste. I mean, what do we remember from these classes? Most of it is memorization, regurgitation, and vegetation. Most of it is a type of education that tells us “believe, don’t think. Obey, don’t dissent,” even though we study American history and almost all the things we aspire to, such as the Bill of Rights, originally came from dissenters.

One of the reasons the political system is not functioning well, Nader said, is due to a lack of civic preparedness that schools should be addressing more completely:

When students come out of high school, are they ready for sweet-talking politicians? Are they ready for advertisements that deceive them and lie to them about products, say “these drugs are safe,” when they’re not safe, “these credit cards are a good deal,” when they’re not? As it is, the students are not ready; they’re straight-out sitting ducks for corporate and political manipulation that destroys our democratic society. We don’t have to look around for much evidence to prove that these days. It’s good to get started early so the students have civic skills. They learn how to do their homework.

Nader learned those civic skills from his childhood, but he learned darker lessons as well.

## **Citizen Power vs. Corporate Power**

The Mad and Still Rivers were used to power factories but were also the mills’ dumping grounds, the water stained with whatever dye was used in production. “We never had the sense that they were our rivers and that we could fish and wade in them,” Nader said. “They were just sewers with colored dyes going down from the plants.”

In his book *The Seventeen Traditions: Tales from an American Childhood*, Nader expands on those recollections, writing:

The town's givers were matched, of course, by its takers—led by the industrial factories, which were low-paying and vigorously anti-union. The older companies were always vigilant about keeping new union factories out of the area. They seemed equally determined to keep fresh air and water at bay, using those two resources as their pollution sinks and sewers.<sup>1</sup>

If the town meeting was the pulsing, civic heart of Winsted, the place every person could have his or her say, corporate ownership seemed its antithesis, with profit paramount and human concerns rarely softening the dictates of the bottom line. The factories that once made Winsted famous for clocks and clothing are all closed now. The trains that rumbled through town, taking Nader as a teenager to New York City to cheer at a Yankees game and depositing him back home the same day, don't wind their way through Winsted anymore.

The lesson would seem to be that some things are beyond the people's will, that diner-fueled debates are all well and good but talk rarely changes much of anything beyond zoning regulations and the town's education budget.

Except that's not the lesson that Ralph Nader learned. He internalized the opposite: that talk matters, people matter, and corporations not only *could* be challenged, they *should* be, by ordinary citizens, particularly students, poised to first question, then act, honing civic skills along the way.

Written while enrolled in Harvard Law School, Nader's book *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile* was published in 1965. It used the Chevrolet Corvair as a powerful example of the auto industry's general indifference to safety. The car was small and sporty—indeed, a shiny red Corvair is at the very center of the Tort Museum's exhibits—but had a dangerous tendency to roll over. The book made it clear that the Corvair's steering and mechanical problems were just a few of a litany of safety defects plaguing American cars at the time, including a lack of seat belts, steering wheels that became spears during crashes, and windows that became razor-like when broken in a collision.

## **Engaging a Student Army**

*Unsafe at Any Speed* became a best seller and goaded a reluctant Congress into action. General Motors was so incensed that the company hired private detectives to follow Nader. If company officials expected to intimidate him, they were seriously misguided. Not only did Nader sue for invasion of privacy

and win, recalled his associate, Donald Ross, that same year, Nader developed the idea of forming what he initially called “a student action army.”

“I told him, what with Vietnam, it didn’t make sense to have that name. Finally, we hit on calling it the Public Interest Research Group,” Ross said. The nonprofit organization, staffed with lawyers and scientists, and dedicated to seeking creative solutions to public problems, was meant to counter the well-financed special interests that dominate Washington, DC.

But what to do about funding? And how to start citizen-led Public Interest Action Groups across the country? College students were the answer. For one, they had the time, passion, and energy to help a myriad of public causes. They would also gain valuable experience researching issues, conducting public campaigns, working on legislation, and marshalling arguments to persuade others to join the cause. Along the way, they would learn about their own rights and how to exercise them in a democracy, lasting lessons that, Nader hoped, would create life-long citizen activists.

***Belief in the power of ordinary citizens to change public priorities is a theme that Nader returns to again and again.***

That belief in the power of ordinary citizens to change public priorities is a theme that Nader returns to again and again:

The lesson of American history, which we never learn, is that it’s easier than we think to overcome power and break through. Three things are needed: [first] a tiny number of committed citizens who roll up their sleeves and say, “This is what we’re going to do; we’re not going to bird-watch or collect coins or collect stamps. This is our hobby.” The second is they know what they are talking about. The third is to have the majority public opinion behind them. It never takes more than one percent or less of engaged citizenry to turn around the most powerful corporate forces.

In the fall of 1970, Nader and Ross visited dozens of campuses, proposing a student-centered plan, a task Ross would continue unabated for the next three years. Those who wanted to set up a PIRG at their college would collect student signatures on petitions to approve a “tax” of sorts. Every student would pay a small sum each semester, such as \$6 or \$10, as part of the college activity fee to support PIRG activities and enable PIRGs to hire professional state staff. Individual students who didn’t want to support the PIRG would be guaranteed a way of opting out of the fee.

All seven public universities in Oregon's state college system voted to form a PIRG. Minnesota universities were next; then those in Vermont gave the thumbs up. By spring of 1971, students across the country began to back the idea of student-led organizations, choosing, researching, and rallying behind issues they considered important. By the end of 1972, students had organized on campuses in 16 states.

## **Founding the PIRGs**

Students formed a few PIRGs at high schools, but while the numerical advantages were obvious, there being millions more high school students compared to the number enrolled in college, Nader recognized early on that organizing at high schools presented special challenges. The inflexibility of the school year, jam-packed curriculum, lack of continuity, and the students' relative youth all created barriers to forming an active high school PIRG. Their young age didn't mean they were less capable but, too often, adults automatically accorded teenagers less respect, making the formation of such organizations difficult: "Teachers and administrators often view 15-, 16-, and 17-year-olds as mere children, 'too young to understand what it's really all about' and certainly too young to do anything about it," Nader wrote.<sup>2</sup>

What helped the PIRGs across the country was the sense of change roiling the US nearly 50 years ago. Nader recalled the public fervor of the era:

It was just the right time. There was the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, women's rights movement. I don't think we could have done it today. So, you take advantage of these abbreviated surges of civic engagement and add to them.

Protest was in the air, but the PIRG model would take students beyond chanting at a march and put them on the front lines of lobbying, researching, and proposing policy. Each campus would engage issues and become, collectively, a laboratory of democracy.

The model stood the test of time. Today, there are PIRGs in 23 states and every region. Nearly 50 years later, Nader is still enthusiastic—particularly about the skills students are capable of learning and refining during their experience working with PIRGs:

They don't just learn the physical skills of canvassing or how to do a referendum, but with the PIRGs, they learn personality skills. They learn how to develop a civic personality where they refine their sense of injustice, without which you cannot have a sense of justice. They learn how to research. They learn how to motivate people. They don't just stay at home and read

books, they get out there where the action is. You want to be a basketball player, you've got to practice. You want to be an artist, you've got to practice. You want to be a citizen action expert, you've got to practice.

Issues have changed in the years since the organizations began, said Janet Domenitz, executive director of MassPIRG, a PIRG chapter located in Massachusetts. "But it is like that French saying, *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*," for all that changes, everything is the same," she said.

Domenitz should know. She started with MassPIRG in 1980 as a campus organizer and became executive director of the state PIRG office in Massachusetts

***"You want to be an artist, you've got to practice. You want to be a citizen action expert, you've got to practice."***

in 1990. Her office in Boston coordinates activities with the 12 campus chapters in the state. "We've been working on waste, toxins, and transportation for 45 years," Domenitz said. "When I came on, it was only recently that students were not treated like kindergarteners, with dorm curfews and other rules. That students have rights is still a recent phenomenon."

## **Technology and Its Impact**

The biggest changes, Domenitz said, involve technology. When she began nearly 40 years ago, communication was far more time-consuming and done most effectively face to face. "As an organizer, you picked up your rotary phone and dialed it. If you wanted to get information out in the world, you stuffed envelopes and mailed them. The method and the medium have changed in terms of organizing a group," she recalled.

Yet there are drawbacks that come with today's ease of communication. "The ability to communicate more quickly to vastly larger numbers of people is fantastic. But the fundamental person-to-person ways of communicating that people should start with is becoming a lost art."

Forty years ago, students at PIRGs organized to protest the number of US stockpiled nuclear weapons. They collected signatures on petitions to reduce the possibility of nuclear war and worked on improving the environment. Today, degradation of the environment is still a dominant student concern, but the issues within that cause have changed.

For example, MassPIRG students are currently working to try to bring about a statewide ban on the herbicide Roundup. They are calling for bans on



chemicals used in homes and gardens that are implicated in bee colony collapse disorder, which is vastly reducing the number of bees. And above every environmental concern the students work on, looms the threat of climate change, said Domenitz:

Twenty somethings literally don't know if the planet will survive. This level of existential threat is hard. Somehow, [the battle over reducing] nukes seemed more isolated. Climate change seems vaster and that's a big burden. It is different, the way music has changed. Kids are as idealistic as students were years ago, with an added edge.

Like those of yesteryear, students have been involved in any number of campaigns to change corporate behavior, Domenitz said. A big recent victory took place in March 2015 when, after intense student protests over the overuse of antibiotics in animals, McDonalds announced it would phase out the use of chickens that had been routinely fed the infection-fighting drugs. Feeding

***“When asked what do [young people] want to do in life—be an engineer, a doctor, or a teacher—I want people to say ‘I want to be a full-time citizen . . . putting forward new ideas and applying old ideas that make life better for people.’”***

farm animals antibiotics is partially blamed for the rise of drug-resistant bacteria, leaving people vulnerable to life-threatening infections. Domenitz credited the students' use of technology—in particular, one hour on Valentine's Day 2015 when students used social media to send 300,000 messages to

McDonalds—to pressure the company to make its decision. Late last year, McDonalds said it would also set reduction targets in the amount of antibiotic-fed beef it uses in its products.

Students come together on issues, but the degree of activism can reflect the differences of individual student situations, Domenitz said. “There is always a good core group of activists. But some students are attending community colleges, and they may be going to school while holding down a job and raising a family. They don't have the luxury of being full-time activists the way others do.” Then there are differences among the campuses themselves. Fitchburg State University has a total of 7,000 students; UMass Amherst has 30,000. “If we get you as a freshman, you will probably stick with us,” Domenitz said.



## The Moral Compass of the Young

If Nader had his way, of course, civic activism would start much younger than college. Elementary school students, he said, are more than ready to be citizens, to roll up their sleeves and take their place in democracy. They, too, can learn to be citizens—the younger, the better:

Studies have shown that kids are able to distinguish right from wrong when they are three, four, and five years old. You start in stages. You don't overload them, but you start. But the real mobilizing starts in middle school. That's when they realize that the world isn't all that it could be.

To Nader, the young are ready to confront issues head on:

First of all, nobody can ask a more piercing moral question better than a nine- or ten-year-old. They're not inhibited; they go right to the core. They are more idealistic at that age than they are likely ever to be, and that drives them to ask tough questions. And that is where they can begin to develop leadership capacity. Also, it's their country. They have the biggest stake, and they can learn by doing. The best way to learn politics is citizen engagement with politicians, with elections, with what happens between elections and with neighborhood organizing.

When asked whether the PIRGs are meant to change events or people, Nader replied, "All of the above." To him, the highest calling is that of citizen. To change the world, all you need is a committed, passionate, one percent.

"When asked what do [young people] want to do in life—be an engineer, a doctor, or a teacher—I want people to say 'I want to be a full-time citizen . . . putting forward new ideas and applying old ideas that make life better for people,'" Nader said.

It's a lesson he sometimes illustrates by giving out \$2 bills:

I like to pass out \$2 bills because on the back of the bill is [an illustration of] a big table with the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and I say, "Aren't you glad these people showed up? Yeah, some of them were slave owners and they were all white males, but it's pretty good they showed up, right?"

That's the crux of civic activity, the central lesson he learned at his father's restaurant, attending town meetings, challenging authority, and organizing students: You have to show up.

"The biggest obstacle to democratic activity in this country, small 'd,' is people not showing up. They have to show up at town meetings, show up to

vote, show up to march, show up for rallies, show up in courtrooms, show up at neighborhood gatherings,” he said.

“If they don’t do that, it’s over.”



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Ralph Nader, *The Seventeen Traditions: Lessons from an American Childhood* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007): 10.
- <sup>2</sup> Ralph Nader and Donald Ross, *Action for Change: A Student’s Manual for Public Interest Organizing* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1972): 107.

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# THE ROLE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS IN FOSTERING DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

Matthew R. Johnson

Higher education's increased focus on civic engagement during the last two decades is well documented. While many have applauded this resurgence, others have criticized the efforts for being too episodic, apolitical, and technocratic. Curiously, the role of Student Affairs—that is, college administrators who foster the learning and development of students outside the formal curriculum—is often left unexplored in the larger civic renewal movement on college campuses. How the Student Affairs profession understands and addresses the democratic mission of higher education remains obscured in a multitude of values and priorities. This makes it difficult to center democratic engagement and preparation of students for public work, including governmental work, through deliberative practice. But Student Affairs holds great promise for preparing college students for democratic engagement, given its embrace of social change leadership models that seek to engage all students, rather than a select group who are considered leaders based on charisma or the position they hold.

I have been on both sides of the often separate worlds of public deliberation and college student leadership development for my entire career. I promoted deliberative practice as a

graduate student in fraternities and sororities and later as a teacher of undergraduate, masters, and doctoral students. I worked to

***Curiously, the role of Student Affairs is often left unexplored in the larger civic renewal movement on college campuses.***

advance the field of leadership development in Student Affairs through the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership and while working in student leadership offices on college campuses. Although I have always believed in the synergistic overlaps between these movements, I have been mostly unsuccessful in bridging the two. I hope that examining the historical and contemporary commitment—and shortcomings—of Student Affairs to democratic engagement, as well as

identifying the connections between deliberative practice and leadership development, might open more possibilities for integrating deliberative practice into the work of Student Affairs. Doing so would better prepare students to fully exercise leadership in their lives and in the work they may do.

## **Student Affairs' Historical and Philosophical Commitment to Democratic Engagement**

Student Affairs is a relatively young field and is often known by different names: student personnel, student affairs administration, or student services. It began to take shape in the 1920s. Dubbed the “student personnel movement,” Student Affairs is primarily concerned with “educating the whole student” as Michael Hevel explains in his historical account of the field.<sup>1</sup> As administrative responsibilities expanded in the early 20th century, Student Affairs administrators organized by meeting and forming associations. During this time, administrators recognized the importance of establishing a body of scholarship on the student experience and provided strategic direction for the emerging field. In 1937, the *Student Personnel Point of View* was published by the American Council on Education Studies. The primary focus of the document was to shape the philosophy of Student Affairs work. Informed by the views of the philosopher John Dewey on progressive education, the document held educating the whole student as its primary ideal. In expanding upon this idea, the authors cited:

The necessity for conceiving of after-college adjustment as comprehending the total living of college graduates, including not only their occupational success but their active concern with the social, recreational, and cultural interests of the community. Such concern implies their willingness to assume those individual and social responsibilities, which are essential to the common good.<sup>2</sup>

As evidenced above, the original document was clear in its intent to prepare students for democratic engagement.

The *Student Personnel Point of View* was updated 12 years later during a time when the population of college students was burgeoning and diversifying. While the 1949 document provided direction that went well beyond a focus on democratic engagement, it did highlight Students Affairs' “urgent responsibility for providing experiences which develop in its students a firm and enlightened belief in democracy, a matured understanding of its problems and methods, and a deep responsibility for individual and collective action to achieve its goals.”<sup>3</sup> Similar to its predecessor, this version centers on preparing

students for democracy as the primary aim of Student Affairs, arguing for a “fuller realization of democracy in every phase of living.”<sup>4</sup> Encumbered by scientific management and a managerial ethos, the 1949 authors wanted democratic preparation to be underscored and augmented from the original.

At least 11 additional guiding documents have been drafted since 1949. In the *Journal of College Student Development*, Nancy Evans and Robert Reason analyzed them and found that four broad principles have endured since the inception of Student Affairs:

- a focus on students, including a respect for student differences and holistic development;
- recognition of the role of the environment in students’ collegiate experience and shaping it to benefit student learning;
- acknowledgement of the importance of empirically grounded practice; and
- a belief that Student Affairs professionals are responsible for preparing students for a democratic society.<sup>5</sup>

The authors noted that the final principle, preparing students for a democratic society, was the least consistent throughout the documents. While Student Affairs educators can point to democratic engagement being a central idea in the first two guiding documents of our field—and an enduring value since then—centering democratic engagement becomes a challenge amidst other values and philosophies.

## **Leadership Development in Student Affairs**

One area in Student Affairs that has gained significant traction with proponents of democratic engagement is leadership development, particularly given its proliferation in Student Affairs and demonstrated empirical connection to fostering civic values, attitudes, and behaviors. Almost every campus in the country offers a smattering of leadership classes, programs, retreats, workshops, trainings, and certificates, and most of the cocurricular offerings are housed in Student Affairs. While campuses may adopt differing conceptions or definitions of leadership, the prevailing paradigm depicts leadership as a shared process whereby people work together toward positive change. Early leadership programs focused on leaders and individual traits, but most collegiate leadership programs now employ shared leadership models. A cogently stated philosophy from this model that guides much of the philosophy of contemporary Student

Affairs leadership work is from Alexander and Helen Astin's report that defined leadership in the following manner:

By "leadership" we mean not only what elected and appointed public officials do, but also the critically important civic work performed by those individual citizens who are actively engaged in making a positive difference in the society. A leader, in other words, can be anyone—regardless of formal position—who serves as an effective social change agent.<sup>6</sup>

The Astins' definition of leadership highlighted the importance of work done both inside and outside of formal public government. They believed that Student Affairs (and higher education in general) ought to dedicate its leadership efforts to preparing students for both.

The most common framework used to advance leadership development in higher education and actualize the Astins' definition is the social change model of leadership. The ensemble who created it sought to depict a model that advanced post-industrial leadership and made explicit connections to the end goal of social change. The social change model, which facilitates social change through self-learning and leadership competence, is the most widely used leadership development model in higher education. Embedded in collaborative, positive social change, the model promotes "the eight Cs" as the primary values in leadership development as seen through individual, group, and community or societal lenses. The individual domain contains three values—

***"A leader, in other words, can be anyone—regardless of formal position—who serves as an effective social change agent."***

consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment—and focuses on the individual values, characteristics, and capacities that one brings to the leadership process. The group domain also contains three values—collaboration, common purpose, and controversy with civility—and posits

necessary attributes for effective group functioning. The last domain, community/society, contains only one value—citizenship—and focuses on the larger attributes necessary for societal change. Change itself is the eighth "C." *Table 1* explains these values in detail. While the first seven values are necessary for social change—with a dynamic interaction among them—the citizenship value forges the most explicit connection between leadership development and democratic engagement as it focuses on acting upon a sense of responsibility to one's community.

The social change model of leadership is unique in that it connects democratic engagement to leadership in specific ways, reflecting an increasing trend in leadership development to recognize inherent connections between shared leadership models and democratic engagement. This trend is perhaps most strongly depicted by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, which connects curricular leadership and civic engagement. The council creates functional areas and program standards to guide Student Affairs practice. Their standards require that leadership programs collaborate with community partners and have learning outcomes in both civic engagement and humanitarian domains.

***Table 1: Social Change Model Values and Definitions***<sup>7</sup>

Value	Definition
Consciousness of Self	Consciousness of self focuses on an awareness of one's values, beliefs, and emotions. Knowing oneself is foundational for engaging in leadership.
Congruence	Congruence is the process of aligning one's values, beliefs, and emotions with one's actions.
Commitment	Commitment requires a sustained investment toward action. Continued involvement and purposeful engagement are key elements of exercising one's commitment.
Collaboration	Collaboration requires fostering and maintaining relationships and developing shared responsibility and accountability.
Common Purpose	Common purpose focuses on developing a shared set of expectations, values, and goals as part of working together toward social change.
Controversy with Civility	Controversy with civility means working productively across and through differences that inevitably arise as part of working toward social change.
Citizenship	Citizenship is not tied to national immigration status; rather, it is the sense of responsibility to the communities that one acts upon.
Change	Change is depicted as the transformation of individuals, processes, or communities that ultimately improve quality of life.

Student Affairs professionals teach the social change model of leadership in a variety of venues, including undergraduate leadership courses that either

stand alone or are part of a major, minor, or certificate program; one-day workshops; multi-week leadership programs; weekend retreats; positional leader training (such as resident assistant training); and short-term service immersion programs (sometimes called alternative breaks). These experiences employ a wide array of pedagogical strategies to teach the model and foster growth in college students' leadership capacities. The extent to which these experiences meaningfully engage students in democratic processes, as opposed to those that marginalize the communities they purport to help or encourage "savior" practices, is contentious and under-studied. In 2014, I examined 77 introduction to leadership courses at a variety of campuses to see how they explored civic engagement. The results were not encouraging. Only seven of these courses had any ongoing relationships with community partners or an established project. The others simply asked students to find volunteer or civic opportunities on their own to engage in as part of an experiential component for the course. None used deliberation as a pedagogy for teaching leadership.

## **The Connections between the Social Change Model of Leadership and Democratic Engagement**

The social change model of leadership has been studied rigorously in the last two decades as part of the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership, an annual national study that examines the development of college students' leadership capacities and other related constructs. I have worked on the national study team since 2012. As of the summer of 2019, nearly 500,000 college students have completed seven iterations of the study. We have noted two consistent findings over the years as they have implications for how democratic engagement could be strengthened through leadership development.

### ***Finding #1: Individual Leadership Capacities Are Easier to Build Than Group or Societal***

The study data show that students self-report higher capacities at the individual level than they do at the group or societal levels. Students report building capacities for self-awareness, clarification of values, integrity, and commitment to espoused values at higher rates than the larger work of democracy that involves engaging across differences, making shared decisions, and taking collective action. In other words, students feel more efficacious in things like clarifying their values and expressing themselves than in working toward the common good in their communities. This suggests that leadership experiences at the college level and perhaps beyond tend to focus on individual attributes



at the expense of group or societal attributes. What's more, citizenship, the only capacity measured in the societal domain, is consistently the lowest capacity that students report.

These results may reflect the way in which many leadership programs at the college level are structured. A leadership curriculum for a weekend retreat, for instance, would likely begin by building rapport among members through ice-breakers and team-building exercises such as challenge courses and simulations. Next, students would explore their leadership styles, possibly through guided reflection activities or self-assessment instruments. After exploring individual attributes, the curriculum would likely move on to more group-oriented activities, possibly working through larger and more complex simulations or helping students channel their individual interests and strengths to their respective student organizations, majors, or careers. In some cases, students are encouraged to leverage their leadership learning to address campus or community issues. In these instances, students may be connected with campus or community leaders who work on related issues and encouraged to work on proposals to address these issues. Students are often asked to prepare individual action plans rather than collective ones. Rather than "What should we do together?" the focus is on "What should I do about the issue during my time on campus and beyond?" Data from the study lend at least some corroborating evidence of this phenomenon and is a limitation for democratic engagement in Student Affairs.

One approach to this problem may be to shift the predominant method of teaching leadership, addressing leadership through group or societal levels first and moving to the individual level later. Rather than the conventional approach to teaching leadership of spending time helping students identify strengths and weaknesses, clarify their values, and find ways to align those values with their actions, a better starting place might be in the work of public deliberation or community decision-making structures. In this way, students engage in democratic work first and then learn and build individual leadership capacities through the group or community experiences. This reimagined approach may also help strengthen connections to public government as it would move students closer to the work that government does.

### ***Finding #2: Conversations about and across Differences Are the Single Greatest Contributor to Leadership Development***

Another compelling finding from several iterations of the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership is that sociocultural discussions—conversations about and across differences that occur among students outside the classroom—

are consistently the greatest predictors of socially responsible leadership capacities. In other words, the more students participate in conversations about and across differences, the greater the likelihood that they will report higher capacities for leadership. Despite the importance of sociocultural discussions, the data show that approximately 10 percent of students report “never” having these conversations, 33 percent report “sometimes” having these conversations, 43 percent report having them “often,” and 15 percent report having them “very

***Just under half of college students report either “never” or “sometimes” having had conversations about and across differences.***

often.” This means that just under half of college students report either “never” or “sometimes” having had conversations about and across differences. Involving students in the collective work of

democratic engagement has the potential to increase the frequency with which these conversations occur. Prior research has shown that experiences with the “diverse other” need to be positive experiences for significant learning to occur. Deliberation holds great potential for exposing students to differing views, thus providing a key link in developing their leadership capacities.

## **Strategies for Incorporating Deliberation in Leadership Development**

In examining the social change model of leadership, public deliberation is philosophically aligned with the model’s stated goals. Public deliberation, of course, also is philosophically aligned with the core of Student Affairs work, namely experiential education and the work of Dewey, from which Student Affairs practice draws its philosophy. The challenge is in finding practical ways to persuade leadership development to incorporate deliberative practice. To aid in this endeavor, I have identified two ways in which deliberation could be incorporated into leadership development work within Student Affairs. Although there are undoubtedly more than two ways, and many are likely in practice in pockets of different campuses, the following two seem to be the most promising practices.

### ***Practice #1: Using Public Deliberation to Foster Group and Societal Leadership Capacities***

Given that the social change model of leadership is the dominant model of teaching leadership to undergraduate students in Student Affairs, public

deliberation could be used as a pedagogy for fostering growth in the group and societal domains. In both of these domains, Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership research confirms that students report lower capacities, thus highlighting a limitation in current approaches to leadership development work. Public deliberation is an intentional process whereby groups of people come together to make joint decisions about how to address public problems by weighing trade-offs associated with different approaches. Student Affairs professionals looking for ways to strengthen the group and societal applications of their leadership programs would be well served by incorporating public deliberations into their curricula. With many leadership programs incorporating civic engagement components, public deliberation offers an established and robust model for strengthening those components. Public deliberation could be incorporated into one-time leadership programs, leadership courses, weekend retreats, or weekly leadership programs. Student Affairs educators could also partner with local government entities to engage in deliberative work on various initiatives that require the public to work together to make difficult decisions.

Student Affairs educators might need to reconsider the dominant model of beginning with building individual capacities and then moving into group activities in their sequencing of leadership development experiences. It may be the case that these individual capacities, such as greater awareness of self and recognition of strengths, may be developed simultaneously with group or societal capacities during experiences such as public deliberation. As the social change model depicts, there is no starting point for the model and each level influences the others. Starting with group or societal experiences using public deliberation or similar practices may be a useful and more successful practice. Such an experiment would also provide a fruitful line of inquiry for others to learn from, especially if government partnerships were fostered. A study of the Democracy Fellows at Wake Forest University provides robust evidence that experiments with using deliberation among college students led to a greater likelihood of developing the group and societal capacities for leadership as depicted in the social change model, including an increased capacity for collaboration, working across differences, and recognizing nuanced perspectives about citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Practice #2: Incorporating Deliberation in Leadership Programs That Focus on Social Issues***

As noted earlier, many leadership programs on college campuses seek to engage students in addressing social and community problems, such as

poverty, homelessness, and low educational attainment. In these leadership programs, students engage with social issues in a variety of ways, including raising awareness through guest speakers, talking with community leaders, and connecting with campus resources working on the issues. Less frequently used, however, is an intentional pedagogical strategy for engaging students in this public work. Public deliberation can provide the necessary framework for doing so. I hesitate to be overly prescriptive in what such applications should look like, but providing these pedagogical strategies to leadership educators would be the first step. In my years of doing leadership work on college campuses, I have never met a leadership educator who was not struggling with finding better and more intentional ways to engage students in community work. While so many leadership programs attempt to engage students “in the community,” the default pedagogical strategy has been community service and service learning, which are replete with limitations. Public deliberation would likely be a welcomed pedagogical innovation for their current practices.

## Conclusion

In seeking to educate the whole student, Student Affairs is concerned with preparing students to live in a diverse democracy. Democratic engagement was the predominant ideal in the founding of the student personnel movement but has since become one of many ideals within the field. The challenge is in centering the work of democratic engagement in higher education and within Student Affairs specifically. Student Affairs creates contexts for learning outside the classroom in order to develop students holistically; it would be well served to center democratic practice more fully. Making stronger connections between deliberation and leadership development is one way to strengthen those inherent relationships and better prepare students for living in a diverse democracy.



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Michael S. Hevel, “Toward a History of Student Affairs: A Synthesis of Research, 1996–2015,” *Journal of College Student Development* 57, no. 7 (October 2016): 844–862.
- <sup>2</sup> American Council on Education Studies, *The Student Personnel Point of View* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education Studies, 1937): 9, <http://www.myacpa.org/sites/default/files/student-personnel-point-of-view-1937.pdf> (accessed June 12, 2019).
- <sup>3</sup> E. G. Williamson et al., *The Student Personnel Point of View* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education Studies, 1949): 4, [https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Student\\_Personnel\\_Point\\_of\\_View\\_1949.pdf](https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Student_Personnel_Point_of_View_1949.pdf) (accessed June 12, 2019).

- 4 Williamson et al., *The Student Personnel Point of View*: 4.
- 5 Nancy J. Evans and Robert D. Reason, "Guiding Principles: A Review and Analysis of Student Affairs Philosophical Statements," *Journal of College Student Development* 42, no. 4 (2001): 359-377.
- 6 Helen S. and Alexander W. Astin, *A Social Change Model of Leadership Development: Guidebook Version III* (Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, 1996): 2.
- 7 Adapted from Helen S. and Alexander W. Astin, *A Social Change Model of Leadership Development: Guidebook Version III* (Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, 1996).
- 8 Katy Harriger et al., *The Long-Term Impact of Learning to Deliberate* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2017).

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# DEVELOPING LEADERS

## The Life and Work of a Citizen-Educator Using Public Achievement (An Interview)

Dennis Donovan and Harry C. Boyte

*Dennis Donovan was the principal of St. Bernard's Grade School, which became both a local and international model for Public Achievement, the youth civic education and empowerment initiative. In Public Achievement, young people, coached by older adults, work in teams on issues they have chosen. St. Bernard's demonstrated that, when done well, Public Achievement changed students, teachers, the school culture, and the neighborhood. Since 1997, Donovan has been the leading international trainer for Public Achievement. In this interview, Harry Boyte, a founder of Public Achievement, talks to Donovan about using Public Achievement for leadership education. The full history and impact of Public Achievement is documented in Awakening Democracy through Public Work: Pedagogies of Empowerment by Harry C. Boyte (Vanderbilt University Press, 2018).*

**Boyte:** Before we get into your own story and experiences, let me ask a question about what the Kettering Foundation calls “leaderful” communities. Rather than communities full of leaders, the foundation sees these as communities with cultures that encourage the development of leaders. They are rare, but they do exist. Does Public Achievement develop leaderful communities?

**Donovan:** There are many ways people think about leaders. I think of a leader as someone who develops people and who also is “political” in a cocreative way. They understand power and self-interest. They recognize that public culture is filled with complexities, diversity, tensions, and politics. From my own experiences, many people don't understand this.

Public Achievement, ideally speaking, generates environments that develop leaders. But it takes time to coach and teach the practices of organizing and cocreative politics. These practices need to be infused into teacher development, parent education, and work with students. It doesn't happen without intentional work to integrate civic and political practices into the culture of a whole community.

**Boyte:** What led you into education?

**Donovan:** My upbringing played a key role in why I went into education and how I thought about it. My mother was from an Italian family and my father was Irish and these cultures impacted my life.

My mother's Italian background was Catholic, with strong values of concern for others. The idea of family came first—the extended family. My father worked at Hamm's beer brewery. He was grateful to have grown up

during the Depression when you couldn't survive without other people. He had a strong work ethic and believed in doing good work in the East Side community, being a responsible person, and being involved in the church.

My father was a public person. He was active in the union and loved local politics. His greatest joy was relating to people. One time near the end of his life, I dropped him off at the grocery store. When I came back, he was talking with some Hmong kids. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm telling them about the history of East Side. They live here and have to know the history."

I was exposed to music from both sides of my family. It became a very important part of my life. But making a living by playing music was tough. I had a great social studies teacher in high school and decided to be an elementary school teacher.

**Boyte:** How did you get into teaching?

**Donovan:** I applied for a job in 1973 and became a sixth-grade teacher. I used what I had learned growing up, that you need to get to know people. I got to know the kids, coached three sports, and did home visits. The school was mainly working class and professionals from Irish and German cultures.

After five years, the pastor asked me to become the principal. I wasn't nuts about doing it, but he doubled my salary and paid for my master's degree. I was approached three times about becoming the principal at St. Bernard's, and the third was a good offer.

**Boyte:** What happened?

**Donovan:** When I moved to St. Bernard's Grade School, my vision was to create a safe environment and have high-quality teachers who connected with the young people. That's paramount. I believe teachers need to learn how to voice opinions, concerns, and conflicts in a public way. Teachers' lounges can be toxic.

St. Bernard's was very different from the first school I taught in. At St. Bernard's, students were from working class and poor families, with a lot of challenges. But I had a good relationship with the youth, even those who were challenging.

There was a sense in the parish that this was how they had always done things, and they didn't want to try anything new. I felt the teaching staff could use some improvement. Some were doing things that may have worked in the 1960s, but this was the 80s. Some were controllers and strong armed. There was a lot of negative politics, a swirling political whirlpool of craziness. At the first school board meeting, there were 50 parents protesting something and wanting to get rid of the pastor.



When I became principal, part of the job was to get money from the archdiocese for student tuition, so I had to be involved in a group called the Inner Urban Catholic Coalition (IUCC), which included all the urban Catholic schools and churches in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

**Boyte:** What did you learn?

**Donovan:** IUCC was a church-based community-organizing project. The organizer, Paul Marincel, saw that I was nervous about talking in front of crowds. He got me to become chair of the education committee in the second year and was very forthcoming about honest feedback and the usefulness of constructive tension. He taught me how to run a meeting with an agenda, how to strategize before the meeting, how to have people pay attention, and how to do a collective evaluation of what worked and what didn't. I liked it.

Paul and John Norton, who was working for a church-based organizing group in Minneapolis, went to a training at the Gamaliel Foundation [a community organizing group for whom Barack Obama had worked]. In the late 1980s, I also attended their training in Chicago. I hadn't ever flown in an airplane. There was attention to skills like "one-on-one" relational meetings and developing public—as opposed to social—relationships. I became exposed to people of color and learned about racism.

We wanted to build power by creating an ecumenical organization, so we courted 50 churches in St. Paul. We held 4,000 one-to-one meetings. I spoke in front of groups. I was on public stages, and the organizers gave me feedback and helped me understand that it's not about embarrassing someone but giving constructive feedback. I got better at not trying to be liked and focused on being respected. I would say it was about developing a more public persona.

Fourteen churches committed to being involved in the new group, the St. Paul Ecumenical Action Council (SPEAC), in 1991 or 1992. We had the convention at St. Bernard's. A thousand people attended, and each chose education, housing, jobs, or crime in Frogtown [a neighborhood in St. Paul] to work on. I was chosen to be chair of the education committee, so I was also involved in all the work of the organization by being on the executive board. It was exciting. I was learning who I was. I was the same kind of performer in public life as in music. I became more strategic. I liked people. I was able to see in people the talents that Paul Marincel had seen in me.

**Boyte:** Community organizers talk about "developing people." What does that mean?

**Donovan:** I see three things.



One is the knowledge and belief that people can do important things. This means that the organizer believes in and communicates the capacity of people to be change agents.

The second is learning a set of skills to do everyday politics. These skills include learning how to map power relationships in a setting, deal with and even create tension in constructive ways, build public relationships, and reflect on experiences, both successful and unsuccessful.

The third is the importance of practice. Like a good musician, developing people takes practice, and for people to become public actors requires practicing the skills involved. They also need a mentor who supports and challenges them.

**Boyte:** What else did you learn from organizing?

**Donovan:** I learned how to get to know powerful people like Jim Scheibel, the mayor; labor leaders in Minnesota; Nils Hasselmo, the president of the University of Minnesota; Chief Finney of the St. Paul police; the archbishop; and every local principal. Our education committee in SPEAC worked with every school board member in the city of St. Paul, as well as with business-people, teachers, parents, and congregational members, to improve the school.

I also learned public speaking. Once, when I was preparing for a major speech, I did a practice session. The organizers said, “You suck. You’re not talking about your passion, your desire to empower youth and change education.” They told me to go seek out Reverend Battle [an African American preacher and a leader in SPEAC]. Battle laughed and invited me to his services. I developed more confidence by telling stories. He said, “You can work with anyone if you’re real, even though you will never understand what it’s like to be black.” I also learned about public conflict. People who were opposed called me a communist. Most people were not negative. They were really eating this up. They could see that my words were making sense.

My organizing experiences impacted the school culture. I knew, for example, we didn’t need two- or three-hour meetings. Our teacher meetings were focused and disciplined. They lasted 45 minutes and were productive. Teachers also learned about the value of agendas and how to put concerns and ideas on the agenda. People began to become real with one other.

**Boyte:** What did you like about Public Achievement?

**Donovan:** When you first described Public Achievement, I thought, “This could be the ingredient that would have the kids and teachers learn what I was learning.” I wanted to make education better. In my own life, I

hadn't liked education, and I wanted to create an environment where students, teachers, custodians, and everyone would grow.

We tried a Public Achievement approach in IUCC for Martin Luther King Day in 1991. Young people throughout the organization were given the opportunity to plan all of the activities and events. From this experience, I saw tremendous potential to do greater things through Public Achievement. I saw Public Achievement as a different kind of education, with less focus on the teacher and more on the student, and with student participation in decision-making. Students would work on things they cared about and would help direct their own learning. They would learn to perform on a public stage.

When we began Public Achievement, students blossomed. They were developing a different way of seeing themselves.

**Boyte:** How did you “develop” staff and teachers?

**Donovan:** Teachers and staff needed to share this vision, so I created opportunities for them to take responsibilities. Susan Francis, hired as a substitute teacher, said she was thinking of becoming an administrator. When I had to be away from the school, I put her in charge. She was worried. If there were a kid problem or a teacher problem, what would she do? I coached her and she did fine. Other teachers wanted to do student-directed thematic education. I encouraged them to present the idea to the faculty. Maintenance workers became involved. No one was more important than anyone else.

**Boyte:** What makes for an excellent Public Achievement program?

**Donovan:** It's important to have somebody in the school who understands Public Achievement as a way of doing school differently and a principal who sees Public Achievement as a tool to empower young people to be engaged with things that are meaningful.

The principal also needs to help teachers do the best they can. Public Achievement helps teachers, if they're open, to see students in a new way, to see that they're smart, creative, have potential, and have ideas about how things can be better.

At a good Public Achievement site, there is a core group of people besides the principal who want to take what's going on in the program into the school more broadly. Public Achievement is a way of doing classroom management differently. In most classrooms, the teacher sets everything up—the rules, the norms. The more students can be cocreators of the environment of a classroom, the more they are going to want to come to school. They feel invested.

**Boyte:** How do school environments change?

**Donovan:** There need to be trainings with school personnel so they can talk about their challenges, their highlights, their thoughts on ways to improve the school. The ideal is teachers and principals cocreating the environment.

Children are dealing with life situations that overpower what traditional schools provide. Students come with all kinds of baggage, not just in urban schools but in rural and suburban schools. Mental health is an issue with students of all ages. I see it at Maxfield Elementary School and among my university students.

They are also dealing with stress caused by family issues, societal issues, worry about the future, whether climate

***Schools can't be isolated from issues that face parents and the community at large.***

change is destroying their planet, and their future work. They worry, "How am I going to share my thoughts with other people?" A lot of things they keep inside. When they can't express them, they act out. Part of the challenge is having people around they can trust, who support them, to whom they can relate. It's important for students to have public conversations about things that matter to them. They need hope.

For the last four years, I have been working every month with lifetime offenders in Stillwater Prison in Minnesota. I've learned a lot about the relationships among poverty, education, and incarceration. Schools can't be isolated from issues like these that face parents and the community at large.

Public Achievement, at its best, works with issues that participants really care about. It takes skill and courage from teachers to invite students to work in a legal and nonviolent way on any issue that touches their lives. Oftentimes, teachers encourage only safe issues because of their own demons.

Public Achievement must also have coaches who are serious about their preparation and learning. The coaches must be comfortable with making mistakes and not having all the answers, able to relate to participants, and not afraid to work in a process that is messy and organic. It takes an individual who goes with the flow and who puts the time and effort into being proactive in bringing ideas and information to the group. Coaches need time for evaluation and reflection as a team in order to grow in their ability as coaches. We call the people who develop the coaches "coach coordinators," and they have the kinds of skills I saw in the community organizers I began work with in IUCC.

**Boyte:** Is this difficult?

**Donovan:** Yes. The coaches are usually college students, and, by nature, they are very busy. If they're volunteers, it's hard to hold them accountable. If they're in a class and the instructor doesn't make coaching a priority and just jams it in, the coaches will see it as another requirement rather than a way to grow democracy.

The best ways to get student coaches to take it seriously are by having paid coaches or by having Public Achievement as part of a major core requirement for a course. There needs to be ample time for coaches to think about what

***Leaders also develop other people. They do not seek to be always at the center.***

they're doing and why they're doing it. Debriefing is important. Our first coach coordinator, Jim Farr, a political science professor at the University

of Minnesota, was a great coordinator because he would talk with his students in debriefings about the implications of Public Achievement for doing democracy. The coach coordinator needs to see Public Achievement as a tool for making student coaches better professionals in their own fields.

**Boyte:** Dennis, talk more about your views of leadership.

**Donovan:** Leaders are usually seen as individuals who act by themselves to get things done, command the attention, and guide the behavior of others. I believe a good leader is different from this conventional view. A leader respectfully manages relationships. He or she needs to be open to growing, a listener, clear with his or her own self-interest and story, and open to making mistakes. Taking risks is crucial.

Most humans want to be liked, but this type of leader wants to be respected. He or she learns to make decisions without everyone being happy, but everyone can respect the decisions.

Leaders also develop other people. They see potential in others and understand that their power grows to the degree that they develop the next person. A good leader allows others to get attention and visibility. They do not seek to be always at the center. That takes time, energy, and talent to do. A leader gets clarity around the difference between the public world and private life, which creates more success in both arenas. A good leader does not make a decision without waiting for 24 hours of reflection.

Leaders have a group of people they can bounce ideas off of and a variety of people in different arenas they listen to. They don't live in a bubble. Such

a leader is a communicator and transparent for the most part, though not all the time.

Finally, good leaders have a public love of people. They care for humanity.

**Boyte:** Let me conclude with the dangers from the dominance of technology. More and more teachers say that robots and information technologies are taking over what was once the role of educators. Can the lessons and approaches of Public Achievement help create a response?

**Donovan:** Today, what is done in education, including how to use technology, is decided by a small number of people. And what they dictate regarding what students should learn is not always what students *need* to learn. Many decision-makers are moving toward the technology approach. It looks good for everyone in a school to have a tablet. But this doesn't mean that there is an improvement in what the students learn about how to interact with other people. In my opinion, technology used at home, in games, and in school can take away from that core need.

There is increasing demand for results-oriented learning. This is often only in the head and not in the heart or soul. This way of evaluating success eliminates many students. There is an increasing need for students to have not only basic knowledge but skills of how to engage despite differences and how to navigate the ever more complex world we live in.



# LIVING DEMOCRACY

## Lessons for Leadership Education

Mark Wilson

*Living Democracy is a ten-week experience for Auburn University undergraduate students. Since 2012, cohorts of four or five students have learned about democracy by living and working in small Alabama communities and fully participating in civic life. They write about their experiences on the Living Democracy Blog ([auburn.edu/livingdemocracy](http://auburn.edu/livingdemocracy)). The editors of HEX asked Mark Wilson, director of community engagement at Auburn, to reflect with Living Democracy graduates on what they learned about civic leadership during these experiences. Those reflections follow an excerpt from the book *Living Democracy: Communities as Classrooms, Students as Citizens* (Kettering Foundation Press, 2017) by program founders Nan Fairley and Mark Wilson.*

### **“Community” Is Connections and Connectivity**

Living Democracy students learn that communities are made up of an infinite number of relationships. Some are formal, while others are informal. Some are strong and harmonious, while others are contentious and frail. Students discover the building blocks of communities, and sometimes they become connectors of people and resources.

Most college students—like most adults—dislike politics. But the politics they dislike are institutional or professional politics, where there are winners and losers and where graft and corruption seem as prevalent as speechmaking and grandstanding.<sup>1</sup> Despite their disdain for politics, students do express a commitment to making the world a better place, and nearly every campus is filled with students and student organizations that advocate and educate for the eradication of social ills and the proliferation of good causes. Many college leadership programs and experiences advocate charity work or cultivating one’s passion, and oftentimes, the most successful “leaders” are those who become founders of new organizations or chapters of organizations.

Living Democracy students are introduced to a different way of understanding politics. If we understand politics as the everyday interactions of individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions—not excluding our traditional ways of understanding politics but adding to them these additional relationships—then we become more reflective of ourselves as citizens. The best way to understand these interactions is in the context of an actual community—a geographical space and place, filled with humans who do what humans do best: congregate and celebrate, remember and forget, build up and tear down, gossip and gripe, and get things done. Communities of place are key to understanding what David Mathews refers to as the ecology of democracy.<sup>2</sup> Community projects—those activities that require decision-making and more people skills than technical expertise—are always political. And these interactions, as challenging and frustrating as they may sometimes be, cultivate what the ancient Greeks called practical wisdom.

The need for college-educated individuals who possess practical wisdom and affection for citizen-centered politics is great. According to research from the National Conference on Citizenship, Alabama ranks sixth in the nation in terms of “citizens having strong social ties with family and friends,” and “trust in neighbors and corporations” is higher than the national average. But Alabama ranks dead last when it comes to “working with neighbors to fix or improve something,” although the national average is nothing to brag about.<sup>3</sup> Fewer and fewer citizens contact elected officials, and the percentage of people who attend local meetings would shock Alexis de Tocqueville, the 19th-century political observer who deemed associations the lifeblood of American democracy.



We ask students to attend, reflect on, and write about city council meetings—instructive and new experiences for most students. Only 1 of the 26 students had attended a city council meeting prior to Living Democracy. “I am ashamed to say that before this summer, I had never in my life been to a city council meeting and had absolutely no idea what to expect,” Mary Beth Snow admitted.<sup>4</sup>

Students learned about the sometimes glamorous, but mostly mundane, aspects of what it takes to make a municipality function. “They touched on the expected topics, such as the city’s property, new initiatives, attracting businesses, and more,” Alexis Sankey wrote. “But what caught my attention were the smaller details, the things that you don’t ever think about. I never thought about how expensive dump trucks were.”<sup>5</sup> The system of city government and the responsibilities of elected officials became clearer to her as a result.

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as the everyday interactions  
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Some students encountered the raw emotion of an angry citizenry at city council meetings. Laney Payne happened to be living and learning in Bayou La Batre during the trial of former mayor Stan Wright. Wright was ultimately sentenced for corruption and witness intimidation related to a sale of property to the Federal Emergency Management Agency as part of the Bayou’s rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina. Payne attended an unforgettable council meeting. Reflecting on the meeting, she quoted citizens who were both angry and scared. She suggested that the mayor’s conviction seemed to remind citizens that their destiny is ultimately in their own hands. One after another, citizens approached the podium to express their concerns and fears for Bayou La Batre. One citizen proclaimed, “We made our men stay home. Us women are going to have to fix this. We all have to work together to get something done in this town.”<sup>6</sup>





In addition to city council meetings, students must attend a civic club meeting since these formal associations are a critical component of the ecology of democracy. Several community partners, such as Elba Rotary Club leader Laurie Chapman, served as catalysts, connecting civic club objectives to larger community issues and the activities of other community organizations. For some students, the first visit to a civic club meeting is to serve as a speaker. Sierra Lehnhoff, for example, spoke to Elba

***“We all have to work together to get something done in this town.”***

members made local service a priority, from working with schools to participating in community events. Lehnhoff reflected, “I met a lot of new people at Rotary, and I think that speaking to a club, any civic club, helps open a lot of doors to partnerships and relationships with people.”<sup>7</sup>

Rotary members about Living Democracy and then asked members to explain the mission and purpose of the club. She learned that the Rotary

Students discovered community connections working with other formal associations. Laney Payne wrote about the political and personal connections of the Organized Seafood Association (OSA) in Bayou La Batre, Alabama’s seafood capital. Payne learned OSA was known throughout the surrounding region for pushing legislation to help shrimpers, fishermen, and crabbers. She interviewed Rosa Zirlott, who founded the organization in 2002. Zirlott told Payne, “If it affects a fisherman, we will find a way to help. You just gotta jump in the water and figure out what it’s about. If I can talk to them about my personal experiences, they’ll believe me. That’s how I can help them.” Payne noted that legislation is just the beginning for OSA. Another priority is working to preserve a way of life. Zirlott told her, “I’m afraid of losing a generation of hard workers and losing the knowledge of how to do this. My husband’s daddy was a net maker, just like his daddy. You have to know the patterns and skills. We are losing all that.”<sup>8</sup>

In the mountains of northern Alabama, students discovered the work of the Collinsville Historical Association was connected to just about every community project. Both Mary Beth Snow and Shaye McCauley noted that the group was determined to preserve local history as a valuable community asset, including their top priority, restoration of the Cricket Theater. Members also produce a newsletter and run a local history museum. Snow described the association president, Roger Dutton, as “the local barber who knows everything that happens in the town of Collinsville.” After joining Dutton and others to start an oral history project, Snow noted, “The whole point of Living Democracy is that we don’t do what we do alone: we are part of a community. By working with an existing organization in my community instead of beginning totally from scratch, I not only make my own job a little bit easier, but I also have the fortune of adding to something that has already been created.”<sup>9</sup>



City council and civic club meetings are very visible aspects of politics in a community, but we also ask students to discover what sociologist Ray Oldenburg describes as “third places,” those “essential yet informal spots central to civil society, democracy, civic engagement, and establishing feelings of a sense of place,” where “both new friends and old should be found.”<sup>10</sup> As Jan Schaffer notes, while journalists and others might neglect the importance of these informal hangouts, wise politicians “know where the third places are.”<sup>11</sup>

Frequenting locations ranging from post offices to pubs, students reflected on the places where people gather, oftentimes across lines of gender, race, and class. Snow discovered that a third place central to community life in Collinsville was Trade Day, an event that happens every Saturday, rain or shine. She described Trade Day as the ultimate flea market, with everything from tools to fried pies offered for sale. She wrote, “For every person there because they really want to buy a new wrench or some flowers or chickens, there are probably three or four who are there because it’s a nice way to get out of the house and encounter your neighbors. Meeting with others is essential to community—you cannot be a community alone. . . . For us to solve problems in our community, we have to be a community, and that means meeting with our neighbors and getting to know them. And Trade Day in Collinsville is a sacred event for that reason: it gives people in the community a place to shake hands.”<sup>12</sup>



Students discovered that some local citizens could not immediately point to one spot as “the place,” and most observed a need for more third places in their rural communities. That realization has become a driving force for several Living Democracy community partners who are making the creation of such places a focus of their life work. Perhaps the best example is the work of Mart Gray in Elba. Gray, pastor of Covenant Community Church in Elba and a Living Democracy community part-

***For us to solve problems in our community, we have to be a community, and that means meeting with our neighbors and getting to know them.***

ner, spearheaded efforts to create the church-owned Just Folk Coffeehouse in a vacant building on the downtown square. Today, Just Folk fills a much larger purpose than dishing up delicious, homemade lunches. The coffeehouse, the hub of activity for Living Democracy students working in Elba, also hosts bluegrass concerts and art exhibits, including those created by youth working in the JumpstART workshops coordinated by Auburn students who spent their summers in Elba. Gray and others hope the revitalization of a once-empty building into a civic space for Elba can inspire others to see the potential of the area.<sup>13</sup>

## Reflections: Lessons for Leadership Education

In the spring semester of 2019, I contacted six recently graduated Living Democracy alumni to hear about their present work, reflect on the topic of leadership, and discover what they had learned since graduation about the relationship between citizens and government. I was also interested in their perceptions of how universities understand and convey leadership.

Alexis Sankey lived and worked in Elba, Alabama, for her Living Democracy experience. After graduation, she worked in social-service non-profit organizations, then took a position in the Birmingham mayor's office. These experiences helped her understand the relationships between city government and local organizations. Having witnessed firsthand the needs of these organizations, Sankey recently launched a consulting business to assist them with critical tasks, such as strategic planning, evaluation, and public relations.

Sankey learned that the disconnect between government and community members is real. Citizens have great ideas and a willingness to work toward implementation of those ideas, she says, but their ideas rarely align with the government's and often end in frustration. Regarding leadership, Sankey says that citizens want leaders who are relatable and understand community dynamics. But she says this means more than effective communication or persuasion. She notes that the process of becoming a leader inherently distances them from the people they represent, so an effort to become or remain relatable has to be intentional and ongoing.

After graduation, Lowery McNeal moved back home to Birmingham, Alabama, to work in a nonprofit organization that coordinates service learning and leadership development projects for college students and recent college graduates. McNeal lived and worked in Selma during her Living Democracy summer, and she is currently completing a

***The process of becoming a leader inherently distances them from the people they represent.***

master's degree in comparative social change at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland.

McNeal says that citizens and leaders share responsibility for the low level of trust that exists between them. She believes public leaders make sacrifices that aren't acknowledged by citizens, leaving leaders feeling unappreciated and dissolving trust between them and the citizens they serve. The governmental system causes leaders "to lose an element of their neighborly humanity" because they are working in systems that do not reflect the ways in which citizens work together

for change. Communication is key to healthy relationships, she says, but the quality of the communication is more important than the quantity. “True communication requires people looking at each other in the eye.”

Universities too often convey leadership as the responsible use of power and authority, according to McNeal, especially in an institutional context. Students, therefore, understand leadership as rules and strategies for a game—powerful knowledge, which must be handled responsibly. She says the burden of leadership is not stressed and points out that discussions with students rarely include how to be supervised by someone who has authority over you.

Learning how to accept and incorporate advice is another key to leadership, McNeal says. Once she became a supervisor of others, her understanding of leadership grew. “You can’t lose the voice in [your] head of what it means to be the supervisee,” she says.

Marian Royston’s Living Democracy experience took place in Hobson City, Alabama. Following graduation from Queen’s University in Belfast, Northern Ireland, with a degree in community development, Royston moved back to her rural Alabama hometown of Roanoke, where she is now a middle school civics and geography teacher. Before becoming a teacher, she created a youth development initiative in Roanoke that focused on high school students. It reminded her that small towns, with their limited populations, must depend upon themselves to develop leaders.

Royston says that the mistrust between leaders and citizens is a reflection of the mistrust citizens often have of one another because we are separated by race and class. “Life is different across town,” she says. Teaching school has taught her that simply living in a place does not mean you understand the entire community. People who live in the country share commonalities with those who live in a village, but the differences are stark, as well. Citizens, she says, want leaders who can relate to them. They want to see themselves in the lives of the people they elect, and Royston cited numerous local examples of how people in leadership positions gained trust by being open and vulnerable.

Royston participated in a number of leadership experiences while at Auburn University, and she says that universities convey leadership to students much differently from what she describes above. Leadership is understood by students as a tool for career advancement or vocational fulfillment, not necessarily for the collective good of society. And if a college graduate is successful, then the university can rightfully claim credit, legitimizing its function in the state as a developer of leaders. At the community level, says Royston, a successful leader in a small town is judged by the resources he or she brings in rather than by nurturing leadership skills in others.

After graduation, Royston learned that nothing really happens as fast as we think it might, and a focus on the product as opposed to the process of leadership can set college students up for an uncomfortable awakening. Strong leaders for democracy are prepared to let the agenda for actions be developed in collaboration with citizens rather than for citizens.

Hamilton Wasnick is a recent graduate who participated in Living Democracy following his freshman year. Originally from the state of Washington, his time in Linden, Alabama, became an opportunity to understand a culture very different from his own. His post-graduation plans are to earn a master's degree in higher education leadership, and he is interested in a career working with college students.

Wasnick says citizens desire a genuine relationship with leaders, one that encompasses more than just a relationship to the authority held by the leader. "Leaders must listen with the intent to hear, not just the intent to respond," he says. They need to be able to change their minds on issues after listening to citizens. A change of mind reflects growth, Wasnick says, but such flexibility is often not named or recognized by the system. College students strive to become leaders on campus, but their positions tend to sequester them away from the larger student body.

For Wasnick, when universities talk about leadership, students understand it to mean involvement, which translates to lines on a resumé. These leaders, he says, are "leaders of policy," while the everyday leaders who encourage others

***A focus on the product as opposed to the process of leadership can set college students up for an uncomfortable awakening.***

to reach their potential are "leaders of practice." The distinction is interesting, and it is unfortunate that both types are rarely found in the same person. College students need the opportunity to have the type of

leadership that requires the nurturing of relationships since that is where leadership is defined. Service opportunities are important, Wasnick says, but they are incomplete if an interactive relationship is not present.

Blake Evans was a communications major who participated in the first cohort of Living Democracy students in 2012. Evans is now the elections chief in the Fulton County, Georgia, Registration and Elections Department, which covers part of metro Atlanta. His career path is ironic, he says, recalling a conversation with the town clerk of Linden, Alabama, during his Living

Democracy summer, who warned him not to go into elections because the paperwork was overwhelming. Evans' work in Linden was his first opportunity to understand how a municipality functions, and it led to his pursuit of a master's degree in public administration.

Evans sees the disconnect between leaders and citizens, but he recounts stories of leaders who are defying this stereotypical relationship by the effort they put into developing trust. He admits that while people may want to see themselves reflected in

the person they vote for, what citizens really desire is proof that they are being respected and heard.

When universities talk about leadership, Evans says, students hear "get out of your comfort zone," which more closely aligns to the type of leadership that citizens appreciate.

Evans' reflection on how universities convey leadership is more positive than negative. Living Democracy and similar programs helped Evans get comfortable working with citizens outside of the university. But these programs take extended time, he says, since the best learning opportunities occur in the real world of everyday decision-making, not in scenarios designed for classroom enhancement.

Laney Payne's Living Democracy experience took place in the coastal Alabama community of Bayou La Batre. She now lives in Florida and works for a nonprofit organization that provides programs for at-risk female youth in the juvenile system. Payne lived in Bayou La Batre during a particularly stressful chapter of the community's life due to the federal corruption case against the mayor.

When asked about her thoughts on the relationship between leaders and community members, Payne told of her recent experience accompanying students in her program to the statehouse so they could meet legislators and tell the story of the organization. The purpose of the statehouse visit was for elected leaders to meet the people they are helping through state funding of services. But, as Payne notes, the visits also become a lesson in leadership. Some officials allotted very little time to meet with the students, while others took their time

***There is a form of leadership that is less visible but equally valuable. You may not be able to locate the less visible leaders because "they are working their butts off" and staying in the shadows rather than the spotlight.***

and connected with the students in a meaningful way. These leaders took their jackets off, came around from behind their desk, and engaged with students with eye contact and concern. “Leaders need to roll up their sleeves a little bit and connect with people,” she says.

Payne concedes that leadership and visibility do not always equate. There is a form of leadership that is less visible but equally valuable. You may not be able to locate the less visible leaders because “they are working their butts off” and staying in the shadows rather than the spotlight.

These six graduates, and others who appear in the previous excerpt, all participated in the Living Democracy program and, in different ways, they each continue to “live democracy” in their own contexts; they continue to ask questions about society and their role in it. They have the kind of wisdom that comes from lived experiences beyond the classroom, and their willingness to reflect on these issues with a former professor is a gift—one that will convey deep truths to another generation of students and beyond.



## NOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> David Mathews, *The Ecology of Democracy: Finding Ways to Have a Stronger Hand in Shaping Our Future* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2014).
- <sup>3</sup> Cristin Foster et al., *2015 Alabama Civic Health Index*, [https://issuu.com/mathewscenter/docs/alchi\\_2015\\_final](https://issuu.com/mathewscenter/docs/alchi_2015_final) (accessed March 28, 2017).
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# THE POWER OF PUBLIC DELIBERATION

## Civic Education for Older Students

William V. Muse and Carol Farquhar Nugent

During the past seven years, the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) and its extended network have offered courses at a number of institutions of higher education. These courses, which focus on the practice of deliberating about public issues, are offered to older adults within continuing education programs sponsored by the Bernard Osher Foundation. Having both held the position of president of NIFI, we see this program as an opportunity to fulfill NIFI's mission of promoting public deliberation while also engaging an underserved—but politically active—audience in deliberative contemplation of political questions.

Educational programs at colleges and universities in this country serve a number of populations. The most iconic market consists of students who are selectively enrolled full time, live on or near the campus, and participate in many campus activities. These students are served primarily by private colleges and major public institutions. A second market segment includes students who are enrolled part or full time, live at home or off campus, and often work part or full time. Students in this audience primarily attend public institutions, particularly community colleges; they are less involved in campus activities and focus primarily on gaining the skills and credentials to acquire a job or advance in employment.

Retirement-aged students represent a frequently overlooked segment of the market for higher education. This third market segment includes adults who are seeking intellectual engagement and enrichment. They are served through “continuing education” divisions of local institutions in which students enroll in noncredit courses taught by retired faculty or members of the community who have experience in the subject being taught. The educational backgrounds of continuing education students range from never having attended college to those with advanced degrees. Although the students who participate in continuing education courses may highly value the experience, this segment of the university is rarely a high priority of the academic leadership.

In 2001, the Bernard Osher Foundation began providing grants to universities to expand and enrich their continuing education programs. The



foundation sought to strengthen offerings for older adults who are motivated by the joy of learning and the desire to stay connected to the world, rather than by a desire to acquire professional skills and credentials. The funds were used to establish Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, or OLLIs. From the time of its inception, more than 120 colleges and universities have established OLLI programs. They offer courses to adults over the age of 50 for very modest fees in a wide variety of subjects. OLLIs have been established at religious and secular institutions, public and private schools, and research universities and liberal arts colleges.

***Retired senior citizens aren't done yet. And they are gratified that their ideas don't just evaporate, but are shared with people who can make a difference by carrying these ideas to eventual fruition.***

In 2012, the National Issues Forums Institute, which is headquartered in Dayton, Ohio, approached the University of Dayton about offering a course through its OLLI program. NIFI is a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization that, in partnership with the Kettering Foundation, develops materials and advocates a process for individuals to engage in public deliberation about things that matter to them. Kettering is a nonprofit operating foundation that researches democracy. Part of this research focuses on “naming and framing” issues of public concern to help citizens identify what they hold valuable and recognize necessary trade-offs in possible approaches to solving public problems. NIFI takes this information and publishes it in the form of “issue guides,” which usually include three options for approaching an issue. It then works with individuals and organizations to convene forums that give citizens an opportunity to learn about the issue, express their views, listen to the opinions of others, and share their conclusions. The forums provide Kettering Foundation with valuable research into the practice of deliberation.

NIFI forums typically involve 15 to 20 individuals, seated around a conference table or in chairs arranged in a circle. The discussion is led by a moderator whose role is to facilitate the exchange of views, ensuring that everyone has a voice and that no one dominates the discussion. The process is called public deliberation because it is very *deliberate*—focusing first on the issue, including personal experience and insights, and then on each option. Forum participants are asked to share their conclusions via a questionnaire.

The University of Dayton OLLI program accepted a proposal from the authors for a course entitled the Power of Public Deliberation. The OLLI course catalog listed the dates and topics for six weekly two-hour sessions. Students were encouraged to acquire the issue guides from NIFI and read them before the class sessions. There was some concern as to whether anyone would sign up for the course, given that it was so different from others in which the instructors share their expertise. Enrollment was limited to 20 students but, to our surprise, 25 enrolled in the first class. This pattern has continued over the past seven years, with the course being offered during both a fall and a spring term. Also surprising has been the number of individuals who have enrolled in the course two or three times, even when the same issue topics were scheduled. Students reported that having the opportunity to share their views and hear the conclusions of others is a different and valuable experience for them.

Tim Hrastar, a communications consultant who enrolled in the OLLI course at the University of Dayton and later became a session moderator in the course, gave this assessment of his experience:

Retired senior citizens aren't done yet. They find a deliberative session rewarding, being able to contribute ideas that lend themselves to solutions. And they are gratified that their ideas don't just evaporate, but are shared with people who can make a difference by carrying these ideas to eventual fruition.

By giving older citizens the opportunity to engage with current issues of deep concern, the Power of Public Deliberation course fulfills the overall mission of OLLI programs.

The central research question posed by the Kettering Foundation is “What does it take to make a democracy work as it should?” The most significant answer to that question is citizen engagement. That normally means voting since a democracy is a representative form of government and voting is the primary way in which one is represented. But in too many elections, particularly at the local levels, voting participation is very low—a great weakness in our democratic system.

Kettering Foundation research found that to increase voting and public engagement, citizens need (1) to have a better understanding of individual issues and how the issues could affect them, (2) a voice to express their views about an issue and hear what others have to say, and (3) an opportunity to engage with others in deciding what should be done. If the issue is one that is being considered by elected officials, this might mean communicating with

them about the conclusions reached in the forums. If the issue affects their own community, it might lead to a task force being formed to work toward a solution.

Working with the Kettering Foundation, the National Issues Forums Institute (and its predecessor, the Domestic Policy Institute) have been using forums that incorporate public deliberation for nearly 40 years. National Issues Forums are convened in

churches, public libraries, civic institutions, schools, and personal residences. Teachers in educational institutions—from middle and high schools to universities, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels—have concluded that the

***Senior citizens who enroll in continuing education classes feel that they have learned much over their lifetimes and are very responsive to the opportunity to share their perspectives.***

deliberation process helps their students develop critical-thinking skills, the ability to communicate effectively (both in speaking and listening), and a willingness to collaborate with others who may be different and who have different views.

Senior citizens who enroll in continuing education classes feel that they have learned much over their lifetimes and are very responsive to the opportunity to share their perspectives. And the setting and climate for public deliberation help individuals learn how to listen to other views and move toward finding common ground—a place where they can work together. Kent Friel, a retired business executive in Cincinnati who developed a course for the OLLI program at the University of Cincinnati, had this to say about his experience with the course:

I have been moderating OLLI classes using the deliberative process and the NIFI issue guides for six years. Universally, in after-class evaluations, the students have endorsed the [process of] learning by listening to others and the civility they have experienced in these classes.

In addition to the University of Dayton, similar courses have been established at the University of Cincinnati, the University of North Florida, Auburn University, the University of Georgia, Oklahoma State University, and the University of Hawaii. Gregg Kaufman, an NIFI ambassador, made a presentation about the Power of Public Deliberation course at the 2018

National OLLI Conference in Scottsdale, Arizona. He was assisted by Julie Mitchell from the University of Dayton and Jeanette Tooley from the University of North Florida, both executive directors of OLLI programs at their universities. They offered a mini-forum, followed by a presentation on how to develop an OLLI course. The objective was to encourage other universities with OLLI programs to implement similar courses. Kaufman, a retired college professor who established the OLLI course at the University of North Florida, said:

The OLLI students bring a diversity of employment and life backgrounds, as well as intellectual curiosity and, much like the first-year students I have taught, respond to the deliberative process with similar satisfaction. People of all ages perceive deliberative dialogue's civility and respect as new and refreshing.

Most senior citizens have already established or completed their careers. This means that continuing education programs like OLLI are opportunities to highlight other purposes of higher education, such as personal enrichment and preparation for civic life. Older adults vote at a higher rate

***Most senior citizens have already established or completed their careers. This means that continuing education programs are opportunities to highlight other purposes of higher education, such as personal enrichment and preparation for civic life.***

than any other age group. Therefore, when they are better informed about issues that are important to their communities, states, and nation, their votes help ensure that we have the kind of leaders who will work toward the most desirable solutions. But democracy flourishes when citizens participate in ways that extend

beyond voting. Senior citizens have voices that need to be heard. The OLLI programs provide the opportunity for this to occur.

This unique deliberative and democratic approach allows people to engage in meaningful and informed discussion despite political, religious, social, cultural, and gender differences. It is critical that we find ways to have civil discourse about the challenges we face, and providing an environment

for the deliberative exchange of views could go a long way toward reducing the level of polarization that now exists in our society.



# BUILDING STUDENT CIVIC LEADERSHIP THROUGH SUSTAINED DIALOGUE

Michaela Grenier

*This article is substantially based on a chapter from the forthcoming book Creating Space for Democracy: A Primer on Dialogue and Deliberation in Higher Education, reproduced with permission of the publisher (Copyright © 2019 by Stylus Publishing, LLC).*

Maintaining a healthy democracy requires a serious and sustained effort from those in government, from citizens who shape their communities, and from the larger society as a whole. There are a variety of roles people can play in supporting a vibrant democracy, including serving in elected office, voting, teaching civic education, and organizing nonviolent protests to spur change. While these diverse roles involve different skills and training, all require leaders who possess skills for collaborating to create change. Collaboration skills are essential to tackling any public problem around which there are diverse viewpoints and competing interests. Providing opportunities for citizens to practice these collaborative skills is critical for supporting a healthy democracy.

## **Sustained Dialogue**

Sustained Dialogue (SD) is an intergroup dialogue process developed in 1993 by Harold Saunders, a pioneering US diplomat who is credited with coining the phrase “peace process” to describe US negotiation efforts in the Middle East. From insights gained during his two decades of experience in international diplomacy and his subsequent work leading international citizen-led dialogue initiatives, Saunders conceptualized a five-stage process that encompassed the patterns and phases through which groups in conflict move when working toward resolution. While Saunders first conceptualized the Sustained Dialogue process as a tool for international diplomacy and peace negotiations, its broader applications soon became apparent.

## **The Sustained Dialogue Campus Network**

In 1999, undergraduate students at Princeton University were the first to introduce the Sustained Dialogue process into the college context. Collaborating with Saunders, these innovative students adapted SD to address racial

tensions on their campus. For several years, Princeton students collaborated with interested students from other college campuses to spread the SD model in a grassroots fashion. In 2003, the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network (SDCN) was officially established as a branch of Saunders' newly formed international nonprofit, the Sustained Dialogue Institute.

Since that time, SDCN has supported the growth of over 40 campus programs in the United States as well as youth-led SD initiatives in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Kenya. SDCN staff helps college and university communities apply and adapt the Sustained Dialogue process to address issues facing their campuses by providing in-person and virtual trainings, dialogue resource guides, and ongoing coaching and support on program design, implementation, and evaluation.

When first applied to the college context, Sustained Dialogue was designed as a cocurricular program by and for students. This is still SD's traditional model, but over the past 20 years, the SDCN team has also helped campuses build additional models, including academic course and retreat formats. Regardless of structure, all programs share the particular SD framework and dialogue method, which has some key features that distinguish it from other models for intergroup dialogue.

Each campus program defines its programmatic goals differently, depending on the needs of its campus and the audiences involved. Addressing such diverse topics as bridging racial divides on campus, combatting Islamophobia, and creating more welcoming residential environments for trans students, campus SD programs may focus on problems that affect the well-being of particular communities or the campus as a whole. SDCN staff train campus participants on dialogue facilitation, understanding social identity, and navigating identity-related conflicts that might arise within a community. As campus programs work to pursue their specific goals, SDCN staff provide ongoing support and consultation to help campuses tackle complex problems. The training, resources, and support are focused on a broad set of goals:

- helping individuals and campus communities develop a deep understanding of the Sustained Dialogue process, including how to apply the process as a tool for collaborative community change through dialogue;
- providing program participants with skills for engaging in true dialogue with one another to improve communication, build or improve relationships, and develop shared understandings around the complexities of problems affecting their communities;

- equipping program participants with skills for taking collaborative action to address problems;
- helping program participants develop a lens for understanding how systems—both current and historical—have impacted their own identities and experiences as well as the identities and experiences of those around them; and
- providing program participants with a framework for analyzing conflictual intergroup relationships.

## **The Sustained Dialogue Model**

It is important to distinguish between dialogue as a mode of communication and the practice of specific dialogic models like Sustained Dialogue. By Saunders' definition, dialogue as a mode of communication can be defined as a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to one another deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Dialogue can thus be understood as the type of interaction that occurs when two or more people communicate with one another in a manner that reflects the authentic engagement and deep listening described above. Dialogue, in and of itself, can be transformative because of its potential for human connection and its contrast with the dominant modes of communication witnessed in much of today's public discourse. But additional civic possibilities arise when this mode of communication is coupled with a larger framework for ongoing communication and shared problem solving as is the case with the Sustained Dialogue model.

Sustained Dialogue has two core pillars that distinguish it from other dialogue methods and conflict transformation processes. One pillar is its five-stage dialogue-to-action process. The other is a relational paradigm that focuses on the dynamic relationships between groups and individuals in conflict.

### ***The Five-Stage Process***

Through SD's five-stage dialogue-to-action process, groups develop insights that could not have been reached by any one participant alone. The *sustained* nature of the process is a key feature. The group meets over a span of several months (or potentially even years) and collectively moves from initial experience sharing and issue identification to developing and implementing a shared action plan for addressing community issues. It develops a cumulative agenda for meetings in which each dialogue session picks up where the last one



left off. This structure allows participants to engage deeply in the relationships they form through SD while also developing new skills and insights.

The first stage of SD—determining who should be in dialogue—involves identifying and recruiting participants based on the topics or relationships that dialogue initiatives aim to address. Stage one frequently involves tailored outreach to groups contributing to or affected by the community issues that have prompted the dialogue. Typically, dialogue groups contain 12 to 15 participants and 2 trained peer facilitators. For topics that affect the entire community, campuses will often run multiple simultaneous dialogue groups of this size to allow for large-scale participation. Peer facilitators are drawn from the communities affected by the issues being discussed. These dialogue facilitators undergo substantial training on the SD process, dialogue facilitation, and how to lead their group in thoughtful and analytical examination of the relationships involved in the community issues they are addressing. Stage one frequently takes the longest as it involves identifying and training dialogue facilitators, recruiting participants, structuring dialogue groups, and organizing logistics so that all groups affected by the topic are able to participate.

The second stage of the SD process involves developing trust and common purpose within the dialogue group as participants begin to share personal experiences and interrogate problems affecting their community.

During the third stage, dialogue group members work together to analytically examine the root causes of community problems and the larger social systems and structures that influence how issues play out at the local level.

Stage four involves developing a plan for action informed by knowledge built within the group, research about community needs, and insights gained from consultation with experts external to the dialogue group.

In the fifth and final stage of the SD process, the dialogue group works to implement the plan they have developed in collaboration with members of their community.

Although the stages in the SD process build on one another, they do not have to be experienced in a strictly linear fashion. Groups might revisit various stages throughout their journey together as new insights emerge and their action plans develop.

### ***A Relational Approach***

The SD model's second core pillar is a relational approach to addressing community problems. It involves explicitly focusing on the dynamic relationships between groups and individuals within the community to build or improve

community relationships while also solving problems. SD groups focus on understanding how community members are affected by or contribute to issues and how they can work together as a group to identify and address root causes of problems. In utilizing this paradigm, dialogue participants and facilitators are asked to analyze five key elements when trying to create change within relationships: patterns of interaction; perceptions, misperceptions, and stereotypes; interests; identity; and power.

Amidst concerns about the costs of higher education and its increasing emphasis on workforce development, many colleges are interested in programs that help students learn how to build relationships across lines of difference and

***Sustained Dialogue has a long history of producing strong community leadership skills. This is especially true for SD facilitators, who develop competence in dialogue facilitation, intercultural fluency, and leading a group toward action.***

lead diverse teams.

Sustained Dialogue provides opportunities for students to develop these skills through a structured process. By asking program participants to foreground relationships while moving through the dialogue-to-action process, SD participants must grapple with critical

questions about how and why breakdowns in relationships have occurred within their community. It also forces participants to approach problem-solving efforts with both a focus on building reciprocal relationships and attention to the complex histories and unequal power dynamics within a community. In this way, SD programs provide valuable opportunities for students to practice civic and relational skills that are required for any members of a diverse democratic society who wish to effect change in their community.

## **The Impact of Sustained Dialogue on Leadership Development**

Sustained Dialogue has a long history of producing strong community leadership skills. This is especially true for SD facilitators, who develop competence in dialogue facilitation, intercultural fluency, and leading a group toward action. While students who serve as dialogue facilitators tend to exhibit particularly marked growth in their skill development, results from SDCN's

annual program evaluations also indicate statistically significant growth in skill development for SD program members as a whole.

The Sustained Dialogue Campus Network staff annually evaluates the impact of campus programs by collecting surveys from the network of colleges and universities running SD programs. Participants and facilitators are asked to complete pre- and post-dialogue surveys that measure their beliefs about their own skills and abilities, their attitudes and behavior, their feelings about particular campus topics, and their experiences participating in SD. Data collected through these surveys help SDCN staff evaluate and monitor the impacts of SD campus dialogue programs.

Results from SDCN's most recent set of evaluation data demonstrate the impact of campus SD programs on students' development as leaders and active contributors to a democratic society.<sup>1</sup> To assess program outcomes related to student civic development, SDCN draws on a framework of civic competencies put forth by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement in their report *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*.<sup>2</sup> In that report, the task force lays out 27 competencies for civic learning and democratic engagement meant to guide the development of undergraduate education plans that prepare students for active participation in a democratic society. SDCN uses this framework to analyze the impact of SD campus programs on student civic development as part of SDCN's broader program evaluation efforts.

The recent evaluation data also show significant positive outcomes around several of the competencies included in the National Task Force framework, particularly in the competencies of critical inquiry, analysis, and reasoning; deliberation and bridge building across differences; and public problem solving with diverse partners.

### ***Critical Inquiry, Analysis, and Reasoning***

Sustained Dialogue helps strengthen program participants' capacities for critical inquiry and reasoning by prompting them to think deeply about their own perspectives and experiences as well as those of others. Results from pre- and post-dialogue surveys demonstrate a statistically significant increase in survey respondents' likelihood to "think critically about the experiences of others and how they can be improved" after having participated in Sustained Dialogue. Results also indicated a statistically significant increase in the frequency with which respondents "examined the strengths and weaknesses of

[their] own views on a topic.” Students’ testimonials about their experiences similarly reflect these themes, with countless students noting how engagement with SD taught them to listen, particularly to those who do not share their own perspectives or opinions.

### ***Deliberation and Bridge Building across Differences***

The 2017-2018 SDCN survey results indicated that engagement with the Sustained Dialogue process helps participants improve their capacity to solve conflicts and build relationships across lines of difference, directly connecting to the “deliberation and bridge building across differences” competency identified by the National Task Force for Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement. The

### ***Engagement with the Sustained Dialogue process helps participants improve their capacity to solve conflicts and build relationships across lines of difference.***

survey results demonstrated statistically significant increases in respondents’ abilities to both “help people resolve their disagreements with one another” and “resolve conflicts that involve bias, discrimination, and prejudice” after having participated in Sustained Dialogue. The ability to effectively

resolve conflicts is a key skill for any civic leader, particularly those looking to build bridges and develop bold actions to address the complex public problems currently facing society. One student testimonial underscored this point:

In this dialogue I learned that it is possible for people of differing backgrounds and beliefs to come together and have constructive conversations. The news and politics today make it seem like this could never happen, but it definitely can if people are willing to try.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Public Problem Solving with Diverse Partners***

As mentioned previously, one of the two key pillars of the Sustained Dialogue model is its five-stage process leading from dialogue to action. Given this structure, the Sustained Dialogue process teaches participants a broad range of skills that are necessary for leading public problem-solving efforts with diverse partners, which is an important civic competency identified by the National Task Force. Through engagement with the SD process, students have opportunities to increase their abilities to build relationships and to lead

collaborative action to address shared community concerns. When asked about their ability to lead groups in which people from different backgrounds feel welcomed and included, SD program participants' pre- and post-dialogue survey responses demonstrated a statistically significant increase in their ability to do so after having participated in dialogue. Pre- and post-dialogue survey results from SD program participants also showed a statistically significant increase in the frequency with which respondents organized others to work on campus or local issues after having participated in dialogue.

## Preparing Civic Leaders

Among all these powerful civic outcomes for Sustained Dialogue program participants, one other result is particularly meaningful in relation to preparing students as future civic leaders. This outcome does not fit as neatly into the National Task Force for Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement's framework, but it is nonetheless important as it speaks to students' sense of civic agency. Survey results from the 2017-2018 academic year showed a significant increase in respondents' self-reported ability to contribute to the well-being of their communities after participating in Sustained Dialogue. This powerful finding suggests that SD not only helps students build tangible skills required for civic leadership, it also helps them build confidence in their own abilities to serve their communities and create change.

In a time of deep polarization in the United States, when it seems increasingly difficult to talk across lines of difference and when, simultaneously, students, faculty, and staff face an increasingly globalized world, Sustained Dialogue offers a method for building the important skills required for engaging constructively with one another, for understanding each other, and for effectively working together to improve campus and community life. Sustained Dialogue also provides a method for helping to equip students with the tools required for living—and leading—in a diverse democratic society.



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Sustained Dialogue Campus Network, *Network Evaluation Results 2017-2018*, available upon request from [INFO@SUSTAINEDDIALOGUE.ORG](mailto:INFO@SUSTAINEDDIALOGUE.ORG).
- <sup>2</sup> National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* (Washington DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2012): 3-4.
- <sup>3</sup> Sustained Dialogue Campus Network, *Network Evaluation Results 2017-2018*.

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# COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS SERVING DEMOCRACY

An Interview with Katrina S. Rogers and Keith Melville

*The occasion for this interview with Katrina S. Rogers, president of Fielding Graduate University, is the release of the new volume Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education: Reclaiming Our Civic Purpose (Lexington Books, 2019), which Rogers coedited with William Flores, former president of the University of Houston Downtown. The project was conceived during an ongoing exchange of college and university presidents held by the Kettering Foundation. Here, Keith Melville, a senior faculty member at Fielding, discusses with Rogers what she and Flores set out to do when they asked essayists of the book to reflect on their institutions' civic purpose and the ways in which the civic dimension is an integral part of their educational mission.*

The book *Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education* grew out of the realization that political polarization and alienation pose a threat to American higher education and that colleges and universities have the power to reinforce the nation's democratic life. As David Mathews, Kettering Foundation president and former University of Alabama president, put it in his own contribution to the volume, "Institutions of higher education . . . are in trouble when democracy is in trouble."<sup>1</sup> College presidents have particular reason to be concerned about their institutions being perceived as politically biased, distanced from public concerns, or serving only the narrow economic interests of their graduates. These perceptions contradict traditional understandings of higher education as serving the public good and pose an existential threat to institutions that rely on various forms of public support.

At a time when democracy is in urgent need of repair, higher education has a key role to play in preparing students to be effective, engaged citizens. "Too often, that responsibility is evident in mission statements, but not in how students are actually educated," notes Thomas Ehrlich, former president of Indiana University, in a testimonial about the book. Colleges and universities can also reach beyond their own campuses to engage citizens through service or by organizing public deliberative forums.

Rogers and Flores acknowledge in their introductory comments the increasing pressure on higher education institutions to emphasize the private, career-enhancing purposes of undergraduate education. They point out that, since the founding of this country, one of the central purposes of education at

all levels has been the cultivation of civic virtues, habits, and skills. They argue that educators must take their civic mission seriously—and start with a clear understanding of democratic citizens as active agents and producers, not just consumers or advocates.

The book is a call to action. It offers a series of compelling snapshots of how leaders of different types of educational institutions—private liberal arts colleges and community colleges, land-grant universities and urban colleges—are responding to this challenge with innovative efforts to infuse many parts of the college experience with a civic dimension.

**Melville:** At a time of growing concern about the erosion of democratic norms and practices, your new book could not be more timely. In a sense, the 21 essays in this volume are different voices in a single conversation. Where did this conversation start?

**Rogers:** Powerful books—and Bill and I hope this is one—are sparked by conversations. These conversations started in 2017 at a national Points of Light conference when that group, under Neil Bush’s leadership, invited David Mathews and others to address higher education’s role. Soon after, the conversation continued as the Kettering Foundation was convening a group of college presidents who had a shared interest in higher education’s role in encouraging civic engagement. In an ongoing series of meetings, we have explored what it means to put a sharper focus on civic engagement and what it takes to prepare students for democratic life.

While many educators aren’t clear about their civic mission or how they can make it a more prominent part of their students’ experience, some are doing strikingly innovative things. The purpose of this book is to shed a bright light on what some educators and institutions are doing to revive and strengthen civic education.

As the presidents in this group got to know one another better and have deeper conversations, we realized that a lot of what we already do as leaders of higher-learning institutions can be understood as civic engagement. It consists, for example, of educating students about their rights and responsibilities as voters and getting students to participate in service learning, which is often now a requirement for undergraduates. Beyond that, we have been exploring what it means to be agents of democracy. This anthology begins by asking college presidents to reflect on their civic commitment and why it is a priority.

**Melville:** The first section of this book, “Rising to the Challenge,” is, in part, a reminder of what many people have noted since the founding generation, that the health of a democratic society depends on what educators do.



**Rogers:** That's right. From the beginning of the American experiment in democracy, the Framers recognized that educators play a crucial role in cultivating civic virtues and skills. You need an educated citizenry to maintain a democracy. The alternative is a tendency to revert to more authoritarian forms of government. Educating for democracy was a central theme in John Dewey's writing, and the connection was reiterated in 1947 when the Truman Commission on Higher Education asserted that, "The first and most essential charge upon higher education is that . . . it shall be the carrier of democratic values, ideals, and processes."<sup>2</sup>

***You need an educated citizenry to maintain a democracy. The alternative is a tendency to revert to more authoritarian forms of government.***

Most college presidents understand the connection. However, the civic mission has receded in higher education. Leaders tend to be preoccupied with day-to-day priorities, such as fund-raising, persuasion, personnel issues, and the other things presidents do to keep their institutions running. It is understandable that many higher education leaders have not regarded the civic mission as a priority.

That's why it is important to make the case once again for higher education's role in helping to repair and strengthen our democracy. When you look at various sectors—government, the corporate sector, and nonprofit organizations—what sector other than higher education is going to form the next generation of democratic citizens? That isn't the role of the private sector, and it's not the role of nonprofits. Neither is it the role of government, although public officials play an important role in reinforcing democratic principles and norms—or undermining them. Higher education must take up the call decisively and in a collective way to bolster democracy, understood as a set of principles and practices.

**Melville:** Several essays in this volume refer to declining trust in higher education. What's the connection between declining trust and the erosion of higher education's civic purpose?

**Rogers:** The decline of public confidence in higher education is part of a broad decline in confidence and trust in most institutions. Clearly, you can't lay this mainly at the feet of higher education. However, in several ways, higher education has fueled mistrust. Our approaches to financial aid have been responsible for increasing student debt. Leaders in higher education have not strongly

advocated for measures that would help to level that playing field, such as affirmative action measures, which has contributed to a lack of confidence. Because higher education is widely regarded as more liberal than conservative, US colleges and universities are blamed for accelerating partisan polarization.

Still, higher education can help to restore the public's trust. Higher education is a major factor in helping young people prepare for good jobs and economic advancement. That is our job, our mission. We can also restore public trust by the way we carry out our civic mission. Civic education shouldn't be ideological indoctrination. As many of the examples in this volume demonstrate, educating citizens takes many forms. It involves a wide range of activities, such as taking part in community problem solving or helping students learn the skills required to engage in deliberative conversations to work constructively across differences.

**Melville:** When they are reminded of their civic mission, many higher education leaders say, "We're already doing that. We just had a get-out-the-vote campaign, and we have an active commitment to community service. What else should we be doing?" One of the chief contributions of this book is that it illustrates the variety of ways in which the civic dimension can be infused into the experience of higher education.

**Rogers:** Many of the presidents who contributed to this volume discuss the work their institutions are already doing. Our goal is to offer a broader sense of democratic citizenship and to be more intentional about it. One central task is for us to reimagine the word "citizen" and claim it. We've had a tendency to think of citizens as consumers. Educators need to start with a

***Higher education must take up the call decisively and in a collective way to bolster democracy, understood as a set of principles and practices.***

broader conception that acknowledges rights and responsibilities, values and behaviors. Many of the essays in this volume illustrate what it means to think of citizens as active agents.

One of the themes of the book is how institutional leaders concerned about democracy are shaping campus communities that embody democratic principles and practices. Another theme is how we instill a sense of empathy, which is a key element in navigating differences. In an increasingly diverse society, we need to learn how to navigate across a wide range of economic, racial, ethnic, and cultural differences.

Diversity consists of something more than tolerating differences and appreciating them. It consists of learning the skills needed to navigate differences. Young people who spend so much time on social media often engage with others who hold similar views. They don't know how to talk to people with whom they disagree.

Contributors to this volume explore ways to navigate differences by learning how to engage in dialogue and public deliberation. In "Section IV, Voices of Presidents on Student Learning and Democracy," readers will find several accounts of how deliberative forums, such as those convened by Initiatives for Democratic Practices (formerly known as Centers for Democratic Public Life), offer a great way to

learn how to engage in productive deliberations. By featuring these occasions and the skills participants learn in the course of public forums, campuses model what it means to live in democratic communities.

***While many college presidents talk about civic engagement "out there," only a few talk about civic engagement "in here," in the day-to-day life of campus communities.***

While many college presidents talk about civic engagement "out there," only a few talk about civic engagement "in here," in the day-to-day life of campus communities. It's a challenge for us as institutional leaders to redesign campus governance practices in such a way that they are models of democratic practice. That's hard work, which reminds all of us—students, faculty, and administrators—how difficult democracy is, how messy and inefficient it can be, and how challenging it is to manage conflict and negotiate differences. There is a lot for us to learn about public deliberation as a core democratic skill. It's not a habit or skill that just our students need to learn, but one that we need to honor as institutional leaders.

**Melville:** Another theme runs through this book: the ways in which some colleges and universities promote a culture of civic involvement, not just within the campus community but within the broader community, on pressing public issues and problems. The reason many people say they don't like politics is that politics—as the word is normally understood—is about conflict. It is something elected officials do. One of the key lessons of civic education is that, initially and importantly, it is what *we* do.

<b>Contents and Authors</b> <i>Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education: Reclaiming Our Civic Perspective<sup>3</sup></i>	
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**Rogers:** Readers will find various examples in this book that demonstrate what colleges are doing to encourage students to engage in community problem solving. They promote a culture of civic involvement not only by encouraging students to participate in voter registration and hosting events

at which candidates are invited to speak on campus, but also by participating in the civic life of local communities, taking part in community forums, and contributing to community blogs.

The question is what we as higher education leaders can do to help students experience democratic politics as something we all do. In the accounts of what takes place at James Madison University, the University of Houston Downtown, Colorado State University, and other institutions, you see examples of students engaged in community problem solving.

Higher education leaders should empower students to be advocates for the social change we want to see in the world. One way to start is by addressing vexing problems in your own community. The first task of a university president is to ask, “Whom do we serve?” It’s not just our undergraduates and employees, but also the local community.

How do we link our activities to what is happening in the surrounding community? You see that in the chapter about James Madison University, written by Jonathan Alger and Abraham Goldberg. You also see that in the chapters written by Kevin Drumm about SUNY Broome, an institution that is located in an economically depressed community where the university and its students play an important role as advocates and engaged citizens, and by Otto Lee about Los Angeles Harbor College, another example of how students can be engaged in community problem solving. In California, some community colleges have opened up their parking lots for homeless students, a bold and controversial measure and a vivid example of what community engagement means, how campuses are rethinking their connection to local communities and their needs, and the lessons students learn about democracy by taking part in these initiatives.

**Melville:** On most college campuses, civic activities are mainly cocurricular. However, the greatest part of what students do is curricular. It takes place in classrooms. College presidents are obliged to respect faculty’s responsibility for defining the curriculum. How can civic education be integrated into the higher education curriculum?

**Rogers:** There are a couple of ways to do it. One is to acknowledge, support, and honor faculty and students for their civic engagement. You can resource their activities by offering budgetary support for them. Presidents can fund deliberative practices and campus forums and provide the resources needed for them. To make change, you work with the willing. You find faculty who care and are committed, and you recognize them for the important work they are doing.

You can also support their work by building incentives into promotion and tenure policies and in other ways offer incentives for faculty who lead civic engagement activities. You can authorize funds to send them to professional development activities, such as training in moderating skills. While it's not appropriate for college administrators to impose their ideas about curriculum, you encourage what you would like to see in the institution and serve as a prominent spokesperson and cheerleader for activities that advance the civic mission.

**Melville:** It's one thing to infuse civic values and skills into some disciplines, such as political science, communication, or sociology, but it's more difficult to do so in career-related courses of study, such as nursing, premed, or the physical sciences. How can college presidents infuse the civic curriculum into these areas?

**Rogers:** I agree that it's easier to do it if you're in political science or history and harder if the student is on track to become a dental hygienist. There are several examples in this book that illustrate how to infuse the civic

***If enough college presidents were committed to taking their civic mission seriously and infusing it into the life of every student, higher education would play an important role in building a new generation of citizens for whom “politics” is not something other people do but something all of us do.***

mission throughout the curriculum. At James Madison University, the first experience for every entering student, regardless of major, is that they engage with a public issue and the complexity of addressing it. Later on, no matter what preprofessional course they have chosen—even, for example, nursing—they grapple with public policy questions related

to their specialty that arise in their local communities. By encouraging such initiatives in every department, President Jonathan Alger has promoted civic learning for virtually every student at James Madison University.

You start with what you've got and build from those strengths. If we all did that—if enough college presidents were committed to taking their civic mission seriously and infusing it into the life of every student—higher education would play an important role in building a new generation of citizens for whom “politics” is not something other people do but something all of us do.

**Melville:** I would like to come back to another theme that runs through this book. There's a sense of urgency today about responding to a crisis in democracy. What is your hope and expectation about how you and other college presidents can make a difference?

**Rogers:** Today, there are more democracies worldwide than ever before. But many are fragile, including our own, which is clearly a flawed democracy. We need to engage in the slow, hard work of building alliances across sectors with associations that share our concern about the crisis of democracy. For example, Points of Light is a large and influential group that promotes volunteerism. It is nonpartisan, created by President George H. W. Bush. That's a good place to start because it is not generally regarded as an organization engaged in addressing problems of democracy. The Association of Governing Boards is another. To reclaim our democracy and rebuild it, we have to build national alliances.

We should be concerned about what we are leaving to the next generation, many of whom realize that democracy is in peril. I hope this new generation will step forward to claim and own democracy. Members of every generation have to step up and claim the world they want. We have the responsibility to equip them with the tools to do it. If we don't do that, we are failing in our mission to serve the public and society generally.



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> David Mathews, "Democracy's Challenge for Academe: From Public Good to Consumer Good and Back?," in *Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education: Reclaiming Our Civic Purpose*, edited by William V. Flores and Katrina S. Rogers (New York: Lexington Books, 2019): 55-67, 57.
- <sup>2</sup> Truman Commission, *Higher Education for American Democracy: A Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947): 102.
- <sup>3</sup> William V. Flores and Katrina S. Rogers, eds., *Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education: Reclaiming Our Civic Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019).

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# WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY DOES HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT?

David Mathews

In a prospectus shared with authors of articles for this issue of the *Higher Education Exchange* (*HEX*), the line that caught my eye raised the questions, What kind of democratic skills are being taught on campuses? and What are the implications for the future of democracy? Democracy's future is already endangered by a loss of public confidence in government and other major institutions, as well as an outbreak of hyperpartisan polarization and every conceivable form of divisiveness. This, in my mind, goes directly to the issue of what kind of relationship citizens should have with their institutions. And that issue, in turn, raises the most basic question of all: What role should citizens play if democracy is to be strong enough to restore public confidence in our institutions and counter hyperdivisiveness?

I think there will always be differences in a democracy, and so I expect that the leadership programs on campuses will develop a variety of skills. In just one issue of *HEX*, however, we can expect to hear about only some of them. But I hope this issue will raise the same kind of questions on campus that *HEX* raises.

Many Americans have been troubled by our political system for some time. They live in all parts of the country and have different reasons for being disturbed. Some fear that the United States is in decline because of what they see as an erosion of our core values and problems in the way our political system works—or doesn't work. Others are troubled by issues like a growing economic divide, along with racial and other forms of injustice.<sup>1</sup> Many believe these problems are self-inflicted wounds. Whatever the reasons, people have lost confidence in the government and also in our other major institutions. This discontent has been widespread for some time.<sup>2</sup> If it were to morph from loss of confidence to loss of institutional legitimacy, it would be fatal to our democracy.

Does higher education have any responsibility for responding to this crisis in democracy? And, if so, does it require institutions like colleges and universities to do anything more than they are doing now in teaching, research, and service? I think the answer is "yes" to both questions.



There are many things that academic institutions might do. The one I propose is the subject of this article. The premise is that responding to this crisis requires a strategy beginning at the grass roots. If our democracy is to be strong enough to meet today's challenges, it will require citizens who see themselves as makers of things (or, in that sense, producers), who act as makers, and who are seen by our institutions as makers. What is important in a democratic sense are not the goods per se, but people acting as agents in their own right, and not as objects of the agency of others. Of course, citizens play many roles: they are constituents, clients, consumers, and voters. For a strong democracy, however, they have to be more. Note that the term *citizen* as used in this article is not meant in a narrow, legalistic sense. It, instead, refers to all members of the public (literally, the people who live in or are part of a city, village, or community).

I am aware of the challenges in treating citizens as producers. Academic institutions, for good reasons, are "built" around other concepts of citizens. They are seen as parents who pay tuition, alumni who make donations, and people who are served by research. For the law school, citizens are clients. For the medical school, they are patients. In each of these contexts, the people are more acted upon than actors themselves.

Recognizing citizens as producers not only strengthens democracy, it strengthens the institutions that work with citizens. The institutions become more effective. Elinor Ostrom's Nobel Prize-winning research has shown that the public goods made by citizens are essential if our major institutions, from schools to hospitals to government agencies, are to be optimally effective. Citizens working with citizens produce goods that can complement what institutions do. Ostrom wrote:

If one presumes that teachers produce education, police produce safety, doctors and nurses produce health, and social workers produce effective households, the focus of attention is on how to professionalize the public service. Obviously, skilled teachers, police officers, medical personnel, and social workers are essential to the development of better public services. Ignoring the important role of children, families, support groups, neighborhood organizations, and churches in the production of these services means, however, that only a portion of the inputs to these processes are taken into account in the way that policymakers think about these problems. The term "client" is used more and more frequently to refer to those who should be viewed as essential co-producers of their own education, safety, health, and communities. A client is the name for a passive role. Being a co-producer makes one an active partner.<sup>3</sup>

Where are all the professionals Ostrom refers to being educated? In colleges and universities. That is where they come to understand the role of citizens in relation to their work as professionals.

Products from the work of citizens complement what institutions do because civic work is different from the work of institutions. I am not talking about such laudable things as volunteering to take the load off teachers and health-care professionals, although that is very commendable. I have in mind supplementary projects that make use of people doing the things professionals don't—and can't—do. That's why I prefer the term *complementary production* rather than just *coproduction*.

The unique public goods that citizens make with citizens are both tangible and intangible. Many come from the associations people create, which can become formal organizations, though most remain very informal. Often citizens simply agree to meet at a certain time and place (maybe a coffee shop) to see what can be done about a shared problem. When institutions have attempted to create similar groups, they have tended not to be as effective. That was the case with citizens' committees working on school desegregation in the 1960s and 1970s. Locally initiated groups had a legitimacy that government-mandated committees did not.

## **Things Only Citizens Can Do**

As I've emphasized, it is especially important to recognize the distinctive things to be done that only citizens can do or that they can do better than institutions. Neighbors and family members are probably best at providing emotional support when trouble strikes. Citizens working in tandem with officials can supply the local knowledge that comes from living in a place 365 days a year and 24 hours a day. Using this knowledge, people understand how to do things that are different from what institutions can and should do.

Among the things that people uniquely contribute is civic energy. It comes from grassroots associations, which I just mentioned. This was evident in a 2018 study of what has allowed some cities to lower their crime rates when others couldn't.<sup>4</sup> The generators of civic energy in this case were a multitude of associations of citizens working together to improve their community. Researchers found that "every 10 additional [civic] organizations in a city with 100,000 residents . . . led to a 9 percent drop in the murder rate and a 6 percent drop in violent crime."<sup>5</sup> Such groups didn't necessarily regard their work as preventing violence, but "in creating playgrounds, they enabled parents to better monitor their children. In connecting neighbors, they improved the

capacity of residents to control their streets. In forming after-school programs, they offered alternatives to crime.”<sup>6</sup> Even if not directly related to crime, these efforts helped turn negative emotions into positive energy.

### **A *With* Strategy**

Where complementary production is happening, professionals and the institutions where they are employed work *with* citizens not just *for* them. This *with* strategy is inspired by Abraham Lincoln’s ideal of a government *of, by, and for* the people in the Gettysburg Address. Today, however, do Americans think our government is really “of” the people? That’s debatable. “By” the people? Doubtful. “For” the people? Perhaps for some, sometimes. So, why not add another preposition—government *with* the people? And why not add the same preposition to the mission of our other major institutions?

### **A Democratic Strategy**

The overarching question in *HEX* has to do with democracy, and a *with* strategy is very much a democratic strategy. Saying that, of course, demands an explanation of what is meant by *democracy* here because the term has many meanings. The most common is that democracy is a system of contested elections resulting in a representative government. Certainly, that is a valid definition. However, I believe that democracy is much more.

I think what we now call democracy began long before the word was coined. It grew out of lessons taken from the collective actions needed for human survival when our ancestors were hunter-gatherers living in villages. This was before there were kingdoms and nation-states.<sup>7</sup> As humans spread out across the globe, they carried with them a “political DNA” developed in the struggle to survive. A principal lesson of survival was that cooperating was critical because we needed collective efforts to stay alive.

Much, much later, the Greeks captured some of this survival legacy in a language with new terms like *democracy*. This word has two roots: *demos* is “the people collectively,” as in a village or *deme*, and *kratos* is “the power or capacity to act.”<sup>8</sup> Modern representative government rests on this earlier foundation of collective decision-making by citizens leading to collective actions for collective well-being. Those actions produce public goods. That is why the concept of citizens and their role is key to developing a stronger democracy.

From this perspective, democracy began and continues as a political system in which, at the most fundamental or organic level, citizens must work

with other citizens to make things that make life better for everyone. Our ancestors went on to form governments and other institutions to produce more and different public goods. These two political systems, one governmental or institutional and the other organic or civic, are interdependent in the ecosystem of democracy, which is the subject of an earlier book.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, this essential, symbiotic relationship becomes weaker if citizens don't join forces to solve common problems or if they delegate what they must do to institutions, governmental and nongovernmental. There can't be a *with* strategy without a productive public.

A *with* strategy is idealistic in that it is democratic, yet it isn't a pie-in-the-sky fantasy. The United States recognizes the need for what citizens produce by working together with them in its laws that allow tax exemptions for nongovernmental institutions that serve a public purpose.<sup>10</sup> And public-government collaboration is very common in some situations. Think about communities hit by natural disasters—fires, floods, and the like. Before the government relief arrives, people rush to help others—even those who may be strangers—possibly putting themselves in harm's way. Yet, while public collaboration with institutions does occur, usually in extreme circumstances, it isn't a well-established policy. Nor is it seen as an explicit strategy.

A *with* strategy encourages collaboration through mutually beneficial or reinforcing efforts between the citizenry and both governmental and nongovernmental institutions. And it encourages collective work, not only among people who are *alike* or who *like* one another, but among those who recognize they *need* one another to survive or to live the lives they want to live.

## **Recapturing a Sense of Public Sovereignty**

Working together to produce public goods does more than provide the goods. It can also give people a sense of themselves as agents of democracy who can make a difference. In 1780, Samuel Cooper, a Boston minister who was a leader in the resistance to the British during the American Revolution, gave a sermon in a ceremony recognizing the adoption of a constitution for Massachusetts. The new constitution, he said, was “an established frame of laws; of which a man may say, ‘we are here united in society for our common security and happiness.’” He compared the laws that had been passed to the fruits that farmers produced by their labor on their own land. So, he reasoned, “The regulations under which I live are my own; I am not only a proprietor in the soil, but *I am part of the sovereignty of my country*” (emphasis added).<sup>11</sup> Cooper had a right to that sense of agency because he and his fellow citizens

had, in fact, been instrumental in creating not just a state constitution but a new nation.

What I take away from this story is that, ultimately, the key to stemming the loss of confidence may be more in what citizens do than in what institutions do. The reason is that human beings usually have more confidence in what they've made, or helped make, than in what has been made for them. When people have worked *with* an institution to solve a problem, they tend to have positive feelings about that institution, provided that the institution has been receptive and the work isn't just menial.

People who have positive feelings about schools, for example, say, "Ours is a good school." Then they will often add, "And we are involved in it." Seeing this connection helped me recognize the possibility for restoring confidence in our institutions by using a *working with* strategy. This strategy can also generate a sense of public responsibility because people tend to feel responsible for what they have made.

### ***Working Together Using Democratic Practices***

Institutions sometimes have difficulty working with citizens because the way people do their work is different from the way institutions do theirs, even when there are similarities. Institutions are not necessarily "built" to deal with citizens as producers. So well-intended efforts to engage people and communities can go awry. Academic institutions and civic organizations can sail by one another like ships in the night.<sup>12</sup>

When citizens work together to combat problems, they have to identify or give names to those problems that will resonate with everyone. These names are not like the names that professionals or experts properly use. Rather, they reflect the primal concerns of humans—security, freedom, control, being treated fairly. These are deeply valuable to most all people. Citizens also have to come up with options for acting on the problems, options that are related to the things they hold dear. The actors include citizens.

Because people consider many things valuable, there will inevitably be tensions among these basic imperatives. For example, actions to make us more secure from danger may restrict our freedom. Although our primal motivations are much the same, we give different priorities to them because we live in different circumstances. That means we have to work through these tensions in order to find a way to go forward. We must move beyond hasty reactions and exercise our human faculty for judgment to make sound decisions. This "working through" is real work, which is why it is called "choice work." Another

term for this kind of collective decision-making is “deliberation.” It is integral to acting.

Obviously, in working, we have to assemble the resources needed to implement our decisions. For institutions, these include legal authority, money, and tangible materials or equipment. The resources citizens have are often intangible, such as political will, or they are structural, like the associations I just mentioned. These associations draw on the varied experiences and skills in the group, along with collective knowledge or common sense.

While institutions tend to organize actions centrally and bureaucratically, citizens act in varied ways. If their actions serve a broad, general purpose, they can reinforce one another. That makes the sum greater than the parts, which is powerful. Humans also have the ability to learn from one another and from their mistakes. Our faculty for learning together is a potent source of power. It draws on the multiple and diverse experiences in a citizenry, which helps us understand what is happening around us more completely. That allows a public to act more effectively. Learning together can also help keep up the civic momentum needed to deal with entrenched problems.

The ways of working I’ve just described allow citizens to make the difference they believe they should make in a democracy. And institutions can play a role in citizens recognizing opportunities to do this work, which are around them every day in the ordinary routines of life. In fact, the opportunities are so ordinary they are easy to overlook. For instance, naming problems goes on everywhere. Options for action are constantly being proposed. Decisions are being made in many places and in many ways. The resources that are needed include those in people’s experiences and skills, which are more powerful when combined.

## **What about the Obstacles?**

So far, my objective has been to explain a *with* strategy and why it is needed, given the problems facing democracy now. However, as is always the case, there are challenges to this strategy that have to be overcome. I am afraid what I’ve said up to this point won’t be credible unless these barriers are acknowledged.

One barrier has to do with the way citizens see their role and their fellow citizens. The unpleasant truth is that people don’t always have confidence in one another. Surveys report that Americans believe selfishness is growing.<sup>13</sup> And some people may be more comfortable with being consumers and clients than with taking on the responsibilities of active producers. If involving citizens in carrying out a *with* strategy was easy to do, it would be commonplace.

What motivates people to become active citizens are threats to what we all hold deeply valuable. And people are more likely to act on these concerns when they see opportunities to make a difference, beginning with the opportunities in shaping the way issues are given names, names that reflect what they hold dear.

## **A Better Alignment**

I believe that institutions and the citizenry can work together effectively by realigning their efforts so that they are mutually reinforcing. The way citizens go about their work has to be recognized in the way that institutions do theirs. The challenge is that these two ways of working aren't the same and can be seriously misaligned. As noted, citizens and institutions alike give names to problems, but the terms aren't identical. For example, citizens want to feel that they are safe in their homes, and this feeling of security is less quantifiable yet more compelling to them than the statistics professionals use to describe crime. As people decide what they should do about their problems, they draw on their experiences. They reflect on how a problem affects what is valuable to them and their families. It shouldn't be too difficult for institutional professionals to incorporate the names people use in their descriptions of issues. That is alignment. And a better alignment between citizens and institutional actors doesn't necessarily require professionals in institutions to do more but rather to do what they are already doing a bit differently.

## **Implications for Higher Education?**

What does all I've just said have to do with institutions of higher education? The same kind of anger and declining confidence governments face has come crashing through the campus gates. The most serious issue is that higher education's standing as a public good benefiting everyone, which is the basis for its claim on public support, is eroding. The evidence? Declining state support and rising tuitions.

What stands in the way of colleges and universities recognizing citizens as agents and producers? One obstacle may be objections to a central role for citizens and reservations about people's capacity for self-governing. However, the more serious obstacle may be more practical: What should a college or university do if it wants to treat citizens as producers rather than consumers or clients? In a chapter in the recently published book *Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education*, I suggest that considerable experimentation



in higher education—in league with formal and informal civic groups—is what is required.<sup>14</sup> Encouraging students to develop their faculty for sound judgment as citizens is one area where we’ve already seen a lot of experimentation. Not only does academe have to respond to declining confidence in its own institutions, but it surely has a role to play in developing the kind of citizenry that will take responsibility for working together to shape the future.

Despite the challenges, higher education is well positioned to do things other institutions can’t do. As I’ve said, colleges and universities educate professionals who can be introduced to a more civic professionalism. That introduction can begin—perhaps should begin—in preprofessional programs.

I am especially encouraged by the development of a new field, deliberative pedagogy, which has attracted an array of faculty members in a diverse group of institutions who are developing a growing literature in the field. One of the first books was from Wake Forest: *Speaking of Politics: Preparing College Students for Democratic Citizenship through Deliberative Dialogue* by Katy Harriger and Jill McMillan. In it, these Wake Forest professors describe what they learned from creating a four-year Democracy Fellows program. Since then, Michigan State University Press has published *Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement*. And a new book edited by Tim Shaffer (Kansas State University) and Nick Longo (Providence College) entitled *Creating Space for Democracy: A Primer on Dialogue and Deliberation in Higher Education* is forthcoming from Stylus Publishing. Nan Fairley and Mark Wilson’s *Living Democracy: Communities as Classrooms, Students as Citizens* describes a program of deep engagement in local democracy by Auburn University students.

Initiatives like those described in this literature could help American higher education make its claim to being a public good serving a public good.



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, “The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider,” <http://www.people-press.org/2017/10/05/the-partisan-divide-on-political-values-grows-even-wider/> (accessed May 29, 2018).
- <sup>2</sup> Ian Anson, “Americans Distrusted US Democracy Long Before Trump’s Russia Problem,” *The Conversation*, <http://theconversation.com/americans-distrusted-us-democracy-long-before-trumps-russia-problem-100082> (accessed July 18, 2018).
- <sup>3</sup> Elinor Ostrom, “Covenanting, Co-Producing, and the Good Society,” *PEGS* (Committee on the Political Economy of the Good Society) *Newsletter* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 8.
- <sup>4</sup> Patrick Sharkey, *Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the Next War on Violence* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018).



- <sup>5</sup> Emily Badger, “The Unsung Role That Ordinary Citizens Played in the Great Crime Decline,” The Upshot, *New York Times*, November 9, 2017, <https://nyti.ms/2hIT3Mu> (accessed May 22, 2018).
- <sup>6</sup> Badger, “The Unsung Role That Ordinary Citizens Played in the Great Crime Decline.”
- <sup>7</sup> The foundation has been reading the literature in paleo-political anthropology for many years as well as examining the work of scholars who found what we know of prehistoric times useful in understanding the earliest forms of politics. See Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011).
- <sup>8</sup> See Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol. 1 (Boston: Leiden, 2010), 325, 772; and Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 386-387, 992.
- <sup>9</sup> David Mathews, *The Ecology of Democracy: Finding Ways to Have a Stronger Hand in Shaping Our Future* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2014).
- <sup>10</sup> Read about the Tariff Act of 1894 at <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-soi/tehstory.pdf> (accessed June 20, 2019).
- <sup>11</sup> Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency John Hancock, Esq., Governour, the Honourable the Senate, and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, October 25, 1780: Being the Day of the Commencement of the Constitution, and Inauguration of the New Government* (Boston: T. and J. Fleet, and J. Gill, 1780). See also Charles W. Akers, “Religion and the American Revolution: Samuel Cooper and the Brattle Street Church,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1978): 477-498.
- <sup>12</sup> David Mathews, *Ships Passing in the Night? A Cousins Research Group Report on Higher Education in Democracy* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2014).
- <sup>13</sup> Alan Wolfe, *One Nation, After All: What Middle-Class Americans Really Think about God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, the Right, the Left, and Each Other* (New York: Viking, 1998): 23.
- <sup>14</sup> David Mathews, “Democracy’s Challenge for Academe: From Public Good to Consumer Good and Back?” in *Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education: Reclaiming Our Civic Purpose*, William V. Flores and Katrina S. Rogers, eds. (Lexington Books, 2019).

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MAURA CASEY is a senior associate with the Kettering Foundation. Her 35-year journalism career encompasses work as an editor and opinion writer for four newspapers, including the *Hartford Courant* and the *New York Times*. She has won 45 national and regional awards for journalism, including a shared Pulitzer Prize for reporting. She owns a Connecticut communications firm, CaseyInk, LLC. Casey holds a BA in political science from Buffalo State College and an MA in journalism and public affairs from American University. In her spare time, Casey sails her boat on Long Island Sound and helps her husband of 36 years, Peter J. Panzarella, harvest and sell the vegetables he grows on their farm.

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KEITH MELVILLE is a senior associate with the Kettering Foundation and a member of the National Issues Forums (NIF) advisory group. He served as the first executive editor and author of 18 NIF issue guides and has written numerous reports for the Kettering Foundation, including *Beyond the Clash: How a Deliberative Public Talks about Immigration* (2019). Previously, Melville was senior vice president of Public Agenda and a White House staff writer. His experience in applied social research encompassed conceptual work for Sesame Street and studies of the impact of school desegregation strategies. He is the author of four books, including *A Passion for Adult Learning* (Fielding University Press, 2016). A professor at the Fielding Graduate University, Melville completed his doctoral studies at Columbia University.

WILLIAM V. MUSE is president of the National Issues Forums Institute and a senior associate with the Kettering Foundation. During his tenure at NIFI, he helped to establish the Taylor Willingham Legacy Fund, the NIFI Ambassadors program, the Moderators Circle, and an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) program of courses for senior citizens that NIFI hopes to develop at universities around the country. He holds a PhD in management from the University of Arkansas. Muse worked in higher education for 40 years, including 20 years as president or chancellor of the University of Akron, Auburn University, and East Carolina University.

RALPH NADER is one of America's most effective social critics. His analyses and advocacy have enhanced public awareness and increased government and corporate accountability. His book *Unsafe at Any Speed* led to the passage of a series of automobile safety laws. Nader founded or inspired a wide variety of organizations, including the Princeton Alumni Corps and the Applesseed Foundation, a nonprofit network of 17 public-interest justice centers. An author, lecturer, attorney, and political activist, Nader's life-long work and advocacy has led to safer cars, healthier food, safer drugs, cleaner air and drinking water, and safer work environments. In 2006, the *Atlantic* named him one of the hundred most influential figures in American history. Nader continues his work to advance meaningful civic institutions and citizen participation.

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