

HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



Democracy Divided

Articles

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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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CONTENTS

Derek W. M. Barker and Alex Lovit	Democracy Divided: How Should Higher Education Respond? (Foreword)	1
Lorlene Hoyt James Garrett	Deliberative Civic Engagement: Campus Experiments in Hong Kong, Israel, Kenya, and South Africa	6
Jed Donelan	Discourse Ethics and Deliberative Dialogue	22
Diana Ali Teri Lyn Hinds Stephanie King Kara Lindaman Brent Marsh Erin Payseur Oeth	Deliberation and Democratic Practice: A Student Affairs Approach	33
Flannery Burke Marie Downey Lani Frost Sydney Johnson Allison Mispagel Andrew Sweeso	Deliberation in the History Classroom	51
Verdis L. Robinson	Community College Deliberative Democracy and the Pandemic: A Conversation with Community College Civic Engagement Faculty	62
Alex Lovit	Does Higher Education Undermine Democracy? (Review Essay)	75
David Mathews	Higher Education in a Time of Crisis (Afterword)	87
	Contributors	94

Foreword

DEMOCRACY DIVIDED

How Should Higher Education Respond?

Derek W. M. Barker and Alex Lovit

Confronted with the coronavirus public health crisis, the shutdown of the global economy, and protests against racial injustice, 2020 has been a time of great stress for our nation and the world. The initial responses to these crises have each surfaced long-term weaknesses in our democratic public life: heightened political polarization, growing racial and cultural divides, weak and ineffective institutions, and distrust of “fake news” and the media. The coronavirus response, economic recovery, and racial equity all require the citizenry to come together with a shared sense of direction. However, the issues that have arisen have all become politically charged, exposing divides that threaten to worsen as we also face a divisive election. Each of these crises has been underscored and exacerbated by a long-term overarching crisis of our democracy, but the current political moment presents an opportunity to ask, What kind of democracy do we want? Can we respond to the nation’s challenges in a way that is aligned with the democracy we wish to see?

The forces contributing to our ongoing democratic malaise have been growing for decades and cannot be easily reversed. They have their roots in the dominant tradition in our public life, known as “adversarial democracy,” which holds that the essence of democracy is electoral competition. The adversarial model is reinforced throughout our public culture, from experiences in families and peer groups to the ways in which public issues are named and framed in the news and social media. Indeed, we might say that the very notion of a “public,” a unity of differences, has been replaced by an aggregation of warring groups. When it comes to their experiences with politics, young people seem to have few spaces these days in which to encounter anything other than adversarial democracy. It is no wonder that, despite interest in volunteering and improving the world, young people view politics with skepticism.

Democracy in the United States was not intended to be purely adversarial. The system was founded as a *republic* rather than a democracy with majority rule. The Founders held that in a large republic, factions would be diverse enough that coalitions would be temporary and unable to dominate for long periods. However, they did not envision the modern two-party system, much less the current state of polarization, as exacerbated by social media and ideological

bubbling. Thinkers with such varied ideas as those of Tocqueville, Dewey, and Habermas also observed that adversarial democracy has always relied upon a strong civic culture to maintain confidence in the system and mitigate against its excesses. But our civic culture seems to be increasingly divided as well, breaking down into distinct groups that are ideologically homogeneous, with each seeing the other as a direct threat to its way of life rather than merely as groups of people with different views.

When the political environment is polarized, the perceived stakes of politics are raised and political conflict appears to be a zero-sum game, with gains for one side implying losses to the other. In that context, perhaps the most common response is still more adversarial democracy—fighting power with power and mobilizing “us against them.” Young people have played leading roles in protest movements around climate change and racial injustice, inspiring some to enter into electoral politics. Protest is effective at raising consciousness around new or suppressed public issues; however, according to Daniel Yankelovich, consciousness-raising is only the first stage in the process of public judgment and collective action. The process is not complete without a “working-through” of tensions and trade-offs and a resolution of the conflict.¹ What will it mean if the only political experiences available to young people are adversarial in nature? Where will they learn the other skills they need to be effective citizens?

Like every other institution that provides space for public discourse, colleges and universities have been affected by these trends of polarization. In fact, given their traditions of academic freedom of thought and expression and a reputation (earned or exaggerated) for shaping young people’s political beliefs, college campuses have become flashpoints for political debate. Competing claims—on the one hand that colleges should provide safe spaces to prevent perpetuating victimization of marginalized groups and on the other hand that restrictions on speech amount to liberal indoctrination—shape how constituencies both within and outside higher education view campus politics. Furthermore, with COVID-19 causing massive disruption to traditional practices, and perhaps posing an existential threat to some institutions, the disincentives for higher education to focus on potentially divisive political issues are more apparent than ever before.

In such an environment, higher education will be tempted to avoid politics and focus on academics. To preserve its legitimacy, higher education has always appealed to neutrality and projected itself as apolitical. The language of “service” reflects this impulse. However, the politics of division and polarization mean that even “facts” are now politicized and subject to contestation.

Despite its best efforts to project neutrality, higher education has been unable to escape accusations of partisan bias, accusations that seem to be validated by the predominantly liberal makeup of most faculty. If higher education is inescapably political, is there a way that it can be political without appearing partisan? Can it model a different kind of politics? The COVID-19 crisis itself demands an enlarged sense of politics—collective, rather than adversarial. The problem of how students can safely receive a high-quality education, develop social connections, and maintain extracurricular activities without endangering themselves or others cannot be solved by institutional actors alone. The current crisis for higher education, our nation, and the world requires collective action and responsibility. It also presents opportunities for collective *deliberation* about how to address a problem that affects all of us and puts things we all value, such as safety, freedom, and equity, into tension.

As the future attitudes of young people will be shaped in great part by whatever collective response occurs in the coming years, higher education has an opportunity to reshape the political socialization of young people. The most important contribution of higher education may be to help restore our young people's faith in democracy. To do so, it will have to model a different kind of democracy—a politics of bridging divides and breaking down social bubbles rather than reinforcing polarization and continuing politics-as-usual. Unfortunately, research suggests that higher education has historically done little to encourage graduates to break out of social bubbles and may actually reinforce them.² Failure to provide young people with an alternative at this critical moment could exacerbate their distrust of institutions and, even worse, of their fellow citizens, further weakening the democratic ideal.

The authors we have invited for *Higher Education Exchange (HEX)* this year provide examples of how higher education can model a different kind of democracy. Each of the experiments highlighted provide students with experiences in deliberative alternatives to adversarial politics.

Lorlene Hoyt and James Garrett reflect on the need for deliberative politics as the global community seeks to come together in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For potential models, they look to a series of experiments on campuses in Hong Kong, Israel, Kenya, and South Africa that developed and introduced students to a new civic engagement paradigm with the potential to disrupt the adversarial cycles of division and polarization.

Jed Donelan develops a conceptual framework for deliberative democracy, bringing ideas from the works of Jürgen Habermas together with practical experiences introducing students to dialogue and deliberation. According to

Donelan, deliberation suggests a process for making decisions without prescribing the outcome, thus providing students with an alternative to skepticism at a time when democracy itself is in question.

“Deliberation and Democratic Practice: A Student Affairs Approach” reflects on an initiative of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators to create and experiment with deliberative issue guides relevant to campus politics. This article captures reflections about the organization’s motivations to engage in deliberation and what was learned from the process of developing its first issue guide on free speech and campus inclusivity.

Flannery Burke and several of her former students reflect upon a world history course that included classroom deliberations on historical topics. As this article demonstrates, historical deliberation was effective both in conveying historical concepts and in prompting students to consider different approaches to political debates today.

Verdis Robinson moderates a conversation with community college faculty to reflect on their experiences with deliberative democracy. While their institutions are the most accessible and locally rooted, they experience the greatest pressure to focus narrowly on workforce development. As they argue, deliberative democracy offers the potential for developing skills that promise to be useful in both the careers and civic lives of graduates and for reimagining the civic purposes of the most democratic institutions in the sector.

In a related article, coeditor Alex Lovit surveys an emerging body of literature critical of higher education’s role in reinforcing socioeconomic hierarchies. The books discussed in this essay demonstrate dramatic differences in resources and practices among American colleges and universities; these disparities are often justified through appeals to the concept of “meritocracy.” Elite institutions, in particular, reinforce socioeconomic divisions—divisions that also tend to contribute to political polarization.

Finally, David Mathews concludes this issue with his thoughts on higher education’s potential role in reversing an overarching democratic crisis. If young people are to regain the ability to make lasting change, they will first need to listen to one another and learn to work together across their differences. Reshaping campus culture may be the first step.

Without suggesting thick unity or unanimous consensus, the ideas and experiments included in this year’s edition of *HEX* suggest hope for meaningful dialogue across differences. In so doing, they illustrate a new role for higher education—one of countering the socialization of youth into a culture of division and ideological bubbles. Beyond merely informing the citizenry by

helping students consider contentious issues from a deliberative rather than adversarial perspective, higher education can help the citizenry come together across divides. To the extent that a public is more than just a grouping of individuals (much less warring tribes), higher education is strengthening or perhaps even *creating* the “public.” Helping the citizenry become a public may be the first step in confronting the crises we are now facing and the most important contribution that higher education can make.



NOTES

- ¹ Daniel Yankelovich, “The Bumpy Road from Mass Opinion to Public Judgment,” *Higher Education Exchange*, 2017, 21-28.
- ² Matthew R. Johnson and Jennifer Peacock, “Breaking the Bubble: Recent Graduates’ Experiences with Ideological Diversity,” *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 13, no. 1 (2020), 56-65.

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DELIBERATIVE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Campus Experiments in Hong Kong, Israel, Kenya, and South Africa

Lorlene Hoyt and James Garrett

As new technologies have made news, information, and political messaging available at our fingertips, our positions on political and social issues have become more entrenched. Articles, opinion pieces, and online commentaries supporting any side of any issue are easily accessible. Rather than facilitate productive conversation, this abundance of information and opinion seems to have driven us further into our own camps. So often, we respond with ridicule to those with points of view different from our own, cutting off any possibility of conversation or understanding. At the same time, the rise of new technologies and media has also given a voice and platform to activists and those with traditionally marginalized perspectives who have successfully changed the terms of the conversation and pushed politicians, traditional media, and universities to address their concerns, at least rhetorically.

Deliberative civic engagement holds the promise of reprieve from intense partisanship and growing distrust of government, the media, and other long-standing institutions. By exploring examples of how people have productively entered politics and public life through deliberative civic engagement, we aim to share a hopeful message to the next generation of citizens around the world.

We questioned whether the time was right to turn our attention to the topic of deliberative civic engagement. We write this in May of 2020, as the

Might deliberation be a relic of a past ?

world, our communities,
and our own families
struggle with the coro-
navirus pandemic. In

this time of uncertainty and rapid change, innovation and decisive adaptation are the order of the day in our governments, institutions, and our own lives. Might deliberation be a relic of a past when time and resources were in greater abundance? Is deliberation a luxury that we can no longer afford?

We would like to suggest that in times of crisis, a return to fundamentals, principles, and proven practices holds particular value. In times of crisis, as ever,

we need to practice techniques for discussion and thoughtful decision-making that are based on our lived experiences. This is exactly the right moment to call into question the civic roles of higher education and to elevate civic engagement practices that “incorporate a specifically deliberative concept of democracy”—practices of listening to one another, weighing options, and discovering where our interests and purposes align.¹

The global pandemic has been a stark reminder of our interconnectedness and our shared responsibilities to one another. At the same time, this crisis has illuminated existing

political divisions in communities around the world. The pandemic itself is yet another example of an issue defined by polarization and disagreement. It has only further high-

The pandemic itself is yet another example of an issue defined by polarization and disagreement. It has only further highlighted current fissures and disparities.

lighted current fissures and disparities. We are seeing clearly the disproportionate impact of the virus on communities with inadequate health-care services, as well as the health effects of generations of racism. We are also witnessing distrust in government and polarized political responses to the pandemic as some communities prepare for the worst while others insist the coronavirus issue is a hoax. Responses from leaders in government and the media have varied tremendously. We are only beginning to understand the implications of those responses.

Writing as we are, only weeks into the crisis, our neighborhoods and campuses empty, it is difficult for us to envision how and when this pandemic will reach its conclusion. Still, we know we will all need to participate in extended and painful discussions as we work to remake and revitalize our communities and institutions in the coming months. Over the course of those conversations, we will certainly experience disagreement and polarization of opinions as we address urgent new questions. It is our hope that this work on deliberative civic engagement may offer both inspiration and guidance as we navigate the many challenges and “wicked problems” ahead.

Wicked Problems

At a time when the world desperately needs an alternative to polarization and conflict, we can look back and see the beginnings of a new paradigm emerging in a series of experiments that took place from 2016 to 2018. The

Talloires Network, in partnership with the Kettering Foundation, organized a series of exchanges aimed at addressing the challenges of polarization and disagreement. The Talloires Network is an association of more than 400 universities in 78 countries committed to civic engagement and social responsibility. We saw the exchanges as an avenue to showcase the difficult work of deliberation already occurring within our member institutions and to bring the institutions into conversations about improving their practices. We aimed to learn more about the most innovative university-led public dialogue and deliberation efforts around the world while, at the same time, deepening these efforts through experimentation with Kettering's research on deliberative concepts.

Throughout their weeks together in Dayton, Ohio, workshop participants discussed approaches to deliberative civic engagement and the controversial issues and wicked problems it might address. (Wicked problems are complex, have numerous causes, and rarely have a single technical solution.) The engaged scholars (university faculty, staff, students, and community partners) who were invited to participate shared the belief that universities ought to play a role in the functioning of civil society. Each had an interest in preparing students to become active citizens who contribute to the betterment of their local communities and in producing relevant knowledge to solve societal problems. Participants were selected, in part, for their leadership roles in a university civic engagement program intended to challenge the notion of an ivory tower.

The controversial issues and wicked problems of common concern identified by these engaged scholars and their communities included xenophobia, poverty, violence, increased hopelessness and despair, loss of trust in government and institutions, inequality, and distrust of the media. To address such challenges, each workshop participant has created spaces and methods for designing and managing activities among people who are affected by wicked problems to foster a sense of understanding and, in some instances, a common call to action. Many participants readily acknowledged that wicked problems are inextricably intertwined, with each a symptom of another.² They also viewed higher education institutions as important players in a larger system and a setting where global citizenship gets constructed.³

Workshop participants recognized the potential of universities to support dialogue and deliberation. As relatively stable institutions, theoretically unfettered by any political agenda, participants believed that universities were well positioned to build community capacity for deliberation by convening deliberative forums and providing people with "passionate neutrality" to facilitate the deliberative process.⁴

Deliberative Civic Engagement

In most cases, the participants characterized their university civic engagement in terms such as service learning, volunteerism, and community-based research. We found that some of the university civic engagement programs and initiatives have challenged the hierarchical and decidedly undemocratic internal structure of the university in ways that engage faculty and students with wicked problems while others avoided discussions of wicked problems that would cause disagreement among participants. These approaches risk leaving participants' assumptions unchallenged and unexamined, assuming a consensus or unmanageable disagreement.

We also discovered significant variation with respect to how universities in different contexts around the world understand dialogue and deliberation as an approach to civic engagement. The term "deliberation" is not commonplace, nor is it typically the focal point of an engagement effort. Rather, such concepts and methods are embedded in partnerships and understood implicitly.

At the start of our collaboration, participants commented that deliberative civic engagement is similar to other approaches used by leaders and educators that may go by different names, such as "collaborative problem solving." A number of participants came to understand deliberative civic engagement as deconstruction of the artificial wall between the university and the local community. Their examples included "working with, not for, the community"; "to be in and of the community"; "bringing community members who don't have access to decision-making bodies to the table"; "involving citizens in identifying problems"; and having "power with, not power over." Participants also recognized that engaging communities through deliberation is, in some ways, a wicked problem itself.

Idit Manosevitch, from the Netanya Academic College in Israel, cautioned the group, saying there is no such thing as "one community" or a "proper" relationship between university and community; deliberation is necessary to determine how this relationship will unfold. Carol Ma, who was representing Hong Kong's Lingnan University, stressed that trust between university and community members is an essential prerequisite to a constructive relationship and that building trust takes effort and time. By the end of the first workshop, the sentiments of the group were captured by Ronald Sistek of the Universidad Austral de Chile, who defined deliberative civic engagement as "thriving through tension and collaboration." Sistek also noted that, paradoxically, those concerned with fostering deliberative civic engagement in their communities and universities must start with themselves. An attitudinal shift toward "embracing

complexity and diversity” and “legitimizing the other” must take place within the individual before group deliberation may be useful.

In 2017, the group began working to identify issues of concern and to conceptualize experiments to be carried out on their individual campuses.

They were exposed, again, to Kettering’s approach to deliberation, which

Deliberation does not necessarily lead to action. It can, instead, lead to creativity, increased awareness, and the ability to talk and listen across differences.

takes time to appreciate and understand. The workshop emphasized the ways in which deliberation differs from collaborative problem solving. For example, deliberation does not necessarily lead to action. It can, instead,

lead to creativity, increased awareness, and the ability to talk and listen across differences. Throughout the week, participants came to understand deliberation as a process of managing conflicts and tensions associated with complex, divisive issues (wicked problems) and that deliberation exists in a continuum between avoiding conflict (unitary positioning) and embracing conflict (adversarial positioning). It is a civil conversation in which power is negotiated and the range of polarization is reduced.

By the time we met for the third and final workshop in 2018, the group had learned that not all problems are suited for deliberation and some problems do not yet have names. They practiced the art of naming and framing and discussed the importance of using shared language and staying neutral (such as, “How do we protect our girls from harmful practices?” instead of “How do we protect our girls from female mutilation?”).

Together, we discussed and explored examples of the key steps for successful deliberation:

1. Identifying a wicked problem
2. Asking, What should we do?
3. Conducting background research
4. Gathering public concerns
5. Grouping the like concerns, identifying the disagreement/tension among the concerns, and unpacking values

6. Describing the approaches/options—grouping all possible actions and trade-offs

Some poignant comments from the final workshop included:

- “Research is detached from problems in society and [the] public is demanding more from universities that receive public money. Research and scientific facts are under attack. Some community leaders do not want our research.”
- “Knowledge is something that is co-constructed (not something that someone has). It is fundamentally relational and implies practice. If we take the practice of deliberation into the community, and you have different modes of knowing, then deliberation itself will evolve.”
- “Problems are not technical. They are political. On some issues, people have very strong opinions. . . . There are climate [change] deniers, for example. Data will not work. Sometimes there are only two patterns: adversarial or avoidance.”
- “Giving voice to and acknowledging people who are ‘irrational’ is very threatening to the academy; such processes are needed to validate people and open up the conversation.”
- “Deliberation can help with the listening—it provides structured listening. This is vital because contemporary culture emphasizes voicing above listening. Deliberation might help people see the value of listening.”

Experiments in Deliberative Civic Engagement

Deliberative pedagogy is a democratic educational process and a way of thinking that encourages students to encounter and consider multiple perspectives, weigh trade-offs and tensions, and move toward action through informed judgment. It is simultaneously a way of teaching that is itself deliberative and a process for developing the skills, behaviors, and values that support deliberative practice.⁵

Despite intensive outreach efforts to our network members over a period of several years, we did not find many examples of deliberative pedagogy under way. At the same time, many of our member universities are actively involved in transforming their curriculum to prepare ethical and engaged citizens. Interestingly, workshop participants rather quickly began to value the practice of

deliberation and took a sincere interest in introducing deliberation in the classroom setting.

The following section describes campus experiments in deliberative pedagogy at universities located in Hong Kong, Israel, Kenya, and South Africa. It also highlights the ways in which these experiments influenced the students who took part.

Hong Kong: Stan Hok-Wui Wong, Hong Kong Polytechnic University

In planning his deliberative experiment for a class, Stan Hok-Wui Wong consulted the resources available on Kettering's website as well as the safety and justice issue guide entitled *How Should Communities Reduce Violence?* published by the National Issues Forums Institute.

He conducted his experiment in March 2019. According to Wong, "It went quite well. The students actively engaged in discussions for about three hours."

The deliberative pedagogy experiment was held in his introduction to politics course with a group of 20 freshmen. This course provided the first opportunity for students to focus on politics as a subject at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Wong began the exercise by introducing students to the idea of deliberative civic engagement and then asked the students to identify a problem in Hong Kong. Ultimately, they selected *the deterioration of high-quality governance*.

During the experiment, Wong expressed some concern over the lack of different perspectives represented in the classroom. That is, the students appeared to be in agreement. He asked them, "What if the government cannot improve or fix problems? What are some other options? Is there anything we can do at the personal level?" This was a turning point in the experiment. This was when the students discovered a deeper problem—the problem behind the problem.

The students discovered a generation gap. One student said that his parents needed to change the newspaper they read because the news seemed to be generated by the government. Several students said their parents were brainwashed. Students also started questioning information they were getting.

Wong will run the experiment again and plans to make deliberation a permanent feature of this course. For him, there were three big takeaways. First, by altering his pedagogy, he created an opportunity for students to exchange ideas among themselves. Second, he believes students benefited from learning about deliberation and practicing deliberation in the classroom. Lastly, he believes his students were highly engaged because they were sharing their personal experiences with real-world problems.

Wong also noted that the students in this course had to complete a final group project that was unrelated to the deliberation experiment. One group, however, chose deliberative democracy as a focus. They also created a video presentation about deliberative democracy.

Israel: Hadassa (Dassi) Postan-Aizik, University of Haifa and Max Stern Yezreel Valley College

Hadassa Postan-Aizik's first experiment in deliberative pedagogy focused on the issue of sexual harassment in Israel. She introduced Kettering's model of deliberation into a social work course—a required course with about 50 students, the majority female. Before introducing this model into the course, she asked herself:

- How do deliberative principles fit with or relate to social work theory?
- How can deliberative principles fit into social work practice?
- How can teaching deliberation benefit social work students?

She began by asking the students to choose an issue and explained to them, “We will talk in a special way about a problem.” The students decided to focus on sexual harassment and the MeToo movement. Each student wrote and submitted a one-page paper on the issue. Postan-Aizik collected and reviewed the opinion papers and used them to create the three options for the deliberation. In the classroom, students used Postan-Aizik's two-page issue guide entitled *How Do We Deal with Sexual Harassment?* The options were: (1) Educate for change, (2) Justice/enforcement, and (3) It's not a problem.

Postan-Aizik structured the experiment thoughtfully, gathering extensive feedback from student participants by way of a questionnaire. She found that a majority (60 percent) of students believed the conversation reshaped their thoughts about the issue. A majority of students (54 percent) also reported that they learned more about the issue, and (80 percent) learned a lot about the feelings of others. Students were also asked whether there was a moment when they thought they might change their mind on the issue. A majority (65 percent) said “no,” however, some (17 percent) said “yes.” Students commented that the experience was unlike any they have had before, that they had never talked about an issue with such intensity, and that the discussion allowed for many different perspectives. They found deliberation helpful insofar as it encouraged a respectful conversation, which enabled learning.

After completing her deliberative work at the University of Haifa, Postan-Aizik conducted an experiment in deliberative pedagogy at Max Stern Yezreel Valley College, centered on Israel's newly passed nation-state law (in July 2018).

This time, the deliberative session focused on the question, How does Israel as a democratic country that protects the rights of all groups also recognize

“Some students were afraid to deal with the issue,” she said. “I was afraid, too.”

Jewish identity? Nearly 50 students participated in the deliberation, which was embedded in a critical sociology course given in the department of social

work. Using an analysis of content generated by way of student writing assignments, Postan-Aizik created an issue guide with the following options: (1) Recognize the importance of Israel as a national country of the Jewish people; (2) Keep individual rights and fight racism as individuals; and (3) Recognize rights for all groups.

Postan-Aizik asked the students to self-organize into 3 groups of approximately 15-16 participants. The students decided to make an effort to divide themselves equally—that is, to ensure that each group had a mix of Jews (of diverse ethnicities) and Arabs, men and women. “Some students were afraid to deal with the issue,” she said. “I was afraid, too.” She explained, “Students were afraid the conversation would be loud, become explosive, and they might lose friendships as a result.”

Prior to the session, she trained six student facilitators (two for each of the three groups), who guided the participants and took notes throughout the session. The facilitators kept time as students went through the options (for a total of 90 minutes). Spending an equal amount of time on each option was part of a larger strategy for being sensitive to student perspectives and managing a difficult conversation. “I focused on the protocol—trusted the process. It does work,” Postan-Aizik said. The experiment went very well. Students had “a quiet, intelligent conversation.”

Kenya: Martin Ocholi, University of Nairobi

Ocholi's first experiment in deliberative pedagogy focused on the issue of student protest and violence in Kenya. During our summer workshop, Ocholi described incidents on campus involving police brutality toward students. The violence he witnessed had erupted as a result of a publicly contested political election.

Ocholi views deliberation as a valuable teaching method—a way to engage students in a productive conversation. He began this experiment by asking students to share their concerns. In addition, he produced a short issue guide to facilitate the discussion. Together, and after some rigorous dialogue and exchange, they developed a shared understanding of why students resort to protest and violence on campus.

When I asked him to reflect on the experience, Ocholi described the problem behind the problem as an absence of clear communication channels between the university administration and the student body:

It is a constitutional right to protest. But, why destroy property? Students have learned that no one listens if they do not destroy property. They don't know how or why decisions are being made. When they write letters, there is no response. They protest to draw attention. When they demonstrate peacefully, the administration calls the police, then words are exchanged, then the violence comes. There are many political agendas at the university; there are external forces placing pressures on the students, they are not aware of the issues, and they get caught in the middle. Also, students engage in protest because it is macho—it is good, they believe, to draw blood. There is an absence of clear communication channels.

Following this deliberation experiment, students provided feedback. Their participation in dialogue and deliberation directly influenced ideas they had about themselves and about local issues. Their comments included, “There is a problem, and we can solve it”; “I felt important. I felt powerful”; and “I now understand the complexity of the issue, and I am thinking about how my actions impact others.”

After completing his deliberative work on issues of student violence in protests, Ocholi conducted an experiment in deliberative pedagogy. This time, the session focused on a pressing issue in Kenya: ethnicity and national cohesion.

Approximately 30 students participated in the deliberation. Using student writing assignments and information he had collected about Kenya, Ocholi presented several options in response to the question How do we achieve national cohesion while respecting ethnic diversity?

The options were:

- Raise public awareness of national cohesion and ethnic diversity;
- Establish a system of meritocracy and standards of competence for employment (i.e., do not use ethnic diversity as a factor);
- Create institutions that promote national cohesion; and

- Ethnicity is a political issue that must be addressed through political solutions.

To begin, each student was asked to talk about being discriminated against or being favored in a given situation. Those who were denied access to opportunity told their stories, which were painful. Some students were excluded from soccer teams, internships, and other social and professional activities due to their ethnicity. In other cases, they were granted privileges or special opportunities *because* of their ethnicity. Ocholi reported, “You could feel the tension in the room.”

The students struggled with the choices that should be made to achieve national cohesion in an ethnically diverse society such as Kenya. During the deliberation, students realized that they represented at least five different ethnicities. They discovered together that each student was guilty of discrimination and each had been a victim of it and that the biggest perpetrator is the individual.

The conversation included some discussion of the “individual as the solution” and a general agreement that people needed to take personal responsibility. According to Ocholi, it was challenging to manage the emotions of a large group and to prevent the discussion from degenerating into a debate.

After the deliberation, students noted that the experience affected their outlook on the issues and introduced them to a new way of dealing with conflict. Specifically, students said they “never really thought about the issue that deeply” and that the session was “an opportunity to discuss issues without finger-pointing and emotion.”

South Africa: Hlekani Kabiti, Walter Sisulu University

Hlekani Kabiti initially considered drafting an issue guide on violent student protest in democratic South Africa. She decided to change direction. The new direction aimed to align with her new role in the Risk and Vulnerability Science Centre at Walter Sisulu University. The issue of concern was solid-waste management on campus. She wanted to use deliberation as an approach for understanding the variety of perspectives on the issue at the Mthatha Campus. Her draft proposal was as follows:

Deliberative Community Engagement for Waste Management Action

The university campus environment is home to diverse individuals drawn from different backgrounds, cultures, attitudes, and social realities. The diverse sociocultural context of the stakeholders contributes to behavior toward waste generation, disposal, handling, and minimization. A lot of

solid waste is generated in the process of running day-to-day business and, consequently, a proper waste management strategy is crucial for university environmental sustainability.

This study was necessitated by the visible waste management challenge at Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha campus. Though the challenge is visible, not much progress has been made in addressing it and tapping into the potential benefits brought [about] by proper waste management practices. In order to develop a waste management strategy, there is a need to unpack the underlying attitudes, perceptions, and misconceptions around waste management.

This paper presents a deliberation model for engaging the various university stakeholders in better waste management practices, targeting perception and behavioral change, and reaching common ground. The model, as guided by the Kettering Foundation's approach to deliberation, encompasses problem naming and framing by different stakeholders, addressing and challenging perceptions, identifying possible solutions to the challenge, making decisions based on sound judgments, identifying resources and stakeholders, organizing action, and [enabling] collective continuous reflective learning. The process will provide baseline information, which is vital for the crafting of a Walter Sisulu University waste management plan.⁶

Kabiti had difficulty in launching the experiment on campus; however, she moved forward with the idea in a courageous and creative manner. In the format of a poster, she presented a framework and methods for deliberation on the issue at the National Conference for Global Change held in Polokwane, South Africa, in December 2018. Her poster depicted the methodological linkage between waste management and deliberative engagement.

During the conference, which was focused primarily on the hard science of climate change, Kabiti talked with conference participants about the issues surrounding integrated waste management and the importance of stakeholder engagement with regard to implementation. She relied on the poster to illuminate how such a deliberation might use different stages of the naming and framing process. She is pleased that she moved forward with the experiment, commenting, "When I first interacted with conference participants, they seemed a bit lost. The poster did help me to share the deliberative approach with a new and wide audience. There was an interest in learning more about deliberative methods." Though a modest experiment in scope, she accomplished the primary goal of introducing concepts and methods of deliberative civic engagement to colleagues in South Africa.

South Africa: Janice McMillan, University of Cape Town

Janice McMillan used deliberative civic engagement in an engineering course at the University of Cape Town between July and November 2019. The course was entitled Citizen Professionals in Engineering and the Built Environment, or C/Prof. The C/Prof course aimed to provide engineering and built-environment students with new lenses with which to make sense of the broader social context into which they will apply their technical skills as professionals.

The course explored the inner city of Cape Town as an important physical arena of citizenship and as a place to bring the idea of the “citizen professional” more concretely into the classroom. Students explored the complexities of the inner city, including the history and issues that have led to deeply rooted inequality and injustice. By visiting key historical and present-day sites, students considered such issues as: (1) For whom is the city easily accessible? (2) What statues and memorials represent the history of the city? (3) Whose history do the memorials show? and (4) How does the city’s physical layout represent Apartheid history?

The second part of the course explored how to engage in conversation around issues of social justice, citizenship, and power by considering different identities and lived experiences. Working in small groups of three to four people, the course required students to plan, design, and facilitate a deliberation. This approach was intended to offer students the experience of developing facilitation and moderation skills, thereby connecting theory and practice, as well as to get them to reflect on what it means to be a professional who thinks about citizenship and community engagement as a core part of his or her professional identity and role.

McMillan drew on the materials from the Kettering Foundation to support students in the various aspects of the deliberation process (such as understanding deliberation as something different from dialogue and debate and how to structure a deliberation). However, while they drew from these materials, they believed they needed to adapt them to a South African context. In particular, they wanted students to understand the centrality of power relations in this work. In addition, as a teaching team invested in social justice teaching and learning, they were also very aware of their own positions as privileged White scholars teaching a class that consisted predominantly of Black students.

They invited a colleague in the University of Cape Town’s Office for Inclusivity and Change to run a series of sessions on Freirean ideology and methods. The aim was to help student facilitators think about issues of unequal

power, voice, and agency. One of the key issues that stood out for students was the notion of allowing learners to bring their own knowledge and experience to the event. This caused some discomfort for some students, which is not surprising given that the majority of higher education—particularly in engineering courses—reflected very traditional modes of teaching that position the lecturer as the expert.

In the end, McMillan and her colleagues concluded that “We need to ensure that our work in the higher education classroom—more than ever before—equips students as young citizens to understand the complex social context in which they will one day work.” As they move their work forward, they will ask and explore several vital questions: Who is at the table (for the deliberation process)? What falls outside our political imagination and why? What are the consequences of asking these questions?

Lessons Learned

It is not necessary to transform the curriculum in order to expose students to deliberation. Introducing methods of deliberation into existing courses can be very effective, as demonstrated by these experiments.

Student feedback on campus experiments was generally very positive. Participating in structured conversation on a difficult issue left some students feeling they had greater agency in understanding and solving problems. In addition, students enjoyed thinking through the complexity of the issues from multiple perspectives and gained new insights from their peers. Though difficult and messy, these

conversations released some of the unspoken tensions in the room. Faculty played a major role in facilitating the

Opportunities for deliberations in these societies are rare, but vital and welcomed.

experiments to ensure students stayed focused on the issues and the discussion led to greater understanding rather than confrontation. Student feedback suggests that opportunities for deliberations in these societies are rare, but vital and welcomed. Generally, students enjoyed exploring important issues, learning from their peers, and considering alternative perspectives.

The faculty who ran these experiments created spaces for students from diverse backgrounds and experiences to practice democratic principles by discussing the multiple dimensions of a relevant social issue. They ensured that the student participants were central to the process of identifying as well

as naming and framing issues. Once an issue was chosen for discussion, the group worked together to identify the tension underlying the issue as well as the values associated with the tension.

Conclusion

Universities occupy a conflicted space in the popular imagination. They conjure competing images of elitism and social mobility, ivory tower isolationism and community uplift, and places of exclusion and places where diverse people interact and thrive. From one angle, elitist universities perpetuate systems in which voices are systematically disenfranchised. Despite the collective brainpower within university walls, they are often out of touch with the knowledge, experience, and assets of their surrounding communities.

However, we know that universities have an opportunity—and, perhaps, an obligation—to create an environment for communities to discuss their differences and devise their own solutions. Universities can create, nurture, and protect environments where ideas can be discussed between people of different beliefs and backgrounds. Such environments may play a vital role in advancing tolerance of differences and understanding between people with divergent values and ideologies. Campus and community environments represent important opportunities to discover self-rule by working through difficult questions with community members, forming networks, and using human and other resources to address local problems.⁷

As a result of the Talloires Network's collaboration with the Kettering Foundation, faculty from universities in different parts of the world have learned about and applied deliberation in their classrooms and hundreds of

At the heart of deliberative practice, we rebuild public trust and democratic institutions.

students have participated in deliberative discussions and benefited from the experience. As societal polarization continues to increase in countries around the world, the need for deliberation grows. The world needs more activities designed to bring people together, to talk, to listen, and to understand one another. At the heart of deliberative practice, we rebuild public trust and democratic institutions. Universities hold tremendous potential with regard to achieving this proposition.



NOTES

- ¹ Derek Barker, "Deliberative Civic Engagement: Toward a Public Politics in Higher Education," in *Creating Space for Democracy: A Primer on Dialogue and Deliberation in Higher Education*, eds. Nicholas Longo and Timothy Shaffer (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2019), 57-68.
- ² Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4, no. 2 (1973): 155-169.
- ³ Lorlene Hoyt, ed., *Regional Perspectives on Learning by Doing: Stories from Engaged Universities around the World* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2017).
- ⁴ Martín Carcasson, "Rethinking Civic Engagement on Campus: The Overarching Potential of Deliberative Practice," *Higher Education Exchange* (2013): 37-48.
- ⁵ Timothy J. Shaffer, et al., eds., *Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2017), xxi.
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- ⁷ David Mathews, *The Ecology of Democracy* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2014).

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DISCOURSE ETHICS AND DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE

Jed Donelan

The New England Center for Civic Life (NECCL) was founded over 20 years ago at Franklin Pierce University in southern New Hampshire to promote the practices of deliberative democracy on campus, in the community, and throughout the region. Inspired by exchanges with the National Issues Forums network, NECCL has worked with universities and colleges, community organizations, and businesses to foster community engagement around pressing community issues. One of the mainstays of NECCL's work has been the Civic Scholar program through which students are trained to moderate student forums on important campus and institutional issues.

As a young faculty member fresh off my dissertation, I was attracted to the work of NECCL through my interest in the discourse ethics of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas talks about an “ideal speech situation” in which, under particular conditions, the agreement between those involved in the discourse is morally binding. This post-Kantian and post-conventional approach to ethics appealed to me as a way of grounding normative ethical claims without appealing to some external (conventional) standard and while avoiding the consequences of ethical relativism. Under the theory of ethical relativism, which holds that morality is relative to the norms of one's group or culture, there is no way of grounding normative ethical claims and democratic practices would be no better or worse than any other method of determining the political will. Ethical relativism would not recognize a normative distinction between democracy as a

How does the practice of deliberation develop the moral competencies required for democratic citizenship?

power struggle between competing interests utilizing majority rule and compromise and democracy as an exercise in communal living and will formation. Habermas

claims that the conversations that ground normative commitments have to be actual, not ideal or hypothetical.¹ I was attracted to the practices of NECCL as a possible real-world instantiation of the ideal speech situation.

After 20 years of deliberative practice, I would like to review this initial attraction and ask the following questions: (1) To what extent does the structure

of deliberative dialogue as practiced by the National Issues Forums Institute and its affiliates realize the ideal speech situation? (2) To what extent can discourse ethics ground the moral aspect of deliberative practices? (3) How might a moral understanding of deliberation inform our practices? and (4) How does the practice of deliberation develop the moral competencies required for democratic citizenship?

Deliberative Dialogue and Habermas’ Ideal Speech Situation

I have considerable training and experience in moderating deliberative forums with the National Issues Forums (NIF) model. NIF forums have a specific structure. A trained moderator guides the discussion using an issue guide that lays out (usually) three approaches to a particular issue, such as immigration or health care. Each approach has positives as well as drawbacks, and the moderator seeks to lead the discussion in such a way that participants recognize the hard but necessary task of “choice work.” After some preliminaries, the moderator looks to invoke a “personal stake” response—why this issue is of particular interest to members of the group. There is also a posted set of ground rules to help guide the discussion and a set of reflection prompts to help bring the conversation to a conclusion.

Some years ago, I was conducting a moderator training at Bates College and attempted to place deliberative practice within the context of discourse ethics. I juxtaposed the conditions of Habermas’ ideal speech situation with the (at the time) ground rules of a deliberative forum.

<p style="text-align: center;">Conditions of Ideal Speech Situation²</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Forum Ground Rules³</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in the discourse. 2a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatsoever. b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion [whatsoever] into the discourse. c. Everyone is allowed to express his [her, their] attitudes, desires, and needs. 3. No speaker may, by internal or external coercion, be prevented from exercising his [her, their] rights as laid down [principles 1 and 2]. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The moderator will guide the discussion yet remain neutral. 2. The moderator will make sure that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. everyone is encouraged to participate; b. no one or two individuals dominate; c. the discussion will focus on the choices; and d. all the major choices or positions on the issue are considered. 3. We listen to each other.

There is at least a superficial similarity between these sets of procedural rules. I will take this *prima facie* coincidence to argue that discourse ethics illuminates the practice of deliberative dialogue in a way that highlights the competencies developed by the participants, competencies that are themselves fundamental for democratic citizenship.

The underlying insight of discourse ethics is that norms are morally binding when they are agreed to by participants in a conversation wherein all affected

Communication oriented to reaching understanding is necessary for integration of mutual human activity.

parties are entitled to speak, no validity claim is beyond question, and the “unforced force of the better argument” holds sway.⁴ This perspective can be seen as a version of social contract theory.

Moral norms are binding because of an agreement among those who will be bound by these norms.

These principles are derived from Habermas’ larger claims around the necessary structures of communication. Communication oriented to reaching understanding is necessary for integration of mutual human activity. Using language to manipulate others through falsehoods, fallacies, and frauds—what Habermas calls strategic action—is dependent on the primary purpose of language, which is reaching understanding. Manipulation through language is only possible if the coordinating function of language is presupposed in the first place. As Kant so clearly pointed out, a lie works only if it is believed. Lying is possible only where truth telling is the norm.

Each statement within a discourse contains a validity claim. These validity claims are redeemed differently in different arenas—fact, norm, or truthfulness. All validity claims are discursive in nature and need to be adjudicated through language. But only normative validity claims are adjudicated purely within the discursive process. Conversely, truth and sincerity, as well as normative claims, have a place within the normative discourse in a way that does not extend to the other spheres of discursive action. Facts, realities, and so forth must be part of the normative conversation and, as such, can have their validity challenged by any participant. Likewise, whether participants really believe what they are claiming can be challenged. Participants’ interests themselves, then, are open to questioning—not *if* they have them, but *whether they should* have them, or whether their perception of their interests is actually in line with an objective reality we might agree upon.

Habermas differentiates himself from other ethical theorists in the neo-Kantian tradition, such as John Rawls, by insisting that normative conclusions be the result of actual dialogue among interested parties rather than the result of some hypothetical thought experiment, such as the “original position.”⁵ While it makes it messy, Habermas insists that actual conversations take place.⁶ This means that people’s actual interests, values, and prejudices are entered into the conversational mix. The possibility of strategic action also enters the picture. Nevertheless, Habermas argues that the presence of the possibility of strategic action indicates the presence of the possibility of communicative action, wherein particular rules of engagement need to be followed if participants are going to be able to, in principle, reach agreement. These rules are attempts to identify what would be required if mutual understanding based on the “unforced force of the better argument” is to be possible.

As stated, I first came to deliberative dialogue as a possible candidate for a messy real-life process that Habermas recognizes will have to take place if interested subjects are going to be able to navigate their shared world and disparate interests through mutual understanding. Let us see how the structures of deliberative discourse in the NIF model line up with the conditions of the “ideal speech situation.” In what follows, I will refer to NIF ground rules as “rules” and the conditions of the ideal speech situation as “conditions.”

The Ground Rules of the Forum

Forum ground rules 2a through 2d can be seen as a way of realizing the ideal speech conditions 2a through 2c. This is not obvious as the ideal speech conditions speak to what a competent speaker has a right to introduce into the conversation, while the forum ground rules are about group dynamics and choice work. Nevertheless, if “one or two individuals dominate” (forum ground rule 2b), then not all participants are being allowed their rights to “question,” “introduce,” or “express” their own “attitudes, desires, and needs” (ideal speech conditions 2a, 2b, and 2c). Thus, some are being prevented through coercion (those dominating the conversation) from exercising their participatory rights as stated in ideal speech condition 3.

The Moderator

One of the consequences of our post-conventional condition is that philosophy can no longer claim to be “queen of the sciences.” No longer the grand weaver of intricate systems in the service of a transcendental truth derived a

priori, the philosopher, according to Habermas, acts as “a mediating interpreter,” questioning assumptions, taking alternate perspectives, and pointing out argumentative errors.⁷ Is not this the practice of a good moderator? “Why do you think that way?” “How might someone who disagrees with you respond?” “We seem to be using the term ‘immigrant’ rather loosely. What do we really mean?” The moderator does have a certain “police” function to (gently and subtly) enforce the ground rules, while pushing participants to be more open to alternative perspectives and more suspicious of their own.

Personal Stake

Perhaps there is no better indicator of whether a forum is going to be successful than the quality of the personal stake. Within the personal stake, “Everyone is allowed to express his [her, their] attitudes, desires, and beliefs” (ideal speech condition 2c). Of course, this function is not restricted to the personal stake discussion but should recur, perhaps prompted by the moderator, throughout the forum so that participants can better understand why assertions are made and believed and why they matter to individual participants.

“We Listen to Each Other”

What is the purpose of forum ground rule 3? Is it a rule relative to a specific procedure that can be discarded as soon as a different procedure is chosen, or is it a moral imperative? *Why* should we listen to each other? And, for that matter, what is the purpose of condition 3 of the ideal speech situation? Where do these *rights* come from? We seem to have introduced moral content that is not the result of an agreement taking place under the conditions of the ideal speech situation. Discourse ethics has been accused of harboring a *petitio principii* in that it introduces moral conditions before any agreement; the very condition of making a norm morally binding is even possible. Is there a way out of this pickle, one that might inform the imperative that “we listen to each other”?

Discourse Ethics and the Moral Practice of Deliberative Dialogue

The basic position of discourse ethics is that norms are morally binding if they are agreed to as the result of a conversation of a particular kind. But why? Because human beings are creatures that coordinate their behavior through language, and this can be done only on the foundation of communicative action, of which strategic action is derivative. But isn't this a moral claim itself? Don't

the features of the ideal speech situation themselves have normative content established before the conversation has even begun? In other words, doesn't discourse ethics beg the question by assuming the existence of normative standards before the justification of those standards, as required by discourse ethics, takes place?

This is the question of "a final justification," and it has been answered by the introduction of the idea of a "performative contradiction." The conditions of communicative action must allow for rigorous assessment of validity claims.

A rigorous assessment of validity claims means they need to be understood, and meanings challenged, before the rightness of the claim can be adjudicated. Thus, "we listen to each other."

If the internal conditions of successful conversation on which we all depend have residual moral content, then the practice of deliberation itself is a moral practice.

We have to hear how others are hearing what we are saying in order to be able to address ambiguities and critiques. The "listen to each other" imperative is built into the necessary conditions of successful communication *without the need to appeal to a normative claim*. Should anyone want to raise the normative issue in the course of the conversation, one could simply challenge the claim that "we listen to each other." Maybe we don't have to listen to each other. But if this is the case, then validity claims cannot be redeemed, including the claim "we don't have to listen to each other," and the claim falls on deaf ears. We find ourselves in the liar's paradox—a performative contradiction. I can't make claims against the possibility of rational discourse without invoking the very rules I seek to deny. We do have to listen to each other, not as a matter of moral obligation, but as a matter of the conditions of common living.

If the internal conditions of successful conversation on which we all depend have residual moral content, then the practice of deliberation, of intentional communal conversation itself, is a moral practice. One of the criticisms often heard from participants of deliberative forums is that the group has not come to "common ground" to address the issue at hand. What have we accomplished? Fair enough. The purpose of a deliberative forum is, after all, to do choice work. The telos of choice work is what gives the deliberation its focus, making it more than a dialogue. That being said, participating in the forum, hearing the experiences and values of others, and coming to terms with

how to express one's own experiences and values, in and of itself, is a moral practice, having moral content and consequences.

Moderators should encourage everyone to participate (particularly those whose voices are often marginalized but whose interests are at stake); keep those who are happy having their voices heard from dominating while participating; deflect, redirect, or diffuse statements that might be belittling of other people or other claims; and work to correct statements that are factually wrong. Moderators work as best they can to ensure that “we listen to each other,” not simply as a specific requirement of a particular democratic practice, but as a fundamental means of being with each other that requires respect and reciprocity—moral commitments—if authentic communal decision-making is to be possible.

Moral Understanding and Deliberative Practice

So, how can we work with moderators (in the case of NECCL, mostly undergraduates trained in our Civic Scholar program) to develop these capacities of fostering deliberation and to deepen the moral experience of the practice? My colleague Zan Walker-Gonçalves and I developed an exercise that might address this in some way. Preparing for a September 2019 moderator training that included students, faculty, and staff, we recalled the concern that many would-be moderators ask: “What do I do if . . .” followed by any number of possible “ifs.” To address this question, we identified typical scenarios a moderator might face that could disrupt deliberation. We then identified possible responses to these situations.

Sample Scenarios

- What do you do with the “expert in the room” who wants to lay down the facts?
- What do you do about participants who dismiss other participants’ contributions—perspectives, experiences, etc.?
- How and when do you diffuse tensions?
- What do you do when a participant stereotypes a group of people?

Sample Responses

- What experiences do other people have around this?

- Sounds like we have differing experiences or values at stake here. Let's remember to respectfully listen to each other.
- This is a good sign. We have tensions around this option. What are these tensions about?
- Would you please respectfully acknowledge what was said and then make a contribution of our own?
- Are you meaning to say all people of a particular kind are one particular way?

We distributed responses to the workshop participants on cards. Then we introduced the scenarios and asked participants to submit the card they thought would be the best intervention for the scenario. This “Apples-to-Apples” type of game allowed workshop participants to consider the nuances of moderator interventions. An interesting development that came out of this exercise was that we discussed all offered responses, not just the one that seemed the best. While participants may not have had a good response to a specific prompt, they had to submit something. The discussion of why participants submitted what they did led to a productive dialogue about what these different scenarios meant. Workshop participants worked through different answers to determine how they might be appropriate, and this led to a discussion that opened up different understandings of possible interests and motivations among participants.

This exercise in “creative empathy” is one way of getting at what we hope to accomplish with our student moderators. It was nicely summed up by graduating Civic Scholar Victoria Vargas:

As a student moderator, I recognized my new ability to listen, consider, and propose questions that will effectively [allow for communication through complex conversation that provokes thought and reason] for others. As a very opinionated student leader, I did find it hard to put myself in an unbiased position like this one requires. However, in doing this, I have been able to open my own mind and challenge my own beliefs privately after these public conversations. I can only hope that deliberative dialogue promotes the same reflection in others as it does in us as moderators.

To my mind, Vargas is talking about moral competencies developed by deliberative forums.

Another example of the moral content of deliberative practice is illustrated by a recent issue framing we undertook at Franklin Pierce University. After a series of events and workshops, Civic Scholars wanted to frame the issue of

controversial campus conversations. An all-day “naming and framing” workshop was held in January of 2018. The result was an issue brief that offered three approaches: (1) Embed controversial topics in course content; (2) Label course content that has controversial content so that students can choose what topics they want to engage in, if any; and (3) Utilize the campus environment to encourage diverse conversations from various viewpoints. All well and good. But as many of us working on this issue brief recognized, Option 2 was only an option for those who had the privilege of determining which conversations they wanted to be part of and which they wanted to avoid. Marginalized voices cannot escape being involved in controversial issues.

Nevertheless, we have held about 10 forums with this brief, and, in general, they have been successful. Students often begin by liking Option 2, individual choice being something many students value. But usually the participants talk themselves out of it, not necessarily from the concern of disrespecting marginalized voices, but more from the idea that college should be a time to explore new and potentially uncomfortable ideas.

Regarding the implicit moral content of participation in deliberative dialogue, student responses to qualitative questions on post-forum questionnaires are encouraging. To the question, What, if anything, might you do differently because of this forum? typical answers include:

- Work to acknowledge that others may not feel as comfortable as I do talking about controversial topics.
- Be more willing to hear other points of view, even if they are extreme.
- Expose myself more to diversity in race and beliefs.
- Consider the perspectives of others, and offer opportunities to speak.

Neither the moderator training exercise nor the *Controversial Conversations* issue brief were designed to augment the moral developmental potential of deliberative practices. Rather, they revealed it. And they might allow us to be more intentional about these practices in future efforts.

Deliberative Practice and Democratic Competency

The commitment to democratic decision-making did not come about as an historical accident. It was a hard-won achievement fought over centuries, first through the bourgeois revolutions of the Enlightenment, then through the historical extensions of participatory rights separate from property, race,

gender, and other restrictions, on to broader and broader inclusiveness, extending well beyond the geographical context of the Enlightenment. Yet, because democratic participation requires communicative action, the possibility of strategic action is concurrently present. We are often more likely to demonize each other in pursuit of our own perceived interests than to extend respect and reciprocity—to listen

to each other. Even those who demonize, who diminish the humanity of others in order to win an argument, have a validity claim behind their dismissal of other perspectives—that somehow those “others” don’t count as much. But once

individuals, or groups of individuals, capable of advocating from their own values and experiences for their own interests are excluded from the conversation wherein those interests are to be decided, the very foundation of democracy is compromised, if not destroyed.

My claims reduce to this: Deliberative dialogue can be taken as an attempt to realize Habermas’ ideal speech situation, imperfect as it is. The very conditions of successful deliberative communication, necessary for coordinated human action, have implicit moral content. Recognizing this allows us to reorient our understanding of deliberation such that we work with moderators to develop and promote understanding of deliberative practice as a way of fostering the moral underpinnings of democratic engagement. The deliberative process, in and of itself, has moral content and develops democratic capacity. This can be seen, at least anecdotally, in the reporting from NECCL activities.

My impression is that deliberative dialogue understates the moral aspects of its practice.⁸ We are currently living through an age when deliberation, listening to the other side, being open-minded, and even claiming something as a fact have become politically suspect. Those of us who believe in the normative value of democratic decision-making cannot respond to this skepticism with appeals to neutrality and nonpartisanship. Those of us committed to deliberative practices are partisan—partisan for a process that recognizes that diverse viewpoints are necessary to come to common agreement. Practitioners should not be averse to recognizing this reality, particularly when training and working

Those of us committed to deliberative practices are partisan—partisan for a process that recognizes that diverse viewpoints are necessary to come to common agreement.

with other practitioners. By emphasizing the moral content of the process itself, deliberators can bring attention to the moral foundations of democracy. This may be an essential step in reclaiming our public discourse, a vital task for the years ahead if democracy is to be reclaimed.



NOTES

- ¹ Jürgen Habermas, “Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification,” in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Boston: MIT Press, 1990), 91-92.
- ² Habermas, “Discourse Ethics,” 89.
- ³ This is an earlier version of ground rules than those currently available at nifi.org.
- ⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg, 2nd printing (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 306.
- ⁵ Habermas, “Discourse Ethics,” 66-67.
- ⁶ Habermas, “Discourse Ethics,” 91-92.
- ⁷ Jürgen Habermas, “Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter,” in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Boston: MIT Press, 1990), 19.
- ⁸ I do not know, but I wonder if that was one of the reasons for adjusting the ground rules from “We listen to each other” to “Listening is as important as talking,” the current ground rule. “Listening is as important as talking” has no moral import and seems arbitrary and attached to a particular practice I can either accept or reject. “We listen to each other” is a moral imperative underlying effective deliberation and democratic participation.

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DELIBERATION AND DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

A Student Affairs Approach

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Higher Education Exchange frequently highlights stories of deliberation at colleges and universities. These examples often demonstrate deliberation's power as an educational practice to build students' democratic skills while also contributing to other academic goals. This article describes deliberation in another context and led by a distinct constituency in higher education: student affairs professionals.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) is the leading organization of student affairs professionals in the United States. Founded in 1919, today NASPA is a membership-driven association of individuals and institutions focused on providing professional development and networking opportunities for student affairs educators. As the leading voice of student affairs, NASPA strives for innovation and evidence-based student-centered practice throughout higher education. NASPA supports a network of 15,000 individual members in all 50 states, 25 countries, and 8 US territories.

Recently, NASPA undertook a project to develop deliberative issue guides for use in student affairs programming at campuses across the country. Student affairs professionals developed issue guides and used deliberative forums aimed at addressing contentious campus issues. In this context, deliberation was truly democratic in the sense that it was a way for students to discuss with their peers issues of mutual concern and work together to collectively decide how campus life should reflect diverse principles and perspectives. Developing materials to support deliberation on campus also proved to be something of a deliberative exercise in itself as the student affairs professionals engaged in this project worked collaboratively to balance varied values.¹

Growing Divisiveness across Campus Communities

NASPA's interest in convening deliberative forums on college campuses was largely motivated by concern over increasing polarization of political conversations in higher education. NASPA recognized the opportunity to support

student affairs professionals in incorporating deliberative dialogue into campus programming. As political conversations have become increasingly fraught and divisive, NASPA staff believed that modeling deliberative dialogue within higher education might be a method of addressing polarization, as well as an approach to increasing student civic engagement.

Campuses have long been valued in our communities for fostering curiosity and learning by creating space to engage in uncomfortable conversations or wrestle with new ideas. Indeed, it is this very trait of open access and willingness to explore across the political spectrum that has resulted in campuses today

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becoming the stage—as they were during the Civil Rights Movement—upon which our national conversations about race, inequality, and justice play out. Despite this historic precedent, mainstream media headlines increasingly call into question whether today’s campuses are stifling some forms of expression.

These claims persist

despite research by Shawna Shapiro, that found that today’s students actually want to engage with those who hold differing opinions while engendering respect, if not all opinions, for all participants.² Similarly, the resurgence of campus organizations committed to confronting political polarization points toward more solutions than conflict.³ Far from squelching free speech and intellectual diversity, campuses across the country hold events on a wide variety of topics and host speakers who hold a diversity of views and opinions, challenging attendees to broaden their perspectives and engage in deliberative discourse.

Student affairs professionals are no strangers to campus controversies and, as the national professional association representing them, NASPA frequently works to provide resources and tools to help engage directly with students and community members. For instance, when the use of safe spaces became part of the ongoing campus controversy, prompting accusations of coddling students or shielding them from facing opposing viewpoints, the NASPA associate director for research and policy authored the policy and practice brief *Safe*

Spaces and Brave Spaces: Historical Context and Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals to provide a historical perspective on the use of safe spaces.⁴ Recognizing the need to develop capacity among student affairs professionals to engage in dialogue around a variety of problems that arise on college campuses, NASPA partnered with the Kettering Foundation to develop issue guides specifically related to campus conversations.

The purpose of the partnership was to learn how best to engage campus communities in deliberative dialogue. While the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) and the Kettering Foundation maintain an excellent library of issue guides dealing with “wicked” problems (problems that cannot be solved easily or through technical solutions) facing our society, NASPA staff were concerned that the issues lacked the voice of their own constituency—student affairs professionals. By developing issue guides specifically for student affairs professionals to utilize, NASPA staff hoped to create a tool kit for campus leaders to address conversations around such topics as controversial speakers and freedom of speech, support for undocumented students, and how to manage guns on campuses. NASPA staff hypothesized that deliberation could be recognized as a method for approaching both campus-based issues and broader societal issues typically covered by NIFI issue guides.

Toward that end, a team of NASPA staff and members engaged in an 18-month process with the Kettering Foundation to create issue guides for use in campus forums. The first issue guide, *Free Speech and the Inclusive Campus*, was released in spring 2020. Several team members who were new to the deliberative dialogue process provided valuable perspectives. Their reflections lent helpful insight and realistic expectations to others who might be exploring the creation of their own issue guides and investing in deliberative practice.

A History of Deliberative Practice

Vice presidents for student affairs and NASPA have been engaged in work to promote deliberative dialogue for meaningful civic engagement for some time. In 2012, a task force within the federal Department of Education and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) partnered to publish the report *A Crucible Moment*, which “call[ed] for investing on a massive scale in higher education’s capacity to renew this nation’s social, intellectual, and civic capital.”⁵ NASPA was one of more than 60 organizations that made commitments to help fulfill this bold national agenda. NASPA committed to “mov[ing] students past simple service learning to deeper levels of involvement and leadership through four specific opportunities for civic

engagement . . . [and] work[ing] with its professional members and partners, as well as directly with its student contingents, to encourage civic engagement and reflection.”⁶

To fulfill this new commitment, NASPA created the NASPA LEAD Initiative, a community of practice for student affairs professionals specifically focused on civic learning and democratic engagement within higher education institutions. The NASPA LEAD Initiative is an application-based program. If accepted into the program, campus representatives meet with association staff monthly during the academic year.

Constituents of the NASPA LEAD Initiative have the opportunity to cocreate resources and opportunities for learning that focus on civic learning and democratic engagement. In 2017, in partnership with the American Democracy Project initiative, a need arose between the two organizations to highlight the available tools relating to dialogue and deliberation. During the 2017 Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement meeting (CLDE) in Baltimore, Maryland, the American Democracy Project and NASPA LEAD Initiative organized a deliberative forum using the National Issues Forums issue guide *Safety and Justice: How Should Communities Reduce Violence?*⁷ The plenary session provided opportunities for people to consider the options and difficult choices that our communities and the nation face if we are going to make progress together and to explore how to carry out this form of democratic practice in classrooms, campuses, and communities.

The 2017 CLDE meeting was a springboard for the NASPA LEAD Initiative to work more closely with NIFI and the Kettering Foundation in creating dialogue and deliberation resources specific to student affairs educators. Leading up to the 2017 CLDE meeting, colleges and universities engaged with NASPA’s LEAD Initiative collaborated to create free online facilitator training courses through NASPA’s Online Learning Community.⁸ The first course, *Moderating Deliberative Forums: An Introduction*, addressed the importance of deliberative forums and neutral moderators to the success of forums. The second course, *Implementing Dialogue and Deliberation Programming and Resources*, shared suggestions for vice presidents for student affairs and other student affairs professionals to implement deliberative forums on their campuses or in their communities.

Representatives from the NIF network and NASPA LEAD Initiative campuses also offered in-person moderator training in a preconference session of the 2017 CLDE meeting. That session provided a hands-on, interactive opportunity for attendees and moderators to practice the skill of deliberation with the intent

of providing participants with the know-how to facilitate similar classroom, campus, and community deliberations.

Adapting Deliberative Processes for Professionals without Deliberative Experience

NASPA members at colleges and universities across the nation face a complex sociopolitical environment with issues ranging from the MeToo movement and student financial security to reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. After much consideration, the topic of free speech surfaced as the first wicked problem that NASPA would seek to tackle with student affairs professionals.

With no easy answers, the salience of free speech on college campuses ignited a shared level of heightened concern. The free-speech issue may be considered from multiple perspectives, depending on the personal stake or narrative of diverse individuals. Deciding on the content of an issue guide on this topic provided a natural experiment for the deliberative process. The naming and the framing of issues involving free speech were entirely constructed with NASPA members and stakeholders, who mirrored the diverse representation of college campus life. Teri Hinds, then director of policy research and advocacy for NASPA, noted:

Student affairs professionals are embedded both in the broader sociopolitical history of our country and also in the immediate lived experiences of the students they work with on a daily basis. This leads them to consider not only the current legal interpretations and case law surrounding free speech on college campuses, but also the role of structural racism in the creation of laws and policies around which speech is protected and for whom. Advocates for historically marginalized communities point out the often unseen racist underpinnings that influences public policy from the framing of the Bill of Rights through today. Challenges to the status quo and the pervasive White privilege embedded in US culture were—during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and [continuing today]—frequently met with violence by both civilian and official police representatives. Student affairs professionals are charged [with] both the need to adhere to the policies and practices of the law and their institutions *and* with supporting and uplifting the students they serve. This can lead to conflict—internally and externally—when the need to protect students from possible violence requires lawful and necessary limitations on some speech.

The collective learning produced through this process was indicative of not only the democratic benefits of deliberation based on the issue guide in

its final form, but also of democratic learning and deliberative practice through the process of gathering concerns and writing the guide. This kind of evidence of difficult choice making and deliberative practice through concern gathering and naming and framing of issues does not always receive due attention. Coproduced with student affairs professionals and NASPA members, the development of the issue guide reflected their experiences and challenges and the voice of their concerns for their profession.

While some constituents of the NASPA membership, particularly among the LEAD Initiative, were already connected to deliberative practices, rolling

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this concept out to the full membership involved multiple angles and engaging a large number of student affairs professionals with little or no familiarity with the practices. “While the LEAD Initiative campus

representatives had various levels of engagement with dialogue and deliberation, their leadership in engaging their colleagues about the process was vital to the broader engagement strategies utilized by our team regardless of their previous experiences with the process” said Stephanie King, formerly NASPA’s director of civic engagement and knowledge community initiatives. NASPA’s core team also had a range of experience levels with public deliberation, including several members with no prior experience in the deliberative process. As such, one of the primary tasks for our team was translating the typical processes involved in public deliberation to an audience with little familiarity or understanding of it.

For example, Brent Marsh (a familiar name to the NASPA network), the incoming director of the NASPA public policy division, joined the team enthusiastically, welcoming the opportunity to learn more about the practice of deliberation. Marsh’s reflections are especially telling given his role as a seasoned student affairs professional:

I was thankful for the opportunity to join this project team. At the time, however, I was completely unfamiliar with the deliberative dialogue process. I eagerly began discovering terms like “concern gathering,” “naming and framing,” “wicked problems,” and more, a process that was greatly enriched when I traveled with two project teammates to the Kettering Foundation’s

beautiful Dayton, Ohio, campus in late September 2018 to participate in a two-day learning exchange. The learning exchange proved to be an incredibly valuable opportunity for a novice like me. I began to more clearly understand the process and could visualize myself and my teammates engaging in it with our student affairs colleagues.

Initially, Marsh's optimism was not universally shared. Members of the team were skeptical of the ambitious process and timeline. Those who were familiar with the deliberative process often had little to no experience in student affairs. As a faculty member, Kara Lindaman respected student affairs professionals tremendously as her colleagues and friends but had little experience in fully understanding their roles and responsibilities. By working with this team, she not only discovered the value of her colleagues' work but better understood the challenges, complexities, and trade-offs student affairs professionals experience in their daily lives:

In higher education we adamantly espouse the need to break down the silos between academic affairs and student affairs, but we have no idea how to do this. As such, we rarely talk and listen to our colleagues in student affairs to better understand their decision-making, and students suffer as a result. From this process, I learned so much from student affairs professionals, and I was deeply humbled by sitting at the same table. Now I see my colleagues differently, my students more holistically, and new opportunities for me. I don't think I will ever be the same faculty member again.

Others were also timid to fully grasp or make sense of the deliberative process. Diana Ali, the associate director of policy research and advocacy at NASPA, also shared some reservations in the beginning:

I first learned about the Kettering Foundation in the same way I've learned about most practitioner-focused work in higher education—through my colleagues at NASPA. With a background in community-based nonprofit work, I arrived with fresh eyes to the world of student affairs four years ago at my first NASPA interview. I have learned to greatly trust my colleagues' expertise and defer to their insight. Conversely, working in policy and advocacy at a generalist student affairs association presents a series of challenges, including that of determining tangible professional development outcomes. Therefore, when my colleagues introduced me to the work initially, I met them with a hint of skepticism. I asked how we would get our members to care. Our colleagues? We struggle enough to highlight the importance of staying abreast of an ever-evolving and currently deregulated higher education policy landscape.

With these sprinklings of skepticism, the core team was created under the leadership of Hinds and King, who individually shared a productive and meaningful relationship with every team member. The shared experience of the team through the process of gathering concerns and naming and framing the issue led to collegial trust and enduring relationships. The lessons learned through this process illustrated the struggle to thoughtfully listen to and combine multiple meanings and perspectives into a collective or cohesive narrative. King had this to share about the creation of the team:

When looking to create the project team, Teri and I wanted to ensure that we brought together diverse perspectives from the association's civic learning and democratic engagement and public policy networks. Prior to this project, while well intentioned, the association often operated in silos lacking the intentionality to bring together various constituent groups to work on projects of this caliber, ironically mimicking the silos often seen on campuses related to academic and student affairs. While the work of dialogue and deliberation was new to some team members, it was equally a strength of others. Having these various perspectives involved in the process allowed us to be thoughtful in our planning and execution of the first issue guide.

Concern Gathering

To start the process, the team opted to move forward by hosting multiple concern gatherings to obtain member feedback from a broad representation of student affairs professionals across positional level, functional area within student affairs, geographic area or region, and institutional type. These gatherings were offered in person at several NASPA-sponsored conferences as well as via four virtual online sessions.

An initial step in framing an issue for deliberation is concern gathering—soliciting a wide range of considerations about a topic from a diverse group of people. For this project, virtual concern gatherings were piloted as a method to reach and engage as many concerned people as possible. While no process is ideal, virtual concern gathering permitted greater access to many different voices across geographical barriers and constraints. This allowed the strength of NASPA in its large membership to be intentionally included during concern gathering. Indeed, voices were heard, and experiences shared, that we may not have experienced in larger in-person, traditionally modeled concern gathering sessions.

These two-hour listening sessions were structured similarly, in person or online. In order to streamline the session and provide as much opportunity for listening as possible, we provided ground rules beforehand as part of the registration confirmation process, along with technical guidance for the virtual sessions. We had a moderator script that was used to guide the conversation and ensure consistency in questions across sessions and moderators.

For introductions, we asked participants to refrain from using last names or identifying their institution, seeking to balance power differentials in the room of those perceived to be topic experts or senior administrators. As a personal stake question, we also asked participants to share one concern they had about the topic as they introduced themselves to ensure everyone participated early.

Most of our sessions were comprised solely of student affairs professionals, faculty, and administrators. At one in-person conference session, we did have a few undergraduate students participate. This student feedback was a valuable addition to our concern gathering efforts. While our guide is geared toward student affairs professionals, our focus is on the student experience, so their voices in the process were much valued and appreciated.

To connect with a variety of individuals at various professional levels, invitations to participate were sent out to many groups, including the full NASPA membership, particularly on campuses participating in the LEAD Initiative; several NASPA divisions, including those focused on public policy, small colleges and universities, community colleges, equality, inclusion, and social justice; and various stakeholders in campus life, including vice presidents of student affairs, undergraduate fellows, and graduate assistants.

Student affairs professionals often engage in communities of practice through which they share information with each other, problem solve, and explore collaborative efforts. There are existing collaborative spaces and work groups for each of the groups identified above. In addition, NASPA has a number of established knowledge communities that bring together professionals around a range of issues and offer opportunities for connection and collaboration.

From a recruitment and technology standpoint, this space was likely an advantage as we tapped existing resources and offered a similar experience to other NASPA offerings either as a conference session or a virtual online community of practice. Many participants had likely participated in other NASPA professional development opportunities and had familiarity with the platform used for virtual concern collecting sessions.

From a facilitation standpoint, this similar space posed some additional challenges. It was important to distinguish the concern gathering process

from these existing collaborative conversations in which participants are often looking for answers, seeking information on best practices, and advocating for specific policies or viewpoints. Team member Erin Payseur Oeth offered her perspective on the process:

As student affairs professionals, we often love connecting with other professionals to talk about issues on our campuses, share tips, and problem solve together. In these concern gathering sessions, however, we had to remind participants that this was a listening phase that would inform the framing of the issue and ongoing discussion. At times, several participants wanted to share best practices and start problem solving immediately.

While we provided ground rules prior to each session and referred to them at the beginning of the call, for the sake of time, we did not explicitly review them. On several occasions, participants would veer toward looking for information or advocating for a policy. They displayed a tendency to view

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the gathering as a collaborative space to delve into the issue and to start identifying best practices. In some cases, they asked questions about existing efforts or policy updates, forgetting that they were there to provide feedback and not to receive answers.

In such cases, we relied heavily on our moderators to keep the conversation on topic. As we went forward, we added some additional explanatory language to the moderator script to spend additional time on framing the project and the deliberative process in general.

While the concept of concern gathering was new for some and the virtual concern gathering process was new for the team, participants engaged well and provided valuable insight that would inform our naming and framing of the issue. Team members found the sessions to be valuable experiences and highly engaging, as Marsh reflected:

I had the opportunity to moderate our first virtual session. I recall feeling a bit nervous and ill-suited for this responsibility, but ultimately it was a fascinating two-hour session filled with rich discussion and broad-based participation. I felt prepared to facilitate because our team had undertaken the necessary planning, including a well-written moderator’s guide that

included a few technical details, questions to push through lulls, and more. Despite our best efforts to set forth ground rules in advance and at the outset of each concern gathering session, we were met with a few interesting moments. Ultimately, however, the concern gathering process was, to me, inspiring and enlightening because it afforded me opportunities to hear from colleagues with diverse and divergent lived experiences, perspectives, and world views, and, quite frankly, it challenged my thinking and increased my capacity to empathize with others who hold different viewpoints.

The many voices and multiple perspectives embedded in student affairs work was always enlightening and a little overwhelming. “Through the use of carefully constructed ground rules and participant-centered facilitation, the virtual boundaries constricting

discussion began to crumble,” described Ali. She added perspective into her role as facilitator: “About an hour into the two-hour session, participants became surprisingly vulnerable and spoke to how their multifaceted identities intersect with the presenting challenges of addressing free speech issues on campus. We followed, rather than led, these conversations.”

Following these concern gathering sessions, the team arrived at an important observation: student affairs educators embraced the potential of deliberation, and free speech represented a timely issue with which everyone was struggling. This nexus provided a meaningful opportunity to carefully name and frame free speech for student affairs professionals, and the core team embraced this responsibility.

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Naming and Framing Issues

Whereas the concern gathering phase required adapting deliberative processes to a broad student affairs audience, the naming and framing phase required our team to engage its own deliberative processes in new ways and across a range of experience. As the concerns were sorted and organized around themes, the team found themselves deliberating internally to find compromise and commonality. “The sheer volume of information we amassed across four

virtual and two in-person concern gathering sessions was initially daunting,” shared team member Marsh. “But as our project team began to work together on organizing the responses, the process felt increasingly manageable. Teamwork was essential, and the unique insights each member contributed were invaluable.”

Our team brought together professionals with experience in public policy, civic learning and democratic engagement, and deliberative practice. While all of us had some exposure to public deliberation prior to joining the project team, the naming and framing process was an area in which many of us lacked

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experience. At the beginning of the project, team members were introduced to the process during a Kettering learning exchange on developing materials for deliberative forums. Since only a couple of team members had previously been a part of writing a full deliberative issue guide, Erin Payseur Oeth, who had experience in both naming and framing *and* in student affairs, expertly shepherded the team through the process.

Important considerations and guiding questions emerged as we began the process of naming and framing the issue guide. NASPA has a public policy division and takes official policy stances on specific issues. Writing an issue guide that included a range of perspectives therefore had the potential to appear to negate or replace official legal or policy stances by NASPA or other policy-making entities. In part, this was a challenge of separating NASPA’s institutional voice from the voices of campus stakeholders, such as faculty, student affairs administrators, and students. Respecting NASPA’s institutional voice while fostering a deliberative conversation that included a broader range of perspectives implicated not only policy positions but also values. For example, NASPA has a strong ongoing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We sought to respect and honor those values while creating a guide that reflected broader values as well.

Another framing challenge for our team was that NASPA is a professional membership association whose primary focus is student affairs professionals, but we also wanted to create an issue guide that could be used more broadly on campuses by faculty and students. We sought to balance the different ways this guide might be used: for making decisions on campus-level policy, generating

awareness of free speech policies, and creating opportunities for productive dialogue across differing perspectives. We asked ourselves how to provide enough context and background information around free speech and the First Amendment for practitioners while avoiding jargon with which students and non-administrators might be unfamiliar.

As we worked through the naming and framing process with these questions in mind, we committed to writing as a team. Even though our remote locations made convening in person challenging, we committed to an in-person, two-day writing session to begin the framing process and then to ongoing virtual writing sessions during which we would collaboratively write, edit, and revise. This time together developed a sense of agency and trust in the difficult value-based choice work of compiling hundreds of voices into holistic and acceptable options. Again, Marsh's thoughts on the naming and framing provide a welcome snapshot of its effects:

We wrestled mightily with the number of options that seemed to emerge from the concerns shared by our colleagues, finally reducing our options from four to three, a process that required both compromise and creativity. We also struggled to best frame our problem statement. While we felt sure the guide's lead title would be *Free Speech and the Inclusive Campus*, we listed at least eight potential problem statements before we landed on, "How do we foster the campus community we want?" Naming and framing was a fascinating process, enriched greatly by working alongside colleagues who have become friends through our work together.

This collaborative process was crucial in avoiding our own biases, wrestling with questions together, and ensuring that we were intentional with our language, our approaches, and our process. Equally important, the core team cocreated a shared understanding of the issue at hand, engaging in listening and choice making, and, perhaps unintentionally, developing deliberative internal practice and capacity. "We listened, researched, and created something. I'm so glad I trusted my colleagues, even now as the inner voice that first hesitated at the onset of the project gets louder during unprecedented times," said Ali.

During the two-day, in-person meeting, we worked to narrow our problem statement and developed several possible framings for the topic. We also reviewed the notes from our previous concern gathering sessions, enumerated specific themes and comments that emerged in the sessions, and then began to categorize these individual items into larger color-coded categories. At least four initial categories emerged from this process: (1) Prioritize campus safety and student welfare; (2) Cultivate intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning;

(3) Develop fair and equitable policies and processes; and (4) Uphold the ideals of free speech. We then assigned a team member to lead the writing for each section, with two members working on the introduction and background information. We then reconvened to review and discuss the sections collectively. Through Google Docs, we engaged in synchronous live editing, which simplified the process.

As is often the case in naming and framing issues, our initial framework evolved as we worked through the writing and editing process together. We focused on the different roles of the university as protector, educator, curator, and defender. We consolidated approaches into three distinct options and rewrote action steps, consolidating “equity and marginalization of student voices” into “student safety and welfare.” We debated whether to include action steps relating to the classroom since our guide was geared toward student affairs professionals. We wrestled with language (for example, What is fair and equitable?) and with how much to explicate technical concepts like time, place, and manner restrictions (legal standards for how colleges and universities may or may not restrict speech). And we had to consistently avoid our own biases to ensure we were representing the concerns, action steps, and trade-offs fairly and accurately.

After much deliberation, the resulting framework presented three distinct approaches:

- Option 1: Prioritize student safety and well-being
- Option 2: Affirm the educational value of intellectual curiosity and engaging with ideas across difference
- Option 3: Uphold the ideals of free speech

As noted in the concern gathering phase, student affairs professionals often are trained with an eye toward best practices or promising practices. This tendency surfaced for us throughout the process. We routinely checked ourselves to ensure we were not promoting a specific approach but rather representing all three approaches well and honoring the values that drove them. At times, we would refer to our concern gathering notes to remind ourselves of the voices that were reflected to us. For instance, at one of our concern gathering sessions, two student leaders with shared marginalized identities engaged in the conversation with each other from two different perspectives with articulate arguments and passion from their lived experiences. One student embraced the idea of controversial speakers and issues and the other suggested it made her feel unsafe and threatened.

These two student leaders came to embody two of the three approaches in our guide. We would often picture these students as we were writing to give voice to the legitimacy and power of their perspectives.

Voices such as these were critical to drafting an issue guide that was inclusive and accessible. The result was an intentional experiment in democratic practice through the equitable

coproduction of the guide with people who had diverse voices and experiences. Through deliberately and methodically considering each option and weighing its actions and trade-offs as a team, the issue guide evolved

Through deliberately and methodically considering each option and weighing its actions and trade-offs as a team, the issue guide evolved into a document of deliberation and for deliberation.

into a document *of* deliberation and *for* deliberation. Rather than providing an expert-based, best-practices document to NASPA members and their campuses, the final issue guide, framed around the issue of free speech, encourages them to engage in the democratic practice of deliberation. Indirectly, albeit intentionally, this process introduced deliberation to a crucial new audience in higher education. Diana Ali elaborated on the experience:

We worked collaboratively in tying together similarities and differences experienced in the threads of participants' stories. We sought equitable input from the members of our team and utilized the very ground rules we had constructed for our participants in the process. We pulled from our disparate skill sets to identify the sticking points and created deliberation options representative of our findings. My background in social work was challenged by my colleagues' backgrounds in civic engagement, administrative leadership, data assessment, and political science.

In conclusion, naming and framing this issue guide posed some unique challenges. Early on, we identified several key considerations and guiding questions to keep in mind as we were writing. Throughout the naming and framing process, we committed to a team-based writing approach so that we could navigate these challenges together.

NASPA's formal release of the guide was delayed from March to May to accommodate transitions and organizational adjustments in light of COVID-19. NASPA will host forums and encourage campuses to adopt the guide for use in the summer and fall of 2020. As post-forum questionnaires and campus

reports are submitted, we will have data to indicate whether and how these forums shaped participants' awareness and thinking around the issue. It will also provide insight into whether campuses found public deliberation useful in addressing wicked problems and controversial issues on their respective campuses. We hope that the release of this guide will also engage more student affairs practitioners in public deliberation as a tool for student learning and civic engagement. Ali reflected:

My initial concern popped up yet again in my head: How do we get student affairs professionals [who are] unfamiliar with dialogue and deliberation to care about this work? But I also realize it is in this very moment that we need to remember what matters to each of us, that we need to peel back the layers and think about what we value and the structures at play in shaping our priorities. In times of crises, the cracks in our system widen, often deepening existing disparities.

In his recent book *Free Speech and Liberal Education*, Donald Downs recommends a nuanced approach to the free speech dilemma, in which the higher education community “must avoid becoming either Chicken Little or the proverbial ostrich with its head in the sand.”⁹ In his writing on the prevalence of racist incidents on college campuses in 2016, educator and public speaker Lawrence Ross pointed to the hypocrisy that “a Colin Kaepernick, who kneels before the flag as a challenge to America to be better . . . is held up as a point of ridicule, whereas the racist just melts back into society.”¹⁰ From his vantage point, Ross

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underlines how the First Amendment is used as a tool to perpetuate White supremacy. Downs and Ross are both experienced and knowledgeable in the field of higher education and

hold highly disparate philosophies regarding free speech on campus. Both perspectives are valuable, even now, and both involve a consideration of trade-offs—the cost of compromise against the cost of agitation.

In order to hear emerging and evolving perspectives, we need to keep engaging in conversations across differences. Evolving tensions and unprecedented challenges to the mission of higher education and our democratic principles highlight a continuing need to invest in strategies to create a metaphorical table expansive enough that everyone should have a seat. NASPA's first issue guide offers one of these strategies.



NOTES

- ¹ Much of this article concerns the first deliberative issue guide created by NASPA, *Free Speech and the Inclusive Campus*. This guide and materials to support moderators in holding forums are available on NASPA's website at <https://www.naspa.org/project/issue-guides-for-deliberative-dialogue> (accessed August 6, 2020).
- ² Shawna Shapiro, "Snowflakes and Free Speech on Campus," *Inside Higher Ed*, June 18, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2018/06/18/middlebury-professor-surveys-student-attitudes-about-free-speech-opinion#.XxsBtwdMsO8.link> (accessed August 6, 2020).
- ³ Amy Binder and Jeffrey Kidder, "If You Think Campus Speech Is All Angry Confrontation, You're Looking in the Wrong Places," *Washington Post*, October 30, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/10/30/if-you-think-campus-speech-is-all-angry-confrontation-youre-looking-in-the-wrong-places/> (accessed August 6, 2020).
- ⁴ Diana Ali, *Safe Spaces and Brave Spaces: Historical Context and Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals*, NASPA Policy and Practice Series Issue 2, (October 2017), https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Policy_and_Practice_No_2_Safe_Brave_Spaces.pdf (accessed August 6, 2020).
- ⁵ The 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): 2.
- ⁶ The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future: CLDE Action Network Commitments 2012-2014 Statements of Commitment from National Organizations, Local Organizations, Higher Education Institutions, and Scholars/Practitioners*, Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2014): 4.
- ⁷ *Safety and Justice: How Should Communities Reduce Violence?* National Issues Forums Institute, <https://www.nifi.org/es/issue-guide/safety-and-justice> (accessed August 6, 2020).
- ⁸ More information about the LEAD Initiative is available at <https://www.naspa.org/division/lead-initiative/resources> (accessed August 6, 2020). NASPA members can sign up for training in dialogue and deliberation at <https://olc.naspa.org/catalog/dialogue-and-deliberation> (accessed August 6, 2020).
- ⁹ Donald Alexander Downs, *Free Speech and Liberal Education: A Plea for Intellectual Diversity and Tolerance* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2020), 3.
- ¹⁰ Lawrence Ross, "Blackface on College Campuses Isn't About Freedom of Speech; It's About White Supremacy," *The Root*, October 31, 2016, <https://www.theroot.com/black-face-on-college-campuses-isnt-about-freedom-of-spe-1790857482> (accessed August 9, 2020).

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DELIBERATION IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOM

Flannery Burke with Marie Downey, Lani Frost, Sydney Johnson, Allison Mispagel, and Andrew Sweeso

What does the public need from history? Historians have a common answer to that question: More history! But the public often has another.

In this essay, I will explore the public purposes of history through my own and my students' experiences with deliberation. The closest most academic historians come to the public on a regular basis is the survey class. Most students in survey classes are not history majors or minors, but students required to take a history class for general education credit. In the pages that follow, I describe my experience incorporating deliberation into a history survey course and draw upon extensive interviews with students from that class to examine the question of what benefits nonhistorians receive from studying history. In the classroom and in later interviews, my students reflected on the experience of deliberation and the insights they gleaned about trade-offs and tensions in decision-making, perspective and bias, and contingency. I quote directly and extensively from my interviews with students so you will read their own words. As this essay demonstrates, the practice of historical deliberation can prompt deep consideration about collective decision-making and democracy.

By incorporating historical deliberations into my world history survey class (Origins of the Modern World, 1500-Present), I intended to get a stronger sense of how history informed contemporary decision-making and when students felt that they had enough

historical knowledge to weigh deliberations about past events. My students—the public—had other, less narrow expectations. Their experiences suggest that

The public needs historical thinking and historical content from historians but also opportunities to see the value of history at work.

the public needs measured consideration and an acute sense of contingency from academic historians and other history professionals. Greater historical content knowledge appears to help students in both realms, but the format of deliberation makes apparent the utility of this knowledge. The public needs historical thinking and historical content from historians but also opportunities to

see the value of history at work. As a pedagogical tool, deliberation can help students see the relevance of historical study for democratic decision-making today.

This essay grew out of a world history course I taught in the spring of 2019, which, as a part of the core curriculum, was a required class for most Saint Louis University students. Fourteen students engaged in one historical deliberation and two contemporary deliberations using materials from the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) and other Kettering Foundation partners. Two mini-deliberations of my own design occupied two class periods, and, as a final assignment, students designed deliberative issue guides of their own. Five of the students' papers wedded deliberative decision-making to historical thinking through their attention to context or contingency, and all five students agreed to talk further with me to prepare this essay about how they had conducted their work. Students reflected on the purpose and meaning of historical knowledge and the purpose and meaning of deliberation.

The five students were all part of the Saint Louis University honors program, but each had different majors and at least one was a double major. Communications, psychology, bioethics, English, accounting, and neuroscience were all represented. As a Jesuit school, Saint Louis University follows the Jesuit imperative to prepare students to be "men and women for others." In addition to the two-course Origins of the Modern World sequence, the College of Arts and Sciences required core courses in theology and philosophy. Moreover, reflection forms a key part of Jesuit education, and students encounter it as a practice in multiple classes. None of the students in the class or our conversation group were history majors or minors (despite my best efforts to recruit them to the department) and only one took history classes following the required Origins of the Modern World class(es).¹ The students' having different majors worked to the advantage of our conversations because I was unable to lapse into history education jargon.

After the conclusion of the course, I met with these students three times. The first meeting included Lani Frost, who created a deliberative issue guide focused on Japan's decision to open to outsiders in the nineteenth century; Marie Downey, whose guide tackled the effects of the Green Revolution and pesticide use; and Allison Mispagel, who proposed four options in response to a split between city and county governance in St. Louis. A second meeting included Sydney Johnson, whose guide addressed the obesity epidemic, and Andrew Sweeso, who focused on the safety and health effects of a St. Louis-area landfill that contains nuclear waste. A third meeting included all five students at the same time. I shared four questions for discussion with them in advance of each of the meetings:

1. How much contextual knowledge does the public need to deliberate effectively?
2. How do we acknowledge gaps and absences in our knowledge while deliberating?
3. When deliberating about events in the past, how do we address contingency?

These questions informed a central query posed by Kettering Foundation program officer Joni Doherty during foundation exchanges in which I participated: What does the public need from history?

The students encountered deliberation in our first class session, during which I engaged them in a deliberative discussion about a newly proposed core curriculum for the university. I asked students to consider whether we should keep the core, which required two world history courses (Origins of the Modern World to 1500 and Origins of the Modern World from 1500), adopt a new core that requires one history course on any topic, or adopt a new core that does not require a history course. Students were surprised to see a history professor consider the option of leaving her own discipline outside of required classes, which was intended to signal my openness to views and opinions different from my own. Although the mini-deliberation did not follow the full naming and framing standards used to create the National Issues Forums Institute's published deliberation guides, it had the advantages of allowing me to introduce the idea of deliberation, signal my ability to facilitate without interjecting my own preferences, and establish the students as the experts on their own values and opinions.

This last advantage proved useful during a historical deliberation about discussions that took place between 1908 and 1913 regarding whether to build a dam in Yosemite National Park. We used a deliberative issue guide from the Autry Museum of the American West developed in cooperation with the Kettering Foundation and National Issues Forums Institute.² The story is familiar to both environmental historians and historians of the American West who know that it pitted John Muir's Sierra Club against the National Forest Service's Gifford Pinchot, who sought a ready supply of water for the city of San Francisco following the earthquake and fire of 1906. Muir was devastated by Congress's ultimate decision to build the dam and subsequently pushed for a counterpart to the National Forest Service. The National Park Service was then created in 1916. Most histories address these two sides, and a common debate in American history classes contrasts Pinchot's utilitarianism and Muir's value

of nature for nature's sake. But the deliberative issue guide, like all issue guides in the NIFI model, includes more than two options: deliberators may choose to build the dam, not build the dam, or let locals decide. The guide includes a description of the Miwok, whose ancestral lands were seized by the park and flooded by the dam. Although my previous classes had tried to game the deliberation by advocating for building the dam—the actual historical outcome—the mini-deliberation at the start of the term allowed me to signal to students that they should pick the option that they thought best, even if it was not what actually occurred.

In the middle of the deliberation, Allison Mispagel exclaimed, “This is so stressful!” I reminded her that the dam had already been built—the decision had already been made—and asked her to explain. She said that it was difficult

In the middle of the deliberation, Mispagel exclaimed, “This is so stressful!” She said that it was difficult to address issues in which not all parties could be equally satisfied.

to address issues in which not all parties could be equally satisfied. Mispagel was especially frustrated that the comparative weakness of the Miwok in the Hetch Hetchy Valley would have prevented them from

gaining control of the land, even had California and the federal government chosen local control as their solution. This outcome seemed unfair to her, but she couldn't think of an arrangement that included the opinions of others without effectively silencing the Miwok. The exchange appears to have affected many of the students, and when designing their own issue guides, I saw no one trying to create an “all of the above” or “we all win” option. Mispagel's stress helped inspire this essay, and she was one of the students who discussed the final paper assignment.

Mispagel's own issue guide addressed the split between the city and the county of St. Louis, a division dating back to 1876 but with ramifications up to the present day. These divisions have received renewed attention since the Ferguson Uprising of 2014. Mispagel endeavored to create a truly deliberative guide, one that addressed, in the Kettering Foundation's terms, a “wicked problem” with no all-of-the-above solution—just like the situation that had created such stress for her when deliberating about the Hetch Hetchy Dam. Nonetheless, she described the format of her issue guide as “neutral” so as to avoid bias. She framed her paper as “a current events issue” and noted,

A lot of the information that I got, and that a lot of people might be gathering about this topic, is from the news, for example, and definitely depending on what news source you're looking at, there's a certain bias there. And so I really tried to . . . keep a nonbiased approach and then input a lot of different views into the different options so the reader would be able to make the most informed decision that he or she could, based on the information that was presented.

In short, while Mispagel recognized that any decision regarding the fragmenting of the St. Louis metropolitan area would be difficult and stressful, she saw the most neutral framing as the best path forward toward a solution. Rather than take a strong stand for her chosen option, she actually preferred to present neutral, but mutually exclusive, choices for deliberators about the future of the city.

Mispagel's concern about bias made me return to one of our class exercises in which students closely examined the bias of a primary source from the past. I asked if she was concerned about the bias of people in the present day or in the past. She acknowledged that she was "more focused on the present day" but recalled that race and racism were central to the city/county split and had influenced past decision-making that prevented the region from unifying:

It was definitely important how you brought up thinking about the biases of people in history as well because there was a lot of information having to do with African American populations. . . . There is definitely a lot of bias, a lot of conflicting views, on that issue and so I think it's definitely important to take into account the views of people back in the day . . . to make an informed decision, I guess, about what to do in the present.

Mispagel's observation about how past biases, including racism, might influence present-day decision-making and even her own efforts to create a "neutral" issue guide brought us back to an ongoing point of discussion: power.

Andrew Sweeso, whose issue guide addressed the West Lake landfill, which contains nuclear waste from mid-twentieth-century weapons production, returned to the issue of power in both of our conversations about deliberation. He was skeptical of whether any guide for deliberative conversation could be truly neutral, but he saw deliberation as an opportunity to engage in "radical listening" to others. Setting aside the option to advocate for a particular position allowed participants to listen to what motivated other participants' decision-making. He noted that:

It has to do with the way a specific deliberation is structured, right? Like, Do you actually know who is participating? Do you know their background?

Do you know their relationship to each other? Because if you're not aware that a certain group is dominant [over] another or is oppressing another, that . . . almost certainly will play out in a deliberation.

Sweeso observed that the facilitator and the deliberation's designers must be aware of inequities that might be influencing deliberators' participation:

Could there be progress toward healing that oppression or undoing that? That's possible, but to mitigate that, there has to be a sort of intention. . . . There is oppression going on here. How can we make it so that this is a forum for the oppressor and the oppressed to engage in a more equal way, if that even is ethical under certain circumstances?

He added that a facilitator who rephrases a participant's statement incorrectly could actually further oppression by misrepresenting a participant's view. "And that can definitely get very, very scary when it's an imbalance of power."

His observation led me to share a feature of deliberations that I have found surprising. Like Sweeso, I was concerned that, in assuming a neutral stance, deliberations could overlook differences of power among participants. Nonetheless, in my observation, students traditionally disadvantaged in academic settings, such as students of color, women, and first-generation college students, appeared to participate *more* when I used deliberations than when we engaged in open class discussion or other classroom activities such as debates.³ Several students responded as to why that might be the case. All agreed that deliberation was less intimidating for students than debate. Marie Downey, whose issue guide addressed pesticide use and the Green Revolution, a topic about which she is quite passionate, particularly appreciated that the trade-offs offered for each option created at least six responses:

So, that really opened up the floor for people who may not have the same views and the same opinions as the majority. They may have different views, and they may feel more comfortable saying them when it's not, "Oh, I have to go up against these people." [Instead,] it's, "Oh, I'm putting this on this section of the board, not trying to compete with anything else."

Downey stressed, though, "It's always going back to [the question] Are people willing to listen? Are they willing to come in with an open mind?"

Lani Frost, whose issue guide addressed the historical question of whether Japan should open its country to outsiders in the nineteenth century, agreed with both Downey's conclusion and Sweeso's reservation. She likens deliberation to "a giant brainstorming session":

Everybody's just giving their own ideas. You're more likely to want to contribute. You might not be thinking in a certain way, but then somebody

says something, and then that makes you think of something, and you can kind of play off each other. In a debate you come in, you have your ideas, you say them, maybe you kind of argue with each other, but here you can kind of build off each other.”

Nonetheless, Frost was acutely aware of how deliberators’ preconceptions influenced them. In framing her own issue guide, she wrestled with the fact that most deliberators in the United States, including myself, her instructor, would come into the deliberation with Western values in mind. While some issues such as industrialization might have affected Japanese populations similarly to those in the United States and Europe, she also wanted deliberators to understand issues specific to Japan and how Japanese responses, even to globally shared experiences, were not the same historically as those of Americans and Europeans. She recognized, as Sweeso did, that in framing an issue for deliberation, it is necessary to “specifically make sure we focus on more marginalized groups because if you don’t focus on them, they might get just completely passed over, and that’s the issue in the first place.” Nonetheless, she also acknowledged that, even with such considerations, deliberators who entered an issue with strong views might be reluctant to revise them.

It depends on how much of an open mind you have. Because if you’re coming in and this impacts you so much, you really know which option you favor the most because it’s the option that maybe has the most benefit for you. So, you might come in and people are sharing all these ideas, but you’re like, “This impacts me a great deal. I know I like the option that works best for me.”

Frost’s comment reminded me of the NIFI issue guide *Land Use Conflict: When City and Country Clash*, which includes four options, one of which is restoring city centers.⁴ I reminded students that when we deliberated using this guide, a majority of the students objected to this option because they were strongly opposed to gentrification. In part because our class sessions are only 50 minutes long, I thought that students had not had enough time to consider the trade-offs of the other options and that the majority view had held without much reflection. Sydney Johnson, whose issue guide addressed the obesity epidemic in the United States, had a similar memory of that conversation. Her family lived next to open farmland that was slated for development of a subdivision. She entered the deliberation concerned about choosing that outcome but then realized that was not the central concern for her classmates. “I am big on conserving farmland,” she explained. “Especially since they chose to make the subdivision but I didn’t want them to, I was even more, like, ‘Well,

this shouldn't happen to others.” When I said I thought that the focus had been on the downsides of gentrification, Johnson said, “Yeah, it started going that way, and I was kind of like, yeah . . . okay, we'll just go this way. But that's not really the way I was leaning at all. . . . But it was okay, you know; I heard other people's opinions. It's a learning experience.”

Johnson's equanimity provided a learning experience in the moment. As Sweeso observed, “In a deliberation done well, there is the opportunity for something that didn't seem as relevant to become more relevant insofar as you now actually have a connection to a person who may be impacted by it, if not yourself.” He turned to Johnson:

Had this issue over farmland being turned into a subdivision come up and had . . . you brought it up and [had] we given you the chance to do that, I think that would have helped a lot in terms of creating a fork in the road and creating that relevancy, but it didn't happen. So now I kind of regret that it didn't happen.

Sweeso's recognition that the deliberation had not been entirely successful because we had not fully heard a diverse range of perspectives (including Johnson's) referenced a persistent phrase in our discussions—“a fork in the road”—which we use to describe the concept of contingency.

Here, I must pause and explain a fundamental misunderstanding with which I entered our conversations. Although I thought that I had kept my bias as a historian at bay by inviting nonhistory majors into the discussions and by limiting jargon, I had actually framed our discussion almost entirely with historical thinking in mind. I was particularly interested in the issue of contingency and how present conditions result from the decisions and circumstances of the past. To me, contingency was the logical place to begin our discussion because deliberation asks its participants to consider choices and their consequences. In my view, it is that element of historical thinking that most demonstrates why history matters—the future, after all, is contingent upon what we do today and what we have done in the past.⁵ The students considered contingency equally important, but they arrived at that conclusion through the process of deliberation itself. That is, they needed to see the idea of contingency at work in each of their deliberations to, in Sweeso's words, “create that relevancy.”

All of the students had, in some way or another, addressed contingency. Sweeso and Downey explored how present-day human and environmental contamination was contingent upon past decisions to use pesticides and develop nuclear weapons. Frost and Mispagel explored how long-term health and urban

patterns had resulted in contemporary problems of obesity and inequitable governance. Frost queried what might have happened had Japan decided to remain isolated in the nineteenth century or if it had delayed its opening to trade and diplomatic exchange.

Of the five papers, Frost's seemed the most historical to me, not just because it considered one of the longest timeframes, but also because Frost was acutely aware in the issue guide itself and in conversation that the outcome might have been different had Japan's leaders chosen a different course. As she put it:

One thing I was kind of aware of when I was writing this [is that] an ideal is not just an ideal for everyone because our ideals are going to be different from what theirs were in the past and even what ours were in the past. Modern people want to be sharing cultures more, but that might not have been what they would have wanted in the past.

Had a different outcome occurred, Frost surmised, "It would have been a consequence of one of any of the different decisions or options that I had [in my issue guide]." Nonetheless, she concluded: "We're us, and they're them. And they definitely wouldn't have made the same decisions. We can do all the theorizing in the world, but it won't change what actually happened."

As a historian, my first reaction to such a conclusion would be to seek out more evidence to determine why what happened did happen, but the students saw contingency as an opportunity to embrace uncertainty. Frost explained that "Uncertainty is welcomed in the deliberation, whereas in a debate it definitely is not. It really allows you to understand more fully and without judgment, so you can come and be, like, 'I truly have no idea. These all kind of don't seem ideal for me.'" Similarly, when I asked Downey whether "finding an answer

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together" always led to finding an answer, she said, "Not always," but she was content with that outcome if everyone came with an open mind and if the importance of each option was clear to each participant in the deliberation. Sweeso agreed and observed that "Being comfortable with that uncertainty is going to be the most difficult part of getting people to address contingency."

Until hearing Frost puzzle through how she had included contingency, Mispagel did not think that she had really addressed it. “I didn’t think about contingency that much,” she reflected. But upon returning to her own issue guide in light of contingency, she concluded, “Some event in the future could be contingent upon what happens with this event now.” Mispagel had learned exactly what I believe the idea of historical contingency offers, but not until she had seen it at play within her classmates’ and her own experiments with framing historical issues for deliberation.

The students’ embrace of uncertainty did not mean that they rejected the timelines and maps that I had required to establish context as part of previous assignments. They considered context necessary because it allowed the importance of different contingent decisions to emerge. As Johnson observed, “There are consequences to every action, so every action is contingent.” For all of the students, context was how they had established the importance of the issue they explored. Downey explained when responding to Mispagel’s issue guide: “Having the timeline and the map are extremely important for outside understanding. This would be for a larger audience, so it’s really important to have those elements that aid the reader.” Johnson, whose issue guide included an overlay of maps that showed a correlation between fast food restaurant locations and obesity, noted, “With the contextualization you can show that there is a problem.” She had seriously considered the question of when she had enough information for each option and whether that information met her criteria for viable evidence. For her, significance relied on evidence. Similarly, Frost concluded that one could always learn more and that any historical issue guide should invite deliberators to investigate further. She observed that later course work on Japanese history led her to reconsider the outcomes that she had first presented. Moreover, students recognized that the values at the heart of any deliberative framing exercise emerged through their research process. Sweeso described the values in tension with one another in his issue guide as freedom, safety, and justice, but he had not set out to address those. “The ethics kind of came as the knowledge came,” he concluded.

When I asked students what the public needs from history, their answers were gratifying to this historian. Mispagel and Johnson agreed that “History can be a helpful tool for figuring out what to do in the present and in the future.” Frost observed, “If you can think critically about the past, you can think critically about different issues.” And Sweeso proclaimed, “The importance of history to public knowledge—it’s immeasurable. You need more and more and more of it to have a sustainable republic.” Downey’s response, however, brought home how deliberation had made visible the value of history within the class. A

“self-professed history-not-liker,” Downey appreciated how our class and the deliberations had allowed her to “see it in a more directed way.” She said, “These are how things impacted each other, and how they impact . . . our day-to-day life today. People need to be able to read history in a way that’s not just history. By giving the greater context of things, that really will help people.”

History introduced students to a tool kit of contingency and context that allowed them to embrace uncertainty, expand their knowledge, reveal what past events shaped their values, and explore different perspectives. As students deliberated and wrote their own issue guides, they wrestled with issues of power, bias, and neutrality that made visible why the history tool kit matters. There is much that the public needs from history, but history might just need public deliberation, too.



NOTES

- ¹ The 2019 College of Arts and Sciences core requirement included both Origins of the Modern World to 1500 and Origins from 1500. Business, engineering, and nursing students, however, had different history requirements that allowed students to take just one of the Origins two-course sequence.
- ² Autry Museum of the American West, *Hetch Hetchy: How Do We Make the Best Use of Our Natural Resources? A Recommendation to Congress*, <https://theautry.org/sites/default/files/documents/education/hh-student-guide.pdf> (accessed June 30, 2020).
- ³ The gender breakdown of the group that I invited to participate in this activity was not an effort to address such inequalities. Of the fourteen students in the class, three were men. Our group was a representative sample.
- ⁴ Mark Edelman, et al., *When City and Country Clash* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 1999), https://www.kettering.org/sites/default/files/product-downloads/land_use_conflict_ib.pdf (accessed June 30, 2020).
- ⁵ Thomas Andrews and I provide a definition of contingency in our article, “What Does It Mean to Think Historically?” *Perspectives on History* 45, no. 1 (2007) (accessed June 30, 2020).

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND THE PANDEMIC

A Conversation with Community College Civic Engagement Faculty

An interview with Verdis L. Robinson

In the following interview, Verdis L. Robinson, a Kettering Foundation associate who focuses on democratic practices of community colleges, talks with Patty Robinson, faculty director of civic and community engagement initiatives at College of the Canyons; David McMahon, assistant professor of history at Kirkwood Community College-Cedar Rapids Campus; Finn Kolsrud, assistant professor of sociology at Kirkwood Community College-Iowa City Campus; Shelley Errington Nicholson, director of the Center for Civic Learning and Community Engagement at Mount Wachusett Community College; Joseph Scanlon, assistant professor of political science at Monroe Community College; Connie Jorgensen, assistant professor of political science at Piedmont Virginia Community College; and Peter Sawyer, chair of the department of history, philosophy, and social sciences and director of the Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at Hudson Valley Community College.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on community colleges has been severe. Community colleges educate about 40 percent of the country's undergraduates and were already stretched thin before the pandemic. Despite the uncertainty of fall admissions and lingering deficits from a decade of decreasing enrollment, community colleges are rising to meet the challenges the pandemic has presented in order to fulfill their public and democratic purposes.

Hailed as “democracy’s colleges” for their affordability, accessibility, and open-access admission practices, community colleges have higher enrollments of lower-income, nontraditional, minority, and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students, giving more people access to democracy and the pursuit of happiness. The pandemic has not changed the commitment of community colleges to give more people access to a high-quality education.

While continuing to address enrollment, course delivery, accessibility, and the welfare of students, faculty, and staff, how do we ensure that community college students graduate as civically engaged, informed, and active agents of change even in the midst of a pandemic? How can community colleges continue their progress in making civic engagement and learning an institutional priority for the future of our democracy? How can deliberative dialogues on

community college campuses be leveraged in powerful ways to make our democracy work as it should? This essay grew out of conversations among community college civic engagement professionals committed to integrating deliberative democratic principles and practices into their campuses and their work with community college students. The focus of the conversations was the impact of the pandemic on their campuses and on their deliberative efforts.

Public and Democratic Purposes of Community Colleges

[Verdis] Robinson: In your view, what are the public and democratic purposes of community colleges? Is this view harmonious with what you are seeing in community colleges in general?

Nicholson: The purpose is to educate everyone on the basic principles of democracy and civic knowledge and action. In general, yes, it is what I'm seeing in community colleges. Unfortunately, many of our students come through the K-12 system with little information about the democratic process, so we often start from a Civics 101 perspective.

[Patty] Robinson: I believe there should be an intentional effort on the part of community colleges to encourage greater student, faculty, and staff participation in civic, community, and democratic engagement. I see the need to return to the original mission of "democracy's colleges." Campuses still seem to address these issues in silos, with little connection between disciplines or departments. This becomes even more problematic on campuses when certain kinds of engagement are

designated as either student affairs or academic affairs. There is also a lack of faculty development that focuses on topics related to civic, community, and democratic

engagement. Many faculty fail to see how these topics relate to their disciplines, much less to their classes. Faculty and students need to learn what strategies, techniques, pedagogies, and tools can be used to facilitate engagement.

McMahon: Higher education is meant to prepare people to live a life of purpose as free citizens who are actively engaged in their communities. Community colleges are uniquely situated to take on this task because of their physical

How do we ensure that community college students graduate as civically engaged, informed, and active agents of change even in the midst of a pandemic?

proximity to the community and the similarity between their demographics and those of the community. The challenge is to renew this purpose and make community colleges truly “democracy’s colleges.”

Kolsrud: A lot of folks may think that the sole purpose of a community college education is to train students for specific jobs or careers. While job training is important, at Kirkwood, we have rededicated ourselves to our common

In fact, civic skills are highly marketable job skills. Consequently, many of our graduates become leaders in the community.

student learning objective of civic engagement: Graduates will demonstrate the skills necessary to engage with their communities. The stated rationale for this objective reads: “Civic engagement means think-

ing and acting in ways that make a positive difference in communities. Graduates should be prepared for knowledgeable and responsible participation in geographic, professional, and personal communities.”¹ Meeting this objective is more than a “nice” addition to the curriculum. In fact, civic skills are highly marketable job skills. Consequently, many of our graduates become leaders in the community. Lastly, increased civic engagement is associated with increased learning and retention.

Scanlon: Higher education needs to empower students—prepare them to think critically about their communities, exercise the power of their voices, and identify themselves as community stakeholders. Right now, higher education focuses on developing individuals for the purpose of individual prosperity, but not for the purpose of understanding their roles as members of larger communities.

Jorgensen: I think that community colleges are under a special obligation to encourage students to be civically and democratically engaged. We are part of the community. Our students live here. I think that most community colleges share this idea, but we are so very underfunded that the democratic purpose of higher education is often not a high priority. At Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC), the goal of our quality enhancement plan is that graduates will be more likely to be civically engaged as a result of their experiences at PVCC. Definitions of civic engagement may vary across institutions, but PVCC adopted author Thomas Ehrlich’s (2000) definition, which states that civic engagement is “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to

make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes.”² Ehrlich’s definition is reflected in the college’s quality enhancement plan vision statement: “[PVCC] seeks to build student leaders who have a strong commitment to democracy and diversity and who engage in the civic life of their communities through collaborative, creative, and critical problem-solving.”³

Sawyer: Higher education has always played a role in preparing individuals to be effective citizens and civic leaders. Multiple documents support that mission, and it is rare not to see that commitment in the mission statements of most colleges and universities. It is not, however, always the practice of colleges to pay attention to this important function. It is often neglected in the curriculum and given only superficial treatment in student life. Often the curricular approach to this responsibility is to require a distribution of courses across disciplines. In campus programming, students have the opportunity to volunteer, take on student leadership positions, or learn about the Constitution one day of the year. This is starting to change, and more and more colleges are incorporating service learning, tying volunteerism to civic responsibility, and providing more opportunities for experiences that are tied to the skills, attitudes, and knowledge essential to good citizenship in a democratic republic. Community colleges are some of the most important institutions to make this shift to preparing people for citizenship. We see more students, have more diversity, and help more people overcome their circumstances to be successfully employed and to become community leaders. I believe we need to continue to be conscious of our role and to structure more experiences and more curricula around this critical goal.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Community Colleges

[Verdis] Robinson: How has COVID-19 specifically affected your college? What is your college focusing on during this pandemic?

Nicholson: Providing for our students’ basic needs, such as food, is more challenging. I am very concerned about voter registration deadlines for the fall. Service learning was halted mid-semester, but I worked with interns over the summer on virtual service learning. Meeting the needs of our most at-risk students (through the food pantry and emergency funds), transitioning to online learning (which is challenging for our students with learning disabilities, limited knowledge of technology, or poor or no internet or computer access), and now contingency planning for the fall are all challenges.

[Patty] Robinson: The pandemic has greatly affected the college, specifically because of the move to remote learning. In addition, remote learning [that is, scheduled online classes] is now transitioning to [self-directed] online education, with a huge push to train all faculty in online education. The college remains open but is operating with only a few individuals physically on site. Summer and fall classes will be taught online, with the exception of some labs that require face-to-face instruction. While challenges have ensued, business goes on, as do virtual classes, meetings, and celebrations. Faculty will teach from off campus through December. The good news is that summer enrollments are up; the bad news is that the college is now facing a large deficit.

McMahon: Like everybody else, we were forced to move to remote education. It disrupted events on campus and our ability to serve our students, but we are adapting. I think our campus has done well in focusing on safety and students. We have raised money through our foundation to meet student needs during this extraordinary crisis. And we are rapidly adapting to the changing circumstances with innovative remote education.

Kolsrud: From my perspective, it looks as though we are focusing on offering the highest quality education while also ensuring student safety. The challenge is to provide the pre-COVID-19 learning experiences for students while ensuring their health and safety and that of the community. Another issue is how to ensure students all have adequate access. During the second half of

This is an important moment in rehabilitating the public's perception of higher education in general—community colleges are in the vanguard.

our spring semester, I had students juggling family, work, and school commitments. Many students faced technological barriers, such as inadequate internet access, issues with online

learning, and so forth. So, the college has invested in resources to help these students with technology access. On the teaching side, the college has expanded online teaching training for faculty to improve online course delivery.

Scanlon: Community colleges are especially vulnerable, and the shift to remote learning was difficult for many who need face-to-face classes. As for deliberation, spring plans were wiped out. However, new online opportunities are presenting themselves for the fall. The health and safety of students and employees, as well as the educational well-being of students, has been taken seriously by the college.

Jorgensen: For the fall semester, we are providing only online instruction except for some labs. Our summer enrollment is a little bit down, but I don't have fall numbers and it's a bit early.

Sawyer: Many of our programs, as well as teaching and student contact, have become more limited. At the same time, there have been realizations of how technology can work to bring us together despite the pandemic, the distance between us, and the problems of not being in the same place at the same time.

The Future of Community Colleges

[Verdis] Robinson: What do you think the future will hold for your college in light of the current pandemic and economic crisis?

Nicholson: As a community college, we need to be prepared to absorb students who would otherwise be going to four-year colleges. We need to ensure we have the infrastructure for this while maintaining a high level of service to our existing students.

[Patty] Robinson: Many changes will occur, but we have a college chancellor who has served in the system for over 30 years. I am confident she will make the college stronger than ever.

McMahon: The future is unclear. Enrollment decline? Or enrollment surge? I think we will come out stronger in the long run. This is an important moment in rehabilitating the public's perception of higher education in general—community colleges are in the vanguard. Our reputation in the community is solid, but I think it will be only enhanced by the time the pandemic is over. We will have proven our worth by adapting to change and by meeting the needs of the community in an affordable fashion.

Kolsrud: A lot more classes may be delivered online instead of face to face. It's hard to say what will happen to enrollment. I suspect we may see an initial enrollment decline, however, I'm hopeful that it will rebound after the fall semester.

Scanlon: The future is unknown right now, but in the short term, much of the work we do will have to shift to a virtual setting.

Jorgensen: I wish I knew. I worry about online classes becoming the norm after things improve.

Sawyer: I think we will continue to grow as an institution to support the training and development of job skills as well as to prepare people to be effective as community members.

[Verdis] Robinson: In your opinion, what might the long-lasting impacts of this crisis be on your college?

Nicholson: We might face a loss of students due to an inability to learn online. More students will be needing help meeting basic needs. And it's possible we will see a temporary boost in enrollment, which should be viewed with caution as it will not last.

[Patty] Robinson: I suspect that the college will schedule greater numbers of courses online. It is an effective way to teach and is more cost-effective than holding face-to-face classes. The overall statewide budget cuts will greatly affect the campus, especially regarding workforce training. I am sure travel and conference money will be suspended for at least a year. Funding for certain positions (such as teaching assistants) will continue to be cut, and I will guess that future full-time positions will also be placed on hold.

McMahon: I'm not an expert in budgetary considerations or program changes, but I think the long-lasting impact will have to do with clarity. We are living in interesting times. Some things we thought were important don't seem so important or possible now. Much is being clarified during this crisis: how to work, how to live, how to keep our economy going, how to be healthy and safe, and how to learn. Most of all, we are learning we are in this thing together.

Kolsrud: I wish I had an answer for this question. At this point, we are trying to do everything we were doing before while ensuring the safety of the students, faculty, staff, and the community.

Scanlon: The financial impact could be severe, and the way in which content is delivered to students could change dramatically. This could result in more emphasis on online learning.

Jorgensen: Online classes could become the norm. On the bright side, this will make us far better online instructors, so the quality of classes should improve.

Sawyer: There will be a rethinking of how we do things and a greater integration of technology into how we accomplish our goals.

Public Trust and Community College Students

[Verdis] Robinson: Many colleges and universities were already facing issues such as waning public trust, decreased attendance, revenue losses, and increased costs for students. How do you think these issues will be overshadowed by or exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis?

Nicholson: In every way you can imagine. Students have lost jobs, are teaching their own kids at home, are *still* homeless or hungry, are in abusive relationships, and so forth. Now we lack the ability to help them as we did in

person. This will get only worse for them and for our students who were already teetering on the edge.

[Patty] Robinson: Issues will be greatly exacerbated. My fear is that many students who had difficulty affording a college education will now think twice about continuing since they may have to seek employment. Or, in some cases, they may see working without a college degree as more lucrative than spending time and money to

receive a degree. To them, it may not be worth the effort since they may incur tens of thousands of dollars of debt. I also think that the digital divide between underserved populations and those with better access to technology will play out even more. Equity issues are now exacerbated. I think

many in the public sphere will see this as a wake-up call for institutions to reevaluate the cost of higher education. I can see programs being cut, salaries decreased, and faculty being dismissed, not hired, or encouraged to retire. I hope that colleges and universities will consider ways to cut tuition costs for students.

McMahon: We are at a reckoning. I think the need for higher education is being demonstrated and our past underinvestment in education is coming back to haunt us. But our political situation may be moving in the right direction because of the pandemic and economic hardship facing many Americans.

Kolsrud: The pandemic is exacerbating issues such as funding, declining enrollment, and so forth. I don't know what the wide-ranging impacts of the crisis will be. However, I'm quietly optimistic about the future. The faculty in my department (social sciences) did an incredible job transitioning spring courses into virtual formats mid-semester. I think we will find ways to innovate moving forward.

Scanlon: Coronavirus will probably result in less trust in public institutions across the board, and decreased enrollment and attendance at events is also likely. It's hard to predict the future but "exacerbated" more than "overshadowed" seems likely to me.

We can shy away or try to turn inward, maintaining our "social distance" as a city unto ourselves. We could, however, use this time to revitalize our mission, reengage with our communities, and work together toward positive and progressive change.

Community Colleges Represented in This Article

College of the Canyons (COC), founded in 1969 in Santa Clarita, California, is a suburban community college with a total enrollment of more than 20,000 students. Approximately 68 percent of its students attend part-time and, with more than 47 percent of its students identifying as Latinx, COC is designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution. COC will continue remote and online instruction through the fall term.

Kirkwood Community College (KCC), in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, was founded in 1966. It is a city college with a total enrollment of more than 14,000 students at its 9 branches. Approximately 61 percent of its students attend part-time, and 17 percent identify as people of color. KCC and its campuses will be open in the fall for in-person classes, but everyone will be required to wear a mask at all times.

Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC), in Gardener, Massachusetts, was founded in 1964. It is a rural community college with a total enrollment of more than 3,800 students. Approximately 65 percent of its students attend part-time, and 26 percent identify as people of color. Most of its classes will begin remotely during the fall semester.

Monroe Community College (MCC), in Rochester, New York, founded in 1962, is a suburban community college with a total enrollment of about 13,000 students. Approximately 39 percent of its students attend part-time, and almost 36 percent identify as people of color. MCC and its campuses will be open in the fall for in-person classes, but the plans are subject to change if new information is received from the system office.

Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC), in Charlottesville, Virginia, was founded in 1972. PVCC is a suburban community college with a total enrollment of more than 5,600 students. Approximately 78 percent of its students attend part-time, and 24 percent identify as people of color. PVCC will be offering the majority of its courses online synchronously [in real time] and asynchronously as well as a hybrid option through the fall.

Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC), in Troy, New York, was founded in 1953. It is a city community college with a total enrollment of more than 11,000 students. Approximately 47 percent of its students attend part-time, and 23 percent identify as people of color. The majority of HVCC's courses will be offered online or in a remote learning format. Any labs or hybrid courses will be conducted in accordance with social distancing requirements.⁵

Jorgensen: It's hard to say, but I think this will be a bigger problem for four-year schools than for community colleges. I don't have a real college-wide perspective yet. Plans are made and then changed.

Sawyer: I think that it is up to the leadership of our colleges. We can shy away or try to turn inward, maintaining our "social distance" as a city unto ourselves. We could, however, use this time to revitalize our mission, reengage with our communities, and work together toward positive and progressive change.

Deliberative Democracy Efforts on Community College Campuses

[Verdis] Robinson: What activities have your colleges engaged in to offer experiences in deliberative democracy?

Nicholson: We've had dialogues, panels, and speakers around issues of democracy and civic engagement. Topics this past year alone included the Electoral College, reasons for voting, immigration detention centers, health care, White fragility, advocacy day, the 100th anniversary of women gaining the right to vote, and Constitution Day. We also engaged students in service with various organizations for 9/11, Day of Caring, and Martin Luther King Jr. Day. For the second half of spring, we had several events planned—dialogues on the economy and the environment, hunger awareness, an alternative spring break day of service with Habitat for Humanity, and an international service trip to Iceland—but all had to be canceled. Finally, at most events, we conducted voter registration.

[Patty] Robinson: After our learning exchange with the Kettering Foundation, College of the Canyons (COC) spent over a year organizing deliberative dialogues to address the topic of whether to arm campus safety officers. We met with students, faculty, and staff and gathered a lot of rich material. In addition, we held several trainings with faculty and students and also participated in a training session with students from a local high school. Partnering with the League of Women Voters of the Santa Clarita Valley, the Center for Civic Engagement organized a community dialogue on the topic of "The America We Want to Be." Currently, dialogues are taking place as part of the nationwide Bringing Theory to Practice grant, or PLACE grant, authored by David Scobey and funded by the Mellon Foundation. COC is holding dialogues to discuss housing insecurity and affordability. To date, Zoom dialogues have taken place with students in classrooms as well as with several community partners. Additional dialogues are being planned over the summer and for the fall. Next steps include organizing dialogues with community members.

McMahon: Deliberation has been an important part of increasing student and faculty engagement at Kirkwood and in the communities we serve. Our efforts began when two faculty members were engaged with the Kettering Foundation and received support through the Democracy Commitment initiative to institutionalize deliberation at the college. Interested faculty were introduced to deliberation through a training session. Since then, deliberation

Deliberation has been an important part of increasing student and faculty engagement at Kirkwood and in the communities we serve.

has been used as part of broader voter education and democratic engagement efforts. Deliberation was an important component of an economic inequality summit hosted by the college, it was critical to voter

education activities prior to the 2018 election, and it was a central feature in events leading up to the Iowa Caucus and caucus training at the college. In January 2020, the civic engagement committee used the morning of Kirkwood's Assessment Day to conduct a college-wide deliberation on the state of our politics. Thus, deliberation has been used in classrooms, as shared experiences, as faculty development, and in the form of community outreach as faculty conducted deliberations off-campus in the community.

Kolsrud: At Kirkwood, we have held events associated with days of commemoration, such as Constitution Day, and with activities, such as guest speakers and film showings. We have conducted deliberative dialogues on a range of issues, including immigration policy, economic inequality, and political divisiveness. Also, we have conducted voter registration outreach for students. For example, in fall 2018, we held our "Parties at the Polls." These events coincided with satellite voting at the Iowa City campus and the Cedar Rapids campus. During these events, we celebrated early voting with games, pizza, and music.

Scanlon: We held annual campus deliberations in the spring semester as well as other deliberative forums, moderator training workshops, and training sessions for faculty and staff on developing materials. Some faculty have integrated deliberation into their curriculum.

Jorgensen: PVCC has offered several deliberative dialogue training sessions to faculty and students and has encouraged the use of deliberative democracy in the classroom. Further, we have offered several college-wide dialogues on topics such as immigration, the national debt, climate change, and guns. Our One Book program always focuses on civic engagement issues, for example, *The*

New Jim Crow, You're More Powerful Than You Think, and So You Want to Be an Anti-Racist. PVCC also offers a wide range of democratic engagement activities, including voter outreach (such as registration and GOTV), Constitution Day, Free Speech Week speakers, Civic Engagement Week, and a two-day civic engagement conference.

Sawyer: We conduct public deliberation with students, faculty, and staff using National Issues Forums Institute materials on campus. We have also used public deliberation in the city of Troy to help the community determine a citywide plan for everyone. Currently, we are planning a deliberation on supporting individuals who have been incarcerated and are returning to their communities. We also hope to conduct a SUNY system-wide deliberation, via Zoom, on voting this fall.

Pandemic Impact on Deliberative Democracy Efforts

While most of the community colleges in this conversation will be beginning the academic year either remotely, online, or under a hybrid model, social distancing poses problems for the traditional way in which deliberations are experienced. In the midst of a pandemic and with an upcoming presidential election that can be leveraged to advance deliberations on national issues on community college campus, new strategies are required. As most students will be engaging virtually, deliberative forums will be virtual as well. They will decrease in frequency, but their impact, given accessibility issues and opportunities, remains to be studied.

While community colleges are ramping up their promotional materials with messages of safe, cost-saving remote learning, they are also promoting the fact that they are “well-positioned to train new workers for the ‘new economy’ created by the COVID-19 pandemic.”⁴ The work of civic engagement and democratic learning is still often seen as a separate effort without realizing or making apparent the interconnectedness of this work with institutional and community priorities—a frustration of many community college civic engagement professionals. Nevertheless, community colleges are still especially well positioned to harness the need and desire to develop ways to benefit their communities and, at the same time, deepen the educational experience of their students who come from within the community and whom the community college serves. Developing and innovating the deliberative pedagogies that reflect the unique opportunities of community colleges is essential and under way.



NOTES

- ¹ Kirkwood Student Learning Outcomes, http://www.kirkwood.edu/pdf/uploaded/1433/kirkwood_student_learning_outcomes.pdf (accessed August 24, 2020).
- ² Thomas Ehrlich, *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education: The ACE Series on Higher Education* (Westport, CT: American Council on Education and Oryx Press, 2000): vi.
- ³ *PVCC's Civic Engagement QEP: Civic Sense*, <https://www.pvcc.edu/campus-life/civic-sense/pvccs-civic-engagement-qep-civic-sense> (accessed August 24, 2020).
- ⁴ "Community Colleges Could Play Key Role in Coronavirus Pandemic Recovery," *Boston Herald*, June 9, 2020, <https://www.bostonherald.com/2020/06/09/community-colleges-could-play-key-role-in-coronavirus-pandemic-recovery/> (accessed August 24, 2020).
- ⁵ All statistics (accurate as of 2017) were gathered from the American Association of Community Colleges' Community College Finder, <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/college-finder/> (accessed August 24, 2020).

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DOES HIGHER EDUCATION UNDERMINE DEMOCRACY?

Alex Lovit

In this essay, HEX coeditor Alex Lovit reviews The Meritocracy Trap: How America's Foundational Myth Feeds Inequality, Dismantles the Middle Class, and Devours the Elite by Daniel Markovits (Penguin Press, 2019); The Years That Matter Most: How College Makes or Breaks Us by Paul Tough (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019); The Merit Myth: How Our Colleges Favor the Rich and Divide America by Anthony P. Carnevale, Peter Schmidt, and Jeff Strohl (The New Press, 2020); Unequal Higher Education: Wealth, Status, and Student Opportunity by Barrett J. Taylor and Brendan Cantwell (Rutgers University Press, 2019); The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students by Anthony Abraham Jack (Harvard University Press, 2019); and The Tyranny of the Meritocracy: Democratizing Higher Education in America by Lani Guinier (Beacon Press, 2015).

American higher education institutions describe themselves as united in the service of democracy. The nation's largest higher education organization, the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), comprises 1,400 institutions, ranging from globally renowned research universities to local community colleges, all "making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in undergraduate education in service to democracy."¹ This rhetoric is supported not only by the dedication of millions of faculty, administrators, and staff, but also by the breadth of popular enrollment in colleges and universities across the country. In 1940, less than 5 percent of Americans held undergraduate degrees. In recent years, a record high of almost 70 percent of recent high school graduates immediately enroll in college,² and college graduates have commanded a wage premium over high school graduates of nearly 50 percent.³ Whereas college was once reserved for a small elite, American citizens increasingly see higher education as necessary for economic security. Higher education also significantly impacts both political engagement and political beliefs.⁴ At first glance, this appears to be a system working as intended—broadly accessible and providing both economic and civic benefits for individual graduates and for the nation as a whole.

But the AAC&U's unified commitment to democracy and growing enrollments on a national scale conceal the gaps between institutions and students. Higher education's democratic promise is belied, at least to some degree, by the enormous disparities of resources between different colleges and universities and the gaps in opportunities accessible by their graduates. This review discusses six recent books, all of which criticize the US higher education system for contributing to the nation's socioeconomic divides. These books vary widely

in tone, scope, and intended audience, but together they constitute an emerging literature that describes colleges and universities as generators of inequality and social division. By these accounts, rather than providing opportunities for social mobility, higher education primarily functions to reinforce existing hierarchies, fuel resentments, and even, for many Americans, symbolize the inaccessibility and indifference of socioeconomic elites.

These books have significant limitations. They focus almost exclusively on undergraduate education, giving little attention to research, service, com-

Higher education's democratic promise is belied, at least to some degree, by the enormous disparities of resources between different colleges and universities and the gaps in opportunities accessible by their graduates.

munity engagement, or other university activities outside the classroom. And they see education primarily through the lens of the economic benefits that students receive. Even as many of them argue for an expanded understanding

of higher education's public purposes, few pages are devoted to expounding on this idea. These books also focus an amount of attention on elite colleges and universities vastly disproportionate to the small minority of students who attend these institutions. And they do not consider higher education's contributions to antidemocratic professional cultures. However, despite these limitations, the authors make compelling arguments that current trends are unsustainable, which deserve the attention of everyone invested in the future of higher education. For those of us who are concerned about higher education's relationship to democracy, these books also provide troubling indications that American colleges are doing more to widen divisions and deepen misunderstandings than they are to unite citizens in common causes.

In *The Meritocracy Trap*, Yale law professor Daniel Markovits lays out a broad argument about growing inequality in the United States. The statistics are familiar: the richest Americans have been gaining increasing shares of both wealth and income in recent decades, while working- and middle-class incomes have remained relatively stagnant.⁵ But the strengths of Markovits' book are the broad sociocultural critique he builds on the foundation of these facts, his insights into the dissatisfactions of the elite who are the apparent beneficiaries of this inequality, and the fluidity of his writing. Markovits argues that American society has been captured by a cult of meritocracy, producing inequality that

is insidious precisely because those at the top actually do have elite educational credentials, specialized skills, and industrious work ethics. “Meritocracy deprives those at the bottom of an oppressor against whom to assert high-minded claims of justice.”⁶ Privilege feeds upon privilege. “Economic inequality begets political inequality, and meritocracy undermines democracy.”⁷ “Meritocracy . . . creates feedback loops between education and work, in which inequality in each realm amplifies inequality in the other.”⁸

This last point, of course, captures the relevance of *The Meritocracy Trap* for higher education. A college degree, and especially one from an elite institution, is necessary to gain access to a high-paying career. Markovits points to a survey in which “nearly 50 percent of America’s corporate leaders, 60 percent of its financial leaders, and 50 percent of its higher government officials attended only twelve universities.”⁹ These elite institutions are so selective that qualifying for admission usually requires committed, intensive, and, crucially, expensive preparation. In the Ivy League and at a handful of other elite universities, “more students come from families in the top 1 percent of the income distribution than from the entire bottom half.”¹⁰ Furthermore, huge endowments enable these elite institutions to spend much more lavishly on educational and student services than their less selective peers, which are more reliant on revenue from tuition. “College, simply put, not only increasingly concentrates training in students from rich households but also increasingly subsidizes the training that the rich receive.”¹¹ In Markovits’ telling, higher education functions as an essential link in a modern aristocracy, sustained

by elite educations and specialized skills. One of the strengths of *The Meritocracy Trap* is its insights into the costs that this system imposes even on those on top of this social hierarchy. Elite

“Nearly 50 percent of America’s corporate leaders, 60 percent of its financial leaders, and 50 percent of its higher government officials attended only twelve universities.”

jobs pay exorbitantly, but they also require never-ending evaluation and grueling work schedules. Higher education also plays a role here: “Elite schooling—exquisitely calibrated to build and measure the self as human capital—trains elite workers in the meritocratic art of instrumentalizing and exploiting themselves.”¹²

Education journalist Paul Tough’s *The Years That Matter Most* is less polemical than *The Meritocracy Trap*, but his conclusions are broadly similar. “Through our current system of higher education, we seem to have reconstructed,

in the guise of openness and equality, an old and established aristocracy, one in which money begets money, wealthy families remain wealthy for generations, and young people . . . born without privilege and power, stay stuck at the bottom.”¹³ Tough is particularly critical of the influence over American colleges and universities wielded by two organizations: the College Board, which administers the SAT test most colleges require as an entrance exam, and the *US News and World Report*, which publishes influential rankings of American colleges. Tough points out that SAT scores correlate more strongly with family income than they do with academic success in college. Nevertheless, selective institutions use the test to sort applicants and to demonstrate their prestige in the *US News* rankings. In large part because family income plays such a large role in determining SAT scores, this leads to a system in which “the colleges that can most easily afford to admit low-income students are the ones that admit the fewest.”¹⁴ Meanwhile, less prestigious colleges, under more pressure to generate tuition revenue, have limited resources to subsidize education for students who cannot pay their own way. “Admissions professionals are well aware that they spend much of their time and energy looking not for more high-achieving low-income students but for more low-achieving high-income students.”¹⁵

One of the strengths of *The Years That Matter Most* is that Tough personalizes these trends through interviews with students applying to and attending a range of institutions. These stories capture the psychological impact of the high stakes of college admissions and success: “When young people make their decisions today about college,

“When young people make their decisions today about college, they often are motivated less by hope and more by fear.”

they often are motivated less by hope and more by fear.”¹⁶ Tough’s psychological insight extends to his analysis of the reasons students (especially first-generation and low-income students)

transfer from the most demanding programs, which might prepare them for the most remunerative careers, or drop out of college without receiving any degree:

In . . . periods of dramatic change, we get a lot of messages from the world that are ambiguous. . . . We are much more open—for better or worse—to new stories about who we are. . . . “I failed my first chemistry test. Is that normal, or am I in the wrong major—or at the wrong university?”¹⁷

Universities that succeed in graduating less privileged students—and Tough chronicles several such programs—often provide additional academic and social

support structures but also promote positive self-understanding for students: You can succeed. You belong here.

The Merit Myth, by Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce researchers Anthony Carnevale and Jeff Strohl and journalist Peter Schmidt, extends this now familiar argument: “College has become the capstone in an inequality machine that raises and perpetuates class and race hierarchies and sinks the lower classes.”¹⁸

The authors point out that colleges’ attempts to climb the *US News* rankings concentrate more attention on applicants’ SAT scores than on graduates’ skills and inhibit institutional diversification:

“Americans may still look to higher education as the clearest pathway to opportunity, but only about 14 percent express a great deal of confidence in the higher-education sector to deliver on that promise.”

The *U.S. News* rankings helped give rise to the now common belief that colleges can be judged based on inputs—the students they admit, the faculty members they hire, the financial support they receive—rather than on the output that is their *raison d’être*, the learning and growth they produce in their students.¹⁹

The focus on ranking also inhibits colleges from crafting and pursuing distinct missions, programs, and teaching methods, thereby inhibiting diversity in the system at large.²⁰

When disadvantaged students do gain access to selective institutions, they graduate at high rates, but more often, they attend open-access colleges with significantly lower completion rates. (This is true even accounting for SAT scores or high school GPA.) Carnevale, et al., write:

With so many people shut out of selective colleges or poorly served by nonselective ones, it’s no wonder that public support for higher education has declined over time. Americans may still look to higher education as the clearest pathway to opportunity, but only about 14 percent express a great deal of confidence in the higher-education sector to deliver on that promise.²¹

Higher education scholars Barrett Taylor and Brendan Cantwell support this argument about the inequalities among higher education institutions with rigorous quantitative data in *Unequal Higher Education*. The core of their book is a study encompassing almost all four-year colleges in the United States between 2005 and 2013. Using four measures—selectivity, enrollment, per-student

spending on education and related activities, and the ratio of that spending to tuition revenue—Taylor and Cantwell sorted colleges and universities into seven categories ranging from “Super Elite” institutions that spent an average of \$93,134 on education per student, only 27 percent of which was derived from tuition, to “Vulnerable” institutions that spent an average of \$18,772 per student, 82 percent of which came from tuition payments.²² As these figures indicate, student experiences and the value they can expect to derive from a college education vary widely across institutions.

The picture of higher education drawn by these numbers is a portrait of extremes. Among the most elite institutions, large endowment-fueled budgets mean that even though students do pay relatively high tuition bills (many of them can afford it), “Every dollar of tuition netted nearly three dollars of subsidy.”²³ At the other end of the spectrum are the institutions that Taylor and Cantwell label “Vulnerable” because they rely on tuition to fund basic operations and often struggle to attract paying students. “When tuition dependence was combined with low demand for admission, institutions became Vulnerable because their primary source of revenue was students who showed little interest in paying to attend.”²⁴ With few other sources of revenue to draw on, these colleges provided much more modest subsidies on student tuition for educational spending. Indeed, “about one in six Vulnerable institutions spent less on students than students paid to attend.”²⁵ Between the two extremes of elite, stable universities and poor, struggling colleges, the latter is much more representative of American higher education. In Taylor and Cantwell’s categorization, an absolute majority of institutions across the country can be labeled “Vulnerable.” (Because these colleges tend to be relatively small, a majority of institutions does not translate to a majority of students; a little less than a quarter of US college students in four-year programs attend these institutions.)

Furthermore, during the nine years examined in *Unequal Higher Education*, declining public financing, insecure endowments, and fluctuating enrollments pushed more and more institutions into the “Vulnerable” category—from 58 percent of all institutions in 2005 to 62 percent in 2013.²⁶ This trend was particularly pronounced among public universities, which have become more and more reliant on tuition in recent years. In 2005, less than one percent of all public institutions fit into this category, but by 2013, more than 11 percent were “Vulnerable.” “Very few publics relied on tuition for half of their spending in 2005, but most did so by 2013.” Taylor and Cantwell argue that institutions have responded to risks of downward mobility by competing in rankings, attempting to diversify revenue sources (including more attention to securing

research funding and soliciting donations) and investing in student amenities. For students, the broad range of institutions ensures access to higher education, but with many colleges' low graduation rates and high reliance on tuition, access is not the same thing as genuine opportunity. According to the authors,

Something like half of all students face a stark choice: go to college and be forced to borrow with uncertain prospects of graduating, thereby taking on financial risk, or do not go to college and face the near certainty of a life characterized by poor wages and economic insecurity.²⁷

Where *Unequal Higher Education* supports the critique of meritocratic inequality in higher education with quantitative research, education researcher Anthony Jack's *The Privileged Poor* does the same with qualitative research. Built upon hundreds of interviews with students at "Renowned University" (almost certainly Harvard, where Jack completed his doctorate and now teaches), this book captures the alienation and indignity experienced by low-income students of color who have gained entry into an elite institution. Of course, students of this description comprise only a small minority at these universities, where many of their classmates have grown up wealthy. But even though Jack is telling the story of only a small minority of poor students in a small minority of wealthy institutions, he does uncover telling disjunctures. "Renowned University" does not appear particularly ill-intentioned in these pages, but it does institute policies without fully considering the impact on low-income students, including closing dining halls during breaks and employing work-study students for janitorial services. Strikingly, the pathways for poor students of color into elite institutions are so narrow that "over 50 percent of the lower-income Black undergraduates who attend elite colleges get there from boarding, day, and preparatory high schools—well-endowed, highly selective schools."²⁸ These students still suffer from disadvantages and exclusion, but they are already acculturated into many unwritten rules of life at an elite, wealthy, White-dominated educational institution. Students with more typical experiences of poverty (such as attending underfunded public high schools), whom Jack labels "Doubly Disadvantaged," are less prepared to seek assistance outside of class hours or to build relationships with faculty. "The Doubly Disadvantaged express strong faith in the idea of meritocracy—believing that focusing on 'the work' is enough for success—but they actually stand to lose the most for believing so."²⁹ Faith in pure meritocracy hinders these students from reaping the full rewards of their position atop higher education's meritocratic hierarchy.

Taken as a whole, these books present a convincing and compelling case that the United States' system of higher education tends to reinforce socioeconomic

divisions. Both well-resourced and struggling institutions may prepare students to participate in democratic society, but students' economic prospects are largely determined by the institution in which they enroll, before they attend their first class. Class mobility is not the same thing as democratic equality, but neither are the two concepts completely unrelated—a point many of these books make. Markovits argues that “democratic equality is the only cure for meritocracy’s discontents.”³⁰ Carnevale, Schmidt, and Strohl state that, “Education has become the foundation of American democracy, but educational inequality is destabilizing the framework and crumbling the façade.”³¹

Practical solutions are more elusive. Most of these books conclude with lists of recommendations. Markovits suggests threatening to revoke nonprofit status to force elite universities to expand their enrollments. Taylor and Cantwell recommend increasing state investment in higher education, targeting particular categories of institutions. Carnevale, Schmidt, and Strohl present a long list of proposals, including reducing the weight of the SAT in admissions decisions, abolishing legacy admissions, requiring universities to enroll a quota of low-income students, and shifting rankings from focusing on inputs (such as SAT scores) of entire institutions to focusing on outcomes (job placements, for example) of particular programs. But all of these authors recognize that implementing any of these

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proposals would require a significant shift in the public's view of higher education. Taylor and Cantwell “call for a new public compact between higher education institutions, citizens, and governments . . . [in which] higher education should be understood as a worthwhile endeavor that produces benefits both for individuals and society at

large.”³² Similarly, Tough asks his readers to “begin by embracing a principle that seemed self-evident to Americans a century ago but is less widely acknowledged today: *Our collective public education benefits us all.*”³³ The problem with calling for radical changes in policy and public opinion, of course, is that these recommendations do not provide practical next steps, and, ultimately, acquit higher education from making changes in the absence of a broader political reform movement.

A slim volume a few years older than the other books discussed in this essay, by Harvard law professor Lani Guinier, suggests one solution to this dilemma. In *The Tyranny of the Meritocracy*, Guinier rehearses a familiar complaint against the current structure of higher education: “We are credentializing a new elite by legitimizing people with an inflated sense of their own merit and . . . unwillingness to open up to new ways of problem solving.”³⁴ But Guinier’s proposed solution to this problem is at the level of the classroom, rather than thoroughgoing institutional reform. She argues for an alternative understanding of merit, based in ability to collaborate and motivation to learn: “The

In order to fulfill its democratic mission, American higher education must confront the inequalities in its own ranks and its own contributions to antidemocratic trends.

skill sets promoted by systems of democratic merit will better serve the challenges of a twenty-first-century world, which demands complex problem solving and collaboration among diverse individuals.”³⁵ *The Tyranny of the Meritocracy* describes several successful educational experiments focused on collective rather than individual achievement, including the Posse Foundation, which recruits groups of underprivileged students to attend top-ranked universities, and pedagogies that focus on preparing students to explain concepts to each other. Guinier does not mention classroom deliberation, but as a practice of addressing shared problems in a group through diverse perspectives, deliberation certainly promotes “democratic merit.”

The literature described in this review focuses on the economic divisions between citizens who have received college degrees and those who have not. But higher education is also associated with deeper cultural divisions, including by shaping how professionals think about their relationship with the public. Former editor of the *Higher Education Exchange*, David Brown, pointed out in 2014, “The culture of professionalism too often stresses individual achievement, ignoring shared social life—rendering service rather than developing collective capacity.”³⁶ In this sense, higher education not only widens socioeconomic divides by providing already privileged students access to in-demand professional skills, but also contributes to an antidemocratic professional culture, which further alienates citizens from professional institutions. (Even Guinier’s vision of education to build democratic merit is more focused on developing cooperative workplace culture than on reimagining relationships between professional institutions and the public.)

As the books discussed here demonstrate, colleges and universities are both victim and generator of wealth inequality—with a small number of lavishly resourced institutions providing elite educations and many others locked in an existential battle to raise revenue from tuition to keep the doors open. These gaps are likely to only widen in coming years due to the extension of previous trends and the disparate impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Faculty and staff at every level of this higher education hierarchy are genuinely committed to fostering democratic citizenship for their students and their communities, and every issue of *Higher Education Exchange* includes examples of democratic innovation in pedagogy and partnership at a range of colleges and universities. However, in order to fulfill its democratic mission, American higher education must also confront the inequalities in its own ranks and its own contributions to antidemocratic trends.



NOTES

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- ¹⁰ Markovits, *The Meritocracy Trap*, 137.
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- ¹² Markovits, *The Meritocracy Trap*, 155.

- ¹³ Paul Tough, *The Years That Matter Most: How College Makes or Breaks Us* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), 20.
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- ¹⁵ Tough, *The Years That Matter Most*, 167.
- ¹⁶ Tough, *The Years That Matter Most*, 257.
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- ¹⁸ Anthony P. Carnevale, Peter Schmidt, and Jeff Strohl, *The Merit Myth: How Our Colleges Favor the Rich and Divide America* (New York: The New Press, 2020), 4.
- ¹⁹ Carnevale, Schmidt, and Strohl, *The Merit Myth*, 63.
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- ²⁴ Taylor and Cantwell, *Unequal Higher Education*, 13.
- ²⁵ Taylor and Cantwell, *Unequal Higher Education*, 95.
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- ³⁰ Markovits, *The Meritocracy Trap*, 285.
- ³¹ Carnevale, Schmidt, and Strohl, *The Merit Myth*, 190.
- ³² Taylor and Cantwell, *Unequal Higher Education*, 153-154.
- ³³ Tough, *The Years That Matter Most*, 329.
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- ³⁵ Guinier, *The Tyranny of the Meritocracy*, 123.
- ³⁶ David Warfield Brown, *America's Culture of Professionalism: Past, Present, and Prospects* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 133.

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HIGHER EDUCATION IN A TIME OF CRISIS

David Mathews

The purpose of the *Higher Education Exchange* is to look at the role higher education plays in our democracy. The 2020 issue comes out in what has been an unprecedented year, and I want to recognize that. I've used this as an opportunity to take stock of what I've written in past issues and to think about the implications for crucial issues moving forward.

A Flood of Crises

When I began writing, I intended to deal with the challenge presented by COVID-19. The country hasn't experienced such a pandemic since the 1918 flu killed millions around the world. As a result of the current pandemic, many academic institutions are battered by a financial crisis precipitated by falling enrollment. And this campus crisis is but one aspect of a larger economic crisis facing the United States. But before I got very far in writing about those problems, the country erupted in outrage over the tragic deaths of George Floyd and others. When colleges and universities open in the fall, if they open, more protests may well up.

A Crisis of Democracy

Underneath all of these crises is one facing democracy itself. While it has been growing for decades and is felt worldwide, this problem is getting serious attention now. A troubling number of Americans, particularly young people and millennials, question whether democracy is the best form of government.¹ The most tangible evidence of this problem is the lack of public confidence in most major, authoritative governing institutions, which include institutions of higher education. This isn't an abstract problem. It is evident in growing public criticisms and the defunding of colleges and universities.

As I have said before, I believe that when democracy itself is in trouble, institutions of higher education, which were created to serve democracy, are also in trouble. Today, they are losing their mandate as public goods that serve the public good. How are they going to overcome their financial crisis without more public support? And how are they going to do that if something isn't

done to counter the plummeting confidence in all authoritative institutions? If this perception of institutions wasn't bad enough, it may be exacerbated by the doubts people have about their own ability to make a meaningful difference in the political system. Many, for a variety of different reasons, feel powerless, pushed out, or relegated to the sidelines in what they believe should be *their* country. A sense of civic duty isn't dead, yet people aren't sure what they can do. Maybe these doubts have something to do with the perception that the governing institutions aren't accessible. And if they don't appear to be, is it surprising that people don't have confidence in them?

Addressing the Crisis: Begin with Students

The first thing that needs to be done is to prevent this loss of confidence from spreading more to democracy itself. A significant number of young people already doubt that democracy works because they feel excluded from it. However, they appear to think of democracy only in institutional terms. They don't see democracy as *us*—all of us—or as “We, the People.”

Citing research from the field of paleopolitical anthropology, I have argued before that democracy at its most basic is voluntary collective decision-making to launch collective action. And because it is about action, citizens need to have more than a voice; they need to have a hand, their hand. People aren't born with this understanding of democracy. They have to acquire it by experience. This understanding begins early, before school age, but colleges and universities still have a role to play. So, the first step academic institutions can take in preventing the erosion of confidence in democracy has to be with their own students. Young people have to experience collective decision-making and action to realize that what *they* are doing *is* democracy.

Rethinking the Role of Citizens

Collective decision-making and action make citizens producers. They create things—some as simple as building neighborhood playgrounds to keep the children off the streets, others as profound as the Civil Rights Movement. Many of these things can be created only by citizens. I often illustrate that point by noting that hospitals can care *for* us but only other people, our family and friends, can care *about* us. And clinical studies show that kind of care has healing powers. Citizens produce a great deal of that care by working together through religious and civic organizations. The things citizens make, “public goods,” are essential to the effectiveness of our institutions and their professionals. The

need for this “coproduction” has been documented in Elinor Ostrom’s Nobel Prize-winning research.

I make the point about treating citizens as producers and not just consumers whenever I have the opportunity because it poses a central challenge that all authoritative institutions face. If colleges and universities recognized citizens as producers, what would it mean? For understandable reasons, academic institutions are “built” to treat citizens as objects to be instructed and served more than as agents with powers to be utilized. For example, in law schools, citizens are clients; in medical schools, they are patients; in business schools, they are usually seen as consumers. So, some experimentation is needed, particularly in preparing professionals to collaborate with citizens as producers.

Democracy *With*

I hope that Kettering’s most recent research publication, *With the People: An Introduction to an Idea*, will be useful in that experimentation. It lays out what the foundation is learning about countering the forces causing authoritative institutions to lose public confidence and citizens to doubt their ability to make a difference in our political system. Abraham Lincoln’s ideal of a government of, by, and for the people was our inspiration. Given the dissatisfaction in not reaching those ideals, we thought adding another preposition might help—with the people.

With is just an idea that has to be tested to see what its practical uses might be. What would it mean for institutions of higher learning to work *with*, not just *for*, the citizenry? The foundation isn’t a college or university, so it does not know. No one may know exactly. That’s why there is a need for experimentation. Maybe there are institutions already turning *working with* into a strategy for engaging people outside the academy to combat the many crises facing the world today. We’d like to know, and I think others would as well.

Polarization on Campus

In order for higher education to play a role in strengthening democracy, it will require countering the ideological divisiveness that now plagues campuses. Recent studies raise questions about whether students are being prepared to work together across the dividing lines. Research by Matt Johnson at Central Michigan University and coauthor Jennifer Peacock, a graduate of the university, shows that college graduates find themselves living in uncomfortable ideological “bubbles” of like-minded people when they leave their campuses to pursue

careers, particularly those in nonprofits. They feel conflicted that their working environments tend to be rather ideologically homogenous because they recognize that diverse, inclusive environments are needed to promote valuable civic engagement. Johnson and Peacock's research, which was featured in the American Psychological Association's *APA Journal Articles Spotlight*, showed that most graduates in the study "had difficulty describing how college prepared them to break ideological bubbles." They also said that their education "did little to foster ideological diversity."²

These conclusions resonate with what some others are seeing. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities' Political Ideology Diagnostic, which is linked to the association's American Democracy Project, often finds that students have stereotypes not only of others but also of themselves. However, the views of students on a range of issues from poverty to education do not fall neatly into ideological groupings like liberal and conservative. The problem is that students feel compelled to conform to the established stereotypes around them.³

This tendency to stereotype is said to contribute to the polarization that besets campuses. The stereotyping is at odds with the values of a liberal education in democracy, which places a premium on respect for opposing views and an open airing of differences. Polarized campuses would not be in a position to help in strengthening democracy. The aim of the Political Ideology Diagnostic project, according to Felice Nudelman, the American Democracy Project's executive director, is to help students find ways to "respectfully appreciate differing viewpoints and know that it is possible to challenge a policy idea without attacking the person."⁴

Democratic Resilience

Fortunately, the story these studies tell isn't the whole story. There are college and university presidents, faculty members, and administrators who believe higher education has a vested interest in a stronger democracy. Joined by trustees, they have been speaking out and acting on what they believe. An account of what they are doing has been captured in a book of essays edited by Katrina Rogers, president of Fielding Graduate University, and William Flores, former president of the University of Houston-Downtown.⁵ I can't do justice to all of the authors, but the chapter titles give you a sense of what is on their minds. David Wilson, president of Morgan State University, entitled his piece, "When the Fight for Democracy and Justice Is the Founding Purpose of Your Institution." It is a useful reminder that most all institutions, even

private ones, began in order to carry out democratic agendas for bringing more people into the ranks of full citizenship: African Americans, women, Native Americans. The list goes on. This history is particularly relevant as the country faces a renewed crisis in race relations. Sean Decatur at Kenyon uses a vocabulary of “inclusiveness and diversity” in his chapter. And Adam Weinberg, at Denison University, writes about the “The Civically Engaged College.” In advocating a rethinking of the civic role of universities, Martín Carcasson, on the faculty at Colorado State University, introduces the challenges of wicked, systemic problems, hyperpartisanship, and “truth decay.” It would be tragic if the current pandemic snuffed out these initiatives, which begin to tell a more complete story of what is happening in higher education.

Another encouraging initiative is coming from a group of colleges and universities that are reaching out to other institutions and professions that also face falling public confidence and mounting criticism. Two test meetings have brought together leaders in higher education, journalism, and philanthropy. And the door is open to legislators. The meetings have gone well; these institutions have a lot in common. They recognize their interdependence in reclaiming their public mission. The future of higher education is not in higher education alone. It never has been. Perhaps something like a common cause for democracy will emerge if these and other professionals and their institutions find that there is benefit in collaborating.

Professionals and institutions can take heart from what many citizens are doing locally to recover a sense that everyday people can make a constructive difference. How encouraging it is today to see Americans from different walks of life joining together, on their own initiative, to help one another. There is a lesson for the future in these examples. Working together makes democracy what it should be.

Going Forward: Lasting Change

We can hope that our struggles today will result in changes that will last. Few changes are permanent, but some last long enough to produce benefits. Yet that isn't always what happens. The pandemic of 1918, terrible as it was, seems to have been largely forgotten. Few, if any, lessons carry over when crises reoccur.

History is filled with records of efforts to address the racial crisis. For example, there were more than two dozen initiatives just in the first half of the 20th century. They are notable for what they didn't accomplish. Not only is change not inevitable, long-lasting reform is more the exception than the rule. Still, today, the desire for change on many fronts is growing.

A great deal will depend on how the issues going forward are framed or presented. Higher education can play a role in that; so can journalists and other professionals. One of the participants in the multi-institutional discussion that I just mentioned, Harry Boyte, a veteran of the front line in the Civil Rights Movement, stressed the need for lasting change in order to thwart future crises. He urged “framing the racial crisis and creating a relational rather than accusatory and polarizing approach.”⁶ Harry worked with Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference at a time when it was difficult to avoid blaming and accusing because the injustices were so blatant and terrible. Harry’s suggestion also draws on his experience working with South African democracy builders in the aftermath of the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa.

I want to emphasize Harry Boyte’s suggestion that we avoid an “accusatory” approach in combating the many crises affecting our country and our institutions of higher education. Few others are saying what Harry is saying. Yet the way we talk in public shapes the relationships that do and don’t develop. Accusations don’t create the types of relationships that are conducive to working together toward comprehensive, long-term change. That is the kind of change that many people want to come from today’s tragedies. And it will take many people from all walks of life for that to happen.

The way we talk about issues has everything to do with whether long-term change is possible. We can’t solve problems together that we can’t talk about together. The key is how public issues are structured or framed for discussion. A framing for lasting change has to have certain characteristics. On major issues, a number of things people hold dear will be at stake and those of greatest concern have to be recognized. Often, the things that are deeply valuable are in tension with one another. Those tensions have to be acknowledged and worked through in deliberation. On issues with serious tension, there is seldom a perfect solution. So, all the options for action have to be on the table, even and especially the less popular ones. And people have to be able to speak freely if they are to be part of whatever change is needed.

Colleges and universities can play a role in how the national discussion is framed, beginning with the discussion on campuses. The institutions are rich with professional expertise that can be helpful, but there is no substitute for public deliberation on the things people consider deeply valuable, the ends and means of life itself. Off campus, academic institutions have had, and can have, an influential role in framing issues by sharing the framings they believe will be constructive with the communities around them. There is no end to

what is possible, particularly if there is collaboration with other institutions that share a commitment to strengthening democracy in a time of crisis.



NOTES

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