Interdisciplinarity, Community, and the Future of the University

Community Engagement for Building Bridges between Cultures, Disciplines, & Generations

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1. By the end of our discussion you will:

1. have a more nuanced understanding of the mutual benefits of community engagement, especially how it is currently thought of in the United States;

2. be able to offer a brief overview of the ideas that can inform community engagement and the knowledge, skills, and values it develops;

3. better comprehend your own potential role (as an educational developer, as an administrative leader, as a teacher, as a community member) in promoting effective and productive community engagement; and

4. be aware of the many academic and practical resources to support effective civic learning and community engagement.

2. Please spend a few minutes and respond in writing to:

Think about your own experiences with community engagement, and also consider the discussions we had yesterday and earlier today (Marburg’s Center for Near & Middle Eastern Studies, Cork’s Learning City, Pécs Learning City-Region Forum, solving the problem of work-life balance, intergenerational & life-long learning)...

What do you see as the benefits of such engagement, for both the university (and its students and faculty members) and the community itself (its organizations and members)?

What skills and values do you think are needed to engage in such work productively, so that everyone benefits?
3. A Few of My Own Assumptions …

1. Universities have an obligation to society as a whole, to their communities, and to the people living in those communities.

2. University-educated people have knowledge & skills that are valuable—that are essential to—the creation of a humane, peaceful, vibrant, and functioning society that helps everyone reach their potential.

3. Knowledge is contextual, and applying knowledge in “real world” situations is good for student learning.

4. Disciplinary knowledge is important, but universities have an obligation to teach skills & knowledge that go beyond one single discipline: “liberal education” or “generic competencies.”

4. What is “Community Engagement”?  

The Association of American Colleges & Universities  

“Civic Learning” & “Democratic Engagement”  

The use of these dual terms emphasizes “the civic significance of preparing students with knowledge and for action.”

“Today’s education for democracy needs to be informed by deep engagement with the values of liberty, equality, individual worth, open mindedness, and the willingness to collaborate with people of differing views and backgrounds towards common solutions for the public good.”

Adapted from the Association American of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U)’s A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy’s Future (2012).
5. AAC&U’s Liberal Learning Outcomes

The Essential Learning Outcomes

Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

**Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**
- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
  
  *Focused* by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

**Intellectual and Practical Skills, including**
- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

  *Practiced extensively,* across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

**Personal and Social Responsibility, including**
- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

  *Anchored* through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

**Integrative and Applied Learning, including**
- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

  *Demonstrated* through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

Note: This listing was developed through a multiyear dialogue with hundreds of colleges and universities about needed goals for student learning; analysis of a long series of recommendations and reports from the business community; and analysis of the accreditation requirements for engineering, business, nursing, and teacher education. The findings are documented in previous publications of the Association of American Colleges and Universities: College Learning for the New Global Century (2007) and The LEAP Vision for Learning (2011). For more information, see www.aacu.org/leap.

6. What do you think of these ideas and ideals?

Looking at the Skills, Knowledges, & Values above, do you agree with them? What would you add or take away?

Thinking of about own university and your own education, how well-prepared are you or your students to engage in such community engagement?
7. The Many Powers of Interdisciplinarity …

“Many intellectual, social and practical problems require interdisciplinary approaches.”

“Interdisciplinarians may help breach communication gaps in the modern academy, thereby helping to mobilise its enormous intellectual resources in the cause of greater social rationality and justice.”

--Moti Nissani, 1997, p. 201
quoted in Chettiparamb, p. 16.

8. What Can Communities & Universities Learn with Each Other?

A Framework for Twenty-First-Century Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Collective Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Familiarity with key democratic texts and universal democratic principles, and with selected debates— in US and other societies— concerning their applications.</td>
<td>• Critical inquiry, analysis, and reasoning</td>
<td>• Integration of knowledge, skills, and examined values to inform actions taken in concert with other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Historical and sociological understanding of several democratic movements, both US and abroad.</td>
<td>• Quantitative reasoning</td>
<td>• Moral discernment and behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding one’s sources of identity and their influence on civic values, assumptions, and responsibilities to a wider public.</td>
<td>• Gathering and evaluating multiple sources of evidence</td>
<td>• Navigation of political systems and processes, both formal and informal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of the diverse cultures, histories, values, and contestations that have shaped US and other world societies.</td>
<td>• Seeking, engaging, and being informed by multiple perspectives</td>
<td>• Public problem solving with diverse partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exposure to multiple religious traditions and to alternative views about the relation between religion and government.</td>
<td>• Written, oral, and multi-media communication</td>
<td>• Compromise, civility, and mutual respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of the political systems that frame constitutional democracies and of political levers for influencing change.</td>
<td>• Deliberation and bridge building across differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values

• Respect for freedom and human dignity
• Empathy
• Open-mindedness
• Tolerance
• Justice
• Equality
• Ethical integrity
• Responsibility to a larger good

Figure 1. A Framework for Twenty-First-Century Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement from A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future (2012), p. 4.
Please consider the following:

1. In your role (as a teacher, educational developer, student, community member), what are the practical challenges of engaging in such community engagement work? What are the potential challenges and problems?

2. What would need to change to make such community engagement more easily achievable or successful?
10. Characteristics of a Civically Engaged Campus

So, what would a **CIVIC-MINDED CAMPUS** look like?

- has a **CIVIC ETHOS** that governs campus life
- makes **CIVIC LITERACY** a goal for every student
- integrates **CIVIC INQUIRY** into all majors and general education
- cultivates **CIVIC ACTION** as a lifelong practice

**ETHOS ➔ LITERACY ➔ INQUIRY ➔ ACTION**

Adapted from *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future*, AAC&U, 2012, page 15.

11. Moving towards an Ideal …

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**TABLE 7: The Faces/Phases of Citizenship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACE/PHASE</th>
<th>COMMUNITY IS...</th>
<th>CIVIC SCOPE</th>
<th>LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>BENEFITS...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusionary</td>
<td>only your own</td>
<td>civic disengagement</td>
<td>- one vantage point (yours) • monocultural</td>
<td>one party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oblivious</td>
<td>a resource to mine</td>
<td>civic detachment</td>
<td>- observational skills • largely monocultural</td>
<td>one party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naive</td>
<td>a resource to engage</td>
<td>civic amnesia</td>
<td>- no history • no vantage point • acultural</td>
<td>random people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charitable</td>
<td>a resource that needs assistance</td>
<td>civic altruism</td>
<td>- awareness of deprivations • affective kindness and respect • multicultural, but yours is still the norm center</td>
<td>the givers’ feelings, the sufferers’ immediate needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal</td>
<td>a resource to empower and be empowered by</td>
<td>civic engagement</td>
<td>- legacies of inequalities • values of partnering • intercultural competencies • arts of democracy • multiple vantage points • multicultural</td>
<td>society as a whole in the present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generative</td>
<td>an interdependent resource filled with possibilities</td>
<td>civic prosperity</td>
<td>- struggles for democracy • interconnectedness • analysis of interlocking systems • intercultural competencies • arts of democracy • multiple interactive vantage points • multicultural</td>
<td>everyone now and in the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Musti 2003.*

12. What Do You Do Next?

1. Think about your own role—and your commitment to this type of work.

2. Educate yourself—familiarize yourself with the myriad resources.

3. Remember this entire process is about learning—it is imperfect.

13. Selected Resources & Suggested Readings


Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). *An Introduction to LEAP: Liberal Education & America's Promise*. (overview paper, no date; website for initiative: http://www.aacu.org/leap.)


Bonner Center for Civic Engagement. University of Richmond. (See resources for faculty at http://engage.richmond.edu/cbl/)

Center for Community Learning. University of California Los Angeles. (See “Conferences and Publications” at http://www.uei.ucla.edu/communitylearning.htm)


Diversity & Democracy (AAC&U Periodical) website: http://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy


