

# Educating for Citizenship

**By Caryn McTighe Musil, vice president for diversity, equity, and global initiatives, Association of American Colleges and Universities<sup>1</sup>**

There has been a quiet revolution occurring in the academy over the last two decades. Civic concerns have achieved new visibility alongside the traditional academic mission of higher education. It is difficult to find a college campus that does not tout a coordinating center for community service, service-learning courses, or research centers devoted to distinctly civic issues. Institutions have redefined themselves to be more responsible citizens in their communities. Nearly a thousand college presidents are members of Campus Compact, an organization created to promote greater campus-community involvement. Seventy-eight percent of students participate in some sort of service experience before they graduate.

The motives for all this campus activity are many. Economic realities have spurred some of this change as colleges discover it is in their own self-interest to improve the quality of their immediate neighborhoods. Concerned about the unraveling of civic and civil society both locally and globally, many have turned to the academy for remedies. Democratizing access to college has also increased community involvement. As women became 56 percent of the student body and people of color moved from single digit percents to 28 percent, the socialized habits, values, and expectations within those groups became powerful influences in turning higher education's attention to community concerns.

Many campuses have begun literally and figuratively to remove wrought iron fences demarcating sharp geographic, social, and intellectual boundaries between the academy and their communities. It seems appropriate, then, to assess the actual meaning of these momentous changes. What does all this campus activity add up to? Where has it taken root--or not--in academia? Is it possible to create wholeness and purpose where currently--for all the impressive activity--fragmentation and randomness too often rule?

## **From Bifurcation to Integrated, Intentional Learning**

Unfortunately, too many institutions are marked by a helter-skelter approach to civic engagement. Rather than a cohesive educational strategy, happenstance and impulse more typically govern. A portion of community engagement is handled largely out of sight through formal institutional representatives. An urban affairs center, a public affairs office, or a community development institutional emissary are typical figureheads. Other more visible structures for community-based learning typically accommodate student interest. As such, responsibility for orchestrating events is usually assigned to student

---

Reprinted with permission from *Peer Review*,  
Spring 2003. Copyright 2003 by the Association of American  
Colleges and Universities."

affairs, or to students themselves, through freshman orientation programs, student clubs, campus-based religious groups, or volunteer community centers on campus.

All too often, civic engagement is not rooted in the very heart of the academy: its courses, its research, its faculty work. Institutions thus inadvertently model a mode of civic involvement that occurs offstage or after hours. Such a bifurcation between the work of the classroom and the life of the college prepares students all too well for the larger societal schizophrenic predicament in which adults are to "care about community" after 5:00 P.M. or on weekends.

But need we continue down this road? Are there ways of melding the work of the mind with the welfare of the world? The answer is a resounding yes, but we have serious work to do. Some campuses have begun to construct more integrative environments in which educating for democratic citizenship is understood not simply as an extra-curricular option, but as a fundamental goal of a twenty-first century liberal education.

AAC&U's recent *Greater Expectations* report ([www.greaterexpectations.org](http://www.greaterexpectations.org)) as well as the new Center for Liberal Education and Civic Engagement ([www.aacu.org/civicengagement/index.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/civicengagement/index.cfm)) both call for a newly understood *civic learning*. Its definition has crystallized through reform movements that have begun to coalesce: the diversity movement; the civic engagement movement; and the movement to create more student-centered institutions. All three argue that students need to be prepared to assume full and responsible lives in an interdependent world marked by uncertainty, rapid change, and destabilizing inequalities. Each recognizes the societal and cognitive development that results when students step out of their comfort zones into contact zones. All emphasize student-centered pedagogies that foster engaged, participatory learning dependent on dialogue and collaboration.

A part of this civic learning can clearly be nurtured through co-curricular activities. But its full cultivation is dependent on moving it from the periphery to the academic core of student and faculty work.

To shift from randomness to purposeful pathways, we need to examine what kinds of civic learning occur in which sites of activity at what stage in the student's intellectual development. What learning experiences, for instance, are best located in student affairs and at what point in the student's career? How might the organized co-curricular experiences reinforce, expand, and complement civic learning in the curriculum? What learning is best mapped into the curriculum? What kinds of different courses taken over time help students to use different disciplinary lenses and modes of knowing that will deepen their understanding of their location in and responsibility to the larger world? And how does that engagement with the world influence what and how students learn or what research questions they pose?

In order to distinguish the kinds of learning spurred by myriad kinds of civic engagement, I have delineated six expressions of citizenship: exclusionary, oblivious, naive, charitable, reciprocal, and generative. They represent both faces and phases of

citizenship. Each reflects different definitions of community, values, and knowledge. While the higher level of learning in reciprocal and generative citizenship can be demonstrated outside of the curriculum, the knowledge and skills necessary to acquire this level are dependent on what is learned through the curriculum. Those last two levels require civic and societal knowledge, analytical perspectives, understanding about diversity and inequality, democratic arts, thoughtful ethical and self-reflection, and the ability to apply knowledge to solve complex social problems.

### **Faces/Phases of Citizenship**

**Exclusionary.** The face of exclusionary citizenship is produced by gated academic environments, which lock students in and all other entities out. It can also be produced by a curriculum that ferociously guards traditional borders. In both cases, the community is narrowly defined only as one's own, which makes *civic disengagement* the ruling value. Because trying to live as if one were on an island instead of a globe is impossible, the benefits reaped are temporary. The exclusionary phase sees the world from a single vantage point (its own) and is distinguished by a monocultural sensibility.

**Oblivious.** The "drive-by" service-learning experiences can often inadvertently produce the face of oblivious citizenship. For example, a large state university located in a bucolic setting bussed their predominantly white students, who had little preparation for the experience, into an inner-city food kitchen for the homeless. As a young college student sat alone at a table with patrons, a homeless man asked her, "Why are you here?" She answered, "I guess I'm here to watch you." Not surprisingly, the man became very angry and abusive. He recognized the kind of *civic detachment* represented by this face of citizenship. In such encounters, the community is perceived as a resource to mine primarily for the benefit of the onlooker. While the student may gain new facts, the experience might simply reinforce stereotypes without widening the student's cultural lenses. Students in this phase, as well as the next, can serve but still remain safely unchanged.

**Naive.** The naive face of citizenship is characterized not by civic detachment but by *civic amnesia*. While the community is seen as a resource to engage, the lack of historical knowledge about its residents or an analysis of its power dynamics limits the learning and the benefits of the experience. For example, a well-meaning student from an elite private college worked in a summer program with inner city youth. The young man arranged to hold the final event at the yacht club where he sailed and invited the kids' families. He later explained with some dismay, "I can't understand why more of the parents didn't come." He was not so much monocultural as acultural. Had the student had a course in which he had studied economic stratification, the urban and cultural history of the city, or been engaged in community-based research that dislodged him as the normative center, it is likely he would have organized a more appropriate final event for the families he cared so much about.

**Charitable.** This is perhaps the most typical face of citizenship at college campuses. Motivated by *civic altruism*, students see the community as an entity that needs help.

Campus programs deliver food to the hungry, blankets to the homeless, and repair homes for the elderly. The knowledge acquired makes students aware of deprivations, and they develop a kindness toward those they seek to help. Usually more multicultural in their sensibility in this phase, students risk serving rather than empowering others, which does not alter the systems that produce the deprivations.

When lodged within the framework of a course that employs both analytical and reflective components, such charitable outreach to communities in need can take on new dimensions that move students toward the next phase of citizenship. In well-constructed courses designed to foster civic learning, students can examine larger structural causes of inequality, compare individual remedies with collective, broader social policies, and explore the histories in under-resourced communities of agency which they have long employed to help each other survive in the face of meager options.

**Reciprocal.** For many students, the faces of citizenship are indeed phases, representing a developmental arc. Each phase can help students understand the limits of their knowledge, analytical lenses, and evolving moral sensibilities. The value animating this reciprocal phase is *civic engagement*. A program at a large Midwestern research university is structured to cultivate this more complex and socially responsible civic learning by having students and the institution negotiate with community partners about the shape and purpose of their communal project. The outline for the research, the nature of the reciprocally useful product they create, and the format evolve over time, through negotiation and experimentation.

In one example, students worked with an African American historical society whose rich archives were in disarray and unavailable to the wider public. Working together, they decided to have the university help catalogue and digitize the collection. Then they decided to focus on the striking narrative describing the underground railroad that had flourished right in their county in the midst of the abolitionist movement. They took things a step further by producing Web-based curricular materials for elementary and middle school children based on the archives and also developed a traveling, public, interactive display.

In the civic learning students acquired in this curriculum-centered, community-connected environment, students came to regard the community not as deprived but as a resource to empower and be empowered by. In the process of their engagement, students learned about the legacies of inequalities, the historical narratives of resistance, the moral debates of the day, and the importance of being able to move among multiple vantage points. By the end of the course, students developed more expansive multicultural knowledge and honed their intercultural competencies.

**Generative.** This cumulative phase of generative citizenship draws deeply from reciprocal citizenship but has a more all-encompassing scope with an eye to the future public good. The community is understood not as something separate and apart but as one and the same, an interdependent resource filled with possibilities. Students move from civic engagement as a value to *civic prosperity* as a goal. They seek the well being

of the whole, an integrated social network in which all flourish. Like the previous phase, this one is dependent on students understanding the residual legacies of inequalities, but they have a wider understanding of the various histories of struggles for democracy. They also have a firmer grasp of the arts of democracy as interpersonal processes, as political mechanisms, and as aspirational values. As in the earlier phase, they can move easily from multiple vantage points and traverse cultural borders. But they also have a deeper grasp of systems that influence individuals and groups as well as a sophisticated knowledge of the levers that can make systems more equitable.

A liberal arts college in New England modeled this generative face of citizenship as it took leadership in an ambitious urban coalition of educators, businesses, religious groups, community activists, and governments to transform their declining city. They tackled the individual problems as pieces of whole cloth. They sought to improve housing, revamp the school system, reduce crime, institute economic development incentives, and create a new sense of community through long-term partnerships. Students continue to be involved in a variety of ways: as participants on community planning groups, as researchers applying their disciplinary knowledge to solve complex modern problems, and as civic entrepreneurs learning about the interconnections between economic development and the public good. Recently, the college has created dedicated courses that are gateways to engagement for first- and second-year students, thus opening curricular pathways to civic learning that promises to transform academic study as it transforms the larger society.

### **Civic Engagement at the Core**

Educating students for generative citizenship cannot be accomplished without recalibrating the curriculum, its pedagogies, and the boundaries of faculty work. The box below offers one map for a developmental learning model for responsible citizenship. To a large extent, such an education certainly draws upon traditional disciplinary and analytical frameworks, but it also expands upon them. In this model, the world--and not just the library--is a center of focus. Applying knowledge and not merely demonstrating knowledge is commonplace. Experiencing the challenge of deliberating across differences to achieve agreed upon ends is a regular occurrence. Integrating what one knows with what one values in the service of the common good has become an everyday habit, not a serial, extracurricular activity.

Such an educational outcome represents an unquiet revolution indeed. It is just the sort Thomas Jefferson had in mind when he rested the future of the young republic on its power to educate its citizenry. Since those initial ambitious steps, the United States continues to discover how to transform democratic aspirations into democratic justice. Higher education dare not recoil from using its formidable resources in the service of that noble and ennobling ambition.

## Faces/Phases of Citizenship

Face/Phase	Community is ...	Civic Scope	Levels of Knowledge	Benefits
Exclusionary	only your own	civic disengagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one vantage point (yours)</li> <li>• monocultural</li> </ul>	a few & only for awhile
Oblivious	a resource to mine	civic detachment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• observational skills</li> <li>• largely monocultural</li> </ul>	one party
Naive	a resource to engage	civic amnesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no history</li> <li>• no vantage point</li> <li>• acultural</li> </ul>	random people
Charitable	a resource that needs assistance	civic altruism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• awareness of deprivations</li> <li>• affective kindness &amp; respect</li> <li>• multicultural, but yours is still the norm center</li> </ul>	the giver's feelings, the sufferer's immediate needs
Reciprocal	a resource to empower and be empowered by	civic engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• legacies of inequalities</li> <li>• values of partnering</li> <li>• intercultural competencies</li> <li>• arts of democracy</li> <li>• multiple vantage points</li> <li>• multicultural</li> </ul>	society as a whole in the present
Generative	an interdependent resource filled with possibilities	civic prosperity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• struggles for democracy</li> <li>• interconnectedness</li> <li>• analysis of interlocking systems</li> <li>• intercultural competencies</li> <li>• arts of democracy</li> <li>• multiple interactive vantage points</li> <li>• multicultural</li> </ul>	everyone now & in the future